

E-PAPER

# The European Election in Germany

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# 1 Summary

## *Election result*

The European Election changed Germany's federal party-political landscape. For the first time in a nationwide election, **Bündnis 90/Die Grünen** (the Greens) are in second place (20.5 per cent; +9.8 percentage points) and are placed in front of the SPD (the Social Democrats). The Greens' absolute number of votes also increased; almost 7.7 million votes were cast for the Greens compared to 4.2 million second votes (party votes) in the Federal Election or 3.1 million in the last European Election. Among voters under 60, the Greens are the strongest party. The **CDU/CSU** (Christian Democratic Union and its sister party, the Christian Social Union) and SPD scored their worst results ever in a European Election. Of the Union parties, the CDU lost significantly (22.6 per cent), while the CSU with their top candidate Weber scored slight gains (6.3 per cent). The SPD dropped to 15.8 per cent (−11.4 percentage points). The **AfD** (the Alternative for Germany) scored significant gains (11.0 per cent; +3.9 percentage points); **Die Linke** and **FDP** (the Left and Free Democratic Party) achieved results just over 5 per cent (5.5 and 5.4 per cent respectively). With no percentage threshold, there will now be **14 German Parties in the European Parliament**. The election result also reflects a **strong regional bias**: While the Greens made gains in the cities in particular, the AfD's heartlands are the structurally backward, rural regions regions, esp. in some areas of eastern Germany.

## *Turnout*

The trend towards a higher turnout was again readily apparent during the European Election in Germany; never before has there been a similar increase over the previous election (+13.3 percentage points). Some 37.8 million of the 61.6 million eligible to vote took part in the election, the highest turnout since reunification (61.4 per cent).

## *Parliament*

Pan-European developments are only reflected in the German result to a limited extent. In Germany, anti-EU parties only play a marginal role, with only the AfD achieving double-digit results in this election. Germany's strongest political force, the CDU/CSU, is part of the largest European group (EPP), while the Greens are likely to be the fourth largest group in the European Parliament – with the German Green's election success contributing significantly to this. The German Greens will be the largest Green Party within the EGP family.

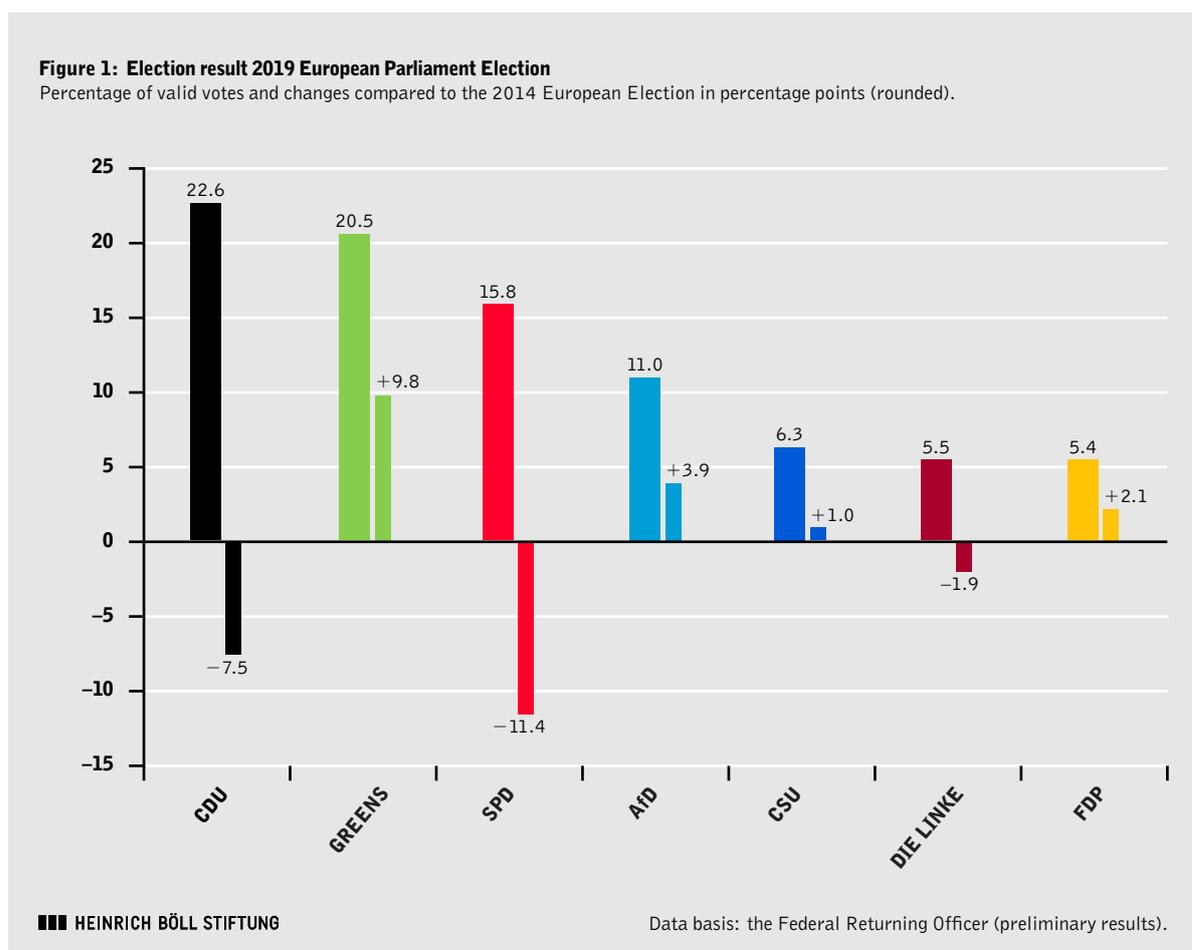
## *Political climate & motives for voting*

The European Election followed its own agenda in Germany to an extent not seen in the past. Never before did European topics play such a decisive part in the outcome. In addition, the key issues during the campaign, above all environmental and climate policy, were deemed European issues by the voters. The Greens and the CDU are the two parties regarded to have the most competent solutions for the issues decisive for our future. In addition, there is a clear pro-European spirit in Germany. Thus, from a German point of view, the 2019 European Election outcome was pro-European and guided by international topics within the framework of German party politics. At the same time, it is likely to have a significant impact on national politics and the competition between parties at the national level. In addition, key stimuli and escalations during the campaign originated not from the parties but from individual and civil society players (e.g. Fridays for Future, the debate started by the German YouTube personality Rezo).

