

German elections, towards the Jamaica coalition?

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On Sunday, September 24, German voters went to the polls to elect the Bundestag. It was the fourth 2017 general election in an important country of the European Union, after the Netherlands ([De Sio and van Ditmars in this volume](#)), France ([Elie in this volume](#); [Paparo in this volume](#)) and the United Kingdom ([Emanuele and Marino in this volume](#)). The outcome of the German election was in line with opinion polls, though with some small surprises in the percentages gathered by the various parties. The CDU-CSU led by Chancellor Angela Merkel was clearly the most voted party as it was stated in the eve polls, but receiving a slightly lower vote percentage than the estimated one, while the radical-right euro-sceptic party Alternative for Germany (AFD) gained a bit more than expected. Table 1 reports the election results, both in terms of votes and seats, and the variations compared to the previous federal elections, held in 2013. Results (in both absolute numbers and in percentage terms) are separately reported for both the majoritarian, single-member-district arena and the proportional, party-vote arena. In fact, the German electoral system is a proportional electoral system with a majority-correction mechanism. The distribution of seats, and thus the determination of party relative strength in the Lower House (Bundestag), takes place on the basis of the proportion of votes received by parties at national level. There is also another vote, to choose a candidate in the single-member district that selects half of MPs creating a stronger relationship between voters and their representatives. Furthermore, there is a 5% threshold to access the proportional allocation of seats, that alters pure proportionality excluding small parties, which may still be represented in parliament by candidates who won their single-member district. In order to understand the strengths of the parties, therefore, we must look at votes to parties in the proportional arena. The CDU-CSU obtained roughly 33% of the vote, with a loss of 8.6 percentage points and 65 seats overall compared to the 2013 federal elections. The second party was the SPD of

the candidate Chancellor Martin Schulz, who on 20.5% achieved the worst result ever in a general election, dropping by 5.2 points and 40 overall seats compared to 2013. The third party was AFD achieving in turn a “historical” result – with 12.6% – and entering the Bundestag for the first time with a remarkable share of 94 seats. AFD was able to exploit the political space that had opened to the right of the CDU by taking strong anti-immigrants stances and sharply criticizing Merkel’s policy of welcoming refugees. This confirms the results of the analysis presented before the vote ([Emanuele and Paparo in this volume](#)), which showed that there was a widespread consensus in the German electorate for cultural ‘demarcation’ positions ([Kriesi et al. 2006](#)), such as making immigration rules more restrictive, limiting the number of refugees and requiring foreigners to adapt to German culture. The agenda on this dimension is quite similar to those already observed in the other countries where we conducted the survey – the Netherlands ([Emanuele, De Sio and van Ditmars in this volume](#)), France ([Emanuele, De Sio and Michel in this volume](#)) and the United Kingdom ([Emanuele in this volume](#)).

With regard to the results of the other parties that have obtained seats, the liberals of FDP have also done pretty well. They have more than doubled their vote percentage, from 4.7% in 2013 to 10.7% in 2017, with an increase of 80 overall seats – in 2013 they were out of the Bundestag having failed to meet the 5% threshold. Finally, the Radical Left Party (*Die Linke*) and the Greens obtained percentages similar to those of four years earlier (9.2% and 8.9% respectively), with a slight increase for both parties both in percentage and in terms of seats. In addition to the two major parties, then, (a record of) four additional political forces were able to overcome the 5% threshold and gain parliamentary representation. A further record is represented by the total number of MPs elected in this election. Thanks to the correction mechanism which, ensuring district winners with their seat, makes parliamentary groups representative of the party proportional vote nationwide, the number of members of the Bundestag is not fixed, but it must grow when the original 299 proportional seats are not sufficient to restore the necessary proportionality. In 2013, the additional seats were 33. This year, as many as 111, with an increase of 78. As a consequence, there will be a total of 709 MPs in the new legislature.

