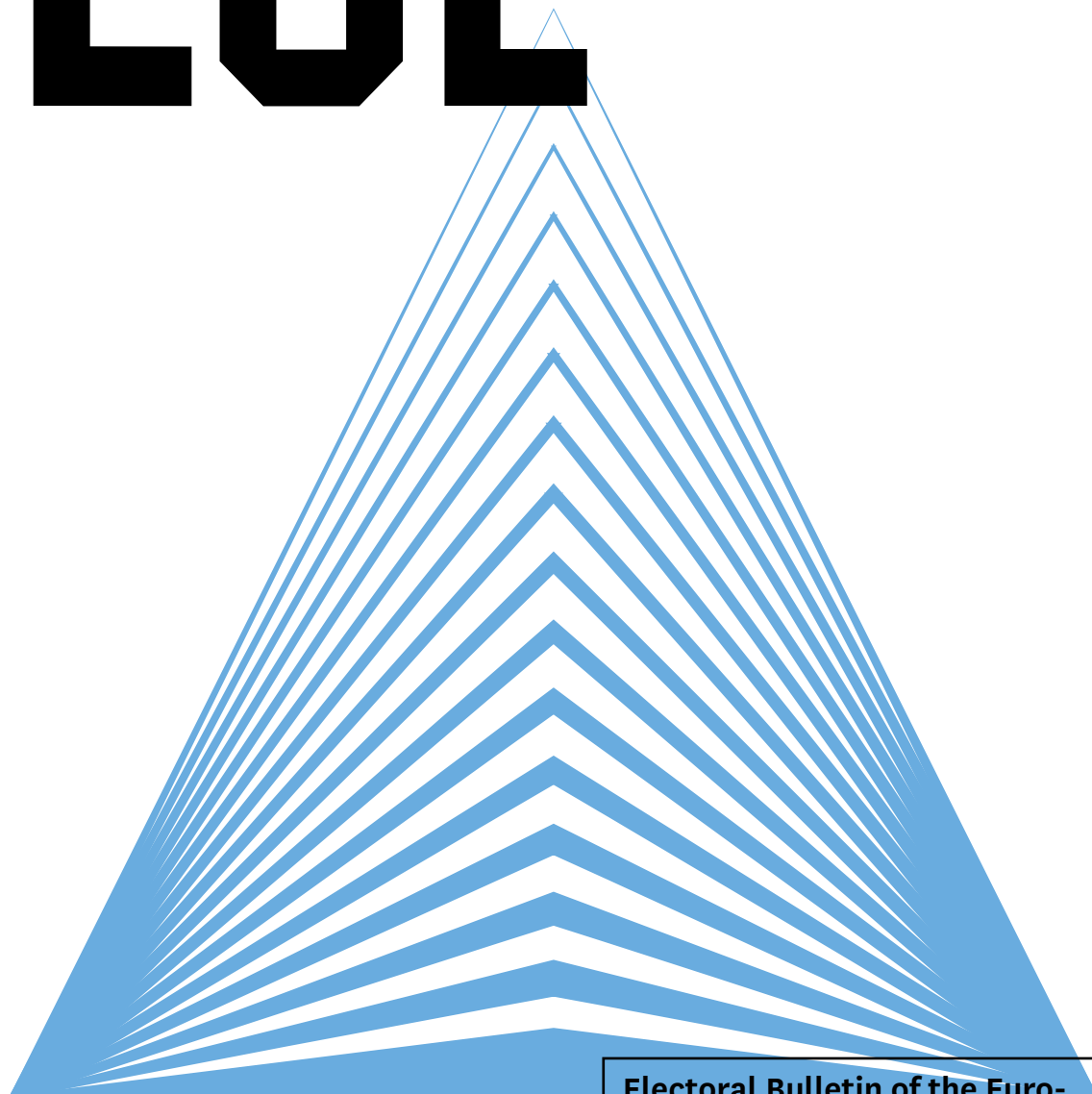Elections in Europe:
December 2020 –
May 2021

BLUE

**Electoral Bulletin of the Euro-
pean Union**

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BLUE

Electoral bulletin of the European Union

December 2020 — May 2021

What is European politics?

To this question, which is all too rarely asked, it seems tempting to answer that European politics is above all the politics of the European Union, the politics of Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg, the politics of the European Semesters, the politics of the summits and the politics of the treaties: the politics of the supranational level. The high point of the European Union's political life, the elections to the European Parliament, the second largest electoral event in the world with two hundred million voters, are the symbol par excellence.

On closer inspection, however, it seems strange to reduce European politics to the so-called "European" elections. Recent history has shown that a German, Greek, Catalan or Roman election can have continental repercussions. Just as regional and local elections, with their many interactions, play an essential role in the life of so-called "national" political spaces, European politics is from the outset a multiscalar fact. No one can understand the Union without also observing its cities, its countryside, its regions, its Member States and those in its neighbourhood. Similarly, no one can understand the political life of the Member States without keeping the European dimension in mind.

Multiscalar does not mean hierarchical. Contrary to the frequent presentation of sub- and supranational elections as second-order elections, and without giving in to the methodological bias that would place the main national elections or those of the "large states" at the top of the pyramid, it is possible to consider each election on its own scale, while paying particular attention to the complex dynamics that unite them, and to patiently generate a systemic understanding of the European political space.

For citizens wishing to learn about contemporary political and electoral dynamics in Europe, BLUE offers a new perspective: a series of concise analyses of regional and national elections in the EU, as well as municipal elections in the 15 largest European cities and national elections in most other European countries. Thanks to this kaleidoscope, preceded by a brief comparative summary and accompanied by graphs, maps and a rich open database, a panoramic view of the electoral life of the continent is finally made possible. Written by specialists in each of these areas, the contributions gathered in these biannual reports will give a glimpse of European politics in all its topicality and diversity.

For scholars, institutions, journalists and organisations wishing to learn about contemporary political dynamics, the review process adopted by BLUE and the orientation given by its Scientific Council will ensure the highest level of analysis. Building bridges between the different public, linguistic and political spaces of the continent is an essential challenge for Europe; BLUE will play its part in this essential construction of a common information platform.

What is European politics? – This is the question, never definitively settled, which this new journal will endeavour to answer. The editors and contributors of BLUE wish you an excellent read.

François Hublet • Editor-in-chief

The Continental Review
Comparative analysis of elections in Europe

01

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The Continental Review

Introduction

The increasing interconnectedness of European politics requires a good knowledge of the political dynamics not only in the member states and their regions, but also beyond them, in the EU's neighbourhood. In the constant flow of information and news, it becomes surprisingly easy to lose sight of the bigger picture. This first issue of BLUE therefore aims to provide the reader with a broad overview of the latest political developments, reporting on both macroscopic trends and smaller-scale dynamics, including at the local level.

Without sacrificing attention to detail, the contributions in this issue will therefore highlight the European issues at stake in the electoral events of the past six months. To facilitate comparison, a first part provides, in a concise manner, transnational elements that take up or extend the analyses contained in this volume: from participation figures to common themes (e.g. independence, the fight against corruption) and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the main aspects of European politics over the past six months will be discussed.

With regard to national parliamentary elections, we start with the Romanian parliamentary election of December 2020, analysed by Ramona Bloj. This election, while leading to the formation of a centre-right government, also confirmed the position of the Social Democrats as the country's largest party, and saw the emergence of a new right-wing formation. We then move on to the Dutch Lower House election of March 2021, covered by Simon Otjes' contribution. It led to the renewal of the previous centre-right government. April saw parliamentary election in Bulgaria, reviewed by Dobrin Kanev, and in Albania, analysed by Ilir Kalemaj. Both elections saw a significant weakening of the position of the incumbent government parties vis-à-vis the opposition. In Bulgaria, a variety of new actors have emerged following the an-

ti-corruption protests of last summer. Lastly, we discuss the parliamentary election in the Republic of Cyprus, which took place in May, and where all major parties lost ground to the radical right; it is presented by Vasiliki Triga and Gilles Bertrand.

Among the national elections, we also look at the Portuguese presidential election which happened in January, analysed by Eduardo Paz Ferreira. Despite the overwhelming victory of the conservative incumbent, the radical right came closer to the second-placed socialist candidate.

Other important elections were held at regional level in Spain, Germany and the United Kingdom. Martin Lepic and Robert Lineira discuss the unprecedented results of the Catalan election in February, marked by the demise of the liberal party and the parliamentary breakthrough of the radical right. Marius Minas and Oliver Drewes then comment the March elections in Rhineland-Palatinate and Baden-Württemberg, where the Social Democratic and Green Minister Presidents were largely reappointed. Finally, Fraser McMillan analyses the results of the Scottish election held in early May, where the dominance of the pro-independence forces reignited the debate on a new referendum. Finally, another particularly interesting election was contested in the Community of Madrid: the incumbent right-wing president gained a large majority, while the liberals disappeared; this election will be analysed by Francisco Cabezuelo.

Finally, the last section of this issue looks ahead to the important German elections at the end of September 2021. There, the reader will find the answers of the directors of the foundations of the three largest German parties, Martin Schulz (SPD), Norbert Lammert (CDU) and Ellen Ueberschär (Greens), to a series of questions posed by BLUE.

Evolution of the results of the European groups

In order to track the macroscopic developments and trends applicable to the whole of Europe, the analysis of aggregate data is essential. To analyse the dynamics of the different political families beyond their respective national contexts, we will rely on the affiliations to the groups in the European Parliament.

The final figures show an overall decline of the left and centrist forces, while the right-wing actors increased their share of the vote. However, the Greens and the radical right seem to contradict these general trends, with the former registering successes and the latter seemingly losing ground.

The radical left group GUE/NGL (European United Left/Nordic Green Left) experienced an overall decline (-6.23 pp on average), mainly due to poor performances in Portugal, Cyprus and the Netherlands, with a loss of 5.8, 3.3 and 2.45 points respectively. The mainstream left, embodied by the S&D group (Socialists and Democrats), was one of the most dwindling formations: it lost 12.13 points on average, with particularly large losses in Romania (-15.6 pp), Bulgaria (-14.47 pp) and Madrid (-10.51 pp), which were only partially compensated by results in Portugal (+7.98 pp), Catalonia (+9.3 pp) and Cyprus (+13.41 pp).

Parties affiliated with the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament saw an overall increase (+8.3 pp), with particularly encouraging figures for Rhineland-Palatinate (+5.03 pp), and significant increases in Baden-Württemberg (+2.55 pp) and Madrid (+2.33 pp). In Bulgaria, the Greens also gained 4 seats in parliament, although this result is difficult to quantify in terms of vote share, as they ran in coalition with a right-wing party and other new formations (obtaining 9.45% of the total vote).

The centrist and liberal Renew Europe (RE) recorded moderate gains in most elections (between +2.41 pp in Rhineland-Palatinate and +5.07 pp in Baden-Württemberg), but poor performances in Catalonia (-19.84 pp) and Madrid (-16.08 pp) led to a negative balance of -13.8 pp. Therefore, they were the group with the largest variation in vote share in these recent elections.

The centre-right, embodied by the EPP (European People's Party), increased its share of the vote by 8.45 pp on average. However, this overall figure hides some quite significant losses. For example, the centre-right lost 5 pp in the Netherlands and 4.14 pp in Rhineland-Palatinate, but also 11.68 pp in Bulgaria, against only a few important victories (+22.63 pp in Madrid and +8.7 pp in Portugal).

The conservative ECR group (European Conservatives and Reformists) seems to have benefited the most from the elections of the last months, with an upward trend in almost all elections (between +0.25 pp in Madrid and +11.9 pp in Portugal). The only exceptions to this trend are Bulgaria (-4.32 pp), Baden-Württemberg (-1.02 pp) and Cyprus (-25.97 pp).

Lastly, the radical right-wing group Identity and Democracy (ID) suffered slight declines (ranging from -2.25 pp in the Netherlands to -5.36 pp in Baden-Württemberg)

wherever it participated in elections, with the exception of Bulgaria, where it increased by 2.37 pp. On average, it suffered a loss of 12.85 pp, among the most severe.

Some national parties still have no European affiliation. On average, with a gain of 11.22 pp, their share of the vote increased more than that of any of the European groups. Most of them are new players, often emerging after contests, as is the case for Bulgaria (+18.52 pp) and Cyprus (+11.9 pp) in particular.

Parties entering and exiting regional and national parliaments

The regional and national elections in the first half of 2021 were marked by the disappearance of some parties and the emergence of new ones. In Spain, the early regional elections in Catalonia and the Madrid region were devastating for Ciudadanos (RE). The liberal party, which had won the early regional elections in Catalonia in December 2017 with 25% of the vote and 36 seats, collapsed to 5.58% and won only 6 seats in the 14 February 2021 election. Worse, Ciudadanos disappeared from the Madrid assembly with only 3.6% of the vote in the May 2021 early elections compared to 19.5% in the 2019 elections. On the other hand, VOX (ECR) has anchored itself in the Spanish political landscape and won 7.67% of the votes in the early regional elections in Catalonia, entering the Catalan Parliament with 11 seats.

In Kosovo, where the vote took place on the same day as in Catalonia, the parliamentary elections resulted in the disappearance of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK, EPP) and Vakat (Bosniak minority interests) in favour of a centre-left party in support of the Union with Albania, Vetëvendosje. The SDU (Bosniak minority interests) and two parties defending the interests of the Roma minority are now represented in parliament.

In Liechtenstein, the Eurosceptic Democrats for Liechtenstein (DFL) replaced the other Eurosceptic party The Independents (DU) from which it had split. The Democrats won 2 seats and entered the parliament, while the Independents lost their 5 seats.

The early parliamentary elections in the Netherlands in March 2021 resulted in three new parties joining the House of Representatives. With 2.4%, the Pan-European federalist party Volt (Greens/EFA) and the JA21 (ECR), a split from the far-right party Forum voor Democratie (ECR) are represented by MPs each. The BBB, an agrarian party, won 1 seat and 1% of the vote.

The Rhineland-Palatinate Landtag election in March 2021 saw the Free Voters (FW, RE) enter the Landtag with 5.35% of the vote and 6 seats.

In Wales, the elections on 6 May were marked by the disappearance of the far-right and anti-devolution formations, UKIP (ID) and the Abolish the Welsh Assembly Party (AWAP, NI), which failed at getting re-elected to the Senedd with a score of around 1%.

Finally, in the Cypriot parliamentary elections on 30 May, the Democratic Front (DIPA, RE), a spin-off from the

Turnout, December 2020-May 2021
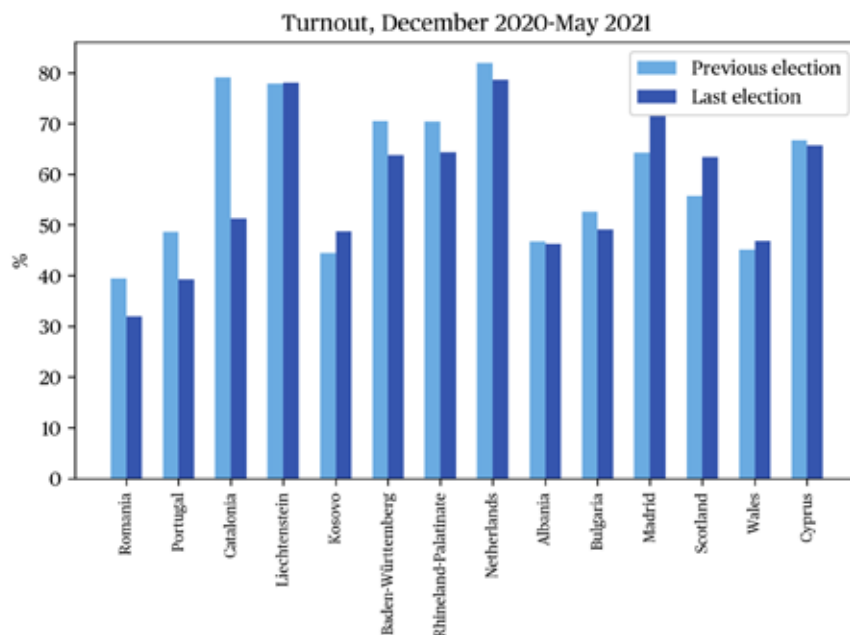
Democratic Party (DIKO, S&D), entered the House of Representatives with 4 seats.

No political parties entered or left the Scottish parliament or the Baden-Württemberg Landtag.

Participation and postal vote

Organising elections is a major challenge for the authorities in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, since they are prone to a lack of social distancing. As a result, some elections have been postponed, such as the Calabria regional council election, which has been postponed to autumn 2021. However, despite the spread of the virus and thanks to the implementation of specific arrangements, a majority of these elections still took place. In most cases, postal voting was encouraged and standardised. Despite these arrangements, a drop in voter turnout was expected in view of the health context. However, this fear did not materialise everywhere – some countries such as Kosovo even recorded record turnouts, and elections where the stakes were perceived to be high were able to mobilise the electorate to a large extent.

The biggest drop in turnout was in Catalonia, down by 27.8 percentage points. Although this drop can be attributed in part to the pandemic, it is also explained by the reduced prominence of constitutional issues, which were one of the main stakes in the election. In contrast, three months later, the particularly high-profile and polarised election in Madrid saw a 7.47 point increase in turnout. Relatively large, though less dramatic, declines were also seen in Portugal and Romania, where turnout fell by 9.5 and 7.55 points respectively. It is worth noting that the Portuguese presidential election took place at a time when Portugal had one of the highest infection rates in the world and a nationwide lockdown was in place. Absentee voting was not allowed and the re-election of the incumbent, whose executive prerogatives are limited, appeared certain. In the end, although abstention in both

Portugal and Romania reached the highest levels since the return of democracy in these two countries, the decline did not reach the proportions that had been feared.

More modest decreases in turnout, around 3 percentage points, were observed in the Netherlands (where almost 10% of the electorate voted by post) and in Bulgaria. In Germany, in the regional parliamentary elections in Rhineland-Palatinate and Baden-Württemberg, postal voting was highly successful, accounting for 65.9% and 51.31% of the votes respectively. However, the overall turnout decreased by 6 points in both Länder to 64%. Finally, in Cyprus and Albania, the 'Covid effect' did not seem to affect the turnout rate much, as it only decreased by 1.02 and 0.51 points respectively.

In contrast, in Kosovo, turnout increased by 4.2 percentage points compared to the last election. Similarly, Scotland recorded a significant increase in turnout (+7.69 pp) with a record turnout of 63.49%, the highest since the creation of the devolved Parliament in 1998. This was due in particular to the high profile of the independence debate – including the prospect of a new referendum – and the possibility of voting by post. Moreover, while some countries, such as Portugal, held elections when infetions rates were particularly high, it was relatively low in the United Kingdom on polling day on 5 May. Finally, the highest turnout was recorded in the parliamentary elections in Liechtenstein, where 77.82% of citizens voted, 97% of them by post – a voting method that was already widely used before the pandemic.

Interactions between elections

In three countries – the United Kingdom, Germany and Spain – several regional elections were held on the same day.

In the United Kingdom, elections to the devolved parliaments of Wales and Scotland were organised, while local elections also took place in England. In these the various parties in power were re-elected. While the Scottish National Party (SNP) maintained the same results as in 2016, Welsh Labour confirmed its dominance by winning almost an absolute majority (29 seats out of 60 in total). As for the results of the local elections in England, they confirmed the popularity of the Conservatives and their leader Boris Johnson: with 235 additional councillors (23% more than at the last elections), historic Labour strongholds, such as Hartlepool, passed to the Tories. Despite the UK-wide media coverage of the Scottish independence issue, it seems that the interaction between these diffe-

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rent elections was ultimately quite modest. The results were mainly influenced by the electorates' perceptions of the Covid-19 crisis management by the different regional governments. However, it was also noted that between 20 and 30% of Welsh people would support Welsh independence, a figure that is rising: the effect of the SNP's success. The popularity of pro-independence ideas in Wales remains an open question.

Two regional elections in Rhineland-Palatinate and Baden-Württemberg kicked off Germany's "super election year" (*Superwahljahr*). The results of these two Länder have therefore often been scrutinised as "weak signals" anticipating the outcome of the federal elections on 26 September. However, as the Länder are characterised by specific political cultures and very different socio-economic structures, it is difficult to make projections based on their results. Indeed, while the Social Democrats (SPD) scored very well in Rhineland-Palatinate (35.7%), the region where they are in power, they are in sharp decline nationwide where, according to the latest polls, they are only in third place behind the conservatives and the Greens. The very popular Baden-Württemberg Greens, the party of Minister President Winfried Kretschmann, campaigned on a more conservative and traditional line than the federal Greens and their list leader Annalena Baerbock. The regional effects of federal political dynamics are difficult to quantify: the so-called "masks affair" (a corruption case involving Christian Democrat parliamentarians) certainly affected the German public at large, but due to the widespread use of postal voting, many citizens had already voted when the scandal broke out.

Finally, although the constitutional issue has structured many Catalan elections in recent years, it seems that the health crisis has partly overshadowed it. Less expected, the relationship between the different levels of government was at the centre of the Madrid electoral campaign, which was a part of a frontal conflict between the regional Popular Party and Pedro Sánchez's center-left national government, with the former opposing the government's measures to control the pandemic and calling for regional "freedom". However, the Catalan and Madrid elections are part of a wider Spanish dynamic. The collapse of the liberal unionists of Ciudadanos (RE) and the growing polarisation of the political space (along the right-left and pro-independence-unionist axes) are the main trends. Significant network effects are unfolding: the Madrid election was provoked by the reversal of alliances caused by Ciudadanos in the Murcia parliament; Pablo Iglesias, a historical figure of Podemos, resigned from the Spanish government to lead his party's campaign in Madrid, retiring from politics after his defeat.

Urban-rural divide

BLUE has constructed an indicator to measure the polarisation of the vote between urban and rural areas in the elections presented in this issue. Given the aggregate score $u_1, ..., u_p$ of the parties in the urban electorate and the aggregate scores $r_1, ..., r_p$ of these same parties in the rural electorate (in percent), we consider

$$1/2 \, (\, |r_1 - u_1| + ... + |r_p - u_p| \,)$$

The result is a percentage that varies between 0% and 100%, where 0% means that the shares of the different parties in the urban and rural electorates are identical, and 100% means that the urban electorate votes for entirely different parties than the rural electorate.

The first observation that can be made is that the urban-rural divide was most pronounced in Bulgaria and Romania, where 21.2% and 17.6% respectively of urban voters voted differently from rural voters. This difference is up by 5.7 percentage points in Bulgaria, compared to a marginal decrease of 1 percentage point in Romania.

In Portugal, the presidential election in January saw the hugely popular Social Democratic Party (PSD, EPP) candidate win with 60.7% of the vote. Not surprisingly, due to his large victory, our indicator is only 6.6%. In other words, only 6.6% of urban voters voted differently from rural voters, down 0.7% from the 2016 presidential election. The high popularity of the candidate in both rural and urban areas strongly reduces the value of the indicator. A similar reasoning can be applied to the early regional elections to the Madrid Assembly, where the Popular Party (PP, EPP) candidate came out in the lead in a vast majority of municipalities.

In Catalonia, the split between urban and rural voters increased slightly between the 2017 and 2021 regional elections, from 13.8% to 14.9%. This result can be partly explained by the fact that rural areas (except for Val d'Aran) are more likely to vote for pro-independence parties than Barcelona, which tends to vote for anti-independence parties such as PSOE or Ciudadanos.

The regional elections in Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate highlighted an intensification of the urban/rural divide. The difference between the urban and rural vote increased by 2.8% and 3.8% respectively. Thus, 13.8% of urban voters cast a different vote from rural voters in Baden-Württemberg and 10.6% in Rhineland-Palatinate. In sum, in most cases where elections were held between December 2020 and May 2021, the urban-rural divide increased moderately. Only Romania and Portugal registered a decrease in this divide.

Socio-economic determinants of the vote

Table **c** presents the result of the estimation of a least squares model evaluating the effect of eight socio-economic factors on the electoral shares of the different European political groups, aggregated at NUTS 3 level.

All other things being equal, population density has a positive effect on the electoral share of the Social Democrat and Liberal groups, and a negative effect on that of the Greens/EFA (whose regionalist component played an important role in this term) and the European People's Party. Conversely, the proportion of the population with a university degree has a positive effect on the electoral

c • Results of the statistical model at NUTS 3 level

Group	Positive effect	Negative effect	R²
GUE/NGL		Birth rate*** median age***	0.85
Greens/ EFA	Univ. degree*** GDP/capita PPP***	Pop. dens.*** net migr. *** median age*	0.76
S&D	Pop. dens.***	Birth rate*** GDP/capita PPP*** univ. degree***	0.58
RE	Net migr.*** birth rate*** median age*** pop. dens.**	Univ. degree*	0.79
EPP	Univ. degree** GDP growth**	Pop. dens.**	0.75
ECR		Univ. degree**	0.81
ID	Median age***		0.82

*** statistically significant, p < 0,01 ** p < 0,05 * p < 0,1
Controls: member states, source: Eurostat, last available year
Parties considered close to a group have been counted together with this group.
221 NUTS 3 regions: 28 BG, 1 CY, 80 DE, 5 ES, 40 NL, 25 PT, 42 RO.

share of the Greens/EFA and the European People's Party, and a negative effect on that of the Social Democrats and the ECR. The demographic situation has a significant effect for five out of seven groups: an older population tends to increase the share of the Liberals and the far right (ID) and to reduce the share of the radical left and the Greens/EFA.Liberals also benefit from a positive net migration rate and a higher birth rate, while left and centre-left groups perform better in areas with a negative migration rate (Greens/EFA) and a low birth rate (GUE/NGL and S&D). Perhaps more surprisingly, the effect of economic factors appears to be smaller: unemployment is not significant for any group at the 90% confidence level, the level of GDP per capita favours the Greens/EFA and disfavours the S&D, but has no effect on the scores of the other parties, and GDP growth has a significant (and positive, at the 95% confidence level) effect only on the scores of the European People's Party.

Autonomy – independence

The issue of regional autonomy and independence played a key role in some of the elections in the first half of 2021. In Catalonia, regional elections were held in February following the dismissal by the Supreme Court for "disobedience" of the President of the Generalitat Quim Torra. This decision, accepted by the left-wing pro-independence party Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC), led to a split between the pro-independence ERC and Junts per Catalunya (JxCat) and precipitated the regional elections. As in every election since 2015, when the Junts pel Sí coalition in favour of the region's immediate independence from Spain won the elections, the issue of Catalan independence has dominated the debate. Despite the low turnout of Catalans at the polls (51.29% compared to 79.09% in 2017), the pro-independence parties still obtained an absolute majority in seats with 74 out of 135. For the first time since the establishment of the Generalitat in 1979, the sum of the votes of the pro-independence parties reached the absolute majority of the votes cast, i.e. 50.73% of the ballots cast, which constitutes a symbolic victory for the Catalan pro-independence parties versus the Spanish state.

Similar issues marked the Scottish elections. The Scottish National Party (SNP), the main pro-independence force, pushed ahead with a campaign that claimed their re-election would lead to a second independence referendum. The Scottish Green Party also campaigned in favour of independence as they did in the first Scottish independence referendum in 2015. The SNP won 64 out of 129 seats, one seat short of an absolute majority. The sum of the seats of the pro-independence parties SNP and Scottish Green Party is 72, guaranteeing an absolute majority for the pro-independence cause in the Scottish Parliament. Here too, the British Prime Minister Boris Johnson ruled out the organisation of a new referendum on self-determination for Scotland on the evening of the elections.

In Wales, the pro-independence momentum that Plaid Cymru had hoped for did not materialise. The party achieved the same score in the May elections as in 2016, 20%, but made progress by gaining an extra seat, from 12 to 13 of the 60 seats in the Welsh Parliament.

In Romania, the Magyar Democratic Union of Romania, a historic party defending the interests of the Hungarian minority in Romania and the autonomy of the Szekler country, scored 5.74%, down 0.5 percentage points, but retained the same number of deputies and sena-

Urban-rural divide indicator, December 2020-May 2021
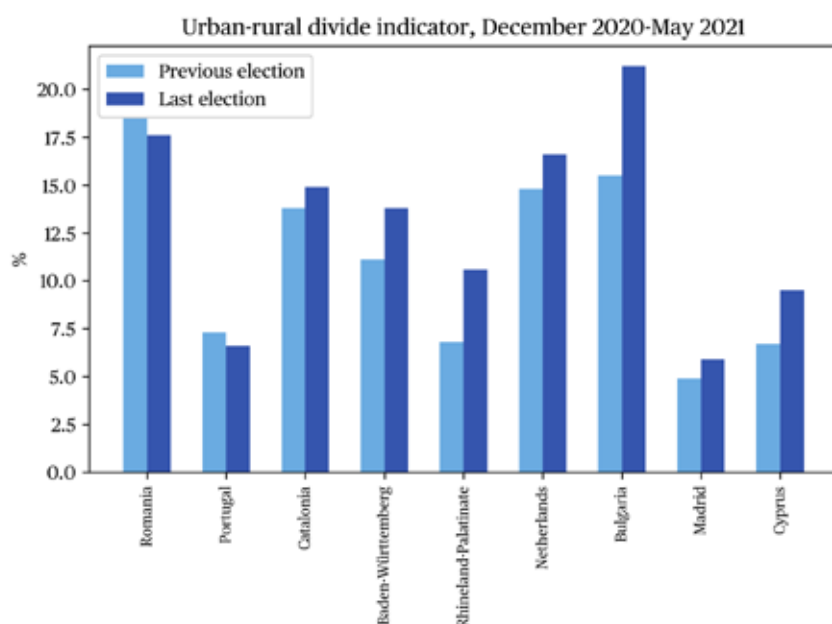
b • Indicator of the urban-rural divide in the elections from December 2020 to May 2021, as well as in previous elections

tors as in the previous legislature, i.e. 21 deputies and 9 senators. The Movement for Rights and Freedoms, defender of the interests of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria, which represents almost 10% of the country's population, obtained 10.73%, up one point compared to 2017, and obtained 30 seats out of 240.

Anti-corruption movements

In the three elections held in Eastern Europe (parliamentary elections in Albania, Romania and Bulgaria) the fight against corruption was a central issue.

Past years have been marked by mobilisations against the corruption of the respective ruling parties. For example, the Rezist civil society movement led to the resignation of the Romanian social democratic government (Social Democratic Party, PES) in November 2019, paving the way for a centre-right minority government (National Liberal Party, EPP) after two years of massive protests. In Albania, the protests were initiated by the Democratic Party (EPP), starting in February 2019, against the backdrop of a boycott of local and parliamentary elections by opposition parties. This boycott followed the publication of audio recordings by the newspaper BILD proving the involvement of Prime Minister Edi Rama and his party (Socialist Party, associated with the PES) in vote-buying campaigns and intimidation of opponents. Finally, in Bulgaria demonstrations took place following an investigation by Radio Free Europe (RFE/RL) implicating members of Boyko Borisov's centre-right government (GERB, EPP, in coalition with the United Patriots, ECR) as well as magistrates. This led to a major political crisis, supported by President Rumen Radev (Ind.), which continued until election day.

Although the context was similar, the electoral consequences of this dynamic were different. In Romania, the anti-corruption vote largely benefited the USR-PLUS (RE) alliance, which has its roots in the civil society and the 2015 anti-government protests, and saw its score rise from 8.9% to 15.6%, entering government alongside the liberal-conservative PNL (EPP) and the Hungarian minority party (UDMR, EPP). In Albania, the anti-corruption movement failed to challenge the institutional and political hegemony of the Socialist Party, which retained its majority (49 % of the vote, 53 % of the seats in parliament). However, the opposition unified under the Democratic Party and its leader, Luzim Basha, who gained 10 percentage points, almost reaching 40% of the votes cast. In Bulgaria, the right-wing governing coalition collapsed in favour of three anti-corruption forces. The new ITN party entered parliament in second place with 17 % of the vote, the new anti-corruption movement ISMV received 4.6 % of the vote, while the centre-right alliance Democratic Bulgaria (EPP/Greens) obtained 9 %. The ruling GERB lost 7 points (to 26%), having alienated part of its electorate – the party had itself been created to fight corruption. The socialist BSP (PES), despite having supported the protests, lost 12% of its votes to the two new anti-corruption forces,

stabilising at 14.5%. The three new parties, although big winners, failed to organise a governing coalition, paving the way for new elections in July.

Ideologically, all the anti-corruption parties in Eastern Europe are characterised by their Europhilia, or at times even their Euro-Atlanticism, with integration into Western organisations seen as a means of continuing the fight against a traditional national political class deemed corrupt and regularly supported by Russia.

Role of the diaspora

For five elections : the Bulgarian, Romanian, Cypriot and Catalan parliamentary elections, as well as the Portuguese presidential election, the data on diaspora voting was published.

Representing respectively 5% and 4% of the citizens who went to the polls, the large Bulgarian and Romanian diasporas voted more for the perceived 'new' parties, be they anti-corruption centrists or national-conservatives, than the average non-diaspora voter. In Romania, for example, the Social Democratic Party (S&D), which came first nationally with 28.90% of the vote, won only 3.37% of the vote among voters living abroad. The USR-PLUS alliance (RE, anti-corruption), which obtained 15.37% of the votes at the national level, won 32.59% of the diaspora votes; the young nationalist party Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR, ECR), whose total score was 9.08%, won 23.24% of the diaspora voters. In four EU Member States (Germany, Italy, Greece, Cyprus), the AUR came first. Its success in Germany and Italy, where almost half of the voters from the EU come from, and where the party won around 35% of the vote, contrasts with the scores much closer to the Romanian average in France and Spain, where the USR-PLUS won over the AUR by 5 to 10 points. The AUR, which is in favour of the union of the Republic of Moldova with Romania and is also present in this country, was not particularly successful among the Romanians in Moldova: the party only received 8.81% of the vote.

In a similar pattern, the Citizens for the Development of Bulgaria (GERB, EPP), the conservative party of the outgoing Bulgarian prime minister, received only 8.57% of the diaspora vote, compared to 25.80% at national level. Similarly, the left-wing alliance formed around the Socialist Party of Bulgaria (BSP, S&D) obtained only 6.46%, compared to 14.79% nationwide. In contrast, the centrist anti-corruption party "There Is Such A People" (ITN) received 30.45% of the diaspora vote compared to only 17.40% nationally, while the centrist Democratic Bulgaria coalition received 17.40%, again almost double its national score of 9.31%. One of these two parties came out on top in each of the EU states. Finally, the four main nationalist or far-right lists received 14.69% of the diaspora vote, compared to 11.25% nationally. The nationalist party IMRO (ECR), which advocates a rapprochement between Northern Macedonia and Bulgaria, obtained almost 40% of the vote in that country.

Winning party (Bulgarian diaspora, April 2021)

- ● ГЕРБ
- ● ДПС
- ● ВМРО
- ● ИТН
- ● БСП
- ● ДБ

Winning party (Romanian diaspora, December 2020)

- ● PNL
- ● USR+
- ● UDMR
- ● AUR
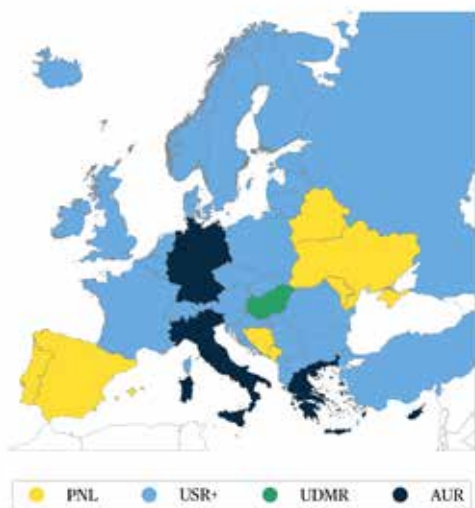
In both cases, the diasporas appear to be more receptive to anti-corruption rhetoric, but also more likely to support nationalist formations. The traditional centre-left and centre-right governing parties (with the notable exception of the Romanian PNL) now carter to only a very small fraction of citizens living abroad.

The diaspora's tendency to support "alternative" candidates is also present, albeit to a lesser extent, in Portugal and Catalonia. Incumbent Portuguese president Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa (PSD, EPP), elected with 60.67% of the vote, won only 52.65% of the diaspora vote, and did not obtain an absolute majority of votes (46.03%) among Portuguese living in the EU. Ana Gomes, an independent centre-left candidate, won 18.51% of the diaspora vote (23.50% in the EU), compared to 12.96% at national level. The candidate of the new party Iniciativa Liberal (IL, RE) won 5.61% of the Portuguese abroad vote, compared to only 3.23% nationally, while the far-right and radical left candidates also improved their scores slightly. However, the significance of this analysis is limited by a very low level of participation: out of 1.5 million registered Portuguese abroad, only less than 30,000 (2%) turned out to vote.

In Catalonia, where the turnout of the diaspora is also very low (4%), its electoral behaviour is characterised by a slightly higher support for pro-independence parties than the regional average (54.87% against 50.77%). The scores of Vox (ID), the Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSC, S&D) and the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC, Greens/EFA) are lower, those of JxCat (pro-independence, NI) of the radical left and Ciutadans/Ciudadanos (RE) higher than at the regional level.

Religious cleavages and political culture

Religion remains a significant factor in several of the polls studied.

In Rhineland-Palatinate, a North-South divide in voting behaviour was identified, which corresponds to the historical religious divide in the state. Thus the CDU (EPP), the offspring of the Catholic Zentrum party, has retained a significant electoral base in the Catholic north (Rhineland), while the SPD (S&D) retains a majority in most constituencies of the Protestant Palatinate. At the same time, the Free Voters (FW, RE) outperformed in predominantly Catholic areas, while the AfD (ID) saw its electorate concentrated in traditionally Protestant constituencies.

An equivalent pattern could be observed in Baden-Württemberg, where the Catholic regions in the south (Swabia and Baden) voted more than elsewhere for the CDU, and Protestant Württemberg, where the SPD had above-average results. Here, the other parties, and in particular the Greens, the big winners of the election, did not have a territorial division of their electorate coinciding with the religious map.

Although a North-South religious divide exists in the Netherlands between Protestants and Catholics, this did not translate into a significant differentiation in voting on this criterion. Only in the Bijbelgordel (the Dutch 'Bible Belt') in the centre of the country, marked by its very strong Calvinist conservatism, do the SGP (the Reformed Political Party, ECR) and the Christian Union (UC, EPP) enjoy significantly higher than average scores. The idiosyncrasies of the Christian parties in these regions remain very strong.

In other elections, notably in Romania and Bulgaria, the relation between party performance and the religious distribution of the population is mainly explained by the ethnic vote. The Bulgarian Movement for Rights and Freedoms (RE) has its electorate concentrated in areas with an over-representation of Islam, i.e. territories with strong Turkish ethnic minority communities. The Romanian UDMR (EPP) has its best results in areas with a Roman Catholic majority, i.e. departments in which the Hungarian minority is in the majority, while the parties reputedly close to the Romanian Orthodox Church (BOR) score much lower than their national averages, whether they are left-wing conservatives (PSD, PES) or populist and eurosceptic (AUR, ECR).

13

BLUE offers systematic monitoring of the following elections in the 27 EU Member States:
- Elections to the European Parliament;
- Direct national elections (parliamentary, presidential, referenda);
- Direct regional elections at NUTS 1 and NUTS 2 level, i.e. : Austrian *Bundesländer*, Belgian *régions* and provinces, Danish *regioner*, French *régions*, German *Bundesländer*, Greek *periferies*, Italian *regioni* and autonomous provinces, Dutch *provincies*, Polish *województwa*, Spanish *comunidades autónomas*;
- Municipal elections in the 15 European cities with more than one million inhabitants ('M15'), which are, in decreasing order of population, Berlin, Madrid, Rome, Paris, Vienna, Hamburg, Bucharest, Warsaw, Budapest, Barcelona, Munich, Milan, Prague, Sofia and Cologne.

These analyses are conducted at the polling level and are accompanied by comprehensive election data at the municipal level.

Where possible, BLUE will also publish analyses or summaries of the main national elections in the EU accession states and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) member states. These analyses are collected in a section called 'neighbourhood'.

On a case-by-case basis, BLUE may also offer analyses of other relevant elections in the EU's immediate environment in its 'special' section.

14

Seats shares of political groups

Group	European Parliament	European Council	European Commission	Member states' Parliaments (lower chamber)		Regional Parliaments (first-level)		M15
GUE/NGL	39 (6%)	-	-	434 (7%)	-5	509 (6%)	+3	76 (6%)
Greens/EFA	73 (10%)	-	-	321 (5%)	+2	640 (7%)	+16	208 (18%)
S&D	145 (21%)	6 (22%)	9 (33%)	1240 (19%)	-80	1898 (21%)	+3	333 (28%)
RE	97 (14%)	7 (26%)	4 (15%)	1081 (17%)	+16	941 (11%)	-45	106 (9%)
EPP	175 (25%)	9 (33%)	9 (33%)	1701 (26%)	-12	2401 (27%)	+30	310 (26%)
ECR	74 (11%)	1 (4%)	1 (4%)	548 (8%)	+15	575 (7%)	+12	42 (4%)
ID	74 (11%)	-	-	406 (6%)	-15	974 (11%)	-11	56 (5%)
Others/NI	27 (4%)	4 (15%)	4 (15%)	738 (11%)	+80	908 (10%)	+7	44 (4%)

Except for the three European institutions (current figures), the above count is based on the results of the last elections in each region. Current party numbers may differ slightly.

