

Gender parity in German politics: further effort required

By Daniela Arregui Coka, Ronny Freier and Johanna Mollerstrom

Although many political authorities endorse the basic goal of parity between men and women across the board, reality does not yet reflect this in Germany. In the German Bundestag, for example, at present 37.1 percent of representatives are women. Divided among the six parties with the greatest likelihood of being elected to the Bundestag, a total of 1,979 people are running for office in the upcoming election. Of these, 35.7 percent are women. An analysis of the lists of candidates by party shows that the parties currently represented in the Bundestag have significantly higher proportions of women among their candidates than the opposition parties FDP and AfD do. In the top 48 slots—that is, the first three on each of the 16 state lists—the Green Party is putting forward 32 women, the Left Party 27, and the SPD 25. With 15 female candidates for office, the Union Parties (CDU/CSU) are also higher than the FDP and AfD (with 11 and eight candidates respectively). Of the 263 ministerial posts available since Germany was founded, women have only held 43. Although Germany has a female chancellor and the gender distribution in the current cabinet is almost equal, certain ministerial posts have yet to be held by a woman. The government resulting from the upcoming Bundestag election could serve as an example by explicitly committing itself to gender parity. In state parliaments, women are more underrepresented than on the national level. In the former, the proportion of women is 31 percent and has recently fallen. Only three out of 16 regional governments are headed by a woman. An international comparison shows that extended use of voluntary quotas for the parties—as already practiced in Germany—could be a highly viable way of achieving parity. They would be more effective if consistently implemented by all at all levels. And voters can make a difference by demanding equal representation from the parties.

In representative democracies, political representatives are elected to make decisions for the good of all citizens. Since women have been shown to represent the interests of women better than men¹ and women constitute half of the population, parity should be the rule in politics. It has also been scientifically shown, in randomized field experiments, that the mere presence of female policy makers increases the acceptance for women to hold such positions in society in general, which is another reason to champion parity.²

In Germany, women received the general right to vote in 1918³ and voted for the first time in the national assembly elections in January 1919. Following Finland (1906), Norway (1913), Denmark, and Iceland (both 1915), Germany was the fifth European country to officially recognize women as political actors.⁴ After Hitler came to power in 1933, women's right to vote was annulled and did not return until equal rights were made law again in 1949.

While the first Bundestag (the German federal parliament, see Box 1) was constituted with only seven percent female representatives in 1949, almost 70 years later the proportion of women representatives has risen to 37.1 percent. On the one hand, this is a sign of great progress in German politics and society. However, more effort is needed to achieve political parity. Given this situation and in view of the upcoming Bundestag elections,

¹ Using experimental designs, gender researchers have been able to show that female representatives make different decisions about the provision of public goods and that their decisions are more likely to involve issues relevant to female voters. See Raghavendra Chattopadhyay and Esther Duflo, "Women as policy makers: Evidence from a randomized policy experiment in India," *Econometrica* 72(5) (2004): 1409-1443. John Lott and Lawrence Kenny (1999): Did Women's Suffrage Change the Size and Scope of Government? *Journal of Political Economy*, 107(6): 1163-1198, as well as Lena Edlund and Rohini Pande (2002): Why have Women Become Left-Wing? The Political Gender Gap and the Decline in Marriage. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 117(3): 917-961, look at how women differ from men in the way they do politics.

² Lori Beaman et al. (2009): Powerful Women: Does Exposure Reduce Bias? *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 124(4): 1497-1540

³ Ordinance on the National Assembly Elections (*Reichswahlgesetz*) of November 30, 1918.

⁴ Beate Hoecker and Gesine Fuchs, eds., *Handbuch Politische Partizipation von Frauen in Europa* (Berlin: Springer Publishing House, 2013). The Austro-Hungarian Empire implemented the voting right for women at the same time Germany did.

Box 1

The German voting system

The German Bundestag is Germany's national parliament, the elected legislative branch of government at the federal level. Every four years, the country elects its members according to the principle of *personalized proportional representation*. Eligible voters elect at least 598 representatives, 299 of whom are directly elected in Germany's 299 voting districts. The other half receive their seats in the Bundestag via the parties' state candidate lists. Accordingly, each voter has two votes.

First and second votes

Candidates who receive the largest number of votes in their voting district enter the Bundestag as direct candidates. The first vote ensures that each region has at least one representative in the Bundestag. However, the second vote, which affects parties' state lists, is more important. It determines which party or coalition of parties has the majority in the Bundestag. For example, if a party receives 15 percent of second votes, it has a right to 15 percent of the seats in the Bundestag. The number of candidates from each list who actually receive seats in the Bundestag depends on the proportion of second votes their party

received in the relevant state. If the Green Party, for example, gets 11 percent of second votes in Hesse, it will receive precisely 11 percent of seats in the Bundestag, filled according to the candidates' ranking on the Green Party state list, from slot one in descending order. This is why slot number is very important: the higher the candidates' ranking, the greater their chance of obtaining a seat in the Bundestag.

