

WHAT ARE THE AMBITIONS OF THE GERMAN GREEN PARTY?



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The German federal election, to be held on 26 September, is set to put the German Green Party in a position to return to power. The vote will take place following a campaign that was in particular marked by the deadly flooding which occurred in mid-July in the Rhineland, once again highlighting the climate emergency. *Die Grünen* remain traditionally associated with the environment and the party's candidate for Chancellor, Annalena Baerbock, has built her credibility on this focus. This is, however, being put to the test in a country that is gearing up to entering the post-Merkel era. After sixteen

years in office, the CDU is not the favourite in the polls anymore. The outcome of the election remains wide open. It will have consequences throughout Europe.

This brief aims to understand what Bündnis 90/Die Grünen embodies today: its history, its voters, its priorities, particularly for European affairs, its leadership and its capacity to compromise with a view to forming a federal government able to lead the environmental and social transition in the German economy, in line with its stated aim. ■ ■ ■

1 ■ A heritage of dissent and normalisation

Compared to its Social-Democrat, Christian-Democrat and Liberal opponents, the Green party is relatively recent. It was officially founded on 13 January 1980 in Karlsruhe. It is a contemporary of other environmental formations set up at this time in neighbouring countries (the Ecolo party in Belgium in 1980, the Mouvement d'écologie politique launched the same year in France, the green lists in Austria in 1982 and the Europese Groenen in 1983 in the Netherlands).

The German party was the result of very different movements, originating in Germany at the turn of the 1960-1970s, and drawing inspiration from anti-nuclear pacifism, neutralism, feminism and federalism. Its founding values were "ecological, social, grassroots democratic and non-violent". It rejected mass consumption as a societal choice. The Greens attracted libertarians from the post-1968 movement, conservatives with a focus on nature and advocates of an anti-industrialist Catholicism. The party therefore appeared to be diverse in its composition and alternative in its drive, against the backdrop of the cold war, to overcome communism and capitalism. It claimed to be "not right, not left, but forward" (*Nicht Rechts, nicht Links, sondern Vorn*).

Even the act of forming a national political party was not self-evident for this group which defined itself as the "anti-party" and which championed a radical agenda, such as leaving NATO and phasing out nuclear power. A far cry from the established *Volksparteien* of the SPD and the CDU-CSU, *Die Grünen* introduced a new political style. The party also stood out for its organisation which strove to act in line with the values it promoted: collective decision-making, equal leadership, direct grassroots participation, rotation of elected representatives halfway through the term of office - which was quickly shelved.

The party did make strides in German politics. Both the German proportional voting system and the country's federal structure helped along its integration into the German political landscape. It sent its first elected representatives to several State parliaments, starting with Baden-Württemberg in 1980. On a national level, it obtained 5.6% of votes in the 1983 federal election, paving the way for its first MPs in the Bundestag. These included Joschka Fischer, who went on to be the first Green politician to take part in a government coalition in a *Land*, becoming Minister of Environment and Energy in Hessen in 1985. Two years later, the Greens won 8.3% of votes in the federal election, thereby continuing their rise.

Taking office in some *Länder* and forming coalitions (most often dominated by the SPD), ***Die Grünen* were progressively becoming more normalised** while environmental issues were becoming a more common political focus. This political integration triggered an internal split within the party between *Fundis* and *Realos*. The former, among the party leadership at the time, rejected alliances with other formations deemed incompatible with their ideas. The others, dominating the parliamentary group in the Bundestag, refused to remain a powerless niche party and instead believed that forming coalitions was an essential means of disseminating their ideas and driving in-depth societal change. The debate is a prime example of the classic dialectic between an "Ethic of moral conviction" and an "Ethic of responsibility", according to Marx Weber's famous distinction.

The Greens began the 1990s weakened by this internal division, in addition to the issue of reunification. As did other groups, the party was against the GDR being fully absorbed by the FRG. In the East, the Greens were predominantly viewed as a "western" party - and still have a weak position there

today (see below). *Die Grünen* did not win any seats following the 1990 federal election and several of the party's more radical big names left. Conversely, its new partner party in the East, *Bündnis 90* (Alliance 90) won eight seats in the first Bundestag of reunified Germany, two of which were from the small East-German green party. The merger between the Western Greens and *Bündnis 90* took place in 1993 and the new formation made progress in the federal election the following year, with the *Grünen* returning to the Bundestag on the opposition benches.