Seat shares of European political families, June 2021

The European Parliament

● GUE/NGL	● S&D	● EPP	● ID
● Greens/EFA	● RE	● ECR	● Other

The European Council

● GUE/NGL	● S&D	● EPP	● ID
● Greens/EFA	● RE	● ECR	● Other
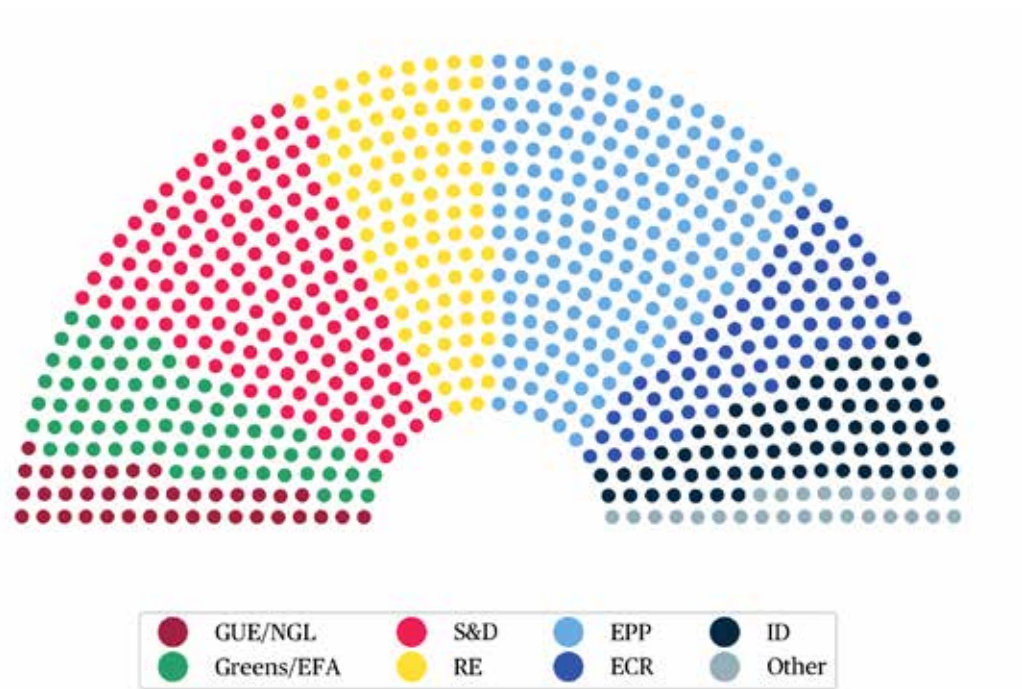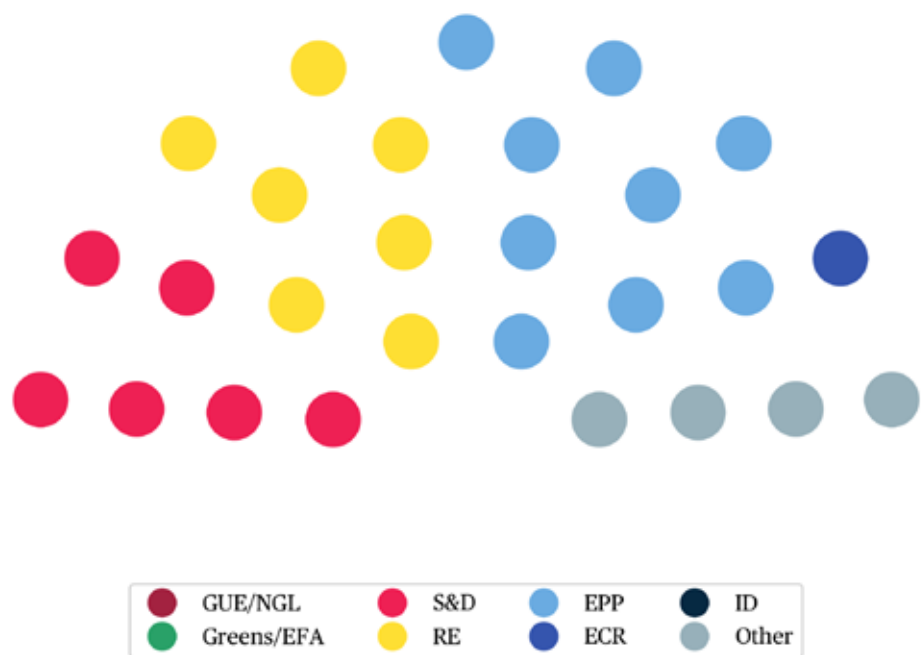
Seat shares of European political families, June 2021

The Commission

●	GUE/NGL	●	S&D	●	EPP	●	ID
●	Greens/EFA	●	RE	●	ECR	●	Other

Member states' parliaments

●	GUE/NGL	●	S&D	●	EPP	●	ID
●	Greens/EFA	●	RE	●	ECR	●	Other
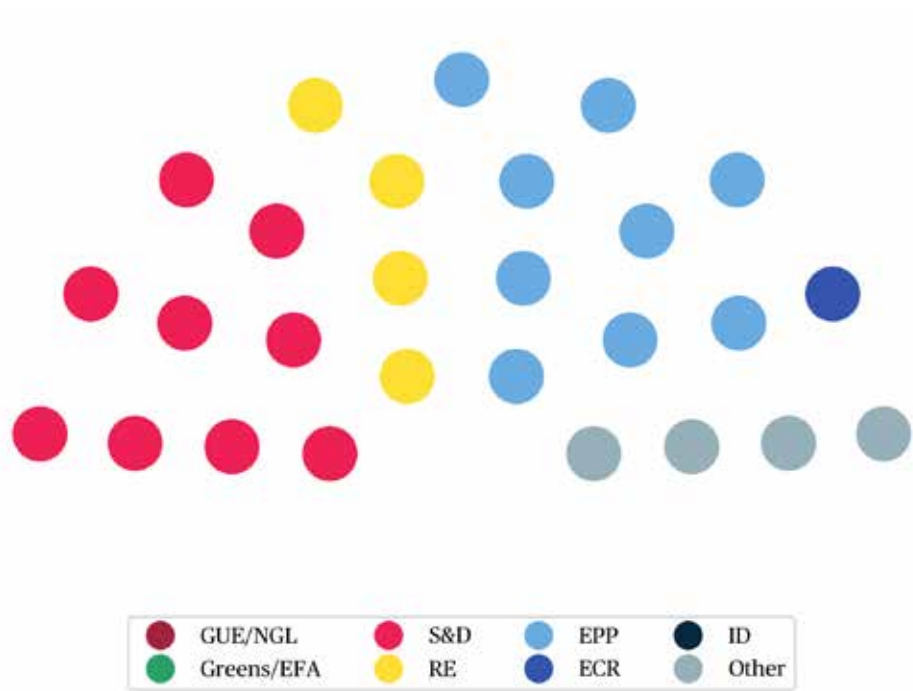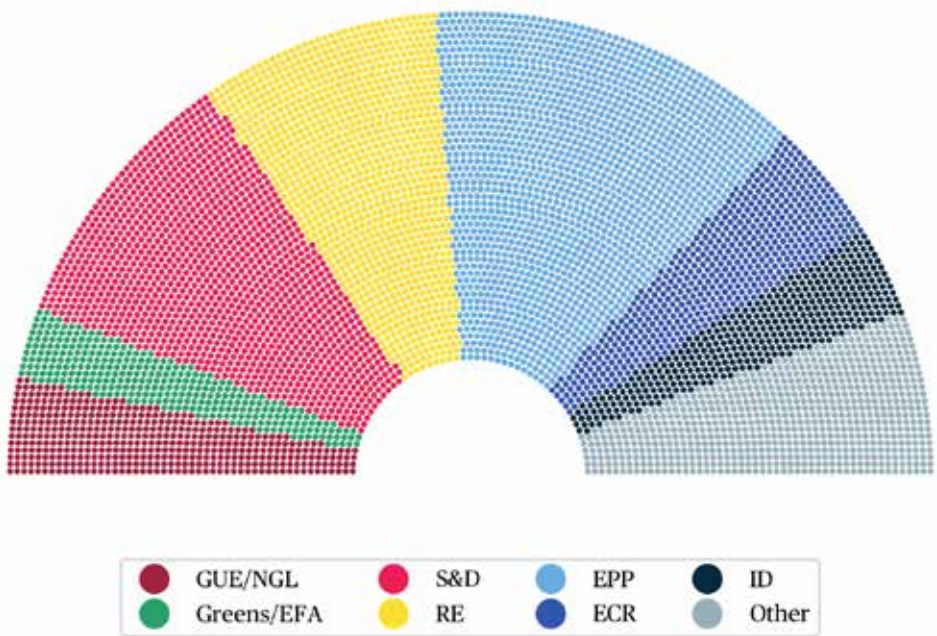
Seat shares of European political families, June 2021

Regional parliaments

	GUE/NGL		S&D		EPP		ID
	Greens/EFA		RE		ECR		Other
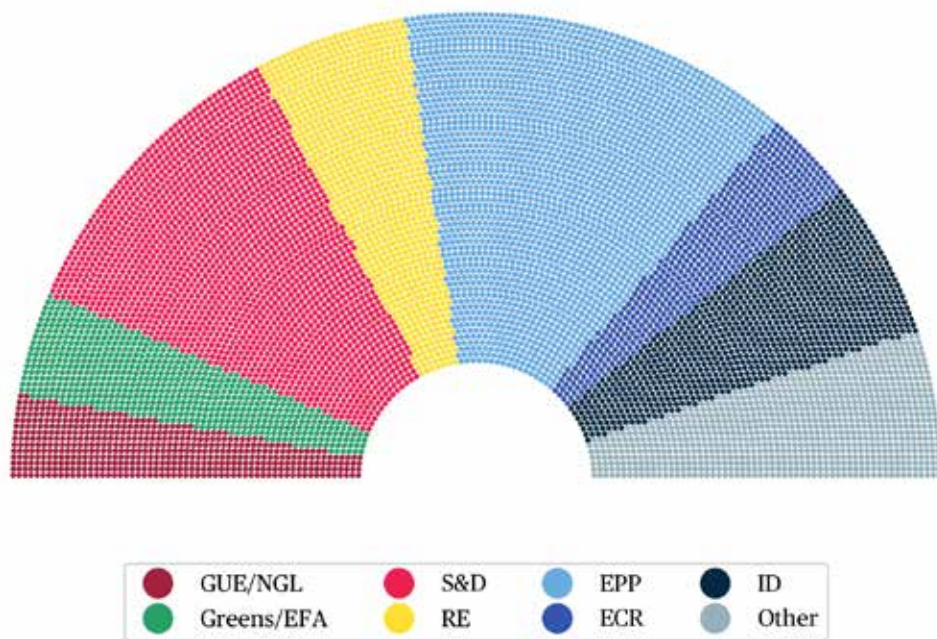
City councils of the EU's 15 cities with over one million inhabitants (« M15 »)

	GUE/NGL		S&D		EPP		ID
	Greens/EFA		RE		ECR		Other
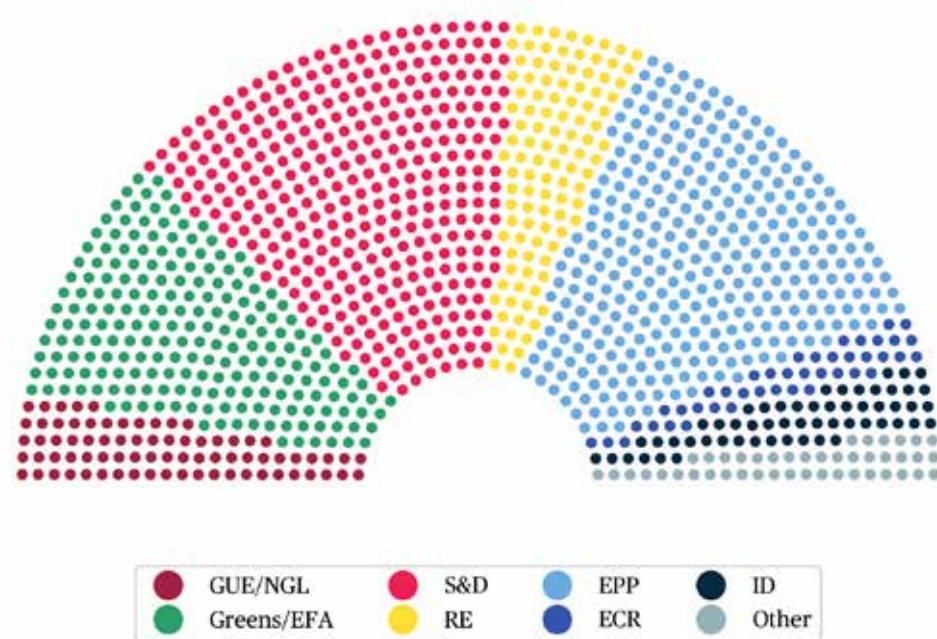
BLUE #1
December 2020 - May 2021
The Continental M

Group of winning party, by municipality

Map

Legend:
- GUE/NGL
- Greens/EFA
- S&D
- RE
- Greens/EFA-EPP
- EPP
- ECR
- ID
- Other
- ~S&D
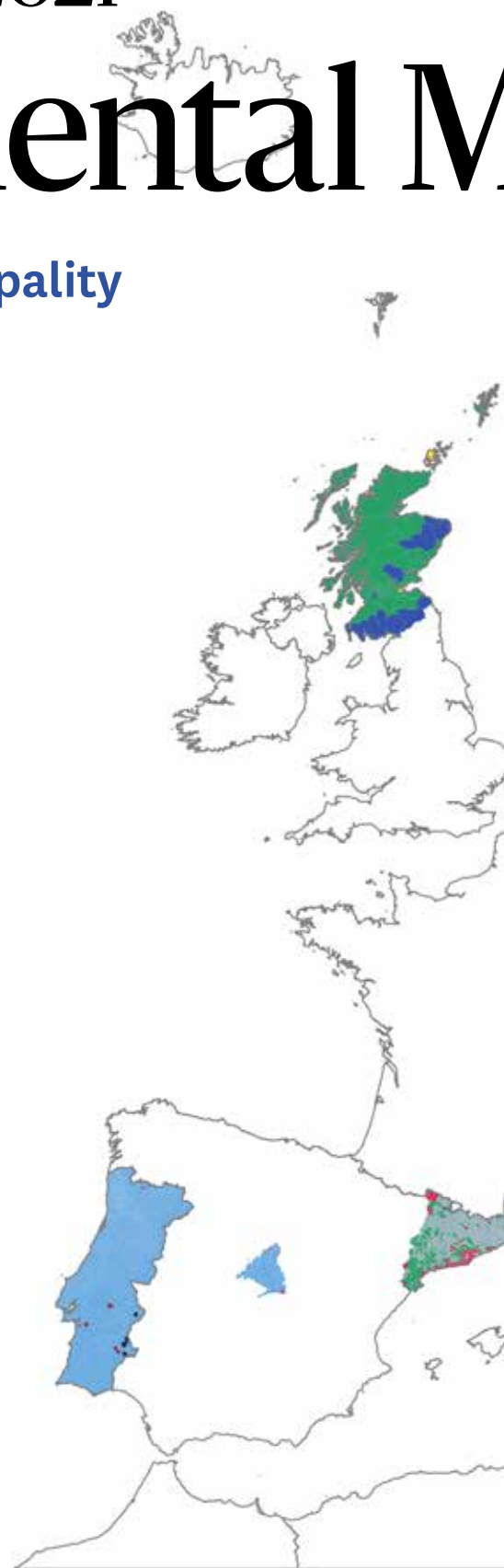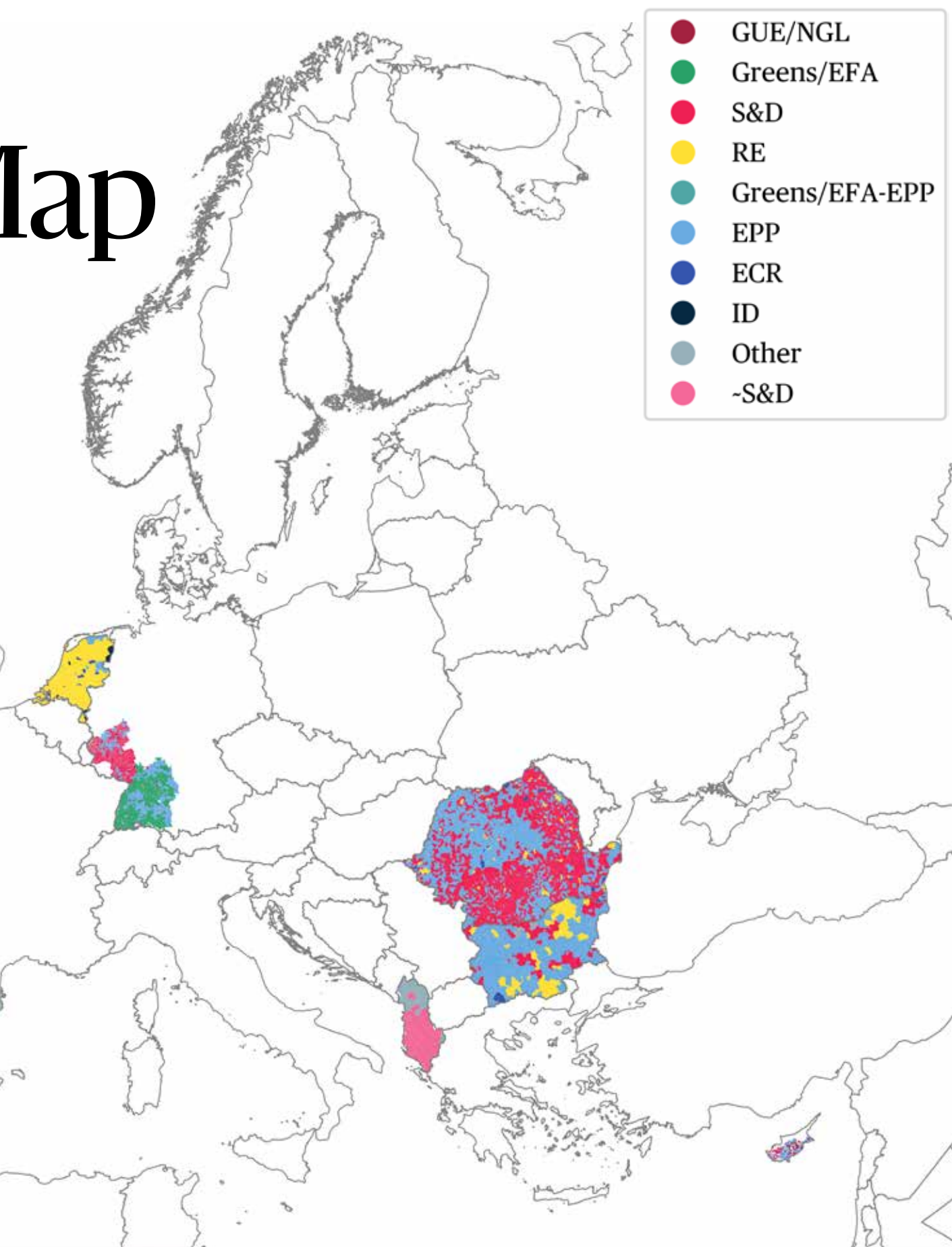
Elections in the European Union
Regional, national and European elections, elections in the largest European cities

02

Ramona Bloj • Groupe d'études géopolitiques

Parliamentary Election in Romania, 6 December 2020

On 6 December, Romanians went to the polls in the parliamentary election to elect both chambers of Parliament (Senat et Camera Deputaților). The Social Democratic Party (PSD, S&D, conservative left) came first with 29.32% of the vote, followed by the National Liberal Party (PNL, EPP) with 25.58%. The USR-Plus Alliance (RE) came third with 15.86% of the vote. The surprise of the election was the entry into Parliament of the Alliance for the Unity of Romanians (AUR, ECR, close to the Orthodox Church), which obtained 9.17% of the vote[1].

The election took place against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic. Following a fire in a hospital on 14 November that killed 10 patients, the health system and the endemic corruption were at the heart of the debate in the weeks leading up to the vote. Romania has the lowest level of public health funding in the EU, both per capita (1,029€) and as proportion of GDP (5%). This is compounded by one of the lowest levels of medical staffing, a phenomenon exacerbated by the dynamics of intra-European migration.

The turnout was 31.84%, down from 2016 (39%), but also from the September 2020 local elections (46.02%). Over 250,000 Romanians voted abroad. This is the lowest voting rate in post-communist history, which contrasts notably with the voting presence (51.7%) in the 2019 European elections.

The big surprise of the election was the entry into parliament of the Alliance for the Unity of Romanians (AUR[2]). Created in September 2019, the AUR advocates the unification of Romania and Moldova, "the protection of the family, the faith and the fatherland." The political line of this new party is not unlike that of the Polish PiS or the Hungarian Jobbik. It is worth noting that AUR received

1. This are the results for the Senate. In the lower House (Camera Deputatilor) results are : PSD (28.9%), PNL (25.18%), USR-Plus (15.37%), AUR (9.08%), UDMR (5.74%).

2. "Aur" means "Gold" in Romanian.

30% of the diaspora vote.

Despite the victory of the centre-right coalition, the PSD remains the largest party in the country

Another surprise was the victory of the PSD (S&D). The party won the 2016 parliamentary elections with 45.48% of the vote, and formed a coalition government with the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (ALDE) and the Magyar Democratic Union of Romania (UDMR, EPP), but the government was toppled on 10 October 2019 following numerous scandals and protests concerning mainly justice and anti-corruption reforms. The PNL then formed a minority government, with the aim of holding early parliamentary elections as soon as possible. However, the Covid-19 pandemic and the health measures implemented to contain the spread of the virus made it impossible to hold the elections before the scheduled date.

The PNL came second with 25.58% of the vote. However, given the possibility of creating a centre-right coalition with the USR-Plus Alliance, the election was seen as a victory. Although remaining the strongest party in parliament, the PSD therefore no longer has the capacity to form a government coalition.

Neither the Pro România party (S&D), created by Victor Ponta (Prime Minister from 2012 to 2015), which aimed to offer a left-wing alternative to the PSD, nor the PMP (People's Movement Party, EPP) of former President Traian Băsescu managed to exceed the 5% threshold, necessary to enter Parliament.

The UDMR, true to form (since the 1990s, its score has oscillated between 7 and 5.5%), obtained 5.74% of the vote, a slight decrease compared to the 2016 elections (6.19%). The party had a key role in the formation of a government coalition.

It can be noted that the PSD obtained better results than predicted by the polls, while the PNL and the USR-

Plus Alliance were well below expectations. The very low turnout partly explains this dynamic: while the more disciplined PSD voters went to the polls, the traditional PNL and USR-Plus Alliance electorate abstained: a more urban, more educated electorate, but also more volatile, and more inclined to sanction the choices of their representatives. It is worth noting that the PNL stood for election after a difficult year in government, especially marked by the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic, which may have alienated many voters – in this case, abstention can be understood as a rejection of the political class as a whole. The USR-Plus Alliance, on the other hand, lacking a strong territorial base, may have been punished for its many internal conflicts.

The legislative and municipal elections in September were the occasion to measure the extent of the crisis of the Social Democratic Party. It still retains a strong territorial hold and can count on a mobilisable electoral base. It is aimed at villages and small towns and at an older electorate. With the implementation of proactive social policies, the PSD responds to a demand for protection that the new government should take into account in its recovery plan.

New national-conservative party AUR enters parliament

The Alliance for the Unity of Romanians (AUR, ECR) was not taken into account by most polls and forecasts. Defining itself as anti-system, although many of its members come from other parties (Mircea Chelaru, PUNR, PRM, PC ; Francisc Tobă, PSD ; Antonio Andrusceac, USR), it organised demonstrations against sanitary measures, the wearing of masks and vaccination. The party obtained less than 1% in the September local elections. Although it was not present in the televised campaign debates, its ability to spread its political message on a very large scale enabled it to reach targeted territories in a capillary way. Despite the pandemic and the health measures, repeating the Brexit strategy, they travelled the country with a golden bus of Trumpian inspiration on which one could read "Dreptate pentru România" (Justice for Romania). Social networks, and especially the Facebook page of party leader George Simion, which has grown in audience since

a • AUR score by municipality (Chamber of Deputies)

the incident between Romanian activists and members of the Hungarian minority in 2019 around the military cemetery in Valea Auzului, have but amplified the message. It should also be noted that the party's co-chairman, Claudiu Târziu, had led the Coalition for the Family, which in 2018 supported the Orthodox Church in a campaign to amend the Constitution to define the family as a union between a man and a woman. Following church closures due to the health crisis, some priests encouraged believers to vote for the AUR.

Today, the AUR is the only anti-system party in Parliament[3]. While the PSD can be expected to take advantage of the period in opposition to restructure itself, the Alliance for the Unity of Romanians will capitalise on both the difficulties caused by the pandemic (economic crisis, new health measures, vaccination) and the difficulties of the ruling party to find a compromise. The party announced this spring that they will run in the Moldovan snap elections on 11 July 2021. The structuring opposition of Moldovan political life, which revolves around the pro-Russian/pro-European axis, could lead to a change in the European discourse of the AUR leaders, who will try to adapt to this configuration, while pursuing their unionist objectives.

New centre-right government coalition PNL-USR-UDMR

On 18 December 2020 the PNL, the USR and the UDMR announced the formation of a coalition government led by Florin Cîtu (former Minister of Finance). The PNL got eight ministers (Finance, Home Affairs, Defence, Energy, Agriculture and Rural Development, Labour and Social Welfare, Education, Culture) the USR-Plus seven (Justice, Economy, Entrepreneurship and Tourism, Transport and Infrastructure, Investments and European Projects, Health, Research, Innovation and Digital) and the UDMR three (Water and Forestry, Public Works and Administration, Youth and Sports). Ludovic Orban, the outgoing Prime Minister, gets the presidency of the Chamber of Deputies, and Anca Paliu Dragu (USR-Plus) that of the Senate.

The new government was sworn in on 23 December with 260 votes in favour and 186 against. A fragile coalition, the decision-making process promises to be all but easy.

Romania's pro-European stance strengthened

Romania's pro-European position remains intact. The PNL-USR-UDMR government will facilitate dialogue with its European partners and take a firmer stance at the European level regarding Hungary and Poland. Romania's
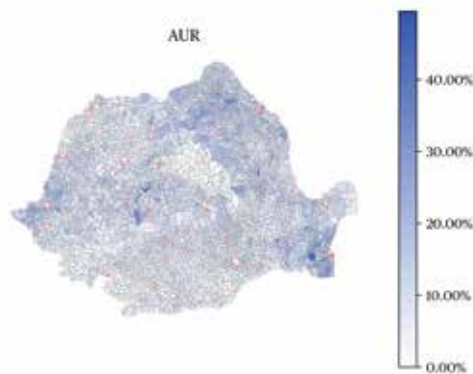
3. George Simion, the party's leader, described AUR as the sole authentic anti-system party. See e.g. the interview of George Simion with Ion Cristoiu, 2 December 2020, or with Cristian Andrei, Interviu. George Simion despre cine e în spatele AUR, legionari, Rusia și politicieni, Radio Free Europe Romania, 9 December 2020.

atlanticism also remains unchanged. However, given the central role of Dacian Cioloş (leader of the Plus party, allied to the UDMR, and chairman of the Renew Europe group) in the European Parliament, Romania can be expected to be more receptive to European initiatives on defence, defence of trade interests, etc.

With the entry in Parliament of the Alliance for the Union of Romanians, which describes itself as being in favour of a Europe of nations, Romania is aligning itself with European trends. A nationalist far-right party is now part of the Romanian political landscape. Its containment will depend largely on the success of the new government, but also on the ability of the Union to stand up to today's challenges.

The next elections (local, legislative, European and presidential) will take place in 2024. This opens up an opportunity for the implementation of the recovery plan, the objective of which is the convergence with the Western European economies, so that the GDP per capita, in purchasing power parity, may reach 87% of the European average by 2025, but also for the legacy of President Klaus Iohannis, whose term was marked by long periods of cohabitation with the social-democrats.

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Party votes

Winning party (2020)

- PNL
- USR+
- PSD
- UDMR
- AUR
- PMP
- PRO

European indicators

Share of votes by EP group

Camera Deputaţilor (2020)

- S&D: PSD (110)
- RE: USR+ (55)
- EPP: PNL (93), UDMR (21)
- ECR: AUR (33)
- Other: Minorităţii (18)
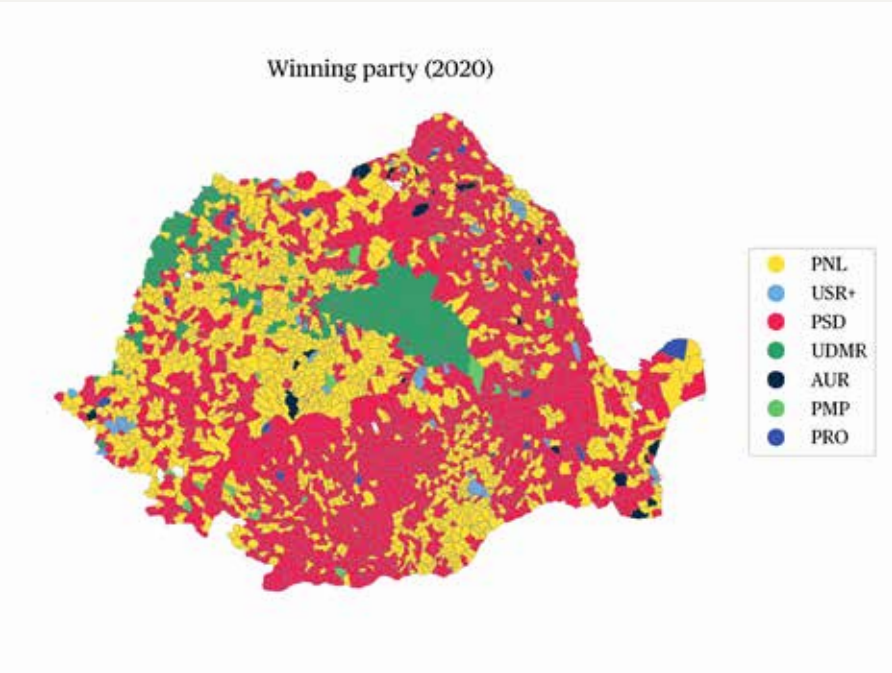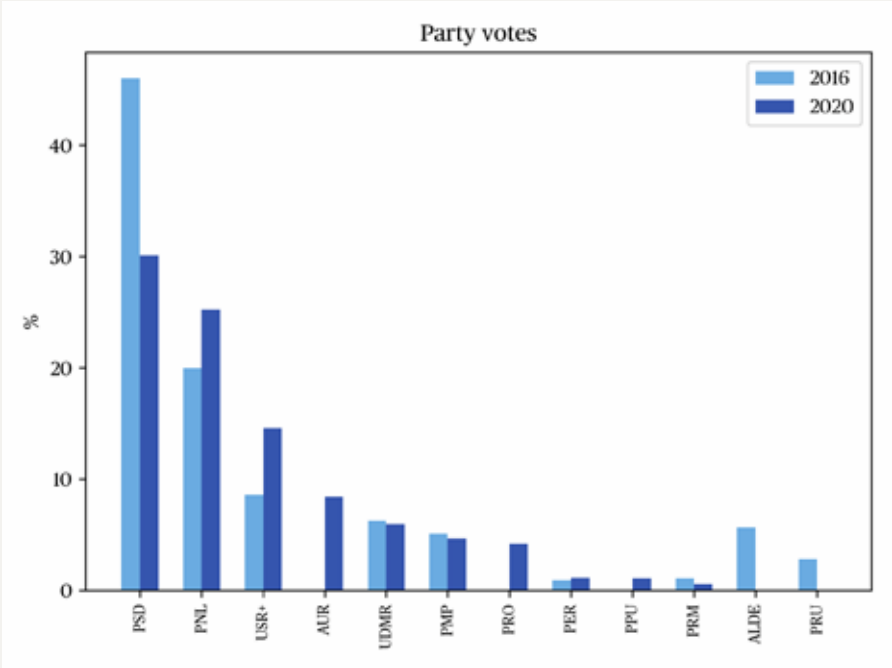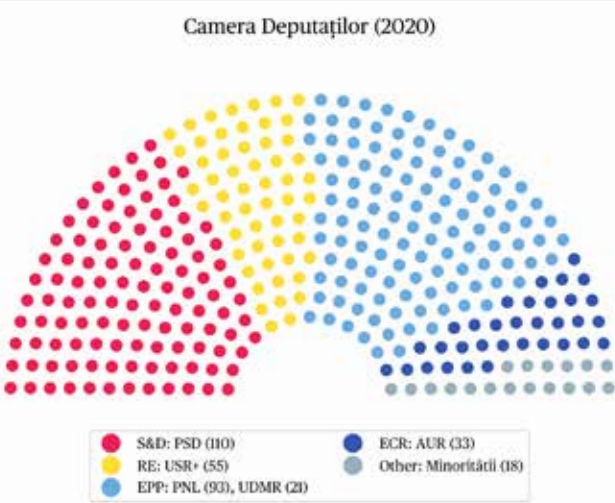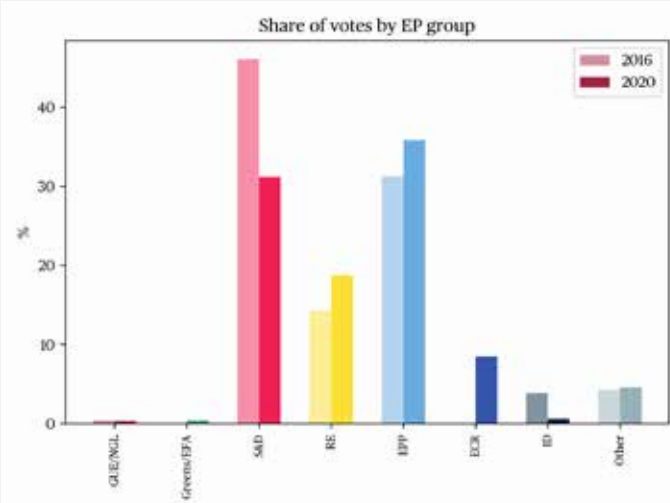
Eduardo Paz Ferreira • Universidade de Lisboa

Presidential Election in Portugal, 24 January 2021

The presidential election in Portugal happened at a time where each electoral event is under particular scrutiny, in search of signals portending the political future, the resilience of the democratic institutions, the viability of the different partisan alternatives and the gap between voters and the democratic system, as depicted by the abstention rate.

In a context of intense, wide-ranging political troubles afflicting the whole of Europe, the pandemic is yet another factor of social breakdown, a threat that will hardly foster cohesion or reduce the conflicts within societies.

The re-election of Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa in the first round of the presidential election was largely expected and confirmed the tradition by which all the presidents of the Republic democratically elected since 25 April [1976, Carnation Revolution] and the Constitution of 1976, served the two successive terms permitted by the Constitution.

Institutional role of the President of the Portuguese Republic

In the Portuguese semi-presidential system, the president is endowed with powers far from decisive, because he is not at the same time Prime Minister, and the government does not depend on the presidential confidence. However, the president retains broad competences, among which are:

a) To convene an extraordinary session of the Assembly of the Republic;

b) To directly communicate with the Assembly of the Republic and with the legislative assemblies of the autonomous regions;

c) To dissolve the Assembly of the Republic, in compliance with the provisions of Article 172 of the Constitution, after having heard the represented parties and the Council of State;

d) To appoint the Prime Minister, in accordance with Article 187, section 1;

e) To dismiss the Government, in accordance with Article 195, section 2, and to dismiss the Prime Minister, in accordance with Article 186, section 4;

f) To appoint and dismiss the members of the government, proposed by the Prime Minister.

Another crucial aspect of his powers concerns the right to approach the Constitutional Court regarding the constitutionality of the texts transmitted to him by the Assembly of the Republic and by the Government.

Furthermore, his presence in the media and his communication through messages addressed to the Assembly or directly to the voters is another asset of the President of the Republic, as well as an important factor for his image among the Portuguese citizens.

If the abstention rates in the presidential election are generally higher than in the legislative elections, they remain at levels suggesting that the Portuguese are comfortable with the presidential institution.

A quick historic analysis reveals that, generally, when presidents and governments did not belong to the same party, the level of cohabitation remained cordial, despite some inevitable problems.

The powers of the President remain unchanged since the constitutional revision of 1982, which suppressed the possibility for the President to dismiss the government without invoking any ground, which thus ended a situation close to presidentialism and created greater flexibility for the government.

Portuguese presidential elections since 1975

In forty-five years of democracy, Portugal has known five presidents with quite diverse personalities who maintained different relations with the governments. During this period, two phases can be identified: initially, the

presidential election was mainly an issue for the military, more or less connected to the political parties and standing for different understandings of democracy – elections of 1976 and 1980 – whereas at later stages, with a few exceptions, the candidates were civilians, with links to the parties or running as independents.

Although the office of President is particularly fit for independent candidacies, the elected candidates are as a rule either presented or supported by a party, without any significant impact on their legitimacy.

Usually, once elected, and sometimes as soon as the election campaign, the candidates insist on presenting themselves as presidents of all the Portuguese, looking to enlarge their electoral base.

The first democratically elected president was General Ramalho Eanes, a key figure of 25 April and of the endorsement of democracy, elected on 25 November 1975.

With the support of most right-wing parties, his first election was easy and the abstention rate low (24.6%), Ramalho Eanes got 61.5% of the vote. Still, a far-left candidate, Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho, the strategist of 25 April, got 15.5%. A third member of the military, without partisan support, Admiral Pinheiro de Azevedo, received 14.5%. The only civilian running, Octávio Pat, backed by the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP, GUE/NGL), got 7.5% of the vote.

This peaceful election did not raise any particular difficulties, highlighting in particular the rise in power of the revolutionary left linked to certain military sectors. The latter had seen their power diminish, however, after the military coup of 25 November 1975, which consolidated the moderate sectors in the armed forces. They had been re-elected in the first round with 53%, followed by the PS and BE candidate, Manuel Alegre (19.6%) and the independent candidate Fernando Nobre (14.1%). The PCP's Francisco Lopes remained at 7.7%.

These last two elections thus show a certain difficulty for the Socialist Party to manage presidential elections.

In 2016, Marcelo Rebelo Sousa, who as leader of the PSD had previously not achieved favourable results, won the election with 52% of the vote, supported by the right-wing parties and garnering a significant share of the socialist and independent vote. His career as a political commentator on television and extremely favourable polls played in his favour. His main opponent, Sampaio da Nóvoa, a former rector of Lisbon University who was counting on the votes of the PS, ended up with 22.8% of the vote, while the party also did not support another of its leaders, Maria do Belém Roseira (4.24%).

The big surprise was the result of BE candidate Marisa Matias (10.12%) and the low score of the PCP candidate.

Results of the January 2021 election

The re-election of Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa in 2021, after a first mandate marked by great popularity, is without surprise. It follows the logic of previous elections, exemplifying the winning candidate, elected with more than 60% of the vote, from a second round. The abstention rate has also risen to 54%, a figure that must, in any case, be read in the light of the peak of the pandemic that coincided with these elections.

The result consolidated Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa's position and suggests that he will continue to play a central role in Portuguese politics. The implicit support of the PS is expected to lead to the continuation of intense cohabitation and cooperation between the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister, as several PS figures have given their express support to Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa. The Prime Minister and Secretary General of the PS, António Costa, did so implicitly.

Once again, the PS did not present a candidate, although one of its leaders, Ana Gomes, usually placed on the left of the party, came second (12.97%), supported by the small People-Animals-Nature party (PAN, Greens/EFA). The candidate's result, while lower than Sampaio da Nóvoa's in the previous elections, could strengthen her role in the party, however without leading to any radical changes.

A novelty, but of more limited significance, was the score of the Liberal Initiative (IL, ALDE) candidate, who had support in the media; he obtained 3.22% of the vote. However, it is unlikely that liberalism, which is not well established in Portugal, will have a great electoral future.

The results of the left-wing candidates were quite low, with João Ferreira of the PCP obtaining 4.32% of the votes and Marisa Matias 3.95%, apparently victims of the strategic vote to Ana Gomes to prevent André Ventura (CHEGA, ID) from coming second. The next elections will show whether these parties are able to regain their previous electoral weight.

André Ventura, candidate of the recently founded far-right Chega party, came third with 11.9% of the vote; his score is probably the most important novelty of these elections.

The far right, which had only one member in the Parliamentary Assembly, will be able to institutionalise itself and become part of the establishment it claims to oppose. The normalisation of hate speech and xenophobic and racist appeals has received enormous media tolerance, and the party is now likely to follow a similar trajectory to other comparable European parties.

Consequences of the election

The beginning of Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa's second term in office was different from the first, mainly due to the Covid-19 pandemic and its economic and social effects, which at times made it somewhat difficult for the President and the Government to reach an agreement and to define areas of competence.

Despite this, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa seems determined to avoid any political crisis and will tend to maintain the current governing conditions. This has allowed

for an excellent Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2021, despite all the difficulties, and has put the country on track to receive support from European aid mechanisms, once the national programme has been approved.

During the second term we saw a gradual hardening of the political debate, with political discourse giving way to partisan bickering and attempts to replace debate with the exposure of real or fake scandals

Although the media are all opposed to the Government, new digital and even print newspapers continue to appear along the same political lines and social networks have reached levels of indignity never imagined and close to those that have emanated from the Trump presidency.

Despite this, the Socialist Party and, in general, all the left-wing forces are still largely favoured in the polls with little variation.

With the hypothesis of a central bloc moving further and further away, the most likely option is for the socialists to continue to govern with the help of ad hoc support, especially from the PCP, which does not seem to be willing to give the right any opportunity to return to power through elections.

As mentioned earlier, the President of the Republic also prefers this solution to any other that could create a political deadlock, since there is no indication that a right-wing majority will be formed.

The parties of the traditional right, on the other hand, have experienced a significant erosion in favour of the far right, with whom they maintain an ambiguous relationship: sometimes coming closer, as is the case with the regional government of the Azores, a political region, where the regional government is supported in parliament by Chega; at other times distancing themselves from it by refusing coalitions.

Within this framework, the smallest traditional party, the CDS, seems to be the most threatened, with figures showing a very significant decline.

In a difficult situation, the centre-right parties radicalise their discourse and bring it closer to far-right positions, thus losing votes from the centre, without preventing transfers to the right.

Chega is, of all the far-right parties, the one that has made the most progress, based on a racist and xenophobic discourse that takes advantage of popular discontent.

Next October, the local elections will be an important barometer for the future, which will allow us to see if the political system will change in a very significant way, which does not seem likely, or if it will keep more or less the same pattern, dealing with the newcomer, Chega.

From the point of view of the presidential mandate, I do not think there will be any great changes, but only a strengthening to promote greater political rapprochement.

Party votes

Winning party (2021)

- PSD
- CHEGA
- PCP
- Ana Gomes (Ind.-PS)

European Indicators

Share of votes by EP group
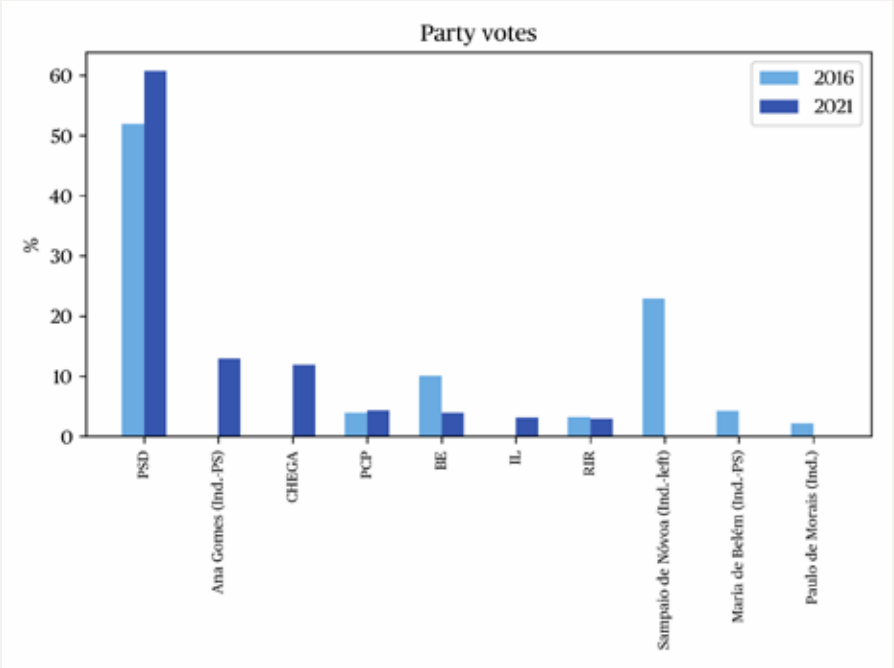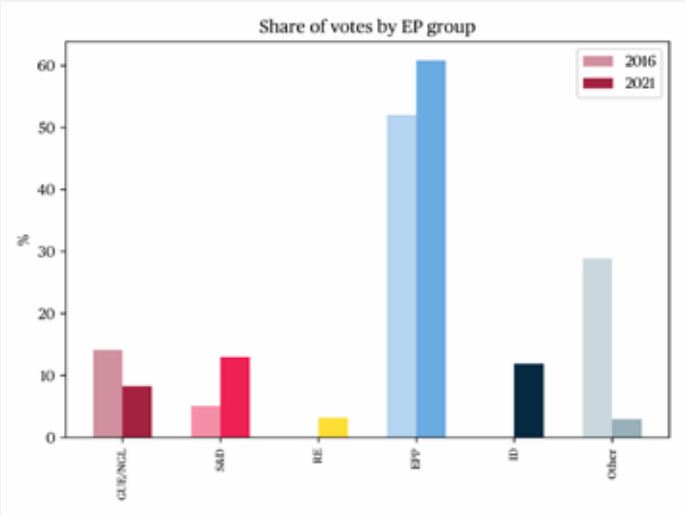
Robert Liñeira • University of Glasgow

Parliamentary Election in Catalonia, 14 February 2021 (I)

Catalonia held its thirteenth election to the Catalan Parliament amid the COVID pandemic, and after years in which the conflict between pro-independence parties and successive Spanish governments has dominated and polarized the political agenda.

With a very low turnout, the election results show record support for left-wing parties and a plurality for pro-independence parties. The electoral changes have translated into a very fragmented Parliament and, to a lesser extent, into changes in government majorities, with Esquerra Republica de Catalunya (ERC) likely to hold the presidency for the first time since Spain restored democracy and self-government institutions.

In the following lines, I analyse the changes in the election results vis-à-vis the 2017 election, the key changes in the Parliament's make-up, and the options for government formation. In the last section, I analyse vote transfers between these elections and the previous ones.

Results

The 53.5 per cent turnout is the lowest ever in a Catalan Parliament election. This record abstention is to a large extent due to the pandemic: the elections were held with the restrictions established by the so-called 'state of alarm', a high incidence of infections and hospitalizations, and different voting slots for infected people or members of at-risk groups on election day. The drop in turnout is also related to a different perception of how much was at stake in the election. The 2021 elections contrast with the previous ones in 2015 and 2017, which set turnout records: 75 and 79.1 per cent, respectively. The 2015 elections were equated to an independence referendum by pro-independence parties, while the 2017 elections followed the October independence referendum, the dissolution of the Catalan parliament proposed by the Spanish government and passed by the Spanish Senate, and the imprisonment

and exile of several pro-independence leaders.

The "data" panel shows the results of the 2021 elections and compares them with the previous ones. The main changes have to do with the two most voted for parties. The Socialist Party (PSC) is the most voted for, something that had not happened in an election to the Catalan Parliament since 2003. ERC has become the leading Catalan nationalist party for the first time since the founding elections to the Catalan Parliament in 1980. ERC has overtaken Junts per Catalunya (JxCat), the main successor to CiU, the party that held the Catalan presidency for more than 28 years, and the senior partner of the independence coalition that has governed Catalonia since 2015. Other relevant changes are the dramatic fall in support for Ciudadanos (Cs), which has gone from being the party with the largest support, with 25.4 per cent of the votes, to seventh, with 5.6, and the irruption of Vox, with 7.7 per cent of the votes. The Candidatura d'Unitat Popular (CUP) has improved its result, while En Comú Podem (ECP) and the Partido Popular (PP) saw a drop in their support for a third consecutive election.

Overall, the Catalan party system has shifted to the left – with 58 per cent of the vote, 10 points more than four years ago – and depolarized within the self-defined pro-independence and pro-constitution blocs. These changes are perfectly illustrated by the rise of the PSC and ERC's overtaking of JxCat. The blocs are no longer headed by Cs and JxCat but by the PSC and ERC, left-wing parties that are also more inclined to reach agreements with parties from the other bloc. Regarding the balance of power between pro-independence and pro-constitution parties, minor seat count changes translate into a substantial one. For the first time, pro-independence parties enjoy an electoral plurality: ERC, JxCat, CUP and PDeCat have a combined 50.7 per cent of the vote, up from 48.1 and 47.7 per cent in 2015 and 2017.

These electoral changes result in Catalonia's most fragmented parliament since 1980. Eight parties have gained representation and none of them have surpassed the threshold of 25 per cent of the vote – again, unprecedented. The Catalan party system is now composed of three large parties (PSC, ERC and JxCat) coexisting with five small ones that do not reach either 10 per cent of votes or 10 per cent of MPs.

Such a fragmented landscape makes only two majorities plausible: a coalition of pro-independence parties (ERC, JxCat and CUP) or a re-edition of the left-wing three-party government that ruled Catalonia between 2003 and 2010 (PSC, ERC and ECP). Both coalitions have 74 seats, exceeding by six the necessary majority of 68 out of 135 MPs. However, only the pro-independence coalition seems possible. The political polarization over the territorial issue in recent years, plus the political competition within each of the blocs, makes agreements between pro-independence and pro-constitution parties unlikely in the short-term. A pro-independence government (with or without a majority) seems to be the main alternative to avoid a snap election.

Electoral changes

The electoral change in these elections has been very marked. Aggregate volatility is 20.9 per cent, which means that at least one in five Catalans has changed their vote. If we add to the equation the demobilized voters in these elections, the level of change is much higher.