Overhang and leveling seats

If in the first vote a party in one state receives more direct seats in the Bundestag than it has actually earned based on its proportion of second votes (see explanation above), the directly elected representatives will still receive their seats in the Bundestag. They are called "overhang seats" (*Überhangmandat*). However, as the German election system aims to uphold the primacy of the second vote, the principle of leveling seats (*Ausgleichsmandat*) was adopted in 2013. According to it, the total number of seats in the Bundestag is increased until all the overhang seats have been balanced out and no longer represent an advantage for any party. This means the Bundestag

this report presents an examination of women's participation in political office in Germany. It compares women's political involvement in Germany internationally and over time, and investigates the respective success of German political parties in integrating women. The regional level of the German political system is also examined.

Germany ranks favorably in international comparison

Worldwide, the political parity of women and men is a distant goal.

According to Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) data,⁵ the average proportion of women in national parliaments is 20.8 percent. Among 192 countries ranked according to political participation by women, five Latin American, three African, and two European countries comprise the Top Ten (see Figure 1). Only Rwanda and Bolivia exceed the 50-percent boundary. However, it must be noted that in both countries, parliament has little influence. And

in freedom indexes that compare countries, both are on the low end of the scale.⁶

Iceland and Sweden are ranked number four and six respectively regarding female representation. Each has a proportion of women in parliament of over 40 percent.

Germany is number 24.⁷ Among Germany's neighbors, only Belgium, Denmark, and the Netherlands are ranked higher.

Unlike emerging and developing countries that have implemented legal regulations,⁸ most industrialized countries have not stipulated a fixed quota for women. Instead, many political parties, especially in Europe, have

⁵ Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Women in national parliaments," (Web page, Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva, 2017) (available online, accessed February 24, 2017)

⁶ In the 2016 Human Freedom Index, Bolivia is ranked 52nd and Rwanda 85th. See Ian Vasquez and Tanja Porcnik (2016), "The Human Freedom Index," (Cato Institute/Washington, D.C., Fraser Institute/Vancouver B.C., and Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom/Berlin) (available online, accessed August 9, 2017).

⁷ The way successors are included differs between the German Bundestag data and the German IPU data, and explains the slight deviation in numbers between these two sources.

⁸ In Rwanda and Bolivia, this is the case, however with the limitation mentioned above. These countries have comparable democratic cultures to a limited extent only.

can be considerably larger than the planned 598 seats. For example, in the 18th legislative period (2013–2017) it was larger by 32 seats. Yet each party's proportion of seats corresponded to the proportion determined by the second vote.

Five-percent clause

In order to receive seats in the Bundestag, a party must have at least five percent of all second votes (five-percent clause). This clause supports parliament's ability to function and prevents it from being blocked by many small minor parties.

State parliament elections

Each of the 16 German states elects its own parliament every four or five years, depending on the state. And these elections are held at different times depending on the region. The number of representatives in state parliaments varies with the size of the state's population, ranging from Saarland with 51 representatives and Bavaria with 180. Most federal states also use personalized proportional representation, the voting system described above.

introduced voluntary quotas for women. Most of the parties represented in the parliaments of Sweden and Iceland have made voluntary commitments regarding the proportion of women among candidates for political office.

