

Germany: victory for Die Linke in Berlin and the AfD in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania

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On 20 September, the AfD won the election to the state parliament of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (MVP), securing 38.2% of the vote (+21.5 percentage points compared with the 2021 result) and 32 seats in the 71-seat parliament. It finished ahead of the SPD, which had previously governed the state as part of the ruling coalition and won 35.5% (-4.1 percentage points; 29 seats). For the first time in its history, the CDU failed to enter the *Landtag* (4.9%; -8.4 percentage points). Turnout was 78.1% (+7.3 percentage points).

In the election to the Berlin House of Representatives (Berlin is a city-state), held on the same day, Die Linke came first with 25.7% of the vote (+13.4 percentage points compared with the 2023 result), winning 47 seats in the 158-seat chamber. The governing CDU came second with 18.8% (-9.5 percentage points; 34 seats), while the AfD finished third with 16.3% (+7.2 percentage points; 29 seats). Turnout was 74.2% (+11.3 percentage points). For the full results, see the Appendix.

In a statement shortly after the polls closed, Chancellor Friedrich Merz said that despite his party's 'catastrophic results', he would remain CDU leader and chancellor and intended to press ahead consistently with [social welfare reforms](#).

The CDU's historically poor result in MVP and the SPD's relatively strong performance in the state, along with its weak showing in Berlin, will heighten tensions within the federal coalition, particularly over the direction and pace of reforms. Chancellor Merz's position is weakening further, while his declaration that he will remain party leader and chancellor merely postpones the debate over the CDU's leadership.

Commentary

- **The elections provided voters with an opportunity to express their opposition to the federal government's policies.** In MVP, 91% of respondents viewed its performance negatively, contributing to the CDU's historically poor result. Even among Christian Democrat supporters, an overwhelming majority (82%, according to a Forschungsgruppe Wahlen poll) believe that Merz's policies were responsible for the party's weak showing. The CDU's latest defeat is increasing pressure on the chancellor, with [some party members having already called for his resignation](#). At the same time, the domestic situation – the CDU's disastrous results in state elections, declining support in federal opinion polls (20%, compared with 30% for the leading AfD), attempts to push through unpopular social welfare reforms and external pressure stemming, among other things,

from Russia's aggressive actions – means that, for now, there is no clear contender within the CDU willing to replace Merz.

- **The erosion of Merz's authority within his own party and the strengthening of the SPD following the election in MVP will deepen disputes within the coalition over the scope and pace of reforms.** The Social Democrats will seek to moderate the most radical proposals and may even sharpen the party's profile in response to the SPD's exceptionally poor result in Berlin. At the same time, further concessions to the SPD will be difficult for CDU voters to accept and could lead to a further decline in support for the Christian Democrats. Merz hopes that implementing the reforms will spur economic growth and enable the CDU to remain in power at state level following the elections in North Rhine-Westphalia and Schleswig-Holstein (both in April 2027), where the party leads in the polls. If Merz remains in office, strong CDU results in these states could, paradoxically, intensify the debate over replacing him as chancellor with one of their state premiers, particularly Hendrik Wüst, Minister-President of North Rhine-Westphalia. A new Christian Democrat leader would then have time to build support for the party ahead of the Bundestag election scheduled for 2029.
- **The strong result achieved by Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania's Minister-President Manuela Schwesig (SPD) will allow her to remain in power,** in a coalition with Die Linke and the Greens. Through a highly personalised campaign that framed the election as a contest between herself and the AfD, Schwesig succeeded in attracting former voters of other parties, with the largest number coming from the CDU (25,000). The campaign was clearly targeted at voters seeking to prevent an AfD victory, which encouraged tactical voting. The Social Democratic leader is viewed positively by 61% of the state's residents, who regard the SPD as the party most capable of addressing its main problems, particularly those relating to the economy and education. Schwesig's success also stemmed from her clear efforts to distance herself from the federal SPD and the government, with the party logo omitted from campaign posters. Her ability to close the gap during the campaign – a year ago, polls put the SPD at 19% and the AfD at 38% – and the prospect of retaining her post as Minister-President strengthen Schwesig's position within the SPD.
- **Die Linke's victory in Berlin was made possible because of its focus on the issue of greatest concern to residents, particularly younger people: the availability and cost of housing.** Die Linke won 46% of the vote among those aged 16–24, while 37% of respondents regarded it as the party best equipped to ensure affordable housing. The party has consistently called for the *communisation (with compensation) of the largest housing companies owning more than 3,000 flats*. This, alongside allegations of antisemitism within Die Linke, will be the main obstacle to forming a coalition with the SPD and the Greens. If Berlin Die Linke leader Elif Eralp were to form a government, she would become the second person of Turkish origin to head a state government, alongside Baden-Württemberg's Minister-President Cem Özdemir. Eralp represents a new generation of party members focused on urban movements, migrants' rights and social issues. Foreign policy is not among their main areas of interest, with the exception of criticism of Israel, which likewise contributes to the party's popularity among younger voters. During the campaign, Die Linke defended Ukraine's sovereignty. If attempts to

form a coalition led by Die Linke fail, a CDU government with the Greens and the SPD would be possible, though less likely.

