



Voter demographics – is Germany a gerontocracy?

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Authors

Barbara Boettcher
+49(69)910-31787
barbara.boettcher@db.com

Ursula Walther
ursula.walther@db.com

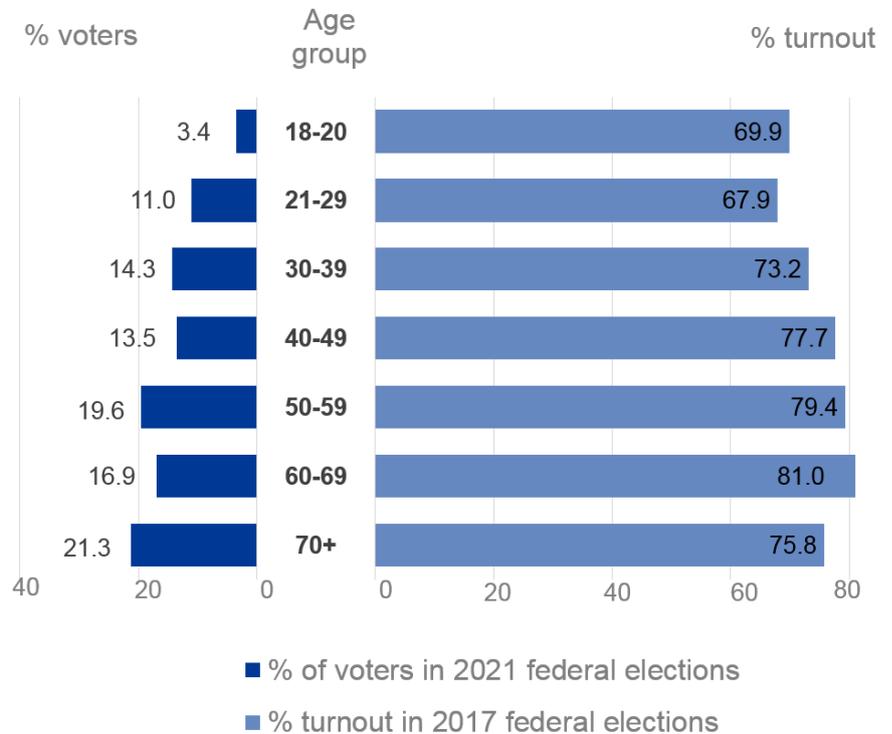
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Deutsche Bank Research Management
Stefan Schneider

For the German federal elections in September, about 60m voters are called to cast their ballot. Despite more than half of voters being 50 years and above, it would still be too far-fetched to say that Germany has become a so-called gerontocracy, where the interests of the older dominate the political process. Moreover, the pandemic could curb participation among all age groups.



Voters aged 50+ are more numerous and have a higher turnout



Source: Federal Returning Officer, Deutsche Bank Research

The impact of demographic change is obvious in various (economic) areas but is also becoming increasingly evident in the political sphere, in this case in the upcoming German elections. Older-aged groups are gaining weight, with voters aged 50+ constituting a majority in Germany since the 2013 federal



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elections. In this year's elections, they account for 58% of the electorate, while just 14% of voters are below 30, including roughly 5% first time voters. Still, saying that the old outvote the young is too simplistic. (1) Voters 50+ (like younger voters) cannot be seen as a homogenous group, but have diverse backgrounds and hence different political preferences. There are some age related voting patterns with older voters tending to vote more often for the conservatives and the SPD and less often for the Greens than younger voters. (2) Party systems have been in flux in all Western democracies, resulting in dwindling party affiliations. This means that instead of always voting for the same party some (older) voters have become more open to consider other options. This trend has benefitted the Greens as a comparatively young party.[1] For example, in the March regional election in Baden-Wuerttemberg, a considerable number of former CDU voters, incl. from the 50+ age group, switched to the Greens, with its 73 year old candidate and incumbent MP Winfried Kretschmann. It is fair to assume that (older) voters take current developments as well as the interest of their families and future generations into account when voting. Thus, their preferences can change over time.

Still, key election promises of both Groko parties in previous elections with respect to pension policy and the policy actually implemented give a strong impression that the CDU/CSU and SPD have a firm view on the older generation.

The pandemic is likely to curb voter turnout in general. Held during the build-up of the 3rd pandemic wave in mid-March, participation in the regional elections in Baden-Wuerttemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate dropped by about 6pp (from 70% in 2016 to about 64%). Why voters stay at home can be explained by three factors: (1) resources, incl. the mental and physical ability to vote. Corona restrictions and health concerns could prevent some voters from going to the polling stations. While postal voting offers an alternative, applying for a postal vote can be a hurdle for some voters. (2) The motivation to vote seems to have suffered during the pandemic. A recent study[1] found a general lower intention to vote in comparison to the 2017 federal elections, especially among poorer as well as middle-class voter segments. This is also related to the expectation that unlike 2017 the right-wing AfD will not be able to mobilize a considerable share of traditional non-voters as the party was not able to raise its profile during the pandemic. (3) Social networking, also an important factor in voter turnout, has suffered during the pandemic. As these factors tend to affect all age groups, we expect a similar age-related turnout pattern but on a slightly lower level given the perceived lack of a leadership figure as chancellor candidate and a somehow uninspiring election campaign so far.

- 1.) For more insights please see our analysis on tipping the scales in a tight election race.
- 2.) Bertelsmann Stiftung, Der „Corona-Effekt“, Warum die Pandemie der Wahlbeteiligung schaden und ihre soziale Spaltung vertiefen könnte, July 2021

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