## 2 Election result

### 2.1 Breakdown of votes

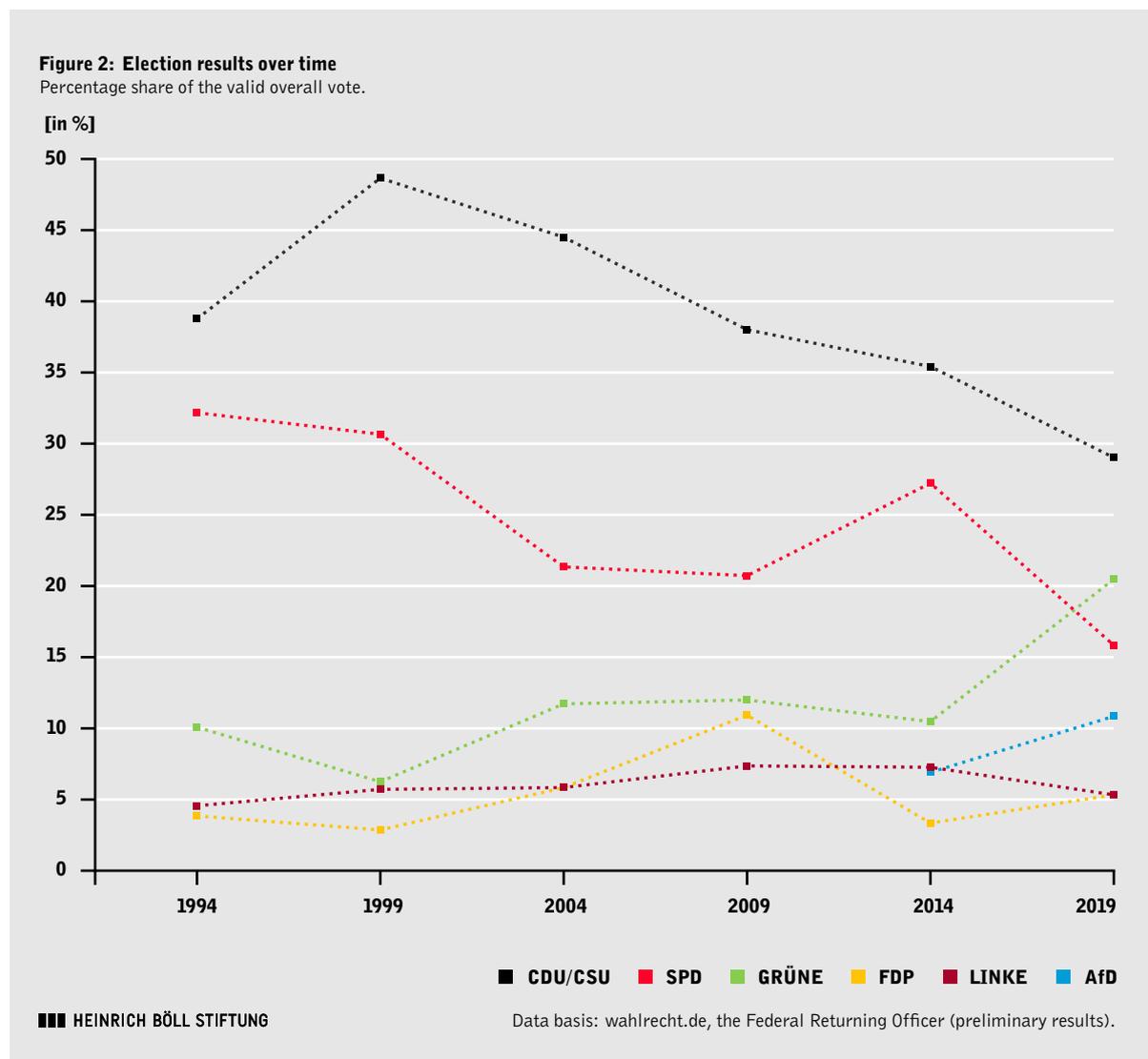
The 2019 European Election shifted the balance of power in the competition between German parties. For the first time in a nationwide election, the **Greens** moved up to second place with 20.5 per cent (+9.8 percentage points). The **SPD** lost dramatically and achieved a record low of 15.8 per cent (−11.4 percentage points). The **CDU** fared similarly, losing significantly, unlike its sister party **CSU** (CDU: 22.6 per cent; 7.5 percentage points; CSU: 6.3 per cent; +1.0 percentage point). The **AfD** was the only relevant anti-EU party to achieve gains in Germany, while Linke and FDP scored in the region of five per cent (figure 1). Particularly noticeable is the situation of the small parties: As there was no minimum percentage clause, several small parties achieved sometimes significant gains (figure 3). Turnout increased sharply to 61.4 per cent (+13.3 percentage points). The share of early and postal votes is also expected to have increased further, as became apparent even before the election.



The **CDU**, at 22.6 per cent, recorded the worst result in its history (figure 2), but remained ahead of the Greens, particularly since the CSU achieved slight gains at 6.0 per cent with its top candidate Weber and bolstered the Union's overall result. In absolute numbers, the CDU/CSU obtained just over 10 million votes (ca. +411.000 over 2014).

The **Greens** achieved their best European Election result with 20.5 per cent and scored massive gains in absolute numbers: In total, 7.675.018 votes were cast for the Greens, approximately 4.5 million more than five years ago and 3.5 million more than in the Federal Election of 2017 (second votes).

