

Forecasting the 2021 German Elections

Forecasting the 2021 German Federal Election: An Introduction

Bruno Jérôme, *University of Paris II Panthéon-Assas, France*
Andreas Graefe, *Macromedia University of Applied Sciences, Munich, Germany*

The German federal election has become a key election not only in Europe but also worldwide. Once again, this election will be closely scrutinized by observers and decision makers around the world. Because of its economic weight, Germany is a key player on the international scene, and its political weight within the European Council makes it a leading player in the governance of Europe. In this respect, it becomes important to be able to anticipate the outcome of German elections, especially in the context of the COVID-19 crisis and its long-term economic and political consequences. What will be the color of the future coalition? What will be the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU)'s influence in the post-Merkel period? Will the Green Party supplant the Social Democratic Party (SPD) as a junior partner in the governing coalition? Will the right-wing Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) continue its rise? These are only some examples of many questions that this symposium on forecasting the 2021 German federal election addresses.

Although interest in election forecasting has increased during the past four decades, relatively little research has been conducted on the German case. In her contribution to this symposium, Stegmaier (2021) describes the evolution of German election forecasting, which has been relatively slow since the pioneering works of Jérôme, Jérôme-Speziari, and Lewis-Beck (1998) and Norpoth and Gschwend (2003). This also becomes evident by reviewing previous *PS: Political Science & Politics* symposia on German election forecasting in 2013 and 2017, which hosted only two (Jérôme 2013) and four contributions (Jérôme 2017), respectively.

For the 2021 election, the symposium brings together the work of 19 researchers in the form of eight contributions, of which three already were featured in 2017 (i.e., Graefe 2017; Jérôme, Jérôme-Speziari, and Lewis-Beck 2017; Kayser and Leininger 2017). Graefe (2021a) presents a revised version of the PollyVote method for combining forecasts from different methods, adopting changes that previously were made for the US version of the PollyVote. Jérôme, Jérôme-Speziari, and Lewis-Beck (2021) modify their political-economy model by directly predicting the percentage of seats going to different parties and better accounting for specificities of the German electoral system (i.e., 5% electoral threshold, proportional representation, and possible coalitions). Kayser, Leininger, and Vlasenko (2021) update their *Länder* model, which draws heavily on election results in each German state (*Bundesland*) to generate a forecast of the federal election outcome.

The symposium also includes three forecasts that were not featured in previous symposia. Gschwend et al. (2021) present a multiparty forecast based on the *Zweitstimme* model. This model uses a Bayesian approach to combining polls and fundamental data on party competition. Quinlan, Schnaudt, and Lewis-Beck (2021) propose a new type of structural model that does not include polling data. Their political-history model predicts the election outcome based solely on the long-term evolution of the German political system (e.g., grand coalitions, reunification, and party dominance in the *Länder*). Murr and Lewis-Beck (2021) present a so-called citizen forecast, which draws on survey data on whom people expect to win the election.

For an overview of the vote-share predictions of these approaches, see Graefe (2021a, table 1), who combines these (and other) forecasts in the PollyVote. As of June 21, approximately three months before the election, there was wide agreement on which party will gain the most votes. Regardless of the method and data used to forecast the election, Armin Laschet's CDU/CSU is predicted to become the strongest party. However, with respect to the interesting question of who will come in second, the forecasts diverge. Whereas the *Zweitstimme* model (Gschwend et al. 2021), which relies heavily on polls, predicts the Green Party to be one percentage point ahead of the SPD, both the *Länder* model (Kayser, Leininger, and Vlasenko 2021) and the citizen forecast (Murr and Lewis-Beck 2021) expect the SPD to beat the Green Party by a comfortable margin of approximately six points. Based on expected seats, the political-economy model (Jérôme, Jérôme-Speziari, and Lewis-Beck 2021) results in the same order of finish, with the CDU/CSU ahead of the SPD and the Green Party by 82 and 101 seats, respectively. Regarding the remaining parties, the forecasts agree that the Left Party, the Free Democratic Party, and the AfD are likely to again pass the 5% electoral threshold necessary for representation in parliament.


This is an updated version of the original article. For details please see the notice at <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096521001785>.


One limitation of vote-share forecasts is that the numbers do not provide direct answers to the questions that voters are most interested in, such as: Who is likely to govern? This is problematic because experimental evidence shows that voters are largely unable to derive this information from vote-share forecasts (Graefe 2021b). In their contribution, Bauer et al. (2021) address this issue in showcasing common pitfalls when communicating vote-share results and proposing the communication of event probabilities as an alternative. Some of the contributions already follow that approach. For example, the PollyVote estimates an 88% chance that the CDU/CSU again will become the strongest party, which is identical to the Zweitstimme model's 88% chance that Armin Laschet will lead the next government. Who will be the junior partner in the coalition remains to be seen. ■