Since the 1980s, the proportion of women in the Bundestag has risen

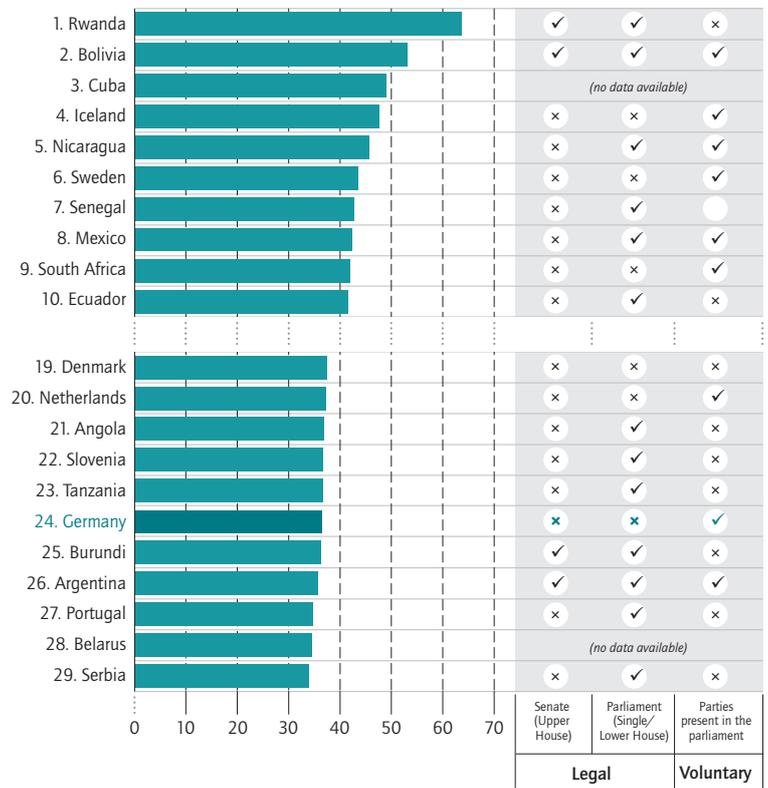
Between 1949 and 2017, the parliamentary representation of women in the German Bundestag grew significantly (see Figure 2).⁹ The increase was a long time coming. Between 1949 and the end of the 1970s, the parliamentary representation of women did not exceed the ten-percent threshold in any election period. Only since the 1980s has the presence of female elected representatives consistently increased—at an average rate of three percent per legislative period since 1983.

The Green Party (called *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen* since 1993) got the ball rolling (see Box 2 for a short presentation of German political parties). When the party was

Figure 1

Share of women in national parliaments

In percent, legal and/or voluntary gender quotas (right-hand side)



Sources: Inter-Parliamentary Union: *Women in politics* (2016) (available online); Inter-Parliamentary Union, International IDEA and Stockholm University: *quotaproject.org* (available online).

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Germany ranks quite favorably in international comparison.

formed in 1979, it adopted a 50-percent quota for women on all offices and seats.¹⁰

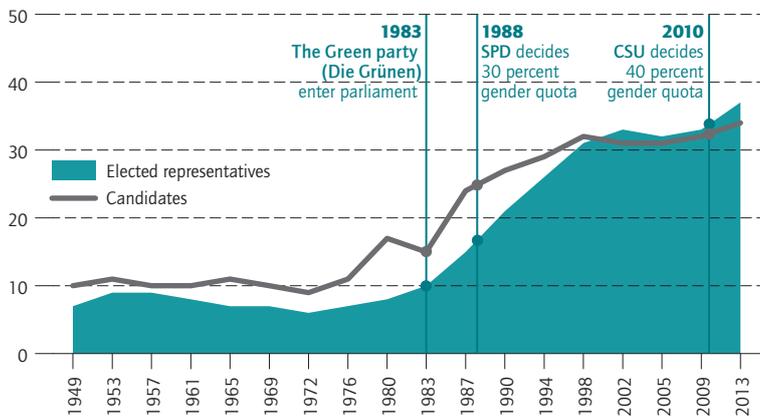
Consequently, the number of female representatives surged when the Green Party entered the Bundestag in 1983. At 35.7 percent, the Green Party caucus had the highest proportion of women in the Bundestag during the 1983–1987 legislative period. For all other parties, the quota was under ten percent. In the following legislative period (1987–1990), the proportion of women among Green Party representatives rose to 56.8 percent, contributing to an increase in the overall proportion of women in the Bundestag from 9.8 to 15.4 percent.

⁹ For purposes of comparison, the number of female candidates refers only to parties represented in parliament. This allows the curve to be compared directly to the illustration of elected representatives.

¹⁰ For a summary of the history of the party quota in Germany, see Louise K. Davidson-Schmich and Isabelle Kürschner, "Stößt die Frauenquote an ihre Grenzen? Eine Untersuchung der Bundestagswahl 2009," *Zeitschrift für Parliamentsfragen* (2011): 25–34.

Figure 2

Share of women in the German Federal Parliament, 1949 to 2017
In percent



Sources: Michael F. Feldkamp and Christa Sommer. *Parlaments- und Wahlstatistik des Deutschen Bundestages: 1949–2002/03*. Deutscher Bundestag, Referat Öffentlichkeitsarbeit, 2003; Michael F. Feldkamp. *Deutscher Bundestag 1994 bis 2014: Parlaments- und Wahlstatistik für die 13. bis 18. Wahlperiode*. ZParl Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen 45.1 (2014): 3–16.

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The share of women picked up significantly in the 1980s, in the past 20 years the rise has slowed down.

The second party to adopt a women’s quota was the Social Democratic Party (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, SPD*); initially the quota was 33 percent, and it was raised to 40 percent in 1994. The Party of Democratic Socialism (*Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus, PDS*), subsequently *Die Linke*, the Left Party, adopted a women’s quota of 50 percent two years later in 1990. The Christian Democratic Union (*Christlich Demokratische Union, CDU*) took the next step, implementing a “quorum” in 1996. The party used the quorum as a way of recommending that women should occupy at least one-third of all offices and seats. The Christian Social Union Party (*Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern, CSU*) waited until 2010 to adopt a 40-percent quota for women on the state and district levels.