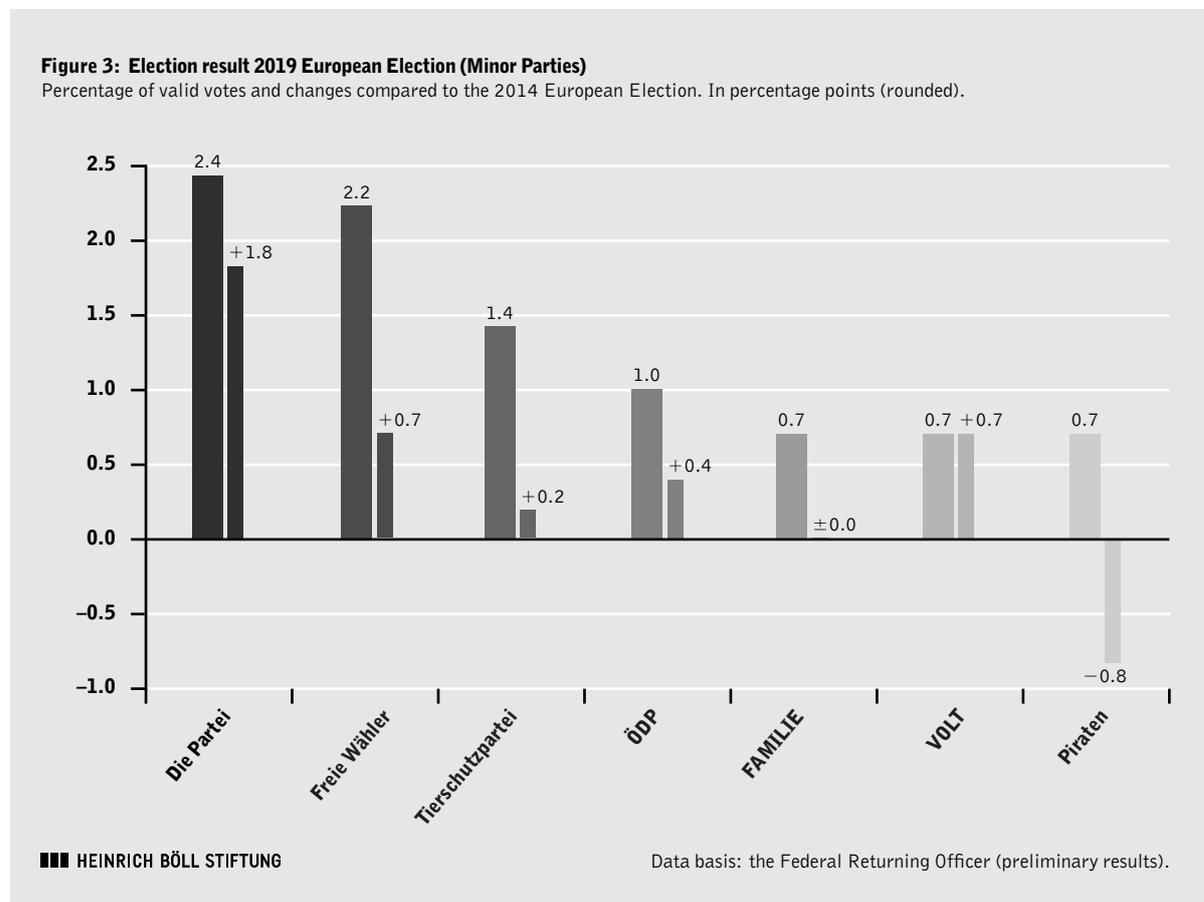
The **SPD** dropped to a European Election low and slipped into third place for the first time. A minus of 11.4 percentage points comes along with massive losses in absolute numbers, the SPD lost about 2.1 million voters and could only mobilise just under 6 million.



The **AfD** is the only anti-EU party of relevance in Germany and, with 11 per cent (+3.9 percentage points), came in a distant fourth (approx. 4.1 million voters). Anti-European parties therefore only played a secondary role in this election in Germany.

While **Die Linke** lost considerably in this election in relative values (only slightly in absolute votes, approx. 2.1 mio. voters, -110000), the **FDP** made corresponding gains (approx. 2 million voters). Both parties remained noticeably below their respective national trends, however.

**Minor party** gains are also noteworthy. Of the 41 parties competing in this election, fourteen will enter the European Parliament. Collectively, the minor parties achieved an impressive 12.9 per cent of votes (2014: 8.8 per cent), the strongest being **Die Partei** («the party», 2.4 per cent; +1.8 percentage points).



## 2.2 Distribution of seats and representation of women

Overall, **a total of 14 German parties** will be represented in the new European Parliament. In addition to the Bundestag parties CDU, CSU, SPD, AfD, FDP, Linke and the Greens, there are also the Freie Wähler («free voters»), Die Partei, Piraten («pirates»), Tierschutzpartei («animal rights party»), Familie («family»), ÖDP («ecological democratic party») and Volt. Of the 96 German seats in the parliament, 29 went to the CDU/CSU, 21 to the Greens, 16 to the SPD. The AfD received 11, Linke and FDP 5 seats each. The minor parties received 9 seats in total (table 1). Compared with Europe as a whole, the pro-European party camp was significantly stronger, corresponding to the prevailing EU-positive mood in Germany. The Greens are likely to play a central role within the EGP group; the German Greens are the strongest party in this group and are crucial to its upward trend.

Table 1: Allocation of seats

	Seats	Gains/Losses
CDU	23	-6
GREENS	21	10
SPD	16	-11
AfD	11	4
CSU	6	1
DIE LINKE	5	-2
FDP	5	2
Die Partei	2	1
Freie Wähler	2	1
Tierschutzpartei	1	0
ÖDP	1	0
FAMILIE	1	0
VOLT	1	1
Piraten	1	0

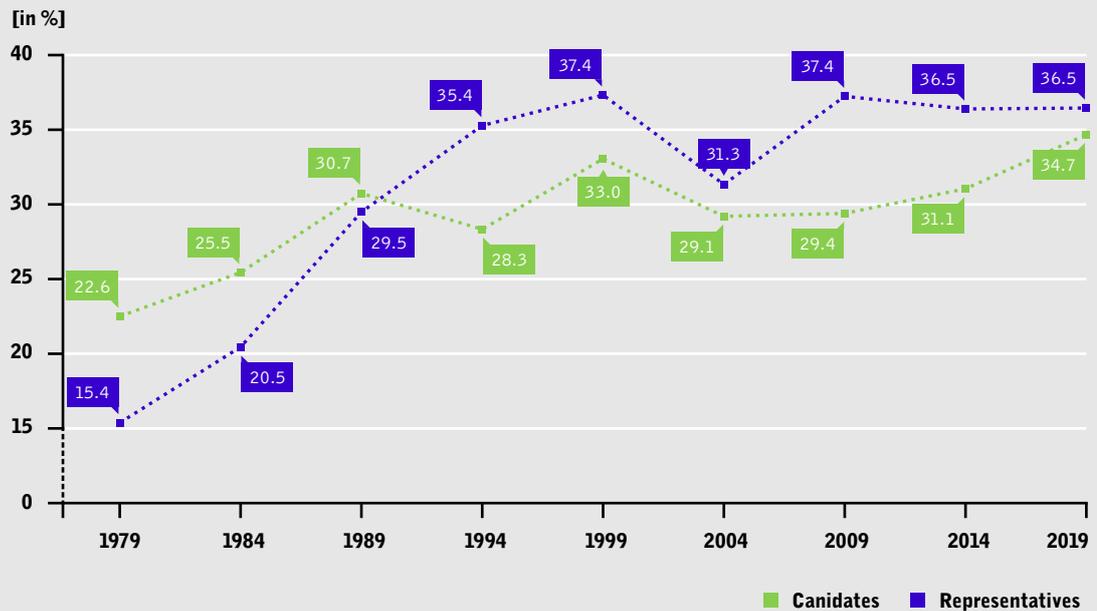
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Data basis: the Federal Returning Officer (preliminary results).

In addition to the distribution of seats, developments in the proportion of women must be considered with regards to the **representation of women** in parliament. There was no difference here to the previous election; the proportion of women remains at 36.5 per cent of German representatives.