REFERENCES


- Bauer, Alexander, Andreas Bender, Andre Klima, and Helmut Küchenhoff. 2021. "Mundus Vult Decipi, Ergo Decipiatur: Visual Communication of Uncertainty in Election Polls." *PS: Political Science & Politics*. In this issue.
- Graefe, Andreas. 2017. "The PollyVote's Long-Term Forecast for the 2017 German Federal Election." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 50 (3): 693–96. DOI: 10.1017/S1049096517000439.
- Graefe, Andreas. 2021a. "Combining Forecasts for the 2021 German Federal Election: The PollyVote." *PS: Political Science & Politics*. In this issue.
- Graefe, Andreas. 2021b. "Poll Illiteracy: How the Public Misunderstands Polls." *Social Science Research Network Working Paper Series*. <http://ssrn.com/abstract=3834394>.
- Gschwend, Thomas, Klara Müller, Simon Munzert, Marcel Neunhoeffer, and Lukas F. Stoetzer. 2021. "The Zweitstimme Model: A Dynamic Forecast of the 2021 German Federal Election." *PS: Political Science & Politics*. DOI:10.1017/S1049096521000913.
- Jérôme, Bruno. 2013. "Editors' Introduction for Forecasting the 2013 German Elections." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 46 (3): 477–78. DOI:10.1017/S1049096513000796.
- Jérôme, Bruno. 2017. "Introduction." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 50 (3): 681–82. DOI:10.1017/S1049096517000397.
- Jérôme, Bruno, Véronique Jérôme-Speziari, and Michael S. Lewis-Beck. 1998. "Prévisions politico-économiques et élections législatives allemandes de septembre 1998." *Rubrique cheminement du futur. Le Figaro économie*, July 10.
- Jérôme, Bruno, Véronique Jérôme-Speziari, and Michael S. Lewis-Beck. 2017. "The Grand Coalition Reappointed but Angela Merkel on Borrowed Time." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 50 (3): 683–85. DOI:10.1017/S1049096517000403.
- Jérôme, Bruno, Véronique Jérôme-Speziari, and Michael S. Lewis-Beck. 2021. "Forecasting the 2021 Federal German Election: A Win for Armin Laschet?." *PS: Political Science & Politics*. In this issue.
- Kayser, Mark A., and Arndt Leininger. 2017. "A Länder-Based Forecast of the 2017 German Bundestag Election." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 50 (3): 689–92. DOI:10.1017/S1049096517000427.
- Kayser, Mark, Arndt Leininger, and Anastasiia Vlasenko. 2021. "A Länder-Based Forecast of the 2021 German Bundestag Election." *PS: Political Science & Politics*. In this issue.
- Murr, Andreas E., and Michael S. Lewis-Beck. 2021. "Citizen Forecasts of the 2021 German Election." *PS: Political Science & Politics*. In this issue.
- Norpoth, Helmut, and Thomas Gschwend. 2003. "Against All Odds? The Red-Green Victory." *German Politics & Society* 21 (1): 15–34.
- Quinlan, Stephen, Christian Schnaudt, and Michael S. Lewis-Beck. 2021. "Forecasting Bloc Support in German Federal Elections: A Political-History Model." *PS: Political Science & Politics*. In this issue.
- Stegmaier, Mary. 2021. "Forecasting German Elections." *PS: Political Science & Politics*. In this issue.


SYMPOSIUM CONTRIBUTORS


Alexander Bauer  is a PhD candidate in statistics at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. His research focuses on the application of advanced statistical methods in interdisciplinary research settings, primarily driven by spatiotemporal research questions and election research. In addition to his research, he works as a statistical consultant for researchers from diverse disciplines at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. He can be reached at alexander.bauer@stat.uni-muenchen.de.

Andreas Bender  received his PhD in statistics from the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. Currently, he is a postdoctoral researcher and lecturer of statistics and a consultant at the Statistical Consulting Unit. He is the creator of the R package *coalitions* that facilitates nowcasts in multiparty electoral systems. He can be reached at andreas.bender@stat.uni-muenchen.de.

Jana Gauss is a master's student in statistics at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. She holds a bachelor's degree in statistics and is currently working as a research assistant at the Statistical Consulting Unit to support researchers from diverse disciplines at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. She can be reached at jana.gauss@stablab.stat.uni-muenchen.de.

Andreas Graefe  is full professor in the Faculty of Business at Macromedia University of Applied Sciences in Munich. His research interests are in forecasting and decision making, with a particular focus on political forecasting. He currently serves as vice chair of the American Political Science Association's Political Forecasting Group. He can be reached at graefe.andreas@gmail.com.

Thomas Gschwend  is professor of political science at the University of Mannheim. His research interests are in forecasting elections, comparative political behavior, and judicial politics. He can be reached at gswend@uni-mannheim.de.