While Merkel’s party has lost many votes from 2013, scoring the worst electoral performance since 1949, it is also true that the second party (SPD) detachment has been remarkable (12.4 percentage points) and there is (almost) no doubt that Merkel will again lead the federal government. It will be her fourth consecutive term, which could take her to a total of 16 years in power, equalling the record held by Helmut Kohl. If it is clear then who the next Chancellor will be, it is unclear what the coalition formula that will support Frau Merkel will be. The electoral outcome tells us that there are two options to form the government: a repeat of the consolidated formula of the

Table 1. 2017 German legislative electoral results, variations from 2013

	Single-member districts				Party list				Total seats						
	Valid votes	%	+/-	Seats	+/-	%	Valid votes	%	+/-	Seats	+/-	%	N	+/-	%
CDU-CSU	17,283,408	37.3	-8.1	231	-5	77.3	15,315,576	32.9	-8.6	15	-60	3.7	246	-65	34.7
SPD	11,426,613	24.6	-4.8	59	1	19.7	9,538,367	20.5	-5.2	94	-41	23.0	153	-40	21.6
AFD	5,316,095	11.5	9.6	3	3	1.0	5,877,094	12.6	7.9	91	91	22.2	94	94	13.3
FDP	3,248,745	7.0	4.6	0	0	0.0	4,997,178	10.7	6.0	80	80	19.6	80	80	11.3
Linke	3,966,035	8.6	0.3	5	1	1.7	4,296,762	9.2	0.6	64	4	15.6	69	5	9.7
Greens	3,717,436	8.0	0.7	1	0	0.3	4,157,564	8.9	0.5	66	4	16.1	67	4	9.4
Others	1,422,306	3.1	-2.4	0	0	0.0	2,324,316	5.0	-1.2	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0
Total	46,380,638	100	0	299	0	100	46,506,857	100	0	410	78	100	709	78	100

'*Große Koalition*' with the SPD, or a 'Jamaica' coalition (for the colours of parties that would be part of it) with Greens and Liberals. At this time, the first option seems unlikely because of SPD unwillingness. Schulz, after eight years of grand coalitions in the last twelve, and several electoral defeats, would want to go to the opposition to rebuild and to not leave to AFD the monopoly of parliamentary opposition. In the Merkel years, minority partners of government coalitions have all been penalized in electoral terms, especially compared to the main government party expressing the head of the cabinet. Suffice it to mention that the FDP, which in the legislature from 2009 to 2013 had been the coalition partner of the Christian Democrats, in 2013 did not get any seats in the Bundestag for the first time in its history, while CDU obtained its best results since 1990, verging the majority of seats.

At this point, unless the SPD changes its mind, the most likely option at the moment is a 'Jamaica' coalition. But how politically viable is such a government formula? In other words, how compatible are the parties that would form it from the point of view of priorities and preferences their voters hold about those issues that are crucial in the German public debate? To answer this interesting research question, we can look at the data CISE collected in the days preceding the election through a CAWI survey on the German voting-age population within a larger comparative study (see [De Sio and Paparo in this volume](#)). As has already been the case for the Netherlands, France and the United Kingdom, respondents have been asked to express their preference on a series of positional issues that refer to two rival goals, such as public services vs. taxes. Subsequently, respondents were asked to indicate the priority they assign to the chosen goal. The questionnaire also included 10 valence issues ([Stokes 1963](#)), that is themes that refer to a shared objective, on which there is a general consensus (such as protection from terrorism). On these topics respondents are only asked to indicate priority, since a 100% consensus is assumed.

Table 2 summarizes the main results of the survey, indicating for each goal the type of issue it belongs to (whether it is positional or valence), its policy dimension (economic or cultural), and, for positional goals, also its direction (whether progressive or conservative). In addition, for each issue, the priority level assigned by voters of the different parties of a possible Jamaica coalition (CDU-CSU, FDP and Greens) is reported; and, for each positional issue, support among the party voters mentioned above is also reported for the specified goal. Finally, the last column on the right of the table lists the values of a priority index for a government supported by CDU-CSU, FDP and Greens, calculated as the weighted average of the priorities of the three different electorates – where priorities of the three electorate are weighed by the fraction of the parliamentary majority that each of the three parties have.

