

THE GERMAN BUNDESTAG ELECTION OF SEPTEMBER 2002

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Key points:

- **2002 saw the closest-run Bundestag election in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany.**
 - **The election was characterized by high levels of volatility in voting intentions in the run-up to polling day.**
 - **The Greens enjoyed a substantial improvement in the party's vote.**
- **The SPD saw a significant erosion of its core vote.**
 - **The SPD-Green coalition was returned with a reduced majority, but with an enhanced role for the Greens.**
 - **Europe remains effectively a non-issue in German party politics, despite popular unease about some aspects of European integration.**

Introduction

The Bundestag elections held on 22 September 2002 had the closest results in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany. They were also characterized by unusually high levels of volatility in voting intention in the months running up to election day. Up to the end of 2001 the Social Democratic Party (SPD) was riding high in the polls, with its coalition partner, the Greens, doing less well but nevertheless polling enough to suggest that they would probably surmount the Federal Republic's 5% hurdle for representation in the Bundestag. However by mid-summer 2002 the SPD and Greens were up to 12% behind the combined

TABLE 1: PRELIMINARY RESULT OF BUNDESTAG ELECTIONS (SECOND VOTES)

	Bundestag elections 22/09/02		Bundestag elections 27/09/98		Bundestag elections 16/10/94	
Electorate	61,388,671		60,762,751		60,452,009	
Number of votes	48,574,607		49,947,087		47,737,999	
% Turnout	79.1		82.2		79.0	
Valid votes	47,980,304		49,308,512		47,105,174	
SPD	18,484,560	38.5	20,181,269	40.9	17,140,354	36.4
CDU	14,164,183	29.5	14,004,908	28.4	16,089,354	34.2
CSU	4,311,513	9.0	3,324,480	6.7	3,427,196	7.3
Greens	4,108,314	8.6	3,303,624	6.7	3,424,315	7.3
FDP	3,537,466	7.4	3,080,955	6.2	3,258,407	6.9
PDS	1,915,797	4.0	2,515,454	5.1	2,066,176	4.4
Others (of which)			2,899,822	5.9	1,698,766	3.6
REP	280,735		906,383	1.8	875,239	1.9
Schill	399,757					

Seats (1998 totals in brackets): SPD 251 (298); CDU/CSU 248 (245); Greens 55 (47); FDP 47 (43); PDS 2 (36); total 603.

Source: dpa.

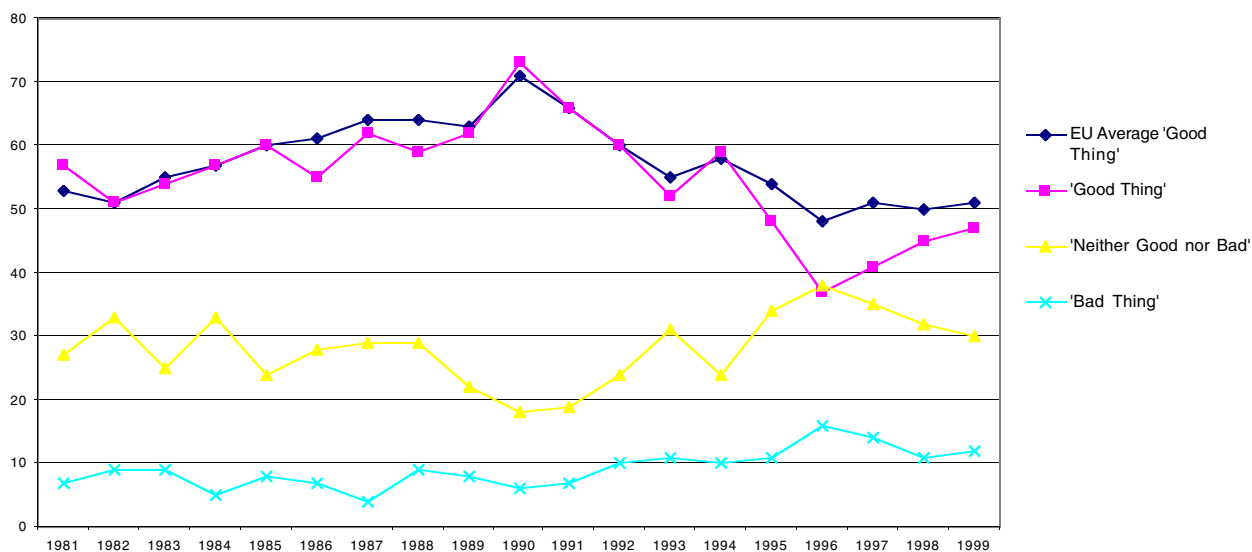
Christian Democratic CDU/CSU-Liberal FDP opposition, despite the personal popularity of Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and his Green Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer. By early September the popular mood had shifted again, with the SPD once more ahead of the CDU/CSU. At the same time, polls indicated that up to a third of the German electorate were still undecided as to which party they would cast their vote for. In the last week before the election the gap closed again, with unpublished polling indicating that the CDU/CSU might even have pulled ahead of the SPD. The results of the Bundestag election are shown in Table 1.

