

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

ONE ELECTION, SIX VISIONS FOR GERMANY

The Parties' Manifestos
for the 2021 General Election

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The three left wing parties (the SPD, the Greens and the Left) are located close to each other in a two-dimensional political space as there are many overlaps in the topics they emphasize and the views they express.



On average equality is the most salient topic in the manifestos, followed by welfare state expansion and technology & infrastructure. The attention given to climate change, environment and sustainability has increased.



The AfD is a clear outlier and is least compatible with the other parties, as most of the main foci in their election program are rarely touched upon or are opposed by the other parties.

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While there are many differences between the parties, they can roughly be divided into two blocs based on their positions on the socio-economic dimension: three left-wing parties (SPD, Greens and Left) and three right-wing parties (CDU/CSU, FDP and AfD). Nonetheless, the positions of the AfD are mainly far off those of the CDU/CSU and the FDP. On the socio-cultural dimension the FDP switches blocs and promotes more progressive-libertarian views similar to the three left-wing parties. Compared to 2017, the parties moved slightly as follows: the SPD to the left, the Greens and the Left to the center, the CDU/CSU and the AfD to the right on the socio-economic dimension but to the center on the socio-cultural dimension, and the FDP stayed.



On average, the most important issue for the parties is equality, which is also the most salient topic in the manifestos of both the Greens and the Left, and is second most salient for the FDP and the SPD. Welfare state expansion takes second place overall and is most prominent in the SPD manifesto (second most important for the Greens and the Left and third most important for the FDP and the CDU/CSU). Technology & infrastructure is ranked third. Both the FDP and the CDU/CSU address this topic most often in their manifestos. The AfD's priorities are far off of those of the other parties, and none of their top priorities make it onto the list of the most overall salient topics.



The 2017 election was dominated by issues of immigration and integration – though far more in public debates than in the parties' election programs. In 2021 the parties focus less on these issues. Instead issues connected to climate change such as environmentalism and sustainability receive extra attention in the manifestos of all parties, except for the Greens, who had already put strong emphasis to these topics.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The German national election in September 2021 will be a turning point. Angela Merkel is not running for office again, thus, for sure Germany will get a new chancellor. However several weeks out from the election, who it will be remains completely open. What will a new government bring for Germany and a world in which Germany is an active player? A long established method to study parties' plans for the next term, and to determine the positions with which they enter the election campaign, is the analysis of the parties' election programs. For this study we look at the election programs of the parties which have been members of the last Bundestag, and will most likely enter it again. We have evaluated the programs, both quantitatively using the long-established methods of the Manifesto Project¹, and qualitatively.

We start by placing the parties in a two-dimensional space. In the socio-economic dimension, the German party system can be divided into three left-wing parties (the SPD, the Greens and the Left), who favor the state over the market and three right-wing parties (the CDU/CSU, the FDP and the AfD). On the socio-cultural dimension the three socio-economic left parties, plus the FDP promote more progressive-libertarian views, while the CDU/CSU and the AfD are placed on the conservative-authoritarian side. Inspection of the most important topics in the election manifestos reflects this finding. The three left-leaning parties show the most overlaps, but the SPD and the Greens also share three salient topics with the FDP. The AfD is least compatible with the other parties, and most of the main foci in their election program, such as traditional morality or anti-EU statements, are only rarely touched upon by the other parties.

These broad ideological classifications are also reflected when looking into the detail of the parties' concrete plans and visions for specific policy fields. We examine the parties' plans for the German welfare state, the ideas with which they want to counteract recent threats to democracy and the rule of law, and how they want to act in light of recent challenges imposed on the state through climate change, digitalization and immigration. Finally, we look at the parties' visions for Germany's role in a globalized world. On many of these issues the parties' concrete plans reflect their

general placement. A clear exception is digitalization, where all parties agree that Germany needs to make headway. It will be interesting to see which positions will survive the coalition negotiations.

¹ For details see appendix.

1

INTRODUCTION

On September 26 2021 the general elections for the 20th German Bundestag are held. Not only do these elections take place under pandemic conditions, but after 16 years of chancellorship Angela Merkel (CDU) does not run for office again. There are three candidates vying for the next German chancellorship: Armin Laschet (CDU), Olaf Scholz (SPD) and Annalena Baerbock (the Greens). 47 parties are registered for participation (Bundeswahlleiter 2021), seven of which have been represented in the current Bundestag: the CDU and the CSU (which together form a parliamentary group referred to as “the Union”), the SPD, the AfD, the FDP, the Left and the Greens. As usual, these parties have published election manifestos, in which they present their political ideas for the next legislative term.²

These manifestos differ not only in the timing of their publication (the SPD was the first on May 9, while the Left was the last on July 20) and their length (by coincidence the ranking of the parties from the shortest to the longest manifesto is identical with their ranking by publication date³), but can also be distinguished with regard to the attention the parties give to specific issues and the positions they take on certain topics. In this study we analyze the thematic composition of the election manifestos of the six established parties⁴, how this has changed in comparison to previous years, and look at not only the differences between the individual programs, but also elaborate on their similarities and overlap. We approach the manifestos in two-ways. First we use data from the Manifesto Project, which has been coding manifestos in over 60 countries for over 40 years. The data from the Manifesto Project allows us to determine party positions on many different topics and to define how important or “salient” these topics are to them.⁵ Second, we have done an in-depth qualitative analysis of

parts of the manifestos to interpret and contextualize this quantitative positional data.

Election manifestos are particularly useful in answering such substantial questions, as these documents “constitute the most authoritative statement of parties’ policy positions prior to elections” (Proksch & Slapin 2009, p. 329), because they are standardized over time and across parties (Manucci & Weber 2017) and, being published only after a lengthy process of intraparty-discussion, represent the position of the party as a whole. In election manifestos parties commit to their policy goals and from that can be evaluated based on their adherence (Merz & Regel 2013).

In the next section we give an overview of the most important topics in the German election manifestos and present the six parties and their overall positions in the German party system. In the subsequent four chapters, we analyze the parties’ position towards significant political issues: in particular we look at their stances on the German welfare and constitutional state, analyze how they want to tackle major challenges of our time, and examine how they define Germany’s role in a globalized world.⁶ We conclude with a summary and discuss potential coalitions based on content matching.

² The authors thank Leila van Rinsum for research assistance and Paul Muscat for proof-reading.

³ The shortest manifesto is the SPD manifesto with 98 standard pages (a standard page consists of roughly 250 words), followed by the AfD (102 standard pages), the FDP (143), the CDU/CSU (179), and the Greens (270). The longest manifesto is the one of the Left with 286 standard pages.

⁴ We do not look at the election manifesto of the CSU (Christian Social Union) from Bavaria separately, but instead consider the joint program with the CDU. In this study, we treat the parliamentary group of CDU and CSU as one party.

⁵ For more details on the methodology see the appendix.

⁶ As this study was written for an international audience we put special emphasis on this latter point, even though international politics only makes up for about 15 % in the manifestos.

2

A QUANTITATIVE OVERVIEW: TOPIC PRIORITIES AND POSITIONAL PLACEMENT

In order to get an initial grasp of where the parties stand, we look at their positions on two policy dimensions at the past and the current election (Figure 1). The two dimensions we consider are the socio-economic policy dimension and the socio-cultural dimension. The former is defined by the relation between market and state. Socio-economic positions on the right favor a free-market economy and want the state to interfere as little as possible. Socio-economic positions on the left support a strong welfare state and believe that the market needs to be regulated by the state. Looking at this data we can roughly divide the German party system into three left-leaning parties (The Left, The Greens and the SPD) and three right-leaning parties (the FDP, the CDU/CSU and the AfD). In 2021 the most right-leaning socio-economic position is taken by the AfD, followed by the FDP and the CDU/CSU. Heading left from the center we find the Greens, the SPD and the Left. The difference between the positions of the three left-leaning parties on this dimension is larger than that between the three right-leaning parties.

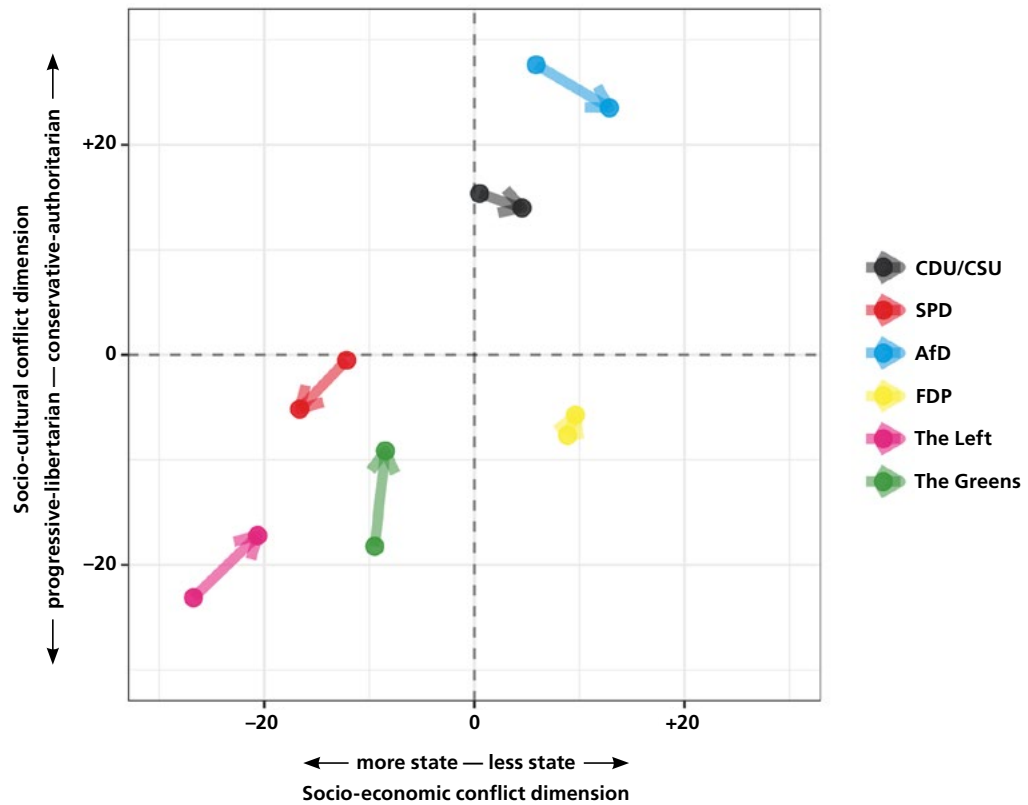
The second dimension we look at is the socio-cultural dimension, which divides the parties between those taking conservative-authoritarian stances on societal issues and those being more progressive and libertarian. Parties on the conservative authoritarian side, for example, favor the traditional understanding of family, are skeptical about multiculturalism and want to foster national culture. On the other side, progressive-libertarian parties take a liberal view on family and gender issues, and are open to a multicultural society. On this dimension the AfD takes the most extreme position on the conservative-authoritarian end of the scale, followed with quite a distance by the CDU/CSU. The other four parties are all placed left of center on this dimension. Close to the center we find the SPD and the FDP, with nearly identical positions, followed closely by the Greens who take a slightly more liberal position. The Left takes the most progressive position.

