

# Victory for the Christian Democratic Union and a breakthrough for the far right in German federal elections

The Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the main opposition party led by Friedrich Merz, won Germany's snap federal elections on February 23. Allied with the Christian Social Union (CSU), led by Bavaria's Minister-President Markus Söder, the party won 28.52% of the vote and took 208 of the 630 seats in the Bundestag, the lower house of parliament (up 11 on the September 26, 2021 ballot). However, the CDU's result was lower than forecast by the polls, which credited it with 30% of the vote. It also failed to break the 30% threshold, while the Social Democratic Party (SPD) performed poorly, and the Liberal Democrats (FDP) collapsed.

As the polls had predicted, *Alternativ für Deutschland* (AfD), the far-right party led by Alice Weidel and Tino Chrupalla, took second place with 20.80% of the vote and 152 MPs (+69). The AfD is now Germany's largest opposition party and leads in all five *Länder* in the eastern part of Germany.

The Social Democratic Party (SPD) of outgoing Chancellor Olaf Scholz came third with 16.41% of the vote and 120 elected members (- 44). This was the lowest result in the party's history, described as "catastrophic" by the Social Democrats. "The result of the federal elections is bad, and I therefore take responsibility for it," declared Olaf Scholz when the results were announced. The SPD will have to find a new leader.

The Greens/Alliance 90 (Grünen), members of the outgoing government coalition, led by Felix Banaszak and Franziska Brantner and whose list was headed by the outgoing Minister for the Economy and Climate Robert Habeck (Greens), won 11.61% of the vote and 85 seats (- 33).

The Left Party (Die Linke), led by Jan van Aken and Ines Schwerdtner, confirmed the upturn that opinion polls had seen in recent weeks. It won 8.77% and 64 seats (+25). Heidi Reichinnek, the group's co-chairwoman in the Bundestag, played a key role in this result. She had called for "not giving up, fighting and resisting fascism", particularly after the vote on a non-binding measure by CDU MPs allied with those of the AfD and the radical left-wing Alliance Sahra Wagenknecht-For Reason and Justice (BSW), aimed at blocking all foreigners at the borders, including asylum seekers, on January 29, the same day that the Bundestag commemorated the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and remembered the victims of the Third Reich. Two days later, on January 31, Friedrich Merz reintroduced a bill aimed at restricting family reunification among migrants, making it easier to detain undocumented foreigners and strengthening police powers. The bill failed, with 350 MPs voting against and 338 in favour (5 abstained).

Die Linke thus largely dominated the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance (*Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht-Für Vernunft und Gerechtigkeit*, BSW), a break-away group which obtained 4.97% of the vote' below the 5% threshold required for representation in the Bundestag.

The Liberal Democrat Party (FDP), led by Christian Lindner, a member of the outgoing government coalition until November 2024 and the longtime kingmaker of elections in Germany, is no longer represented in the Bundestag. Some voters were undoubtedly disappointed by Lindner's participation in the government and felt that it did not give them any influence over the government's choices. Others did not forgive him for having broken up the government coalition. The FDP obtained 4.33% of the vote and therefore lost

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its 91 seats in the Bundestag. Christian Lindner has announced his retirement from politics.

Turnout was particularly high, at 82.54%, an increase of 6.04 points compared to the federal elections on 26 September 2021.

The election had been brought forward by several months (originally scheduled for September 2025) following the departure of Liberal Democrat ministers from the coalition led by Olaf Scholz on 6 November 2024, which led to the collapse of the government.

### Results of the federal elections in Germany on 23 February 2025

Turnout: 82.54%

Political Parties	Proportional Vote			Majority Vote			Total number of seats
	Number of votes	% of votes	Seats	Number of votes	% of votes	Seats	
<b>Christian Democratic Union (CDU)</b>	11 194 700	22.55	36	12 601 967	25.46	128	164
<b>Social Christian Union (CSU)</b>	2 963 732	5.97	0	3 271 730	6.61	44	44
<b>Christian Unions Total CDU-CSU</b>	<b>14 158 432</b>	<b>28.52</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>15 873 697</b>	<b>32.07</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>208</b>
<b>Alternative for Germany (AfD)</b>	10 327 148	20.80	110	10 175 438	20.56	42	152
<b>Social Democratic Party (SPD)</b>	8 148 284	16.41	76	9 934 614	20.07	44	120
<b>Alliance 90/The Greens (Grünen)</b>	5 761 476	11.61	73	5 442 912	11	12	85
<b>Left Party (Die Linke)</b>	4 355 382	8.77	58	3 932 584	7.94	6	64
<b>Liberal Democratic Party (FDP)</b>	2 148 878	4.33	0	1 623 351	3.28	0	0
<b>Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance For Reason and Justice (BSW)</b>	2 468 670	4.97	0	299 226	0.60	0	0
<b>Association of voters of South Schleswig</b>	76 126	0.15	1	58 773	0.12	0	1
<b>Others</b>	2 197 691	4.44		2 157 591	4.36	0	0

Source : <https://www.bundeswahlleiterin.de/bundestagswahlen/2025/ergebnisse.html>

*'Our hand will always be outstretched to participate in a government and to carry out the will of the people (...) We are open to coalition negotiations with the Christian Democratic Union, without which no change of policy will be possible in Germany'* said AfD leader Alice Weidel, who welcomed her party's "historic result", adding "We have never been as strong at national level".