The aggregate and relative changes in support for each party are shown in Figure **a**. The combined effect of the pandemic and the lower saliency of the elections has resulted in one and a half million less votes than in 2017. Logically, this has meant that all parties have lost support

in absolute terms, except for the PSC and Vox, a new party that did not participate in the elections four years ago. In relative terms, the biggest fall is that of Cs, which has lost 86 per cent of the votes harvested four years ago. The rest of the parties are moving at similar levels of relative losses, between 36 and 40 per cent of their votes in 2017.

In order to find out how the electoral transfers may have worked with respect to the previous election before post-electoral studies are available, I analyse in Figure **b** the changes registered in the more than 5,000 wards in which the elections in Catalonia are organized. Specifically, I will describe the two major quantitative changes: the fall in turnout and the loss of support of Ciudadanos.

Each of the points in Figure **b** represents a ward, while the axes show the difference between the percentage of turnout in 2021 and 2017, and the change in support for pro-independence parties (Figure **b**, left) and pro-constitution parties (Figure **b**, right). The figures suggest that demobilization has mainly harmed the pro-constitution parties: their support has mainly decreased in those sections where turnout has fallen the most.

Figure **c** performs the same exercise but relates the fall in support for Cs's to the change in support of its main competitors. The fall of Cs coincides, on the one hand, with those wards where turnout fall the most, but also with those where Vox and the PSC make their best results, making evident both a pattern of demobilization but also of vote transfer to both right and left parties.
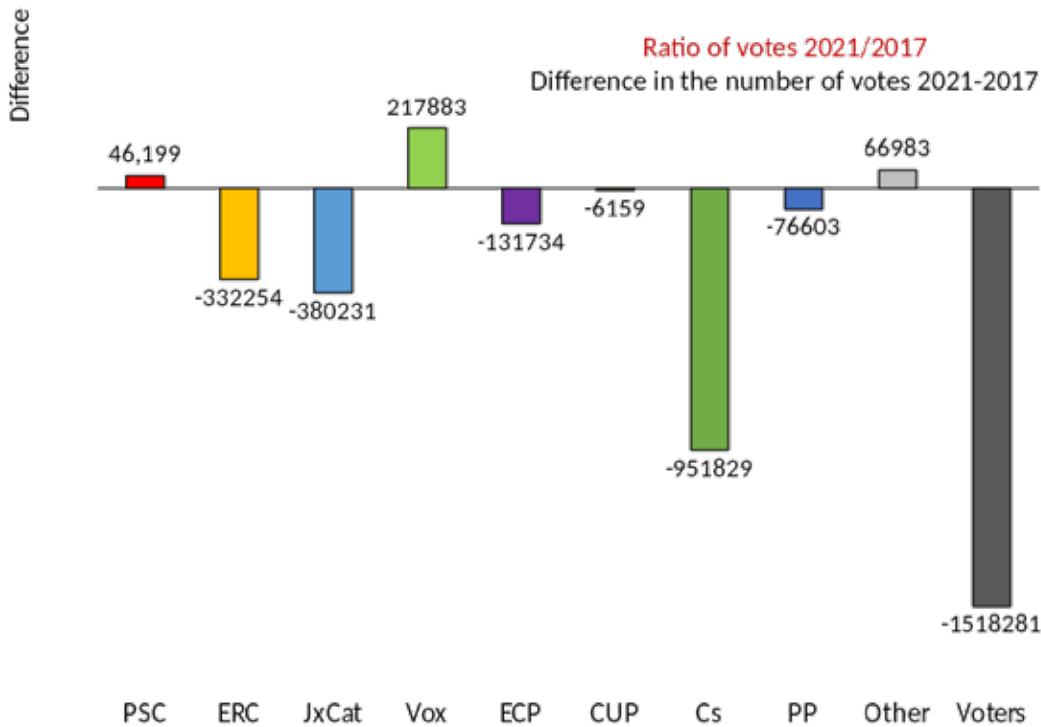
a • Evolution of the number of party votes

b · Correlation between changes in participation and changes in support for independence and union

R2= 0.03

R2= 0.74
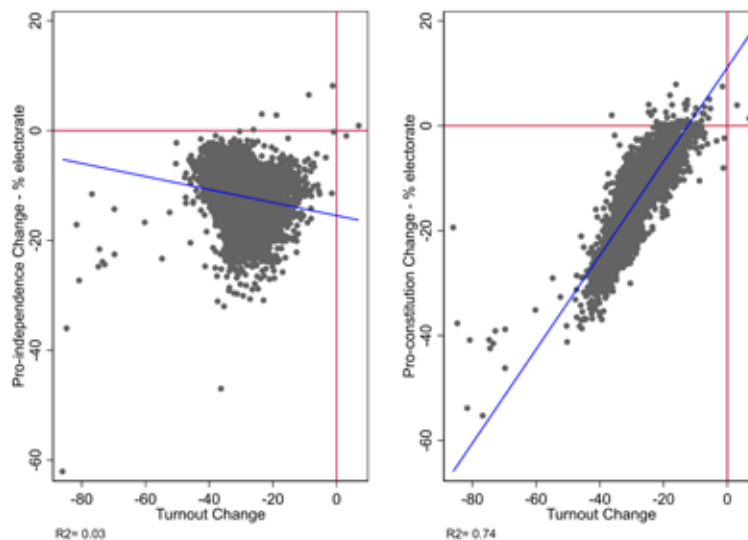
c · Correlation between changes in participation and Cs, PSC and Vox scores

R2= 0.46

R2= 0.65

R2= 0.76
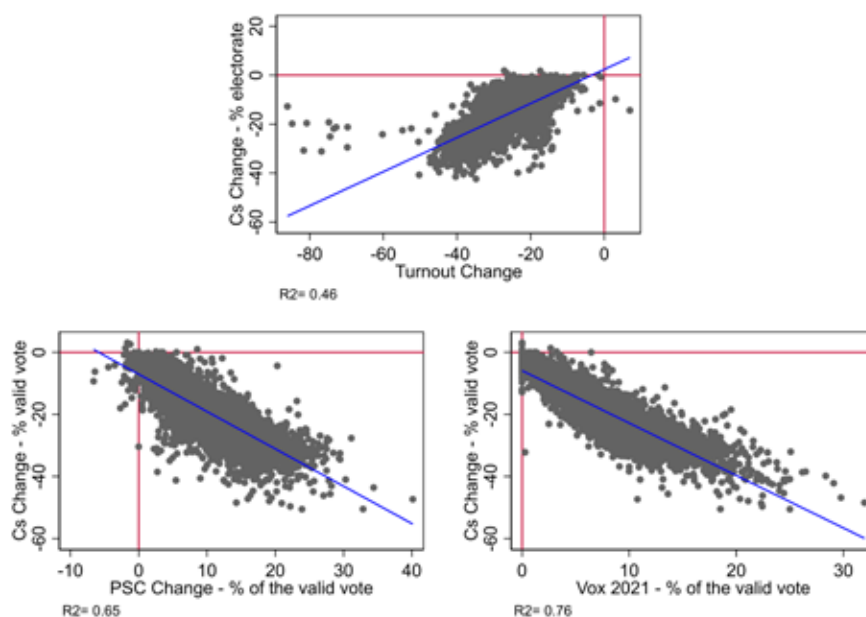
Our coverage of the Catalan election in February 2021 continues on the following pages with an analysis of the geographical trends of the election, offered by Martin Lepič.

Martin Lepič • Univerzita Karlova, Prague

Parliamentary Election in Catalonia, 14 February 2021 (II)

The Catalan parliamentary election of 14 February 2021 have been held in the atmosphere of health concerns associated with the Covid-19 pandemic and a growing socioeconomic anxiety following the prolonged lockdown measures. This added to the ongoing political stalemate which has resulted from eight years of the nationalist pursuit of independence and a legal and repressive reaction of the Spanish state. Taking place several months ahead of the schedule, the snap election was announced following the Supreme Court of Spain's verdict that banned former President de la Generalitat Quim Torra (Junts per Catalunya) from public office.

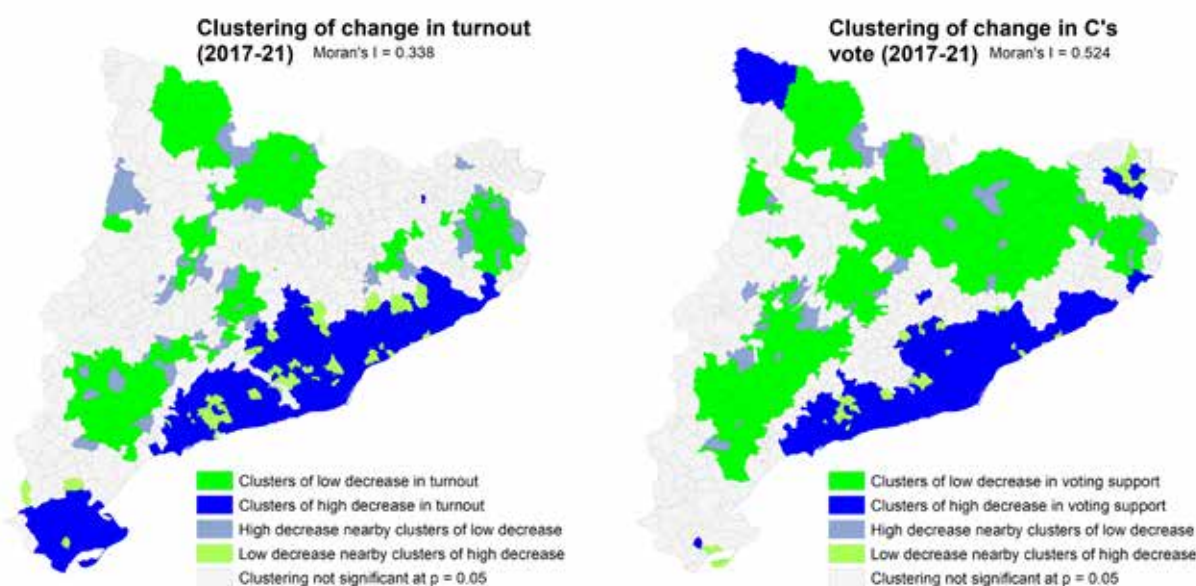Most of the pre-election surveys predicted a sharp drop in electoral participation. Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya (PSC), a regional branch of Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), the senior incumbent party in Spain, was considered a front-runner, all the more as the party nominated popular Salvador Illa, the then health minister of Spain, as a candidate for presidency. On the opposite, parties in favour of secession of Catalonia from Spain aimed to consolidate their incumbency and negotiate a self-determination referendum. There were, however, several disagreements between Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC) and Junts per Catalunya (JxCat), two constitutive parties of the informal pro-independence bloc, on how to achieve their goals. Finally, a reshuffle within the right-wing unionist bloc of parties, which occurred in the 2019 Spanish general elections, was anticipated in Catalonia as well.

Taking the aforementioned context and the overall election results as a point of departure, I aim in this article to investigate important elements of the time-space varia-

a • Spatial patterns of change in turnout and election support for C's by municipalities, 2017–2021

tion in electoral participation and its consequences for the respective parties' outcomes, dynamics of the pro-independence vote and its ethno-cultural and socioeconomic determinants, and trends in party replacement between Ciudadanos (C's) and PSC and Vox.

Recurrence of differential abstentions and pro-independence majority

The drop in electoral participation by 28 percentage points that occurred between 2017 and 2021 was not uniform across the Catalonia's territory. Figure 1a shows sizeable spatial dependence and clustering of high and low values of turnout change among 947 municipalities in Catalonia. It demonstrates that clusters of a sharp decline in participation are located in the metropolitan areas around Barcelona and Tarragona, along the Mediterranean coast, and in southern Catalonia, though with significant local exceptions. A relatively moderate decline in participation was recorded in western Pyrenees, in the countryside around Girona, and in the Priorat district in south-central Catalonia. To a large extent, the introduced spatial pattern corresponds to the varying degrees of decline in election support for C's over this period (Figure **a**, right). Important segments of the former C's voters apparently decided not to participate in the current electoral contest.

Notably, the participation declined most profoundly in areas where it had previously been lower, and to a lesser extent in localities where it was generally high. As a consequence, polarization of the Catalonia's territory in terms of electoral participation have significantly amplified. The Gini and Theil coefficients of variation, for instance, indicate that turnout polarization has increased at least three times between 2017 and 2021.

In terms of impact of this dynamics on the electoral outcome, the areas of a lower participation and recently a sharp decrease in turnout are congruent to those where

the pro-independence parties scored lowest and vice versa. The argument that the participation levels are in an increasing manner higher in areas of a high support for pro-independence parties is reinforced by strengthening of the relationship between these two variables, as illustrated by the graphs in Figure **b**. A steep rise in turnout polarization brought about the percentage rise of the pro-independence vote in Catalonia beyond the symbolically important 50 percent threshold. In this context, it was not a societal diffusion of Catalan nationalist affiliations but an electoral mathematics that determined this novel outcome.

The pattern in which people who advocate sub-state nationalist and independence-aimed policies are more enthusiastic about casting their votes in the Catalan parliamentary elections is nothing new in Catalonia. As the political outcome at stake in the regional elections between 2012 and 2017 was of seminal importance, the differential abstentions entirely diminished from Catalan politics. In that period, the urban and industrial areas encompassing Barcelona as well as the Mediterranean coast experienced constant rise in electoral participation. Hereby I suggest that the phenomenon of differential abstentions have occurred again within the anomalous context of the 2021 elections.

Spatial embeddedness of pro-independence allegiances

Although the overall support for pro-independence parties has reached for the first time beyond the 50 percent of votes cast, the spatial distribution of this support remained largely constant. Pearson correlation of the pro-independence vote between 2017 and 2021 was 0.967, which indicates a significant stability of support among municipalities. The only exception was the consequence of a decline in electoral participation around Barcelona and Tarragona, where the secessionist support increased
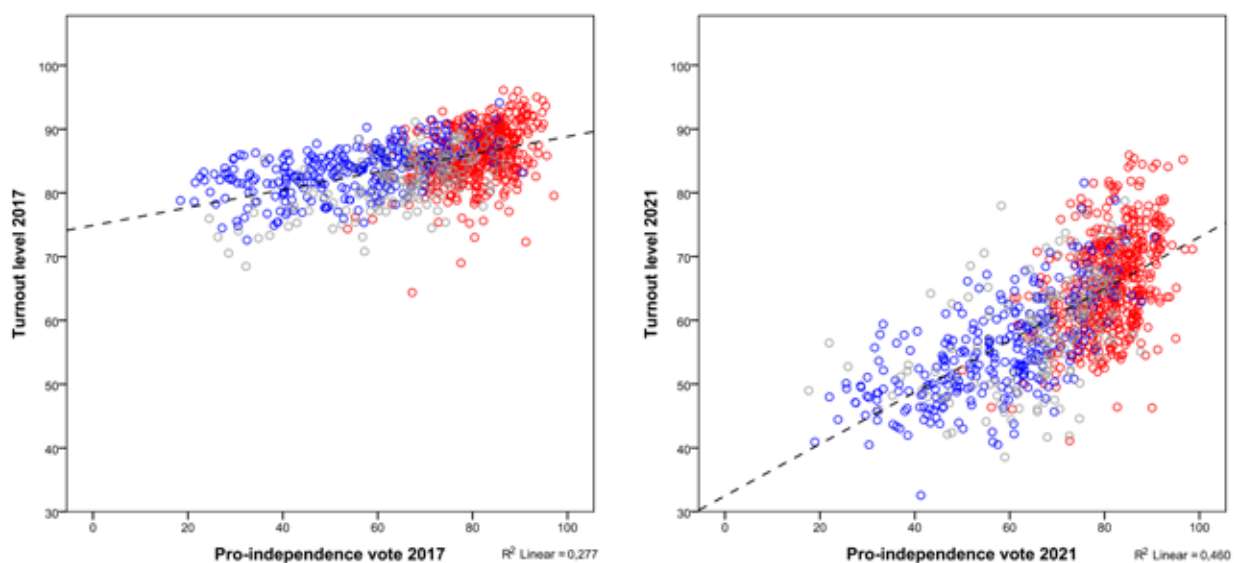
b • Relationship between turnout level and pro-independence vote by municipalities, 2017–2021

precisely because of the differential abstentions (Figure c, left). Altogether, the time-space stability of the pro-independence government backing across Catalonia implies that the performance of the incumbent government was not a decisive factor behind voting in this electoral contest. Territorial allegiances in favour of or against the independence-aimed nationalism in Catalonia are profoundly entrenched and defections are not frequent.

Yet these allegiances, even though resilient to changes, are not uniformly distributed across Catalonia. This is exemplified by the strong degree of clustering of the pro-independence vote in the 2021 regional elections (Figure c, right) as well as by the inversely strong clustering of the vote for pro-unionist parties. Spatial clustering of both respective territorial allegiances was refined in the 2012 realigning elections and remained constant since then. Moreover, spatial polarization of the pro-independence and the pro-unionist vote, which also amplified since 2012, likewise remained unaltered in 2021. There is no doubt that Catalan secessionist nationalism has an important territorial dimension. Its core areas remain in the northern and inland Catalonia, while the unionist core developed in the metropolitan belt around (and not necessarily in) Barcelona, along the Mediterranean coast, in the remote Pyrenean region Val d'Aran, and partially in southern Catalonia. Nevertheless, it has to be stressed that due to its population leverage there are plenty of pro-independence voters in the metropolitan Catalonia as well.

Support for ERC and JxCat distinguished

It may be tempting to understand the present aggregate results as predicative of internal unity within the respective nationalist blocs. This picture will nevertheless erode when analysing the individual parties within each bloc separately. ERC, JxCat, and Candidatura d'Unitat Popular (CUP) diverge not only ideologically and in their respective political strategies but their constituencies

also differ. The two maps in Figure 4 illustrate the differences in spatial patterns of support between ERC and JxCat. While it is possible to conclude that the areas of lower election support are congruent for both parties, the location of respective party strongholds distinguishes between southwestern and northern Catalonia. Correlation diagram in Figure e acknowledges the nonlinear and spatially fragmented relationship between the distribution of ERC's and JxCat's support bases. Interestingly, the distribution of support for far-left nationalist CUP is resembling that of conservative JxCat rather than centre-left ERC, an issue certainly deserving further research.

Ethno-cultural determination of the pro-independence support

Catalan nationalism in general and the current pursuit of independence in particular are frequently labelled as inclusive phenomena. At the same time, many scholars of the Catalan pro-independence movement emphasize a significant dependence of this movement on the ethno-cultural determinants of support. In this analysis, I examined the associations between the percentage of pro-independence vote in a municipality and a share of people born in Spain outside Catalonia in that municipality (Figure f). Pearson correlation of this association reached -0.826 in 2021, a value almost identical to that of 2017, which indicates significant and constant ethnicization of the pro-independence support. This pattern was sustained even when controlling for the effects of socioeconomic and demographic factors in the statistical model. One important consequence of the movement's dependence on the ethno-cultural basis of allegiances is an increased clustering and polarization of the pro-independence vote since its pattern began to resemble the segregated ethno-cultural distribution of population. There are, however, distinctions between the individual pro-independence parties. Ethnicization of support is more profound in the case of JxCat, while the pattern for
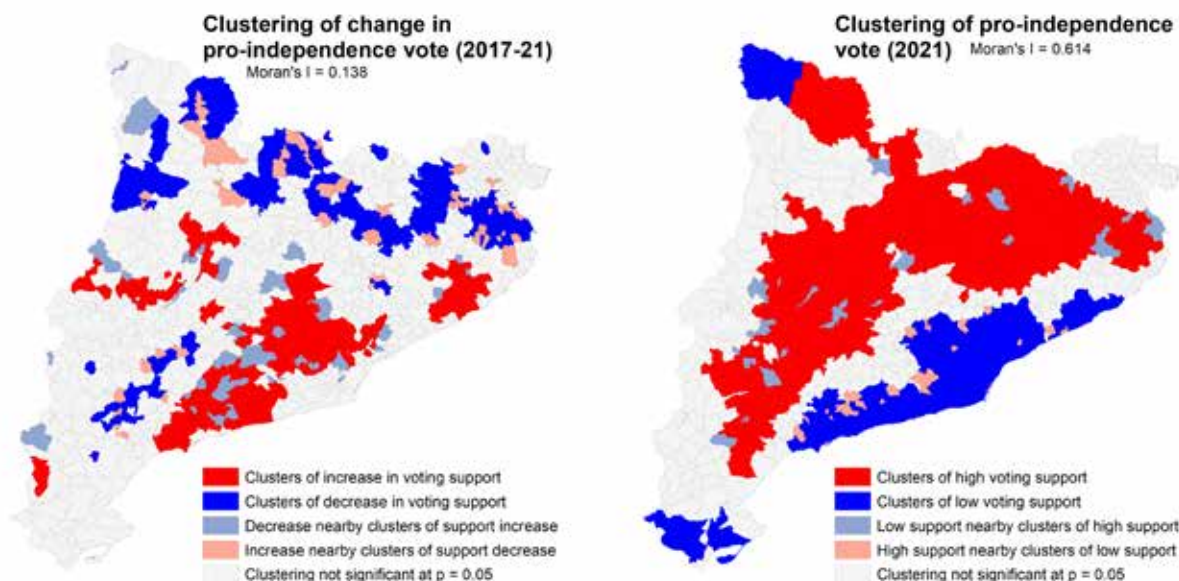
c • Spatial clustering of differences in the pro-independence vote between 2017–2021 and the degree of pro-independence vote in 2021

Clustering of ERC vote (2021)
Moran's I = 0.310

Clustering of JxCat vote (2021)
Moran's I = 0.536

Clusters of high voting support
Clusters of low voting support
Low support nearby clusters of high support
High support nearby clusters of low support
Clustering not significant at p = 0.05
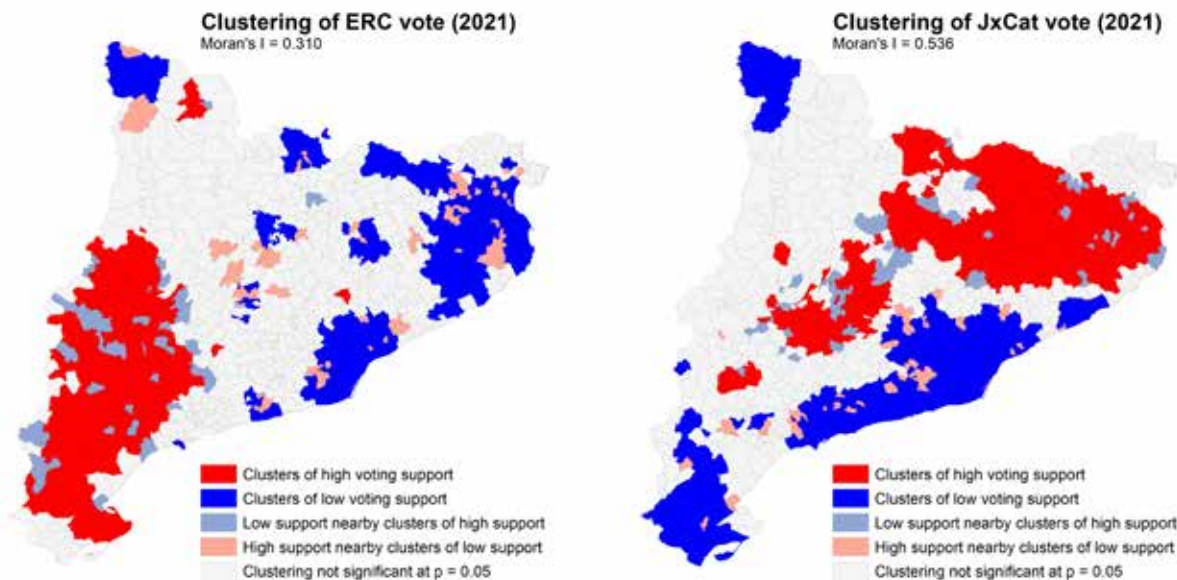
ERC is, again, nonlinear and fragmented in space between northern (red dots) and metropolitan (blue dots) areas of Catalonia. Similar levels of ethnicization, though inverse, can also be observed for the pro-unionist parties.

Collapse of C's and party replacement within the unionist and right-wing blocs

I have already described the association between the decline in electoral participation and the decline of support for C's between 2017-2021. The collapse of C's voting support was, nevertheless, more complex than just an outcome of voters' demobilization. Large parts of the former C's voters switched to PSC and above all to Vox in the 2021 regional elections (Figure **g**). This indication inferred from the ecological analysis is confirmed by the Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió (CEO) survey data, which show significant party replacement from C's to Vox and PSC. The data also demonstrate that the two groups of C's defectors diverge on a wide range territorial (centralization

vs. federalization) and ideological issues (right vs. left), pointing to the heterogeneity and unsustainability of the C's original electorate.

The party replacement by a significant segment of the C's electorate in favour of far-right nativist Vox parallels the development observable in the 2019 general elections in Spain. Strategic shift to the right in C's rhetoric and advocated policies aimed to capture the rise in popularity of Vox, but it most importantly led to the legitimization of far-right demands among a segment of the electorate. In this respect, the emergence of Vox was mainly a result of the restructuring within the right-of-the-centre ideological bloc, not an outcome of the society-wide diffusion of far-right support. Finally, switching of support from C's to PSC added to the sharp decline of right-wing unionist vote in Catalonia, an occurrence not experienced in the rest of Spain.

The question emerging from this development is as follows: does the party replacement from C's to PSC mean a mere searching for the more credible unionist alternative, or was it a substantial change that occurred in favour of the preference for institutional decentralization short of independence among the new PSC voters? While it is obvious from the analysis that significant parts of the Catalan electorate are ideologically and socio-spatially entrenched in favour of either secession of Catalonia from Spain or a preservation of the status quo, there apparently remains a segment of voters who are ambivalent in terms of the territorial question.
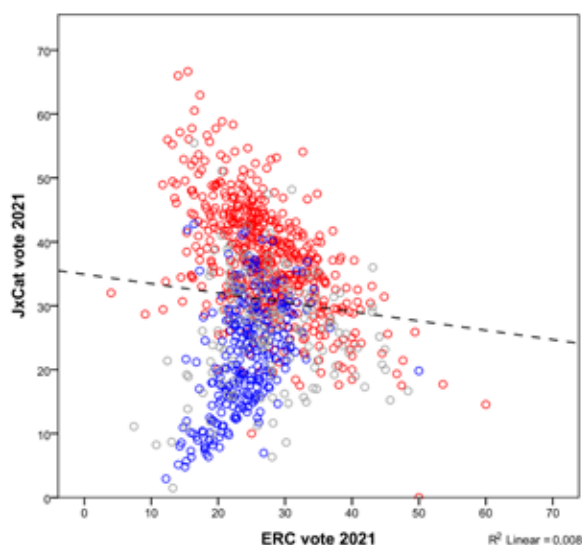
e • Fragmented relationship between the 2021 election support for ERC and JxCat by municipalities

f • Relationship between pro-independence vote and ERC vote, respectively, and share of people born in Spain outside Catalonia by municipalities, 2017–2021
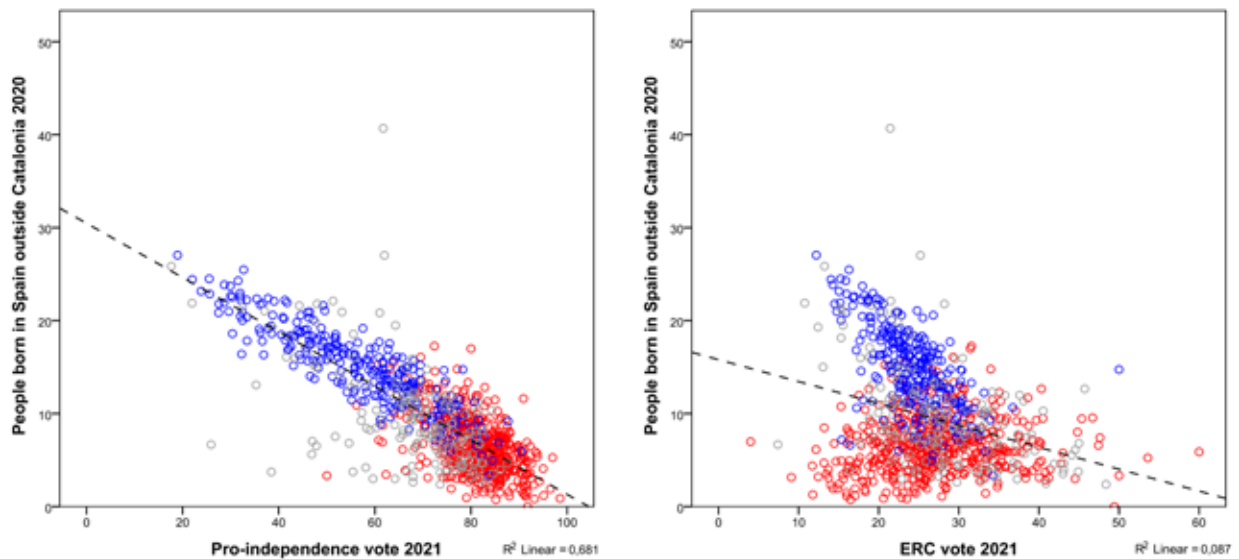
g • Party replacement between C's and Vox and PSC by municipalities, 2017–2021

Party votes

Winning party (2021)

Legend: JxCat, ERC, PSC, CUP-G, PP, VOX

European indicators

Share of votes by EP group

Parlament de Catalunya (2021)

GUE/NGL: ECP-PEC (8), CUP-G (9)
Greens/EFA: ERC (33)
S&D: PSC (33)
RE: Cs (6)
EPP: PP (3)
ECR: VOX (11)
Other: JxCat (32)

Oliver Drewes • Universität Trier
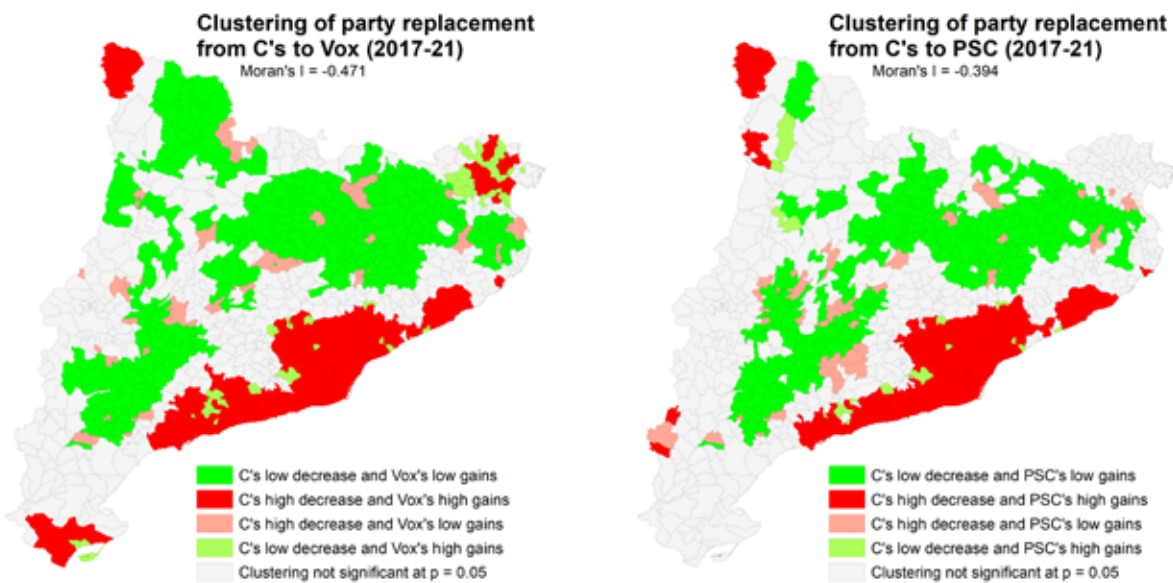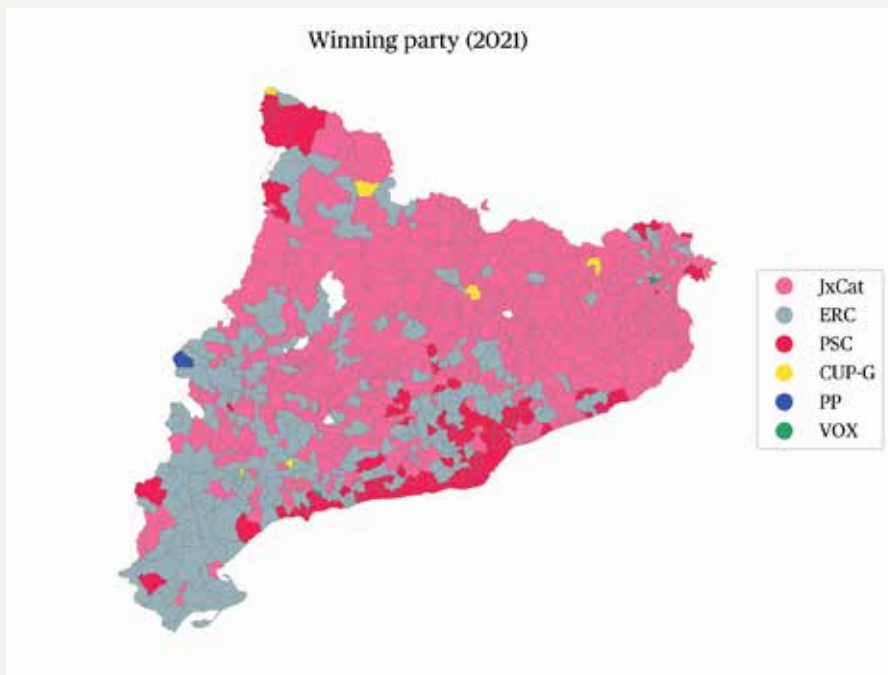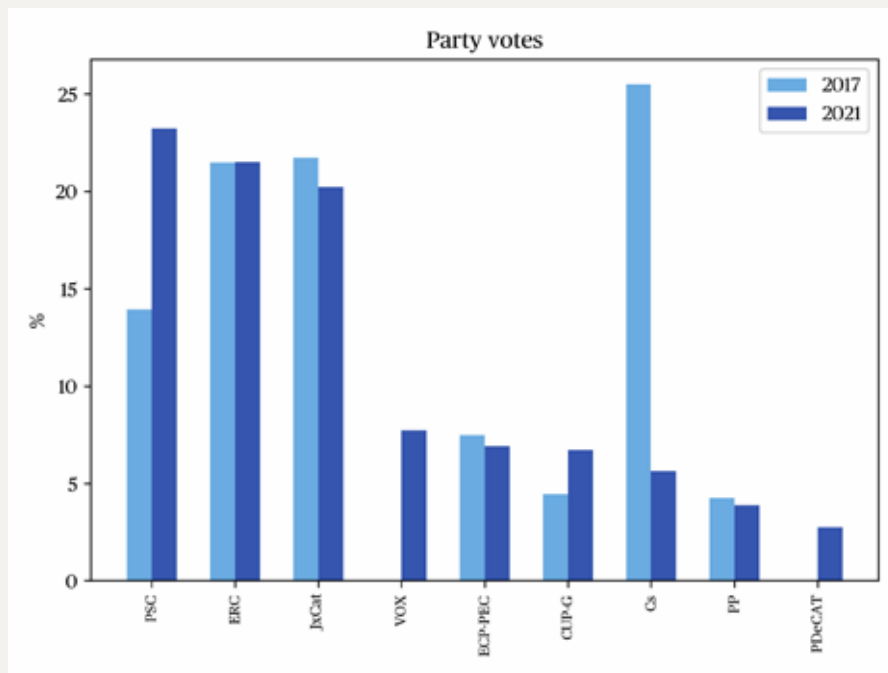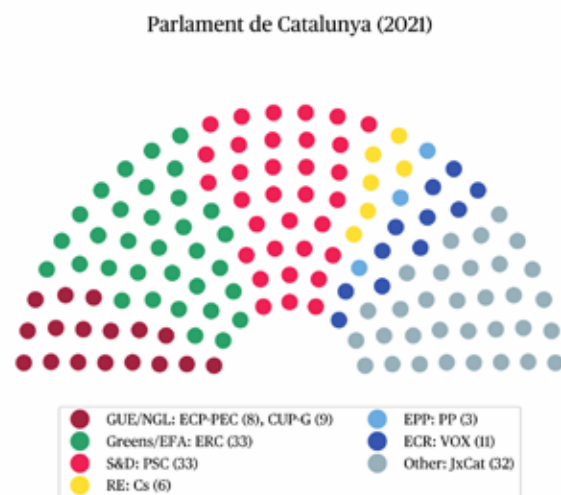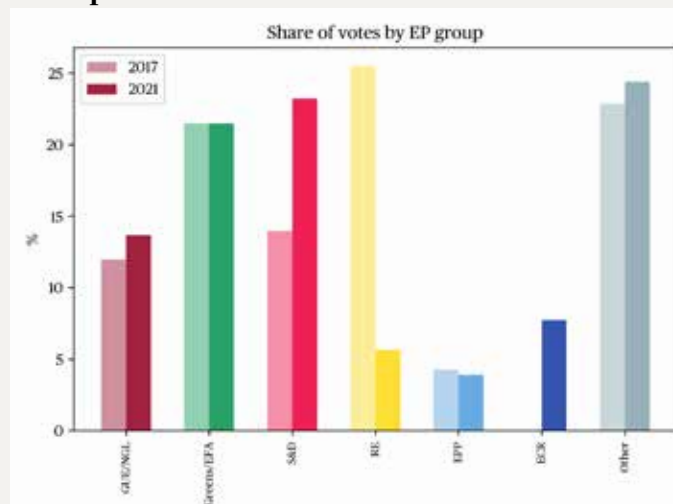
Parliamentary Election in Baden-Württemberg, 14 March 2021

Introduction and context

In 2021, several important elections are due to be held in Germany. Besides the federal election which will take place in September, five state elections will be organised. In this so-called "super election year," the first two regional elections were held in the Western states of Rhineland-Palatinate and Baden-Württemberg. In the months preceding a federal election, state elections are generally regarded as an indicator of nationwide political trends, and their results are watched particularly closely. Therefore, this analysis will also examine electoral outcomes in the perspective of the upcoming federal elections.

In this context, two circumstances deserve special consideration: first, the significance of the third candidacy of incumbent Minister President Winfried Kretschmann (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen; Greens/EFA) and, second, the characteristics of the electoral system in Baden-Württemberg.

Kretschmann has been Minister President since 2011. He first led a Green-Red coalition with the Social Democrats (SPD; S&D) between 2011 and 2016, and then the first Green-Black coalition with the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU; EPP) on state level (2016 to 2021). Kretschmann's high and stable approval ratings played a significant role in the continuation of the Green-Black government, and the strongly personalized campaign somewhat diminished the issue-oriented focus of party competition. At the same time, the Covid-19 pandemic benefited parties in executive roles and leadership positions, as the political focus in moments of crisis is clearly stronger on governing parties than on opposition parties.

Both the approval rating for Kretschmann as Minister President (between 67% and 84% since 2016) and the generally high level of approval of the state government's work (between 60% and 70% for the most part) are re-markably high compared to other German states (Infratest dimap, 2021a). This popularity and degree of approval made it difficult for competing politicians to pose a threat to Kretschmann during the election campaign. In a direct comparison, 65% of the people surveyed would have voted for Kretschmann directly as Minister President shortly before the election, while only 17% would have voted for Susanne Eisenmann, his CDU challenger (ibid.). Comparing the approval rates of the two top candidates, it became clear that Kretschmann was perceived as significantly more likeable and credible and was attributed more expertise (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, 2021a). Based on this large discrepancy, the CDU made a strategic mistake by conducting a personalized election campaign instead of one based on content (Brettschneider, 2021). Furthermore, the election campaign was challenging for the CDU since it had to mobilize against its own coalition partner. The role of junior partner in a coalition typically makes it difficult to attack the larger coalition party leading the government, since the CDU itself bears partial responsibility for the government's performance. The relevance of political actors in Baden-Württemberg as well as their policymaking in this election was highlighted by the fact that 63% of respondents indicated that state politics had been a more important reason for their voting decision than federal politics (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, 2021b). Therefore, in this context, the simultaneous nationwide upswing of the Green Party (INSA, 2021) should not be interpreted too strongly as a factor in this state election – the same applies for the CDU.

In addition to the significance of Kretschmann's popularity ratings, the electoral system in Baden-Württemberg has a particular feature that needs to be noted in order to be able to understand the results: Unlike the standard German election mode with a first and second vote in federal and state elections, which are used to elect direct candidates in the electoral constituency and list positions

on the party list, in Baden-Württemberg only one vote is cast to elect a person nominated by a party (or someone without a party affiliation). Since there are no state party lists, the election with one vote is simultaneously a proportional and a personal election, and each candidate must stand for election in one electoral constituency[1]. Therefore, a differentiated analysis of the popularity of party programs and party politicians is increasingly difficult. This shifts the focus of the analysis towards the performance of individual parties and politicians.

Results and changes in election results

The 2021 state election results showed only minor changes for most parties compared to the 2016 election. The Green Party gained 2.3 pp and the Free Democratic Party (FDP; RE) gained 2.2 pp, thereby seeing itself as the winner of the election. Meanwhile, the CDU lost 2.9 pp, the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD; S&D) 1.7 pp and the Alternative for Germany (AfD; ID) 5.4 pp (see "data" panel). For the AfD in particular, which thus slipped to 9.7% in total, the result represents a bitter setback due to the loss of a third of its voters, who had first elected the party to the state parliament in 2016. While the CDU admitted its electoral defeat due to the lost votes, the AfD had a harder time in this regard, instead pointing to the difficult circumstances of the election campaign. The Left Party (GUE/NGL) was able to increase slightly by 0.7 pp to a total of 3.6%, but once again missed entry into state parliament (five-percent hurdle). The Free Voters (RE) were also able to gain 2.9 pp, but with 3% of the votes in total they also missed the five-percent hurdle required for entry into the state parliament. In the run-up to the election, the Climate List Baden-Württemberg had attracted attention, promoting a more comprehensive and intensive climate policy than the Green Party. Although the Climate List only received 0.9% of the votes, these votes are mainly to the disadvantage of the Greens, whose potential to win mandates was thereby diminished, albeit to a small extent.

1. See Constitution of the State of Baden-Württemberg, Art. 28, Section 1.

Compared to the 2016 election, voter turnout fell from 70.4% to 63.8% equivalent to 4,894,500 votes (Statistisches Landesamt Baden-Württemberg, 2021). The lower participation has a negative impact on the AfD in particular, as around 16.6% (equivalent to around 135,000 votes) of its 2016 voters did not turn out to vote in this election year, meanwhile the party was hardly able to gain any new voters (Intratest-dimap, 2021b). Likewise, 165,000 voters of the CDU abstained. Meanwhile the party also lost 145,000 voters to the Green Party, who was able to improve its result by gaining votes mainly from the CDU, the non-voters (105,000), the SPD (115,000) and new voters (90,000) (ibid.).

Performing a principal component analysis of voting behaviour at the municipal level, we can identify groups of municipalities whose voting behavior deviates from the average result. This allows, in particular, for a more detailed analysis of the electoral dynamics of centre-left parties. Most of the deviations (56%) from the average result can be attributed to an increase in Green and SPD votes in mainly urban areas, accompanied by a decrease in CDU and AfD votes (Figure **a**). In contrast, another 20% of the deviations, especially in the rural northern part of the country, are attributable to an increase in votes for the AfD, SPD and FDP and a decrease in votes for the Greens and CDU (Figure **b**).

Trends in content

A substantive assessment of the state elections must take into account the current context of the Covid-19 pandemic. The crisis, which led to considerable restrictions in public life and in the exercise of fundamental rights while also causing existential concerns among the population, overshadowed other unrelated issues. However, this did not mean that the election campaign revolved exclusively around the fight against the pandemic. Still, the crisis meant that political attention was focused on pandemic control and thus on the state government or, more specifically, on Minister President Kretschmann. At the same time, challenger parties found it difficult to run their campaign, as they were receiving less media attention and were hardly able to conduct classic election campaigns
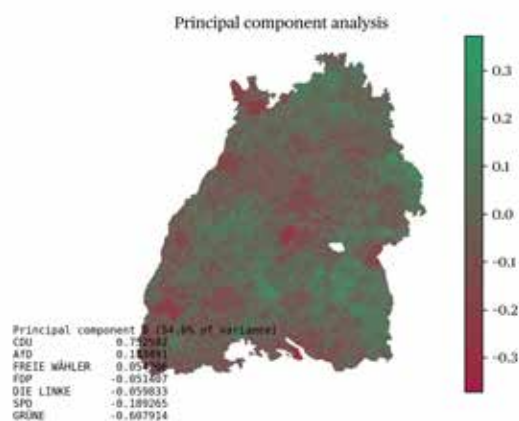
a · Principal component analysis of the 2021 vote: first eigenvector
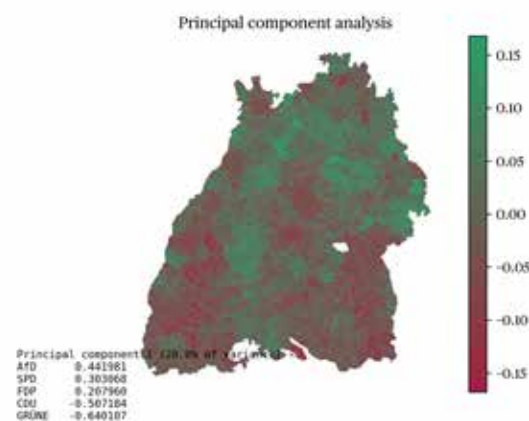
b · Principal component analysis of the 2021 vote: second eigenvector

with analogue events, citizens' dialogues, etc. The strong focus on the crisis management of the state government and the relatively few opportunities for conventional campaigning make it difficult to assess citizens' political priorities, as far as issues aside from the Covid-19 pandemic are concerned.