To get an overview of the issues which dominate political competition in the German party system, we can look at the general salience and distribution of topics in the 2021 parties' manifestos (Figure 2) and more specifically the five issues which, on average, received the most attention. The overall most important issue is equality, which subsumes

statements about the fair treatment of all people, equal distribution of resources and protection of minorities against discrimination. Equality is the most salient topic in the manifestos of both the Greens and the Left, and is second most salient for the FDP and the SPD. Welfare state expansion, an issue connected to equality, takes second place overall. Unsurprisingly, this is most prominent in the SPD manifesto (second most important for the Greens and the Left and third most important for the FDP and the CDU/CSU) and concerns policies related to public social services, such as health care, pensions and social housing. Technology & infrastructure, which covers not only digitalization but also modernization of transport and all kinds of infrastructure development, is ranked third. Both the FDP and the CDU/CSU address this topic most often in their manifesto. In fourth place we see positive references to labor groups (better payment, more jobs, better working conditions), which is the third most addressed issue in both the SPD's and the Left's manifestos. Finally, the fifth most important topic for the whole party system is law and order, encompassing issues such as strict law enforcement and internal security. This is most prominent in the CDU/CSU manifesto, where it is ranked second. Remarkably, none of the topics which are most important for the AfD appear in the overall top five, highlighting how far the AfD's topics are from what concerns all other parties.

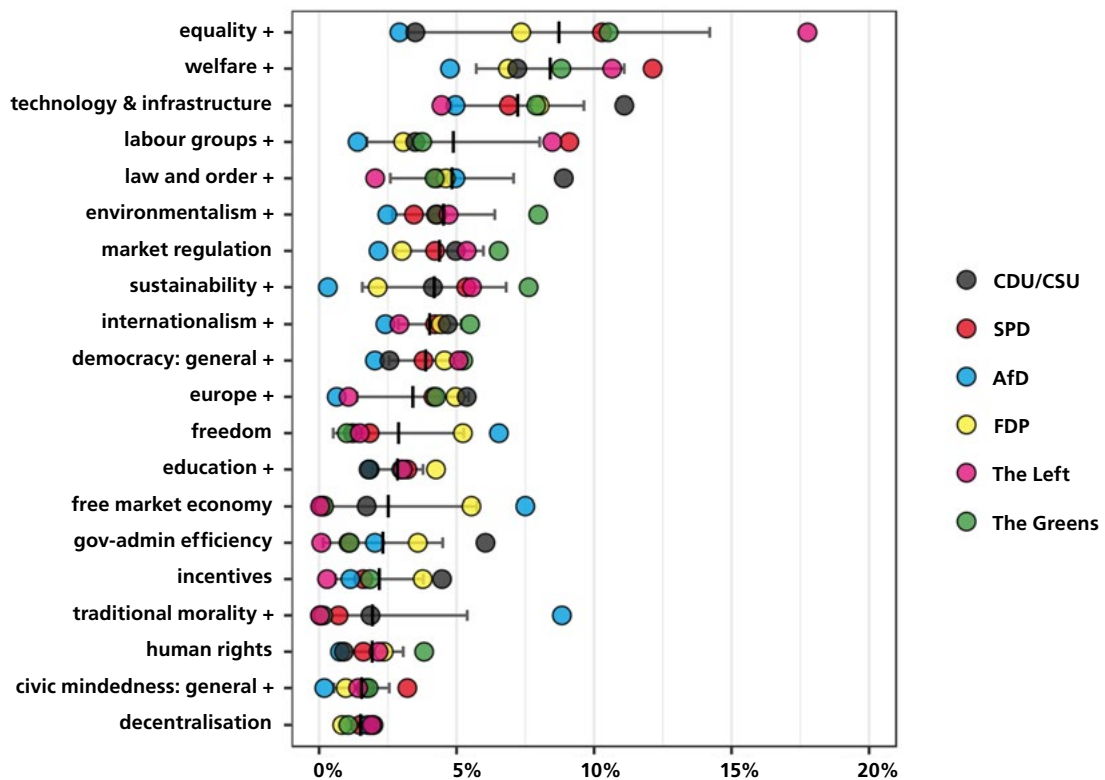
The top issues in 2021, both in the overall political competition (as mentioned above) and at the individual party level (Figure 3) thus suggest essentially three main points. First, the potential coalition partners on the left side of the political spectrum (Greens, Left, SPD) have a lot of common ground to work on. The SPD shares four of its five most important issues with the Greens and the Left and all three of them put a distinctively strong emphasis on the issue of sustainability. Second, the CDU/CSU adopts a rather unusual profile, as it is the only party to make topics such as law and order and government efficiency part of its main talking points, thus potentially filling a thematic niche left by the others. And third, there is a large discrepancy between the AfD and the five other parties. Three of the AfD's top themes (traditional morality, negative attitude toward the EU and emphasis on a "national way of life") are rarely, if ever, found in the programs of the other parties. This shows clearly that AfD positions are far from the political mainstream.

Figure 1
Positions in the 2021 Election Manifestos



Note: The scales have been recentered to the German party system. The center has been calculated by calculating the mean of the six parties currently present in the Bundestag (and their predecessors) for the time 1990–2017. The positive and negative values show the strength of the deviation from the center of the scale.

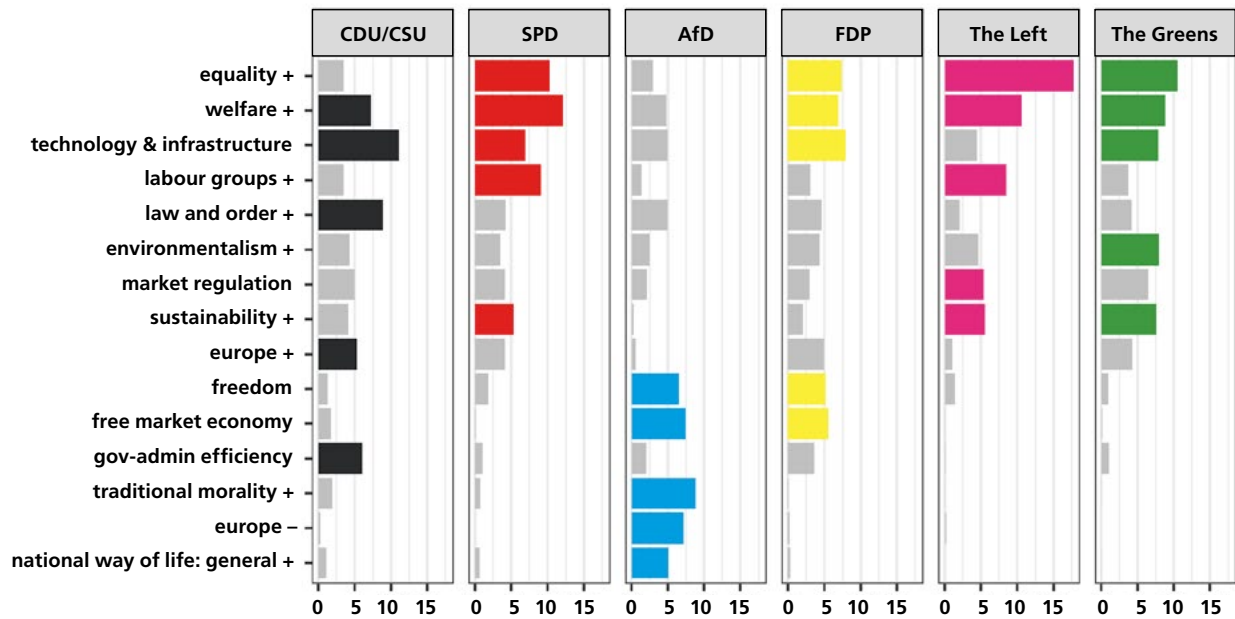
Figure 2
Share of Statements of the 20 most frequent Topics across all Parties in the 2021 Election Manifestos



Note: The small vertical line in each issue row shows the mean share of statements across all parties and the grey horizontal line shows one standard deviation in each direction. The plus (+) sign behind some of the categories means that these categories just capture positive references to the specific topic.

Figure 3

Share of Statements of the Top 5 Topics for each Party in the 2021 Election Manifestos



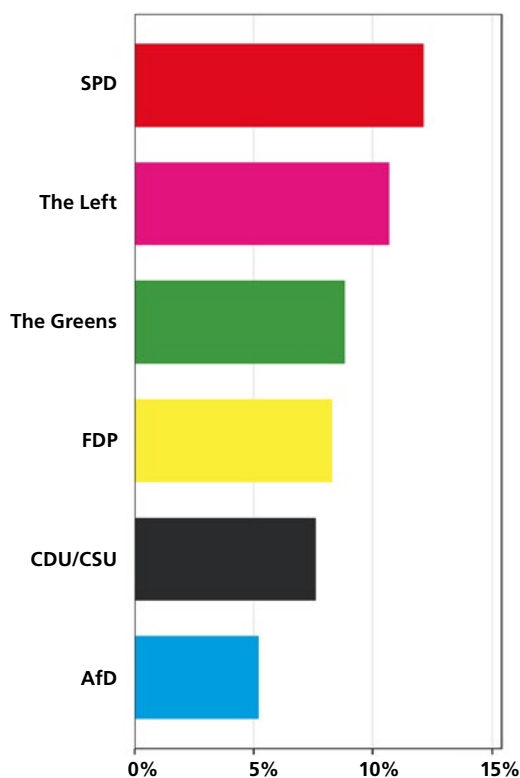
Note: A topic is included if it is a top 5 topic for at least one party. The topics are sorted by the mean share of statements across parties and the shares are measured in %. The plus (+) and minus (-) sign behind some of the categories means that these categories just capture positive or respectively negative references to the specific topic.

3

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES FOR THE GERMAN WELFARE STATE

While the corona crisis has affected Germany extensively, it was not the origin for, but can rather be seen as a catalyst and burning glass for existing social inequalities and shortcomings of the German welfare state. Consequently, and unsurprisingly, all parties address these issues to a great extent in their election manifestos, and hence the welfare state is one of the most important topics in most of the manifestos (Figure 4). It is unsurprisingly most salient to the Left and the SPD, who devote 11 % and 12 % of their manifestos respectively to issues related to the welfare state. The Greens, the CDU/CSU and the FDP address these issues in around 7 % of their manifestos. With only 5 % of statements in their manifesto about the welfare state, the AfD devotes the least attention to this issue.

Figure 4
Share of Statements on Topics related to Welfare in the 2021 Election Manifestos



Note: To measure how often the parties talk about welfare themes overall, the proportions of the two Manifesto Project codes 504 (Welfare State Expansion) and 505 (Welfare State Limitation) were combined.

HEALTH CARE

The Left and the SPD's high emphasis on welfare issues is reflected in their plan to fully reform the German health insurance. The SPD wants to introduce a citizen insurance ("Bürgerversicherung") that covers all health and care needs, which is equivalent to the Left's demand („solidarischen Gesundheitsversicherung“ and „solidarische Pflegevollversicherung“). This would mark a huge change in German health care insurance, which traditionally is divided into private and public pillars. In light of the experience made during the COVID-19 pandemic, all parties agree that better payment and working conditions for nursing staff in hospitals and care facilities is needed, though to slightly different degrees. In addition, all parties stress the importance of and want to increase medical care in regional areas, especially regarding outpatient services. Regarding funding of hospitals, the SPD and the Greens propose to critically reassess flat rates per case, the Left and the AfD want to abolish them for sure. Furthermore, the Left and the Greens propose that hospitals should work in line with their social mission and thus be financed publicly. This is opposed by the FDP, which takes a stand against the unequal treatment of private, public and denominational providers.

