

Let's end the secrecy about the German election

The BBC and Channel 4 always go to town over any US Presidential election, and provide comment about US Congressional mid terms. Any error or politically incorrect comment by a Republican is played up, and suitable bon mots by Democrats are reported. There is even sometimes commentary designed to produce a little balance.

When it comes to a pivotal and important European General election there is usually a deafening silence. In a month's time Germany goes to the polls to choose a replacement Chancellor for Mrs Merkel. Voters will also be invited to pass judgement on how green electors want policy to be, how much more power the EU should enjoy, and how prudent the budget of the EU's largest economy should be. Given the media's enthusiasm for all things EU the lack of interest in all this is noteworthy.

Many people in the UK have not even heard the names of the 3 main challengers to take over as Chancellor. Armin Laschet is the new leader of Merkel's CDU party (sort of Conservative). Annalena Baerbock is the chosen Chancellor candidate for the Greens. Olaf Scholz is the leader of the SPD (Labour like).

The election has been through three phases so far. It began with a surge for the Greens when they announced their fresh new candidate for Chancellor who briefly went into first place in the polls. It swung back to the CDU. In the last few days the lagging SPD has had a strong run and pulled level with the CDU in joint first.

The Greens have fallen back into third thanks to claims that Ms Baerbock's CV had elements of fiction in it and that her book had borrowed material from elsewhere without credits. More importantly Green policies of raising fuel taxes and subsidising cycling are going down badly. The CDU has lost traction partly thanks to Mr Laschet's unfortunate joke cracking as a backdrop to the German President speaking about the deaths of people in the recent floods. Mr Scholz has picked up support by avoiding such disasters.

There have been some continuities in the polls. The polls have always said the 3 main parties remain very unpopular, struggling to get much above 20% each. The polls have always said the 3 Chancellor candidates are unpopular, with more than half the voters often preferring none of the top 3. They have also said that the most talked about possible coalitions, CDU/Green/Free Democrats (Jamaica) and SPD/Free Democrats/Green (Traffic light) are more unpopular than any of the top three parties! The polls regularly give the Eurosceptic AFD 9-11% so they will definitely have no role to play in a future German government as none of the pro EU parties want them in a coalition.

The green arguments are especially important. Mr Laschet as current head of

the government of Rhineland Palatinate has to defend the decision to allow the loss of six more settlements and a major expansion of the strip mine for lignite at Garzweiler. The CDU/SPD coalition federal government led by Merkel has just agreed that Germany will continue to mine coal and burn it for electricity until 2038. This means Germany will not make much of a contribution to COP26 and the climate change pledges, refusing to match the UK by ending electricity from coal early. German electors seem worried by the lignite expansion but not enough to make the SPD less popular. They seem even more worried by the Greens wish to use taxes and subsidies to change things faster. There are also important differences over taxes, spending levels, borrowing and the size of the EU budget. I will keep you posted.