The AfD's breakthrough is part of a dynamic that is affecting every country in Europe (and more widely around the world) and which is seeing the far right grow stronger. *'It can be seen as a form of normalisation, but Germany has never been normal in this respect because of its history and the Shoah. The Federal Republic was built on the principle of 'never again', which is the foundation of its democracy. A far-right party with neo-Nazi elements is calling this position into question, and that's a problem'*, said Claire Demesmay, associate researcher at the Marc Bloch Centre in Berlin. With 20.80% of the vote, the far-right party is now in a strong position.

The rise of the AfD, like that of the far left (Die Linke), shows the fragmentation of the German political landscape and complicates the formation of a stable government coalition. A third of Germans voted for parties representing the extremes (34.54%).

Friedrich Merz has ruled out any cooperation with the AfD. The formation of a 'grand coalition' (*Grosse Koalition* or *GroKo*) bringing together the CDU-CSU and the SPD is the most likely post-election scenario. Together, the two parties have 328 seats, more than the absolute majority in the Bundestag. *'Above all, this means recreating as quickly as possible a government capable of taking action in Germany, with a good parliamentary majority'*, declared Friedrich Merz.

The two parties have already governed together four times since 1945: between 1966 and 1969, between 2005 and 2009, between 2013 and 2018 and finally between 2018 and 2021. The last three major coalitions were led by Angela Merkel (CDU).

Friedrich Merz has promised the Germans stability and a firm hand on certain issues, notably immigration, saying that he wants to turn the page once and for all on the policy of welcoming immigrants that has been in

force for the past 10 years and tighten up immigration policy. He says he wants to act with sovereignty, for example in foreign policy. The Christian Democrat leader has made strengthening European defence the priority of his action. *'Given Donald Trump's 'indifference' towards Europe, the old continent must gradually achieve independence from the United States'*, he said. A supporter of military aid to Ukraine, Friedrich Merz made the creation of an 'autonomous European defence capability' as an alternative force to 'NATO in its current form' an 'absolute priority'.

Friedrich Merz repeated during the election campaign that he wanted to form a government before Easter, i.e. 20 April. *'I am aware of the responsibility that falls to me, and of the scale of the task that lies ahead. I approach it with the greatest respect, and I know it won't be easy (...) It's ambitious, but we need to take decisions before the summer recess at the latest that will have a real and psychological effect, especially for businesses, so that the situation improves in Germany. We need to put a stop to the bleeding of investment and jobs'*, he declared, adding "Above all, we need to recreate as quickly as possible a government capable of taking action in Germany, with a good parliamentary majority".

On 3 February, the CDU adopted a catalogue of fifteen measures for immediate implementation. These include tax exemptions for overtime, tax cuts for gastronomy and electricity grids, the return of subsidies for agricultural diesel and tax exemptions for working pensioners, up to a monthly salary of €2,000.

Friedrich Merz, 69, from Brilon, a spa town in North Rhine-Westphalia, was elected to the European Parliament in 1989. In 1994, he won a seat in the Bundestag. In 2000, he replaced Wolfgang Schäuble as chairman of the CDU-CSU group in the Bundestag. Angela Merkel replaced him following the federal elections of 22 September 2002. Friedrich Merz then left political life. He pursued several professional activities, including one with the German subsidiary of BlackRock, an American multinational specialising in asset management. Following Chancellor Angela Merkel's announcement in October 2018 of her intention to step down as leader of the CDU after the

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federal elections on 26 September 2021, Friedrich Merz declared his candidacy to replace her as party leader. On 7 December 2018, he was defeated by Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, who won 51.8% of the vote. She resigned on 10 February 2020 and Friedrich Merz again stood for the party presidency. He was defeated by Armin Laschet. After Laschet's defeat in the federal elections on 26 September 2021, Friedrich Metz finally became CDU President in December 2021 with 62.10% of the vote.

In all likelihood, he will become Chancellor and replace Olaf Scholz as head of the German government once he has succeeded in forming a coalition.

However, it is by no means certain that Germany will emerge from the political uncertainty of these elections. Friedrich Merz has a considerable task ahead of him at a time when the political and economic system on which the country has operated for decades is now obsolete. He expressed this by saying that Europe needed to emancipate itself from the United States. *'I never thought I would have to say something like that'*, said the future German Chancellor.

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Publishing Director : Pascale JOANNIN

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