The table is based on second votes and shows that the election resulted in losses for the SPD (-2.4 per cent) and post-communist PDS (-1.1 per cent), which failed to get 5% but did win two direct mandates on the first vote. The SPD also picked up four 'overhang seats' (Überhangmandate), which are apportioned on a territorial basis after the election, if required. The CDU/CSU increased its share by 3.3% (and one 'overhang seat'), although it should be noted that the Christian Democrats' improved showing was almost exclusively due to the performance of the CSU (the CDU's sister-party in Bavaria). The FDP did better than in 1998 (up 1.1%) but worse than expected and nowhere near the party's target of 18 per cent. The big winners were the Greens. The party increased its vote by 1.9%, which, in relative terms, is approximately 20% higher than its vote in 1998. It also won its first ever direct mandate, in the inner-city constituency of

Berlin-Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg-Prenzlauer Berg-Ost. The Greens' slick and often very funny election campaign focused heavily on Joschka Fischer.

The Red-Green coalition was returned with a reduced majority. Given the Greens' relative success, it might have been expected that the party would drive a hard bargain during coalition negotiations and demand another ministerial post. However the party's negotiators decided to eschew this option in favour of enhanced powers for the party's three existing ministries (Foreign Ministry, Environment, and Consumer Protection) and a number of politically appointed state and parliamentary secretaries. In a Bundestag of 603 seats, the coalition has a majority of nine over all other parties, making it not only the minimal-connected-winning coalition but also the minimal-winner as well. In coalition theory, such small majorities are often considered to be desirable, because the spoils of office are not spread so thinly as they are with larger majorities. However in practice this is often not the case, because they also allow relatively small factions to hold the whole coalition to ransom. The SPD's parliamentary party is highly disciplined but the Greens are less so. Moreover, the Greens' one direct mandate is held by Christian Ströbele, an old-style left-winger. Ströbele is no fan of Fischer and certainly not of Schröder. In addition, his direct mandate gives him a certain moral authority and makes him less susceptible to the kind of pressure that can be put on list-based politicians. He could easily

FIGURE 1: GERMAN SUPPORT FOR EU MEMBERSHIP. 1981–99



Source: Eurobarometer 52.

become a focus for dissent over the lifetime of the coalition.

There are other worrying trends for the SPD in particular. The party's vote fell by 4% in western Germany, although this was offset to some extent by picking up 4.6% in the east (no doubt at the PDS' expense). It also lost 5% among male and (core) working-class voters. These voters appear to have gone straight across to the CD, which gained 6% and 8% in these respective categories of voters. Its only advantage was the enduring popularity of Chancellor Schröder, who led his CDU/CSU challenger Edmund Stoiber in the polls throughout the year. Without Schröder, the SPD's share of the vote might have been far worse than it was. It is not clear whether Schröder will run for Chancellor in four years' time. What is clear is that the Red-Green coalition was saved in 2002 by the Greens, in particular Fischer. Assuming that the coalition lasts another full term (which is quite a big assumption), the SPD has some ground to make up – particularly among its core voters – over the next four years.