Proportion of women in CDU/CSU half as big as Green Party or Left Party

Within the four caucuses of the 18th Bundestag, the representation of women varies greatly (see Figure 3)—among both the candidates and elected representatives.

In 2013, the parties with the highest proportion of female candidates were the Greens and the SPD, with 43.7¹¹

¹¹ This number deviates from the 50-percent quota mentioned above because in some states the party does not fill the list of candidates equally, despite the quota.

Box 2

Overview of main German political parties

Christian Democratic Union (*Christlich Demokratische Union, CDU*): center-right conservative party established in 1945. Current chancellor Angela Merkel has been the leader of the CDU since 2000. Operative exclusively in the state of Bavaria, the conservative **Christian Social Union (*Christlich Soziale Union, CSU*)** is the sister party of the CDU. CDU and CSU MPs form one parliamentary group in the Bundestag, known as the CDU/CSU or Union. The CDU/CSU has the most MPs in the current assembly (2013–2017), with 309 out of 630 seats.

Social Democratic Party (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, SPD*): center-left. Established at the end of the 19th century to represent the interests of the working class, the SPD distanced itself from its Marxist origins after World War II to appeal to a broader audience. It currently has 193 MPs in the Bundestag.

Left Party (*Die Linke*): socialist party established in 2007 in part as a legacy of the Communist Party of the German Democratic Republic. It has a strong foothold in eastern Germany. With 64 seats, it is currently the third largest party in the Bundestag.

Green Party (*Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*): environmentalist party formed in 1993. It was created as a fusion of two parties: the Green Party, born of the anti-nuclear protests in West Germany in the late 1970s, and the East German civil movement, Alliance 90. The Greens have been represented in the Bundestag without interruption since 1983. They are currently the smallest parliamentary group with 63 MPs.

Free Democratic Party (*Freie Demokratische Partei, FDP*): liberal party founded in 1948. It champions individual freedom, the free market, and privatization. In the 2013 general election it fell short of the five percent of votes needed to be represented in the Bundestag for the first time since 1949. According to polls, it stands a good chance of making a comeback in the September 2017 election.

Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland, AfD*): right-wing party founded in 2013 in response to the euro area debt crisis. It narrowly missed the five-percent threshold in the 2013 election but might manage to enter the Bundestag for the first time this year. It is Eurosceptical and champions traditional family values.

and 39.8 percent respectively. The Left Party came in third with 35.3 percent female candidates. The CDU/CSU caucus had the lowest proportion of female candidates (31 percent).

Of 630 elected representatives, 234 were women. Here the Left Party (54.7 percent) and the Green Party (54 percent) were at the front. Proportionately more women took seats in the Bundestag than were represented among the candidates. The SPD achieved balanced results: at around 44 percent, it had a similar amount of female representatives as were on the lists. The CDU/CSU caucus is the only one in which the proportion of women who won the election was lower than the proportion among candidates. With a 25.8-percent proportion of women, that caucus is more than ten percent below the average.

The reasons for the difference between the proportion of women candidates and representatives can be found among the parties as well as the voters. The former can actively influence women’s chances of success by their placement on the relevant list and the lineup of direct candidates (see Box 1). Voters can use their first vote to directly influence whether or not women win seats in the Bundestag.

More female candidates on the lists for the upcoming Bundestag; FDP and AfD lower the average

For this analysis, we evaluated the lists of the six parties that, according to polls, have serious chances of winning seats in the next Bundestag.¹²

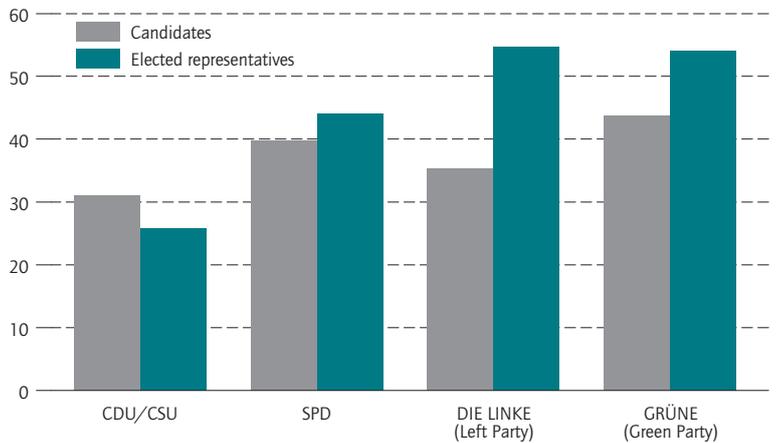
In total the CDU/CSU, SPD, Left Party, Green Party, Free Democratic Party (*Freie Demokraten*, FDP), and Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland*, AfD) are putting 1,979 people on the states’ lists of candidates. Of them, 707 are women—a proportion of 35.7 percent.

