

Germany: Political landslide in Bavaria

At least opinion polls in the last few weeks were right. For the rest, Sunday's elections in Bavaria will have created a landslide. Not only for Bavaria but probably also for German national politics



According to the preliminary results of Sunday's election in Bavaria, the CSU came in at 37.4% (from 47.7%), the worst result since 1950. The Greens came in as the second largest party with 17.7% (from 8.6%), followed by the Free Voters at 11.5% (from 9.0%), the AfD with 10.2% (from zero), the SPD with 9.6% (from 20.6%) and the FDP with 5.0% (from 3.3%).

Given that the CSU had reached an absolute majority in 12 of the last thirteen elections, this result marks a political landslide. The party's strategy to criticise Chancellor Angela Merkel's stance on refugees and migration did not work out well. Instead, the party left the political centre vacant, leading to the increase of the Greens as a kind of liberal alternative to the CSU. The Greens won many votes in Bavarian cities. At the same time, the CSU's strategy strengthened rather than prevented the AfD.

Implications for Bavarian and national politics

For **Bavarian politics**, as significant as the CSU losses are, not a lot will change. Currently, a coalition of CSU and Free Voters seems like the most probable outcome, which could keep the damage for the CSU limited, even though the party is shaken to its core and some personnel changes cannot be ruled out.

For **national politics**, the loss of the CSU could bring some short-term relief for Angela Merkel. The CSU government members should refrain from starting fights with Merkel or put the coalition at risk, at least for a while. However, at the same time, there are at least two aspects which are more worrying for Merkel: the longer-term trend that also Germany cannot escape the gradual end of strong parties in the political centre, a more scattered political landscape and already, in the short run, the free fall of the SPD. Never before has the SPD come in at a single-digit level in a regional or national election. While the CSU will be licking its wounds for some time, voices within the SPD to quit the coalition could easily get louder. Don't forget that the SPD already had a very hard time deciding to enter another grand coalition. All of this makes an explosive mix which is likely to hamper Germany's decision-making power, both at the national and European level.

If you thought the result of the Bavarian election was bad for national and European decision-making, hold your breath because in two weeks from now, voters in the state of Hessen will go to the ballot boxes and current polls see a drop by as much as 10 percentage points for Merkel's CDU.

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