Finally, a special issue has evolved around §219a StGB (criminal code), which criminalizes "advertising" abortion, and has received strong media attention over the last few years. The SPD, the FDP, the Left and the Greens want to abolish this paragraph; they are committed to safe access to abortion and demand comprehensive information about it. While the CDU/CSU does not address this issue, the AfD takes the clear counter position. They demand a mandatory pregnancy conflict counseling, with the goal to hinder abortions.

FAMILIES

All parties want to strengthen support for families. We look at the parties' plans for child allowance/benefit and parental leave: the SPD wants to introduce a new progressive child benefit depending on parental income (minimum €250 per month and a maximum of around €500) which replaces the previous child allowance. This is similar to what the Greens propose, a basic child security benefit which combines exist-

ing social benefits for parents and children, plus an extra benefit that is income dependent. The FDP proposes a child opportunity benefit (“Kinderchancengeld”), which consists of a basic benefit, a flexible amount and a non-material opportunity package. They do not specify however what determines the rate of the flexible allowance and, like the Greens, they also do not give exact numbers. The Left wants a child benefit of €328 which is independent of parental income. Children from poor families shall additionally receive a benefit of up to €302, the exact amount depending on their age and not parental income. The CDU/CSU proposes a system of child tax splitting similar to that already in place for married couples. They want to simplify family benefits through automatization and digitization, and to increase the tax relief for single parents. The AfD’s concern is a “misuse” of child benefit. They want that child benefits paid for children living abroad be reduced to the amount in the country the children live in. They do, however, want to increase child allowance and introduce full tax deductibility for child-related expenses.

The Left demands an extension of parental allowance to 12 months per parent (24 for single parents) as well as an increase in the minimum amount of parental allowance. The Greens want to introduce “KinderZeit Plus”, which refers to an extension of parental allowance to 24 months (8 months per parent with 8 months for flexible distribution). The SPD proposes to expand “ElterngeldPlus” into a flexible, subsidized part-time parental leave after the first year of a child’s life. The FDP only wants to increase the months for parental leave to up to 15 months if one of the partners takes at least three months. The FDP proposes the introduction of a partner protection, analogous to maternity protection, where single parents can nominate for instance other family members who support them after the birth. Moreover, the FDP calls for a temporary break in the forced resignations of members of executive or supervisory boards and other top executives who take parental leave. The CDU/CSU wants to extend parental allowance to 16 months if both father and mother take parental leave. The AfD argues for a “child-birth-promoting” family policy and greater appreciation of family work. They want to introduce a child care subsidy for the first three years which can be paid to either the parents or the grandparents. Additionally, the AfD wants to introduce a system of family tax splitting.

Three parties, the SPD, the Left and the Greens, suggest that women were significantly more affected by the COVID-19 crisis than men. They state that women do not only perform more care work within families, leading to a relapse to old gender roles, but also work more often in so called “system-relevant” professions (care, education and retail), which are less well paid.

RETIREMENT

While the SPD and the Greens want to keep a pension level of at least 48 %, the Left wants to raise it to 53 % and lower the standard retirement age to 60 for those who have paid their pension contribution for at least 40 years. The Greens

and the SPD want to retain the retirement age at the age of 67, while the CDU/CSU does not want to lower it either, but are also not clearly stating to not raise it. The FDP wants to create more flexibility and let everyone above 60 who has accumulated entitlements to a pension of at least the level of the guaranteed minimum pension decide for themselves when they want to retire. More flexibility about when to stop working for those above the official pension age is also promoted by the Greens and the AfD. All parties but the SPD mention that they want to abolish the double taxation of pensions. While the CDU/CSU, the SPD and the Greens want to make it compulsory for self-employed persons who are not insured otherwise to be included in statutory pension insurance, the FDP wants to keep the free choice. All parties but the AfD support and want to expand company pensions and agree on the necessity of a basic pension. The FDP additionally wants to introduce a statutory share pension. An alignment of the pension level between East and West is proposed by the Left, the SPD and the AfD. The Greens want to create age-friendly cities and communities and improve the participation of pensioners in the digital world.

UNEMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL SECURITY

In 2003 the Red-Green Coalition introduced Hartz IV (or “Arbeitslosengeld/ALG II”, the unemployment benefit). 18 years later, the SPD does not mention any of these terms once in their election manifesto. While the Left and the Greens want to abolish Hartz IV and instead implement a basic minimum income, the SPD proposes the development of “citizen money” (“Bürgergeld”), whose standard rate should allow “for a life with dignity and enable social participation”. All three parties want to abolish sanctions and to extend unemployment insurance to self-employed persons. The FDP on the other hand wants to cap the level of social spending at 50 % of the federal budget and suggests the introduction of “liberal citizen money” (instead of ALG II) with a uniform rate and expanded basic security savings (“Schonvermögen”). The latter demand is also expressed by the AfD. The CDU/CSU does not mention the term welfare state (“Sozialstaat”) at all and opposes an unconditional basic income. Furthermore, the Union wants to keep sanction mechanisms but change the rules for additional income for young adults up to 21. The AfD wants to limit access to the German social system for EU foreigners and plans to extend the entitlement for unemployment benefits (ALG I) depending on the length of the previous working contract. The AfD proposes reforming unemployment insurance by lowering the contribution rate to increase employees’ incomes.

The parties can be divided into two groups with regard to the minimum wage. The FDP wants to align the salary limit for mini- and midi-jobs with the current minimum wage, the CDU/CSU wants the same for mini-jobs; the AfD wants to keep it as is. The other three parties on the other hand want to increase it to €12 (Greens and SPD) or €13 (the Left). Furthermore the Greens and the Left want to abolish existing exceptions, e.g. for people under 18, and the offsetting with surcharges for shift work or overtime.

EDUCATION

Compared to the other parties – as the previous sections have shown – the FDP is less supportive when it comes to welfare state expansion. This picture is turned upside down when looking at education policies. This issue is more important to the FDP than to any of the other parties, which is in line with the liberal idea of equality of opportunity. Instead of caring for citizens with a strong welfare state, they want to invest in education to give citizens the chance to make something out of their lives – whether they succeed is up to each individual.

In line with this goal they want to invest an additional 1 % of VAT earnings into education. In addition they want to reform educational federalism so that federal and state governments can work together and adapt the constitution accordingly – a proposal also supported by the Greens but opposed by the CDU/CSU. The three left-leaning parties have a special interest in questions of educational equality: both the Greens and the Left demand more inclusive and socially diverse schools and the SPD calls for a federal Equal Opportunity in Education Initiative. The AfD however wants to keep separate schools for children with special needs, a demand shared by the FDP, to give children and their parents freedom of choice. The Left underlines the need for renovation of school buildings to, among others things, allow for barrier-free access.

A topic regarding higher education that all parties but the AfD address and want to expand is the student loan BAföG, Germany's Federal Training Assistance Act. The Left, the Greens and the FDP want to change the eligibility to be independent of parental income. The SPD, the Left and the FDP want to abolish age limits, and the CDU/CSU wants to replace them with upper limits. The FDP wants to set a new limit of the standard study period plus two semesters, whereas the Left wants to adapt the eligibility period to the real average duration of studies and wants a separation from performance reviews. The SPD wants a "Neustart-BAföG" (fresh start) for vocational training of adults, similar to what the Greens call "Weiterbildungs-BaföG" (further training) and the Union call "Aufstiegs-BAföG" (promotion).

EQUALITY

It is not just the classical questions around welfare state expansion or limitation that are given importance in the parties' programs, but also the more general question of social equality. These can be questions related to economic differences (such as the reintroduction of the wealth tax, which is demanded by the SPD, the Greens and the Left and rejected by the CDU/CSU, the FDP and the AfD), but also concerning discrimination based on race, gender etc. For instance, all parties argue for more equality for people with disabilities, especially with regard to work, education and accessibility. Moreover, people with a migration background (by the Greens and the Left) and Eastern Germans (by the Left) are explicitly included in the discussion surrounding equal op-

portunity and representation. While equality is the topic that the Greens and the Left address most often and the SPD and the FDP second most often, it is only ranked 11th in the CDU/CSU and the AfD manifestos.

As an example, concerning LGBTIQ issues, the SPD wants to reform the transsexual law, while the FDP and the Greens want to abolish it. The SPD, the FDP, the Greens and the Left argue in favor of more self-determination to make it easier to change both gender and name. The AfD on the other hand rejects gender reassignments of children and adolescents and opposes "early sexualization" and the "sexual education of diversity", stating that for them the family consists of a father, mother and children. All other parties except the CDU/CSU, which does not address the issue of LGBTIQ-rights at all, want to reform rights for LGBTIQ people and non-heteronormative families with regard to marriage, parentage and adoptions.

4

COUNTERACTING POTENTIAL THREATS TO SOCIAL COHESION, DEMOCRACY AND THE RULE OF LAW

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, the necessity for and importance of social cohesion in withstanding such critical times has been stressed. However, it is not only the pandemic that is seen as a difficult challenge for democracy and social cohesion. There are clear differences between the parties in how they perceive certain threats to society and also how they want to deal with them. The SPD, for example, first speaks in general terms of “extremists and terrorists” who threaten “our free society,” but then deals primarily with the dangers of right-wing extremism and Islamism. They see creating greater social justice as a tool to combat this danger. The FDP also works with the general concept of extremism (only anti-Semitism is discussed separately), but sees scientific research and the subsequent prevention of radicalization processes as the central answer to extremism.

The Greens and the Left, on the other hand, see right-wing extremism as the main threat to German society, the Greens more subtly (similar to the SPD) and the Left in a more obvious way. The Left devotes parts of its program explicitly to the danger posed by right-wing terrorism, discusses past attacks and criticizes the fact that right-wing ideas fall on fertile ground in parts of society and the security authorities. In particular, it calls for support for NGOs currently outlawed as left-wing extremists by parts of the society, in their work against right-wing extremism. In contrast to this clear prioritization, the Greens begin by stating that terrorism as a whole represents an acute danger to an open society and explicitly mention both right-wing extremist and Islamist terror as sources. In other parts of the program however, they address the need to dismantle right-wing extremist networks and call for, among other things, the establishment of an archive on right-wing terror that would serve as a basis for deeper scientific research of the threat posed by right-wing extremists. While the Left thus formulates its priority explicitly, one notices the greater emphasis on right-wing extremism among the Greens primarily through the larger and more detailed scope of their discussion of the topic compared to other extremist world views.

Interestingly, the CDU/CSU and the AfD make clear and divergent prioritizations in their threat assessments. While the CDU/CSU calls right-wing extremism the “greatest threat to our open society”, the AfD devotes a separate chapter to left-wing extremism and crimes by “foreigners”,

while right-wing extremism is mentioned only once in their election program (in the form of a relativization). What they do have in common, however, is the way in which they propose dealing with the perceived threat: seeing tougher laws and strengthened, modernized security authorities as essential in achieving a safer society.