**Figure 4: Proportion of Women**

Proportion of female candidates for the European Parliament (including substitute candidates) and elected female candidates (in per cent; excluding MEPs elected by the West Berlin House of Representatives until 1989).



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Data basis: the Federal Returning Officer (preliminary results).

The proportion of women among elected candidates is roughly the same as the proportion of female candidates, 34.7 per cent of 1380 candidates being female. Equal representation has therefore still not been achieved. Noteworthy: While the overall list of the CSU had just under 33 per cent women, 50 per cent of the elected CSU were female. Thus, Linke, Greens, SPD and CSU are sending at least 50 per cent female representatives, whereas the minor parties in particular are only sending men, since they are generally heading these parties' lists.

Table 2: Proportion of female candidates and elected female candidates

	<b>Total</b>	<b>CDU</b>	<b>CSU</b>	<b>Greens</b>	<b>SPD</b>	<b>Die Linke</b>	<b>FDP</b>
<b>Candidates 2019</b>							
<b>Total</b>	<b>1380</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>168</b>
of which women	479	88	20	21	74	11	33
Proportion of women	34.7 %	44.0 %	32.8 %	52.5 %	48.7 %	50.0 %	19.6 %
<b>Elected candidates 2019</b>							
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>
of which women	35	5	3	11	8	3	2
Proportion of women	36.5 %	21.7 %	50.0 %	52.4 %	50.0 %	60.0 %	40.0 %

	<b>Die Partei</b>	<b>ÖDP</b>	<b>AfD</b>	<b>Tier-schutz-partei</b>	<b>Familie</b>	<b>Piraten</b>	<b>Freie Wähler</b>	<b>Volt</b>
<b>Candidates 2019</b>								
<b>Total</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>
of which women	47	21	5	6	0	1	8	10
Proportion of women	32.9 %	21.9 %	16.7 %	50.0 %	0.0 %	11.1 %	32.0 %	38.5 %
<b>Elected candidates 2019</b>								
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
of which women	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0
Proportion of women	0.0 %	0.0 %	18.2 %	0.0 %	0.0 %	0.0 %	50.0 %	0.0 %

Candidates and elected candidates (total; percentage of women) for parties represented in the European Parliament, 2019 European Election; own calculation.

## 3 Political mood before the election

### 3.1 Political mood regarding Europe before the election: interested, pro-European and concerned

European Elections have hitherto been considered an electoral sideshow. There was rather little interest in the European Parliament as a seemingly «second class parliament», with correspondingly little interest in the European election campaign and low actual turnout, especially compared with national elections. However, the assessment of the significance of the European Parliament has changed in Germany, as has the media's and the general public's interest in Europe, in the EU and in election campaign reporting. As a result of European and international developments in recent years, **interest in the EU**, and thus in the European Parliament, has increased. Debates between EU supporters and EU critics, and the emergence of pro-European or (right-wing) populist, anti-European groups and parties have not only changed the competition between parties in European countries. Awareness of for the importance of the EU has also changed in the course of the Brexit debate, the increase in nationalism and the associated conflicts regarding the defence of liberal democracy in Europe.

In the German context, the Pulse of Europe and Fridays for Future campaigns played a part among others (including large-scale demonstrations in combination with election appeals on the Friday before the election), but also political debates at a European level (e.g. regarding digital copyright), in short: The EU is on the agenda more than it has been for a very long time. This presence is reflected in media reporting in the run-up to the election and is related with a much increased interest in the European Parliament Election. In addition – also a rather new phenomenon – there were numerous pro-European Election campaigns by businesses. Barely two weeks before the European Election, a significant majority of citizens in Germany was (very) interested in the election (Politbarometer opinion poll: 56 per cent, +18 percentage points compared with 2014; Europa-trend opinion poll: 63 per cent, +22 percentage points compared with 2014<sup>[1]</sup>), during election week, interest increased further (69 per cent (very) interested, 2014: 48 per cent; infratest dimap pre-election opinion poll). Significantly, this is in no way a phenomenon restricted to certain age groups, but a **cross-generational strong interest in the European Election**. Only the 35–49 age group express slightly less interest by comparison

**1** Forschungsgruppe Wahlen research group: Politbarometer Extra 05/2019; survey period 14 to 16 May 2019; cited as Politbarometer. Infratest dimap: Europatrend May 2019; survey period: 14 to 15 May; cited as Europatrend.

(Europatrend), in line with what is normal for this age group. This increased interest is accompanied by a further rise in the demand for early and postal votes.<sup>[2]</sup>

Not only has interest in the European Election been driven by Europe-related debates in recent years – **European topics also play a central role in the individual election choices** of German citizens. For the first time, European topics were more important for decision making than national political considerations (or equally important, depending on the poll; Politbarometer: 58 per cent considered European politics more important, 38 per cent national politics; infratest dimap exit poll 46 to 46 per cent European versus national politics). Although from the citizens' point of view, European Elections are still not as important as national elections, the election was highly visible this year in Germany and in addition harbours the potential for national repercussions (as is the case with the SPD's result in conjunction with the regional election in Bremen). However, these were not paramount for interested citizens, whose particular attention on election Sunday was focused above all on future majorities in the European Parliament (54 per cent, infratest dimap pre-election opinion poll).

Interest in the European Election was not primarily based on an EU-sceptic attitude in Germany: The European Election was **not an anti-EU election in Germany**. To the contrary, evaluation of EU membership was unusually positive in Germany (Politbarometer). More than half of those questioned believed the EU to be more likely to bring advantages for the population, while only one in ten saw only disadvantages (more advantages: 55 per cent, advantages and disadvantages: 32 per cent; more disadvantages: 10 per cent; Politbarometer). This means that approval rates were not only more than double the long-term average in the Politbarometer ratings since 1992, but also very positive compared to some other EU countries, where anti-European parties are becoming much more popular. The EU therefore has an unusually strong political presence in Germany, and is at the same time unusually highly rated. This very positive development can be attributed to the Brexit debate. Since the Brexit referendum in June 2016, agreement with the statement «EU membership is an advantage» is overall at a much higher level than before (Deutschlandtrend opinion poll April).