Compared to the last Bundestag elections, almost all parties have increased their proportion of women (see Figure 4). The Left Party and the Green Party assigned its candidate slots to males and females, alternating with near perfect consistency throughout. Unlike the situation in 2013, the two parties achieved parity among the candidates listed as a result. In 15 of the 16 states, the Green Party put a woman at the top of its list, and the Left Party followed suit in 12 of 16 states.

The SPD and CDU/CSU also achieve higher proportions of women than they did in 2013. The CDU/CSU

Figure 3

Share of women in the German Federal Parliament, 1949 to 2017
In percent, by parliamentary groups



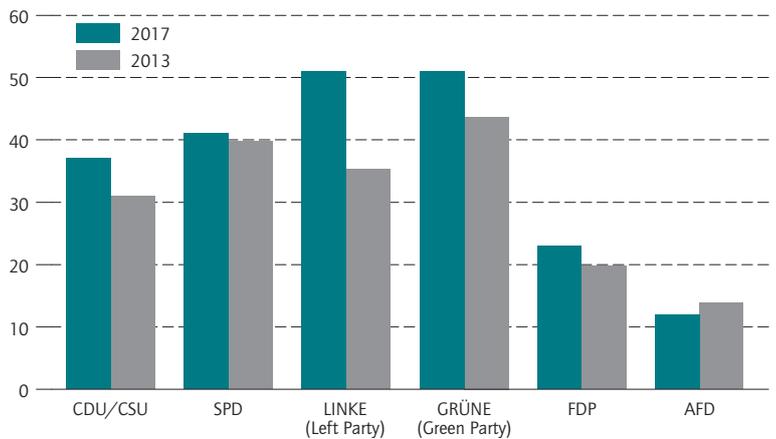
Sources: Michael F. Feldkamp. *Deutscher Bundestag 1994 bis 2014: Parlaments- und Wahlstatistik für die 13. bis 18. Wahlperiode*. ZParl Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen 45.1 (2014): 3–16; *Deutscher Bundestag* (available online).

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The Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) have the lowest share of female MPs.

Figure 4

Share of women among candidates for the 2017 general election
In percent, by parties



Sources: Authors’ own calculations based on data published by the election commissioners of the 16 regional states. Only parties standing a chance of entering the Federal Parliament, according to current polls, are considered.

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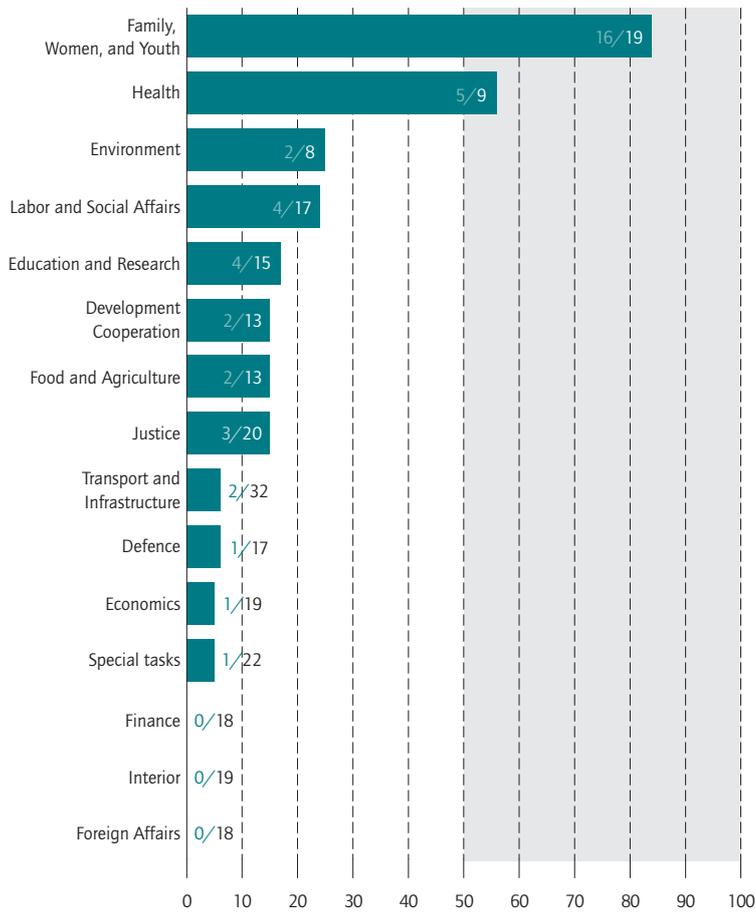
The share of women among the candidates is higher in most parties than it was in 2013, FDP and AfD lag behind.