On a more general note the parties propose different measures with which they want to strengthen social cohesion, democracy and the rule of law to make society and its institutions resistant towards such threats.

SOCIAL COHESION

In the AfD manifesto the word “solidarity” only appears twice (in the context of stability of marriages). Instead, the party rejects anti-discrimination laws and stresses the freedom of individuals. For the SPD, on the other hand, solidarity receives a lot of attention, as the party sees it as prerequisite for fighting polarization of society and for equal participation. Moreover, the SPD sees diversity as a strength of society, calls for mutual respect and opposes discrimination. The Union calls for a society that sticks together and sees individual freedom and collective responsibility as mutually dependent. Remarkably, they view the principle of social market economy as “solidarity in action” and want to link volunteering and digitalization in the form of voluntary digital ambassadors. The Greens emphasize that only solidarity can protect the most vulnerable in times of crises and the Left sees social security as a prerequisite for solidarity.

The SPD, the FDP, the Union, the Left and the Greens want to strengthen voluntary work. The SPD wants to establish a nationwide uniform benefit (“Freiwilligengeld”) and a legal right to obtain funding of voluntary service for all under the age of 27. Similarly, the Union wants to adjust the compensation (“Taschengeld”) and introduce a legal claim. The FDP calls for a remuneration within the Federal Voluntary Service (“Bundesfreiwilligendienst”) comparable to voluntary military service and for the possibility for part-time models to reach new target groups. However, the FDP opposes compulsory social or military service. The Greens want to double the yearly places, raise the pocket money to a uniform level and include free public transport tickets. The lat-

ter idea is also supported by the Left, though they stress that voluntary work must not replace jobs that are subject to social security contributions. The AfD does not mention volunteering in its manifesto.

All parties also stress the importance of culture and sports for social cohesion, respect and against discrimination. The SPD even wants to anchor culture as a national goal in the constitution and the Left and the Greens call for more diversity in both sports and culture. The AfD however, the only party to use the term “Leitkultur” (leading culture), opposes the replacement of the German culture by what they call “Verfassungspatriotismus” (constitutional patriotism).

DEMOCRACY AND ITS (PERCEIVED OR REAL) DEFICITS

All German parties commit to democracy, but they address different aspects in varying degree and have various perceptions of the threats to democracy. To ensure freedom of press and to protect journalists better, the FDP calls for a separate inclusion of attacks on journalists in the criminal statistics. The FDP, the Left and the AfD want to secure whistle blowers from legal consequences. The AfD blames the “mainstream media” for having given up their role as the fourth estate and for being biased in their reporting instead of critically-objective. Both the FDP and the Union want to fight hate speech on social media, as they suggest this contributes to further radicalization and extremism.

To achieve a strong democracy, the SPD, the FDP and the CDU/CSU call for more political education in schools (FDP & Union) and beyond, for instance through educational leave for employees (SPD). Furthermore, some parties want to foster political participation of young people by lowering the voting age to 16: the SPD proposes this for elections on all levels, whereas the FDP and the Greens would restrict this to federal and European Parliament elections. The Left goes even further and calls for a voting age of 14 for elections on all levels. As a strong democracy also needs support from civil society, the parties also express ideas on how to strengthen civil society: the SPD wants to change the catalog of charitable causes to allow for political activism of tax-privileged corporations such as associations, and the Union wants to reintroduce the “democracy clause” (“Demokratieklausel”) to ensure that recipients of funding commit to the democratic constitutional order. Both demands are supported by the Greens.

The parties also differ regarding their views and proposed implementations of more direct democracy. While the CDU/CSU only wants to make use of digitalized procedures such as Hackathons to foster solutions directly built by citizens, the FDP proposes extending the right of petition to include so called “citizens’ plenary process” (“Bürgerplenarverfahren”) and supports randomly selected citizens’ councils; the latter are also supported by the Left and the Greens. Furthermore the Left wants to introduce

people’s initiatives and referenda on the federal level and even calls for a veto right for the people against parliamentary decisions. While the SPD remains quite abstract, the AfD is most concrete and radical in their demands: they want more direct participation of citizens based on the Swiss model, including the right to introduce legislative initiatives.

To fight lobbying and corruption, the Left and the Greens call for a more transparent lobby register with fewer exceptions. The AfD calls for a limit on the term of office for MPs (four legislative periods), and for the Federal Chancellor (two terms). The latter demand is also put forward by the FDP and the Greens. Moreover, the AfD wants to prohibit the Federal Chancellor as well as the state governors (Minister-Presidents) from being MPs at the same time (strict division of powers) and to abolish parliamentary state secretaries. A special case is the AfD calling for a parliamentary COVID-19 enquiry committee, as they accuse the government of bypassing parliament during the COVID-19 crisis. The Left too demands more parliamentary involvement regarding restrictions in times of crisis.

DEFENDING THE CONSTITUTIONAL AND JUDICIAL SYSTEM

Together, the CDU/CSU, the SPD and the FDP advocate a strong and assertive constitutional state. However, they remain vague about the exact approach they want to take to achieve this. The FDP and the Greens have formulated a more precise commitment to reforming and modernizing the judicial system. Both call for a reduction in the workload by means of more personnel and more efficient structures, as well as the digitization of the authorities and the judicial system. For the AfD on the other hand, the focus is on what it sees as a politically biased judiciary, which it would like to “depoliticize.” According to their intention, the staffing of the public prosecutor’s office and the judiciary should be as free from political influence as possible. Thus, the AfD program represents the potentially strongest intervention in the judicial system.

One topic that is completely missing from both the Union and the AfD manifestos concerns the recurring presence of radical right-wing structures in the German security agencies. Given the strong emphasis on the general danger posed to society by right-wing extremists, it is surprising that the Union leaves this issue completely out of the discussion. The SPD, on the other hand, addresses it directly in both the army and the police and proposes better supervision, training and working conditions as a solution. The AfD wants to reform the intelligence service, because they believe it is currently used as a partisan instrument against political opponents, something they want to stop with their reform. The Left goes further in its demands and calls for the dissolution of the German intelligence service (Verfassungsschutz), which in its view, and contrary to the AfD’s view, tends to promote right-wing structures instead of fighting them, and calls for authorities to focus and investi-

gate right-wing structures in public security institutions and the army. The Greens join that call for a greater priority of right-wing extremist structures and also propose the idea of an increased diversity in the army to prevent the formation of radical structures.

5

FUTURE & RECENT CHALLENGES

While the COVID-19 pandemic has overshadowed nearly all politics for the past one and a half years, there are and have been several other challenges that have and will play a major role in German politics, probably the most important of which is climate change. The second challenge is digitalization, given a sharp increase in attention during the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, we address migration, which played an important role in the previous election.

CLIMATE CHANGE

The topic of climate change, environment, and sustainability could be considered a – if not the – focal point of the 2021 election. In 2019 for the first time a majority of the German population regarded it as the single most important problem (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen 2021). Then due to its overwhelming importance, the COVID-19 pandemic indirectly reduced the emphasis politicians, the media, and citizens devoted to the topic and also decreased the mobilization capacities of pro climate movements such as Fridays for Future, which was very successful in Germany in 2019. But the topic has made a strong comeback in the 2021 election campaign – supported by the ground-breaking decision of the German supreme court on 29.3.2021 forcing the government to speed up its environmental efforts to avoid drastic problems for future generations (BVerfG 2021).

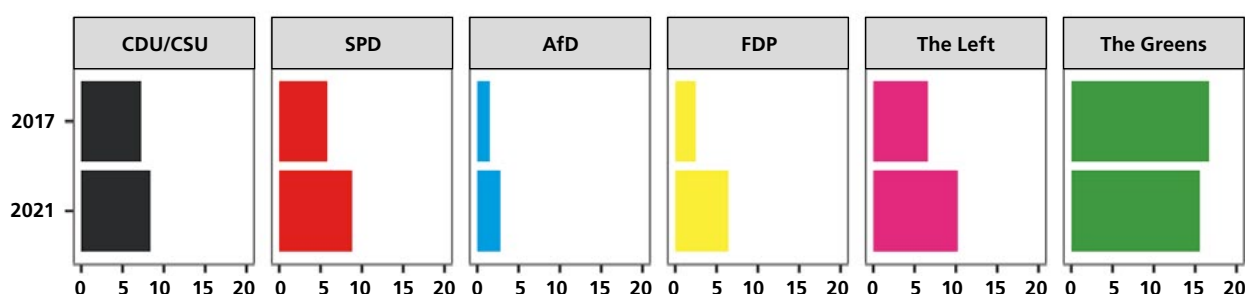
Figure 5 supports this view of high importance by showing the individual parties' emphases on the environment and

sustainability. Other than the Greens, every party increased their emphasis, although by different degrees. The Left, the SPD, and the FDP devote an additional 2.5 percentage points and the CDU/CSU and the AfD roughly one more percentage point compared to 2017. The Greens maintain by far the most supportive position, using it as a cross-cutting topic to frame various other policies and devoting more than 15 % of their manifesto to it. The AfD mentions the topic by far the least at about 2.5 %. The other parties are placed somewhat in the middle between these two extremes, between 10 % (The Left) and 6 % (FDP). As the parties also write about many other issues in their manifestos the emphasis most parties put on this issue is quite significant. On a more general level one can say that there is a tendency in 2021 for (center-)left parties to be more supportive than (center-)right parties.

The main clusters of the topic are energy production (renewable vs. fossil), transportation (cars and flights vs. public transport, bicycles etc.), sustainability, biodiversity and protection of nature, more general solutions to the CO2 problem, and how to deal with international treaties. The general framing and orientation of the Greens, the Left, the SPD, the CDU/CSU and the FDP is one of more sustainability, more energy-efficiency, more recycling, more biodiversity and so on. But they vary in the timing, the spending, the framing, the emphasis, and the concreteness of their proposals. We have therefore taken a closer look at what exactly the parties propose in these different areas.

Figure 5

Share of Statements on Topics related to Climate Change in the 2017 and 2021 Election Manifestos



Note: To measure how often the parties talk about topics related to climate change overall, the proportions of the two Manifesto Project codes 416.2 (Sustainability +) and 501 (Environmental Protection) were combined.

For the important problem of energy production one can clearly see a broad consensus – except for the AfD – favoring the transition from fossil energy production to renewable energy production, though the desired speed and concreteness of policy proposals varies significantly. An important national issue in the context of climate change and energy production is the topic of coal because of its long tradition in the country and the fact that its industry is situated in economically declining regions in both the western and eastern parts of the country. Nowadays all parties – except for the AfD – are in favor of exiting coal-based energy production. As the current government has already put into place a plan to eliminate coal (“Kohle-Kompromiss” = coal compromise) by the year 2038, the parties vary not only in concrete policy implementations but also in the framing of this exit. The Greens and the Left aim at an exit at an even earlier date and the SPD retains the option of an earlier exit by arguing that the faster you increase renewable energy production the earlier you can get rid of fossil based energy. The CDU/CSU focuses on the second part of the coal compromise, by stressing their commitment to support the affected regions, employers and employees in their transition to new economical opportunities. The FDP only argues that due to the exit from coal and nuclear energy there is a necessity for more stress testing of systems of energy production because of the volatility of renewable energy. The only clear opposition is the AfD, which wants to reverse the exit from coal and nuclear energy production.

