

Christian Democrats defeated in elections in Hamburg

Early elections to the parliament in Hamburg were held on 20 February. The winner of the election is the SPD, which has received an absolute majority of the votes and will form a government by itself. The Christian Democrats, who after ten years of ruling will have to return to opposition, suffered the worst defeat. The Christian Democrats' electoral defeat will not affect the situation in the German central government as yet. However, the opposition's majority in the Bundesrat will be reinforced.

The elections were held as a consequence of the breakup of the CDU/Green Party coalition in November 2010 after the lost referendum regarding school education reform, which was pushed through by the local government coalition, and the resignation of the popular Christian Democrat prime minister, Ole von Beust. His successor, Christoph Ahlhaus, a conservative politician who is not a native resident of Hamburg, had to lead a minority Christian Democrat government. However, he failed to win over the electorate in Hamburg. Support for the CDU was as low as 21.9% (42.6% in 2008). The SPD's success, who won 48.3% of the votes (34.1% in 2008), will enable the party to form a government by itself, which will be led by Olaf Scholz, who was minister of employment in 2007–2009 in the federal government formed by the CDU/CSU/SPD grand coalition. The other parties who are entering parliament are the Green Party, support for whom increased but was lower than declared in pre-election polls (11.2%), the Left party (6.6%) and, after seven years of absence from the parliament of Hamburg, the FDP (6.4%). The result of this election will allow the opposition to have a stronger majority in the Bundesrat. Since the federal government coalition has lost 3 seats in the Bundesrat (now it has 34 of the 69 seats), it will encounter more difficulties adopting laws which require approval from this legislative body. The poor result and the need to relinquish power has strongly undermined the image of the Christian Democrats at the beginning of an election year (parliamentary elections in seven federal states are due to be held in 2011) and is a clear warning sign to the CDU. This defeat will intensify the campaign ahead of the March elections in three other federal states.

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