12 After assessment by the state election commissioners, these lists have been available on the parties’ websites since August 7, 2017 at the latest.

Figure 5

Female federal ministers in Germany since 1949

Share of women in percent, number of elected women ministers (left-hand digit), ministers in total (right-hand digit)



Note: Data for the Federal Republic of Germany are only available until 1990. The areas of competence and responsibility for federal ministries change over time. For example, health matters have shifted between being overseen by a stand-alone ministry and the ministry for family and youth. Thus, only nine ministers for health are accounted for here.

Source: Federal ministries.

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Three federal ministries have never been headed by a woman.

was able to raise its proportion of women candidates by six percentage points to 37.2 percent¹³ with the SPD at 40.7 percent (39.8 percent in 2013). This puts the partners in the current coalition government closer to each other than they were in 2013. However, their approaches

¹³ The CSU in Bavaria assigned 20 of its 74 candidate slots on the list to women, achieving a proportion of 27 percent. However, the more important direct district positions only have eight women out of 46 (17 percent).

to the lineup differ. Using an approach similar to that of the Green Party and the Left Party, the SPD almost exclusively alternated men and women. Ultimately, nine women are at the top of state lists. Of the 48 top slots, comprised of the three top slots in each of the states, women fill 25. The CDU/CSU has six top women candidates, and of the 48 best positions women only fill 15.

While the parties in the current Bundestag have obviously made an effort to achieve parity, the picture is different for the FDP and AfD, currently in the opposition. Compared to 2013, the FDP has improved its proportion of women candidates by three percentage points, but only has an overall proportion of 22.6 percent. And the situation in the top positions is bleak: women are at the top of only four state candidate lists and they hold only 11 of the top 48 slots. On five of the 16 state lists, there are no women at all in the top three slots.

Women play an even more subordinate role in the AfD. Among the party's 231 candidates, only 27 are women. In comparison to the last Bundestag election, the quota of women has actually fallen from 13.9 percent to 11.7 percent. Women are at the top of four of the AfD's state lists and in total, there are eight women in the 48 best slots. In nine federal states there are no women among the top three. And on four of the party's state lists there are no women at all.

A comparison of the candidate lists by federal state shows significant differences. The parties in Hesse have achieved a proportion of women of just under 42 percent on their lists, and the city states of Berlin, Hamburg, and Bremen—plus the state of Brandenburg—are at 40 percent. North Rhine-Westphalia (29.4 percent) and Saxony-Anhalt (29 percent) are at the other end of the spectrum. The AfD has no women candidates on its list in Saxony-Anhalt, and the CDU, FDP, and SPD are under 30 percent there. The CDU has put one woman at the top of its list for the state, but the next women on the list hold slots ten and 11.¹⁴

This year the proportion of women on the lists is higher than it was at the last Bundestag election in 2013, but this does not automatically mean that more women will be among the elected representatives in the fall than were in the Bundestag during the current legislative period. The final result depends on different factors: not only the overall numbers of voters for each party but also where people voted for which party. In addition to

¹⁴ Even the state's Women's Union (*Frauen Union*), the lobby for women's issues in the CDU, described the lineup in the CDU list for Saxony-Anhalt as discriminatory (Web page, mdr Sachsen-Anhalt, Leipzig, 2017) (available online, in German only).

their placement on the relevant state lists, the results of the direct mandate are also an important determinant of the ultimate gender distribution. The currently published aggregated surveys do not provide adequate findings on this point. On the one hand, the effort of some parties to achieve parity is a reason to hope that the proportion of women holding seats in the Bundestag will grow. On the other hand, it is quite likely that the FDP and AfD—two parties in which women are significantly underrepresented on the lists—will hold seats in the next Bundestag.¹⁵

The Federal Ministry for Family Affairs has had the most female ministers; three ministries have had none

At the federal level in Germany, the executive branch has also historically underrepresented women (see Figure 5). In the history of the Federal Republic of Germany, a total of 263 federal ministerial posts have been filled, and the posts went to women in only 43 cases. Elisabeth Schwarzhaupt was the first female federal minister (of health) in 1961.

Women tend to head ministries that are closely connected to stereotypical “women’s issues.” Of the 19 ministers appointed to head the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs (currently Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth) since 1949, 16 were women. With a representation of women of over 80 percent, that ministry is at the top of the list of German ministries. The majority of the ministers at the Federal Ministry of Health have also been women.