When assessing the topics that were perceived as most important independently of the pandemic, it is striking that environment and climate w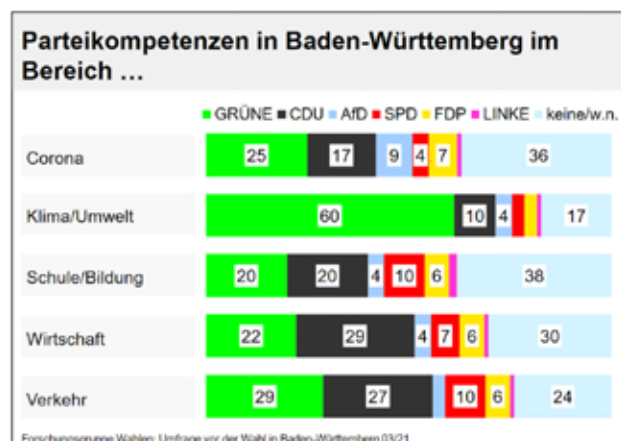ere assigned a comparably high priority (19%) alongside with economics (22%) (Infratest-dimap 2021c). Hence, the pandemic did not significantly distract attention from the longer-term issue of climate change. The third most important topic was social justice (16%), followed by education and schooling (15%) (ibid.). The fact that Kretschmann's government managed to deal with these and other issues satisfactorily probably stems from his largely non-ideological and pragmatic style of government and his image of proximity to citizens, rather unusual for a Green Party politician.

An indication that the CDU could regain strength stems from the citizens' evaluation of the expertise of the respective parties in various policy domains. Although other factors than the mere evaluation of capabilities determine a party's chances of success, the recognition of expertise in as many policy areas as possible is a necessary condition for electoral success, making it an indicator worth considering. For example, the CDU in Baden-Württemberg is being attributed similar expertise as the Greens in the important policy fields of education, economics and transport, as well as in the currently particularly relevant Covid policy. They are attributed a somewhat higher expertise in the area of economic policy (Figure **d**, Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, 2021b). The Greens are only perceived as significantly more competent in the field of environmental and climate policy, which shows that the CDU has the chance to win back trust and support in a majority of policy fields – at least as long as these policy fields do not continue to be overshadowed by environmental and climate policy, which currently enjoys a high priority in society.

Geographical trends

When comparing the election results in the consti-

c • Evaluation of party capabilities in Baden-Württemberg
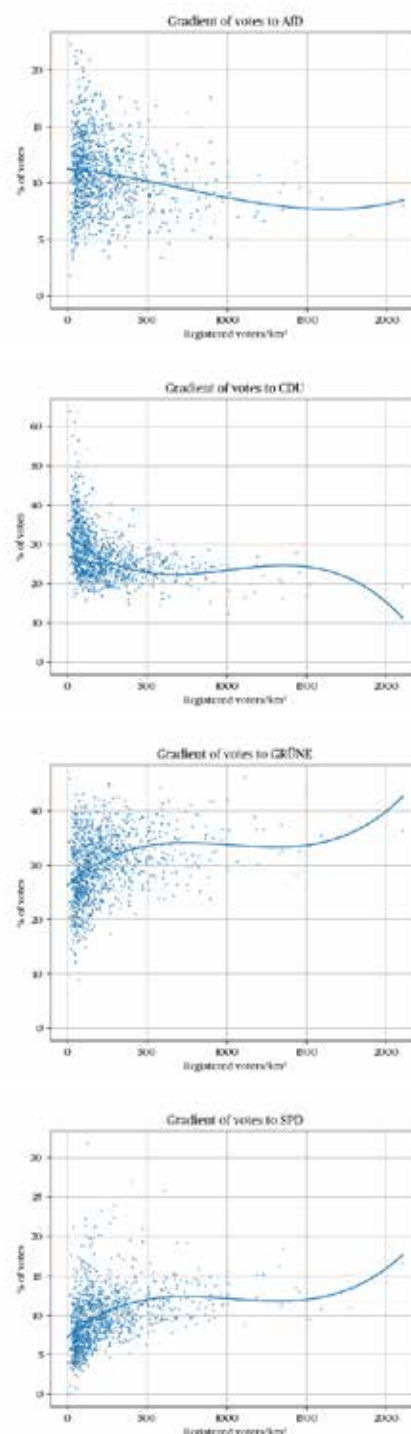
tuencies, several findings stand out. The fact that the AfD finds less support in urban areas than in rural regions is also reflected in this state election, as is the fact that it can generate the least support in university towns. This finding is not surprising, but in comparison to the CDU, which is also less successful in urban areas than in rural ones, it is apparent that the difference in success between rural and urban areas is greater for the CDU than for the AfD (Figures **d-e**). While the CDU and the AfD are the only parties to show a (slight) decrease in approval ratings between rural and urban areas, the Greens and the SPD show an upward trend (Figures **f-g**). The Left Party also shows an upward trend, but at such a low level that

it still failed to enter the Landtag. The FDP, on the other hand, is voted with largely equal frequency in rural and urban areas.

Although there is a tendency for the Greens to gain support in urban areas (especially university towns), the spread is quite wide. A closer examination of constituency results shows that the Greens achieved particularly high approval ratings in all urban constituencies, but also, to a large extent, in the rural areas of South-West Baden-Württemberg near the borders with France and Switzerland (Figure **h**). While this state election confirms that the Greens are strongest in urban regions, it also shows that they are quite capable of conquering rural regions – an indication that should not be forgotten in the perspective of the upcoming federal election.

The CDU, which had been the party of the Minister President since 1953 before the Greens took over the state government ten years ago, is still the Greens' biggest competitor. Despite the stable strength of the Greens, the CDU can rely on their success in many larger constituencies, as well as stably strong results in the Eastern and North-Eastern constituencies bordering Bavaria (Figure **i**). The Greens won 58 and the CDU 12 of the 70 constituencies. The fact that the SPD was able to win individual municipalities, but no constituencies, is generally explained by the lack of a unionised working-class milieu in the region (Debus, 2017:20). This explanation in terms of missing socio-structural premises is theoretically based on a micro-sociological approach to electoral behavior.

Coalition-building

While experts were assessing the possible coalitions in the run-up to the election, speculation arose about the possibility of a coalition of Greens and SPD. The SPD is politically and ideologically more closely aligned with the Greens than the CDU, and seemed to be able to profit from a progressive cooperation. However, the election outcome gave a coalition of Greens and SPD exactly 50% of the seats – the one seat missing to attain a majority eventually thwarted this possibility (see "data" panel). Thus, the only remaining options were a continuation of the Green-Black coalition or a "Traffic-Light" alliance between Greens, SPD and FDP, a combination never experienced before in Baden-Württemberg. In the run-up to the election, Kretschmann did not specify with whom he would prefer to form a government. The FDP, like the SPD, was open to such a coalition. After an controversial internal debate, the Greens eventually decided to govern with the Conservatives. As "Green-Black" had been able to govern in a stable and smooth manner during the past four years, this decision was not unexpected. In a pre-election survey, 44% of respondents expressed a positive opinion about this coalition model, while 33% disapproved it. In contrast, the "Traffic-Light" coalition was view negatively by 51%, and positively by only 28% (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, 2021b).

Looking at the new Green-Black coalition from a theoretical perspective, coalition theory suggests four factors explaining the outcome of the government formation process:

1. electoral results and number of seats (for the purpose of office-seeking)[2];
2. substantive political positioning[3];
3. institutional and contextual factors[4];
4. negative or positive statements by the parties about possible coalitions[5].

The first factor comes into play in the explanation of the continued coalition, as the formation of a government of two parties instead of three allows for the possibility of maximising their holding of political offices. The second factor points to the fact that party forming coalitions try to compromise as little as possible in terms of content. In this respect, the coalition of the Greens with the CDU does not appear as a natural choice, but the rifts were already bridged by the previous coalition of the two parties, so that this factor plays a lesser role in the continuation of the government. This is expressed, for example, in the Greens' statement that climate protection policies would be easier to pursue with the CDU than through a "Traffic-Light" coalition. The context of shared government ex-

2. See a typical example of this in van Deemen (1989).

3. See Laver (1996), p. 261 sqq.

4. See Martin, Stevenson (2021).

5. See Debus (2009).
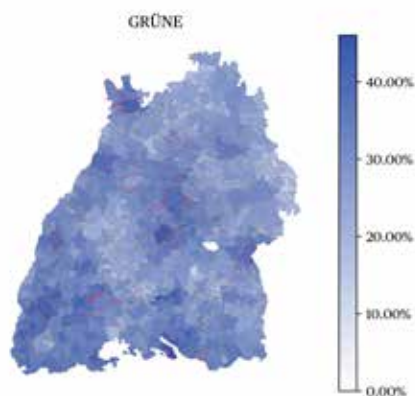
h • Green scores by municipality
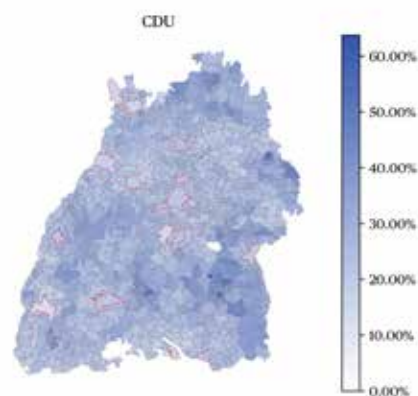
i • CDU scores by municipality

perience and its well-rehearsed functioning correspond to the third factor that explains this coalition formation. A contextual factor to consider at this point is the fact that the Greens emerged as the winners of the election and the CDU as the losers, which reinforced the hierarchy between the two partners within the coalition. In a "Traffic-Light" coalition, the position of the Greens as a coalition leader would have been much less dominant : the FDP, as the second preceived election winner, would have been likely to make strong political demands, which would have highlighted the greater ideological divide between the parties. Finally, the absence of significant conflicts between the Greens and the CDU during the campaign reflects the fourth factor ; this constructive approach of the parties already indicated that a continuation of the coalition was not only possible but also probable.

Impact of the election on federal politics and the federal election in September 2021

Regional political events and dynamics are relevant for federal politics in two respects. On the one hand, Lande elections reflect to a certain extent the political climate of federal politics and give an idea of prevailing tendencies, while on the other hand, the state level can serve as an experimentation ground for coalition options at the federal level (Eith, 2008:118). The latter is relevant in the context of the upcoming federal election, as the Green-Black government in Baden-Württemberg and the Black-Green government in Hesse can be seen as models of a future coalition between the Greens and the CDU in the federal government. Even if other coalition options are possible, the experiences from Baden-Württemberg and Hesse will play a role for the Greens and the CDU.

The good performance of the Greens in Baden-Württemberg, the third largest state of Germany (both in terms of area and population), puts the party in a good starting position at the beginning of this "super election year." While the party is unlikely to reach similar levels at the federal level, the result nevertheless has a certain appeal that should give the Greens momentum in the federal election campaign. One major difference between the Green electorate in Baden-Württemberg and its nationwide counterpart is generational: the age structure of Green voters in Baden-Württemberg is almost balanced, whereas, in Germany as a whole, it is mainly younger age groups who increasingly vote Green (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, 2021b:2 ; Infratest dimap, 2019). In this respect, the support potential of older age groups in Baden-Württemberg cannot be compared to that of the same age groups at the federal level. On the other hand, the two leading candidates of the Greens at the regional and federal levels respectively, Winfried Kretschmann and Annalena Baerbock (who is also candidate for chancellor), have different appeal to the electorate. While Kretschmann advertised continuity ("You know me"), while Baerbock focuses on transformation and change. As a much younger candidate, she also stands for a more dynamic style of

politics than Kretschmann. Baerbock could benefit from this difference, however, if she succeeds in combining her transformative political demands with references to the stability of the Green state government of Baden-Württemberg and the economic prosperity of the Green-led state (Statistisches Landesamt Baden-Württemberg, 2020). She could thus alleviate the scepticism of more conservative voters towards her.

While the election result provide momentum to the Greens' platform, it also represents the first obstacle in the CDU's federal election campaign, which, with its relatively weak performance, did not start the year on a promising note. However, the CDU's result must also be contextualised, taking into account the discontent with the federal government's crisis management at the time of the election. Likewise, the corruption scandals revolving around some CDU members of the Bundestag, who came under heavy criticism with – at the very least – morally reprehensible deals involving medical equipment, questionable secondary revenues and deals with Azerbaijan, will have weighed somewhat on the CDU in Baden-Württemberg towards the end of the election campaign.

The AfD started the super-election year with harsh losses in one of its few strong regions in western Germany. This reflects its current difficulties in parliament. Not only had the AfD in Baden-Württemberg attracted attention since 2016 because of internal disputes over substantive orientations : conflicts are also becoming increasingly prominent in the federal party. In its first term in the Baden-Württemberg state parliament, the AfD parliamentary group struggled with resignations, scandals over donations and expulsions. This could well explain its poor regional performance. It also indicates the main challenges that the AfD will face in the upcoming federal election campaign. However, despite its many recent difficulties, a certain core constituency of AfD voters seems to have emerged that remains largely loyal to the party regardless of the context (Politico, 2021). While in Baden-Württemberg this electorate only reaches moderate proportions, the AfD can rely on a significantly larger voter base in Eastern German Länder, which gives the party significant weight in government formation processes despite the refusal of all other parties to form of a coalition with them.

For the FDP and the Left, Baden-Württemberg hardly has any significant federal implications, as the Left was unlikely to win seats in the region and the FDP's position has not changed compared to 2017, which can be attributed to the party's mostly insignificant performance at the state level.

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43

Party votes

Winning party (2021)

Indicateurs européens

Share of votes by EP group

Landtag von Baden-Württemberg (2021)

Marius Minas • Universität Trier
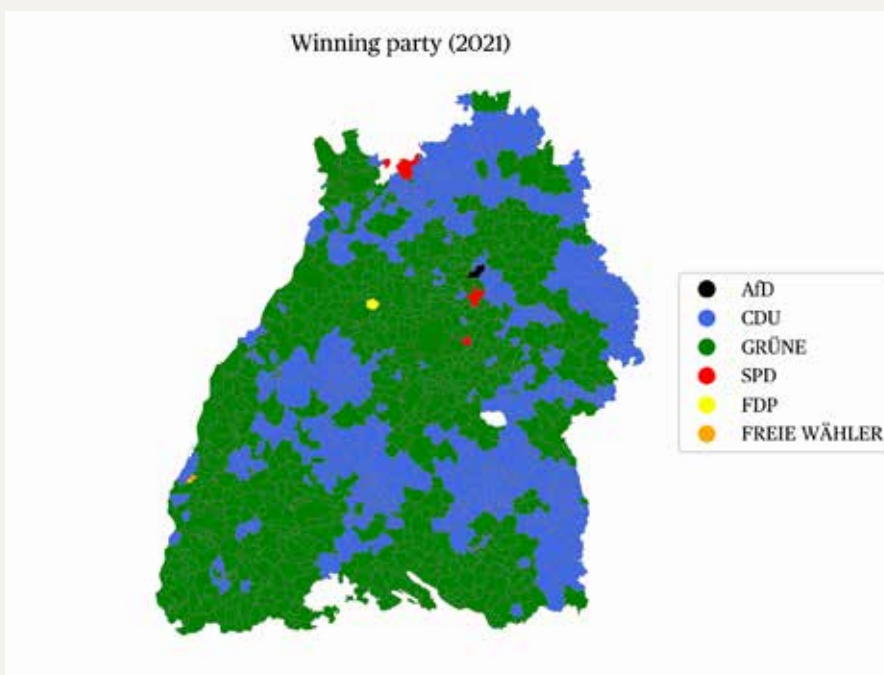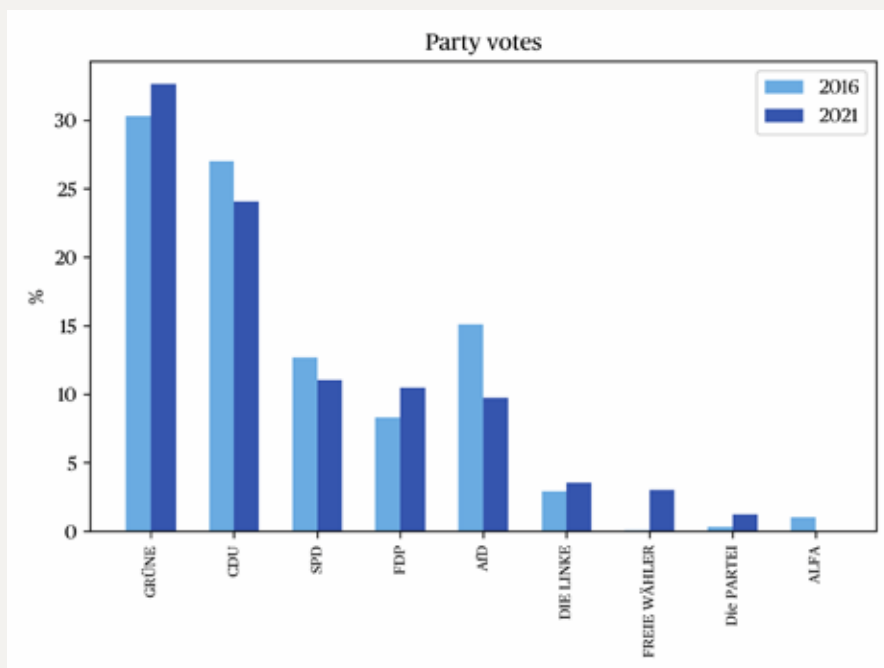
Parliamentary Election in Rhineland-Palatinate, 14 March 2021

Voting in 2021

On 14 March 2021, the so-called "super election year" kicked off in Germany. On that Sunday, the citizens of Rhineland-Palatinate and Baden-Württemberg elected their representatives in their respective state parliaments – Saxony-Anhalt, Berlin and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania will follow later in the year. Likewise, the election for the 20th German Bundestag will take place on 26 September 2021. These six different elections at the state and federal levels – plus local elections – are of great importance for the political landscape in Germany. Moreover, in the German multi-level system, elections influence each other (Jun et Cronqvist, 2020:305; Detterbeck et Renzsch, 2008 ; Burkhart, 2007). The elections in Rhineland-Palatinate and Baden-Württemberg could thus be seen not only as a chronological prelude, but also as an indicator of political trends in this "super election year."

The Corona pandemic is a distinctive feature of 2021, which has affected the whole election process (Leininger et Wagner, 2021). On the one hand, from an organisational point of view, hygiene concepts and regulations for the polling stations have to be developed, implemented and supervised; additional postal votes need to be made available. On the other hand, the debate about the pandemic occupies a large part of the political discourse. The parties' attitudes towards Covid policies add to – and sometimes even overshadow – the traditional content of election programmes. Representatives of the governing parties in the federal and state governments receive (even) more media scrutiny as the crisis management is managed in an increasingly executive manner.
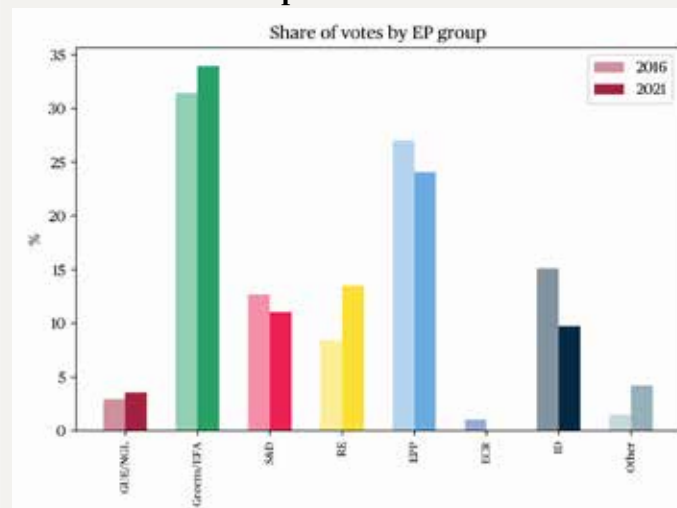
Meanwhile, the traditional (analogue) election campaign on the ground is severely limited. The resulting unequal distribution of media presence of the candidates and their parties favors officeholders, whose visibility significantly increases – a non-negligible advantage in the election campaign. On a programmatic level, the population tends to place more trust in incumbent politicians in times of crisis, possibly because of a "rally-around-the-flag" effect. According to Mueller, this effect is particularly noticeable in the wake of global and dramatic events, which attract the public's attention towards public officials (Leininger et Wagner, 2021 ; Mueller, 1970). This is undoubtedly the case with the Covid-19 pandemic.

The increased number of postal ballots also changes contextual factors as defined by the Michigan model frequently used in electoral research. Those without a stable party identification decide only shortly before election day for which party they will vote. Thus, news coverage in the preceding weeks strongly influence the voting decision. However, with postal votes, the period between submitting the ballot and the actual election day is barely, and sometimes not at all, reflected in the voting decision. This has been the case with this year's "mask affair" involving CDU/CSU MPs in the Bundestag.

The results of the 2021 Rhineland-Palatinate state election in perspective

In 2021, 101 members of parliament were elected in 52 constituencies in Rhineland-Palatinate by means of personalised proportional representation. With a first vote, citizens elected a constituency MP in their respective constituencies using a first-past-the-post system. However, the exact number of MP seats won by each party is eventually determined in proportion to second vote results, with seats being distributed only among parties which have obtained at least five per cent of second votes (a system known as the "five per cent clause"). After deducting the seats that the parties are entitled to through winning constituencies (first vote), the remaining representatives are chosen from state or district lists submitted before

the election[1].

Voter turnout in 2021 was 64.3% (2016: 70.4%), of which the proportion of postal voters represented almost two-thirds (2016: approx. 31%).

As can be seen in the graphics in the "data" panel, the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD; S&D) emerged as the winner, contrary to the poll results in the months before the election[2]. With 35.7% of the state votes and 32.2% of the constituency votes, the party won 39 of the 101 seats, 28 of which were direct mandates. The Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU; EPP), which was just ahead of the SPD in the aforementioned pre-election polls, won 27.7% of the state votes and 31.4% of the constituency votes on election day – its worst result ever at a state election in Rhineland-Palatinate. The party obtained only 31 seats in the state parliament, 23 of which were direct mandates. Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (The Greens; Greens/EFA) become the third strongest force in parliament with 9.3% of the state vote, 10.9% of the constituency vote, and will thus have ten seats (one direct mandate). The Alternative for Germany (AfD; ID) won 8.3% of the state vote and 7.6% of the constituency vote, which amounts to nine seats in parliament. The third governing party (alongside the SPD and the Greens), the Free Democratic Party (FDP; RE), also re-enters parliament with six seats, having received 5.5% of the state vote and 6% of the constituency vote. The Free Voters Party (FW; RE) is a newcomer. Having received 5.4% of the state vote and 7.5% of the constituency vote, the party will have six seats in parliament. Finally, the Left Party (GUE/NGL)[3], the Animal Welfare Party (Tierschutzpartei)[4], The Party (Die Partei)[5], Volt (Greens/EFA)[6] and other parties[7] failed to reach the five per cent threshold.

Compared to the 2016 state election, two of the six parties represented in the new state parliament improved their results in terms of state votes. The Greens increased their share by 4.0 and the Free Voters by 3.2 percentage points. The other four parties saw their share of the state vote decline. While the losses of the two remaining governing parties, SPD (-0.5%) and FDP (-0.7%), are comparatively small, the two opposition parties recorded heavier losses: CDU (-4.1%); AfD (-4.3%).

Explanatory factors according to the Michigan model

In 2020, Jun and Cronqvist described party competition on Rhineland-Palatinate as a case of "moderate pluralism" (Jun et Cronqvist, 2020:306 sqq.), with the SPD and CDU dominating the political scene. The two parties see themselves as the "main competitors for voters' favour", (ibid.: 305) thus making it comparatively more difficult for smaller parties to assert themselves in Rhineland-Palatinate than at the national level. Even the voter bases of the Greens and FDP – which served in the state government prior to the election – are unstable, meaning that both formations have had to gain experience in the extra-parliamentary opposition (ibid.: 306). Other small parties succeeded in entering the Landtag only in isolated cases: the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) in 1947; the German Reich Party (DRP) in 1959; the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) in 1967 and the AfD in 2016.

The 2021 election represents a caesura in this respect because the AfD, in spite of its losses, was able to reconfirm its presence in the state parliament. On the other hand, with the Free Voters entering parliament, the number of parties represented in the regional assembly increased from five to six for the first time in history. The spectrum previously ranged from two to five parties. While the dominance of the two major parties and moderate pluralism will remain after the 2021 election, parliamentary fragmentation, segmentation, and pluralisation are visibly increasing.

According to the Michigan model, which is well established in electoral sociology, it is above all the factors of identification, issues and candidates that determine voter behaviour. The post-election survey for the 2021 state election run by Infratest dimap shows interesting findings in this regard (John, 2021:11). Particularly SPD, Greens and CDU voters opted for their parties out of conviction. Compared to other parties, the CDU and FDP benefited from a strong party identification of the electorate: 30% of CDU voters and 21% of FDP voters gave party loyalty as the reason for their voting decision[8]. Voters for the Greens (72%) and the AfD (71%) were the most issue-oriented, but the Free Voters (64%) and the FDP (63%) were also able to convince voters through content[9]. According to the electorate, the decisive content-related issues in this election related to the following topics: social security (22%), economy (20%), education (17%), environment/climate (16%), COVID pandemic (12%), crime/internal security (8%) and immigration (5%) (John, 2021:11).

In the voters' assessment of party competence, the SPD has an advantage over its main competitor, the CDU. The SPD is ahead of the CDU in dealing with the pandemic and in the areas of social justice, schools/education and the economy. The SPD also scores better than the CDU on climate protection but lags far behind the Greens here.

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1. More information on the specific features of the Rhineland-Palatinate electoral system can be found on the website of the Landtag in Rhineland-Palatinate.

2. Sonntagsfrage, February 2021 : CDU 31%, SPD 30% (Infratest Dimap, 2021b) ; January 2021 : CDU 33%, SPD 28% (Infratest Dimap, 2021a) ; December 2020 : CDU 34%, SPD 28% (Infratest Dimap 2020).

3. 2.5% of the vote at state level and 2.8% at constituency level.

4. 1.7% of votes at state level, no direct candidates.

5. 1.1% of the vote at state level and 0.4% at constituency level.

6. 1.0% of the vote at state level and 0.1% at constituency level.

7. Other candidate parties, individuals or voter communities with less than 1% of the votes at state and constituency level: Pirates (Greens/EFA), ödp (Greens/EFA), Klimaliste, Basisdemokratie, Dr. Moritz, SIGGI WÄHLEN.

8. Greens : 18%, SPD : 15%, AfD : 12%, Free Voters : 10%.

9. CDU : 44%, SPD : 31%.
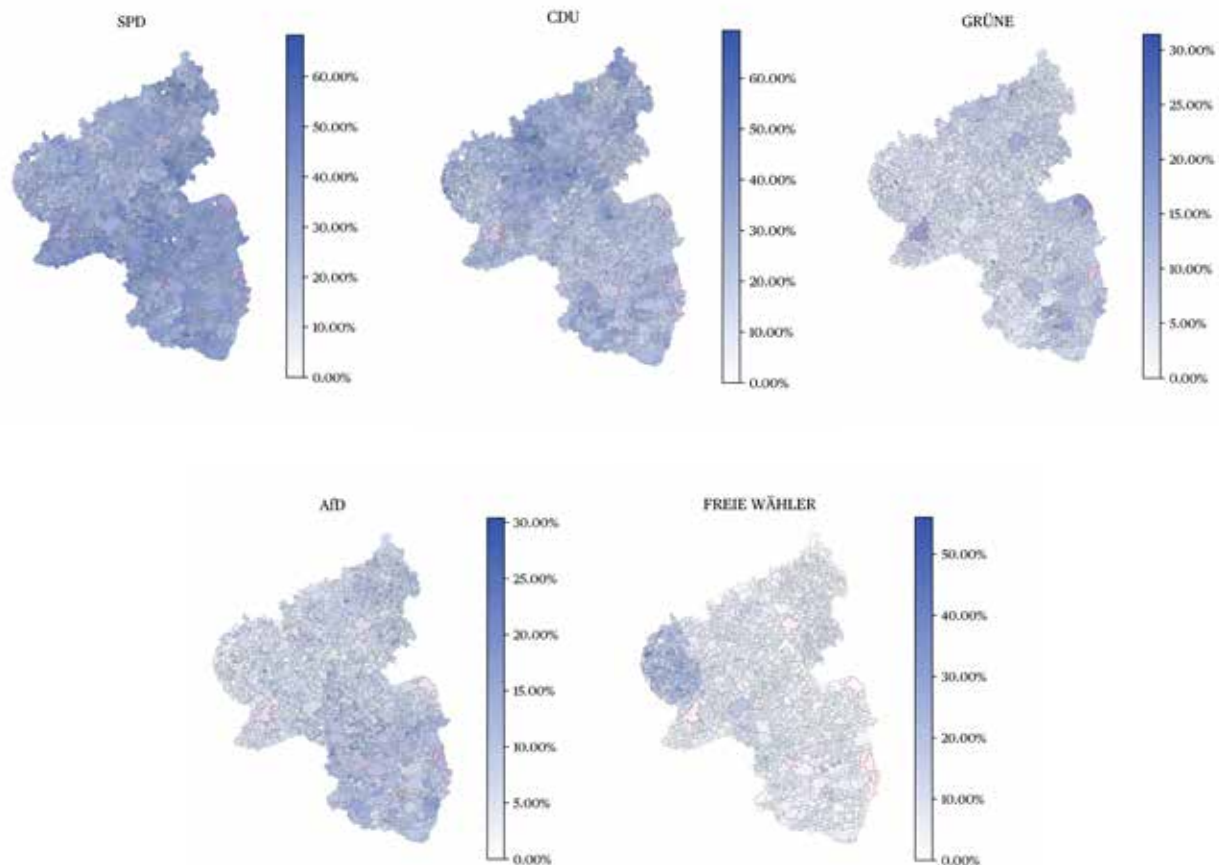
Only in the area of transport is the CDU considered more competent than the SPD (ibid.: 8 sqq. ; Forschungsgruppe Wahlen e.V., 2021:2).

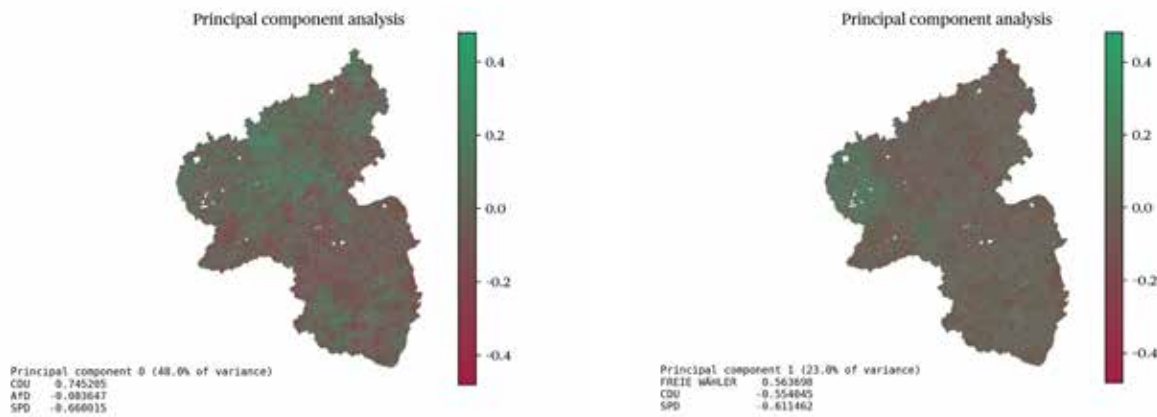Following the Michigan model, the popularity of the Spitzenkanidaten also affects party competition. The citizen-oriented style of politics of former Minister President Kurt Beck (SPD), nicknamed the "state father," (Borucki & Jakobs, 2020) was continued by the incumbent Minister President Malu Dreyer (SPD) who was therefore granted the informal title of "state mother". The popularity of her style of government led to a predictable incumbent bonus, which is also confirmed by the polls comparing her to her direct competitor, Christian Baldauf (CDU). In a (virtual) direct election for the office of Minister-President, Baldauf lost to his opponent Dreyer by 28% to 56% (Infratest Dimap, 2021b). The discrepancy in the measured popularity ratings is even more striking; while 71% of respondents are (very) satisfied with Dreyer, Baldauf has to put up with 33% (very) satisfied (Infratest Dimap, 2021a). One of the reasons for this could be Baldauf's relative lack of notoriety among Rhineland-Palatinate's population. The Süddeutsche Zeitung ran a headline "Who knows this man?" above a picture of Christian Baldauf on 25 February 2021 – barely two and a half weeks before the election. The article referred to a survey by Südwestrundfunk, according to which around 40% of respondents did not know the CDU's top candidate, even though he had been the Rhineland Palatinate CDU chairman between 2006 and 2011 and has since been deputy chairman. According to exit polls, 51% of SPD voters chose their party because of Dreyer, while only 23% of CDU voters made their decision because of Baldauf (John 2021:11).

Geographical explanatory factors

In addition to the three central factors of the Michigan model, the political maps provide important insights into the political processes. As shown in figure **a,** there are many SPD and CDU voters in almost all constituencies. However, the SPD is concentrated in the central part of the map, while the CDU performs best in the country's north and southwest. As a principal components analysis (figure **b,** above) suggests, 49% of the difference in communal results from the regional average is explained by the fact that there are more CDU voters, fewer SPD voters and fewer AfD voters in these constituencies. Figure **a** also shows that the AfD was able to score well in the rural areas in the south of the Land.

The same figure shows a typical trend for the Greens: the party won high shares of the vote in urban areas and university towns such as Mainz, Trier, Koblenz and Landau. While the political map does not provide much information on the FDP, with only a few districts in the North-West of the state appearing to be highlighted, the constituency of Bitburg-Prüm, in which the Free Voters achieved 21.3%, stands out. Their regional success in the Eifel can partly be explained by the popularity of their Spitzenkandidat Joachim Streit (Free Voters), who grew

Principal component analysis

Principal component 0 (48.0% of variance)
CDU   0.745205
AfD   -0.083647
SPD   -0.660015

Principal component analysis

Principal component 1 (23.0% of variance)
FREIE WÄHLER   0.563698
CDU   -0.554045
SPD   -0.611462

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up in the region. Through intensive door-to-door campaigning, he managed to get elected mayor of Bitburg and later rose to the position of district administrator (Ludwig, 2021). As figure **b** shows, the comparatively strong result of the Free Voters coincides with weak performance – compared to the state average – of the CDU and SPD in this region.

The cluster analysis (figure **d**) confirms this clear North/South cleavage as well as Bitburg-Prüm's specific position. The map showing government support in the individual regions shows a similar picture (figure **c**, left). Again, the already familiar pattern of a North/South divide is discernable. However, here the Bitburg-Prüm constituency merges with the rest of the North, where, in large parts, less than half of the population is satisfied with the government. Satisfaction with the government has spread further in the south and centre of the country since 2016. In this area, the green indicator shows that in significantly more districts than five years ago, more than 50% of the population supports the 2016-2021 government (figure **c**, right).

Perspectives

The widespread satisfaction with the incumbent government made a continuation of the previous government model likely. On the day following the election, Minister-President Dreyer announced in an interview with Südwestrundfunk: "I'm talking to my current coalition partners [Greens and FDP; author's note] […] We want to continue the traffic light [*Ampel,* that is red, yellow green], I've never made that a secret." (Welt Online, 2021) The political scientist and expert on Rhineland-Palatinate, Uwe Jun, also sees "no real alternative to a new edition of the alliance" (ibid.). Even before the election, and especially after the announcement of the final official result – which arithmetically allows an alliance of SPD, Greens and FDP – the relaunch of the traffic light coalition was the most likely scenario for the coming legislature. Dreyer had already rejected a "grand coalition" consisting of SPD and CDU: "The voters would be quite surprised if I were to say now: We are going in that direction." (ibid.) A centre-right alliance consisting of CDU, FDP (alternatively with

the Free Voters) and AfD is not a realistic option. On the one hand, the CDU categorically rejects any government cooperation with the AfD, and on the other hand, there are very few convincing reasons for the FDP to opt for this option in terms of content and strategy. During a press conference on 30 April 2021, the coalition negotiations between the SPD, the Greens and the FDP were declared successfully concluded. The respective party congresses ratified the negotiated coalition agreement the following week. Of the nine ministries, some of which will be reorganised compared to the last legislature, the SPD will receive five and the two junior partners two each. According to Minister President Dreyer, each of the partners will be in charge of one of the three priority issues: Biotechnology (SPD), Climate Neutrality by 2040 (The Greens), Future of Inner Cities (FDP) (SWR.de, 2021). Looking at the negotiated coalition agreement, it seems that the green light of the traffic light shines brightest, although care was taken to ensure that each of the coalition partners retains its profile (Tagesschau.de, 2021).

In conclusion, the SPD benefitted from its competent handling of the central issues of state politics, especially from the confident handling of the pandemic by its incumbent Minister President. Contrary to the national trend, the party emerged as the strongest force. On the other hand, the CDU suffered a clear defeat, partly due to a rather unpopular top candidate and growing dissatisfaction with the nationwide Covid crisis management of the CDU/CSU-led federal government. Voters confirmed their satisfaction with the Greens' and the FDP's government work. While the Greens rode on the upward wave of the federal party's trends and improved on their result of 2016, the FDP suffered losses but remains in parliament and government. After the AfD's re-entry into the state parliament, the Free Voters' success represents a turning point in Rhineland-Palatinate, as they form a sixth parliamentary group for the first time.

Concerning the upcoming federal election, it is not clear whether this state election triggered particular trends. The SPD was able to gain one percentage point (from 16% to 17%) in the Sunday poll for the federal election that followed the Rhineland-Palatinate vote. Whether this is a "Rhineland-Palatinate effect" cannot be deter-

Government backing (2021)

Government backing (2016)

- 0%-25%
- 25%-50%
- 50%-75%
- 75%-100%
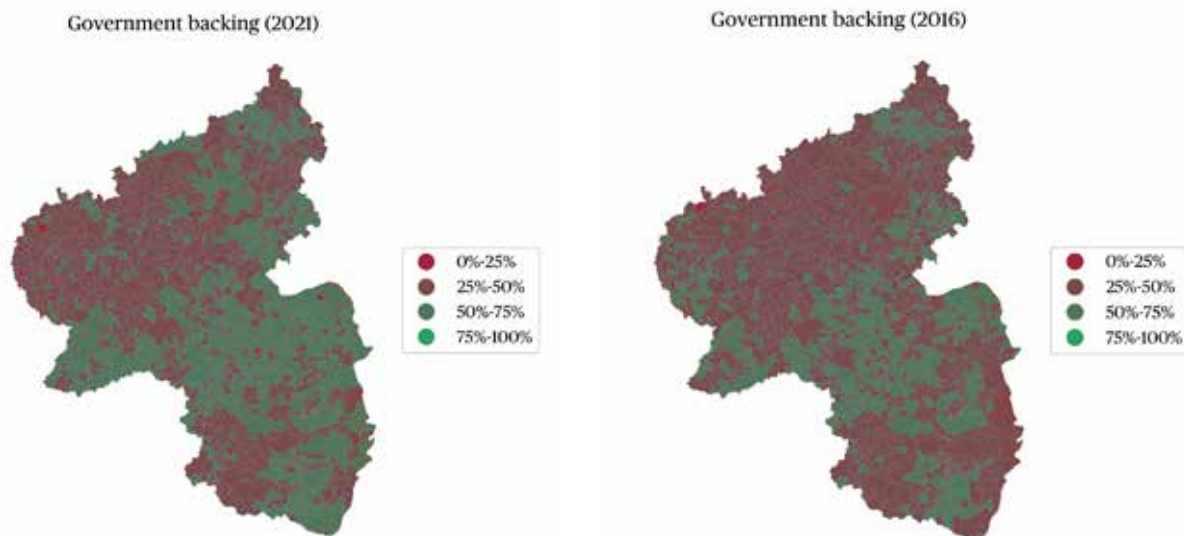
mined with certainty, as the party has already lost this marginal bonus again and stands (as of mid-April) at 15 percentage points (Infratest Dimap, 2021c). This year, it is particularly likely that federal politics itself, especially the handling of the pandemic and the popularity of the Spitzenkandidaten, will have a more significant influence on the outcome of the federal election. Moreover, the signal effect of a traffic light coalition in Rhineland-Palatinate for federal politics is limited. The example of Rhineland-Palatinate shows the viability of this currently unique government option under the leadership of the SPD. Current polls, however, point to a different power balance in the federal government, i.e. a traffic light under Green, not Social Democratic leadership. Thus, the significance of this example appears limited (Tagesschau.de, 2021).

In addition, other issues and personnel questions may be decisive for a successful compromise in the form of a coalition agreement. Sufficient overlap in quantitative and qualitative form between the SPD, the Greens and the FDP at the federal level can not be presumed at that point. The Rhineland-Palatinate experience is thus difficult to generalise.

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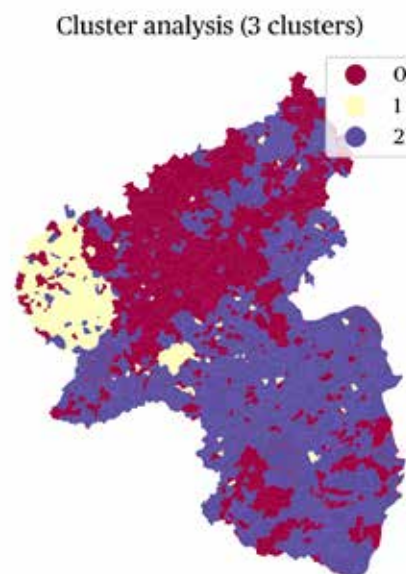
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49

Cluster analysis (3 clusters)

- 0
- 1
- 2

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Party votes

Winning party (2021)

Legend:
- CDU
- GRÜNE
- SPD
- FREIE WÄHLER

European indicators

Share of votes by EP group

2016
2021

Landtag von Rheinland-Pfalz (2021)

- Greens/EFA: GRÜNE (10)
- S&D: SPD (39)
- RE: FDP (6), FREIE WÄHLER (6)
- EPP: CDU (31)
- ID: AfD (9)

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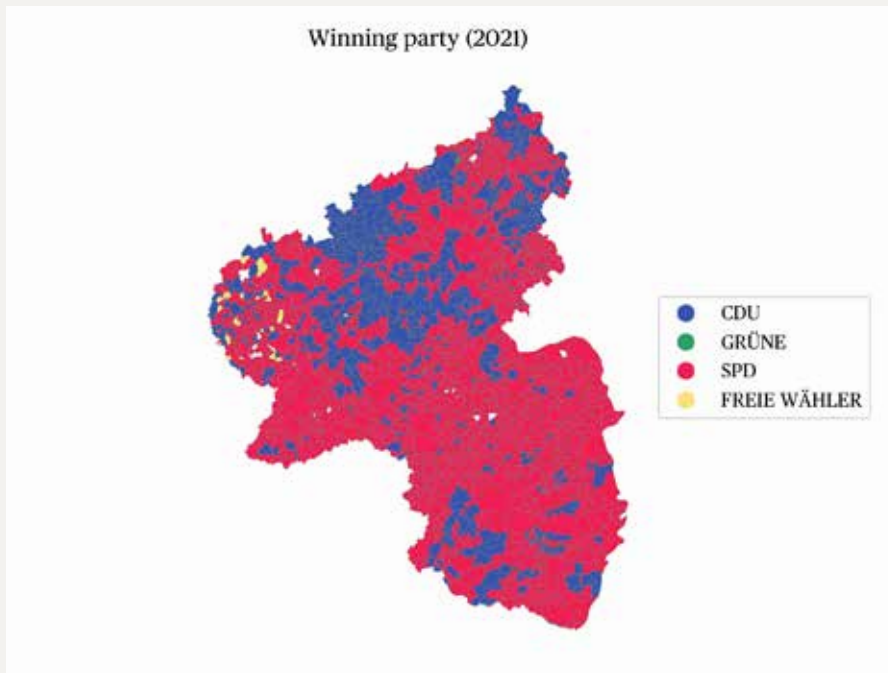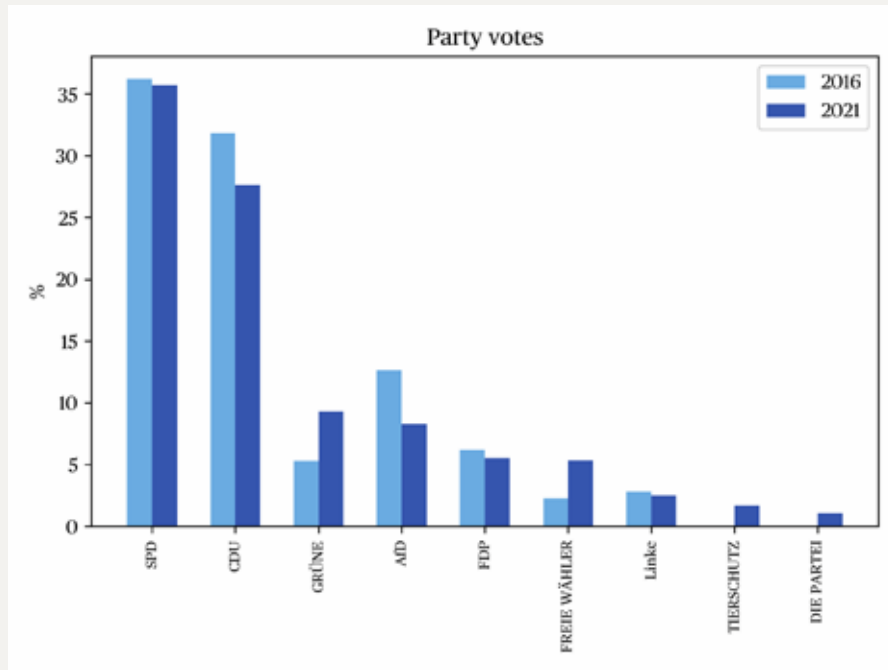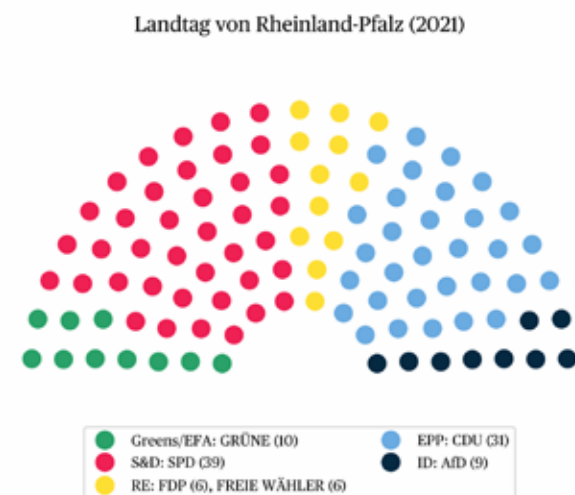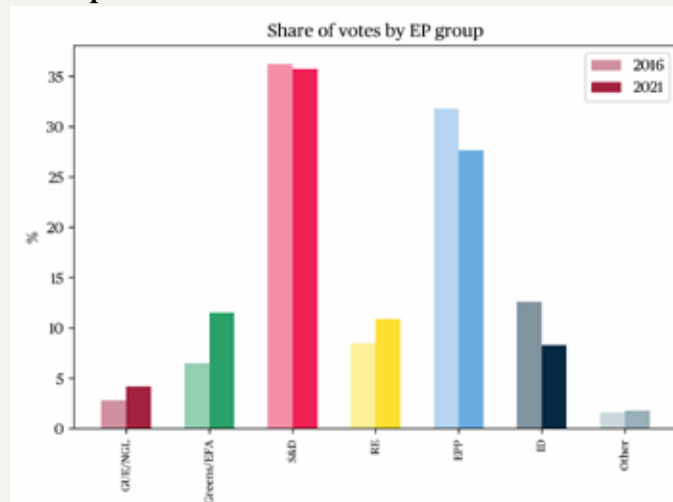
Parliamentary Election in the Netherlands, 17 March 2021

Introduction

In 2021, the Dutch voters elected the most fractionalized parliament in Dutch history. In this fractionalized landscape the centre-right coalition retained its majority. The coalition benefited from popular support for its corona policy and did not pay an electoral price for the child benefit scandal that caused the government to step down three months before the election. This article examines the paradoxical trends of voters flocking away from established parties to smaller newer ones on the one hand and voters flocking to the government parties on the other hand.