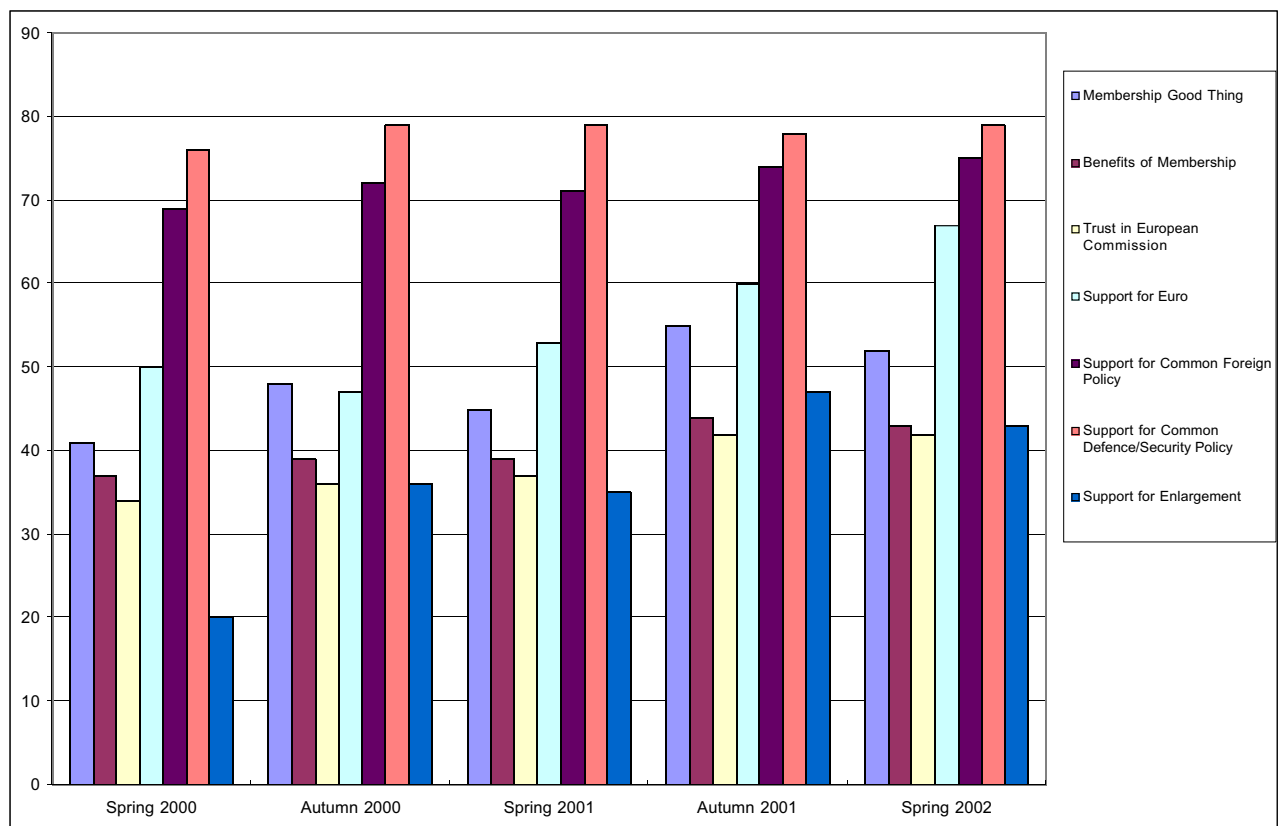
The European issue

All of the mainstream parties were anxious to keep 'Europe' off the agenda in the run-up to the 2002 Bundestag elections. They were reasonably successful in this. Despite popular unease over perceived price rises after the introduction of Euro notes and coins at the start of 2002 – and the closeness of the election race – none of the mainstream parties chose to make the euro an issue. Even though for historical reasons

retail price inflation is highly sensitive for Germans, it became effectively a non-issue in the final month of campaigning. This was reflected in a drop in the salience of European issues as the election approached. At the start of August 2002, 9% of Germans regarded euro-related price rises as the 'most important' theme in the campaign. This fell to 6% a week later, then 3%, before disappearing from polling data by the end of the month.