In most of the other federal ministries, there have been between two and four women ministers in this nearly 70-year period. There has never been a female head of the Federal Ministry of Finance, the Federal Ministry of the Interior or the Federal Foreign Office.

In the current cabinet, seven out of 16 members are female. Ursula von der Leyen and Brigitte Zypries are the first two women ministers of the Federal Ministry of Defence and Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy, respectively. Angela Merkel, a woman, has been the head of government since 2005.

¹⁵ The website *mandatsrechner* (available online, in German only) makes a projection of the reappointment of seats in the new Bundestag, in cooperation with daily newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel*. The projection is updated regularly on the basis of polling surveys. As of August 29, 2017, *mandatsrechner* projected the share of women in the new Bundestag at 32 percent. However to come up with a figure for MPs elected both directly and from the lists, *mandatsrechner* has to make a series of strong assumptions. Direct mandates for instance are projected based on the results of previous elections.

After the Bundestag election, a new government will be formed. As practiced in some other countries,¹⁶ appointing ministers to intentionally achieve gender parity would send a strong message to German policy makers and society in general.

Parliamentary representation of women at the state level has plateaued in recent years

Women are also underrepresented on other legislative levels of German government. In state parliaments, the average proportion of women was 31 percent in 2017. In comparison to the 2011,¹⁷ the proportion of women in state parliaments fell by two percentage points.

The political representation of women in state parliaments varies depending on the state (see Figure 6 left-hand side). There is a difference of 16 percentage points between the highest and lowest proportions of women. In 2017, Thuringia had the highest representation of women, with a proportion of 41 percent. At 25 percent the proportion of female representatives in the Baden-Württemberg state parliament was the lowest in Germany—despite a significant increase of seven percentage points since 2011.

Hamburg and Saarland were among the top-ranked states in 2017, where the proportion of women in parliament was 37 and 35 percent, respectively. And the proportion of women in the newly elected Saarland state parliament grew the most in comparison to the reference year (six percentage points). In Thuringia (plus three percentage points) and Saxony (plus one percentage point), the proportion of women in the state parliament rose between 2011 and 2016.

In 11 of 16 federal states, the proportion of women has stagnated or fallen since 2011. Bremen experienced the most obvious decline: in 2016, nine percent fewer women were elected to parliament than in 2011.

At the executive level, only three out of 16 states—Mecklenburg Western Pomerania, Saarland, and Rhineland Palatinate—have a woman at their helm (see

¹⁶ For example, recently elected French President Emmanuel Macron promised a government team based on gender parity during his election campaign. He kept his promise and now has 15 women out of 29 ministers and state secretaries (French government: composition of the government (available online); and in Sweden the government, which calls itself a “feminist government” (Government Offices of Sweden: a feminist government (available online)), has achieved parity.

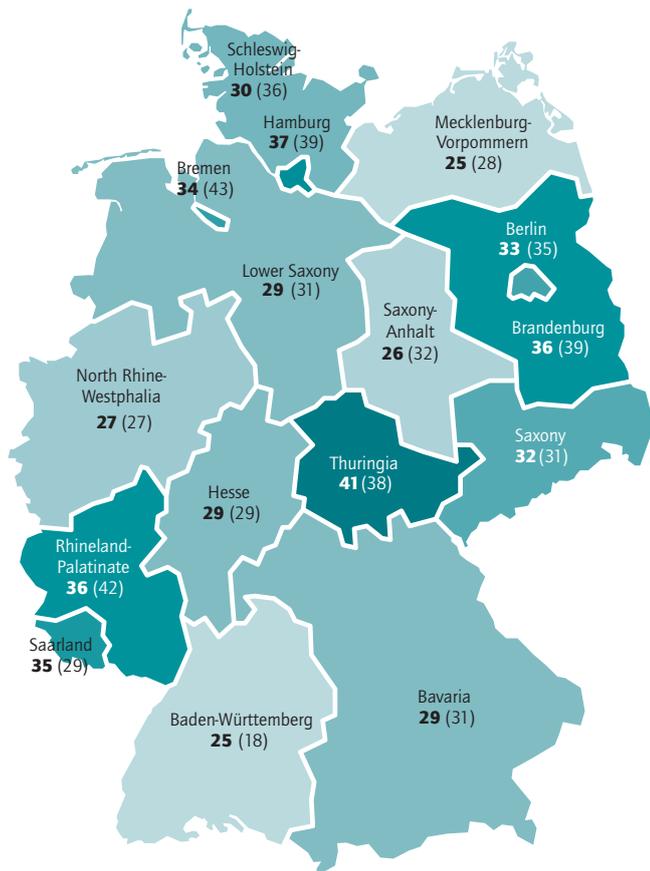
¹⁷ Because an external data source is available for 2011, all current figures are compared to figures from 2011 and not to the composition of previous parliaments, see 2. Atlas für Gleichstellung von Frauen und Männer in Deutschland.