The party's normalisation peaked with the Greens taking part in the coalition led by Gerhard Schröder (SPD) from 1998 to 2005. The federal government included three

Green ministers, including the position of Vice-Chancellor, Minister of Foreign Affairs, held by Joschka Fischer. This experience of power forced the Greens to become pragmatic. The party gave up its radical pacifism through Germany's participation in the war in former Yugoslavia, and then in Afghanistan. It also turned away from its anti-capitalist stance, calling for an "ecological and social market economy", in addition to the social market economy dear to capitalism in the Rhineland and taken up on a European level. The party suffered as a result of these ideological contortions, which also led it to support the controversial structural reforms of the labour market carried out under Schröder (Hartz plan).

2 ■ Current vision and priorities

Following 2005 and their trying period in office, the challenge for the Greens was to change their image from a single-issue party, focused solely on environmental protection, with a prohibitive approach (*Verbotspartei*). Its 2021 programme attempts to present a combination of pragmatism and stringency in all public policies. The upshot is that the party's **normalisation does not prevent it from putting forward radical measures**. This is summed up in one of its slogans: "Radicalism is the new realism". This realism is coated with a narrative that claims to be more constructive and hopeful than in past programmes.

In terms of climate change, the area in which *Die Grünen* remain the most highly anticipated, their programme sets out measures that would be adopted within the first hundred days of the future government (*Klimaschutzsofortprogramm*). This programme aims to elevate Germany's climate objectives to reach climate neutrality by 2040 and to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 70% compared to 1990 (as against 65% in the German Climate Protection Act).

To achieve this, the Greens propose a carbon price at €60/metric ton (compared to the current €35) as early as 2023 on fuel and heating markets (leading to a €0.16 increase in petrol prices), the end of new petrol vehicle sales by 2030 (the European Commission proposes 2035) and the end of coal by the same deadline (compared to the current timescale of 2038). Of symbolic importance, the party intends to enforce a motorway speed limit of 130 km/h, as does the SPD (whereas CDU and FDP do not wish to set a speed limit) and to increase the modal share of rail travel. It also wishes to continue Germany's withdrawal from nuclear power, a move which it plans to extend to Europe. Above all, it is banking on the rise of green hydrogen and renewables, and on rail development. **These major changes would be made very socially responsible** (training grants, climate bonus fund for those receiving minimum social benefits).

Beyond this, their social measures include an **immediate increase in the minimum wage** to 12 euros (compared to €9.50 currently - €10.25 in France), the introduction

of an unconditional basic income, the phasing in of a 30-hour week, increases in the rate of taxation on high incomes, the right to housing and the annual capping of rent increases, and more childcare spaces in nurseries. More broadly, an analysis of their programme shows a drive **to enfold the German economy in a “socio-environmental framework”**, with repercussions on international trade rules, financial investment, innovation support, digital development and agriculture.

At the macro level, the Greens have adopted an unprecedented position and are advocating a high level of public investment (€50 billion/year over the decade). The goal is to step up the digital transition in Germany and its public services, which came under fire for their state of disrepair during the Covid-19 crisis, and to support education and training. Above all, investment would provide massive funding for research and innovation in order to support the environmental and energy transition. The Greens wish to create an alternative economic model that is socially responsible and climate neutral by 2040 (compared to 2045 by the outgoing coalition), which would propel Germany to a leading position at the cutting edge of technology, medicine and green energy sources.

To achieve this, they aim **to gradually lift the debt brake** (to 10% instead of 2% currently), which has been enshrined in the German constitution since 2009. They are also open **to revising the European Stability Pact**. They support advances in the Economic and Monetary Union, a European tax system and a strong European social component.

On the geopolitical level, the Greens share the objective of increasing the European Union's independence from the other major powers. They would like the EU's capacities in the semiconductor industry to reach 20% of global production and support the creation of major European research centres

which would contribute to the EU's independence with regard to artificial intelligence.