When it comes to the transportation sector, which on its own is responsible for a third of Germany’s primary energy demand (BMVI 2020/21, p. 302), most parties see the necessity for a drastic change, though only the three left-leaning parties talk about a traffic transformation (“Verkehrswende”). To achieve this, the Greens and the Left want to completely ban combustion motors by 2030, while the SPD wants to have at least 15 million fully electric cars by 2030. The CDU/CSU and the FDP want to stay open to different kinds of technologies, but see the need for climate friendly alternatives. The Left, the Greens, the SPD and the CDU/CSU all also want to invest in trains and public transport to make it more likely that people switch to these methods of transportation. The AfD, though, talks about climate hysteria and wants the car to remain the favorite means of transportation for Germans.

The relevance of sustainability increased in nearly all of the manifestos in comparison to 2017. The only party that did not increase its emphasis were the Greens, but with nearly 8 % of their manifesto devoted to sustainability they were and still are the party highlighting these issues the most. The SPD and the Left increased their emphasis each by about 2 percentage points to a saliency of about 5 %. The issue is least salient to the AfD at 0.3 %, though this is an increase from 2017 where sustainability was not mentioned in their manifesto at all.

Related to the idea of sustainability, the Greens, the Left and the CDU/CSU propose fostering regional food consumption. Aside from increased sustainability, the CDU/CSU and the

Greens also see the benefits it brings to domestic farmers (CDU/CSU) and local business (The Greens). The Left regards it as a possibility for reducing the market power of the big corporate groups. The AfD also wants to promote regional food, though in their case to support national producers and ensure Germany’s independence. As a means to make it easier for the consumers to choose sustainable (SPD and CDU/CSU) and regional (Greens and CDU/CSU) goods, some parties propose better and more uniform labels. Connected to this, the protection of nature and biodiversity plays a role in all manifestos, though the FDP and the AfD do not go into much detail. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, the CDU/CSU frames it in a religious way, as preservation of creation.

With regard to international treaties, five of the six parties in parliament actively support the Paris agreement in their election manifestos. Only the AfD wants to cancel the agreement and strongly argues against it and against a Green New Deal in general. One major issue related to the Paris agreement is the deadline for when Germany should become a climate-neutral nation. The Left wants to reach this by 2035, the Greens by 2041, the SPD and the CDU/CSU by 2045, and the FDP and the AfD don’t make concrete statements, although the FDP mentions that Germany has already agreed on 2050.

DIGITALIZATION

In the policy field of digitalization, the Corona pandemic had a lasting and visible impact. With the call to work from home wherever possible and the general principle of avoidance of personal contacts even in the course of administrative activities and school lessons, the necessary digital infrastructure has become a main focus of overall political attention. As one might expect, these impressions are also reflected in the election programs of the parties. What is particularly surprising is how much agreement exists between all parties regarding the fundamental problems and their main issues.

An important topic in the election programs is the adaption of labor policies to the new “digitalized” reality during the COVID-19 pandemic. With the exception of the AfD, all parties address the issue of remote work. The three parties on the socio-economic left (SPD, Greens, the Left) directly call for a right to work from home or some kind of mobile work. The SPD has also formulated a minimum threshold: employees should have the right to work remotely for at least 24 days a year (with a regular 5-day working week). The Greens and the Left go even further in favor of a general right to remote work and do not link it to specific numbers of days. The only condition for all three parties is that it must be possible to perform the job remotely. It is also important to all three parties on the left that it is about the employee’s right, so he/she should always have the choice between remote work and on-site presence.

The two economically liberal parties, the CDU/CSU and the FDP, are also in principle in favor of more opportunities for employees to do remote work. However, rather than directly

establishing a legal employee right, they propose different paths. The FDP focuses on cooperation between employees and employers and would like to establish by law that every employee can at least request to work from home. Rejections of such requests must then be explained and justified by the employer. The CDU/CSU refrains from making legal binding proposals altogether. It expresses the desire for more options to work remotely for employees, but relies entirely on agreements between unions and employers and within companies.

Where all parties agree is the importance of a future-proof digital infrastructure to support the new digital reality in work and in the private sphere. Whether it's the SPD calling for Germany to become a "gigabit society" in the 2020s or the CDU/CSU planning to close gaps in mobile coverage by 2024, the main goal of better digital infrastructure is the same across all parties. In detail, the approaches differ with regard to one central point along the economic left-right axis. The SPD, the Left and the Greens are all in favor of some form of legally guaranteed internet coverage for households. The Left goes the furthest with its proposed amendments, which see the internet and mobile communications as a state responsibility and fundamental right and accordingly wants to organize the expansion and operation of the networks entirely by the state. The FDP and the CDU/CSU on the other hand refrain from speaking of legal guarantees. However, they also rely on subsidies and incentives for private providers and households, with the FDP's "gigabit vouchers" for private households or the CDU/CSU's financial support for local municipalities to connect to the broadband network. The AfD gives the smallest space to the issue of digital infrastructure. For seamless mobile network coverage, they rely on the consistent implementation of "national roaming," in which a user switches to other network providers automatically in the event of dead spots.

The parties also set many similar priorities in other areas of digitalization. All six agree on the importance of limiting the market power of the big digital "monopoly like" companies.

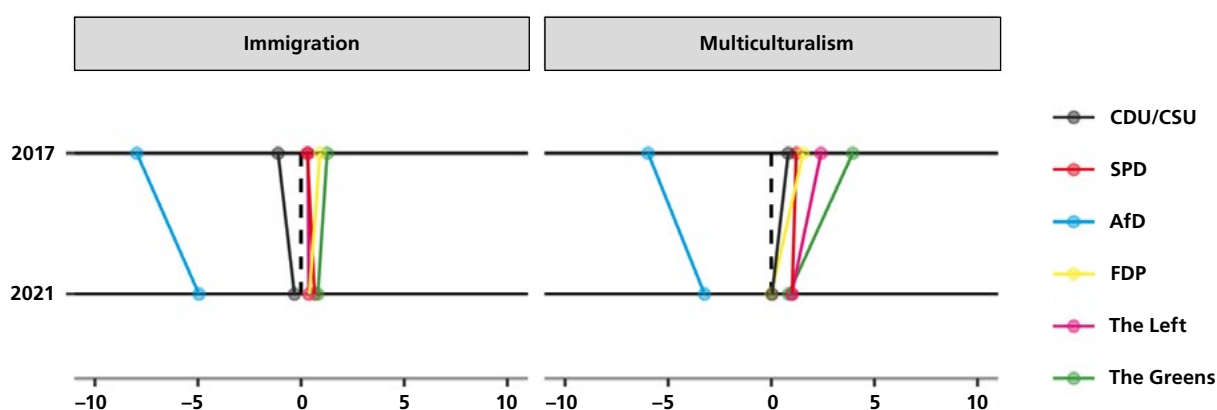
In detail, the parties emphasize that they should be legally obligated to provide interoperability and data sharing. The services of the large tech companies should not be restricted to certain software solutions, and the data which consolidates their market power must also be made available to other, especially smaller, competitors. The AfD and the Left also insist on a different system of taxation of the big players (AfD: taxation of turnover instead of profit, Left Party: taxation at the place of generation). Important to all parties is the use of open source software in the public sector and the unrestricted availability of publicly produced software and data. All of them are thus committed to the principles of open data and open government.

IMMIGRATION

The topic of immigration was regarded as the most important problem by the general public between 2015 and 2018 (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen 2021) and considered the main challenge during the 2017 election campaign. But in the 2021 election campaign it became somewhat less important – a result of both the decreased pressure due to the current immigration situation, as well as the focus on the two new challenges of the environment and digitalization and being overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 6 shows the positions and movements of the parties with regard to the two main facets of the topic of migration: immigration and multiculturalism. The first facet focuses on how to deal with immigrants who are not yet in the country and whether one should allow more immigrants. The second facet relates to policies dealing with immigrants who are already in the country and whether to employ multiculturalist or assimilationist approaches when integrating them into the society. There is a clear general trend to the center. A major explanation for this development is the drastically decreased emphasis on both dimensions from 2017 to 2021, which is mostly driven by the exceptionally high saliency on these issues in 2017. The SPD is the only party in-

Figure 6
Attitudes toward Immigration and Multiculturalism in the 2017 and 2021 Election Manifestos



Note: The position on immigration in the 2021 election manifesto is formed by subtracting the number of negative immigration statements (Manifesto Project Code 601.2) from the number of positive immigration statements (Manifesto Project Code 602.2) and for Multiculturalism accordingly (Manifesto Project Codes 608.1+608.2 subtracted from 607.1+607.2).

creasing their positive view on immigration and the Left the only one that at least maintains their previous stance. Some variance of the parties' positions is visible and aligns broadly with the parties' general positions on the left right spectrum. On one side the Greens, the SPD, and the Left are supportive of and inclusive towards immigrants and on the other the AfD is very restrictive and exclusive. The AfD even uses it as a cross-cutting issue with which to frame various other policy positions. The FDP and the CDU/CSU adopt centrist positions – which is also a result of hardly dealing with the topic at all.

More concretely, the handling of the topic of immigration in the 2021 election manifestos is clustered around the following points: desired vs undesired immigrants, acceptable reasons for immigration, duration of immigration, benefits for immigrants, economic and societal integration, (family) reunification, dealing with illegal immigrants, and actions with/in the countries of origin. There is a broad consensus among all parties that there should be a properly structured way for highly-skilled immigrants whose skills are required by the economy. As the share of immigrants of this kind is comparably low and as they mostly come from the Western world, the parties when discussing immigration mostly focus on other kinds of immigration. For both the immigration process itself as well as the handling of immigrants who are already in Germany the parties adopt significantly different stances. Although all parties except the AfD accept the concept of moral and humanitarian reasons for allowing immigration, the acceptable reasons for asylum, the number of immigrants, and which countries of origin are considered to be "safe" varies. The three left-leaning parties are on the more supportive side: the SPD wants to give well-integrated people without a secure residence a permanent right to stay, the Greens specifically connect this to a residence in Germany for five years (three for adolescents, young people and families with underage children) and according to the Left, migrants should even have a legal right to naturalization after five years in Germany. The three left-leaning parties plan to broaden family reunification rules to cover those with subsidiary protection and refugees, including regulations for siblings of unaccompanied underage refugees. This is opposed by the CDU/CSU and the AfD, which rejects any kind of family reunification for refugees. The CDU/CSU not only wants to keep the number of refugees fleeing to Germany and Europe low, but wants to reduce it even further. The CDU/CSU, the FDP and the AfD want to enforce the obligation to leave the country through deportation. The AfD even wants to abolish church asylum. In sum, the three right-leaning parties adopt a clear adverse attitude towards any kind of "illegal" immigration.

