# The Berlin state election results: A vote against all parties in government

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It would be hard to find a previous election in Germany in which the gulf between the interests of the population and the politics of the established parties was as obvious as in the re-run of the Berlin state election last Sunday.

The Social Democrats (SPD), Greens and the Left Party, which have jointly ruled Germany's capital since 2016, lost almost a quarter of a million voters since the original September 2021 election, which was annulled by the Constitutional Court of the State of Berlin. The SPD lost 111,000, the Left Party 71,000 and the Greens 65,000 votes. This amounts to a quarter of their previous constituency. The Free Democrats (FDP), which governs at the federal level with the SPD and Greens, also lost 60,000 votes, and thus almost half of its voters. The FDP failed to reach the 5 percent threshold for parliamentary representation and is no longer in the House of Representatives.

These huge losses are only partly due to the lower turnout, which at 63 percent was well below the level of 2021, when elections for the federal parliament (Bundestag) were held on the same day. At the time, 75.4 percent participated in the Berlin election. In the last valid state election in 2016, almost 67 percent of eligible voters went to the polls.

The SPD of German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Berlin Mayor Franziska Giffey achieved with 18.4 percent their worst-ever result in their former stronghold, where they have led the government for 22 years. The SPD was only 105 votes ahead of the Greens and thus remained the second strongest party by a hair's breadth.

The only party that gained voters in both absolute and relative terms is the Christian Democrats (CDU), which became the strongest party with 28.2 percent of the vote and gained 10.2 percentage points compared to the original election. It owes this unexpected electoral success not to its own popularity, but due to hostility towards the other parties.

All of the polls conducted in connection with the election confirm that hardly anyone expects the CDU to solve Berlin's pressing problems—housing shortages and unaffordable rents, a dearth of teachers and crumbling schools, ailing infrastructure and overwhelmed public services, as well as low wages and widespread poverty.

Only 31 percent of respondents felt that a CDU-led state government, known as the Senate, would better solve the problems. Fifty-two percent responded negatively to the question. On the question of who people would vote for in a direct election for mayor and how satisfied they were with the political work of each candidate, Giffey, with 32 percent and 36 percent respectively—miserable for an incumbent—was clearly ahead of the CDU's lead candidate, Kai Wegner, for whom only 27 percent and 23 percent spoke out.

The CDU was therefore elected primarily due to opposition to the other parties. The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) also lost voters, mainly due to abstention. But it was able to improve slightly in percentage terms to 9.1 percent compared to 2021. Its result is significantly lower than in 2016, when it achieved 14.2 percent.

The CDU and SPD achieved the highest results among voters over 60, with the CDU winning 38 percent and the SPD 26 percent of the vote. In contrast, among 18- to 24-year-olds they reached only 12 and 11 percent respectively. The Greens were the strongest party in this age group with 22 percent.

Of the 3.7 million people living in Berlin, just over 1.5 million voted. One in five is not eligible to vote because they do not have German citizenship, and just

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under a quarter abstained. In addition, 14 percent are minors who are not yet eligible to vote. Of the voters, just under 14 percent voted for parties that failed to pass the 5 percent threshold and are not represented in the House of Representatives.

The mass abstention and the rejection of all government parties are an expression of the vast gulf between the government's policies of war and social austerity, and the interests of the vast majority of the working population. The confrontation with Russia is hated, as are the cuts in health and education spending and the massive real wage losses.

Even if it is not yet clear whether the SPD/Green/Left Party coalition will continue or be replaced by a CDU/SPD or CDU/Green coalition, it is already clear that the incoming government will continue and intensify the confrontation with the working class.

The struggles for wage increases that keep pace with inflation and decent working conditions in hospitals, local public transport and rubbish disposal, which led to numerous strikes and protests during the election campaign, will come to a head. The same goes for the struggle for housing and affordable rents.

Above all, however, the proxy war that NATO is waging against Russia in Ukraine and the associated military build-up and danger of nuclear war are bringing ever-wider layers of the population into conflict with the governing parties, all of whom support militarism. Berlin's lead candidate for the Left Party, Klaus Lederer, explicitly advocated arms deliveries to Ukraine and attacked opponents of war.

This underscores the significance of the Socialist Equality Party's (SGP) election campaign. The SGP was the only party to put the fight against war at the heart of its election campaign, linking it to a socialist programme to mobilize the international working class.

The SGP more than doubled its vote, despite a total boycott by the media, achieving 801 votes. More importantly, the party reached tens of thousands with its rallies, election manifesto, leaflets and videos, and countered the warmongering of the ruling elite with the perspective of international socialism. In its election statement, the SGP declared:

> The only social force that can prevent another world war is the international working class—that is, the vast majority of the world's population, which is now larger and more interconnected than ever before. The SGP, together with its sister parties in the Fourth International, is building a worldwide socialist movement against war and its root cause, capitalism. War cannot be stopped without breaking the power of the banks and corporations and putting them under democratic control.

This perspective now assumes critical importance. Globally and across Europe—from France to Britain and Spain to Germany—the largest wave of class struggles since the 1970s is developing, bringing millions of workers into conflict with the capitalist system.

The SGP's election campaign sent an important signal to steer these struggles in a socialist direction, break the influence of the trade unions and political parties that are holding them back and selling them out, and combine the struggle for workers' rights with the fight against war.

This work must be continued and deepened after the election. It increasingly coincides with the experiences of workers and youth, who recognise that they can neither defend their wages and jobs, nor stop the war or prevent environmental destruction by applying pressure to those in power. Rather, they require an independent perspective. The central task is to build the SGP as a new mass party of the working class. The election campaign laid an important foundation for this.

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