Their foreign and defence policy programmes are also very ambitious. The Greens are **in favour of Ukraine joining NATO**, and would like the organisation to take a new direction. They **oppose the target of 2% defence spending in national budgets**, want to prohibit the use of armed drones in the Germany military and the export of German weapons to conflict zones. They advocate Germany signing the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. The party also wishes to restore multilateralism. As Atlanticists, they are **against the NordStream2 gas pipeline** and recommend a firm attitude towards Russia and China (they are against the trade agreement signed with the EU). They would allow themselves the option of being more critical of the Israeli government's policies. The party's reaction to the return to Taliban rule in Afghanistan was clearly in favour of sending troops to evacuate all Afghans who assisted the Western intervention.

Lastly, in terms of society issues, the proposals dear to the Greens are evident when it comes to feminism, diversity, an open migration policy and participatory democracy. The party has expressed its desire to involve all components of German society in its economic transformation plan, particularly with a view to driving the environmental transition.

In addition to the range of measures put forward, the Greens' programme stands out for its level of detail based on expertise. The party enjoys an in-depth dialogue with academic researchers. The precision of its programme contrasts in particular with that of the CDU which offers vaguer promises. Yet this difference in approach stems from their respective voters. Supporters of the Greens aspire towards an in-depth transformation of the German economy and society, and not a relative *status quo*.

3 ■ Activists, leaders and voters

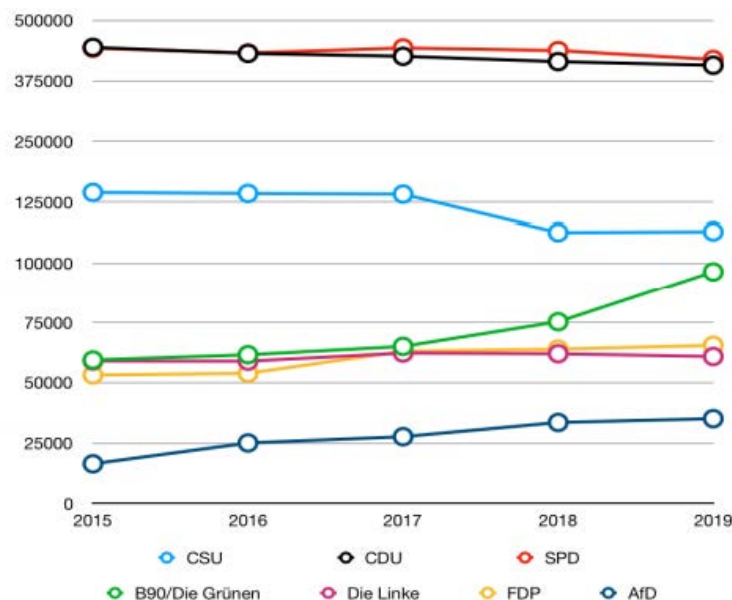
Without claiming to have become a *Volkspartei* (people's party) in the conventional way of the SPD and the CDU, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen has expanded its support base. Over the last ten years, the number of party members has doubled, passing the 100,000-member mark in April 2020. Membership remains far below the levels of the Social-Democrats and Christian-Democrats, which both boast over 400,000 members, though there has been a noticeable decline in these figures. Green party membership now considerably surpasses the liberals (FDP, with more than 63,000), the far right (AfD, with around 35,000) and the far left (Die Linke, with roughly 61,000 members). Beyond figures, **the voice of green activists is important in a party that advocates grassroots democracy** (*Basisdemokratie*) and transparency.

The sociological profile of activists has changed. **More than 70% are higher-education graduates**, as for the liberals. And, like

the FDP and unlike the AfD, members live for the most part in the West. Only 7.5% of party members lived in the East in 2018. The Greens are in office in very few municipalities in the *Länder* of the former GDR. They put this shortcoming in the East partly down to the fact that many young people have moved from the East to the West.