At least since the so called "European migrant crisis" of 2015 it is obvious to all member states of the EU that the topic of immigration is one that needs to be dealt with, especially at the European level. This is also partly reflected by the German parties in their current national election manifestos. When dealing with the EU dimension of the immigration topic, the parties – still generally following their

stances on immigration – emphasize the problems relating to the external border of the EU, the different approaches to multiple issues regarding immigration among the EU member states, specific international treaties, and they demand actions on the EU level. Additionally, there is some blame-shifting towards the EU by the AfD which condemns it for failing to stop immigration, and by the Left and the Greens which criticize it for failing to deal with the humanitarian aspect of immigration. Whether the parties support EU-wide actions on the topic, actions by subgroups of member states (e.g. "coalition of the willing"), or only those on the national level also depends on their general stances towards the EU and on what kind of actions they expect from the EU. The international focus on the topic is complemented by some parties by debating UN-driven pacts and programs and arguing for canceling or improving them, depending on the parties' stance on immigration: the AfD wants to cancel the UN Global Compacts on Migration and Refugees, the Left and the SPD reemphasize their support of the UN Global Compact on Migration, and the Greens supports both Global Compacts, the UNHCR's resettlement program, and the UNFCCC Task Force on Displacement.

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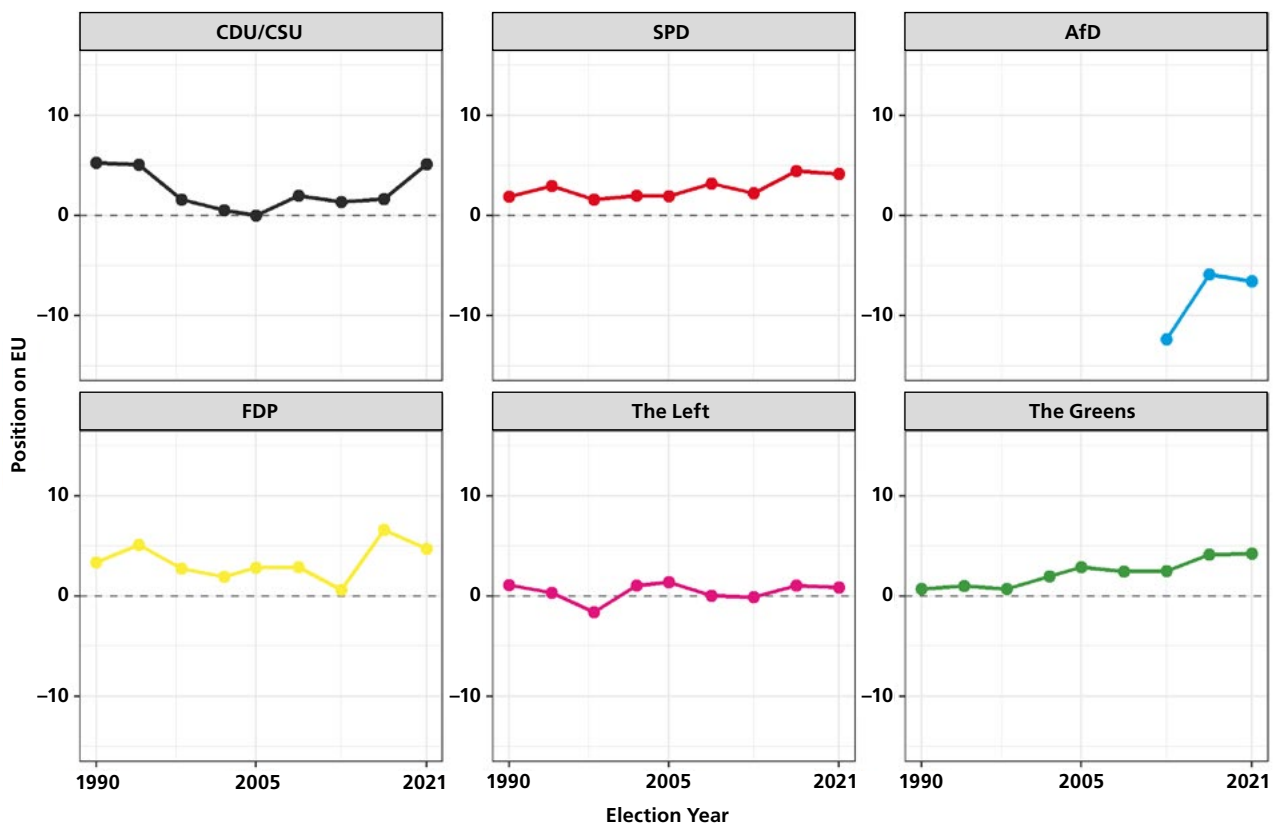
GERMANY IN A SUPRANATIONAL AND GLOBALIZED WORLD

In our globalized world it is not just the national context which plays an important role when making plans for the future. Germany is placed in a supranational and international context. For example, two of the challenges just discussed cannot be solved by any national government alone, but need international cooperation. Thus Germany depends on its supranational and international partners and is itself an important player in both the EU and on an international level. In this section we focus on Germany in this supra- and international context and analyze how much attention the parties devote to these issues in their programs and what vision they have about Germany's role internationally.

GERMANY AND THE EU

Many relevant questions today are no longer decided on the national, but on the European level. As one its founding members, deeply indebted to the idea of a European community – especially because of its history, Germany has always had a strong relationship with the EU. And not only for ideological reasons, but also for the economic profits an export-driven economy like Germany has gained from its membership. Hence, the political parties have always taken a mostly positive stance towards the EU. Figure 7 shows that for a long time all parties in the German Bundestag took a position in favor of the EU or were

Figure 7
Attitudes toward the EU in Election Manifestos (1990–2021)



Note: The position on the EU in each election manifesto is formed by subtracting the number of negative EU statements (Manifesto Project Code 110) from the number of positive EU statements (Manifesto Project Code 108). Accordingly, a number > 0 indicates a more positive attitude towards the EU, a number < 0 a more negative one.

at least neutral towards EU integration. A borderline case is the Left, which has over the years moved back and forth between a slightly positive and slightly negative/neutral position, however the only election where it adopted an explicitly negative position was in 1998. The Greens started out with a slightly positive position in the 1990s, but have become much more positive towards the EU over the years. In contrast, the CDU/CSU followed a downwards trend from the early 90s until 2005, but since then have again taken more and more positive stances. Irrespective of these changes, all parties have for the most part taken a positive stance towards the EU. This positive bias changed when the AfD entered the political arena. While the AfD position is not as negative as it was in 2013, the AfD still clearly stands out with its anti-EU position. In fact, the AfD is the only party in Germany which supports a “Dexit” (the German equivalent to Brexit). In line with its own support for such a process, the AfD stresses that it opposes any penalties for the UK. The other parties (except for the Left which just does not mention the Brexit at all) emphasize that the United Kingdom will continue to be a strong and close partner for the EU and Germany and underline that the joint agreements will be the basis for a new partnership. But the CDU/CSU, the FDP and the Greens also insist on keeping a close watch on whether the UK complies with the agreements to ensure fair competition between the island and Europe and to ensure peace on the Irish island.

THREE VISIONS FOR EU INTEGRATION

While the quantitative comparison of the party positions above has already given some idea on where German parties stand with regard to the EU, the picture is still rough and especially between the parties which show a positive leaning towards the EU, differences can be observed when taking a closer look. Essentially, the general ideas about EU integration can be categorized into three different visions. First, a reconstruction of the EU, rebuilding it as a confederation of sovereign states (Staatenbund). Second, keeping the EU as it is, but strengthening its economic and fiscal ties and establishing more cooperation in external and security politics. Third, deepening EU integration by establishing a real social union on top of the existing economic and fiscal union.

The first solution is the one proposed by the AfD. As already said, the party clearly opposes the EU and calls for a “Dexit”. Instead, they suggest founding a new European Economic and Interest Community (“europäischen Wirtschafts- und Interessengemeinschaft”). While such a “Dexit” would be their preferred solution, they also make some statements with regard to individual aspects of the EU that they want to abolish. Most prominently of course, they want to leave the Eurozone, a claim central to the party’s formation in 2013. On top of this they also speak against a deepening of common foreign and security policies, as well as common regulations for social policies, and are in favor of a “renationalization of EU agricultural policies”.

The second vision is the one held by the CDU/CSU and the FDP. Both parties support a strong EU in the areas of economic and fiscal policies. The CDU/CSU wants to deepen coordination between the EU states on economic policies, establish a Capital Markets Union, and strengthen the European Banking Union and the European Stability Mechanism. The FDP wants to transfer the latter into a European Monetary Fund. They clearly object to any collectivization of debts and want to quickly re-establish the EU’s fiscal policies.

Both parties are mainly interested in deepening EU economic cooperation with regard to trade with non-European countries, e.g. for securing import of energy sources. The CDU/CSU also sees the EU as a strong stakeholder that can negotiate with other big industrial countries to protect European companies from distortions of competition through state subsidies.

Another area where they want to deepen cooperation is with regard to common foreign and security policy. The FDP calls for an EU Foreign secretary and believes that the EU should build its own army. The CDU/CSU wants to strengthen FRONTEX and cooperation between the national police and secret service forces. EUROPOL would become a kind of “European FBI”, whereas the FDP just calls for the European Bureau of Investigation.

Where these parties do not want a strengthening of the EU are all policies which could be subsumed under the title of a Social Union. The FDP, however, only makes this point indirectly by not mentioning any of these areas. The CDU/CSU, on the other hand, clearly states that it objects to any European unemployment, health or pension insurance.

This is the central point on which the vision of the third group of parties, the SPD, the Left, and the Greens, differs from the vision just described. These parties do not only want to strengthen the EU as an economic and fiscal union, but want to deepen the union by establishing a social union on top. All three of them, for example, call for a minimum wage in all EU countries and want to strengthen rules on co-determination. The SPD and the Greens propose a European unemployment insurance that ensures that in times of crisis all member countries can provide a social security net, and The Left and the SPD want to improve the social security net for seasonal workers. The Left is also very explicit about where the financial means for an improved European welfare state shall come from: they want to increase the taxes for the rich, support the EU-wide minimum tax rate for companies, and want to introduce a financial transaction tax. While the latter two are also supported by the SPD, the FDP and the AfD strongly oppose any tax regulations at the European level.

With regard to fiscal policies, the parties of the third vision also differ from the propositions made by the FDP and the CDU/CSU. Instead of re-establishing austerity policy, they all want to continue with the European investment policy introduced during the COVID-19 crisis. The Greens propose a permanent investment fund and want to establish a short

term credit line for all countries to counteract speculation against individual countries. The Left even wants a debt relief for poor regions and wants to increase investment in economically weaker regions and industrial sectors. Both the Greens and the Left also highlight that the European parliament needs to have decisive influence in this area. A difference can be found with regard to the parties' positions towards the European Central Bank (ECB): while the Greens support its independence, the Left wants it to be controlled through the European parliament. The SPD position on this issue is not stated in their program.

An aspect where the SPD and the Greens agree with ideas proposed by the parties of the second vision concerns supporting a reorganization of competition and state aid law to protect European companies from competitive disadvantages.

With regard to common foreign and security policy all three parties have rather different positions. The SPD clearly wants to strengthen cooperation in this area, it wants to build a European army and supports a European foreign secretary, and wants the EU to develop initiatives for armament control and disarmament. The Greens too want to expand this area, but are less explicit with regard to a European army, they just say that they want to strengthen cooperation between the member countries' armies. They also mention that they want a restrictive armament policy. The Greens state that they want to fight organized crime through establishing a European Bureau of Investigation, similar to the plans by the FDP. The Left adopts the most extreme position on this issue: the party is strongly against any kind of expansion in the military sector or military build-up, they object to the idea of a European army and want to prohibit the export of military equipment.