Since the 1950s, German elites have tended to be very pro-integration. Until recently, this European orthodoxy was bolstered by a 'permissive consensus' on the part of the broader population. However this consensus has been strained by German unification, combined with the country's high – and now entrenched – levels of unemployment. On the left of the party system, the SPD engaged in a brief flirtation with a more 'sceptical' attitude to Europe in the mid-1990s, while the post-communist PDS remains hostile to many fundamental aspects of the integration process. At the same time, however, the Greens – in contrast to some Green parties elsewhere in Europe – have become very pro-European over the course of the past decade. On the right, the FDP is sometimes relatively ambiguous about aspects of European integration, reflecting the legacy of the internal split between 'social' and 'national' liberals, although the Christian Democratic CDU remains broadly pro-EU. However, the CDU's Bavarian sister party, the CSU, has resisted some elements of the integration process. As the ruling party in Bavaria, it forged cross-party alliances at the state level in order to defend its interests and has also developed links with Jörg Haider's People's Party in neighbouring Austria. These moves were made under aegis of Edmund Stoiber, the

FIGURE 2: BREAKDOWN OF GERMAN SUPPORT FOR SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF EU MEMBERSHIP, 2000–2002.



Source: Eurobarometer 53; 54; 55; 56; 57.

state's Minister President and the Christian Democrats' defeated candidate for Chancellor in the 2002 Bundestag elections.

This breakdown in the elite consensus is reflected in popular attitudes. Figure 1 demonstrates that until the mid-1990s public opinion towards European integration was stable at around the EU average before falling back to around about 5–10% below the average. However, Figure 2 shows that unease focuses on certain aspects of the integration process. Figure 2 uses half-yearly polling data from 2000 to 2002, and presents the attitudes of the German public towards specific aspects of EU membership. These are: (i) membership as a 'good thing'; (ii) the benefits of membership; (iii) trust in the European Commission; (iv) support for the euro; (v) support for a Common Foreign Policy; (vi) support for a Common Defence and Security Policy; and (vii) support for eastern enlargement of the EU. The data show that overall levels of support for membership are reasonably stable and that the percentage of Germans polled who regarded EU membership as a good thing has increased again since the late 1990s. Moreover two EU policy objectives – a Common Foreign Policy and a Common Defence and Security Policy – are very

popular, with between 70% and 80% of those polled indicating support. However other aspects of EU policy – such as the benefits of membership, trust in the Commission, and support for enlargement – are only supported by a minority of the German public.

Party positions on Europe

It is clear that many Germans are uneasy about the European integration process. Moreover, in a proportional electoral system like Germany's, one or more political parties might be expected to exploit the niche within the multi-party system left empty by more 'Euro-orthodox' parties. The generally buoyant levels of support for European integration per se mean that 'relevant' parties – that is, parties that might expect to have some influence over the formation and/or maintenance of governing coalitions – could well opt for a strategy of 'hard' Euroscepticism (defined as the outright rejection of the integration project in its current form and opposition to their country joining, or remaining in, the EU). However, in the light of significant levels of public unease about topics such as enlargement, a strategy of 'soft' Euroscepticism

(defined as contingent or qualified opposition to aspects of the integration process) would appear to be a workable option, although an analysis of party manifestos demonstrates that the mainstream political parties have resisted this option. Using the issues flagged in Figure 2, party positions are as follows:

Membership as a 'good thing'/benefits of membership

- **PDS:** Critical but not Europhobic. Much is made of the internationalist ideals of the EU, but the EU as it currently exists is sharply criticized for being undemocratic, and too pro-business.
- **Greens:** EU membership is seen as a good thing. The EU is the platform from which the party's long-standing ideological objectives – international peace and cooperation, social justice, environmental protection and development, and the protection of the 'European social model' – can be achieved. There is some criticism of the EU's lack of democratic accountability and transparency, as well as its failure to allow Turkey to join the accession countries.
- **SPD:** The European Union is seen as a vehicle for mutual security and cooperation, but balanced by a discourse of national interest(s) and the 'weight' of Germany's 'voice'. The EU is also seen as a counterweight to/constraint upon globalization. There is also a perceived need to preserve the 'European social model' at the European level.
- **FDP:** Pro-European in tone but critical about some aspects of the Union – particularly the functioning of its institutions and the failure to complete some aspects of the Single Market Programme. The benefits of membership are seen primarily in commercial terms.
- **CDU/CSU:** The EU is a good thing and 'the unification of Europe is the most valuable legacy of the twentieth century'. However, the Union must be 'more fairly' financed by reform of the structural funds and a reduction of the burden on German taxpayers. German should be given working language status within the Union.