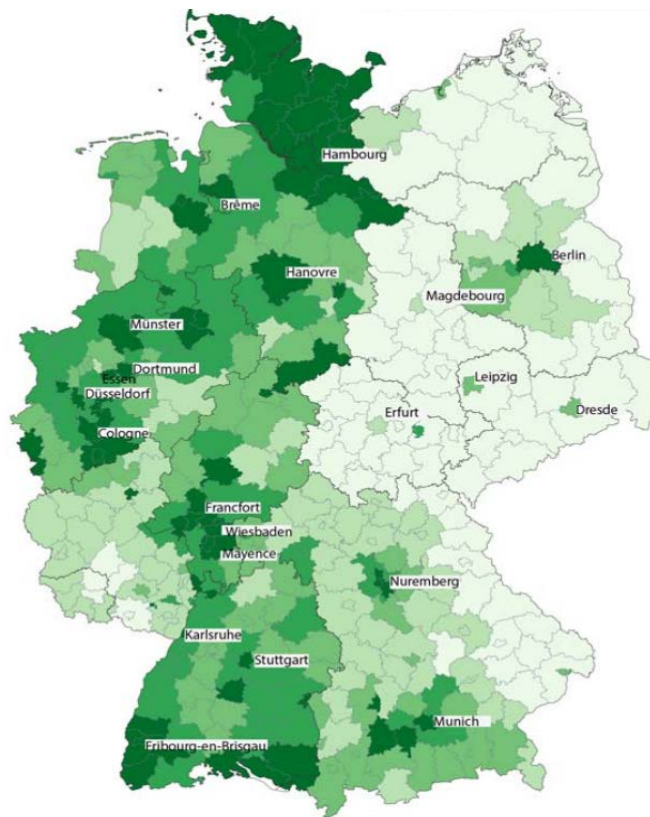
This gap between East and West in the party's activist support can be seen in its electorate, which is rooted in the West. Furthermore, it is more significant in Southern Germany. The Greens do particularly well in Bavaria, Hessen and Baden-Württemberg in elections. This wealthy *Land* is the only one to have a Green Minister-President: Winfried Kretschmann, in office since 2011 and re-elected comfortably last March. His "Green conservatism" meets the aspirations of the *Grünen* voters who are considerably less left-leaning than in the North, for example in Berlin.

FIGURE 1 ■ German political party membership figures (2015-2019)



Sources, press data, Oskar Niedermayer 2019, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen

FIGURE 2 ■ Map of German Green party results in the 2019 European election



Source : Bundeswahlleit.

These contrasts within the German Greens electorate and its local presence do not hinder the identification of shared sociological traits: **the party attracts young people**, particularly first-time voters (36% of 18–29-year-olds vote for the Greens compared to 16% for the CDU-CSU), who live in cities and are highly educated. Another characteristic of this electorate is that there are slightly more female voters. In the 2019 European election, 24% of women voted Green, compared to 18% of men. *Die Grünen* also have **more female members than the other parties** (41% compared to 33% at the SPD and 27% at the CDU). Green voters partly come from the SPD, but also, to a lesser extent, from the CDU. These two major parties have retained a broader voter base.

In short, the Greens cannot particularly be defined as a party that has become politically centrist, but rather as a **“middle-of-the-spectrum party”¹ in sociological terms**. As they became normalised with a focus on a “radical realism”, their ideas have spread throughout German society, which claims to be very concerned about climate change. According to the Eurobarometer survey of autumn 2020, “environmental issues and climate change” ranked top of the major challenges to be tackled by the EU for 60% of Germans, far ahead of the European average of 45% (the French place “terrorism” in the top position). It has reached the extent that **the Greens are now overwhelmed by a segment of young people** calling for bolder environmental measures, through protests

1. LATTARD, Alain, “Les Verts de 2005 à 2013. Le succès fragile d’un parti assagi”, *Allemagne d’aujourd’hui*, issue 206, 2013, pages 120 to 130 (in French).

such as *Fridays for Future*. Dissident environmental lists (*Klimaliste* in the regional elections) are presenting the Greens as a party too open to compromise.