In this article, I will discuss the context of the elections, specifically the corona pandemic and the childcare benefit scandal. I will examine the results of the election for each of the parties and I will briefly discuss the 'second half' of the elections the formation of a new government and its likely effect for European integration.

Social and Political Context

The Dutch general election, like most elections in 2020 and 2021, took place in the context of the world-wide corona pandemic. In the Dutch context, there also was a specific scandal surrounding childcare benefits.

The pandemic

Since the start of the pandemic the trust in the Dutch government has increased strongly (Van der Meer et al. 2020). In December, the government had introduced a new lockdown to prevent the third wave and this lockdown quickly included a nine o'clock general curfew. In general, Dutch voters were supportive of the government's measures to contain the spread of the disease. Specifically, this meant that the support for the Liberal Party (VVD, Renew) of Prime Minister Mark Rutte had increased strongly in the polls. The party therefore decided to hinge their campaign on the leadership of Mark Rutte.

Corona was a thick blanket that covered the campaign. It prevented parties from in-person campaigning, instead parties relied on earned and paid media. The three televised debates proved particularly decisive for the election results.

Corona also prevented other themes from taking centre stage in the political arena. Parties dutifully debated themes such as the climate, healthcare and immigration, but none of these themes really dominated the political debate, as the real question was who was trusted to steer the Netherlands out of the corona pandemic.

The Childcare benefit scandal

In January 2021, the Dutch government coalition of VVD, CDA (EPP), D66 (RE) and CU (EPP) had resigned over scandal surrounding childcare benefits. In the Netherlands, most families with children younger than four receive benefits to pay for childcare. In an overzealous attempt to fight fraud, the Dutch government had ruined thousands of families who had committed only minor infractions or who had outside of their knowledge had contracted fraudulent childcare companies. The government had specifically investigated families with dual nationalities (Otjes 2021a). Moreover, the government had consistently provided parliament with false or incomplete information when it had questioned them on the subject. The government had resigned before a parliamentary debate on a critical report of a parliamentary investigation committee on the subject. The result of this was that the issue was never strongly politicized.

The results

The elections resulted in a very fragmented parliament (see 'Data'). No less than seventeen parties were elected into parliament, compared to 14 in the previous election. The largest of these (the ruling VVD) had only 34 out of 150 seats. This meant that also the effective number of parliamentary parties, a standard measure of fractionalization in political science (Laakso & Taagepera 1979), was quite high: 8.5 up from 8.1 in the previous term. This was 5.3 on average in the last 100 years. The Netherlands has extremely proportional electoral system where votes are almost perfectly translated into seats.

The elections saw relatively mild volatility: only 14% of seats changed hands. This was the lowest level of volatility in over twenty-five years. In particular the government parties were spared: usually government parties lose seats in the elections, now they retained their majority. It was the first time since the 2003 elections that the parties supporting the government kept their majority and the first time since the 1998 elections that they actually expanded their vote total. This effect was driven by the trust in Rutte as crisis manager and the fact that the most convincing bid to challenge his leadership came from D66, his own coalition partner.

Turnout was relatively high despite the Covid pandemic: 79% of Dutch voters turned out. The turnout was slightly lower than in 2017 (82%), but it was higher than the average turnout in the last twenty years. The government had attempted to boost turnout by allowing voters to vote in person for three days, by allowing people who are older than 70 to vote by mail and by allowing people to cast three proxy votes instead of two.

In order to understand the political landscape, the geographic trends and socio-demographic trends, it may be useful to follow the result per party. We discuss these in nine clusters: the VVD, D66 and the CDA are discussed separately, followed by the radical right (PVV, FVD, JA21), the traditional left (PvdA and SP), the new left (GL, PvdD and Volt), the small Christian parties (CU and SGP), parties rooted in migrant communities (Denk and Bij1) and parties representing specific communities (50PLUS and BBB). Unless specified otherwise, the demographic data reported below, comes from an exit poll by Ipsos (Harteveld & Van Heck 2021).

The liberal leader

For over ten years, the Liberal Party (VVD, Renew) of Prime Minister Mark Rutte had governed the country. The party can be characterized as 'conservative liberal' and stands on the right of the European liberal family. It favours market-solutions to economic problems. During the corona crisis, the party deviated from its fiscal conservatism, and instead it supported a massive program to keep Dutch workers employed and companies afloat in the economic crisis. On cultural matters it mixes conservative positions on immigration and law order with progressive positions on moral matters such as euthanasia and same-sex relationships. The party describes itself as 'euro-realist': it supports European integration when it benefits the Dutch interest, specifically the Dutch economy.

For over a year, the polls indicated that the VVD would expand its seat total in the upcoming election. In January the Poll of polls of the Peilingwijzer had indicated that nearly 30% of the Dutch voters would cast their vote for the VVD (Louwerse 2021). Rutte's performance as manager of the corona crisis was lauded by voters and the announcing stricter measures to curb the disease had led to increases in support for him and his party. Polling clearly indicated that since the start of the corona-crisis, Rutte's ratings among voters had increased strongly (Kanne & Driessen 2021). The result (22% of the votes) was considerably less than the party had polled in the months leading up to the election. Still the party retained its position as largest party.

The VVD was the largest party in nearly every municipality and was particularly strong in larger cities and commuter towns in the three most populous provinces: North-Holland, South-Holland and North-Brabant. The party was the largest among men and women, in every age group and among voters at every level of education. It performed better among men, highly educated voters and middle-aged voters.

The liberal challenger

Democrats 66 (D66, Renew) which was also part of the governing coalition broke the 'rule' that had been true for 40 years that governing meant that the party would halve its seat total in the election. Instead the party expanded its vote total and became the second party with 16% of the seats. The party's leader, the sitting minister of development cooperation and foreign trade, Sigrid Kaag (D66, Renew), performed particularly well in the debates. In January, the party had polled below 10% of the vote. Kaag was able to win the support of progressive voters with the promise of new leadership. The sitting minister positioned herself as the progressive alternative for Mark Rutte.

D66 is a social-liberal party which sits in the centre of the European liberal family. It supports strong action to fight climate change. It is fiercely pro-European. It is progressive on moral matters, such as women's and LBGT+ emancipation. It mixes left-wing and right-wing positions on the economy, for instance advocating investment in education but also a more liberalized pension system. On corona-policy, D66 distanced itself somewhat from the government in particular in advocating more freedom for vaccinated people and ending the curfew. The party wants the Netherlands to embrace a multicultural and cosmopolitan identity. On the matter of national identity, Kaag had the strongest clash with Geert Wilders (PVV, I&D), who accused her of betraying the Netherlands by wearing a headscarf during a visit to Iran. Kaag confidently defended herself by claiming that she had acted in the national interest by visiting Iran and advocating for peace
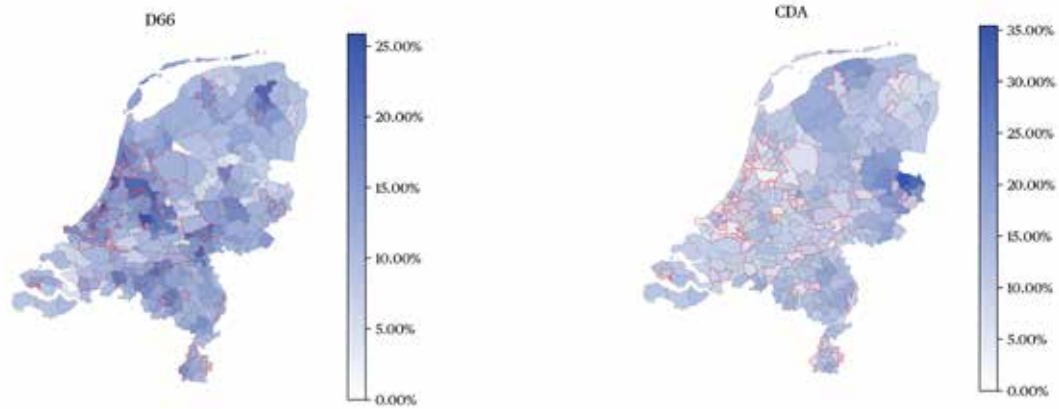
in the region.

D66 performed particularly well in the largest cities: the party was the largest in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague. It also did well cities with universities, such as Wageningen, Leiden and Groningen. The party did best among higher educated voters, younger voters and women. The last is particularly notable because in 2017 (in contrast to 2021), D66 had a majority male electorate (NOS 2017). This is a clear indication that Kaag was able to court female voters with her bid to challenge Rutte's leadership.

The Failed Christian-Democratic Challenge

The Christian-Democratic Appeal (CDA, EPP) was riddled with leadership problems. The party held an internal election to choose a new leader. Hugo de Jonge (CDA, EPP), the minister of healthcare responsible for corona-policy won that election. He stepped down less than half a year after being elected because he found it impossible to combine fighting corona with campaigning. He was replaced by Wopke Hoekstra (CDA, EPP), the minister of finance. He had chosen not run in the internal election. Hoekstra, the stern minister of finance, was seen as the ideal leader of the CDA, who could perhaps even replace Mark Rutte as Prime-Minister and make the CDA the largest party again. Both De Jonge and Hoekstra made a series of larger or smaller mistakes: for instance, De Jonge, who was responsible for corona-vaccination had chosen to start vaccinating much later than other countries to popular dissatisfaction. Hoekstra had taken the opportunity to ice skate in the famous ice-rink Thialf as part of the campaign, despite the fact that it was officially closed to the public. Hoekstra lost his popular appeal and the party went from 13% to 10% of the vote.

The CDA is ideologically similar to the VVD, right-wing on economic issues, conservative on matters of migration, pro-European where it serves the national interest. The only difference is that the party is more conservative on moral matters.

The CDA performed well in rural areas in the North and East of the country (Fryslân, Groningen and Overijssel). The party performed particularly well in Twente

where the number 2 of the party, Pieter Omtzigt, the MP who fought for the interests of the victims of the child benefit scandal lives. The CDA performed well among voters who were aged fifty or older where it was the second largest party.

The Radical Right

In 2021, three radical right-wing populist parties entered parliament: the PVV, a main-stay of the radical right family, the FVD, which reinvented itself as anti-lockdown party and JA21, a relatively moderate branch of this family. Together these parties expanded their seat share from 15% to 19%, the highest for the populist right since 2002.

In 2017, Forum for Democracy (FVD, ECR) had entered parliament as hard-Eurosceptic party: it advocates the Dutch withdrawal from the EU. On other matters is a clearly radical right-wing populist party with a neo-liberal bent. It has right-wing positions on immigration, the environment and the economy. In 2019, it did well in the European and Provincial elections. After that the decline set in. Its youth wing had attracted more extremist elements: in their WhatsApp-groups, young members shared anti-Semitic memes. This was the reason for a split in the party in November 2020. The remaining, radical wing of the party led by Thierry Baudet reinvented itself as an anti-lockdown party. FVD was the only party to hold in-person campaign events. In these events, Baudet openly shared his skepticism about the dangers of the corona virus and his opposition to vaccination. This allowed the party to make a resurgence: in January 2021, the party was polled at two percent of the vote but it won five percent.

The moderate wing of the FVD formed Correct Answer 2021 (JA21, ECR), which also entered parliament. JA21 is a radical right-wing populist party but it is more moderate compared to PVV and FVD: it wants to limit immigration but does not want to close down mosques. It is Eurosceptic but does not want the Netherlands to leave the EU. It believes that humans cause climate change but thinks the Netherlands can better adapt to the coming change than try to prevent it. It does not deny the severity of corona. It is moderately conservative on moral matters and right-wing on economic matters.

PVV

FvD

JA21
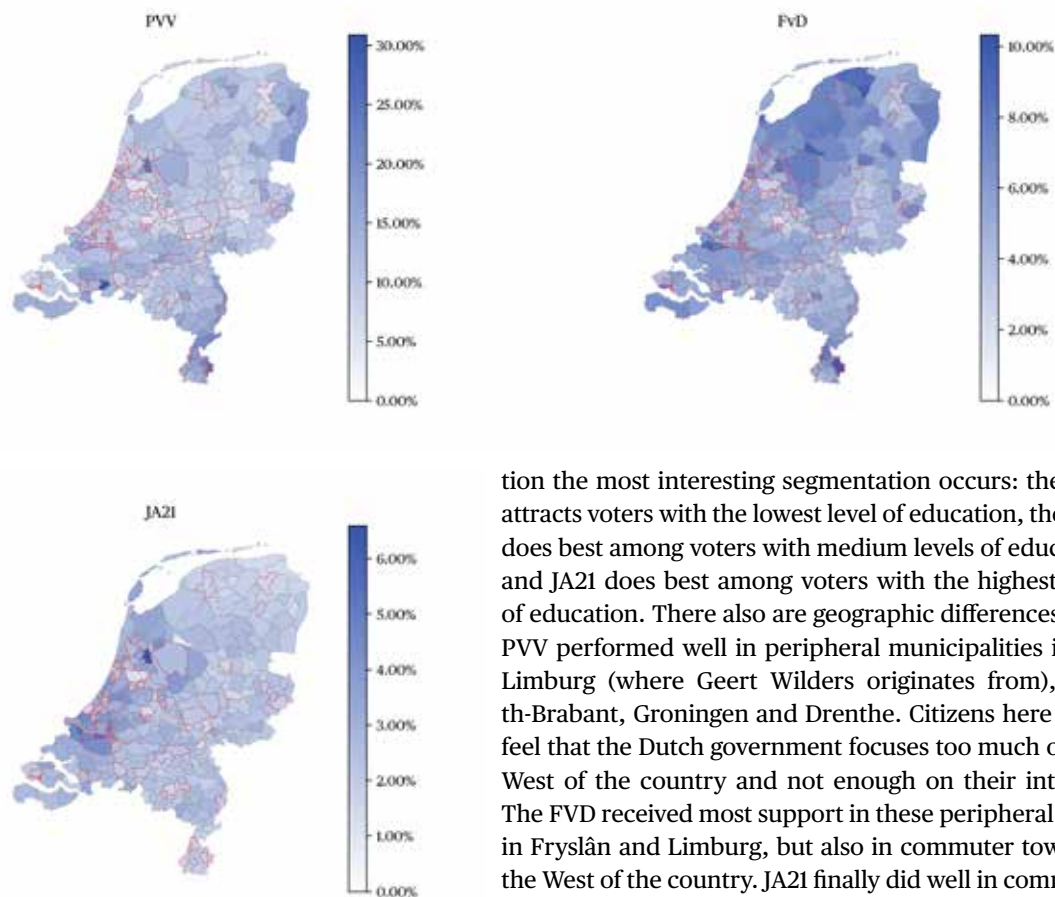
The Freedom Party (PVV, I&D) of Geert Wilders remained the largest radical right-wing populist party in the Netherlands. The party focuses strongly on immigration, civic integration, national identity and Islam, which it sees as a dangerous ideology and not as religion. The party wants do defend the rights of women, gays and lesbians against what it perceives as the threat of Islam. The party denies the need to take government action to fight climate change. It wants the Netherlands to leave the European Union. On economic issues, it is mixes left and right-wing positions on economic issues for instance proposing to lower the pension age to 65, which mostly benefits Dutch people without a migration background, while proposing more stringent measures for welfare, which relatively many people with a migration background rely on (Otjes 2019).

The PVV was generally supportive of the government's action to fight corona although it did call for the end of the curfew and the opening of outdoor dining and drinking. The PVV saw a relatively small loss of (from 13 to 11%). This was the end of a roller coaster ride in the polls: in the 2019 European election, the PVV had even lost its seats in the European Parliament. As the FVD lost support, the PVV recuperated.

The PVV, FVD and JA21 appeal to a similar electorate but with some differences (Spierings et al. 2021). All parties appeal to men and voters who do not trust the government, but the PVV electorate is much older than the JA21 and FVD electorate. Where it comes to educa-

tion the most interesting segmentation occurs: the PVV attracts voters with the lowest level of education, the FVD does best among voters with medium levels of education and JA21 does best among voters with the highest level of education. There also are geographic differences: The PVV performed well in peripheral municipalities in the Limburg (where Geert Wilders originates from), North-Brabant, Groningen and Drenthe. Citizens here often feel that the Dutch government focuses too much on the West of the country and not enough on their interest. The FVD received most support in these peripheral areas in Fryslân and Limburg, but also in commuter towns in the West of the country. JA21 finally did well in commuter towns close to Amsterdam and Rotterdam.

The Traditional Left

The Labour Party and the SP had their traditional base in the working class. These parties are in decline. They won only 12% of the seats, compared to 15% in 2017 and 35% in 2012.

For practically all of its existence, the Labour Party (PvdA, S&D) had been one of the two largest parties in parliament. In 2017 the party lost more than three quarters of its seats. It is a social-democratic party with centre-left positions on immigration, the economy, moral and cultural matters, EU integration and the environment. It was generally supportive of the government's anti-corona measures. Like the CDA, it also suffered leadership problems. The party's leader, Lodewijk Asscher stepped down three months before the election. As minister in the 2012-2017 Rutte II cabinet, he was partially responsible for the child benefit scandal that had caused the fall of the Rutte III cabinet. He was replaced by the relatively unknown former minister of development cooperation and foreign trade, Liliane Ploumen. The poor performance of the Dutch Labour Party fits a larger trend in Europe where social-democratic parties are under pressure (Benedetto et al. 2020). The fact that for a segment of traditionally social-democratic voters the social-liberal party D66 was an appealing alternative also fits more general European patterns (Abou-Chadi & Hix 2021).

The Socialist Party (SP, GUE/NGL) is a radical left-wing

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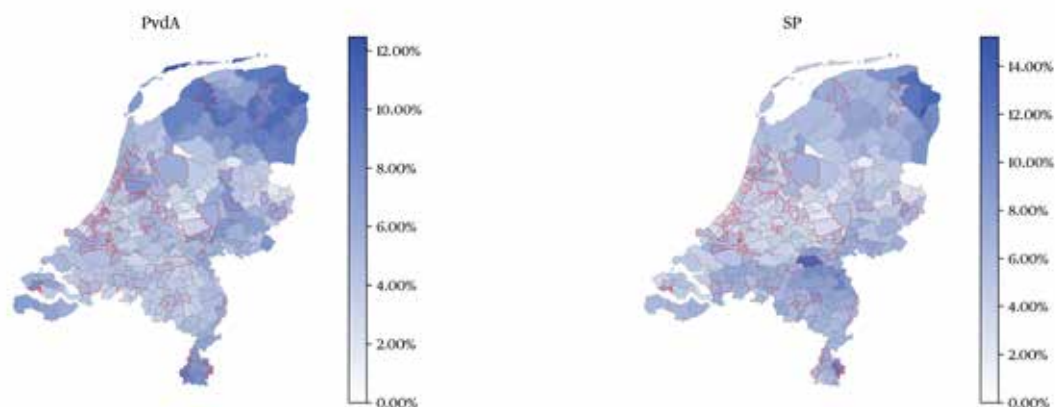
party. The party advocates for more government intervention in the economy to ensure a more equal distribution of income. It wants the Netherlands to house more refugees (although not more labour migrants). It is Eurosceptic (although it does not advocate the Netherlands leaving the EU). It is generally progressive on moral matters (although skeptical about extending euthanasia) and it wants strong action to fight climate change (although it does not want poor citizens to pay for these measure). The SP was generally supportive of the government's corona measures: this fit the profile of a party that traditionally advocates the interests of healthcare professionals, seniors and the chronically ill.

The Labour Party kept the 6% of the seats the party had had. This was un expected result as the 6% had been seen previously as aberration due to the participation in the second cabinet Rutte. The SP lost almost half of its seats. The party blamed this on the fact it usually campaigns door-to-door in working class neighborhoods. This was not possible due to corona. It also possible that because it had been quite supportive of the government in the last year, its traditional base of lower educated voters that distrust the government no longer felt represented by them.

The PvdA performed well in the three Northern provinces (Fryslân, Groningen and Drenthe), the traditional heartland of the party and the South of Limburg (where Ploumen was from). The SP also performed well in more peripheral municipalities in Groningen and Limburg as well as in North-Brabant. Both were strongly supported by senior citizens. The SP did best among lower and middle educated voters, while the PvdA did best among higher educated voters, reflecting that the party had lost its traditional working-class base.

The New Left

In addition to the traditional left-wing parties, there also are three parties on the left with a more progressive and post-materialist orientation: the GreenLeft (Groen-Links), the Party for the Animals and Volt.

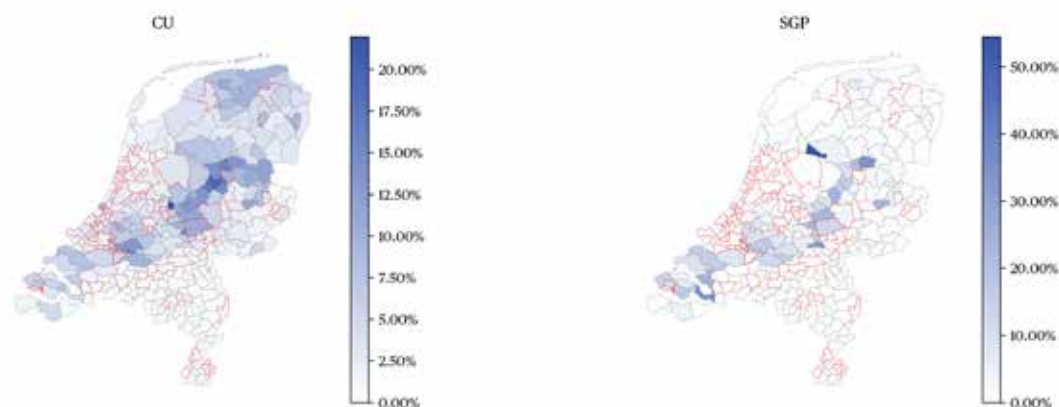Four years ago, the party GroenLinks (GL, Greens/EFA), benefitting from the heavy loss of the Labour Party,

it had performed particularly well. Now it lost almost all of its seats. This party focused its campaign on climate, hoping to make the elections climate elections. It has generally left-wing positions on the climate, the economy, immigration, moral and cultural matters. The party supports further EU integration. It also supported the government's anti-Corona measures, although it did advocate for re-opening universities. In the last four years, it had developed an ambiguous relationship with the government, supporting it on crucial matters (the budget, climate policy and pension reform) but also being heavily critical of its tax policies. The party's leader Jesse Klaver (GL, G/EFA) had attempted to build a left-wing alliance with SP, PvdA and D66. When these parties rebuffed this attempt publicly, the party had lost its credibility as 'leader of the left'.

The deeply green Party for the Animals (PvdD, GUE/NGL) is more than a single-issue animal advocacy party. It focuses on animals, climate and the environment but takes left-wing positions on moral, cultural and economic matters. The party is moderately Eurosceptic, making it a good fit with the radical left instead of the Greens in the European Parliament. It also opposed the corona measures where they infringed civil liberties, in particular the curfew. More than anything the party is characterized by its opposition to what it calls 'compromism', the way of doing politics in the Netherlands where the process of finding consensus is more important than the long-term impacts of the decisions on people, animals and the environment. The party expanded its seat share from 3 to 4%.

The new party Volt (G/EFA) is part of the pan-European euro-federalist party Volt, which also has a German representative in the European Parliament. He sits in the Group of the Greens. In its first election, the 2019 European election, it performed quite well for a new party but narrowly did not win a seat. The party is close to D66 programmatically: progressive on moral and cultural matters, pro-European and centrist on the economy. The only real substantive difference is that Volt favours nuclear energy to avoid the climate crisis.

All three parties see a large share of their support concentrated in large cities with universities such as Ams-

terdam, Utrecht, Leiden and Nijmegen. All three perform best among higher educated voters and voters aged 34 and younger. In these municipalities and voting groups they see strong competition from D66. The GreenLeft lost almost half of its seats, because in the eyes of many voters D66 had a more credible claim that a vote for them would steer the formation in a progressive direction.

Small Christian parties

There are two parties who are supported mainly by protestant voters: the CU and the SGP.

The ChristianUnion (CU, EPP) was the fourth government party. This small Christian social party mixes left-wing positions on immigration, economic matters and the environment with more conservative positions on moral matters, civic integration and EU integration. It broke with the conservatives in the ECR in 2019 because the allowed the FVD to join their group.

The Political Reformed Party (SGP, ECR) is the second small protestant party in the Netherlands. It is consistently a right-wing party on immigration, moral matters, the environment and the economy. The party is also moderately Eurosceptic. It opposed corona measures where they infringed on civil liberties, in particular the curfew.

Both parties have a consistent base of church going protestants who live in the Dutch Bible Belt, the Bijbelgordel, which runs from Zeeland in the South West to Overijssel in the North East. The CU was the largest in Bunschoten and Oldebroek, municipalities in this belt. The SGP was the strongest in a number of municipalities such as Tholen in Zeeland and Staphorst in Overijssel. Both are very stable, keeping their 3% and 2% of the vote.

Parties rooted in migrant communities

There are two additional parties on the left, which are rooted in specific migrant communities: Denk and As1 (Bij1).

Denk is a party of, for and by citizens with a bicultural background. It performs particularly well among citizens with a Dutch-Turkish and a Dutch-Moroccan background and Islamic Dutch citizens (Otjes & Spierings 2021). The

party was founded in 2015 as a split from the Labour Party and stays close to this party on economic and environmental matters. On cultural matters, such as immigration and the fight against discrimination, the party is progressive, while it is more conservative on moral matters. The party kept 2% of the Dutch votes.

As1 (Bij1) is a party that bases itself on the insights of intersectional feminism that there are different sources of oppression and disadvantage that can reinforce each other in different ways. These include race, gender, class and handicaps. This makes the party an anti-racist, anti-capitalist, feminist party. It is left-wing on immigration, moral matters, economic matters, the environment and the EU. It was the only party to criticize the government that its anti-corona measures were too lax. The party which was formed in 2016 as a split from Denk, which in the eyes of the party's founder TV-presenter turned anti-racism campaigner Sylvana Simons was too conservative. Attention to the issue of racism was heightened after the murder of George Floyd and the anti-police violence protests in the US and Europe. The party became an assembly place for those who felt that GL was too right-wing on economic matters and the SP too conservative on cultural matters. The party received moderate support for migrant communities in particular from Dutch-Surinamese and Dutch-Antilleans and some support from progressive voters without a migration background (Otjes & Spierings 2021). This was enough for one seat.

Sectional interest parties

Finally, there are two parties that represent specific sector interests: seniors (50PLUS) and people living in rural communities (BBB).

50PLUS (EPP) is the Dutch pensioners' party. In general, the party advocates for the interests of seniors. It is progressive on moral matters and more conservative on the environment, EU integration and immigration. The party saw major internal conflict with its party leader leaving to form his own (unsuccessful) party and its new leader breaking with the party's commitment to lowering the retirement age. Its sole MEP which sat in the EPP also left the party. Due to these conflicts the party lost all but

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DENK
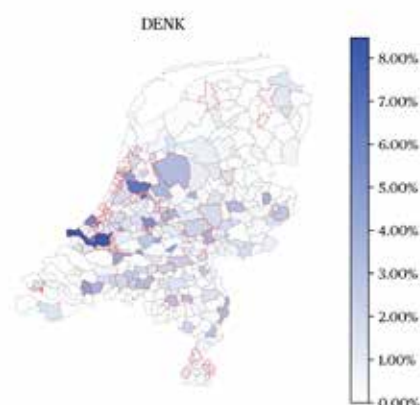
one of its seats. The remaining support came almost exclusively from people older than fifty.

The Farmer-Citizens' Movement (BBB) is a new party that advocates the interests of Dutch people in rural areas in particular farmers. Its success can only be understood with reference to the huge resistance by farmers against proposals to reduce nitrogen pollution (such as cutting half the number of cattle in the Netherlands). While these protests were mostly in 2019 farmers were still dissatisfied with government plans. It is notable that three of the four current government parties (VVD, CDA and CU) usually performed well among farmers. A new party for rural Netherlands was formed. This party is moderately right-wing on environmental, cultural and economic matters, it is Eurosceptic and more progressive on moral matters. The party won one seat in parliament. Its support was concentrated in rural areas in particular in the East of the Netherlands, where party's top candidate Caroline van der Plas was from.

Government Formation

The process of cabinet formation is perhaps more important than the election in determining policy outcomes. Some have even called it the "Bermuda Triangle of Dutch politics", where the election result disappears and something unexpected can come out (Van Keken and

Kuijpers.

2021). While it was clear from the on-set that the formation process would be complex, it became more byzantine in the first two weeks.

The formation took a dramatic turn when became public that the scouts (Annemarie Jorritsma (VVD) and Kajsa Ollongren (D66)) had discussed the political future of Pieter Omtzigt, the CDA MP who had been instrumental in exposing the child benefit scandal, with Mark Rutte. This led to a motion of no confidence against Rutte supported by the entire opposition. In the subsequent weeks minutes of cabinet meetings were leaked which indicated that the lack of information provided to parliament was the result of a conscious political choice. The formation process effectively halted. Two successive informateurs have since been appointed, veteran negotiator Herman Tjeenk Willink and the Chair of the Social-Economic Council, Mariëtte Hamer At the moment of writing (8/6/2021), it is unclear what this way out will be. The only thing that seems very likely is that the two largest parties VVD and D66 will form the basis for the new coalition.

European perspective

Also, where it comes to the EU, the government formation will be more important than the elections. The EU was not seriously debated in the campaign (Boekestijn et al. 2021). Yet, the new government faces serious choices. The Rutte III government opposed steps towards European economic policy integration, such as Eurobonds and permanent economic stabilization mechanisms (Otjes 2021b). The presence of the Euro-federalist D66 at the government table did not mollify the government's position. Its three current coalition partners, all Euro-realist parties, set the agenda. It looks likely as though the Liberal Party and D66 will form the core of this new government. EU policy will mostly be determined by the interplay between VVD and D66 and their prospective government partners. Mark Rutte of the Euro-pragmatist and fiscally conservative VVD enjoys a reputation as "Mr. No" in Brussels (Van Wiel 2020): he will want continue being a brake on anything resembling a transfer union.

5OPLUS

BBB

The good result of the radical right is likely to put electoral pressure on the Liberals to stay their course. D66 however will want to chart a much different course, both in substance and tone. The entry of Volt into the parliament may force them to realise their pro-European promises (Otjes 2021b).

Conclusion

All in all, these elections reflect the specific national and global circumstances in which they took place: the corona pandemic help explain some of the general patterns, but for the specific parties, events like the child benefit scandal, the murder of George Floyd or the nitrogen crisis mattered. These events help explain the contradicting patterns of increasing movement towards smaller parties and towards government parties.

The elections in the Netherlands are only the first half of the expression of a political will. Crucial now is the formation of a new government. Given the global pandemic and its impact of the economy, the Netherlands wants to have a stable government. Forming a stable government will be challenge however given that the childcare benefit scandal has rocked the faith in Mark Rutte and his ability to lead a new government in many of the opposition parties.

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Party votes

Winning party (2021)

Legend:
- CDA
- CU
- D66
- PVV
- SGP
- VVD

European indicators

Share of votes by EP group

Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal (2021)

- GUE/NGL: SP (9), PvdD (6)
- Greens/EFA: GL (8), Volt (3)
- S&D: PvdA (9)
- RE: VVD (34), D66 (24)
- EPP: CDA (15), CU (5), 50PLUS (1)
- ECR: SGP (3), FvD (8), JA21 (3)
- ID: PVV (17)
- Other: DENK (3), BBB (1), BIJ1 (1)
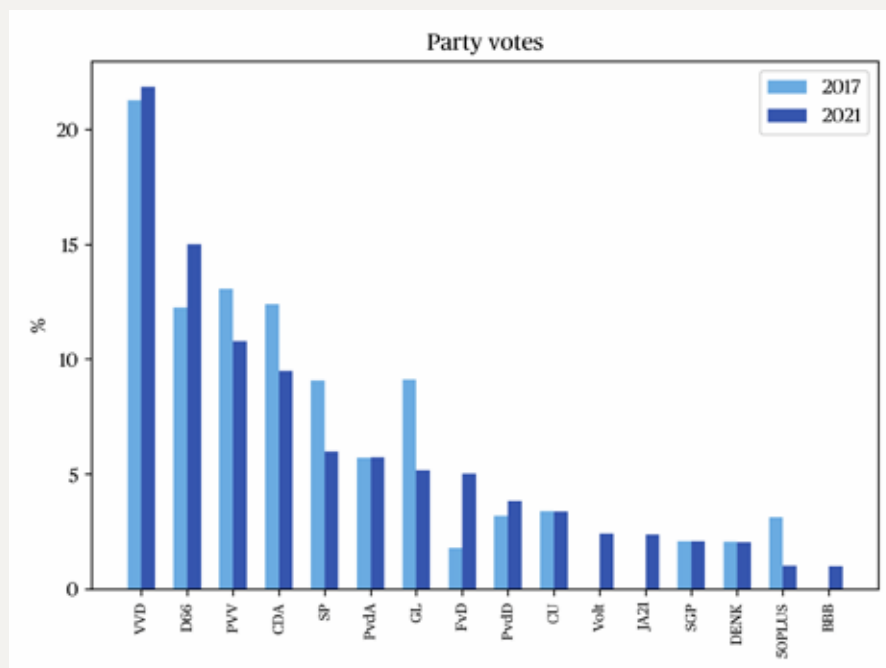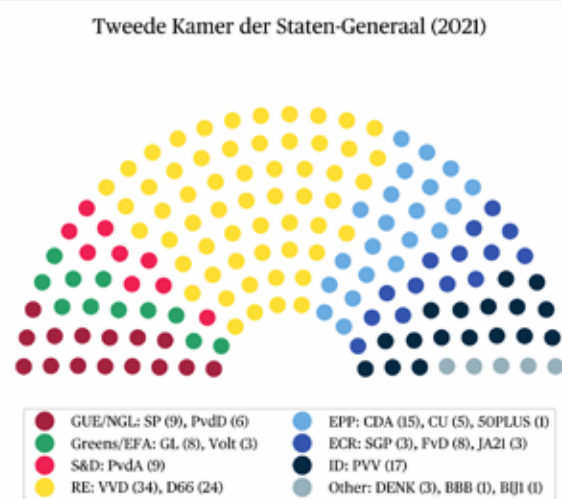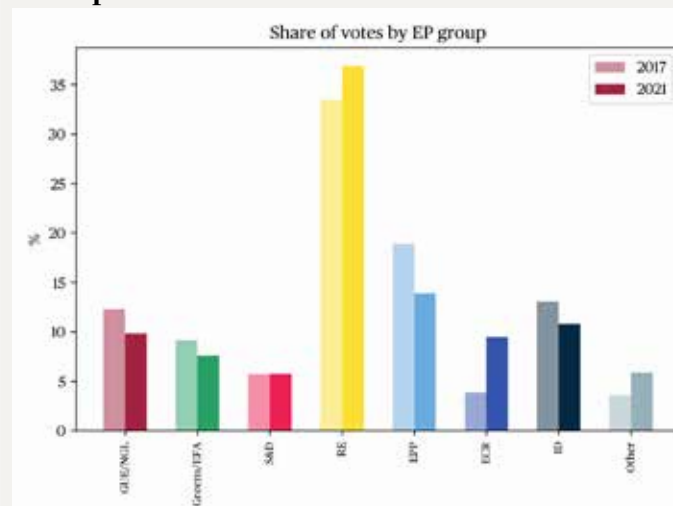
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Parliamentary Election in Bulgaria, 4 April 2021

On April 4, 2021, the eleventh parliamentary elections since the beginning of democratization took place in Bulgaria. 6,789 million officially registered voters were asked to elect candidates from 30 parties and coalitions for the 45th National Assembly. The elections were conducted according the proportional representation system with a single preference option and four percentage threshold.

Context

The context of the elections was marked by some important specifics.

The first one was that they were held in the middle of the third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, which left its marks on many aspects of the electoral process. Bulgaria was one of the most affected countries, especially in terms of mortality; the vaccination process was slow; the government policy was contradictory and oriented towards electoral goals. Nevertheless, generally, the situation worked in favor of the government. The anxiety among the citizens fueled the attitudes for preserving the status quo. In addition, the state of emergency allowed the prime minister to spend during the election campaign significant public funds with minimal scrutiny. The pandemic has negatively affected parties with older electorate as far as many older people did not go out to vote amid their concerns to be infected. For example, according an Alpha research survey 25% of Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP, S&D) supporters expressed strong concern, compared to an average of 10% nationwide (Alpha Research, 2021).

Unlike the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition, the ruling parties commanded significant financial and organizational resources. The report of the OSCE observers concluded that "massive use of state resources gave the ruling party a significant advantage". The ruling party Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB, EPP) and its coalition partners could also count on exceptional media comfort, noted in the mentioned report as "lack of editorial diversity".

The next important specific was related to the effect of the mass protests in the summer and autumn of last year. These lasted more than three months, expressing the civil dissatisfaction with the model of illiberal democracy established by GERB in the last decade: a model characterized by the tendency of merging the ruling party with the state, damaged rule of law, neutralization of the independent judiciary, control over the media, pressure on the opposition. The economic and social effects of this model were visible in the fact that Bulgaria remained the poorest country, the country with the lowest average salary, the highest level of inequality (DG EMPL, 2020), and the highest level of corruption in the EU (Transparency International, 2020). The protesters demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Borissov (GERB) and Chief Prosecutor Geshev. Both of them ignored these demands, did not resign and eventually survived until the protests subsided. In the elections, however, the protests took a kind of revenge. The anti-government attitudes expressed in them proved to be stronger than all the advantages the ruling parties had.

Turnout

One of the substantial electoral features, which was hard to predict before these elections, was the turnout. Most of the observers predicted turnout far below 50 percent (in absolute numbers around 2,5 million votes) because of the fears of infection, the absence of postal voting, and the concentration of the vote in only one day.

Surprisingly, this forecast was refuted, with more than 3,334 million or more than the half (50.61%) of the voters participating in the elections. It is not a high proportion, but under the given circumstances percentage like this means a relatively high turnout. At least it is comparable
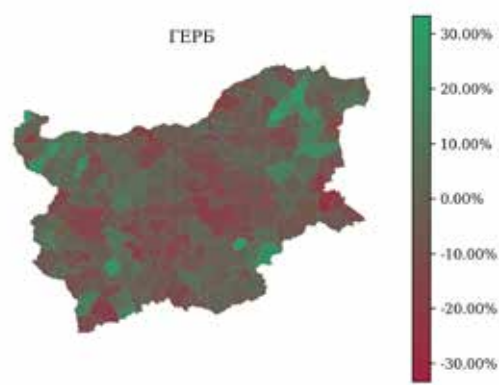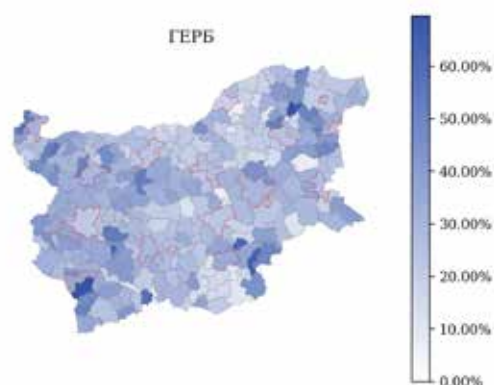
to the last elections held in normal situations: 51.33% in 2013; 48.66% in 2014; 54.07% in 2017. This higher than expected turnout is largely due to a new phenomenon – mobilization of young voters. According to exit polls, if in 2017 the share of voters between 18 and 30 years old was 14.9%, in 2021 it was 18.2%.

Party results

The voters sent in parliament six political parties/coalitions (see "data" panel). The number is relatively high – higher than the average value of 5.18 parliamentary parties since 1990, and ranking third after the eight parties in parliament in 2014, and the seven in 2005.

Three of the parties were new elected. Together they won 31.83% of the votes, occupying 38.33% of the seats in parliament (see "data" panel). This situation is nothing new in the history of the Bulgarian party system. It has been marked by frequent turns, abrupt changes in the preferences of the voters, sudden switching of voters to newly formed parties. At the beginning of the millennium the disappointment with the 'old' parties grew sharply. The first to make use of it was the National Movement Simeon II (NDSV) which won in 2001 with ease almost 2 million votes and half of the seats in parliament. The year 2009 saw its repetition, though on a smaller scale. GERB, founded a couple of years earlier, received almost 1.7 million votes at its first parliamentary elections. Now it is the

party "There is such a people" (ITN, independent) that is taking on this role, however in a much smaller scale.

GERB (Boyko Borisov)

The concrete election results show that despite the protests and the great dissatisfaction with the government, GERB (in coalition with the marginal Union of Democratic Forces) was able to confirm its position as the strongest political party. It won 837,707 votes (26.18%) and 75 out of the 240 seats in parliament (31.21%). In general, GERB retained its leading position in most Bulgarian municipalities ("data" panel), and compared to 2017 both retreats (notably in the capital Sofia) as well as some gains can be found. The difference of votes to the next parties has been reduced ("data" panel, Figures **a-b**). As usual, the structure of the vote for this party is very close to the structure for the whole country, but the loss of votes in the capital and in the bigger cities is also evident in the party's performance in terms of population density (Figure **c**).

However, the 2021 GERB results were the worst performance of the party in national elections since its first participation in 2009. GERB suffered a significant loss of votes, receiving more than 300,000 votes less than in 2017, and with 75 mandates, twenty fewer seats in parliament. For the first time the party received less than one million votes. And this provided that GERB has taken full advantage of its position as a governing party in a pandemic context. This 'victory' looks like a Pyrrhic one, since the party is not able to govern alone and no other parliamentary party is willing to support it in parliament. In this sense the major result of the elections was that GERB had to go into opposition after being in power for eleven years – in case that the National Assembly was able to form a majority and a government.

ITN (Slavi Trifonov)

Another significant election result was the unexpected second place of ITN. The party was established by the popular TV host and singer Slavi Trifonov in 2019 with no clear ideology. Its program seemed to be limited to
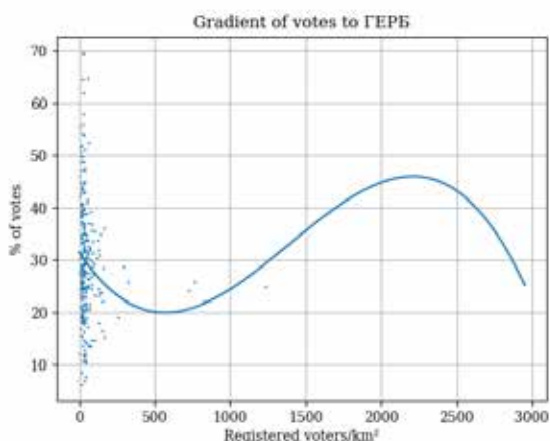
c • Gradient of GERB vote with respect to population density in April 2021, by municipality
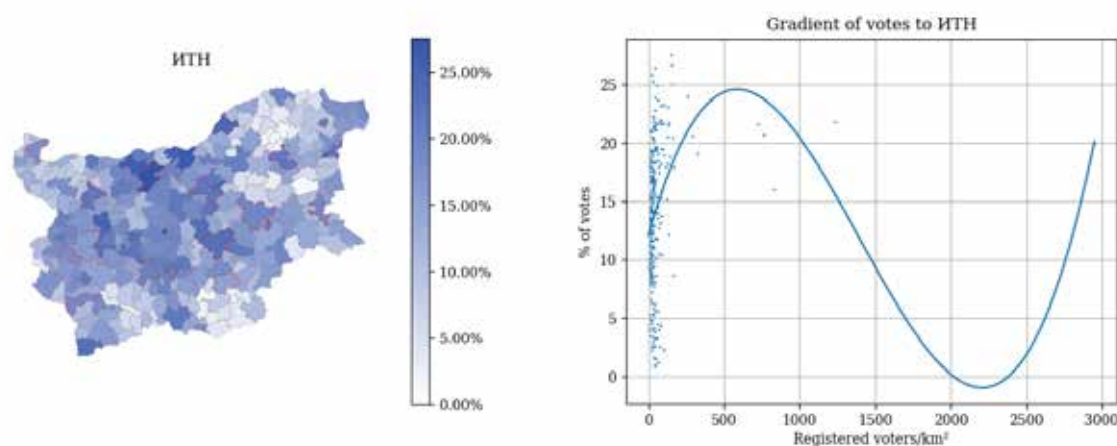
the agenda – populist-motivated and most likely harmful for Bulgarian democracy – of a referendum initiated by Trifonov in 2016: for a majority electoral system with absolute majority in two rounds; for compulsory voting; for severe cuts of public party financing (from then 11, now 8 BGN to 1 BGN per vote).