European Commission/other EU institutions

- **PDS:** The EU's institutional framework is undemocratic and lacks transparency. The party favours strengthening of the European Parliament (EP)'s co-decision powers and a new right of policy initiation along the lines of that enjoyed by the Commission. It demands the 'development' of the idea of a 'European citizenship' and the incorporation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights into a new constitutional settlement.
- **Greens:** Argue for a 'Europe of democracy and solidarity' and regard the EP as being the vehicle for this. The EP's powers should be enhanced, and include the right to elect the Commission President. The Greens' manifesto also argues for a new EU Constitution, which would be voted on in a Europe-wide referendum.
- **SPD:** Institutions and processes must be 'democratically

legitimate and politically efficient'. Two (interconnected) areas are flagged in the manifesto: (i) the need to establish a European Constitution and (ii) the enhancement of the powers of the EP, to include the election of the Commission President.

- **FDP:** Explicitly federalist. The existing institutional configuration is no longer adequate and a new constitution – setting out the division of competences between different tiers of governance – is required, based on the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The FDP's manifesto argues for more powers for the EP, particularly in the field of Justice and Home Affairs, and strengthened institutional capacity for the European Court of Justice (ECJ).
- **CDU/CSU:** More critical than was the case in the time of Helmut Kohl, and closer to the position that Stoiber spelt out in Bavaria. The European Council must share its legal and budgetary powers with the EP. Each member state's share of EP seats must more accurately reflect its population, thus increasing Germany's share. The CDU-CSU's manifesto argues for a new EU constitution, based on the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which would set out the competences of each tier of governance. The responsibilities of the EU, the document argues, 'must be clear, transparent, and limited (my italics).

The euro

- **PDS:** No mention is made of the euro.
- **Greens:** No mention of the euro.
- **SPD:** The euro strengthens Europe and enhances the stability of the world financial system, from which all domestic economies profit. However a greater degree of 'consultation' between the European Central Bank (ECB), business/trade union interests (Tarifvertragsparteien), and member state governments is needed (obviously a pointer to Germany's new dissatisfaction with the rules governing the ECB's monetary policy set out in the EU's Stability Pact).
- **FDP:** Only mentioned in a substantive way in relation to the liberalization of European markets. The euro is not, in itself, a solution to Europe's structural problems and will only work in the context of Europe-wide supply-side reforms.
- **CDU/CSU:** Take credit for the creation of the euro and the Stability Pact. Defend the Stability Pact and independence of the ECB.

Common Foreign Policy/Common Defence and Security Policy

- **PDS:** Argues for strong regional cooperation, including enhancing links with the countries of the former Soviet Union, in order to offset the effects of globalization. The EU must become a strong 'civil power', operating within established international frameworks such as the UN and begin to 'challenge' the United States in the areas of disarmament, environmental reform, and the introduction of an International Court of Justice.
- **Greens:** Argue against the militarization of the EU and for a strategy of civil power. The EP and Commission

should assume primary responsibility for these policy areas. The European Rapid Reaction Force should not be the first step to the creation of a 'European Superpower'.

- **SPD:** Positive about developing a 'European' foreign and security policy identity, but must be complementary to the transatlantic alliance with the United States, which remains 'the foundation of European security'. NATO is at the core of Germany's foreign policy interests. The SPD's manifesto argues for the creation of a common European border police, to defend the Union against 'organized crime and illegal immigration'.
- **FDP:** The EU is the appropriate platform to build a 'value-oriented' (wertorientierte) or ethical foreign policy, but little detail is provided. Great emphasis is placed upon defence and security policy. There are two strands to this: (i) the Rapid Reaction Force is welcomed as a complement to NATO and the transatlantic alliance and a precursor to a combined European Defence Force under a unified command structure; (ii) military cooperation is seen in commercial terms, with the standardization of military equipment leading to coordinated Europe-wide defence-related production/research and development.
- **CDU/CSU:** A small segment on eastern enlargement but very little of substantive importance on either a Common Foreign Policy or Common Defence and Security Policy.