It is noticeable that there was **no significant polarisation in the German European Election campaign**. The reason for this is most likely that a generally EU-friendly attitude within the population is reflected within the range of established parties from CDU/CSU to Die Linke and that more specific issues were only partially discussed in this campaign. Thus, the vertically integrated European Parliament Parties on offer in Germany in essence follow

**2** Something the Federal Returning Officer is quite critical of, see e.g. Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung newspaper of 21 May 2019, Bundeswahlleiter sieht steigende Briefwählerzahl skeptisch («The Federal Returning Officer takes a critical view of a rise in postal votes»), [www.faz.net/-hzv-9n6k0](http://www.faz.net/-hzv-9n6k0).

the German party competition model, with more minor parties entering parliament due to election law. Real controversies regarding fundamental restructuring or even abolishment of the EU did not penetrate into the election campaign. Among the larger parties relevant to the competition, only the AfD represents a fundamental counterpoint with its anti-EU stance. AfD supporters are the only ones seeing mainly disadvantages in the German EU membership (more disadvantages: 41 per cent; more advantages: 26 per cent; Politbarometer; see also infratest dimap, table 3). In this climate it is fitting that supporters of all relevant parties with the exception of the AfD are predominantly in favour of more communitarisation within the EU, especially the supporters of Die Linke and the SPD but also of Greens, FDP and CDU/CSU. (Politbarometer; infratest dimap pre-election opinion poll; different from Europatrend survey: here, 28 per cent of Die Linke supporters, 42 per cent of FDP and «only» 74 per cent of AfD supporters were in favour of European countries acting more independently in the future<sup>[3]</sup>). The Brexit debate is showing its effects here; the AfD did not emphasize the «Dexit debate» about Germany leaving the EU in its campaign, not least because there are different attitudes among its voters. It focused on other topics instead.<sup>[4]</sup>

Fundamental support for the EU should not disguise the fact that a majority of Germans is **dissatisfied with political practice in the EU**. Only 35 per cent are satisfied, as opposed to 58 per cent dissatisfied (Politbarometer; here also AfD: 96 per cent dissatisfied). There is no doubt that the underlying causes for the dissatisfaction may be extremely varied, that for example both the desire for more communitarisation or for renationalisation of politics is behind this dissatisfaction. This also means that this dissatisfaction with the real situation within the EU combined with the exceptionally strong interest in the EU as a political player could generate the potential for debates over specific reform requirements. At a first glance, there was a dominance of the exaggerated «destiny» election narrative during the campaign – future analyses will show to what extent individual issues were also topics during the campaign. In contrast, pre-election opinion polls already showed clearly the polarised positions among the German public regarding European policy. There are differences of opinion on topics such as EU-wide tax regulation, e.g. the introduction of a Europe-wide tax on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (for: 45, against: 52 per cent; infratest dimap pre-election opinion poll) or standardised minimum company taxation (for: 54, against: 40 per cent; infratest dimap pre-election opinion poll). The protection of the EU's external borders is

- 3 The strong divergence between the two polls may in part be due to different wordings, but may also – for Die Linke – be due to the clear inner-party split that became apparent recently during Die Linke's Bonn party conference on Europe.
- 4 They also had their position changed on the voting advice application «Wahl-O-Mat», see also Markus Wehner (FAZ): AfD in der Defensive («The AfD on the defensive»), 15 May 2019, [www.faz.net/-hz7-9my4t](http://www.faz.net/-hz7-9my4t).

also controversial; here, too, the public is divided between «adequate» and «deficient» (infratest dimap pre-election opinion poll).

A noteworthy expression of a more pronounced **European perspective during the German election campaign** is the view of Germany within a European context. While anti-EU parties play only a minor role in Germany, the situation is completely different in many European countries. Anti-EU populists, both left-wing but above all right-wing, are gaining massive support. This problem area was not only very present in the media with regards to the future parliament, but was also viewed with growing concern by the public in the run-up to the election. Four out of five of those surveyed regarded the anticipated results of **anti-European, populist and right-wing parties as a big problem** for the EU's future (problem: 78 per cent (2019) versus 65 per cent (2014); Politbarometer). However, only ten per cent regarded this as one of the most important problems (Politbarometer). That is to say, while the German public is predominantly pro-EU as a whole, it sees the anti-EU populists as a latent threat to the pan-European future. A lack of unity among member states, refugee and migration policies as well as climate change and the environment were seen as **central problems for the EU** (27, 26 and 20 per cent; Politbarometer).

However, the topics regarded as key challenges for the EU were only partly relevant for individual votes. A **decisive topic for the election outcome** that also seems to be developing from a valence issue to a salience issue (i.e. moving from considering more/less to the alternative for/against) is **climate and environmental policy**. No other topic was more important for the individual vote in the run-up to the elections in Germany (environmental policy is a crucial topic for 48 per cent; Europatrend), and for no other topic was a European solution regarded as more essential (solve climate policy at a European level, agreement 88 per cent; Deutschlandtrend, April). Add to this high levels of media attention, of social mobilisation (Fridays for Future among others), and the widely-held perception of a great need for action with regards to climate protection. Unsurprisingly, supporters of the Greens see most of this need for action (great/very great need: 97 per cent; Deutschlandtrend May), whereas especially AfD supporters see no need for action (little/no need: 55 per cent). This topical boom is helping the Greens to stabilise at a high level in both federal and European politics. The Greens are the party traditionally regarded as having the greatest environmental expertise. It therefore comes as no surprise that around 40 per cent of those questioned saw the Greens as best placed to fight against climate change (Deutschlandtrend May). This topic is even more important for the supporters of the Greens, 88 per cent of whom regard environmental policy as very important for their individual vote in the European Election (Europatrend).

Nevertheless, it was not only **environmental and climate policies** that contribute to potential voters' decision making: other important topics include social security (43 per cent), securing peace (35 per cent) and, of lower importance, migration, economic growth and currency stability (multiple answers were possible). Thus, only European level topics were important for the individual vote, with different topical priorities among the supporters of

the different parties: While the environment was the key topic for supporters of the Greens (88 per cent), for Die Linke supporters, social security was as dominant as migration was for the supporters of the AfD (69 per cent in each case). Among FDP supporters, economic growth was of key importance, while preferences varied more widely among the supporters of the SPD and CDU/CSU (SPD: social security and environment/climate protection, 50 and 47 per cent; CDU/CSU: securing peace 49 per cent, environment/climate protection 41 per cent; Europatrend). Thus, the topics important to potential voters were closely linked to the known traditional areas of expertise of the individual parties – another expression of a vertically integrated party system in which the voters address European topics but link them to their national party themes.

## 3.2 Dynamics during the election campaign

The European election campaign in Germany was in general not very polarised for the reasons outlined above. Nevertheless, the 2019 campaign was characterised by intensive reporting, a close linkage to national topics and above all **surprising dynamics during the final week**. The great relevance of environmental policy as illustrated above is a longer-standing phenomenon in the competition between German parties that has taken the place of the previously dominant conflict regarding migration. The Fridays for Future demonstrations in particular contributed to this. They were very successful in the media, particularly since the second global Fridays for Future protest day took place during the election in Europe (just before the election in Germany), generating a great deal of turnout and receiving great coverage.

