

Large swing back to NZ National; German left's big problem with Left party

Written by Adrian Beaumont, Honorary Associate, School of Mathematics and Statistics, University of Melbourne

The New Zealand election will be held this Saturday 23 September. Polls close at 7pm local time (5pm Melbourne time). The German election will be held on Sunday 24 September. Polls close at 6pm local time (2am Monday Melbourne time). Both countries use the mixed member proportional method for their elections, which I [explained here](#).

Two weeks ago, Labour was leading in most NZ polls, but there appears to have been a [large swing back](#) to the conservative National in the final weeks. While last week's Colmar Brunton poll gave Labour a 44-40 lead over National, a Reid Research poll had National up by 47.3-37.8.

This week, the final Colmar Brunton poll gave National a 46-37 lead over Labour with 8% for the Greens and 5% for the anti-immigrant NZ First. The [final Reid Research poll](#) gave National a 45.8-37.3 lead, with 7.1% for both the Greens and NZ First.

The swing back to National is probably because Labour leader Jacinda Ardern's attraction to voters has faded as election day approaches. Undoubtedly Ardern's charisma boosted Labour's vote, but it appears that actual votes are not determined by the opposition leader's popularity. The focus on Labour's tax plans in the final weeks may also have helped National.

The November 2007 Australian election may also be an example of voters turning away from a popular opposition leader's party in the final weeks. Under the popular Kevin Rudd, Labor held a 55-45 or better lead over John Howard's Coalition government for virtually all of 2007, but some final polls showed a dramatic narrowing to 52-48, and Labor won by 52.7-47.3.

In both the 2007 Australian election and 2017 NZ election, the local economy was strong, and the incumbent government was not on the nose. In both cases, popular opposition leaders enhanced their parties' positions, but when voters decided, the economy was more important than the opposition leader's popularity.

The Greens' vote has lifted to 7-8%, putting them clear of the 5% threshold required to win seats without holding a single member electorate. If NZ First makes it, they are likely to be able to choose between National and Labour/Greens for the next government.

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There is some doubt about whether NZ First retains its parliamentary position. The final polls had them at 5-7%, and they could underperform thanks to the “Trump factor”. NZ First leader Winston Peters won the [Northland electorate at a by-election](#) in the last Parliament, and it is likely to revert to National at the election.

If NZ First falls below the 5% threshold, and Peters loses Northland, they will be kicked out of Parliament. In this scenario, whoever won the most votes between National and Labour/Greens would be likely to win government. A big youth turnout could help Labour and the Greens overcome National’s one-point lead over Labour/Greens in the final polls.

Germany: Centre-left SPD’s problems with Left party could keep right in power for a long time

Current [German polls](#) give Chancellor Angela Merkel’s Christian Democrats (CDU) about 36%, the centre-left Social Democrats (SPD) 22%, the far right Alternative for Germany (AfD) 10-11%, the Left party 9-10%, the pro-business Free Democrats (FDP) 9-10% and the Greens 7-8%.

The lack of variation from poll to poll suggests “herding”, in which polls artificially move towards a consensus that may be wrong. If the polls are accurate, the six listed parties will all clear the 5% threshold needed to enter Parliament.

If the CDU and FDP combined fall short of a parliamentary majority, it could be difficult for Merkel to form a government. No party will work with the AfD, and this article in the [UK *Financial Times*](#) indicates that the SPD will be very reluctant to join another CDU-led government.

The SPD’s problems stem from their treatment of the Left party as a pariah. Following both the 2005 and 2013 elections, left-wing parties (the SPD, Greens and Left) won a majority of parliamentary seats, but a CDU government with the SPD as junior partners (a “grand coalition”) was formed because the SPD refused to deal with the Left.

In 2009 the [SPD’s vote crashed to a record low](#) of 23.0%, down 11.2 points from 2005, after the first grand coalition. After a slight recovery to 25.7% in 2013, current polling indicates

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that the SPD could do even worse than in 2009 following the second grand coalition.

If the Left continue to win about 10% of the vote, it is difficult to see how the SPD can ever form a left-wing government without a deal with the Left, thus perpetuating the right's dominance.

The predecessors of the Left were East German Communists, but it is now a genuinely progressive party. According to [German international broadcaster DW](#), the major sticking point for a deal between the Left and SPD is the Left's insistence on withdrawing all German soldiers from foreign missions.

Martin Schulz, a former president of the European Parliament, became the SPD's [leader in January 2017](#), and there was an immediate poll surge that put the SPD into a near-tie with the CDU. In my opinion, the SPD should have broken the grand coalition at this time, forcing an early election.

Such a strategy would have enabled the SPD to differentiate themselves from the CDU. By remaining in coalition with the CDU, the SPD owns Merkel's policies, and as a result they have slumped back in the polls to their position before Schulz became leader.

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