Starting from the priorities, we note that, as already noted for the German electorate as a whole ([Emanuele and Paparo in this volume](#)), the most impor-

tant themes are valence. In the first five places on the agenda of a possible 'Jamaica' government, there are as many valence issues – among which the need to fight the poverty of the elderly and terrorism. In general, there are no big differences between the electorates of the three parties with regard to the priority assigned to the various valence issues, if we except a greater attention on security issues for CDU-CSU and FDP voters than the voters of the Greens, which, on the contrary, show greater care (as expectable) for environmental protection and less attention to economic growth. But these can be described as nuances. Just consider that economic growth is not among the valence issues with the highest priority even among liberal and Christian-democratic voters.

Among positional issues, those characterized mainly by the cultural dimension (such as Europe and immigration, but also nuclear energy) show greater priority levels. In particular, the goal of staying in the EU has a level of priority among the three electorates which is even greater than the one shown by several valence issues and, above all, there is a high consensus (83% to 92%) in three electorates. Europeanism is therefore a goal that unifies voters of parties of a possible 'Jamaica' coalition, as it is also shown by the high priority and agreement levels received by the goal of the EU imposing a system of refugee quotas to member states. The agreement on solidarity between EU countries disappears when it comes to transferring money from Germany to poor countries in order to keep the euro. The majority of liberal voters opposes it, contrary to voters of the other two parties, in particular the Greens. However, it should be pointed out that this issue shows very low priority levels in the three electorates, as low (31%) is also the priority assigned by liberal voters to the opposite goal – of not financing the poorest countries in the Eurozone, on which, as anticipated, most agree (54%). Moreover, the opposition of the Liberals does not concern Europe in itself, but a more general attitude unfavourable to broadening public spending, in line with the party's pro-market tradition, as shown by other issues that we will discuss later.

Among the most salient issues we have mentioned those related to nuclear power and immigrants. While the goal of maintaining the decision to abandon nuclear power is, like Europeanism, strongly supported by voters of all three parties (from 80% among liberals, up to 87% for Greens), and is therefore a factor making the birth a 'Jamaica' coalition possible, on goals such as "making immigration rules more restrictive", "limiting the number of refugees", "requiring foreigners to fully adapt to national culture", it is more difficult to find a compromise. In fact, while the overwhelming majority of the CDU-CSU voters, and even more so, of the FDP take demarcationist stances, the majority of Greens voters disagree, having a more favourable attitude towards immigrants. Surely this is a potential friction point, especially if one considers that CDU-CSU has suffered the AFD competition on its right on

these issues. However, it should be considered that pro-immigrants goals, while being majoritarian among the Greens voters, are far from being unanimously supported or being considered as high priorities – with priority levels ranging from 27 to 33%, depending on the goal.

Economic issues show lower priority levels than cultural issues, with the exception of the goal of raising the minimum wage, among which there is a high agreement among the three electorates (it ranges from 77% of the Liberals to 87% of the Greens voters). In general, it is interesting to note that the electoral basis of the three parties are sufficiently compatible on economic issues, with a generalized agreement on progressive positions even among the CDU-CSU and FDP voters. The only economic issue that is divisive is the goal of using the current budget surplus to invest in infrastructure and education. While the vast majority of liberal voters are opposed (preferring to allocate this money to tax reduction instead), the vast majority of Greens voters (77%) agree, with CDU-CSU voters in an intermediate position (53% for public investments). Once again, FDP voters' negative attitude towards increasing public spending is confirmed, and this may be a friction, especially with the Greens. However, it should be said that this issue is not among those with the highest priority for voters of the FDP (34%).

Among the least important issues, there are some environmental issues (the construction of wind turbines and the use of diesel-fuelled vehicles), as well as civil rights (gay marriage and gender quotas) and the introduction of binding referendums. On these issues, however, there is a strong convergence between voters of the three parties, progressives on civil rights and direct democracy and careful to the environmental issue, with the exception of the possibility of using the cars powered by diesel. While nearly two-thirds of CDU-CSU and FDP voters agree not to ban diesel cars, the overwhelming majority of Greens voters are in favour of the ban (with a priority of 43%).