Another highly relevant topic, albeit more for younger voters, appears to have been internet policy. This normally not-so-present topic gained high relevance in the months leading up to the election: The passing of the **EU copyright directive** provoked great protests, especially among youths and young adults and was likely a catalyst for the engagement of younger voters in particular. Due to the fact that the responsible rapporteur in parliament was a German EPP member, protest on this topic was directed mainly towards the CDU/CSU but also against the SPD as a co-ruling party – fertile ground for discernible protest against these parties from young internet users during the final phase of the election campaign.

**The new dimension attained in the interrelationship between online and offline mobilisation** and formats during the campaign is especially worth noting. Apart from the Fridays for Future demonstrations (with their online and visible and real world presence), the anti-CDU polemics of YouTube personality «Rezo» also shaped the final phase of the German election campaign. In a nearly hour-long video he called for a boycott of the CDU/CSU as well as

the SPD and AfD. The video – certainly controversial in its style<sup>[5]</sup> – was not only viewed millions of times but also shaped the reporting in traditional media during the last days before the election. Here, too, reporting focused mainly on Rezo's climate policy theses. An additional video message from a number of influencers just before the election gave further support to the key demand (not to vote for the CDU/CSU, SPD or AfD). The video intervention was also taken up in numerous ways during the Fridays for Future demonstrations. Apart from the substantive issues, this mainly shows the further-reaching challenges in a changed political/digital society. Thus, the CDU was unable to come up with a strategic response to this frontal attack, which was clearly noted, and not only by young voters, during the final phase of the election campaign. In addition, this case illustrates how an individual comment, as opposed to a harsh attack from a political competitor, dramatically energised the final phase of the election campaign – not only another expression of a changed political communication landscape but also of a new understanding of politics that will likely continue to be debated even after the election.

In addition to these cross-party dynamics during the final phase of the election campaign, **problematic situations for individual parties during the campaign** must also be noted. Some time before the election, the **FDP** failed to launch a united start to their campaign during the FDP party conference. Instead, the start was downright unsuccessful as the party's top candidate for the European Parliament and previous secretary general Nicola Beer only gained 58.6 per cent of the delegates' vote for the party's Federal Executive. In contrast, the government crisis in Austria escalating just before the European Election, triggered by the so-called «Ibiza scandal» around Freedom Party politician and Vice Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache, will have presented a special challenge for the AfD. The AfD was not only striving towards a joint parliamentary group with their partner party FPÖ (Austrian Freedom Party) in the European Parliament – recent AfD party financing affairs were also brought back into the focus of the public media. These **crises radiating from the European party families towards Germany** did not only affect the AfD during this election campaign: The **CDU/CSU** also experienced difficulties due to the surprise government crisis, but above all the (now suspended) Hungarian EPP member party Fidesz with head of government Viktor Orbán put a strain on the CDU/CSU campaign with its top candidate Weber. The **SPD**, the German member of the PES, is in a similar situation. In its case, accusations of corruption against the Rumanian PSD under Liviu Dragnea – though receiving considerably less attention in Germany – affected the campaign.

**5** See e.g. Ann-Kathrin Büüscher, Die Selbstzerstörung der CDU («The CDU's self destruction»), 23 May 2019, [www.deutschlandfunk.de/reaktion-auf-rezo-video-die-selbstzerstoerung-der-cdu.720.de.html?dram:article\\_id=449593](http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/reaktion-auf-rezo-video-die-selbstzerstoerung-der-cdu.720.de.html?dram:article_id=449593); Jasper von Altenbockum (FAZ): Zerstörerisch («Destructive»), 24 May 2019, [www.faz.net/-gpg-9nayd](http://www.faz.net/-gpg-9nayd).

Due to the short-term nature of the Rezo video intervention and the Ibiza crisis, direct effects on election behaviour cannot be measured precisely. It must however be noted that during this election campaign, several new topics came to the fore during the last few days. This is likely to have been significant especially since close to 40 per cent of potential voters only made their decision on election day or immediately before (table 3).

## 4 Voting behaviour

### 4.1 Time of decision, motive, topics

The decision for or against a party is based on complex individual considerations.<sup>[6]</sup> The first distinction to make is whether a party is chosen from a conviction (for this particular party) or from disappointment (with a view towards other parties). A choice from conviction can be seen as positive, whereas a choice from disappointment indicates protest voting behaviour. Taking an overall view, it is evident that the overwhelming majority of voters select their party from conviction, with only the AfD collecting mainly disappointed voters (table 3).

The table also shows that voters made their choice based to a large part on **reasons of European politics**, as discussed above. Nevertheless, a number of voters continued to keep German politics in mind – a fact that should neither surprise nor should it be interpreted as a purely national basis for decision making, in particular considering the interconnectedness of parties and topics. The share of **late decision makers** must also be noted, especially with regards to the dynamics during the last week of the election campaign; the total figure was significantly higher than during the last general election. In the case of the CDU/CSU and Greens, voting decisions tended to have been made early. Almost half of CDU/CSU voters claimed to have made their decision a long time ago (or were loyal voters). It is a similar picture for the Greens, here four out of ten claimed to have made their decision a long time ago. With this, Green voters made their decision along similar lines to the average of German voters in the European Election; compared with the 2014 European Election, the share of «Green» late deciders has decreased significantly.

**6** A note on method: Underlying data for the analysis on voting behaviour is based on the infratest dimap exit poll (as of 27 May 2019) unless otherwise specified. In a representative sample of 400 polling stations, information on voting behaviour, age and gender was collected on 26 May from a total of 55319 voters, with additional socio-structural and content-related markers from 8776 voters. In order to allow for postal voters and to make general statements about all voters, the exit poll's voter data is weighted based on the official result. The result is a representative picture of the total electorate as well as the electorate of the individual parties.

