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Working Group

Elections and Public Opinion

Call for Papers:

Special Issue Proposal „ The Federal Election 2021: Germany at the Crossroads?“

(to be submitted to *Electoral Studies*)

In many respects, the federal election 2021 represents a watershed for German politics. After 16 years of chancellorship in different coalitions, Angela Merkel did not re-run for office. For the first time since 1949, there was no incumbent competing in the election campaign. Also, for the first time, the Greens had announced an official candidate for the chancellorship in light of their good poll ratings in the beginning of the year. At the ballot box, the Greens achieved their best-ever result on the federal level, but fell far short of expectations created by their performance in the polls earlier that year. Exactly the opposite dynamic can be observed for the Social Democrats. During the election campaign, the SPD's poll ratings rose continuously and they ended up being the strongest party with 25.7 percent of the votes while the Christian Democrats achieved their historically worst result (24.1 percent). This also means that for the first time, the two so-called *Volksparteien* have no longer received more than 50 percent of the votes. This points to major shifts in the German party system. Three other developments can be mentioned to illustrate these shifts. First, the AfD seems to have established itself as right-wing populist party within the German political system. In some East German states, the AfD constitutes the strongest or second-strongest party despite its turn towards a radical right-wing programmatic profile. Second, a rather large number of voters (8.7 percent) voted for one of the small parties that did not enter parliament. In contrast to 2013, where this figure was even higher, this is not related to two parties missing the five percent threshold but to the fact that citizens turn increasingly to micro parties with no change of winning a representation. Third, the Left is not only losing its support in East Germany but only made it into parliament because the party won in three constituencies. Hence, while center left parties like the SPD and the Greens did well, the leftist party is in deep crisis.

Additionally, the election took place during a major public health crisis and after a major natural disaster. The Covid19-pandemic is still in full swing leading to a high rate of postal votes and also to new parties competing. Moreover, several regions of Germany were hit hard by a flood disaster in the summer, which contributed to the increasing political salience of climate change and a closer link with socio-economic issues. To what extent these events and circumstances have actually affected the election results is only one of many interesting open questions.

Against this backdrop, we invite papers for this special issue that study aspects of this potentially historic German federal election in 2021. We particularly welcome contributions that focus on the election campaign, voting behavior of social groups and the role of issues, like climate change, natural disasters, or the Covid19-pandemic. We also welcome papers that contribute to the understanding of the 2021 election by comparisons with earlier elections and developments in

other countries. This includes studies that not only focus on voters but also on parties, electoral candidates, or aggregate-level results. We explicitly invite different kinds of methodological approaches (e.g., computational, observational, experimental and mixed-methods approaches). Finally, we encourage proposals from all career-levels and all backgrounds.

If you are interested in contributing to the Special Issue on the 2021 German federal election, please submit your abstract (400 words max.) until 14 January 2022 to ak-wahlen@dvpw.de. The editors of the Special Issue will review the abstracts and select a number of potential contributions, based on which a coherent proposal for Electoral Studies will be compiled. All selected papers are supposed to be presented and receive feedback in a panel at the Annual Workshop of the DVPW Working Group Elections and Public Opinion (AK Wahlen und politische Einstellungen) taking place in Berlin, 19-20 May 2022.

We look forward to receiving your submissions and will be happy to answer any further questions.

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