Figure 6

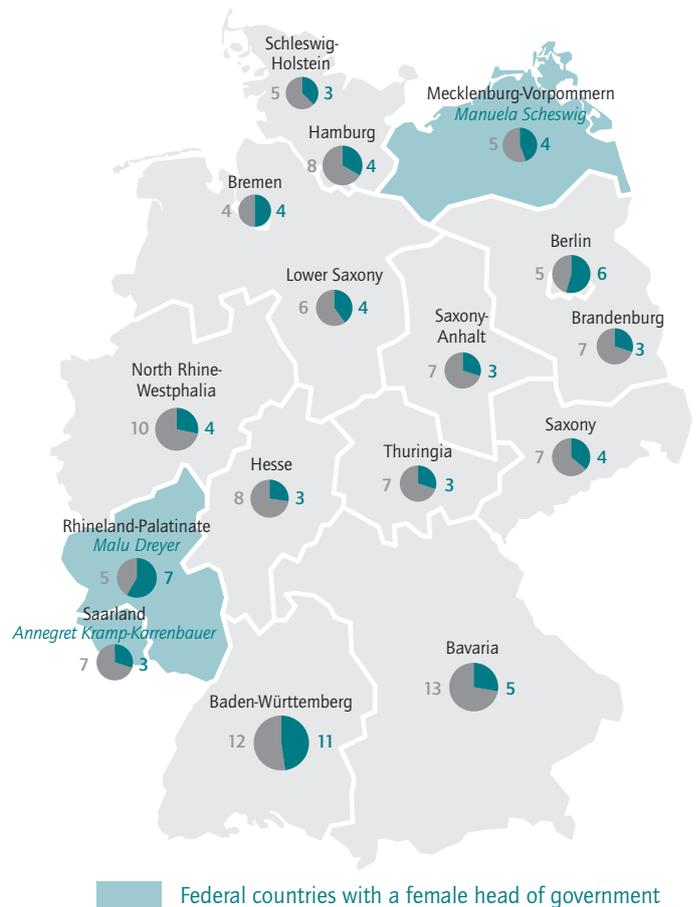
Political representation of women at regional level

Year 2017

Share of female representatives in the governments of regional states
In percent (for comparison: 2011 values in brackets)



Female and male ministers at regional level
Women (green) and men (grey) in regional cabinets



Sources: Official election statistics (2016; 2017 for Northrhine Westphalia, Saarland, Schleswig Holstein); Atlas zur Gleichstellung von Frauen und Männer in Deutschland, Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (2017).

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The share of female MPs in regional parliaments ranges from 25 percent (Mecklenburg Western Pomerania) to 41 percent (Thuringia).

Figure 6, right-hand side). Some 6.6 million citizens, less than ten percent of Germany’s population, thus live in a state with a female head of government.

Women are slightly better off in regional cabinets.¹⁸ Of a total 187 members of cabinet at regional level, 72 are currently female (38.5 percent). However in only two states, Berlin and Rhineland Palatinate, does the share

¹⁸ The sources for these figures are the websites of the respective regional governments. Prime ministers, ministers as well as secretary of states were counted as cabinet members.

of women reach 50 percent. Women are over-represented as ministers for education (nine out of 16 regional ministers) but six out of 16 Finance ministries also have a woman at their helm.

Conclusion

Although gender parity in political representation is a commonly recognized goal in Germany, further effort is required to get there. In the current Bundestag, 37.1 percent of representatives are women, meaning women are still underrepresented. Although the posts in the current

cabinet have been filled almost equally and a woman has led the government for over ten years, several politically important ministries in the Federal Republic of Germany have never been headed by a woman. Germany has never had a female president either.

Society and its political authorities must keep working to raise the proportion of women in politics. Equal access to public office is one issue. Further, equal representation is important to ensure that the interests of women have equal prominence on the political agenda. After all, politics serves an exemplary function. If the political system sets good examples it can make it easier to propose and implement measures to improve the position of women in other areas of society. The new federal gov-

ernment to be formed this fall could send an important message to this effect.

Of the Western democracies that rank higher in the representation of women than Germany, none has binding, legally stipulated gender quotas for political offices. However, political parties in many places, including Germany, have set up voluntary quotas. They are a useful, effective means of achieving parity, but only if parties adjust the quotas—raising them to 50 percent from the 30- or 40-percent level that is the status quo in Germany—and implement them on all political levels. The voters also play a decisive role and can demand that parties and political representatives set, and live up to, targets about gender parity.

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