In conclusion, our analysis shows that building a 'Jamaica' coalition is not an impossible task, if we look at the compatibility of CDU-CSU, Greens and FDP electorates on a broad range of issues. Certainly, there are difficulties, which concern in particular the distinction between the Greens' voters and the voters of the other two parties on immigration issues and a specific environmental theme, as well as the distinction of liberal voters on certain economic issues related to public spending. However, there are many themes on which the different electorates are unified: not only valence issues (such as fighting poverty of the elderly, etc.), but also various positional issues, and in policy areas (such as the economy or civil rights) where you could expect greater compatibility problems. Above all, the main unifying factor is Europeanism, which is also considered a very salient topic. Furthermore, it should be noted that the electorate of the largest party, the CDU-CSU, always has at least one party (between the Greens and the Liberals) which they are com-

Table 2. Issues for the agenda of a possible Jamaica coalition government by priority and support

Goal	Type	Prog/ Cons	Dimen- sion	CDU-CSU		FDP		Greens		Governmental priority index
				Priority	Support	Priority	Support	Priority	Support	
Protect from terrorism	Valence			90%		94%		74%		88%
Fighting poverty of elderly	Valence			85%		84%		79%		84%
Fighting crime	Valence			81%		90%		68%		81%
Fight unemployment	Valence			81%		75%		68%		78%
Providing affordable homes	Valence			80%		74%		71%		77%
Stay in the EU	Positional	P	CULT P	77%	92%	75%	88%	68%	84%	75%
Protect the environment	Valence			69%		75%		86%		73%
Support for families and children	Valence			73%		72%		63%		71%
Providing social justice	Valence			70%		68%		76%		71%
Support economic growth	Valence			74%		70%		54%		70%
Maintaining infrastructure	Valence			66%		70%		65%		66%
Keep the decision of nuclear power phase-out	Positional	P	CULT P	63%	83%	59%	80%	70%	87%	63%
The EU has to enforce refugee quotas in all member states	Positional	P	CULT P	61%	83%	58%	78%	55%	83%	59%
Make immigration rules more restrictive	Positional	C	CULT C	62%	77%	72%	88%	27%	49%	58%
Minimal wages should be increased to a minimum of 10 EUR	Positional	P	ECON P	55%	79%	60%	77%	61%	87%	57%
Limit the number of refugees	Positional	C	CULT C	55%	78%	73%	86%	29%	48%	54%
Require foreigners in Germany to fully adapt to national culture	Positional	C	CULT C	53%	81%	67%	83%	29%	46%	52%

Goal	Type	Prog/ Cons	Dimen- sion	CDU-CSU			FDP			Greens			Governmental priority index
				Priority	Support	Support	Priority	Support	Support	Priority	Support		
Keep current pension age	Positional	P	ECON P	51%	70%	71%	48%	71%	52%	77%	51%		
Keep current regulations in the job market	Positional	P	ECON P	49%	80%	68%	41%	68%	48%	84%	47%		
The current budget surplus should be used in infra-structure and education	Positional	P	ECON P	40%	53%	48%	34%	48%	60%	71%	42%		
Reduce income differences	Positional	P	ECON P	40%	64%	71%	45%	71%	48%	66%	42%		
Introduce possibilities for binding referendums	Positional	P	CULT P	35%	71%	87%	57%	87%	40%	79%	40%		
Building more wind turbines	Positional	P	CULT P	32%	60%	68%	39%	68%	54%	79%	37%		
No cars should be banned	Positional	C	CULT C	41%	63%	64%	41%	64%	13%	29%	36%		
Keep gay marriages	Positional	P	CULT P	29%	73%	64%	23%	64%	56%	87%	33%		
To maintain the EURO, Germany should transfer money to poorer countries	Positional	P	ECON P	28%	57%	46%	19%	46%	32%	76%	27%		
Politics should implement gender quotas	Positional	P	CULT P	25%	57%	54%	31%	54%	26%	65%	27%		

patible with, meaning that Merkel's party is never isolated against the other two. Finally, for the issues on which there is disagreement between the three electorates, preferences of the CDU-CSU voters are always in an intermediate position. The latter are certainly factors that can facilitate the search for possible compromises, art in which, among others, Angela Merkel famously excels.

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