

Green Resilience in Germany

Article by Sebastian Bukow

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With Greens in the governments of 11 of 16 *Länder*, Germany has navigated the pandemic through decisive measures and without going into a full lockdown. This track record, along with the strong public support, gives the Greens an edge in the 2021 elections and promises to keep their progressive ideas high on the political agenda.

Speaking to parliament in early February, Health Minister Jens Spahn rated the Covid-19 risk for the German population as low. But this assessment was soon withdrawn and a comprehensive crisis management response set up. In March, Chancellor Angela Merkel set “flatten the curve” as the main objective, while federal and regional governments agreed on measures to shut down public life. Though Germany never had a complete lockdown, life fell asleep for weeks. In March, kindergartens were closed as well as schools, universities, restaurants, cultural venues, and sports facilities. As a result of decreasing case numbers, “contact tracing” became the new objective in mid-April and discussions about normalisation increased.

Germany managed the first six months of the pandemic well, both in terms of the economy and public health. The economy was supported by the largest assistance package in the history of the Federal Republic and by tax reductions, paid for by public borrowing. Over a trillion euros of support was approved by federal and regional levels combined. Reduced working-time allowances effectively prevented a rise in unemployment, though certain sectors still suffered particularly badly. In September, unemployment was 6.2 per cent. Following Germany’s first confirmed case on 27 January, about 325 000 cases were officially confirmed by mid-October (9621 deaths). The healthcare system has performed well so far, supported by the lower age of patients, lower contact rates, and efficient pandemic management.

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Despite protests against response measures, problems regarding medical equipment supplies, and a confusing patchwork of regional regulations, public perception of the crisis management is generally positive. Trust in the government has increased since the pandemic started. The governing Christian Democrats surged to 39 per cent in the polls in May before falling back somewhat. Their coalition partners remained stable and support for the far-right Alternative für Deutschland dropped. The Greens experienced moderate poll losses during the first wave but have recovered to just over 20 per cent support, performing strongly in local elections in North Rhine-Westphalia in September.

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the health sector, the Greens are pushing for a more preventive health system and reforms to health funding. On the economy, Greens were pushing for targeted support that would strengthen local economies rather than general tax reductions that also benefit large online retailers.

There are long-term factors behind the Greens' strong position too. Co-leaders Annalena Baerbock and Robert Habeck are popular beyond the party. Greens are governing in 11 of 16 *Länder*, the most important level for Covid-19 policies. Environmental issues remain on the agenda, now related to the debate over a sustainable economic restart after the pandemic. Party growth has been steady since 2017 and there are now over 100 000 members. The Greens are still the smallest party in parliament but have defended their second place in the polls. It's a good starting position for the federal election in 2021.



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