PLANS FOR STRENGTHENING EU INSTITUTIONS

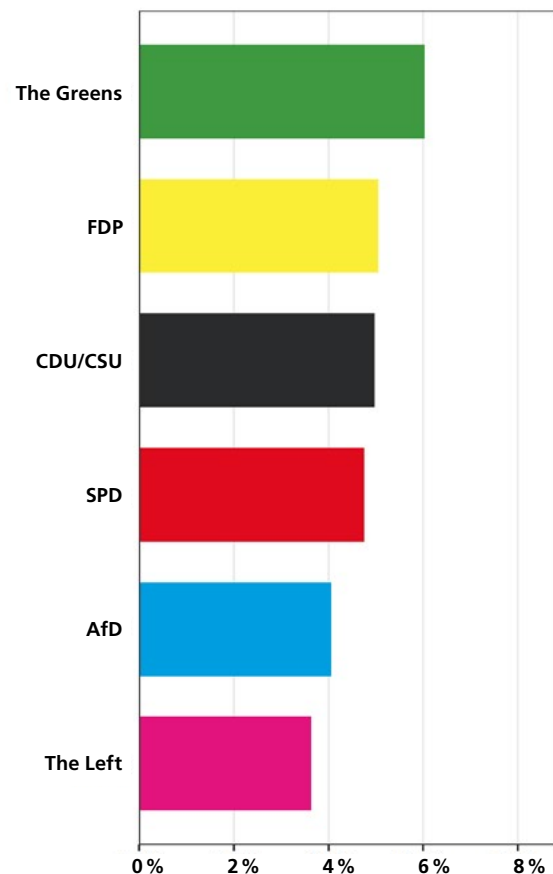
The parties supporting either the second or third vision for EU integration also make some suggestions with regard to how the EU should be strengthened institutionally. Here the parties agree on strengthening the European Parliament. All five parties want to give the parliament the right of initiative and want to establish a common election law (only the Left does not mention this topic). The CDU/CSU, the FDP and the Greens also want to encourage European-wide leading candidates. The European Commission should, according to the FDP and the CDU/CSU, be reduced in size to increase its ability to act, and according to the Left and the Greens the commissioners should not only be voted into office by the parliament, but the parliament should also have the ability to vote them out of office again. In another attempt to improve the Commission's ability to work, the CDU/CSU wants to make the majority principle the common voting system in more areas and the Greens want to abolish unanimous votes altogether and have the Commission decide everything by majority. The FDP, the Left and the Greens demand the work of the European Council become more transparent.

To strengthen democracy in the EU, the FDP and the Left want to set up a new constitutional convention and let the European public vote on the new constitution. The Greens suggest establishing a public service media platform to help establish a European public sphere. In addition all parties want to sharpen the sanction mechanism to be able to withhold financial funds from countries who do not comply with EU law. The Left also wants to give individuals the right to appeal to the European Court of Justice and the Greens want the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union to be legally enforceable by member states. Lastly, the SPD, the FDP and the CDU/CSU support a European seat in the Security Council.

GERMANY'S INTERNATIONAL ROLE

There is (almost) no fundamental challenge to Germany's "classic" international role on the part of any party. The saliency the parties distribute to this issue also does not differ a lot (Figure 8). It is least salient to the Left and to the AfD (both around 4 %), followed by the SPD, the CDU/CSU and the FDP (all around 5 %), and finally the Greens (slightly above 6 %).

Figure 8
Share of Statements on Topics related to Internationalism in the 2021 Election Manifestos



Note: To measure how often the parties talk about international themes overall, the proportions of the three Manifesto Project codes 103 (Anti-Imperialism), 107 (Internationalism: Positive) and 109 (Internationalism: Negative) were combined.

According to the manifestos of the SPD, the Greens and the CDU/CSU, both international cooperation and participation in international institutions remain central pillars of German foreign policy. Their explicit call for an active international mediation role continues to emphasize Germany's post-war era self-perception as a so-called "civilian power". Together with the advocacy of Israel's unrestricted right to exist and the preference for a two-state solution, which can also be found in the FDP manifesto, multilateralism and Israel's safety remain two fundamental pillars of German foreign policy that enjoy almost cross-party consensus (with some exceptions among the AfD and the Left).

Adaptions and differing positions regarding Germany's international role can for the most part be found in the details of the various implementations of such a general multilateral philosophy. The SPD focuses primarily on further strengthening Germany's international mediation role, for example by upgrading the Center for International Peace Operations (ZIF), and through advancing international legalization, for instance in the area of arms exports or the transnational enforcement of human rights. The Greens also head in the same direction and propose strengthening both the Civil Peace Service (ZFD) and the Center for International Peace Operations (ZIF). They also want to establish a stronger presence of the work and, above all, the successes of civil conflict prevention in the public eye. In contrast, the CDU/CSU emphasizes a broader and more active international role that is more closely aligned with Germany's own national interests. Accordingly, international cooperation and multilateralism serve to co-determine the shape of the emerging new multipolar world order in a favorable way. Cooperation within the democratic community of states helps oppose the looming threat of authoritarian states, populist movements and global crises – if necessary by military means.

The AfD takes a unique position here. Both a reference to an active international mediating role (civilian power) and to Israel's right to exist are entirely missing from its election program. Instead, they indirectly oppose an active multilateral German role through mediation and intervention by emphasizing the autonomy of nation-states and the right of peoples/nations to self-determination.

For the Left, the main priority is an international policy that works through cooperation and not through economic or military sanctions. In their view, Germany should refrain from such means, contrasting in part the active international role that the four other parties assign to Germany. Instead, they give a lot of space in their election program to strengthening and reforming the UN as a central cooperation and conflict resolution institution.

UN AND NATO

As a means to strengthen the EU's international power the CDU/CSU, the FDP and the SPD call for a permanent seat

for the EU in the security council. The AfD also wants this extra permanent seat, however not for the EU but for Germany. The Greens and the Left, on the other hand, both want to minimize the power of the security council instead of adding another seat.

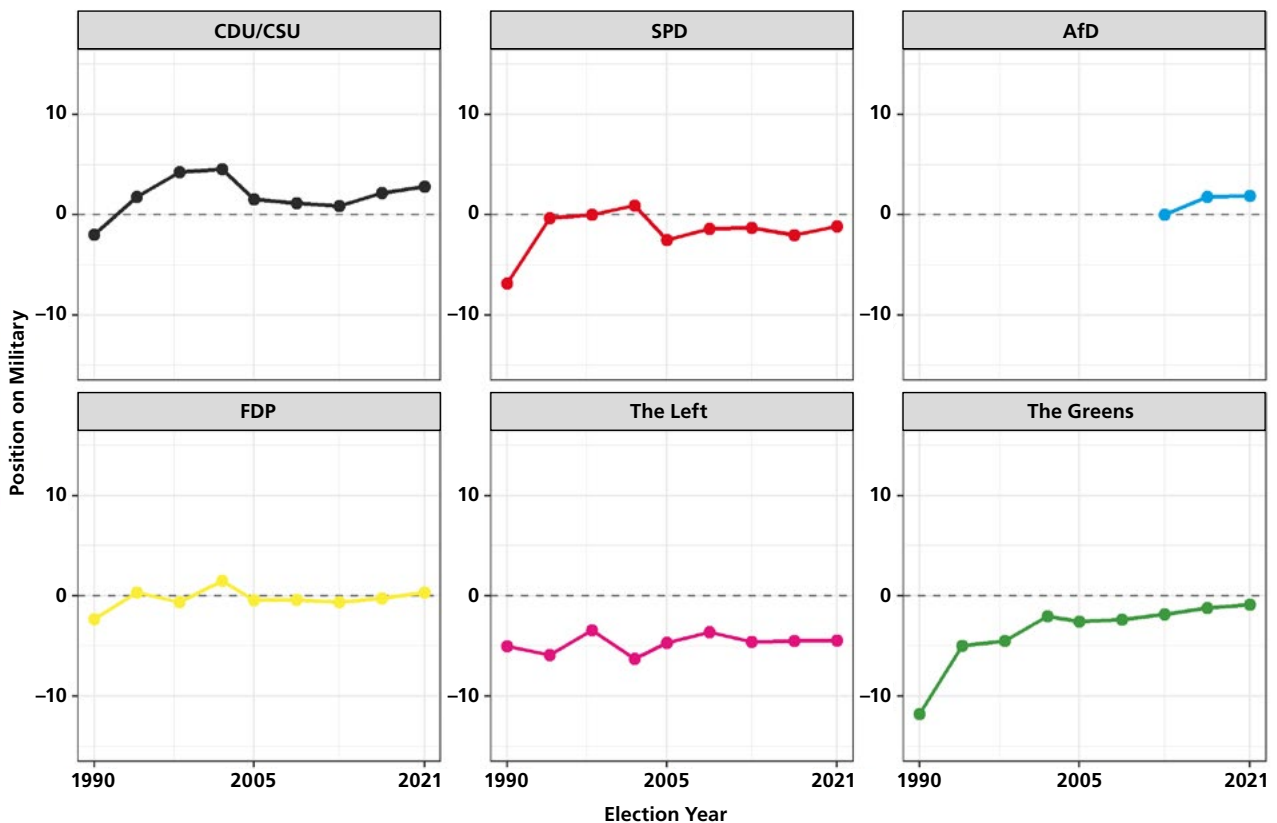
All parties (excluding the Left) also share a commitment to the German NATO membership and thus implicitly to military interventions in the event of an attack on a member of the alliance. This also fits in with the cross-party consensus to push ahead with modernizing the German army and its equipment. However, only the CDU/CSU mentions the use of military means as an explicit foreign policy option in its election program. By calling for a more active role on the international stage and for all options in defense, foreign and development policy to be weighed up and considered, they are taking a special role among the German parties. In contrast, the SPD, for example, deliberately describes itself as a "peace party" with a focus on disarmament and dialogue, and the AfD even talks about limiting NATO's activities to the territory of the alliance-members itself. The Left goes one step further and calls for the dissolution of NATO. Furthermore, it advocates a strong disarmament of the German army and a consistent rejection of any military intervention by the Bundeswehr.

Looking at the quantitative data, we can again build a position index, based on the pro- and anti-military statements in the manifestos. This shows that the Left is clearly the party most strongly opposing any kind of military intervention, while the CDU/CSU are most supportive of such endeavors (Figure 9). Interestingly, the parties' positions on this matter have stayed relatively stable on this issue since 2005.

THE RELATION WITH THE UNITED STATES

A special relationship has always existed with the US. Here, the election of President Joe Biden has clearly been seen as a turning point. All parties but the AfD see this as the opportunity to (re)strengthen the relationship between the US and Germany and the EU. The SPD and the Greens want to place a special focus on topics such as climate change, global health policies, trade, disarmament and security. The Greens stress that the US will not focus its security policy on Europe again, but that the EU itself needs to take responsibility with regard to foreign and security questions. The FDP primarily wants to intensify trade relations and calls for a transatlantic free-trade agreement, but also to renegotiate the EU-US-Privacy Shield. The CDU/CSU wants to foster cooperation in science and technology to secure US-European leadership in technology, especially with a view to China. They also stress Europe's dependence on the US nuclear shield and highlight Germany's obligation to do its part within NATO. The AfD is less enthusiastic about German-US relations. They agree that it is the strongest partner, but also complain about US sanctions against Germany.

