

Look ahead to 2017: The German federal election

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To mark the end of the year, we've asked our contributors to preview some of the potential stories of 2017. In this contribution, [Kai Arzheimer](#) looks ahead to the German federal election, which is due to be held in the autumn.



In September 2017, Germans will go to the polls to elect the members of their national parliament, the Bundestag. In all likelihood, 90 or more of the new MPs will belong to the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) party, the German member of the European radical-right party family that is projected to win about 15 per cent of the vote. This would make the AfD the first new party to enter the Bundestag since 1990, and the first radical-right party to gain representation in the Bundestag since the 1949 founding election.

Since its inception in 2013, the AfD has been successful in every one of the ten regional (Land) elections in which it took part. In Germany's federal (and sometimes almost feudal) system, the AfD parliamentary parties have provided an important political infrastructure, and all the relevant players at the national level are also leaders of regional party chapters.

Having a large parliamentary delegation at the national level will change the AfD. On the one hand, parliamentary parties in the Bundestag are very well staffed and equipped with ample financial resources. The AfD will not just win a voice in the nation's foremost political forum but also the means to use this voice to the fullest extent. On the other hand, the parliamentary party and its mostly inexperienced members will become a new power centre that will overshadow the national executive and the regional party chapters. The AfD's leadership is rife with conflict, which will come to the fore during the campaign or shortly after the election. The party's recent decision to deny its co-leader and most prominent face, Frauke Petry, the role of a *Spitzenkandidat* (front-runner candidate) is a case in point.

Obviously, a strong parliamentary presence for the AfD will also change the Bundestag, and German politics more broadly. Chancellor Merkel's presidential style and centrist policies, her commitment to the euro and the EU, and her refusal to close Germany's borders to refugees are the AfD's *raison d'être*. In the new Bundestag, Merkel and the AfD will be pitted against each other, because Merkel will again be chancellor: Although the Christian Democrats will suffer considerable losses, they will still emerge as the strongest party. Somewhat ironically, a far-right success may very well mean that Merkel cannot form a centre-right government. Instead, she may have to rely on another Grand Coalition, or on some multi-party format that the AfD and their voters will hate even more.

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