- **Despite its victory and more than doubling its support, the AfD will not form a government in MVP due to its lack of coalition partners.** It will be the only opposition party to a potential government comprising the SPD, Die Linke and the Greens. It will also hold a blocking minority, enabling it to prevent constitutional amendments that require a two-thirds majority. The party will be able to initiate parliamentary committees of inquiry on its own. It will also become the only party representing conservative voters in MVP, which is likely to reinforce its position in the state. Support for the AfD was driven by disillusionment with the SPD, which has governed the state since 1998, dissatisfaction with federal policy and a growing perception of the party's competence on policy issues. The AfD attracted the largest number of previous non-voters – 66,000 – as well as 48,000 former SPD voters and 32,000 former CDU voters. It also achieved its best result among manual workers, winning 44% of their votes compared with 35% for the SPD, and came first in every age group under 60. Among voters aged over 60, the SPD came first with 46%, compared with 32% for the AfD.

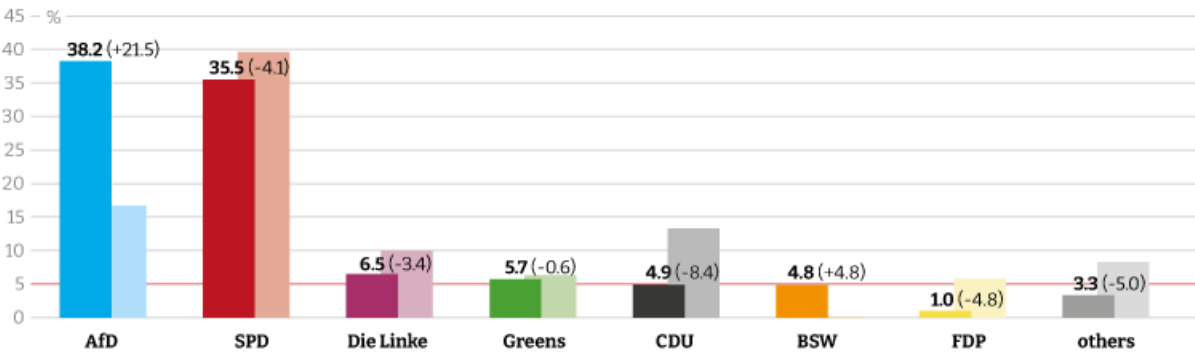
APPENDIX

Despite its victory in MVP, the AfD will not form a government there because of its lack of coalition partners.
In Berlin, a government led by Die Linke will likely be formed
Results of the 20 September 2026 elections to the Landtag of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and to the Berlin House of Representatives

— electoral threshold

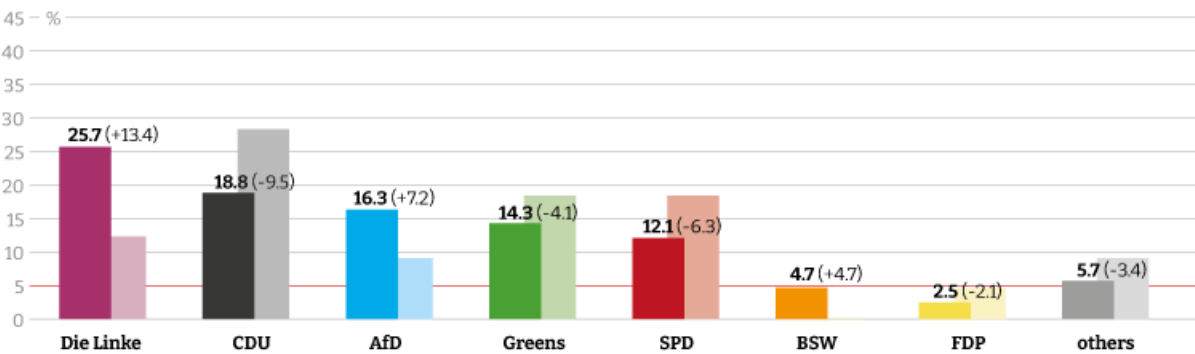
Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania

Results of the 2021 state election are shown in lighter shade.



Berlin

Results of the 2023 state election are shown in lighter shade.



Source: State Electoral Commissions.