Although almost absent from the official election campaign and campaigning only on Trifonov's own TV channel and in the social media, the party was successful because of its anti-government and anti-establishment appeal. 565,014 (17.66%) Bulgarian voters supported the party, including the greater part of the protest vote and especially including the younger voters. 30% of the voters between 18 and 30 years old voted for the party. In its first appearance at elections ITN was even able to become the strongest party in some municipalities ("data" panel). Its electoral strongholds have been the district cities and towns and villages (Figure **d**).

The ITN votes and their share were not surprising. Surprising was the fact that as a second political force in parliament (51 seats, 21.25% of mandates) Trifonov's party became the only party with realistic chances to form a functioning government coalition. This "kingmaker role" made ITN look as the real election winner.

The socialists of BSP

The next important election result was the extremely poor performance of BSP, which allowed ITN to overtake this party which was considered safe for the second place. During the transition the socialists have experienced sharp ups and downs. However, the 2021 results were a historic low, the worst parliamentary election result in absolute number of votes since 1990. Only 480,146 (15.01%) citizens voted for BSP compared to 955,490 (27.93%) in the previous elections 2017. It has lost one-half of its 2017 voters and dropped for the first time below the line of half a million votes. The BSP parliamentary faction was also almost halved and it will contribute only 43 (80 in 2017) deputies to the new parliament. Former socialist voters didn't vote or switched preferences to other anti-government parties and coalitions. Estimates show that the party lost about 60 thousand votes to ITN and another

40 thousand to the protest formation "Stand Up! Thugs Out!" (ISMV, independent). The gloomy picture is completed by the results in the individual constituencies and municipalities. In 2021 the BSP was leading in only one of the 31 constituencies; in 2017, it was the strongest party in seven. The comparison between the results of these two elections shows that BSP has now lost its leading role in a large number of municipalities ("data" panel, Figure **e**). Most of its voters are concentrated in the small and medium-sized towns (Figure **e**, right).

There are various reasons for the poor performance of the once-largest Bulgarian party, including serious political mistakes of the party leadership that have unsettled and demobilized many party supporters.

Other parties

The fourth largest party in the national Assembly is the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS, RE), the longstanding representative of the citizens with Turkish ethnicity. This specific of the party is the reason of the territorial concentration of its electorate, covering the areas of residence of this ethnic group ("data" panel, Figure **f**). Traditionally it keeps its strongholds in the smaller settlements (Figure **f**, right).

This time DPS was not able to maintain its traditional position as the third strongest force in parliament, although its results were somewhat better than in 2017. With its 336,306 voters DPS got 10.51% of the vote, little more than in 2017 (9.24%, 315,976 voters), but a big step back from its much better result of 14.84% (487,134 voters) in 2014. This configuration is repeated in the number of seats: 30 in 2021 and 26 in 2017, but 38 in 2014. The increase in votes and number of deputies in 2021 seems minimal, given that in these elections DPS remained a monopolist in its specific constituencies. In 2017 it had a serious competitor in the face of DOST party of the former DPS chairman Mestan, which received 100,479 votes (2.94%).

The fifth strongest formation in parliament is Democratic Bulgaria (DB), a center-right coalition between the party Yes Bulgaria of former Justice minister Hristo Ivanov; the party Democrats for Strong Bulgaria (DSB), founded by former PM Ivan Kostov; and the ecological
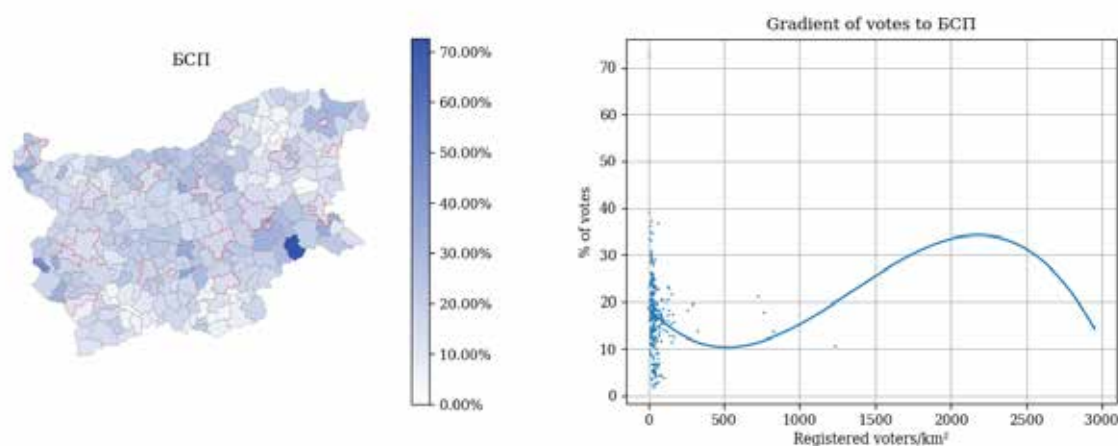
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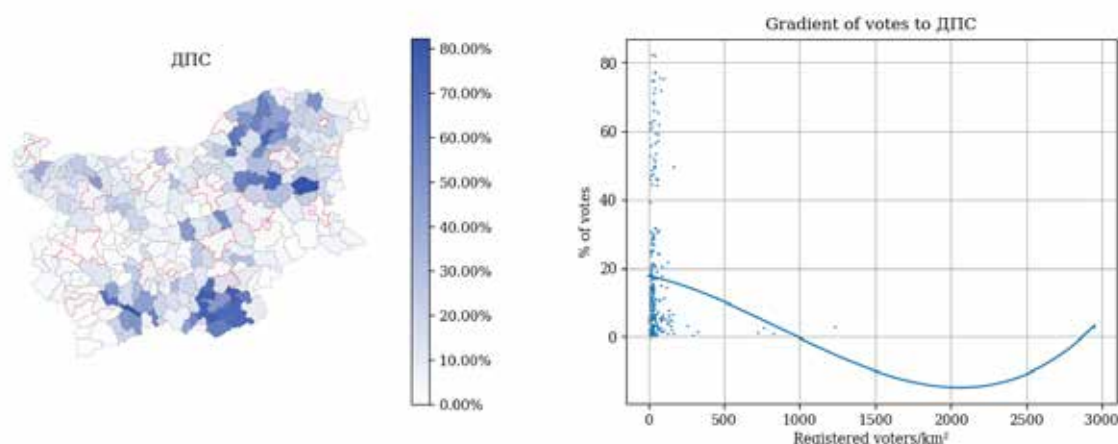
Green Movement (ZD). With regard to affiliation with EP political groups the picture is ambivalent: Yes Bulgaria is not affiliated yet, DSB is EPP member, and ZD is a member of the Greens. The distribution of seats is as follows: Yes Bulgaria (independent) – 13; DSB (EPP) – 8; Green Movement – 4 (Greens/EFA); citizen quota (independent) – 2. Generally, DB is considered to represent the so-called traditional right which was once gathered in the big umbrella party Union of Democratic Forces (SDS). In 2017 three quarreling right parties ran on their own in the elections but each reached less than four percent of the vote and all remained outside parliament. In the 2021 elections, it was the new coalition DB that embodied this political tradition. As an extra-parliamentary opposition hostile to GERB and Borissov's government DB was one of the driving forces in the protests last summer.

DB received 302,280 votes (9.45%) and 27 seats in parliament – a slightly better result than the votes and seats won by a similar coalition (Reform bloc) in 2014. The most remarkable achievement of the formation was the best result in the capital Sofia. However, DB still has problems to reach the other parts of the country and remains more or less a "Sofia party" (Figure **g**).

The last party that entered parliament was another protest movement, ISMV. It is an alliance between some of the protest leaders and the former ombudsman Maya Manolova. Formally, ISMV is an electoral coalition formed by three small parties. It is considered to be center-left oriented although one of the backing parties is EPP member. 150,949 votes (4.72%) were cast for this coalition and it has 14 MPs.

Conclusion

The election results showed, above all, that the majority of Bulgarian voters wanted change. The government backing has changed since 2017 and there is an obvious decline of this support in most parts of the country. GERB is still the largest force, but entirely isolated and unable to form a cabinet. Three of the parliamentary parties are newcomers and their success is linked to the summer anti-government protests. BSP has always been an opponent to Borissov's party. DPS, though supporting GERB when needed during the former legislature, now verbally declared its readiness to support the protest parties. In this way, a dividing line between GERB and all other parliamentary parties is formed.

At the same time, there is a second dividing line, which significantly complicates the situation and the country's prospects after the elections. It is the dividing line between the so called "parties of the status quo" (this includes the "old" parliamentary parties GERB, BSP and DPS) and the new "parties of change." However, the latter have only 92 seats in parliament and are far away from
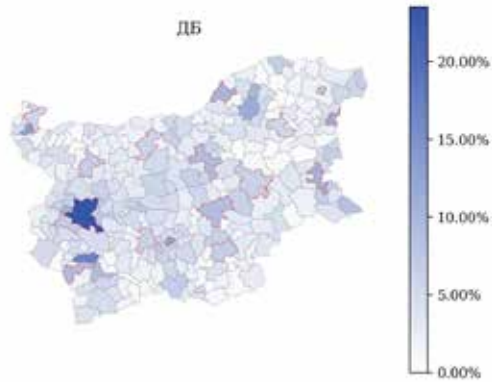
the required 120+1 majority. Their reluctance even to talk to others (and to secure or even to accept parliamentary support at least by the BSP) made it extremely difficult to form a government.

The prevalence of the second dividing line over the first one became clear when the three attempts provided by the constitution to form a cabinet failed. The inability to form a majority and a government by a newly elected parliament occurred for the first time since the beginning of democratic change. President Radev had to dissolve parliament, appoint a caretaker government, and schedule new elections. Early elections were held on July 11. This is an unprecedented situation in Bulgarian political life. Bulgarian politics is entering unexplored territories.

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Party votes

Winning party (2021)

European indicators

Share of votes by EP group

Народно събрание (2021)
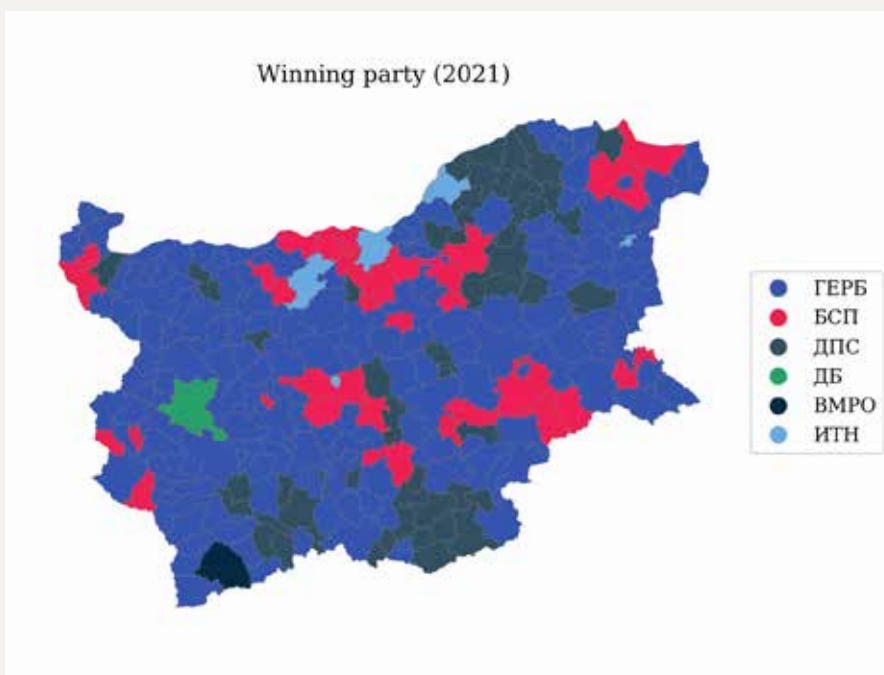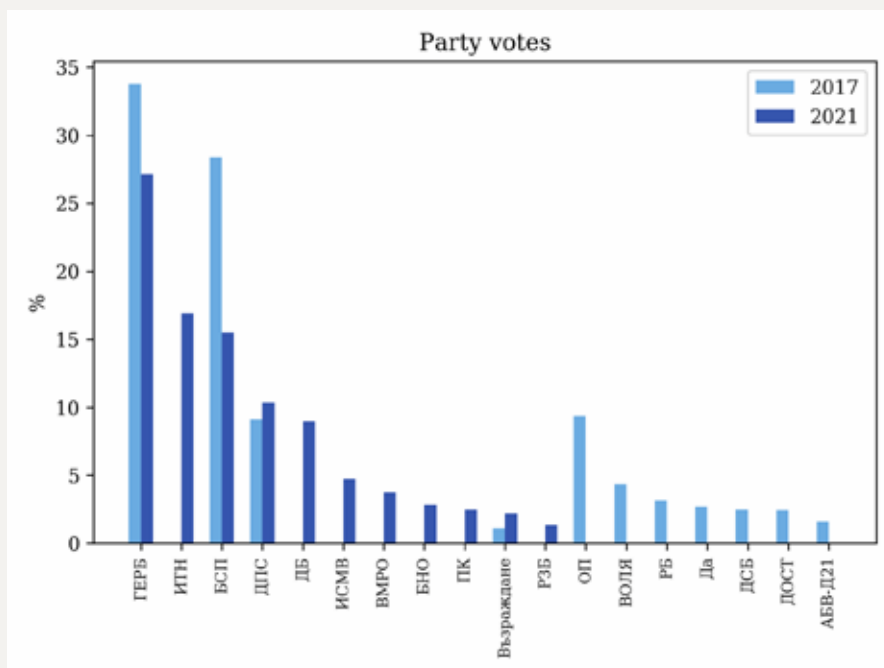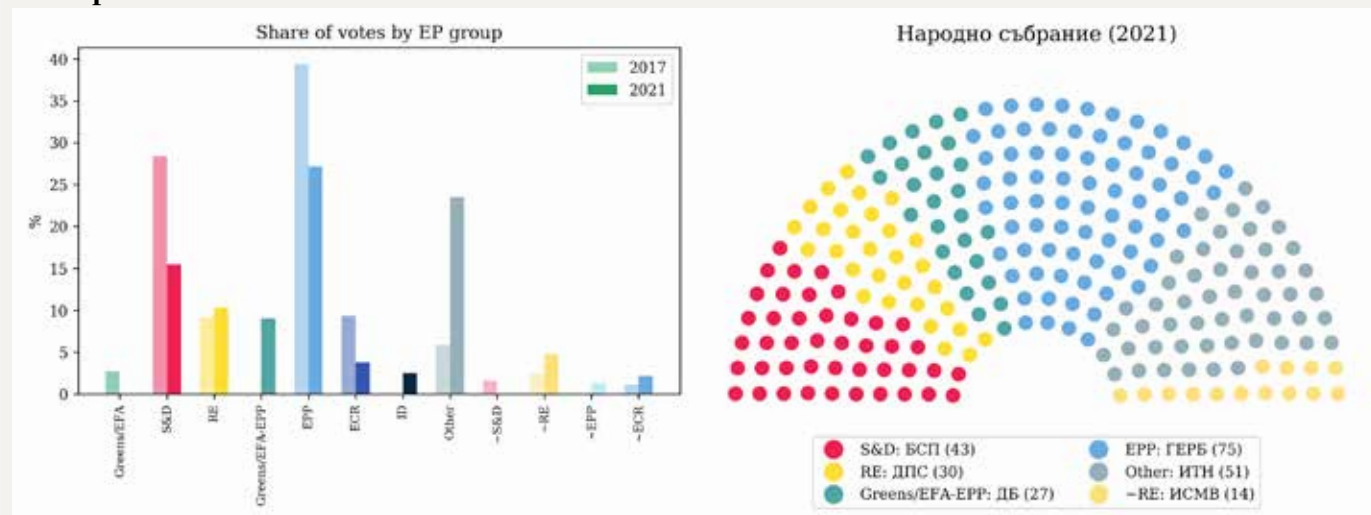
Francisco Cabezuelo • Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Parliamentary Election in the Community of Madrid, 4 May 2021

The regional elections of May 4, 2021 in the Autonomous Community of Madrid, a single-province autonomous region and the political and economic capital of the country, have been the most influential political event of this season in Spain. The uncontested victory of the Partido Popular candidate, Isabel Díaz Ayuso (Madrid, 1978), marks a new change of cycle in both Madrid and Spanish politics.

Ayuso's list was able to obtain more seats than the three left-wing parties combined (PSOE, UP, and Más Madrid). Her strategy of constant opposition to the policies of the Spanish Government, presided by the socialist Pedro Sánchez Pérez-Castejón (Madrid, 1972), has been endorsed by the Madrid electorate. This has been a serious setback for the national government, which has found in Madrid and its incumbent president a rebellious region with unexpected leadership. Despite the pandemic, this year was marked by controversy and constant clashes between the national and regional executives.

Another important fact has been the turnout figure, which reached 76.25 percent. Out of a census of 4,783,263 people, 3,644,577 went to vote, although the elections were held on a Tuesday, a working day, as opposed to the tradition of Sunday elections. Likewise, they took place under a state of emergency, with strong mobility restrictions and highly restrictive sanitary and hygienic measures. The share of the postal vote grew more than ever. All in all, the high turnout was undoubtedly one of the main characteristics of these elections. Interestingly, it was also the first time that three male and three female candidates were running, representing all possible political options.

The candidates

Isabel Díaz Ayuso, of the Partido Popular, is the winner of the election. She has become a political and mass phenomenon inside and outside Madrid, to the extent that the state entity Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS) included her in the CIS barometer for the month of May. This decision to include Díaz Ayuso in the potential candidate pool for the presidency of the central government, even pitting her against the president of the Partido Popular, Pablo Casado Blanco (Palencia, 1981), is exceptional. Indeed, the CIS usally does not include regional leaders as options to become president of the Council of Ministers. Ayuso, a great connoisseur of social networks and digital communication, an expert journalist and a graduate from the Faculty of Information Sciences of the Complutense University of Madrid, was apparently right in her strategy of public appearances and statements to the press.

Mónica García Gómez (Madrid, 1974) headed the left-wing and environmentalist list called Más Madrid, and became, thanks to the election results of May 4, the leader of the opposition and head of the left. García, who was largely unknown to the general public until recently, is an anesthesiologist in the public health system who led the protests of health professionals against the health policies of the regional executive. In the May 5 election, she has managed to beat the socialist candidate, who had been the winner of the previous election in 2019. Más Madrid thus created a surprise against a Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) in free fall, which lost the leadership of the opposition in the process.

Ángel Gabilondo Pujol (San Sebastián, 1949), from PSOE, was the winner of the same regional elections in 2019 but did not reach the presidency due to the pact between the right-wing parties (PP and C's). However, in 2021 he has signed the worst result in the history of the socialists in an election in Madrid. The politician of Basque origin and former Catholic friar was rector of the Autonomous University of Madrid and Minister of Education between 2009 and 2011 in the second government of

President José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. Just before the early call for elections, the Madrid press speculated on the departure of Gabilondo from active politics, due to his age, or on the possibility that he would be elected by the Congress of Deputies as Ombudsman, an institutional position for which he reached consensus due to his disposition, profile and political trajectory.

Another major protagonist of the campaign was the candidate Rocío Monasterio San Martín (Madrid, 1974), an architect and politician with strong family ties to the Cuban exile and the leader of the Vox formation in the Community of Madrid. Vox is the most right-wing formation of the entire Spanish political spectrum. Its strongly nationalist stance has led some analysts to compare it to Matteo Salvini's Lega or Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National.

Despite the great expectations generated by the announcement of his candidacy, and even though his party eventually increased its support from 5.6% in 2019 to 7.2% in 2021, Pablo Iglesias Turrión, the leader of Unidas Podemos (Madrid, 1978), was one of the big losers of this election. On election night, following the announcement of his defeat, Iglesias declared that he would not take his seat at the Madrid Assembly and that he intended to completely retire from active politics. Iglesias headed the left-wing list Unidas Podemos, which brought together different currents and movements. After the election, he left all his positions and called for the renewal of his party's leadership. Ahead of the Madrid vote, Iglesias, in a surprising and unprecedented move, had already left his position in the central Executive as a second vice-president of the Government and Minister of Social Rights and Agenda 2030 to lead his party's campaign in the Capital region. But his belief that he was the only candidate able to bring together all left-wing forces was eventually shattered.

Edmundo Bal Francés (Huelva, 1967), of Ciudadanos (C's), was the second big loser of the regional election, as his party literally disappeared from the political scene. By not reaching the minimum legal threshold of five percent of the vote, his formation went from 26 seats in 2019 to none in 2021, achieving only 129,216 votes or 3.57 percent against 629,940 votes in 2019. A declared admirer of the French president Emmanuel Macron, the respected jurist born in Andalusia came down to regional politics from the national scene, but he too failed to make a positive impact on the electorate. Bal could not stop the decline of his formation, which had been part of a coalition government with Diaz Ayuso since 2019. Controversies and even contradictions between members of the executive of the two formations had been constant during the last two years. The call for elections was motivated by the decision of Ciudadanos to end the regional government that they formed with the Partido Popular in the Region of Murcia, after which Ayuso, fearing that the same could happen in the capital, promulgated a decree of dissolution of the regional assembly. Its members should normally have held office until 2023.

Messages and anecdotes from the campaign

The campaign has been marked by tension, polemics, in a hard confrontation between some candidates. In a thwarted rally of Vox in the popular suburb of Vallecas, the formation of Rocío Monasterio suffered several physical and verbal aggressions. It was discovered in the final stretch of the campaign that Podemos security personnel were involved in these violent actions.

On the other hand, the security services located several packages with threats, knives, violent messages, scissors and sharp objects that were addressed to Pablo Iglesias (UP), the former president José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (PSOE), the current Minister of the Interior, Fernando Grande Marlaska (PSOE) and even to Isabel Díaz Ayuso (PP) herself.

Another highlight of the campaign was the strong clash in a radio debate on Cadena SER, the main private radio broadcasting station in Spain, between Pablo Iglesias and Rocío Monasterio. The leader of Podemos left the debate after a fierce argument. He was later accompanied in his decision to leave the debate by Mónica García and Ángel Gabilondo. Curiously, neither Ayuso nor any representative of the Partido Popular had decided to participate in that debate, which helped generate a more institutional, cleaner and less muddy image of the PP leader.

Ayuso, who did not win the previous elections and whose unexpected candidacy and appointment by the party apparatus without primaries had been a much-discussed decision, has become in only two years a leader of the right and a reference for her party in other regions. In this election, she has been able to mobilize and convince a young and urban electorate with messages based on freedom of movement, ending restrictions, liberal ideas, and a controversial initial slogan "Communism or Freedom" that ended up printed on posters only as "Freedom."

The results

The Partido Popular won 44.73 percent of the vote, compared to 22.33 percent in 2019, going from 719,852 votes two years ago up to 1,620,213, which translates into a jump from 30 to 65 seats, more than doubling its vote and seat share. Ayuso's victory, achieved by absorbing votes from the center and the right, has meant a hard blow for the Madrid left and even the disappearance of the only party that claimed to be liberal and/or centrist, namely Ciudadanos. Together, the parties of the left were unable to beat the Partido Popular. Ayuso's candidacy won in 176 of the 179 municipalities that make up the region. Only in the towns of Fuentidueña del Tajo and El Atazar did the Socialists win. Interestingly, in the town of El Atazar, with only 112 voters, the last municipal election ended up in a tie between the Partido Popular, Ciudadanos and Vox on one side, and the Socialist Party and Podemos on the other, which forced the election of the mayor by tossing a coin, eventually giving the victory to the left.

The difference between the Partido Popular and the

next most voted list is more than one million votes. The main opposition party is now Más Madrid, which has gone from 475,672 votes (14.69 percent) up to 614,660 votes. For its part, the historic Socialist Party fell from 27.31 percent of the vote (37 seats) in the previous elections to 16.85 percent, from 884,218 votes in 2019 down to 610,190 in 2021. United Podemos, the formation led by Pablo Iglesias, suffered another major setback. Iglesias has declared himself an admirer of French politician Jean-Luc Mélenchon, Greek former Prime minister Alexis Tsipras and Portuguese leader Caterina Martins. He has never hidden his sympathies for the regime of Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela.

Ayuso's victory was not the only one on the right. The other conservative party managed to increase its number of votes from 287,667 (8.88 percent) to 330,660 (9.13 percent), going from 12 to 13 deputies, and maintained its position as the fourth political force in the regional parliament.

The Partido Popular has managed to mobilize all its electorate, former abstentionists, former Socialist voters, former Ciudadanos voters and new voters. Beyond the figures, the Madrid election of this spring has resulted in the departure from active politics of two major figures of the left. While the departure of Gabilondo (PSOE) was foreseeable due to his age, Iglesias's (UP) decision was much more surprising, and the leader of the left also gave up his position as general secretary of Podemos, which he had held since 2014.

The victory of Isabel Díaz Ayuso, who has become the new icon of the Spanish right, has been a hard blow for the left, who failed to beat the Madrid Popular Party. Furthermore, her victory shows the opposition of the people of Madrid to the policies of Pedro Sánchez and his coalition partners in La Moncloa.

Party votes

Winning party (2021)

European indicators

Share of votes by EP group

Asamblea de Madrid (2021)
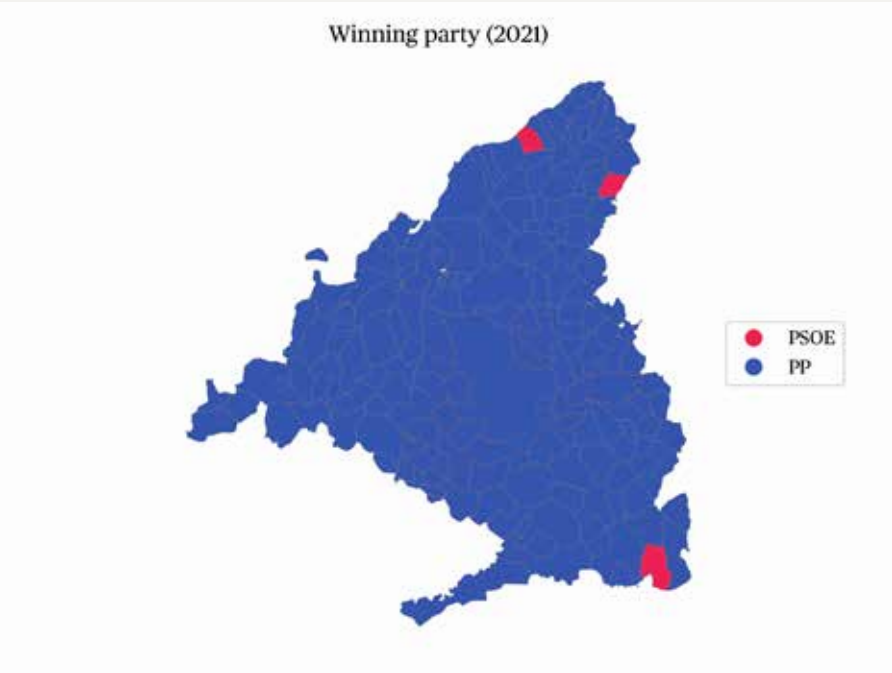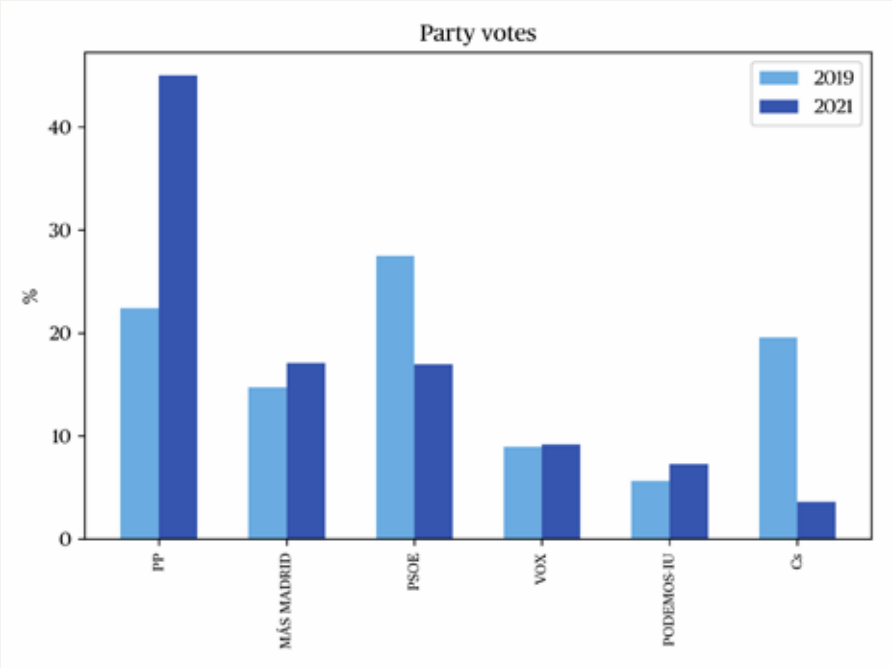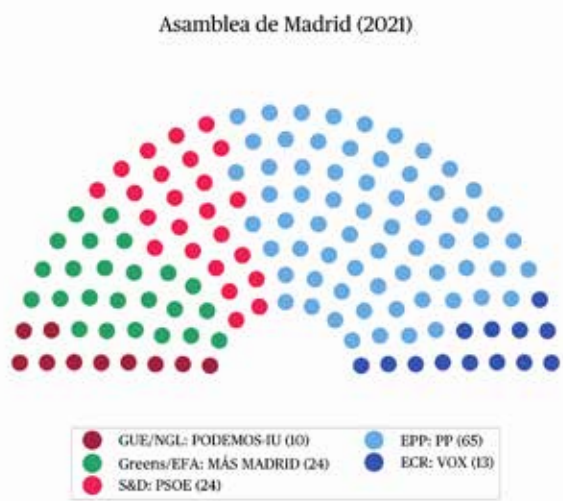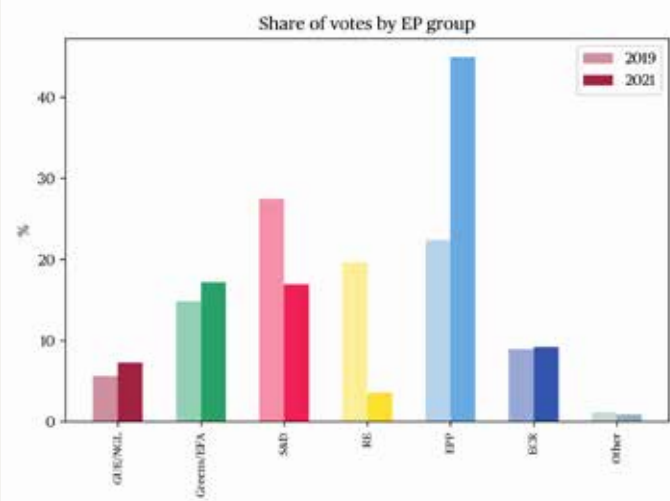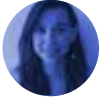
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Parliamentary Election in Cyprus, 30 May 2021 (I)

On 30 May 2021, the 12th Parliamentary Elections since the island's independence took place in the Republic of Cyprus (RoC). Parliamentary elections in Cyprus are traditionally of lower importance compared to the Presidential elections, since the President of the Republic wields executive power. Despite their lower salience, the Parliamentary elections are still considered a crucial barometer for the political parties' power and influence in the Parliament, but also outside of Parliament. Parties' parliamentary strength has an impact on how crucial issues, such as the economy, institutional matters, the next presidential elections and the so-called Cyprus problem are dealt with.

Context

The 2021 parliamentary elections turned out to be significant in various ways. They were the first elections to take place during the COVID 19 pandemic crisis, amidst growing economic uncertainty due to the lengthy lockdowns and a political and institutional crisis caused by the "golden passports" corruption scandal. The latter was heightened after an Al Jazeera television documentary in which the then speaker of the Parliament, Demetris Syllouris, and an MP from the opposition party AKEL appeared to operate as mediators for arranging the naturalization of a criminal Chinese businessman. This incident triggered a series of events: the resignation of the President of the Parliament, an interim investigation for numerous applications for a Cypriot passport, especially for applicants with obscure criminal records aided by prestigious law firms in Cyprus, the abolition of the specific naturalization scheme upon Brussels' pressure and an overwhelming public anger. Against this background, the composition of a new parliament could have been a transformative moment with the entry of new political parties protesting against corruption and expressing indignation against the existing political system. The results,

however, did not produce such a moment, since most of the new parties did not manage to pass the threshold of 3.6 percent and enter the House of Representatives, but instead confirmed the status quo in the Cypriot political context.

Although corruption was a flag issue during the campaign for many parties, especially the new ones, this was not truly the major concern of public opinion. Instead, opinion polls suggest that the economy, along with the classic Cyprus problem, were the most salient issues upon which the electorate formulated its vote choices (IMR, 2021 ; Cypronetwork, 2021). Against this background context the way to the election was long, intense and polarized. The parties and their candidates organized their promotion campaign events predominantly through social media since the lockdown did not allow for social events. This fact had two consequences: On the one hand, the use of social media for campaign reasons opened up new ways of communication and potentially created a new precedent for the use of new technologies in the forthcoming electoral campaigns in Cyprus. On the other, due to social media's greater scope for interactivity, the campaign became toxic with the use of harsh language by candidates and party supporters, especially those of the new parties, while also providing a platform for the expression of generalized public anger and discontent.

The Candidates

In these elections there were 15 candidate parties/political formations and seven independent candidates. Eight new parties ran for the first time. Past electoral analysis (Triga, 2017) indicates that the Cypriot ideological space is structured upon two well-known axes of political competition. The first concerns the regulation of the economy, the classic cleavage between left and right. The second axis concerns culture and identity issues and incorpo-

rates the so-called Cyprus problem. The Cyprus problem is understood as the long-standing de facto partition of the island into a southern Greek Cypriot and a northern Turkish Cypriot part following the Turkish invasion and occupation of the northern part of the island in 1974. Since then, the Southern part of the RoC has been the only internationally recognized state, a fact that makes Cyprus the only EU member state with divided territory under military occupation. Below we briefly discuss the parties that run for the elections in relation to the two axes of the political space in Cyprus.

The so-called old parties were the following:

a) DISY (Democratic Rally – Δημοκρατικός Συναγερμός), with a classic right-wing ideological stance that holds the majority in the Parliament. DISY occupies its own distinctive policy space characterised by a consistent neo-liberal economic position and a more moderate cultural position (mostly because of its position on the Cyprus problem). The President of the Republic, Nicos Anastasiades, belongs to this party.

b) AKEL (Progressive Party of the Working People – Ανορθωτικό Κόμμα Εργαζόμενου Λαού) is a communist party (according to party's declarations [Akel, 2019]) that adopts left-wing economic positions and is socially progressive. In these elections (as well as recent ones) AKEL has suffered a gradual loss of its electoral base. Yet it remains the biggest opposition party and has the most liberal stance on the Cyprus problem.

c) DIKO (Democratic party – Δημοκρατικό Κόμμα), the third biggest party, is rather centrist in terms of the economy but has taken a more nationalist turn vis a vis the Cyprus problem – a fact that has created tension inside the party and led to a split with the creation of a new party DIPA (Democratic Front – Δημοκρατική Παράταξη) under the leadership of DIKO's former leader, Marios Garoyian.

d) ELAM (National Popular Front – Εθνικό Λαϊκό Μέτωπο), a far-right party, authoritarian in terms of cultural issues and ultra-nationalist vis a vis the Cyprus problem. ELAM appears quite centrist on the economy, which is quite common among many other far-right parties in Europe who have a populist stance and support policies that are against austerity or privatizations, for example.

e) EDEK (Unified Democratic Union of the Centre – Ενιαία Δημοκρατική Ένωση Κέντρου) is a socialist party, left on the economy but on the conservative side with respect to cultural issues, especially the Cyprus problem: the party denounces the bizonal bicommunal federation. EDEK, despite its consistent decline in recent elections, managed to maintain its fifth position in these elections.

f) KOP (Movement of Ecologists-Citizens' Cooperation – Κίνημα Οικολόγων Συνεργασία Πολιτών), known also as the Greens, is an overall centrist party promoting a democratic renewal with the collaboration of civil society. However, its positions toward the Cyprus problem remain a bit confusing since the change in its leadership.

g) The Solidarity Movement (Κίνημα Αλληλεγγύη),

which first competed in the 2016 parliamentary elections, is a fringe party created by an ex-member of DISY following disagreement with President Anastasiades on how the Cyprus problem was being deal with. The party gained three seats in the 2016 parliamentary elections following a hard line on the Cyprus problem by opposing the model of bi-zonal, bicommunal federation and disputing the overall political establishment.

The remaining eight parties were all newly created. Except for DIPA that as mentioned above was rather moderate on the economy and the cultural axis, the rest six parties were anti-status quo, and mobilized on a anti-corruption agenda. Most of them (apart from Famagusta for Cyprus (Αμμόχωστος για την Κύπρο) also adopted a nationalistic stance on the Cyprus problem (e.g. Awakening 2020 (Αφύπνιση 2020), Active Citizens: United Cypriot Hunters (Ενεργοί Πολίτες: Κίνημα Ενωμένων Κυπρίων Κυνηγών), Independents: Generation Change (Ανεξάρτητοι: Αλλαγή Γενιάς), Peoples Breath (Πνοή Λαού), Animal Party Cyprus (Κόμμα για τα Ζώα Κύπρου), Patriotic Coalition (Πατριωτικός Συνασπισμός).

Election Results

Turning to the election results (see "data" panel), we immediately notice that it was a loss for the opposition rather than for the incumbent, who incured losses. Incumbent parties are frequently "punished" by election outcomes – this was also the case for DISY. The party lost almost 3 percent of its vote share and one seat, having gained only 27.8 percent of the overall votes, at a historical low. However, it remained the first party and held its power. Relatively speaking, this is not a bad outcome for DISY, given that the party was directly involved in the golden passport scandal and has been in power for almost eight consecutive years. Another observation is that AKEL faces the biggest setback of all parties. This vote "hemorrhage" had started already after the defeat of its candidate for the Presidential elections in 2013. Since then, the party seems unable to recover from the perceived failures of Chirstofias presidency (an AKEL leader for 21 years) and capitalize on public discontent of the government's policies and scandals. The very centralized party approach vis a vis its members and an overall lack of modernization of its discourse appear as ineffective strategies for bringing voters back to the party.

In general, all the existing parties (except for ELAM) lost votes compared to the 2016 parliamentary elections (a phenomenon that emerged in the last 10-year period). More specifically, the two main parties have lost almost 17 percent of their vote share, with their combined electoral strength now accounting for 50 percent of the total vote share (as opposed to 56.4 percent in 2016 and 67 percent in 2011). The notable exception was the far-right party of ELAM, which turned out to be one of the biggest winners. Overall, the new parties managed to attract 14 percent of the vote share by adopting positions that were held traditionally by DISY and DIKO. However, despite their com-

bined gains, apart from DIPA, seven of the new parties did not manage to cross the 3.6 percent (since 2015) threshold to enter parliament.

The parliamentary elections result re-inforced three political phenomena that have become apparent since 2011 and will undoubtedly shape the dynamics of the forthcoming 2023 Presidential elections:

1. **The growth in voters' abstention as a systemic feature of the present political context in Cyprus.** Abstention rates show a raising trend in Cyprus politics. In the immediate period before the onset of the Great Recession, turnout was about 89 percent (2006), to be compared to the 65 percent in 2021. Although it follows a wider European tendency since the early 2000s, is rather unusual for Cyprus. It is worth mentioning that in these elections. on top of the 34.3 percent that abstained from the ballots, 80.000 new voters did not even register to vote. Analysts connect this trend with the abolition of compulsory vote in Cyprus (legally in 2017, yet the turning point was when Cyprus joined the EU in 2004), and most importantly with a generalized feeling of political apathy, distrust and lack of interest in politics on the part of the electorate.

2. **The continuous party fragmentation, also related to electoral dissatisfaction.** The trend is linked further to the weakening of the two major political parties, DISY and AKEL, which are perceived as unaccountable political formations. Hence, we observe the emergence of new, non-mainstream parties that put forward anti-status quo and anti-corruption manifestos. Although this phenomenon is not new, we do observe that these new parties tend not to last, as shown by the example of Solidarity Movement, which lost its representation in 2021. An interpretation could be that the stressful period of the pandemic re-booste indignation and distrust towards the capacity of "old" parties to manage crises (presently the pandemic), a sentiment which was expressed by the new political parties.

3. **The far-right party ELAM consolidated itself, and is now the fourth political power in the Cyprus political system.** After its first appearance in the 2009 European elections (polling a mere 0.22 percent), ELAM has been steadily and gradually increasing its power. Although ELAM first appeared as a protest party within a wider context of political disappointment, it managed to consolidate its position without the support of its mentor and brother party Golden Dawn in Greece (that latter has been largely disbanded following the imprisonment of many of its elected MPs). Explanations for ELAM's rise can be attributed to the abandonment of its radical actions and its professionalized campaign strategies, which contributed to its incorporation in the political system. It is indicative that a party representative commented ELAM's performance on a TV show on election night by using the phrase "democracy won."

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Parliamentary Election in Cyprus, 30 May 2021 (II)

The territorial framework

A British colony until 1960, the island of Cyprus experienced an "intercommunal" conflict[1] which led to its partition in 1974. Despite a dozen rounds of negotiations since then, the conflict is "frozen" without a lasting solution (Bertrand, 2017). The island is thus divided into:

- A southern zone representing 58% of the territory, with 850,000 "Greek" Cypriots (Greek-speaking Orthodox), minority Christians (Armenians, Catholics and Maronites), a few hundred "Turkish" Cypriots (Muslims) and non-citizen residents living under the authority of the Republic of Cyprus (RC), the only state internationally recognised as sovereign on the island;
- A Turkish-occupied northern area, representing 36% of the territory, with an estimated population of 260-330,000 "Turkish" Cypriots but also Turkish nationals, some of whom also enjoy citizenship of the self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), as well as several hundred "enclaved" Greek Cypriots [2];
- The remaining 6% of the territory is almost equally divided between two British Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs) and the buffer zone between the two zones in the north and south, which is under the control of the United Nations Force (UNFICYP).

As the partition was illegal, the RoC maintained the six original electoral districts, while Kyrenia's electoral district is entirely in the north and Nicosia and Famagusta's

in part. Greek Cypriots who were resident in these constituencies before 1974, but who took refuge in the south at the time of partition, continue to vote there fictitiously (the polling stations being "delocalized" to the south).

The constitutional framework

The RoC has a strong presidential system. The President of the Republic is elected for five years by direct universal suffrage. He appoints the ministers, who are not accountable to the House of Representatives (the only chamber of parliament). The duration of a legislature is also five years, but it does not match with the presidential term – there is a three-year gap, due to the conflict (1965 presidential elections postponed to 1968, 1975 legislative elections postponed by one year). The 1960 Constitution provided for the election of deputies by separate community electorates. Greek Cypriots and Christian minorities elect 56 deputies; Turkish Cypriots are supposed to elect 24 deputies, but their seats have remained vacant since the conflict in late 1963. However, following a 2004 ruling by the European Court of Human Rights, a 2006 law allows the 400 or so Turkish Cypriots living in the south to register on the Greek Cypriot electoral roll and thus participate in the election of 56 deputies. Finally, three deputies are elected by the members of the three Christian minorities (who therefore vote twice) but only have an advisory role on issues concerning minorities (e.g. education).

Members of Parliament are elected according to a system of proportional representation with limited preferential voting (1979, modified in 1995 and 2015). The distribution of seats is done in two steps. A first distribution allocates as many seats as each list has obtained votes, multiplied by the electoral quotient (resulting from the division of the number of valid votes by the number of seats) of the constituency. The list leaders and then the

1. This is a particularly problematic label (Bertrand, 2005a). It would be more accurate to speak of a conflict between Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot nationalist political-military elites and factions, with the population either supporting or suffering (and often both) from the belligerents (Copeaux and Mauss-Copeaux, 2005). The Greek and Turkish states are also involved in the conflict.

2. These are Greek Cypriots who remained in the north despite the Turkish occupation.

| Electoral constituencies	Seats	Possible preferential votes
Lefkosia (Nicosie)	20	5
Lemesos (Limassol)	12	3
Ammokhostos (Famagouste)	11	3
Larnaca	6	2
Paphos	4	1
Kerynia (Kyrenia)	3	1

candidates with the highest number of preferential votes are selected first, followed by the other candidates. A distribution of the remainders then takes place, but in order to participate, the party must have obtained 3.6% of the votes cast nationally. This threshold is raised to 10 or 20% for coalitions of two or more parties.

### The Greek Cypriot political landscape

Composed mainly of 4 large parties which totalled 97% of the votes during the 1991 legislative elections and still 68% in 2021, it is still largely marked by intra- and inter-community conflict, but also by a clientelist system identifiable in particular by the recruitment in the civil service of affidavits of the parties in power. Thus, the results of each party in the legislative elections seem to play a role in the distribution of public jobs during the following term (Faustmann, 2010).