Table 3: Motives and time of voting decision

	Total	CDU/CSU	SPD	GRÜNE	DIE LINKE	AfD	FDP
<i>Motives for voting decision</i>							
<b>Voting decision based on...</b>							
conviction	66 (-1)	79 (+1)	73 (+1)	71 (+5)	61 (+6)	37 (+4)	57 (-13)
disappointment	29 (+1)	15 (-2)	22 (±0)	25 (-4)	34 (-6)	59 (-1)	38 (+13)
<b>Voting decision based on...</b>							
national politics	47 (-7)	51 (-14)	42 (-9)	42 (-1)	51 (-3)	(+15)	47 (+1)
european politics	45 (+6)	41 (+12)	51 (+8)	51 (-1)	40 (+1)	(-20)	45 (-3)
<i>Attitude towards EU membership</i>							
<b>Membership brings...</b>							
more advantages	63 (+17)	70 (+22)	70 (+17)	82 (+24)	56 (+23)	15 (+4)	61 (-3)
more disadvantages	9 (-7)	4 (-8)	6 (-6)	2 (-6)	7 (-16)	42 (-3)	7 (-4)
equal	24 (-11)	22 (-13)	20 (-13)	14 (-18)	33 (-7)	39 (-2)	29 (+7)
<i>Time of voting decision</i>							
<b>Decision...</b>							
on election day	18 (-1)	16 (-3)	19 (+2)	13 (-6)	19 (+1)	16 (+2)	22 (±0)
during the last days	19 (-2)	16 (-3)	20 (-1)	23 (-3)	19 (+3)	20 (-8)	23 (+3)
<b>late deciders</b>	<b>37 (-3)</b>	<b>32 (-6)</b>	<b>39 (+1)</b>	<b>36 (-9)</b>	<b>38 (+4)</b>	<b>26 (-6)</b>	<b>45 (+3)</b>
during the last weeks	21 (+1)	19 (±0)	18 (-3)	26 (+5)	19 (±0)	17 (-6)	19 (-5)
some time ago	31 (+4)	32 (+5)	28 (+2)	31 (+6)	33 (+1)	50 (+7)	28 (+5)
always the same	9 (-2)	14 (±0)	13 (±0)	7 (-1)	8 (-5)	6 (+5)	7 (-2)

In per cent; green: difference to 2014 in percentage points; questions: Did you vote for your party because you were convinced by them / disappointed by others? What was most important for your decision? Germany has... from EU membership? When did you decide who to vote for in the European Election?

## 4.2 Sociodemographic findings

Voting behaviour differed significantly between different **age groups**. While there were indicators for an open generational conflict during the weeks leading up to the election, it was not a given that this would be reflected so clearly in the results. The civil society alliances active before the election (among them Fridays for Future, the protest against the EU copyright directive, the Rezo debate) have fuelled this generational conflict. This topical and organisational escalation of a generational conflict is reflected in the increasing structural anchoring of voting behaviour within the different age groups. For the first time, **the Greens are the strongest party among voters under 60, with around 25 per cent** (CDU/CSU approx. 22 per cent; FGW election coverage). **The CDU/CSU only became the main political force due to voters over 60**, drawing on around 40 per cent of the vote in this age group and thus securing the «overall win». In summary, the CDU/CSU (as well as SPD) rely on voters aged 60 and up, while the Greens are in the lead among the under 60s.

Table 4: Voting behaviour according to age

	CDU/CSU	SPD	GRÜNE	DIE LINKE	AfD	FDP	Sonstige
<b>age</b>							
18–24 y.	12 (–15)	8 (–12)	34 (+16)	8 (±0)	5 (–3)	8 (+5)	25 (+9)
25–34 y.	18 (–11)	10 (–9)	25 (+9)	7 (–1)	11 (+3)	6 (+3)	24 (+7)
35–44 y.	23 (–10)	11 (–11)	24 (+9)	5 (–2)	13 (+5)	6 (+2)	18 (+7)
45–59 y.	26 (–5)	14 (–14)	24 (+10)	5 (–3)	13 (+6)	5 (+2)	12 (+3)
60+	41 (–1)	22 (–10)	13 (+8)	5 (–2)	9 (+3)	5 (+1)	6 (+2)

in per cent; green: differences to 2014 in percentage points;

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Source: ARD/infratest dimap exit poll.

Here, **four groups** can be identified where voting decision and age correlate with political positions: Young and first time voters of the (formerly) smaller parties were facing a generation 60+, who were mainly conservative in their voting behaviour. At the same time, in the intermediate age groups, the allies of this young generation formed a relative majority and faced the right-wing parties, who achieved better than average results in this group. It remains to be seen whether this constellation will result in a more permanent demarcation line. At the moment, **young and first-time voters** (18–24 years) are turning their back on the former people's parties – above all the CDU (12 per cent, –15 percentage points) but also the SPD (8 per cent, –12 percentage points). At the same time, they give a below average percentage of their vote to the AfD (5 per cent, 3 percentage points). The preferred party among the young and first-time voters were the Greens (34 per cent, +16 percentage points). Die Linke (8 per cent, unchanged) and FDP (8 per cent; +5 percentage points) also scored above average results in this age group, as did the minor parties. They find their opposite in the **generation 60+**. This age group remained firmly attached to the former people's parties, resulting in a higher than average result for them here. 41 per cent of this age group continued to vote for the CDU/CSU with only a small decrease relative to the last election (–1 percentage point). In the age group below (45 to 59 years), CDU/CSU only managed 26 per cent of the vote this time. While the SPD incurred big losses in the 60+ age group (–10 percentage points), they still achieved 22 per cent, a total of eight points more than in the age group below. The Greens scored their lowest number of votes in this age group, only 13 per cent, but were nevertheless able to increase their score by 8 points – a gain not to be underestimated with regards to the absolute size of this group. Votes for the AfD were also below average in this age group (9 per cent); the party was nevertheless able to score a slight increase (+3 percentage points). In the **intermediate age groups**, two further polarised groups can be identified: On the one hand, there was a broad majority of Green voters (between 24 and 25 per cent), with similar gains across these groups (+9 to +10 points). On the other hand, this was counterweighted by an above average number of AfD voters (between 11 and 13 per cent), and this is where this party was able to score their biggest gains (+3 to +6 points).

Differences in **the voting behaviour of men and women** are particularly noticeable among the supporters of the Greens and the AfD, reflecting pre-political dynamics and informal participation patterns. The above average participation of women in the support of refugees since 2015, and also in the Fridays for Future demonstrations, played a part in their voting behaviour, as did a stronger inclination towards right-wing and authoritarian attitudes for the men. Thus, 24 per cent of women voted for the Greens, and only 18 per cent of men did. The difference has become more marked since the last election with an increase of 12 points in the Greens' share of votes among women and a smaller increase (9 points) for the share of votes among men. This difference is practically mirrored among AfD voters: 13 per cent of men voted for this party but only 8 per cent of women did. The share among women increased by 3 percentage points compared to the last election (men: +4).

There were few core changes regarding **education-specific voting behaviour**. The CDU/CSU and SPD scored well with voters with low or medium educational qualification levels, with some obvious anomalies – especially with regards to the losses. While the SPD lost evenly across all educational levels (between 11 and 12 percentage points, with a slightly bigger percentage loss among the more highly educated), support for the CDU/CSU remained virtually stable at 40 per cent in the group with low educational qualification levels (–1 percentage point), while decreasing in the group with medium (–8 percentage points) and high educational qualification levels (–7 percentage points to 23 per cent). For the Greens, there is an inverse relationship to this; the share among the highly educated is 30 per cent (+13 percentage points). However, the Greens also increased their share of the vote among those with medium (+8 percentage points) and lower levels of formal education (+5 percentage points), while remaining at a low level of 15 and 9 per cent respectively in these groups. Die Linke and the FDP also score higher among the better educated. The share of AfD voters among the highly educated remained constant at 7 per cent, while increasing by 7 percentage points from a similar level to 15 and 13 per cent for those with medium and lower levels of formal education. The AfD's gains in this election therefore mainly came from those with medium to low levels of formal education.