Eastern enlargement of the EU

- **PDS:** Regarded primarily in terms of its domestic economic and political impact. Can only work for the region if matched by more public spending by Berlin and Brussels to improve infrastructure and human capital. EU structural policy is singled out for specific criticism. Renewal of 'traditional links' with neighbouring countries of the former Warsaw Pact is welcomed, but entirely in the context of the possible advantages for eastern Germany. It is balanced by warnings that this region might suffer by becoming a 'transit route' between western Germany and the new markets in the accession countries.
- **Greens:** Regard the enlargement of the EU as a historic opportunity to overcome the division of Europe. Turkey to be given some kind of 'perspective' on integration (Integrationsperspektive) as soon as its record on human and minority rights allows.
- **SPD:** Positive about enlargement, albeit framed within a discourse of domestic benefits. Stresses the need to maintain 'sensible' transition policies such as the seven-year constraints on the free movement of labour and services between the EU (except Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Ireland) and the accession states.
- **FDP:** Regards enlargement as a historic opportunity to overcome the division of Europe, but argues that this must be the catalyst for reform of EU institutions, as well as the Common Agricultural Policy and Structural Funds. In keeping with the party's neo-liberal instincts, the FDP criticizes the transitional restrictions on the movement of labour and services between existing and new member states.
- **CDU/CSU:** The segment on enlargement strikes a delicate balance between an 'idealistic' European discourse ('enlargement as a historic opportunity') and a more

uncomfortable discourse of national interest. The issue of enlargement is linked to the rights of ethnic Germans in the accession countries, as well as the legacy of those Germans expelled from former German territories following the Second World War (particularly the Sudetenland, Silesia, and East Prussia). The manifesto defends the system of transitional controls on the movement of labour from accession countries put in place mainly at German behest over the last few years.

Summary and conclusions

None of the mainstream parties advocated an explicitly anti-European position during the 2002 Bundestag elections. Even the PDS's position was ambiguous, partly because the party's manifesto ignored European issues or subsumed them into other topics. In addition, with the exception of the party's proposed reforms of the EU's institutional arrangements, European issues were not dealt with in any real detail. The PDS's position on European integration remained one of 'soft' Euroscepticism: criticising key elements of the integration process (rather than the idea of the process itself) and framing the entire debate within the context of the interests of the former East Germany. Of the other parties, the Greens' position was positive (although raising some of the same issues about transparency and democracy as the PDS) and portrayed the EU as the ideal platform to tackle transboundary issues such as the environment and disarmament. The SPD adopted a pragmatic position, stressing national interest(s), the domestic benefits of EU integration and the defence of the 'European social mode'l, whilst the FDP (in keeping with the party's neo-liberal self-image) also took a pragmatic stance that stressed the opportunities presented by integration for German business and consumers. The CDU/CSU's position was more interesting; the manifesto made much of the benefits of European integration but balanced this with more assertive passages about the German language and the rights of ethnic Germans. However whether this represents a new 'turn' in the CDU/CSU's position on Europe or was due more to the influence of Stoiber and the CSU in this particular campaign remains to be seen.

To conclude, in so far as these parties have 'positions' on Europe, they are secondary to, and contingent upon, the parties' wider ideological profiles. In the broadest terms, the elite consensus on Germany remains intact. Even in such a close-run election no party really took up the European ball and ran with it. Ordinary Germans – and some among the country's elites – may harbour doubts about the pace and scope of European integration but it remains a secondary issue for now.

Convened from the Sussex European Institute, the Opposing European Research Network is a group of academic researchers studying party politics within the European Union and candidate countries and seeking to understand in particular why Euroscepticism exists in some states and not in others. Like the Royal Institute of International Affairs, the Network itself retains an independent stance on the issues under consideration. The views presented are those of the authors.



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