AKEL (Ανορθωτικό Κόμμα Εργαζόμενου Λαού, Workers' Reform Party), founded in 1941, is actually the Communist Party (founded in 1926, banned under that name by the British in 1933). It favours reunification and thus a compromise with the Turkish Cypriots, but called for a vote against the UN plan in 2004 and failed to reach an agreement during the presidency of its former general secretary Dimitri Christophias (2008-2013). DISY (Δημοκρατικός Συναγερμός, Democratic/Republican Rally – the distinction does not exist in Greek), founded in 1976, brings together different sensibilities: nationalists, conservatives, liberals. It is one of the heirs of the nationalist current which bears a heavy responsibility in the conflict. Its leaders, Glafcos Clerides and then Nicos Anastassiades, the current President of the Republic, voted in favour of the UN plan in 2004, but some of their activists and voters are ultranationalists. DIKO (Δημοκρατικό Κόμμα, Democratic/Republican Party) is more liberal than DISY but no less nationalistic: its leader, President Tassos Papadopoulos (2003-2008), is primarily responsible for the failure of the UN plan (76% of Greek Cypriot votes in opposition in the 2004 referendum). At the time, he claimed that he would negotiate a "better plan." His son Nikos, the current leader of DIKO, is equally maximalist. EDEK (Ενιαία Δημοκρατική Ενωση Κέντρου – Κίνημα Σοσιαλδημοκρατών: Unitary Rally of the Democratic Centre -Movement of Social Democrats), founded in 1969, certainly belongs to the Socialist International, but is also very nationalistic and

b • Total vote share of the four large historical parties of the RoC, 1991-2021
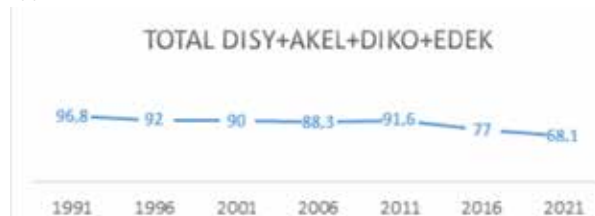
c • Turnout in general elections in the RoC, 1981-2021
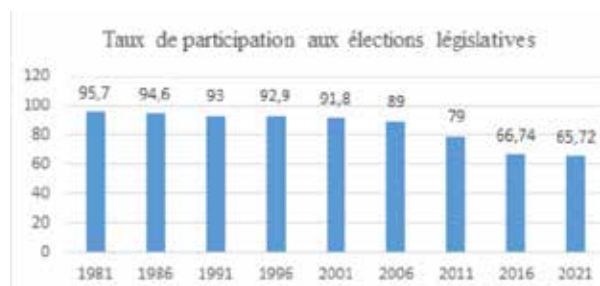
maximalist, and not too open to dialogue with Turkish Cypriots.

These four parties have been in relative decline for the past thirty years (Figure **b**).

The political scene only started to open up after the 2001 parliamentary elections (4 MPs belonging to 4 new parties, including environmentalists). Nevertheless, the phenomenon remained very marginal until the financial crisis of 2013.

The crisis of representation, born of the 2013 crisis, still ongoing

As a member of the European Union since 2004 and the Eurozone since 2008, the RoC suffered the consequences of the 2008 global crisis, the debt crisis and the subsequent crisis of confidence in the EU institutions and the local political class (Karatsioli et al., 2014). However, the financial crisis only erupted in 2013 when the fragility of Cypriot banks, highly exposed to Greek debt, holing bad debts and at the heart of a real estate bubble,

d • Results of the general elections of 30 May 2021

	Votes 2021	% 2021 (% 2016)	Seats
AKEL (communist)	79 913	22,34 (25,67)	15 (-1)
DISY (federalist right)	99 328	27,77 (30,7)	17 (-1)
DIKO (anti-federalist right)	40 395	11,29 (14,49)	9
EDEK (anti-federalist left)	24 022	6,72 (6,18)	4 (-1)
DIPA (diss. DIKO, pro-negociation)	21 832	6,10	4
ELAM (nationalist)	24 255	6,78 (3,7)	4 (+2)
Environmentalists (anti-federalist)	15 762	4,41 (4,8)	3 (+1)
Votes obtained by parties represented in Parliament	305 507	85,41 (96,9)	
Turnout	366 608	65,72 (66,74)	
Registered voters / Total seats	557 836		56

forced the European Central Bank to intervene and the European Council to impose drastic measures on the RC. However, the ensuing recession lasted only two years and, despite the persistence of some difficulties, the Greek Cypriot economy recovered faster than expected (Hardouvelis & Gkionis, 2016). However, the crisis has severely eroded confidence in the political class, a phenomenon aggravated by corruption scandals (Assiotis and Krambia-Kapardis, 2014), most recently the affair of the "golden passports" granted opaquely to non-EU nationals in exchange for sometimes dubious investments, and the total lack of progress in the negotiations for reunification.

Voter turnout fell sharply in 2011 and 2016; it stabilised in 2021. Unsurprisingly, surveys show a link between abstention and the decline in citizens' identification with the four historical parties; as elsewhere, young people abstain the most (Kanol, 2013).

Correlatively, the four major parties (AKEL, DISY, DIKO and EDEK), which had always received more than 90% of the votes in the legislative elections (except in 2006: 88.3%), received only 77% in 2016 and 68% in 2021.

The new parties are the very relative winners of the crisis of political representation. In fact, 8 of the 10 new parties that have obtained at least one MP since 1996 are the result of dissidences from the big 4, and have disappeared one after the other. The only one still active is DIPA (Δημοκρατική Παράταξη, Democratic Front), founded in 2018 by DIKO cadres challenging the current party leadership. Like all previous breakaway parties, DIPA only relatively endangers the party it split from: DIKO kept the 9 MPs it had in 2016, despite losing 10,000 votes from one election to the next .

Two parties are exceptions to this rule: the environmentalists, and the far right under the banner of ELAM (Εθνικό Λαϊκό Μέτωπο, National Popular Front), established in 2008 as the Cypriot branch of the Greek party Golden Down (Katsourides, 2013). These are representative of two relatively new and growing political currents in most EU member states. Having won their first parliamentary seat in 2001, the Greens have 3 seats twenty years later… This is hardly a meteoric rise, especially as the party lost 1200 votes between 2016 and 2021. Of course, the Western European green parties have not progressed very fast either. The Greek Cypriot ecologists however may suffer from their peculiar positioning: they are not very open to negotiations with the Turkish Cypriots, which is surprising for a party claiming to be on the left of the political spectrum, and likely to confuse young voters. ELAM, on the other hand, has enjoyed a positive dynamic in the last decade: a small group in 2011 (4354 votes), it obtained 13040 votes in 2016 (2 MPs) and almost doubled its score in 2021.
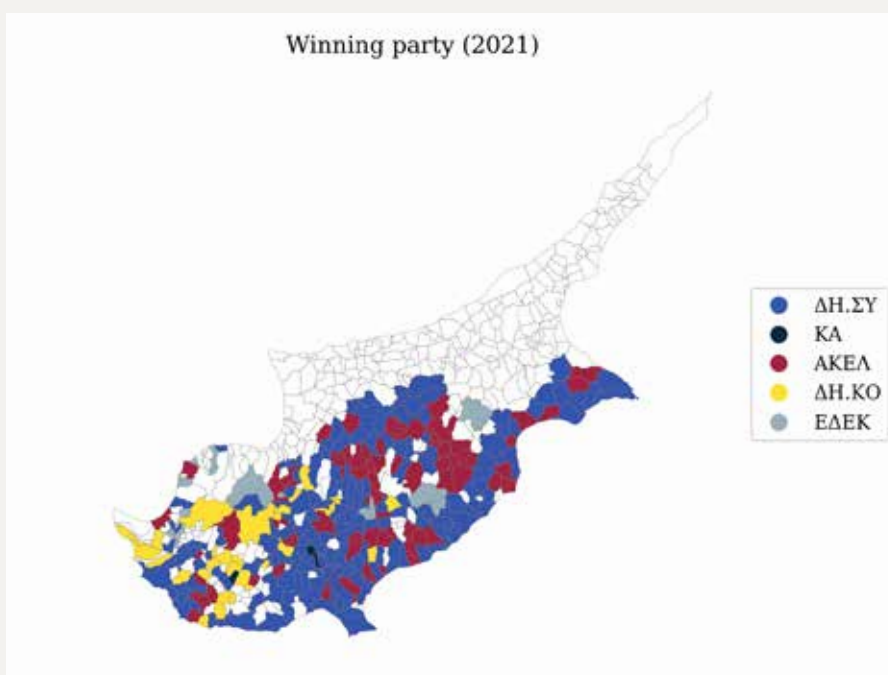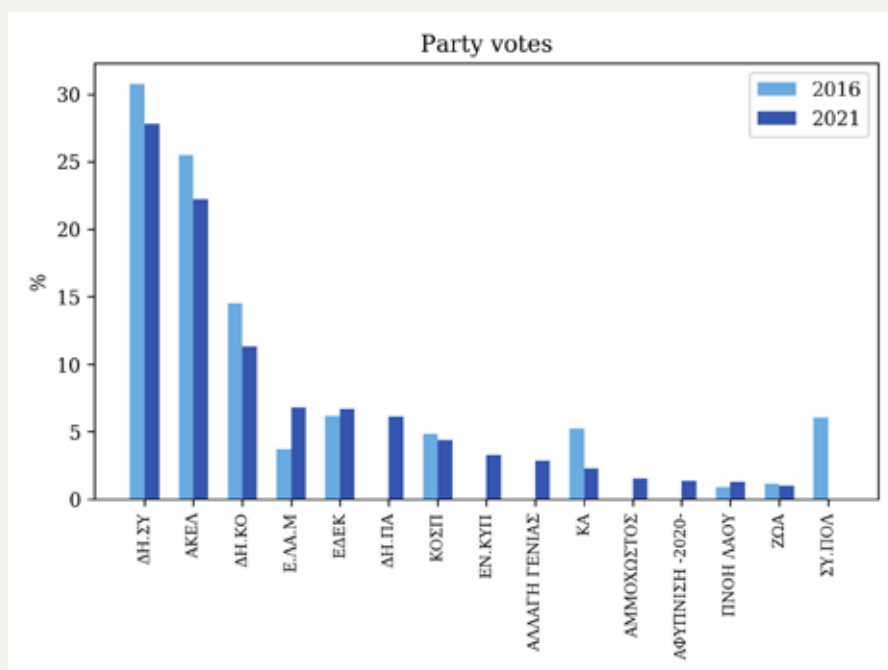
Conclusion

The May 2021 elections are characterised by a high abstention rate and a historically low score of the four major parties, that have shared almost all the seats in parliament since 1976. Clearly, these results reflect exasperation with the governing parties, which did not anticipate or manage the 2013 crisis well. The results also reflect a certain weariness with the political oligarchy. However, it should not be forgotten that the most important election in the RoC is the presidential election, which will take place in February 2023.

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Party votes

Winning party (2021)

European indicators

Share of votes by EP group

Βουλή των Αντιπροσώπων (2021)
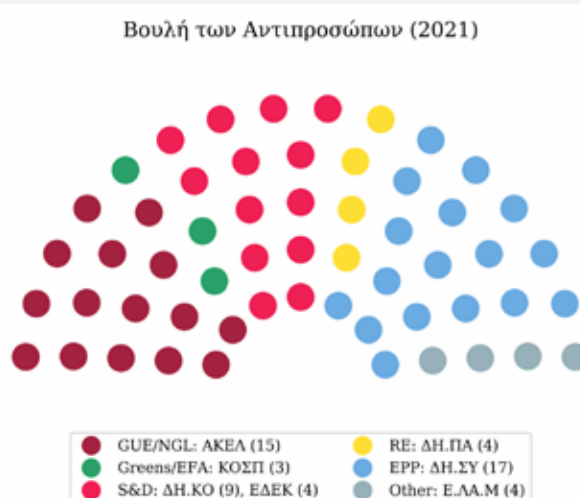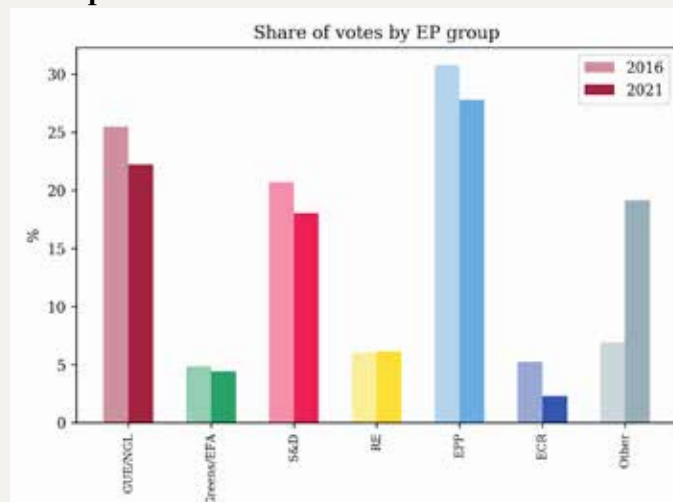
Elections in candidate and EFTA states
National elections

03

Ilir Kalemaj • University of New York Tirana

Parliamentary Election in Albania, 25 April 2021

Context of the vote

On 25 April, Albania held its 10th consecutive parliamentary elections in the post-communist period. The first elections took place in 1991 and were won by a landslide majority by the ruling communists, followed by snap elections in 1992 which saw a sweeping victory of the Democratic Party (alb. PD). Meanwhile, the previous communist party transformed itself into the new Socialist Party (alb. PS), led by its first chairman Fatos Nano. The next elections took place in 1996, when widespread vote fraud was witnessed and condemned by preliminary reports from OSCE/ODIHR and other international organizations. The PD won this election by a wide margin, winning 123 deputies out of 140 in the Albanian parliament.

The next preliminary elections took place a year later, in 1997, after a general revolt that followed the collapse of the pyramidal schemes in the country. The PS won by a landslide and held power under various governments until 2005, winning also the elections of 2001.

The PD came in power through coalitions both in 2005 and 2009, while losing power in 2013 elections, when PS and the Socialist Movement for Integration (alb. LSI, Europhile left) formed a coalition that gathered more than nine hundred thousand votes, and, in partnership with some smaller parties, led a comfortable majority. The Socialist Party of Albania-led Alliance for a European Albania eventually received 57.6% of the vote, winning a solid majority of 83 out of the 140 parliamentary seats.

The 2017 elections were specific for a number of reasons. First of all, the elections were postponed by three months, after a political crisis that the opposition led by PD had initiated. The date of the election had been negotiated and agreed upon on 18 May in a meeting between PD leader Basha and PS chairman Rama. Second, because the parties ran separately, pre-election coalitions were not formed between the opposition parties. PD. LSI and the other smaller parties on the right ran in a single list with the Democratic Party, therefore not being able to generate all the votes that they would otherwise mobilized if they would have run their campaigns independently within a pre-electoral coalition. As a result, the PS won 74 of the 140 seats (Koleka, 2017).
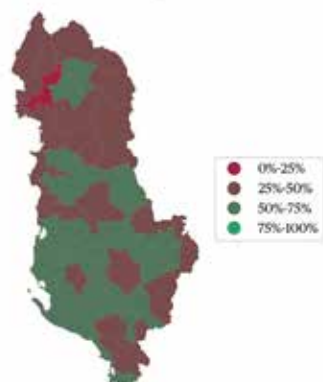
a • Support for the PS government by municipality in 2017
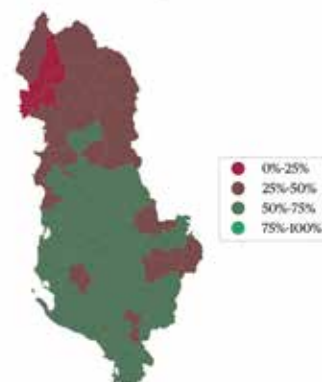
b • Support for the PS government by municipality in 2021

Difficulties during the 2021 elections

One of the major problems that was witnessed in these elections was the very high number of irregular votes. There were 83,028, more than five percent of the total number of votes cast on election day. The main cause of the invalid votes was mistakenly selecting different candidates from the party as a result of people being confused with the new system.

As the partial recounting of the districts of Berat and Durres showed, there were no major irregularities witnessed in the voting centers. This was also made possible by the new changes in the electoral law, which in addition to representatives of the major parties in the electoral commissions also allowed the use of security cameras in each voting center as well as the presence of international observers in selected centers. Furthermore, the representatives of all parties and the independent candidates had to sign the required papers by the time of completion of vote counting.

On the other hand, a major problem that persisted in these elections was the use of public administration to support the ruling PS. For example, in one of her interviews right after the elections, the head of the OSCE/ODIHR observer mission, Ursula Gacek, talked of "the misuse of the resources of public administration" and the "fuzzy position between the [Socialist] party and the state" (Bushati, 2021). This has been a persistent problem also in the past, and OSCE/ODIHR said that it will be reflected in their final report as one of the recommendations not fulfilled.

The biggest concern however is the opposition claim that the government and PS have used illicit funds and other favors to buy electoral votes massively, which dictated the overall result. Some exponents of the opposition have claimed that they would not recognize these elections, prompting fears of a déjà vu where the opposition walked out of the parliament on February 16, 2019 and decided to "burn" their mandates. PD leader Lulzim Basha and LSI leader Monika Kryemadhi, however, have not given any indication of this radical step. Although both have claimed that these elections had been manipulated and that they would soon furnish evidence for their claims, they have also made clear that they would enter the parliament and make use of this political arena to denounce the electoral crimes. According to PD and its electoral expert Ivi Kaso, the electoral crimes were particularly affecting the results in the districts of Elbasan and Shijak. Kaso added that so far, PD has filed more than 180 criminal charges (Kaso, 2021).

Evolution of electoral participation and parties' vote sharess

On first glance, it seems that PD has improved considerably compared to the 2017 elections, or even to the other two previous general elections. For example, PD

has had an electoral result of 610,463 votes in 2009 when it won the elections together with LSI, then it fell down do 528,373 votes in 2013 when it lost the elections to PS that came in power in coalition with LSI. PD continued to lose ground in the 2017 elections, when it fell to a new low of 456,481 votes, and finally recouped in the present elections of 2021, reaching a new high of 622,126 votes.

But this analysis hides the fact that in the 2021 elections, PD had incorporated all smaller right-wing parties (i.e. the Republican Party, the Christian-Democratic Party etc.) and even some centrist and center-left parties such as the Justice, Integration and Unity Party (alb. PDIU) and the Agrarian Party. For example, the PDIU party alone has three representatives in the new parliament, selected as part of the winning list of the Democratic Party. The Greek minority is represented by the leader of PBDNJ Vangjel Dule who was elected as part of the list of the Democratic Party. On the other hand, a Greek minority representative Niko Kuri is elected as part of the PS list for Vlora district. Therefore, both PD and PS have their own representatives of the Greek minority.

Regarding the newly created parties that ran in these elections, the Albanian Democratic Movement led by Myslim Murrizi (Alb. LDSH) received only 4697 votes, the Movement for Change (LN) led by Jozefina Topalli received 7049 votes nationally, whereas the Democratic Conviction (BD) led by Astrit Patozi received 8238 votes. All these three parties were splinter parties of the Democratic Party that ran for the first time in these elections. Additionally, two other parties that were newly created were the New Movement (LRE) party led by Arian Galdini, which received 3771 votes, and Nisma Thurrje, which received 10216 votes. There were also some independent candidates that ran in different districts. Overall, 46 parties ran in this election, down from 54 in 2017.

Meanwhile, the Central Election Commission (CEC) has published the average age of the winning MPs based on preliminary results. In the new parliament, the youngest MP is from the Democratic Party – Andia Ulliri, 22 years old, while the oldest is Luljeta Bozo, 79 years old and comes from the Socialist Party. The youngest average age is that of LSI candidates with 45.5, while the oldest is that of PSD with 49.7. Slightly lower comes PD with 49.5 and PS with 49.3. According to the CEC, 10 deputies are aged under 35 and three over 70 (KQZ).

Political geography and spatial distribution

In the 2021 elections, PS has won 53% of the mandates with only 49% of the votes. It has registered particularly strong growth in four districts, namely in Tirana, where it grew 20 thousand more votes as compared to 2017, Durrës, with four thousand votes more, Dibër, with 3947, Elbasan district, with 13343 votes more than in 2017, while it had a lower number of total votes in the other eight districts throughout the country (Kume, 2021).

Support for the incumbent government appears to

be generally lower in the northwest and northeast of the country, especially in the Shkodër and Kukës regions, while it is higher in the southwest and south of Albania, especially in the Vlorë and Kukës districts. Regarding the distribution of votes in the 12 districts from north to south between PD and PS, it is as follows: Shkodër 43% PD and 28% PS, Kukës 62% PD and 35% PS, Lezhë 47% PD and 38% PS, Dibër 45% PD and 44% PS, Durrës 41% PD and 50% PS, Tiranë 39% PD and 48% PS, Elbasan 37% PD and 55% PS, Fier 37% PD and 52% PS, Berat 30% PD and 56% PS, Korcë 40% PD and 48% PS, Vlorë 31% PD and 57% PS, Gjirokastër 30% PD and 53% PS (see "data" panel).

On the other hand, it is important to note that if the local elections would be taking place today, PD would have won only 14 municipalities out of 61 in total, based on the current distribution of votes (Kume, 2021; see also " data" panel). This, of course, has to be taken into consideration with the caveat that other factors may impact the distribution of votes in the next local elections, from the timing of the elections to the composition of the candidates' lists.

In any case, this also confirms a regular trend, observed in the last general and local elections, whereby PS obtain the largest and steadiest gains by municipality (figure **c**).

Principal component analysis (PCA) can be used to identify municipalities that behave differently from the Albanian average. For example, in figure **d**, we see that 72% of municipality-level variance can be explained by the higher share of votes of PD (and the corresponding lower share of votes of PS) in some Northern municipalities; on figure **e**, we see that 21% can be explained by a better performance of the LSI and PSD in specific municipalities.

The analysis gains further relevance if we are to consider that in the autumn of the current year, preliminary local elections (partly or in full) are due to take place. This follows an expected decision of the newly assembled Constitutional Court about the constitutionality of the 2019 local elections, which took place without the participation of the opposition. The opposition decided to boycott those elections, claiming that massive, unpunished fraud had taken place in the 2017 parliamentary elections. The distribution of the votes that we witnessed

in the 2021 parliamentary elections does not seem to favor the opposition in the upcoming local elections, at least for the time being.

With repect to the urban/rural axes, the voter distribution highly favored the SP in a majority of the rural/periphery and semi-peripheral areas. This Is especially important in a country such as Albania where almost half of the population still lives in the rural and periphery areas, the highest such percentage in Europe today.
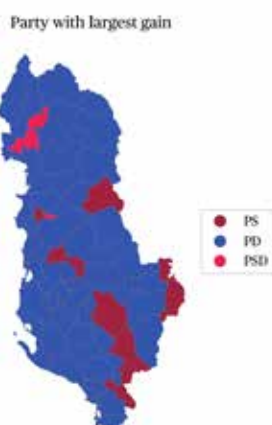
Possible government coalitions and their consequences

Under most pre-election analyses and predictons, no single party could have possibly won the majority of 71 deputies or 51 percent by its own. Some of the public declarations of Premier Rama mentioned that possibility, although mostly with the goal of expressing optimism and confidence that he and the PS would be able to pull a third in a row victory and govern without a coalition. It seems that contrary to the opposition's expectations, as well as to the majority of election predictions by independent observers, PS not only won as the single biggest party (widely expected), but also received 74 deputies, thereby being able to form the next government completely by itself.

We should note, however, that prior to election day, Premier Rama offered the possibility of creating a grand coalition to PD and its leader Lulzim Basha, an offer that probably was conditioned by the possible lack of majority on election day by the PS. The day after the election, Mr. Rama congratulated PD and its leader Basha on their performance and said that it recognized them as the only "loyal opposition". He thus in a way retracted its pre-election offer of co-governance, but also added that he recognizes no borders in its cooperation with the opposition as long as it is done in the spirit of reforms that would enable Albania to open the negotiations with the European Union (interview with Edi Rama, 2021).

European perspectives and effects of the outcome on international and interregional politics

For any careful observer of the social and political life of Albania, the result of the elections of April 25, 2021, was not unexpected. A combination of early and late factors, related to the way democracy and the constitutional and legal system of this country work, the political culture, the parties' decision-making, the distortions created by usage of the public administration to the profit of the ruling party, the imbalance of the numbers of electoral colleges between the regions, the exclusion of emigrants from electoral rights etc. have made the outcome previsible.

The international actors were seriously committed to restoring the constitutional standards of political life and democracy, by guaranteeing free elections and institutio-

Party with largest gain

PS
PD
PSD

c • Party with largest gains (in percentage points), by municipality, 2017-2021

Principal component analysis

Principal component 0 (72.0% of variance)
PD   0.724779
PSD   0.125492
LSI   -0.222660
PS   -0.639756

Principal component analysis

Principal component 1 (21.0% of variance)
LSI   0.562260
PSD   0.419231
PD   -0.412779
PS   -0.580949
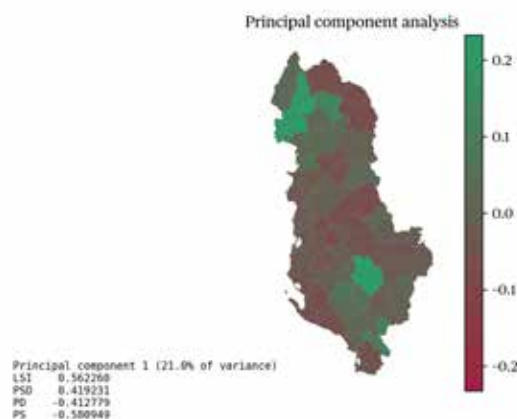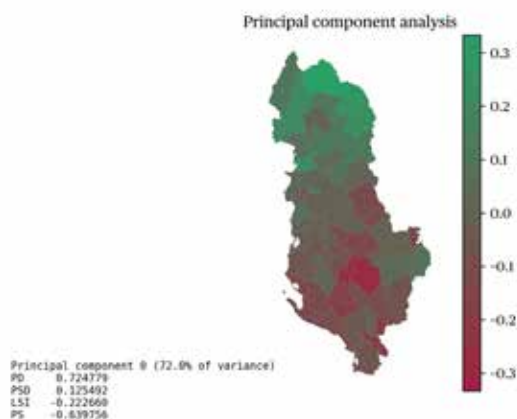
nal reform. The U.S. Embassy mediated to calm the crisis of handover of mandates through the agreement of June 5, 2020. It also reminded the Albanian political class from time to time of the red lines that should not be crossed. Such were the messages of deputy assistant Secretary of State Mathew Palmer on his virtual visit to Tirana: credible candidates, transparent and standard elections and a call for tomorrow's government to duly complete the justice reform.

At first glance, it seems that international actors are negotiating with the country's elite, reyling on the principle that in Albanian political parties, the biggest societal group interests are represented. It is often assumed that party decisions and the selection of human resources observe statutory rules, which impose an internal democracy, elite criteria, respect for cultural communities, and consequently representation of the sovereign will. In fact, the reality is more complex and offers a somewhat different picture. The political system is often highly impenetrable, due to the myriad of political parties and coalitions that run in general or local elections, while the party leaders randomly select personalities whose formal education or moral background often seem dubious. Sometimes, candidates that have had criminal affiliations are either running or backing their favorite candidates, although Albania passed a decriminalization law some time ago (Law No. 138/2015).

A prime example of this is Tom Doshi, the leader of the Social-Democratic Party (PSD), who despite the repeated calls of the U.S. Embassy in Tirana to back down based on his previous records, decided to run nonetheless. As the U.S. ambassador clearly stated: "This is not just from a person or an individual in the United States government, but it is the United States Secretary who has personally identified an individual who has not chosen to continue to represent the Albanian people in the Assembly" (Politiko,2021). Tom Doshi was elected but resigned right after the election, because of the American pressure. Nonetheless, his party elected three candidates, which for the opposition is unacceptable, since the party did not present

any political program or made any sensible economic promises and its elected candidates, with the exception of Doshi, were unknown to the general public. The same goes for one of the most voted candidates of the PS in Tirana district, Ornaldo Rakipi, who is suspected to have been massively voted because of family ties rather than of any other personal quality – he is equally unknown to the public or socialist voters (Dosja, 2021).

International observers also made it clear in the preliminary OSCE/ODIHR report that the falsification of votes continued even in this election. Moreover, we witnessed the placement of shady candidates in the lists, whose source of income is unknown. Basically, there was no prior financial transparency; no strict obligation to report on political parties spending was imposed by the regulators of the electoral process, therefore creating an inequality in the selection of the candidates and their respective campaigns.
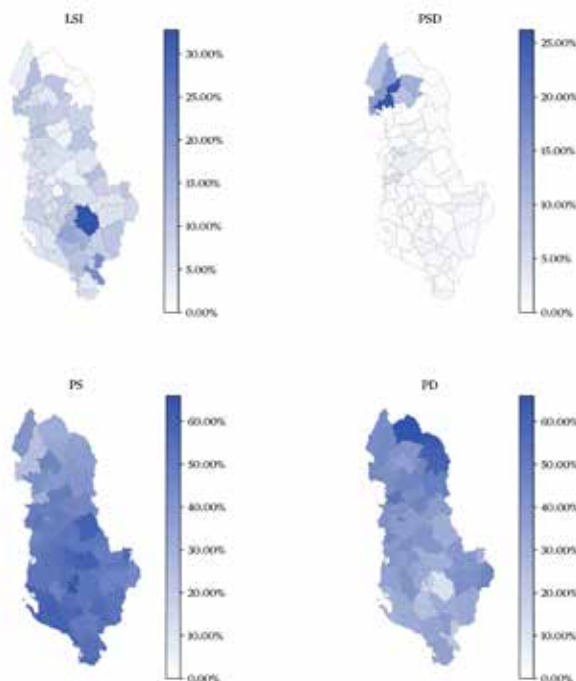
f • Scores of the main parties by municipality

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Party votes

Winning party (2021)

Legend: PS, PD

Indicateurs européens

Share of votes by EP group

Kuvendi i Shqipërisë (2021)

-S&D: PS (74), PSD (3), LSI (4)   -EPP: PD (59)
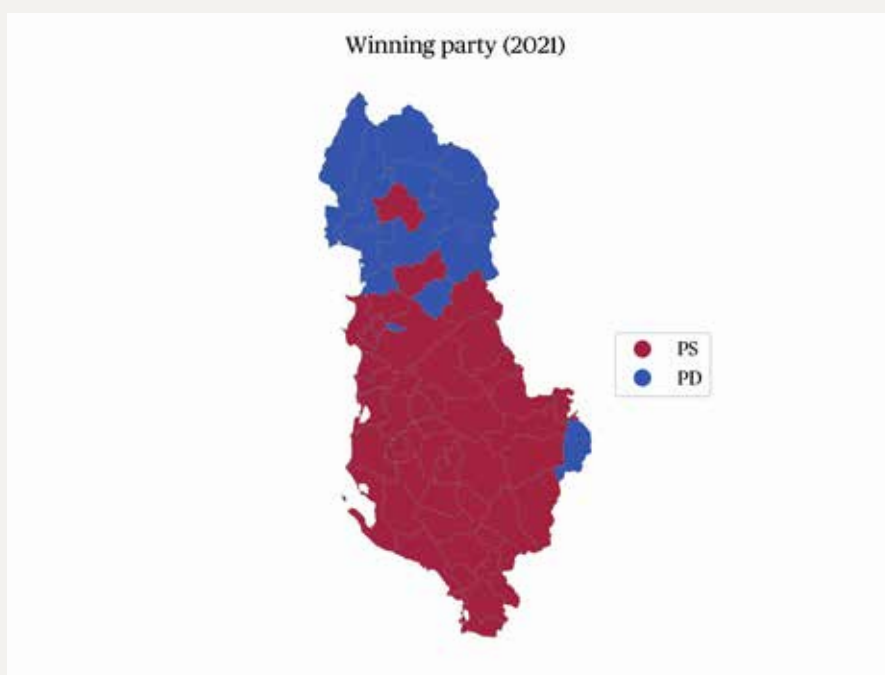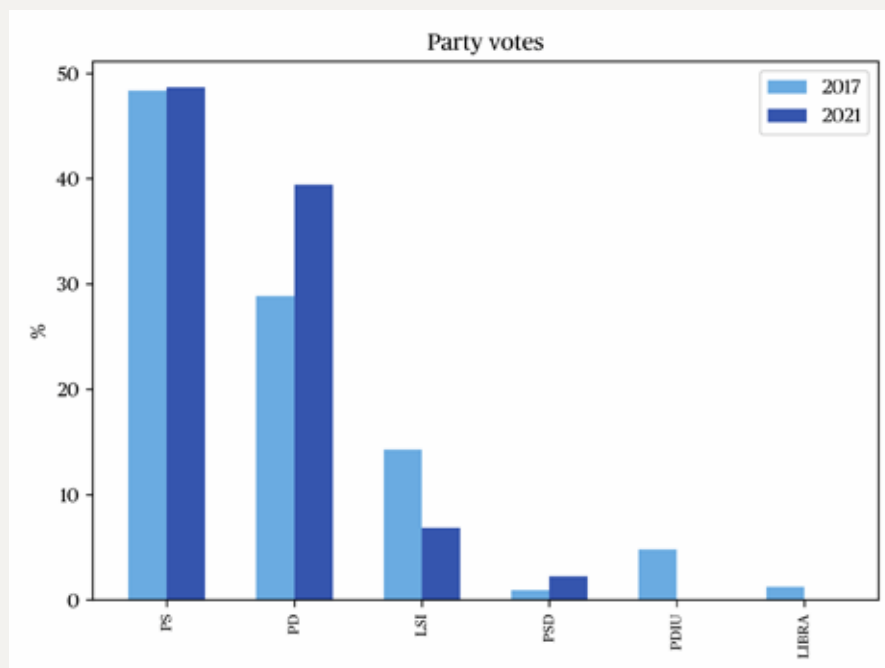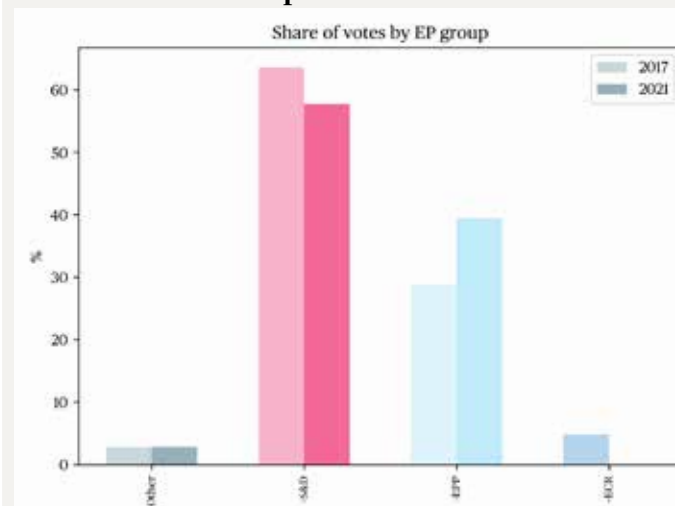
Special Analyses
Selected regional and national elections with European significance

04

Fraser McMillan • University of Glasgow

Parliamentary Election in Scotland, 6 May 2021

Comparing the party composition of the Scottish Parliament (Holyrood) sworn in this month to the one elected five years ago, little looks to have changed. Vote shares barely shifted versus 2016, and none of the five main parties gained or lost more than two seats in the country's 129 Member legislature, which is elected using a mixed system combining Westminster-style single-member districts with proportional top-up party lists at the regional level. Figure **a** shows how similar the result was to 2016.

But the apparent aggregate stability of Scottish electoral politics masks significant shifts under the surface after five years of constitutional and social upheaval. And the result guarantees an intense intergovernmental battle over the devolved parliament's constitutional authority to hold a referendum on leaving the United Kingdom.

If 2021 turnout is anything to go by, Scottish citizens are deeply invested in this coming clash. Voters had been widely expected to stay away from the polls given the near-total absence of traditional campaigning. Parties bombarded households with bullet-pointed pamphlets and the leaders debated on television no fewer than six times. But, with candidates unable to organise in-person events or canvass as they normally would, there were concerns that the campaign was making little impression.

Despite suggestions this could result in a sub-50% turnout, voters showed up in record numbers. Participation surged by nearly eight percentage points to 63.4%, comfortably the highest level since the parliament opened in 1999. The increased number of postal ballots and greater free time to head to the polls during lockdown may have contributed to this boost. But it's clear that, even experiencing a largely-digital campaign amid a gradual return to post-lockdown normality, the Scottish electorate had politics on the mind.

Background

It is difficult to avoid attributing the spike in participation to the ever-present issue of Scotland's sovereignty, even though opinion polls suggested that the COVID pandemic and recovery were far and away the public's highest priorities. While the pro-independence Scottish National Party (SNP), in power since 2007, went into the election emphasising continuity and pandemic recovery,
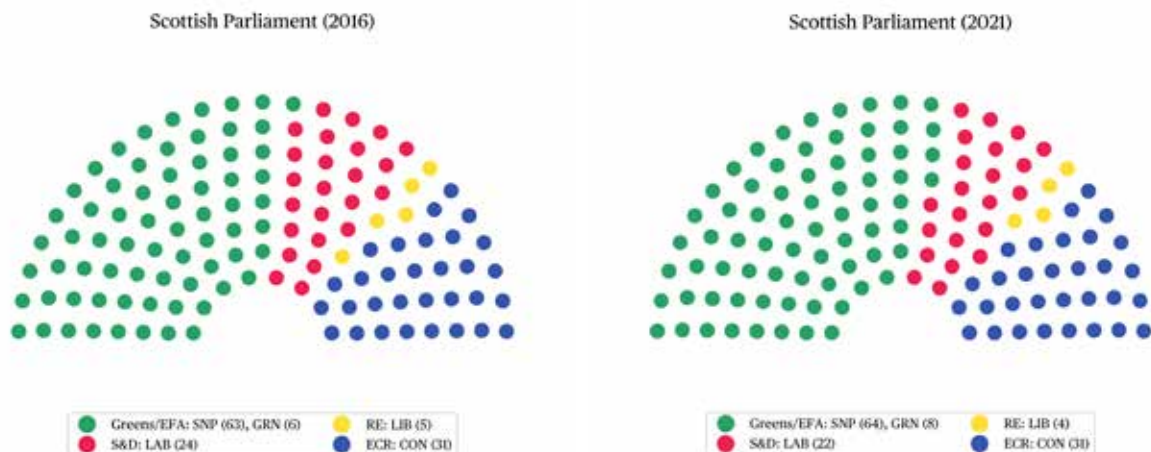
a • Composition of the Scottish Parliament in 2016 and 2021

they also promised to hold a referendum on leaving the UK by the end of 2023. This would be the second vote on the matter, following the historic original contest in 2014. On that occasion, the Yes to independence campaign lost with a higher-than-expected 45% share having picked up significant support over the course of the campaign.

As a result, the No campaign secured only a pyrrhic victory. Scotland's political landscape today is entirely a product of that referendum which, rather than resolving the question, let the nationalist genie out of the bottle. The plebiscite legitimised and mainstreamed the previously fringe pursuit of Scottish independence, and SNP membership swelled several times over in the days and weeks afterward. The party went on to win 56 of Scotland's 59 Westminster seats at the 2015 general election — held, of course, using a pure First-Past-the-Post system –, an increase of 50 which reversed Labour's stranglehold on the country overnight.

The 2016 Scottish Parliament elections saw the Scottish electorate realign according to constitutional preferences: just one in ten SNP voters was opposed to independence, versus one in three in 2011. But an influx of pro-independence voters and constitutional convers helped the SNP offset these losses to win their third Holyrood victory in a row. That said, the independence issue might have faded into the background for some time had the UK not voted to leave the European Union in yet another constitutional referendum just weeks later. While the UK as a whole chose Brexit, it was opposed by nearly two thirds of Scottish voters. This immediately reignited the independence argument, not least because the SNP manifesto contained a pledge leaving the door open to another referendum in the event of a "material change of circumstances... such as Scotland being taken out of the EU against our will".

While Brexit complicated the practicalities of Scottish independence, it undermined a key plank of the pro-union campaign's 2014 platform and reemphasised the "democratic deficit" that Scottish devolution was supposed to resolve - that is, the country voting for one outcome and getting another. It also, thanks to the SNP manifesto, created the pretext for another bite at the independence cherry. The 2016-2021 SNP minority administration, with the wildly popular Nicola Sturgeon at its head as First Minister (she attained a net +50 approval rating at some points in 2020), requested the legal authority to hold a second referendum on multiple occasions. Each time, however, they but was were repeatedly rebuffed by successive Conservative Prime Ministers arguing that the timing was not appropriate.

Context

With polls throughout 2020 and early 2021 suggesting that the pro-independence side had gained a slight edge in public opinion, the SNP portrayed the 2021 election as an opportunity to obtain a renewed mandate to put the question before voters and send a message to Westmins-

ter. The Scottish Greens, who had provided the votes to pass the SNP's budgets since 2016, made a similar pledge. Both parties also support Scotland rejoining the European Union as an independent state – it is no accident that most of the movement in independence polling has been down to risk averse Remain voters to whom the UK no longer appears the safe bet. Demographically, these shifts have erased gender differences on the constitutional question and weakened the link between socioeconomic prosperity and support for the union.

In the 2021 campaign the anti-independence parties - the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats - all pledged to oppose a second referendum with varying degrees of vehemence. Otherwise, the parties disagreed on little of substance – Scotland's elite policy consensus is well to the left of centre. The international trend towards ambitious spending and future-proofing in the wake of the pandemic has narrowed whatever distance there was between the SNP, Scottish Labour and the Scottish Greens.. And while nobody would describe them as being on the left, even the Scottish Conservatives ran on a high-spending, socially liberal platform. Much of the top-level campaign focused on the coronavirus recovery and the SNP's performance in government rather than the prospect of a referendum. Safe in the knowledge that most pro-independence voters were already likely in their camp, the SNP primarily emphasised Sturgeon's pandemic handling and experienced leadership rather than the constitution.

The only major surprise of the campaign came with the late entry of a new pro-independence political party led by disgraced former SNP First Minister Alex Salmond. Salmond had served as Scotland's First Minister between 2007 and 2014 and was Sturgeon's friend, mentor and boss for decades, but the pair became estranged after multiple sexual harassment and assault complaints against him came to light in 2018. Salmond won a legal challenge against the Scottish Government for procedural failings and was acquitted of criminal charges in 2020, arguing that past "inappropriate" conduct did not rise to criminality.

This complicated scandal reached its political apex weeks before the 2021 election, when both Salmond and Sturgeon appeared in front of a parliamentary committee investigating the complaints process. Salmond alleged an implausible conspiracy between civil servants and senior SNP figures to take him down, while Sturgeon claimed she had responded appropriately and sought to emphasise the personal difficulty of the situation. Opposition politicians had hoped the case would damage Sturgeon or even result in her resignation, but she was cleared of breaching the Ministerial Code by an independent government legal advisor shortly after her committee appearance. The affair generated a great deal of heat, but very little light.

Salmond was not ready to leave the stage, however, and he attempted to return to the political scene as leader of the new Alba Party in the run-up to the election. They
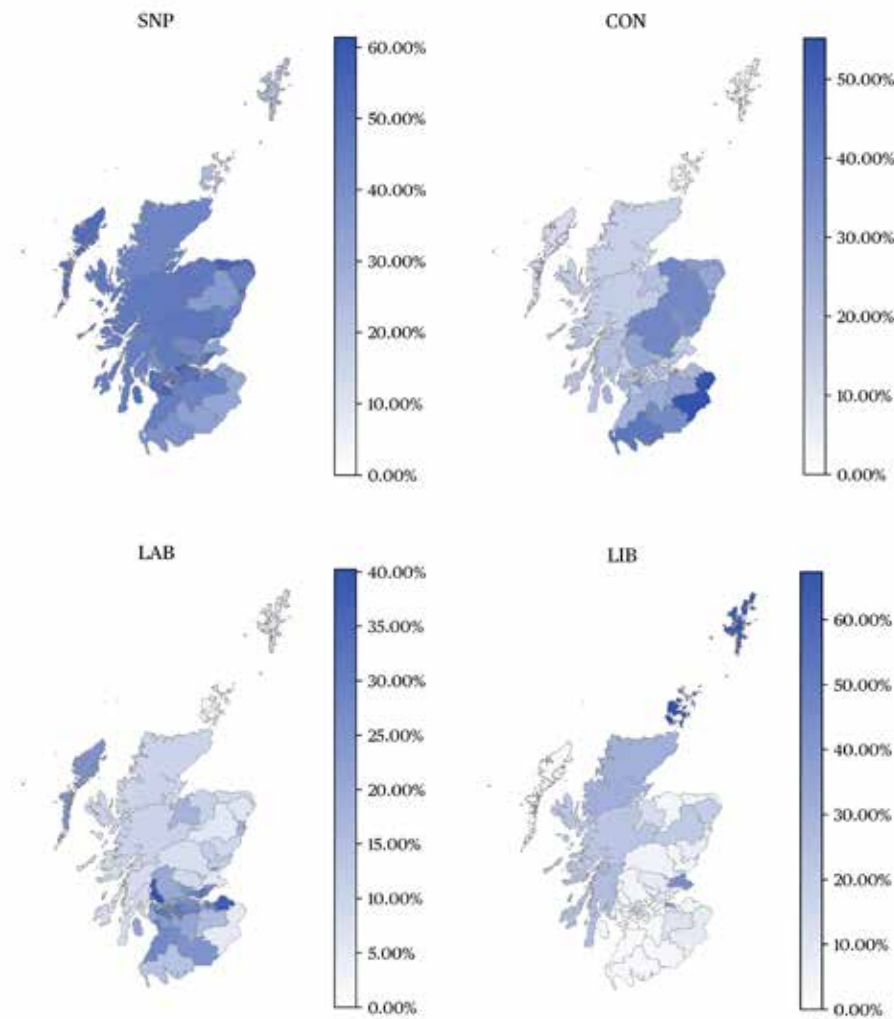
camp rather than much movement between them. That's why the outcome fell in the same range as 2016 despite the twin sociopolitical earthquakes of Brexit and COVID. Overall vote shares changed little, with the SNP up 1.2% to 47.7% in the constituencies but down a similar amount to 40.3% on the regional ballot. The Conservatives remained static in the constituencies (losing 0.1%) and gained slightly on the list, landing on 21.9% and 23.5% respectively, while Labour dropped a point or so on each ballot to finish third again on 21.6% and 17.9%.