When looking at the **voting behaviour of different occupational groups**, changes can be seen particularly in the group of the unemployed – a group that is small at present but nevertheless of symbolic importance. The most important party in this group is the AfD, achieving 21 per cent of votes (+16 percentage points), potentially explaining the corresponding decrease in the share of Die Linke (–3 percentage points to 13 per cent). The Greens scored surprisingly well in this group, with 17 per cent of the vote (+6 percentage points). The CDU/CSU (14 per cent; –7 percentage points) and SPD (14 per cent; –14 percentage points) were slightly weaker in this group. Among the **pensioners**, as seen in the analysis by age, the CDU/CSU and SPD showed a strong lead (41 and 23 per cent), with the SPD recording significant losses compared to the CDU/CSU (–12 percentage points), and significant gains for the Greens (11 per cent; +6 percentage points). National debates about pension policy in the run-up to the election have thus been no help for the CDU/CSU,

even less so for the SPD. There are surprising findings among the other groups as well. Among the **self-employed**, the CDU/CSU incurred losses (9 per cent; -12 percentage points), primarily to the benefit of the Greens (25 per cent; +10 percentage points), who became the strongest party in this group. The FDP (12 per cent; +3 percentage points) and AfD (12 per cent; +4 percentage points) also achieved slight gains in this group. The AfD also achieved significant gains among the group of the **workers** (23 per cent; +13 percentage points), reaching a level similar to that of the CDU (24 per cent; -8 percentage points), far ahead of the Greens (14 per cent; +7 percentage points), who were in effect at the same level as the SPD (15 per cent; -11 percentage points).

Finally, there remains a look at the **subjective satisfaction with the personal economic situation**. The CDU/CSU (30 versus 18 per cent) and FDP (6 versus 3 per cent) scored higher among those who are satisfied with their economic situation than among those who are not satisfied. The FDP was able to slightly increase its share, while the CDU/CSU lost some share in both groups (-7 percentage points each). The Greens are new to this constellation, coming from a position of equal shares among those satisfied and those not satisfied at the last election. They achieved different increases in the vote (+11 and +6 percentage points) this time, with the bigger share in the group of those satisfied. In contrast, the SPD suffered unequal losses in both groups (-13 percentage points among those who are satisfied and -9 percentage points among those dissatisfied). It thus achieved similar shares in both groups (15 and 17 per cent) in this election. Linke and AfD generally speaking had a bigger share of the vote among the dissatisfied, with Die Linke losing asymmetrically (-6 percentage points to 9 per cent among the dissatisfied and -1 percentage point to 5 per cent among the satisfied). The AfD's overall gain in the share of the vote while simultaneously losing share both among the satisfied (-1 percentage point to 10 per cent) and among the dissatisfied (-6 percentage points to 19 per cent) can be interpreted to show that mainly those unsure about their personal economic situation switched to the party.

### 4.3 Regional findings

Regional differences between **eastern and western** German Länder are apparent in this election. At opposite ends of the spectrum in East and West are **Die Linke** and the **AfD** on the one hand and CDU/CSU and Greens on the other. Die Linke and the AfD were more successful in all of the eastern German Länder than in the western Germany (AfD: 19.6 to 8.8 per cent; Die Linke: 12.7 to 3.7 per cent; here and hereafter: infratest dimap). While Die Linke suffered significant losses in the East (-6.7 percentage points), it remained comparatively stable at a low level in the West (-0.6 percentage points). The AfD gained 11.3 percentage points more in the East than in the last European Election, while the gain in the West was only 2.1 points. Especially in Saxony, the AfD succeeded in creating local pockets of mobilisation. Here, some regions with above average turnout showed a clear win for the AfD (e.g. Sächsische Schweiz/Osterzgebirge (Saxon Switzerland/East Ore Mountains),

only here: ZDF/the Federal Returning Officer). There are indicators for similar developments in some parts of Thuringia and Brandenburg; this will have to be studied further with regards to the regional elections in autumn.

**The CDU/CSU and Greens** in turn were more successful throughout western Germany (30.8 to 21.1 per cent and 22.2 to 13.8 per cent). For the Greens, this result in an exact mirror image of the AfD they score their lowest results in the five eastern German Länder, achieving very good results only in the urban regions. Gains for the Greens in the East were only half of those in the West (5.7 to 10.9 percentage points), although this difference decreases when regarded as a percentage. In addition, and another success for the Greens: They score significantly above the five per cent mark in all Länder, including the East, and thus have a stable nation-wide base (from Hamburg, 31.2 per cent to Thuringia, 8.6 per cent). In a cross-Länder comparison, the CDU/CSU's eight lowest results came in the eastern German Länder and the City States, with their share of the vote below 25 per cent in these regions. The CDU/CSU losses compared to the last European Election were slightly higher in the East than in the West (2.2 percentage points).

Much more interesting than a pure East/West perspective is an **analysis by population density**. While voter turnout was almost identical (between 59.6 per cent and 62.3 per cent), there were more significant differences in party results. This shows that generalised East/West comparisons fall short; instead, topical and structural components of the individual vote have to be taken into account. Although population density does not necessarily measure the structural or economic strength of a region, it at least complements an analysis purely by individual Länder. This shows that the percentage of votes for the **CDU/CSU** and **AfD** increased consistently with decreasing population density, from 19.8 per cent to 33.4 per cent and from 8.9 per cent to 13.9 per cent, between large cities and sparsely populated areas, illustrating again the below-average performance of the CDU in the City States and the relative strength of both **parties in rural areas and in medium-sized towns**. In contrast, for the **Greens**, the results show a steady increase in relation to population density, from 13.5 per cent in rural areas to 27.5 per cent in large cities. The Greens' success in the eastern German medium-size towns and large cities as well as the Berlin hinterland in Brandenburg State was also noticeable. It is however remarkable that the Greens were no longer only voted for in the urban population centres, but also achieved double-digit results in rural areas – although at a lower level – which should become relevant with regards to the simultaneously-held local elections. The polarised picture regarding **Die Linke** must also be mentioned: They were more successful in large cities and rural areas than they were in medium-sized towns, although the electorate and the competitor parties are likely to be quite different in these regions.

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