This shift to the middle both in terms of the Grünen's electorate and activist base is reflected in its **leadership which is currently dominated by *Realos***. Over the campaign, the

party has stood united behind its candidate for German Chancellor, Annalena Baerbock, appointed without internal primary elections. During the party conference on 11-13 June 2021, 98.5% of delegates confirmed her bid, illustrating all the characteristics of the Green electorate: young, female, urban, highly qualified, from the West.

BOX 1 ■ A woman who knows her stuff

Annalena Baerbock was born in 1980 in Hannover. Married and mother to two daughters aged six and ten, the young woman embodies the ambitions of a pragmatic and realistic Green party. Holding a seat in the Bundestag since 2013, she presents herself as a woman who knows her stuff, who is competent and dedicated. She was previously president of the regional party in the state of Brandenburg from 2009 to 2013. She has served as co-leader of the *Grünen* since 2018, alongside writer and philosopher Robert Habeck. Habeck agreed with her, without consulting their supporters, to publicly step down in her favour on 19 April 2021, leaving her free to run for the chancellorship.

An expert in law by training, Annalena Baerbock studied political science and public law in Hamburg. She continued her studies at the London School of Economics (LSE), where she graduated in 2005 with a master's degree in international public law. Quickly, Baerbock, now in her early forties, wanted to work in public affairs and entered politics with the firm intention of "changing things". As of 2005, she became a member of the Bündnis 90/Die Grünen party, then spokesperson of the party's working group on European affairs (2008-2013). She was also a member of the European Green Party's executive board from 2009 to 2012, after working as a parliamentary assistant to MEP Elisabeth Schroedter (from 2005 to 2008).

In June 2021, Annalena Baerbock published her manifesto book: *Jetzt. Wie wir unser Land erneuern*², (Now, how we renew our country). The tone of the book is both optimistic and firm. The candidate sets out ambitious and radical plans for her country, which she believes to be necessary to tackle the coming climate and economic crisis. The young woman calls for courage and solidarity. She intends to mobilise support in all areas of society to rebuild a modern Germany that is environmentally-friendly, socially-minded, competitive and prosperous, according to her party's vision.

However, the Greens candidate remains an anonymous mystery who has yet to prove herself to German voters. Her youth is both her strength and her Achilles' heel. As she has yet to hold a position in the executive government, and critics highlight her inexperience, compared to opponents Armin Laschet and above all Olaf Scholz, who are well-established figures in German politics in a campaign in which opinion focuses more on candidates' personalities than on their agenda. In addition, Annalena Baerbock faced a wave of accusations in June and July, particularly concerning her manifesto book. Her popularity rating fell steadily (17% of voting intentions on 11 July 2021), as did voting intentions for the party. On 24 July 2021, after having obtained 25% of intentions in early May, the Greens can only count on 18% of voting intentions (according to the INSA polling institute). She remained deliberately out of the media spotlight following the deadly bad weather this summer, refusing to make the tragedy political; an attitude which meets the expectations of her voters.

2. BAERBOCK, Annalena, *Jetzt. Wie wir unser Land erneuern*, Ullstein Buchverlage, 240 pages, €24.00, 2021 (in German).

The more flamboyant co-leader of the Greens, Robert Habeck, is the other major figure in the party today. An elected representative in Schleswig-Holstein for more than twelve years, the philosopher works

well with Annalena Baerbock and both want to bring the Grünen back into federal government. To achieve this, they are open to taking part in a new coalition.

4 ■ Power relationships and compromise

For the federal election to be held on 26 September, the German Greens are **the leading opposition party** facing a right-left grand coalition, which has been in power for a long time. The Greens appear to be **a credible coalition partner** owing to their convincing power-sharing in a wide range of formats on local and regional levels. *Bündis 90/Die Grünen* is part of the governments in ten *Länder* out of sixteen and in charge of several municipalities.

In this federal election which has been deemed very open since the start of the campaign. Greens supporters themselves are not expecting their candidate to be elected Chancellor, as it is estimated that she will win less than 20% of votes. Her campaign has not impressed her own supporters, who are critical of her mistakes. The bad weather in July has not turned the tide in the polls. Several observers believe, however, that she has been subject to personal attacks by the tabloids in Germany. Russia is also suspected to have influenced the campaign against her via social networks. However, with a score that could be twice that of the 2017 election, the Greens are expected to join the next federal coalition. They are getting ready for this role. If they come second, they could claim the position of Vice-Chancellor, heading the Federal Foreign Office.