Figure 9
Attitudes toward the Military in Election Manifestos (1990–2021)



Note: The position on the military in each election manifesto is formed by subtracting the number of negative Military statements (Manifesto Project Code 105) and the number of statements about Peace (Manifesto Project Code 106) from the number of positive military statements (Manifesto Project Code 104). Accordingly, a number > 0 indicates a more positive attitude towards the military, a number < 0 a more negative one.

GERMANY AS AN ACTOR IN A GLOBALIZED, ECONOMIC MARKET

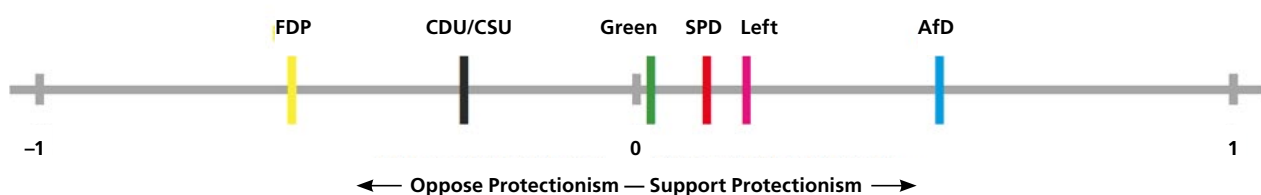
As Germany's economy strongly depends on its exports,⁷ international trade is an important topic for the country and consequently also plays a role in the parties' election manifestos. However, some parties take a more protectionist view on how Germany's economic relation to other countries should be handled while others trust in the merits of a free market. To define the parties' positions on a scale ranging from full protectionism to fully unregulated trade, we

determined the share of all statements in the manifestos that expressed either a more protectionist view or a more free trade view and subtracted the latter from the former.⁸ Based on this data we can arrange the parties on a scale giving their position towards protectionism (Figure 10). The least protectionist is the FDP, followed by the CDU/CSU, though with quite a gap between them. A similar interval divides the CDU/CSU from the Greens, the SPD, and the Left, who all take similar positions. The most protectionist position is held by the AfD.

⁷ It is still the third largest exporter in the world after China and the USA (BMW 2021, p. 1).

⁸ For contextualization it is important to say that in none of the manifestos such statements account for more than 1 % of all statements.

Figure 10
Position on more/less protectionism in the 2021 Election Manifestos



Note: The position on protectionism in the 2021 election manifesto is formed by subtracting the number of negative protectionism statements (Manifesto Project Code 407) from the number of positive protectionism statements (Manifesto Project Code 406).

TRADE

If we look at the parties' positions on international trade in more detail, we find clear differences with regard to how they frame it: some stress its economic benefits (CDU/CSU, FDP and AfD), while others emphasize its contribution to fostering peace (Greens and Left) and social justice (Left). As a consequence, the FDP and the CDU/CSU are predominantly concerned with how free and rule-based trade can be assured, while the three left-leaning parties (SPD, Left, Greens) strongly stress the importance of securing environmental and social standards and ensuring human and workers' rights. They do agree, however, on the necessity of establishing sanctioning mechanisms which ensure compliance with these norms.

The parties' positions towards free trade agreements vary in line with these larger goals. The CDU/CSU and the FDP strongly support a swift completion and ratification of both CETA and the EU-Mercosur trade agreement (in the case of the latter the CDU/CSU though makes the exception that agricultural production and product standards must be adhered to) and want to restart negotiations with the USA. The FDP even wants to make negotiations easier in the future by only needing to ask the European parliament for consent, excluding national and regional parliaments. The AfD is not very explicit and does not name any concrete trade agreements, but stresses that non-discriminating access for German companies to external import and export markets must be ensured. The SPD takes the middle ground: while they do not speak against any of the trade agreements, and stress the importance of the EU-Mercosur agreement to strengthen both economic and political ties between the two continents, they also state that such agreements need to set binding social and environmental standards and adhere to the ILO norms. If not they would not sign the agreements. The Greens are less convinced that such standards can be ensured through trade treaties, therefore want to abolish the EU-Mercosur agreement altogether and in the case of CETA, believe that strong reforms are needed before it can be signed. The most distinct position is held by the Left, which strongly opposes all free trade agreements.

A topic present in all manifestos is a due diligence law. The German parliament adopted such a law in June 2021 after long debates and the topic is thus still very much on the agenda. The AfD is the only party that clearly opposes such a law and wants to abolish it. The FDP is not completely against it, but only because they believe that without such regulation competitive disadvantages could arise for companies respecting human rights. Accordingly, they speak out for a European solution that secures competitive equality and also want to strongly limit its scope, e.g. to areas of direct control. Both the AfD and the FDP stress that they want to encourage responsible actions by the consumers, bringing their market power to good cause. The CDU/CSU position is a little more supportive in its framing, but substantially not that different to the FDP. The CDU/CSU prefers a European solution to avoid competitive disadvantages of German companies, but does not want it to go substantially any

further than the German one. While the SPD and the Greens also promote a European solution, more importantly they – just as the Left – want to extend the recently adopted law with respect to civil liability arising from malpractices. The Greens and the Left also want to extend the number of companies affected by the law.

INTERNATIONAL TAXATION – AN ANSWER TO TAX EVASION

All parties except for the AfD see the necessity of combating tax fraud and tax evasion and therefore support some kind of international minimum taxation. The FDP, however, clearly states that it only supports such a law if it is made together with the US to ensure competitive equality. In a similar vein, the CDU/CSU wants the OECD to take measures on this issue. The SPD, the Greens and the CDU/CSU also specifically call for a special tax for the big tech companies, and the SPD, the Left and the CDU/CSU support a financial transaction tax.

7

CONCLUSION

The election manifestos of the six parties we analyzed in this study are all very encompassing documents, giving the voters more or less a concrete idea about the parties' positions and their plans for the next legislative term. Importantly the parties are also all eager to put these plans into practice and to become part of the next government, a dream that appears to be at least slightly plausible for all of them other than the AfD. But what does appear certain is that the next government will be a coalition – so what do the manifestos tell us about the parties' positions and priorities, and how do their plans fit together?

Even though our analysis has shown that there are many differences between the parties with regard to their concrete plans, on an aggregate level the analysis has also shown that on many issues they can be roughly divided into two blocks: three left-wing parties (Left, Greens and SPD) and three right-wing parties (FDP, CDU/CSU and AfD). Although it needs to be said that even though the AfD belongs to the right-wing block, its positions on some issues are clearly far off those of the CDU/CSU and the FDP. This divide between the two blocks is very visible on the socio-economic conflict dimension. With regard to the welfare state, the three left-wing parties on a general level clearly favor state over market, while it is the other way around for the three right-wing parties. On the topics of immigration and integration the left-wing parties are also more supportive of receiving and integrating immigrants than the three right-wing parties, though the AfD of course stands out on this issue on the side of the right-wing parties. When it comes to questions of how to handle the challenges arising from climate change, the Left and the Greens promote the most radical positions and the CDU/CSU is to some extent a borderline case, as their position can be placed somewhere in the middle between the Left and the Greens on one side and the FDP and the AfD on the other. Three groups are also apparent when it comes to Germany's international role. The AfD is the only party which promotes an anti-EU and strongly protectionist position. The CDU/CSU and the FDP are supportive of international cooperation but mainly for economic reasons, while the three left-wing parties want to use international cooperation to promote social and sustainable standards. The Left does differ from the other parties, though, by strictly opposing all military missions and promoting to abolish NATO.

There are only a handful of issues where some kind of cross-party unity exists. Despite fundamentally different ideas on health policy, a positive stance towards better working conditions in the "system-relevant" health and care sectors and the expansion of rural health infrastructure is shared by all parties. Each party also expresses a basic commitment to more environmental protection and biodiversity. Most of the common ground, however, lies in the technocratic, less ideology driven questions of a future proof digital infrastructure. All six parties recognize the need for improved network coverage, both for mobile and broadband connections. And they all intend to break the market power of the big US companies in the digital sector in some way. So there are issues with some degree of unity, though they are few and are only at the level of abstract goals and ideas, not means and solutions.

For the first time since the federal elections in 1953, the next German government will likely consist of more than two parties. As cooperation with and government participation of the AfD has been excluded, a coalition of the three right-wing parties is impossible. A coalition of the three left-wing parties (the so called Red-Red-Green coalition) also seems unlikely given the Left's stance on foreign policy, but not impossible. But coalitions can, of course, also bridge left and right. Four of such coalition possibilities are mainly discussed: In the first three cases they are named after the flag of the country which includes the party colors: Kenya (CDU/CSU, SPD and the Greens), Jamaica (CDU/CSU, the Greens and FDP), Germany (CDU/CSU, SPD and FDP) and the "Ampel" (traffic light) consisting of the SPD, the Greens and the FDP. For each of these coalitions, however, the precondition would be that one party "switches sides" and works together with parties from the other bloc. Given the tight race between the CDU/CSU, the SPD and the Greens in current polls, it remains to be seen which of the parties will actually meet the terms of a coalition agreement and be part of the first German government after Merkel.

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APPENDIX

Parts of the data used in this article were produced in the context of the Manifesto Project. The Manifesto Project was founded in 1979, originally under the name Manifesto Research Group (MRG). Since 1989 it has had its home at the Berlin Social Science Center (WZB), where it has received long-term funding from the German Research Foundation (DFG) between 2009 and 2023. The Manifesto Project collects election manifestos in over 60 democracies all over the world. A team of coders analyzes these manifestos. They first split each manifesto into separate policy statements, a statement is never longer than a natural sentence, but one sentence can include more than one statement. After that the coder assigns one of 76 policy goals to each statement. Such policy goals are for example democracy, freedom rights, welfare state expansion or welfare state limitation, environment protection or multiculturalism. Based on these assignments we can calculate the importance (or as we say saliency) a party devotes to a specific issue in its manifesto.

This information is valuable because it tells us something about a party's policy priorities. It thus contains information on which issues a party will especially care about if elected into office. The idea behind saliency theory is that parties in most cases do not talk negatively about an issue, but instead they differentiate themselves from each other by laying different foci (Budge 1987, p. 24/25). For example, a social democratic party will talk more about the welfare state and workers' rights and perhaps less about freedom rights, whereas a liberal party puts its focus on free market economy and freedom rights and makes fewer statements about the welfare state. Which issues are more and which are less salient to a party thus contains valuable information about a party's ideology. Previous research has also shown that this difference in saliency has an influence on actual policies: parties, who make it into government, spend relatively more time on the issues that were salient to them in their programs (e.g. Hofferbert/Budge 1992).

As well as calculating the saliency of specific issues, the annotations can also be used for estimating policy positions of the parties on various issues. The most well-know positional index calculated from the data is a party's left-right position (Laver/Budge 1992a). This index is calculated by adding up the frequency of statements falling into the right and left-leaning categories in a manifesto and then subtracting the latter from the former. Furthermore several additional policy specific positions can be calculated in cases where we code opposing policy goals, like welfare state expansion versus welfare state limitation or pro- versus anti-EU statements.

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