While the aggregate results appear very stable, they mask a some amount of churn due to local and regional divergences. The SNP consolidated its dominant position in First Past the Post constituencies, gaining three seats to take its total to 62 of an available 73. However, the party wins so many constituencies it is virtually impossible for them to take PR top-up seats in most

ran only on the proportional regional ballot and adopted a more aggressive pro-independence platform, providing a home for elements of the movement who simultaneously oppose the SNP's social liberalism and cautious, pragmatic approach to securing a second independence referendum.

Results

If the first post-referendum Scottish election suggested that the country's electoral politics had reoriented around the constitutional question, the 2021 contest confirmed beyond all doubt that the nation is deeply polarised on the matter of its future relationship with the rest of the UK. Voters on both sides of the divide behaved more strategically this time around, attempting to exploit the voting system to maximise representation of their constitutional preference. For unionists, this meant consolidation, as strategic voting increased in constituencies all over the country. For the nationalists, it meant modest fragmentation, with the Scottish Greens gaining further ground in the regional ballot. The results from each ballot are shown in figures **b** et **c**.

The story of the 2021 election is therefore one of deckchairs being rearranged within each constitutional

of Scotland. The constituency gains and reduced list vote share resulted in the loss of two out of four proportionally allocated seats, both in the South of Scotland region which contains the strongly anti-independence Borders area. This is visible in figure **d**. This left the SNP with a net gain of a single seat vs. 2016, taking their total to 64 – just one short a parliamentary majority.

Given the hurdles presented by the electoral system, this would be considered a remarkable achievement in any other circumstance. However, commentators had talked up the prospects of an SNP majority before the election, to the point that this became the central question about the outcome. Pro-union lawmakers and commentators seized on the SNP's single-seat deficit in the election's aftermath to argue that this undermines the Scottish Government's moral authority to pursue a second referendum. These claims, of course, apply the majoritarian standards of First-Past-the-Post to a semi-proportional electoral system in which nearly half of seats are drawn from multi-member districts, and illustrate how deeply ingrained this "Westminster mindset" is in Scottish political culture.

For their part, unionist party vote shares remained virtually static overall. However, there was significant

SNP

CON

LAB

LIB

GRN

tives, who gained an average of around three percentage points in seats where they finished runner-up in 2016. The party's 2021 gains demonstrate a linear association with the share of voters who chose Leave in the EU referendum. Other anti-independence seats with stronger 'Remain' leanings gravitated towards Labour and the Lib Dems, depending on who was best placed to beat or challenge the SNP. As a result, there are very few "three-way marginal" seats remaining – the overwhelming majority of constituencies are straight fights between the SNP and the best-placed unionist challenger, and who that is largely depends upon the proportion of pro-Brexit voters in the seat.

While the overall vote share for pro-union parties slightly declined, tactical voting ensured that its efficiency increased. This strategy undoubtedly deprived the SNP of a majority, with target constituencies such as Dumbarton, Eastwood and Aberdeenshire West remaining just outside the nationalists' grasp even as they meaningfully increased their share of the vote in each locality.

However, this outcome is unlikely to frustrate the pursuit of a second independence referendum. An increased number of SNP constituency voters gave their regional vote to a different nationalist party on the list – but it was the Scottish Greens, rather than Alba, who capitalised on this. Alba secured 1.6% of overall list votes and didn't come close to winning a seat in any region. The Greens, meanwhile, captured 8.1% of the proportional vote to achieve their best ever result of 8 seats, cementing their status as the fourth-largest party and bringing the total number of pro-independence MSPs to a record 72. There may prove to be room in the party system for a more aggressively nationalist project which promises heightened confrontation with Westminster, but it is unlikely to be one led by a figure as unpopular as Salmond.

Finally, the election also produced the most diverse Scottish Parliament yet elected. The legislature is now close to gender-balanced, with 45% women MSPs. This contingent includes the parliament's first full-time wheelchair user and its first two minority ethnic women. Six minority ethnic representatives were elected in total, all

geographical variation. Unionist incumbents increased their vote share in 8 of 13 constituency seats won by these parties in 2016, of which they ultimately retained 10. And in the large number of constituency seats won by the SNP in 2016, anti-independence voters flocked to the nearest challenger. The 2021 election demonstrated just how robust the pro-union vote in Scotland is, a fact which is often forgotten in light of rising support for independence.

These dynamics especially benefitted the Conserva-

of whom are from a South Asian background. While there remains scope for progress, these advances were welcomed across the political spectrum.
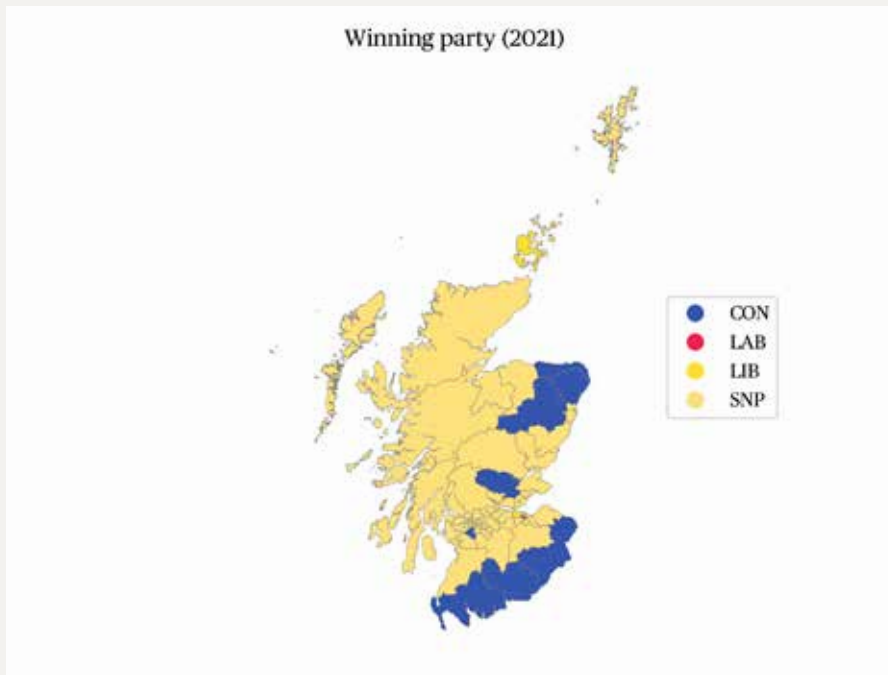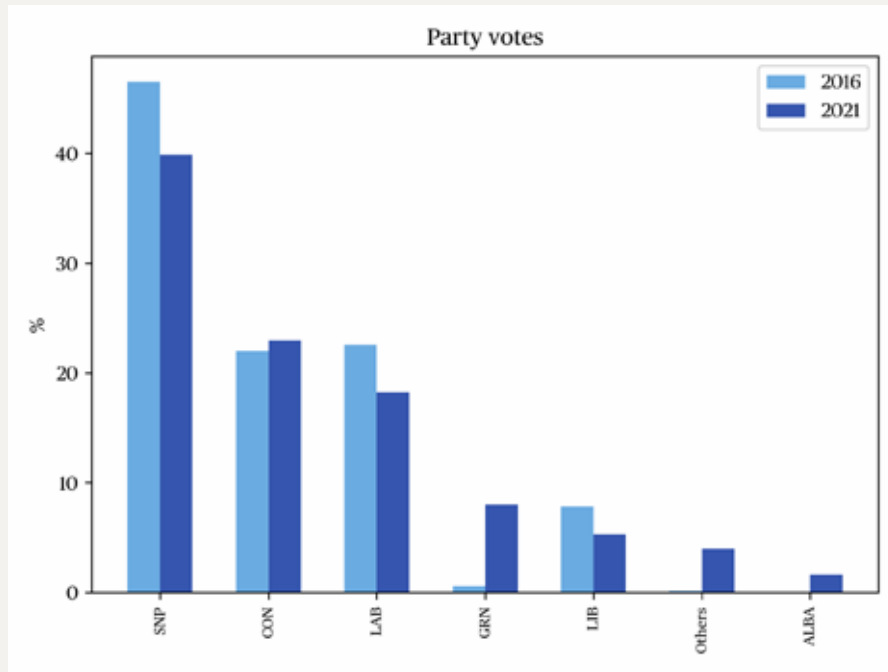
What's Next?

The result leaves the parties in much the same place as they were before the election, albeit with a slightly tighter nationalist grip on the legislature as a whole. The SNP will continue as a minority administration buoyed by Scottish Green support – this time, perhaps, backed by a more formal cooperation agreement – and they will renew their push for another referendum once the pandemic fades.

The fundamental problem for unionists in Scotland remains their electoral fragmentation. The SNP's position is envious, as the party virtually monopolises the constituency vote of independence supporters and can rely on an ever-enlarging Green contingent to provide backup on essential budget votes and constitutional matters. The traditional Westminster parties meanwhile – among whom there is a great deal of historic animosity, as well as irreconcilable policy differences – are forced to split the other half of the electorate three ways.
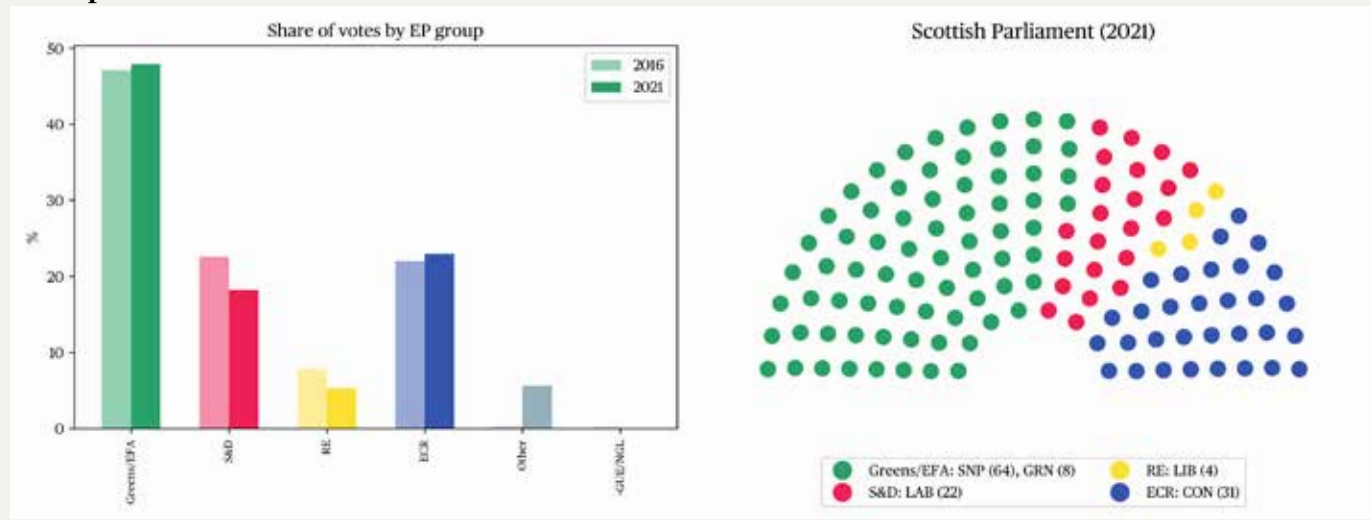
This places the anti-independence cause in a structurally perilous position. The Scottish Parliament has had a continuous pro-independence majority since 2011, and that is highly unlikely to change until the issue is resolved one way or the other. The country seems destined to hold another independence referendum at some point, and age patterns in attitudes to independence suggest that time is not on their side: independence would comfortably carry the working age population in another referendum, and Yes beats No by as much as 70%/30% among younger cohorts. With an unpopular UK government likely to spend the next few years frustrating the Scottish Parliament, nationalists also have an opportunity to rebuild the dubious economic case for independence and consolidate support for their cause. The politics of Brexit may have convinced some No voters to switch sides, but its practicalities could push them back in the other direction. While Sturgeon must walk a strategic tightrope – and will face pressure to hold a Catalonia-style "advisory" referendum in the event that a legally-binding contest proves impossible – she is playing the long-game and understands that the surest route out of the United Kingdom is one supported by a convincing majority of Scots in a referendum with widespread legitimacy. The wider Yes movement is probably less patient than this, and that may eventually cause real problems for the First Minister.

The likeliest way to build that majority, for now, is to exploit the "undemocratic" recalcitrance of Boris Johnson's government on the matter of a referendum itself. While the strong unionist showing at the 2021 election showed that Scottish independence is far from inevitable, this feedback loop may ultimately prove the undoing of Great Britain as a political whole after more than three centuries of shared sovereignty. The Prime Minister will be all too happy to play along, knowing that a Gaullistic "Non" to Scotland is in his short-term interest even if it is a danger to the union's long-term future. The longer the constitutional-legal confrontation between Scotland's two, increasingly-estranged governments continues, the more likely it seems that public opinion will swing behind independence.

Party votes

Winning party (2021)

Legend: CON, LAB, LIB, SNP

European indicators

Share of votes by EP group

Scottish Parliament (2021)

Greens/EFA: SNP (64), GRN (8) RE: LIB (4)
S&D: LAB (22) ECR: CON (31)

Special Dossier: Elections in Germany in September 2021
Interviews with Norbert Lammert, Martin Schulz, Ellen Ueberschär

On 26 September 2021, the elections for the 20th Bundestag will take place in Germany. Although this electoral event does not directly fall within the period covered by BLUE's first issue, its utmost importance for European politics as a whole suggested that some perspectives on its dynamics should be given prior to the vote. We therefore decided to provide our European readers with a preview of the election, focusing more closely on European and global issues. To this end, we approached the chairpersons of the major German political foundations, three of whom – representing the three parties which also nominated a candidate for Chancellor – agreed to answer our questions on the European implications of the Bundestag elections. You will find below the perspectives of Pr. Norbert Lammert, Chair of the CDU-affiliated Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Martin Schulz, Chair of the SPD-affiliated Friedrich Ebert Foundation, and Dr. Ellen Ueberschär, Co-Chair of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, the party-affiliated foundation of Bündnis 90/Die Grünen.

The three interviewees answered our questions at the end of June or beginning of July 2021 – events such as the flood disaster in Western and Central Europe and the severe forest fires in Southern Europe did not yet happen at the time of writing.

The three contributions are presented in alphabetical order of their authors' second name.

Norbert Lammert

Chairman of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, former President of the German Bundestag

Picture: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

Interview with Norbert Lammert (Konrad Adenauer Foundation, CDU)

How do you imagine the EU in the year 2030? Where do you believe is reform most needed? Which amendments to the Treaties would you propose?

I generally find it difficult to predict the future – no one can reliably predict what will happen tomorrow – especially not in the European Union, where every substantial change depends on the unanimous consent of all member states. At the same time, of course, it is important to at least be prepared for any foreseeable challenges and to consider how to master them in light of one's capabilities and the available opportunities.

The EU still possesses considerable economic power; our liberal, democratic societies still have a strong appeal in many parts of the world. But our social, political and economic model is facing competition. China, in particular, is supposedly proving that economic prosperity and democracy do not necessarily go hand in hand.

This situation of international competition will concern us in the 2020s and the EU will have to prove its mettle. In the face of profound global challenges, it must prove its ability to influence the outside world and at the same time prove its utility internally. That is why elected representatives, in particular, must tirelessly explain to their citizens why the EU is necessary in the 21st century. This is less trivial than it seems at first glance. For some time now, we have been faced with the remarkable paradox that many people seem to have lost faith in the value of constructive international cooperation, even though we are facing global challenges not only in relation to the Corona pandemic and its effects, but also with regard to climate change, digitalisation and many other developments that have one thing in common: they do not stop at national borders, and no nation state can successfully tackle them on its own. Against this background, the EU, as an institution particularly suitable for problem solving,

should actually flourish. In reality, the willingness to find common solutions is declining everywhere in Europe – at a time when the necessity of finding such solutions has objectively increased.

The EU's reform efforts must be directed towards this – it must succeed in providing common European answers to the important questions of our time. This is perhaps easier to achieve by focusing on a few particularly central issues.

An important aspect must be the common European foreign and security policy. In order to improve the EU's agency in this policy area, it should build up joint European armed forces within the framework of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) by 2030, expand Europol and deepen intelligence cooperation and joint cyber-defence – to mention just a few projects.

On which partnerships (in the Council of the EU and the European political groups) should the next German government rely in order to implement this vision?

Germany must and will seek dialogue with all European partners. Of particular importance are the two major neighbouring countries, France and Poland. Depending on the issue at hand, there will be varying degrees of agreement with one member state or another, or even between the European party families. It is important to remain open for compromise. This is a central feature of democracy: compromise must be found and implemented while balancing different legitimate interests. Even if this is more difficult, or at least more complex, in a European framework than at the national level.

But with the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) there is at least a possibility to form flexible "coalitions of the willing and able" within the framework of the EU and to cooperate even more closely within them.

This is a highly relevant instrument that should be used more in the future. France's President Macron called for a very similar approach in an interview with Le Grand Continent when he suggested "project- and actor-based coalitions"[1]. This can certainly be applied to the EU within the framework of the PESCO.

Which foreign-policy approach should the EU follow regarding the USA, China and Russia?

The USA is our ally, China and Russia are not. With Russia's aggressive foreign policy and China's ruthless assertiveness, the Western alliance is once again confronted with strategic challengers; we have been in a geopolitical competition for quite some time. There can be no equidistance to China or Russia and the USA.

Russia is intervening in elections – not only in Europe – and is pursuing a militarised approach to political power on our borders. The civil wars in Syria and Libya are still unresolved crises in our immediate vicinity. China is expanding politically and economically, investing in European infrastructure and trying to drive a wedge between the EU member states and the USA. Europe must find common answers to these and a whole series of challenges in international politics. Otherwise, we will no longer be a formative actor, but only a passive observer of an international political struggle fought on our own territory.

A realistic assessment of the situation also includes the simple but serious awareness that without the military capabilities of the USA, Europe will not be able to protect itself effectively in the foreseeable future. The transatlantic partnership is therefore of vital importance for Europe. The greater the EU's own capacities and competences, the more credible a partner it is for the US.

In close cooperation and coordination with Washington, the EU should develop mechanisms and approaches to deal with China and Russia, but without closing the door to meaningful cooperation. In their own and mutual interest, Europe and the US must work together more and develop a common stance in more areas: from climate protection and respect for human rights to data protection, digitalisation and the fight against pandemics, we must coordinate our efforts, show mutual consideration and develop mutually acceptable solutions. The resumption of the TTIP negotiations and the overdue conclusion of a transatlantic trade agreement would send a clear signal.

Reciprocity is part of a stable relationship. Militarily, we can ease the burden on the United States in the middle and long term, but our options are limited. Europe must therefore focus on its strengths and use its economic power more strategically. Through trade agreements and development aid, we can build ties with states in our neighbourhood, instead of leaving them to Chinese influence.

1. The Macron Doctrine: A conversation with the French President, Le Grand Continent, 16 November 2021.

Ultimately, the world continues to need a reliable and capable Western alliance to ensure peace and freedom, security, and prosperity. American and European interests are not always the same, but our political cultures are convergent, and our common values are robust.

What type of climate policy do you wish the EU should adopt? Which global role should the EU play in climate questions?

In functioning democracies, whatever one can organise majorities for is implemented, and not necessarily what minorities consider to be a priority. That said, the climate issue will undoubtedly be one of the key challenges of the future. The EU should therefore commit to an active role in international climate policy and continue to pursue a comprehensive strategy for sustainability as envisaged in the European Green Deal.

In the process, both national and European climate policy must also take into account the manifold legitimate interests of different parts of society. Only if it is possible to sustainably reduce greenhouse gas emissions and at the same time advance economic and social development will European climate policy be implemented in the Union and become a global example. A sustainable growth strategy must therefore rely on market-based instruments and work with incentives rather than prohibitions where appropriate, while promoting innovation and competition. In other words: European climate policy, the promotion of innovation and the social market economy should continue to be closely interconnected.

What European perspectives are necessary for the next generation of Europeans, especially with regard to the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic?

The pandemic is holding up a mirror to all of us. It has brought existing latent problems in European societies and in the EU into the spotlight. Strategic dependencies, the crisis of multilateralism (which did not stop at the EU, judging by the impact of unilateral national efforts), cumbersome decision-making processes – to name just a few points – have led to the EU not always looking its best during the pandemic. The lessons learned are manifold and it is certainly too early to draw final conclusions.

But one thing should be clear – also with regard to the next generation of European citizens: for all its shortcomings and cumbersome voting procedures, the EU is an ambitious and complicated, but highly intelligent attempt to find a workable answer to the loss of sovereignty in times of globalisation. Or, to put it differently: by deciding to share and jointly exercise their sovereignty, the European states have preserved the possibility of exerting a decisive influence on their own affairs. On careful consideration, the EU has succeeded in many more fields of action than a public as accustomed to success as it is suspicious of it is prepared to accept.

Nevertheless, we must take criticism seriously, even and particularly when it seems exaggerated or unjustified. At the same time, we have to explain such relationships more understandably. In a world that is becoming more and more complex, the questions and the possible answers have to be explained more than they used to be in order to become understandable.

Ultimately, it is important to convey that Europe, despite all its difficulties, remains a historically unprecedented and exemplary model. We have to explain to our own citizens – also in order to address their concerns – not only how European institutions function, but also what perspectives they can expect from the Union in the medium and long term. Obviously, this can no longer be justified only with reference to economic and political necessities, but must also be experienced at an emotional level. Europe is also, and perhaps above all, a matter of the heart.

Martin Schulz

Chairman of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, former President of the European Parliament

Picture: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

Interview with Martin Schulz (Friedrich Ebert Foundation, SPD)

How do you imagine the EU in the year 2030? Where do you believe is reform most needed? Which amendments to the Treaties would you propose?

In the Coronavirus pandemic, after initial difficulties, the EU proved to be quite capable of acting, having learned from its mistakes during the financial crisis. At the same time, however, the fundamental structural and political deficits of the Union and the urgent need for structural reform became very clear. Reforms must be conducted with much broader participation by European citizens. By 2030, the EU must be sovereign, capable of acting on its own and respected as an international player.

To further stabilise the euro area, the monetary union should be deepened and underpinned by a political basis. The decisions taken in response to the Coronavirus pandemic, including the instrument to support short-time work (SURE), joint borrowing, the possibility of raising own resources and the suspension of the Austerity and Growth Pact are important steps towards more sovereignty and, above all, more solidarity in the EU. However, more reforms are needed and the coming new federal government must pursue them from day one, as they are in Germany's own best interest. The path towards a fiscal union, as called for by the Social Democratic candidate for chancellor, Olaf Scholz, is therefore the right one.

The Conference on the Future of Europe is an important initiative and a promise to the citizens. It is intended to regain the citizens' dwindling confidence in the successful peace project of Europe. The conference's late start, caused not only by the pandemic, but also by disagreements between the Parliament, the Commission and the Council on questions of processes and personnel, was not a good start. This must be urgently changed in the course of the conference, and the proposals and ideas from the Citizens' Forums must be seriously discussed.

Possible treaty changes must not be excluded a priori, but maintaining the European values of peace, freedom, solidarity, democracy and human rights should be our priority. The process should also not end with the French Council Presidency, because the EU is, and remains, a work in progress.

Further integration steps and stronger cooperation at the political, fiscal and economic level, but also in the area of foreign, security and defence policy will be necessary in order to be able to meet the global challenges facing Europe. A sovereign Europe needs a strong EU at its core. In the long run, this permanent integration and reform process will lead to a kind of European Federal State. The relationship between nation states and the EU in such a federation will evolve in the course of the process. National and European sovereignty must complement each other in a meaningful way, because this is the only way we can master the major challenges in the areas of climate, digitalisation and comprehensive security.

On which partnerships (in the Council of the EU and the European political groups) should the next German government rely in order to implement this vision?

First and foremost, there are the progressive centre-left groups in the Parliament, above all the family of Socialists and Social Democrats, who are pushing the EU integration and reform project into the right direction, namely towards more active responsibility based on solidarity, socio-ecological balance in domestic and foreign policy, and a social, political, economic and fiscal union in the interest of the citizens. The liberal-centrists of Renew Europe and the conservative EPP strive for reforms and further integration steps in many areas; however, they focus mainly on the expansion of the economic and monetary union, the internal market and the security and

defence policy. The right-wing populists and extremists of ID and the Eurosceptics in the ECR not only want to prevent further integration instead, but also, partly, to destroy the EU.

The last few years of the Merkel government have been marked by political stagnation in European matters, which from a social-democratic point of view is politically short-sighted and demonstrates a lack of solidarity. To address the economic and social consequences of the pandemic, the EU was able to agree on the emergency aid package and the comprehensive reconstruction fund New Generation EU, and thus on joint borrowing. This happened on the basis of a Franco-German Initiative launched in July of last year by the Social Democratic Finance Minister Olaf Scholz and his French counterpart, Bruno Le Maire. The election of Olaf Scholz as the next German Chancellor would therefore be a real opportunity to foster the EU reform and integration process.

The outcome of the French elections is also critical for the EU. If the right-wing Rassemblement National wins and Marine Le Pen becomes the next French president, this will stop the European reform and integration process, perhaps even reverse it or lead to a Frexit. Therefore, the future German government must not wait for the elections in France, but should immediately form flexible alliances, depending on political concerns and the respective national interests, in order to advance the European project. The Franco-German convergence is viewed with scepticism by smaller countries. In order to avoid this "hegemon effect", we need different alliances with various member states, especially the smaller ones, on the different reform steps.

Which foreign-policy approach should the EU follow regarding the USA, China and Russia?

The current governments in Moscow, Ankara and Beijing perceive intergovernmental and multilateral relations through the prism of power hierarchies, vulnerabilities and dependencies. This was also true for the USA until Trump was voted out of office. The result are increasingly strong and unabashed autocratic policies, both internally and externally, including human rights violations, attacks against liberal democracy, trade wars and attempts to divide the EU. In addition, these governments fuel conflicts in their respective vicinity, pose military threats, acquire armament and, in the case of Turkey and Russia, even intervene miltarily. Their goal is geostrategic influence in the Eastern European vicinity, the Middle East and Africa, as well as, in China's case, in the Indo-Pacific region. They also deploy increasingly aggressive global trade and investment policies, which could escalate into a trade war between China and the USA, while China itself has pushed far into European territory with the Belt and Road Infrastructure Initiative. In the face of these realities, the suspension of punitive tariffs on aluminium and steel, the constructive attitude of the USA and the developments in the subsidy dispute between Airbus and Boeing are positive developments in EU/US relations.

Unity and solidarity within the EU are essential in the face of growing conflicts between major powers, multiple attacks from Russia and in defence of its own values and interests. In order to strengthen multilateralism, now once again in cooperation with the USA, the EU must pursue a sovereign policy guided by its own values and interests in the areas of trade, climate, energy, technology and digitalisation, as well as classical and advanced security, and act in a united manner. In doing so, the EU should stand up for its values by urging states that violate these values and international rules to respect their obligations under international law, and abide by their multilateral commitments. If necessary, this must be backed up by sanctions or similar measures.

The EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Josep Borrell, has called for a push-back, containment and engagement approach in the current Strategy towards Russia. Three new principles are to be added to the five existing principles in dealing with Russia, which comprise full implementation of the Minsk agreements on Ukraine, closer relations with Russia's neighbours, strengthening the EU's resilience to Russian threats, "selective engagement" with Russia on specific issues such as counter-terrorism, and support for people-to-people contacts on both sides. This approach should avoid breaches of law, limit the possibilities of weakening the Union, and allow for cooperation in areas where it is possible.

In its relations with China, the EU applies the three-fold principle of cooperation, competition and systemic rivalry. The Asia Connectivity Strategy, the EU-China Investment Agreement and an EU-Indo-Pacific strategy are currently being discussed in Brussels. Here, but above all in questions of human rights violations and climate change, coordination and a joint approach with the USA are important. However, consistency and a clear joint stance between European partners are central if cooperation with the USA is to take place on an equal footing.

In order to make Europe capable of global policy leadership, the EU member states must be prepared to integrate their national interests into European interests. This means moving away from the principle of unanimity. In defence and security policy issues, it must continue to cooperate more closely with NATO and work with transatlantic partners to support values-based, socially balanced and sustainable international trade, climate and development policies. The joint communiqué published at the end of the recent NATO and EU/US summits favors this approach.

What type of climate policy do you wish the EU should adopt? Which global role should the EU play in climate questions?

With the adoption of the European Green Deal and the ambitious CO_2 emissions target of a 55% reduction of emissions by 2030 and the goal of zero emissions by 2050, the Union is a global pioneer in climate policy. Im-

plementation must now take place in all EU policy areas and at all levels of the Union, and above all in the context of the €750 billion reconstruction package. The central demand of social-democrats in climate protection matters is that it should be implemented in a socially equitable way. The great challenge is to ensure that this is achieved throughout Europe. To make the continent ready for the future, economic dynamism, social justice and ecological responsibility must be reconciled. Ecological change must not happen at the expense of the socially disadvantaged. The task of adapting one's own practices must be made easier for those who cannot afford it. Those who have worked in coal mining, for example, must have their education and training funded instead of being dismissed. For this purpose, a "Just Transition Fund" with a budget of €7.5 billion has been set up at EU level. The ecological transformation of the economy will cost jobs, but it will also create many new jobs and initiate competition for knowledge and development of environmentally friendly technologies. If this restructuring comes together with socially just measures, we will be able to take the majority of the European population along the path towards a sustainable economic model within the next 30 years. At the same time, the EU will set global standards and show that the sustainable and successful restructuring of one of the largest economic areas globally can be implemented in a socially acceptable way.

What European perspectives are necessary for the next generation of Europeans, especially with regard to the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic?

With the comprehensive reconstruction fund New Generation EU and the adoption of the Multiannual Financial Framework, the EU has set a milestone on its way to becoming a more crisis-resistant, but also ecologically and socially sustainable economy and society. This decision was taken in the member states and in Europe in the midst of the pandemic. 37% of the funds are to be used for the sustainable restructuring of economies and climate investments.

For social-democrats, it is important that these funds are used to support the vulnerable sections of society: young people, women, people with a background of migration and people with disabilities, who have been hit particularly hard by the consequences of the pandemic. Investments in solidary and functioning public health systems, social security, education, research and sustainable infrastructure – and thus in the future of the next generation of Europeans – must be given top priority. A European Unemployment Insurance and a framework for decent minimum wages in the EU countries are important projects of the Action Plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. However, in view of rapid technological developments and ecological transformation, much remains to be done in this regard to make the EU fit for the future in the area of labour and social affairs. Here too, people must always be at the centre of our efforts.

For the next generation of EU citizens, inclusiveness is already a much more natural part of everyday life, as is the protection of the environment and the climate. However, young Europeans need to feel that the EU's recovery fund, among other things, is actually helping to achieve sustainability, climate and digital goals. The fund should make a positive and visible difference, and show young citizens that it is a sound investment in their future and not a subsidy to compensate for past mistakes.

In surveys, many EU citizens want a strong and sovereign EU that has the power to act on global issues, defend the rule of law and democratic principles, control its external borders and at the same time allow lawful immigration within the framework of a humane migration and asylum policy. Such an EU should promote resilient supply chains, support fair trade, tackle climate change, and be able to act effectively and quickly in the event of further pandemics. A retreat into protectionism, as called for by a minority, would not be sustainable. On the other hand, the embedding of a sovereign EU in NATO in security matters, a renewal of transatlantic cooperation on an equal footing, and joint promotion and integration into a rules-based international system are guarantees for a secure, stable and prosperous democratic and sovereign Europe.

Ellen Ueberschär

Co-President of the Heinrich Böll Foundation

Picture: Bettina Keller

Interview with Ellen Ueberschär (Heinrich Böll Foundation, Greens)

How do you imagine the EU in the year 2030? Where do you believe is reform most needed? Which amendments to the Treaties would you propose?

The European Union of the year 2030 will be invigorated by the crises of the 2020s. The Conference on the Future of Europe will have provided it with new impulses. It will manifest itself as a federal union that strengthens the democratic and social rights of its citizens and guarantees pluralistic democracy and the rule of law – the core idea and the motive for the foundation of the EU – internally and globally. The internal constitution of the Union in 2030 will make it attractive again for its European neighbours, and the European integration will have progressed through the extension and deepening of the EU. The United Kingdom will already have re-applied for EU membership. The EU in 2030 will be deeply interconnected with European civil society, not least because of the newly created European media and the consequently applied European Association Law.

The 2020s will be decisive years, during which the European Union will need to prove its resilience and effectiveness. To this end, it is essential to present a comprehensive and coherent answer to the multiple crises of our time. A European Green Deal that takes place at the municipal, national and European levels can strategically handle imminent transformations and connect social security, ecologic and economic innovation and digital modernisation. In the same time, it will integrate the European periphery through specific propositions, so as to again make the EU an autonomous actor on a global scale. These expectations are shared by the German public, as shown in the study "Selbtverständlich Europäisch" published in June 2021, in which two thirds of respondents said they expected the EU to be active and co-operative.

In order to become more resilient, credible and active, the EU can use a vast number of instruments already available without amending the Treaties. The most important of these is the extension of qualified majority in the Council of the European Union to matters for which unanimity was previously required, as laid down in Article 48 (7) TEU. Using this disposition would help overcome political blockades and increase the EU's agency. As a prerequisite for this, the European Parliament should be strengthened. In addition, the Rule of Law mechanism adopted in 2020 makes it possible to consequently enforce rule of law standards under stronger parliamentary control. Employing this mechanism could be essential in the future co-operation with some eastern European Member States.

Resilience also means taking a bold step towards a political union in terms of fiscal and social policy. In a 2021 Eurobarometer survey, 9 out of 10 Europeans said that a social Europe is important to them personally. The study "Selbstverständlich Europäisch" also shows that citizens place a high priority on social security in the EU – an assessment whose acuteness is further heightened by the increasing social inequality and unemployment caused by the pandemic.

A fiscal union would give the EU the possibility of an integrated economic and financial policy. The Covid 19 pandemic has made it clear that an ideology of austerity and iron-fisted budgetary cuts does not work since, across borders, robust social and ecological infrastructures as well as health care services are vital in moments of crisis. An economic and fiscal union must go hand in hand with the strengthening of Social Europe – for example, the strengthening of social rights through common European labour and social standards, and a European directive introducing minimum social security standard and coordinated minimum wages in all EU member states.

On which partnerships (in the Council of the EU and the European political groups) should the next German government rely in order to implement this vision?

Shaping policies for the coming decades means tackling it together in a robust democratic alliance. Major transformations need strong backing in both society and politics to support, shape and implement the change. They therefore require strong political and civic alliances on all levels – from the municipal to the European and international levels. Many actors in political institutions are now active promoters and supporters of a green, socio-ecological transformation. Basically, a strong EU with the ability to act requires the capacity for compromise between all democratic party families that are interested in the economic sustainability of the Union. But negotiating concessions between the individual member states and the European institutions is also necessary.

On a political level, the outcome of the French Presidential election in 2022 will be decisive for the Franco-German partnership as a catalyst for the EU. The past years have shown that cooperation between Paris and Berlin is essential for the EU's capacity for action – even if this is not the only lever of progress in European integration.

In the field of asylum and migration policy, it is possible that the EU will have to rely on a coalition of the willing in the short to medium term to promote a sustainable, humane asylum policy. As long as the EU as a whole is incapable of acting on the issue of asylum and migration and reforms are watered down beyond recognition due to the necessity of agreeing on the smallest common denominator, the "willing" states must take responsibility through increased cooperation. However, it remains central to include the Central and Eastern European member states and their perspectives in the process.

At the international level, the pandemic has made it clear that the EU needs global, democratic alliances based on trust and shared values to strengthen its global agency – including first and foremost the transatlantic relationship, the UK-EU relationship, as well as international alliances such as the Paris Climate Agreement, WHO, NATO, to name but a few.

In order to strengthen the European project, the people who will be directly affected by the changes – the municipalities, civil society and local initiatives on the ground – should be directly involved. The dialogue among civil society actors as well as between civil society and politics should be strengthened structurally on a transnational level in order to enable the political participation of all citizens. Ultimately, it is also the support of civil society that will strengthen the credibility of the European Union as a successful project and provide it with societal support in times of crisis.

Which foreign-policy approach should the EU follow regarding the USA, China and Russia?

Since the election of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, the historical transatlantic partnership is being reshaped. In the midst of a global pandemic, as we face an economic crisis and the continued presence of revisionist autocrats, it has become clear that bold responses need robust international alliances. As Europeans, it is now our responsibility to provide the conditions for a strong partnership, especially in matters of climate protection, democracy and the strengthening of civil society.

In order to achieve the goal of climate neutrality by 2050, a transatlantic climate coalition among democratic allies at the political level is necessary. This coalition should help create common, ecological, social and economic framework conditions and set new standards, for example in the field of green technologies. With the appointment of John Kerry as Special Climate Envoy, the USA have taken a first important step in this regard, also towards the EU.

At the level of civil society, a renewed European-transatlantic partnership also offers many opportunities for cooperation, especially in areas where civil society actors are already interconnected across the Atlantic, such as climate justice, gender democracy and anti-racism. To seize these opportunities, it is essential to strengthen the international cooperation of civil society and municipal actors.

Furthermore, the European Union must find clear responses towards autocratic regimes. A positive example of joint transparent action is provided by the sanctions list agreed between the EU, the USA, Great Britain and Canada towards Belarus. In terms of a value-based foreign policy, it must be clear that dialogue must remain a priority as long as no red lines are crossed. In future, foreign policy must not only be oriented towards values such as human rights standards and towards interests, but also towards environmental standards. Value-oriented foreign policy in a democratic alliance would therefore create greater independence vis-à-vis China and Russia regarding trade and infrastructures and set clear conditions for cooperation. At the same time, European values must also be strengthened and defended internationally by the EU as a global actor. This involves protecting endangered and persecuted civil society partners and human rights defenders, such as many democratic opposition members in Russia and Belarus.

What type of climate policy do you wish the EU should adopt? Which global role should the EU play in climate questions?

The climate crisis requires rapid political action, not only from the EU, but also worldwide. In order to still achieve climate neutrality and the 1.5° target, this action should be oriented towards fundamental structural transformation. The European Green Deal of the European Commission is an important step towards climate neutrality by 2050. In April 2021, the German Federal Constitutional Court declared the German Climate Protection Act

unlawful because parts of it were incompatible with fundamental rights, as they would shift the dangers of climate change onto the younger generation – a landmark decision for the climate generation also at the European level.

The EU must now move forward with ambition and rigorously implement its own goals. First and foremost, this means thinking jointly about environmental recovery, digital transition and the ecological-social transformation of the economy. The reconstruction programme Next Generation EU, for example, could lead the way for ecological renewal if investments are consistently oriented towards ecological and social criteria.

Furthermore, it is central to find common European solutions for an energy, mobility and heat transition, because the mobility sector still accounts for 30% of CO2 emissions in the EU. The European Mobility Atlas of the Heinrich Böll Foundation illustrates the opportunities of a sustainable ecological infrastructure in Europe, for example in the form of a night train network. Green hydrogen from renewable energies will also have to play a role here in the transformation of major industries. Not least, the EU must manage to consistently think ecologically and collectively about policy areas which will also require a fundamental reform of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy.

If the EU shapes its policies in a climate-friendly and sustainable way, it can also take on a leading role globally: Within the framework of the transatlantic partnership, it could create a climate-neutral transatlantic zone that sets new standards – for example through joint CO2 taxation, coordinated trade criteria and the promotion of new and green technologies for climate protection.

Democratic allies can learn a great deal from each other about climate protection, such as how to implement the energy transition in cities, agricultural reforms in rural regions, Smart Cities or a European train network, if they establish the forums that are needed for close exchange. Here, the revival of the US-EU Energy Council, a Clean Energy Bank as well as a joint coordination of the democratic allies at the UN climate conferences could be milestones of international cooperation.

What European perspectives are necessary for the next generation of Europeans, especially in relation to the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic?

In the midst of global crises (whether economic, health, rule of law or climate crises), the European Union is faced with the responsibility of creating a future in which the young generation can lead a self-determined life – a life that is worth living. The fact that their perspectives are still insufficiently heard and taken into account is shown not only by the worldwide climate protests of Fridays For Future, but also by the Women's Movements and Black Lives Matter protests in Germany, the EU and the USA. The movements equally demand the implementation of democratic promises – equal political and social representation in a diverse society, participation opportunities for all, and policies that seriously address the climate crisis as well as structural inequalities.

This is why the European Union must focus on young people and give them a prominent seat at the negociating table. The measures taken to contain the pandemic, from school closures to the vaccination campaign, have shown that the young generation is not the primary focus of political decision-makers. The pandemic has clearly revealed the deficiencies in social infrastructures, especially in schools. It is all the more important to now provide perspectives to address the growing social inequalities and to give everyone an equal chance for a self-determined life and education.

This includes creating opportunities for participation and increasing the representation of young people, women and people of colour in civil society, politics and institutions. Equally important is the strengthening and systematic inclusion of young and civil society voices in political decision-making processes – as is already the case, for example, in the Citizens' Climate Council in Germany or through the involvement of climate activists in the shaping of Joe Biden's climate agenda. Ultimately, it must be the European Union's goal to make today's policies sustainable for future generations through a democratic process.

Short analyses

Parliamentary elections in Liechtenstein, 7 February 2021

The grand coalition formed since 2005 by the two main centre-right parties, the Patriotic Union (VU) and the Progressive Citizens' Party (FPB), unsurprisingly won 72% of the vote and 20 of the 25 seats at stake, with scores virtually unchanged since the last election in 2017.

The two liberal-conservative parties, which share a similar political position, have made it clear that they wish to continue their joint governmental work. The VU came out ahead of the FBP by only about 40 votes and took the post of head of government from the FBP, which is now held by Daniel Risch.

The Free List (FL, centre-left) won almost 13% of the vote and three seats, virtually the same result as in 2017. The Democrats for Liechtenstein (DpL), a small national-conservative party, won 11% of the vote and two seats at the expense of the Independents (DU) party, from which it split in 2018. The DU, with 4% of the vote, failed to get the 8% of the vote needed to enter parliament. The scores of the different political blocs thus remained largely unchanged.

The turnout was 78%, with the vast majority of voters voting by post, as was the case in 2017.

François Hublet

Parliamentary elections in Kosovo, 14 February 2021

Turnout was up slightly from the October 2019 elections, from 44.59% to 48.78%. Note that the proportional representation system allocates 100 seats to Albanian parties and 20 seats to ethnic minority parties.

As the polls had predicted, the left-wing sovereignist party Vetëvendosje emerged as the big winner, winning more than 50% of the vote and taking 58 out of 120 seats. The party's candidate, Albin Kurti, took over the leadership of the new Kosovar government.

Vetëvendosje claims to be anti-corruption, in a country marked by scandals and the aftermath of the war of independence. The president of the Republic resigned in November, prosecuted for war crimes; the last government fell on a politico-financial affair.

All members of the new government are either from Vetëvendosje or from a party representing an ethnic minority (Serb, Bosniak, Turkish or Ashkali).

The Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK, conservative), with strong ties to the former liberation army, came second (17%), while the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK, nationalist right) obtained 7.1%. The Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK, liberal-conservative) of the outgoing Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti came third with 12.7%.

Victor Queudet

Parliamentary elections in Wales, 6 May 2021

Established by the Devolution Act in 1998, at the same time as the Scottish devolution, the Welsh Senedd is an assembly with 60 members elected under the "additional member" system: 40 members are elected locally, in a constituency, but voters also vote for 20 'regional' members, with Wales divided into 5 regions each with 4 members in the assembly.

Despite the epidemic context, the turnout of 46.6% was the highest recorded for a Senedd election since the first legislative term in 1999; however, it remains well below the Welsh turnout in the general election for the Westminster parliament (66.6% in 2019).

Labour's victory contrasts with local failures in England: the Labour Party won 30 of the 60 seats, returning to its best level ever (+1 compared to 2016), and only one seat away from an absolute majority. The Conservatives made significant gains (16 seats, +5) and became the second political force in Wales, ahead of the pro-independence Plaid Cymru (13 seats, +1) which, despite good results, did not achieve a breakthrough comparable to the Scottish SNP, and lost one of its historic seats. The Liberal Democrats retained a single seat in the Senedd. The collapse of UKIP, which had won 7 seats in 2016, thus allowed a redistribution to the main benefit of the Conservatives.

This is a clear victory for Mark Drakeford, the First Minister of Wales since 2018, a Labour politician who is much appreciated for his efforts against Covid-19. Reappointed for 5 years, he has formed a minority government. He has already promised a "radical" agenda for Wales, in terms of health, but also on social and economic issues.

As Mark Drakeford has pointed out, the solid performance of Welsh Labour in the face of the Tory wave and the ambitions of Plaid Cymru offers interesting lessons for the Labour Party in the midst of a crisis after further defeats in England. Local ties, more devolution and decentralisation: the victories in Cardiff and Manchester outline a possible new strategy for Labour, which would also offer it a frontal opposition to the Conservatives – and, in particular, to Boris Johnson's government.

Victor Queudet