Bruno Jérôme  is associate professor of economics at the University of Paris II and a member of the Law and Economics Center of Paris 2. He also is a member of the Political Forecasting Group. His interests are in political economy, public economics, election forecasting, and European economics and institutions. As a contributor to PS, he published in October 2020, "State-Level Forecasts for the 2020 US Presidential Election: Tough Victory Ahead for Biden" (with Véronique Jérôme-Speziari, Philippe Mongrain, and Richard Nadeau). His most recent books are *Analyse Economique des Elections (Economica)* (2010, coauthored with Véronique Jérôme-Speziari); and *Villes de gauche, villes de droite*: Presses de Sciences

Po (2017, coauthored with Richard Nadeau, Véronique Jérôme-Speziari, and Martial Foucault). He can be reached at bruno.jerome@gmail.com.

Véronique Jérôme-Speziari is associate professor of management at the University of Paris-Saclay and teaching assistant at the University of Paris II. She is Director of Communications for the Political Forecasting Group. Her interests are in political economy, public economics, election forecasting, political marketing, and nonverbal communication. As a contributor to PS, she published in October 2020 "State-Level Forecasts for the 2020 US Presidential Election: Tough Victory Ahead for Biden" (with Bruno Jérôme, Philippe Mongrain, and Richard Nadeau). Her most recent books are *Analyse Economique des Elections (Economica)* (2010, coauthored with Bruno Jérôme); and *Villes de gauche, villes de droite*: Presses de Sciences Po. She can be reached at veronique.jerome@gmail.com.

Mark A. Kayser is Dean of Research and Faculty as well as professor of applied quantitative methods and comparative politics at the Hertie School in Berlin. His core research interests address the economic underpinnings of democracy, including political accountability, the effects of electoral competition on policy making, and economic influences on electoral preferences. He can be reached at kayser@hertie-school.org.

André Klima received his PhD in statistics from the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. Currently, he is a postdoctoral researcher and lecturer of statistics and a consultant at the Statistical Consulting Unit. His research focuses on the estimation of voter transitions in multiparty systems. He can be reached at andre.klima@stat.uni-muenchen.de.

Helmut Küchenhoff is head of the Statistical Consulting Unit at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. His main research focus is applied statistics in many fields and, more recently, research on voter transitions and the COVID-19 crisis. He can be reached at kuechenhoff@stat.uni-muenchen.de.

Hannah Kümpel is a master's student in statistics at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. She holds a bachelor's degree in mathematics and is currently working as a research assistant at the Statistical Consulting Unit to support researchers from diverse disciplines at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. She can be reached at hannah.kuempel@stablabs.stat.uni-muenchen.de.

Arndt Leininger is assistant professor of political science research methods at Chemnitz University of Technology. His areas of research are in political behavior and applied quantitative methods. More broadly, he is interested in direct democracy, turnout, youths in politics, election forecasting, economic voting, and electoral studies. He can be reached at arndt.leininger@phil.tu-chemnitz.de.

Michael S. Lewis-Beck is F. Wendell Miller Distinguished Professor of political science at the University of Iowa. His interests are in comparative

elections, election forecasting, political economy, and quantitative methodology. He can be reached at michael-lewis-beck@uiowa.edu.

Klara Müller is associate member at the Center for Doctoral Studies in Social and Behavioral Sciences at the Graduate School of Economic and Social Sciences at the University of Mannheim. Her research interests are in political psychology and forecasting elections. She can be reached at klarmuel@mail.uni-mannheim.de.

Simon Munzert is assistant professor of data science and public policy at the Hertie School and a member of the Hertie School Data Science Lab. His research interests include opinion formation in the digital age, public opinion, and the use of online data in social research. He can be reached at munzert@hertie-school.org.

Andreas E. Murr is associate professor of quantitative political science at the University of Warwick. His research interests are in election forecasting, party leadership elections, and political methodology. He can be reached at a.murr@warwick.ac.uk.

Marcel Neunhoeffer is research associate at the Chair for Statistics and Data Science in Social Sciences and Humanities at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. His research interests are in the application of deep learning algorithms to social science problems with a focus on privacy. He can be reached at marcel.neunhoeffer@stat.uni-muenchen.de.

Stephen Quinlan is senior researcher at the GESIS–Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences,

Mannheim, and is project manager of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems project. His research interests are in comparative electoral behavior, social media's impact on politics, and election forecasting. He can be reached at stephen.quinlan@gesis.org.

Christian Schnaudt is a postdoctoral researcher and lecturer of political science at the University of Mannheim. His research interests are in political behavior (with a particular focus on political support and participation), comparative politics, and survey methodology. He can be reached at schnaudt@uni-mannheim.de.

Mary Stegmaier is vice provost for international programs and associate professor in the Truman School of Government and Public Affairs at the University of Missouri. Her research interests include international elections, voting behavior, and forecasting. She can be reached at stegmaierm@missouri.edu.

Lukas F. Stoetzer is postdoctoral researcher in social sciences at the Humboldt University of Berlin. His research interests are in comparative political behavior and political methodology. He can be reached at lukas.stoetzer@hu-berlin.de.

Anastasiia Vlasenko is a PhD candidate in political science at Florida State University. She studies authoritarian politics and democratization specializing in the politics of Ukraine and Russia. She is particularly interested in transitional-period reforms, propaganda, legislative politics, and elections. She can be reached at av16j@my.fsu.edu.