The Christian-Democrat candidate Armin Laschet is thought to be flexible enough to facilitate such a coalition, where other more uncompromising and less pro-European CDU candidates (such as Friedrich Merz) would have made this difficult. The natural strategy for the conservatives would

be to turn towards the liberals, whose participation in a so-called Jamaica coalition could give the Greens a lesser role to play. For these reasons, it is not in the Greens' interest to accept the FDP's presence, particularly as their two programmes appear to be less compatible on areas such as the environment, migration, investment and foreign affairs. **The liberals are proving determined to be part of the next coalition**, with a view to retaining their credibility as a government party. In the 2017 election, they cut off any debate regarding a Jamaica coalition. The political survival of their leader, Christian Lindner, is on the line this time and he is already eyeing the position of finance minister in the future government.

The Greens entering the federal Chancellery would be possible through the formation of an *Ampelkoalition* (traffic light coalition bringing together the Grünen, FDP and SPD, according to their election results). Yet in view of the polls, this scenario is the least likely.

The open field of possible coalitions means that the timescale of their formation is highly uncertain. The cautious consensus indicates a new German government that, at best, would be up and running just before Christmas, but it is likely to be later. As a reminder, the previous cabinet (Merkel IV) only took up office in the March of the year following the election held on 24 September 2017. An agreement on a black/green coalition would not be the most difficult to reach, as the positions of the main figures are better known in advance. However, **a three-**

party coalition which would take longer to agree on, seems to be more likely.

In the difficult negotiations to come, the Greens already know that they are the only party to support the lifting of the debt brake. This move is not supported by the Social-Democrats led by the current finance minister, Olaf Scholz, who is well regarded by public opinion. The ambitious public investment plan, which is a key component of the Grünen's programme, seems to be in jeopardy in this case. The idea of creating a federal investment fund has been floated as an alternative. With future Green MPs known to be more left-leaning than their leaders, those joining the federal government in the coalition may well find themselves under massive pressure from these elected representatives during the term of office.

In Brussels, a black/green coalition would be endorsed by the von der Leyen Commission, as the European Green Deal and its implementation through the Fitfor55 legislation package are in line with the Grünen's priorities. Should they come to power in the European Union's leading country, it would be a major development. Environmental parties are currently in government in six relatively small or medium Member States (Austria, Belgium, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg and Sweden). This would mean that the European Green Party would have a larger role in the 'big league'. Having the Greens in the German federal government would also strengthen Green bids in other countries

such as Hungary, where the Green mayor of Budapest, Gergely Karacsony, will stand against Viktor Orbán in 2022.

A coalition including the Greens would also curry favour in Paris, except with regard to nuclear power and probably migration policy. An understanding with the Greens is considered easy and strategic for European economic issues in order to sustain the European fiscal stimulus and to revise the Stability Pact. Conversely, a liberal return to power is feared due to their expected uncompromising attitude on these very issues.

Franco-German cooperation may well be sidelined by different election timetables.

After 26 September, France will have to bide its time with a caretaker government during the formation of a new coalition. This coalition could then be operational just as France enters the presidential election campaign.

The German Green party is on the verge of power. According to how their ambitious programme is enacted and which positions they would hold, their return in a coalition could have a major impact on the German economy and its foreign and European policy. The Greens' arrival in the government would provide key support for the energy and digital transitions promoted in the European Union. The Franco-German motor would be deepened or disrupted as a result, according to the political changes expected in France in 2022.



■ List of people consulted

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- Jens ALTHOFF, Head of Office, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, Paris
- Corinne BALLEIX, diplomat at the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs
- Philippe LAMBERTS, Co-President of the Greens group in the European Parliament
- Daniel FREUND, *Bündnis90 / Die Grünen* MEP
- Hans-Dieter LUCAS, Ambassador of Germany to France
- Lorris MAZAUD, diplomatic adviser at the French Embassy in Germany

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