

WHO ARE *THE GREENS*?

There has been quite a bit of buzz recently on both sides of the Atlantic about the prospects for success for Germany's Green Party in upcoming federal elections this September. These prospects may be of particular interest to stakeholders of manufacturing companies with operations in both the U.S. and Germany. These stakeholders may find themselves asking questions such as: What are their chances for success? If they succeed, what does that mean for environmental policy in German and Europe? How might such policy impacts influence the way in which these companies operate here in the U.S.?

I am not going to try to answer such questions here. However, I thought that a quick primer on the German Green Party might be of some use in developing a basic understanding of who they are – and who they aren't. So then, *auf geht's!*

The first important thing to understand about The Greens is that they are more than just a green party. The Greens are actually an alliance of Germany's original Green Party and another alliance of three left-of-center parties that were formed in the period following the fall of the Berlin Wall and prior to Reunification, when the former East Germany was starting to experiment with democratic reforms. In fact, the formal name of the party is Alliance 90/The Greens (*Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*), although they are commonly referred to as simply The Green Party, or The Greens.

The Green Party has previously been in power at the federal level, having most recently been part of the Red-Green coalition government under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Following the most recent federal elections, The Green Party nearly became part of another government, along with the two main conservative parties – the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the CDU's sister party in Bavaria, the Christian Socialist Union (CSU) – as well as Germany's main classical liberal party, the Free Democratic Party (FDP or *die Liberalen*). Negotiations to form such a coalition government ultimately fell through. The Greens have been, and currently are, part of coalition governments in a number of states (*Länder*), as well as in various municipal and other local governments.

Although the Greens have had access to the levers of power at all levels of government for some time now, the big difference this year is that they may be in a position to form the next federal government. This would also mean that the Party's leader would become the next chancellor. Traditionally, The Greens have named co-head candidates – one man and one woman – to lead their party into federal elections. Because of their prospects for success this year, they have named a single *Spitzenkandidatin*, Annalena Baerbock – a one-time foreign exchange student in Florida and former competitive trampoline gymnast at the national level.

(Trampoline gymnastics, by the way, has been on the Olympic program since 2000.) If The Green Party is tapped to form the next government, she would become Germany's next chancellor, or *Kanzlerin*.

In terms of the party's political orientation, the Greens are generally regarded as having two main factions. The *fundis* are the more leftist of the two factions. The *realos*, on the other hand, are considered to be the more pragmatically-minded of the two. Annalena Baerbock, and her fellow party co-head, Robert Habeck, both come from the *realo* side of their party.

Finally, it is important to note that as The Green Party's political fortunes have risen, the political fortunes of the other main left-of-center party in Germany – the Social Democratic Party (SPD, which is the acronym for the party's name in German, *Die Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*) – have fallen. In recent polling, The Greens outpace the SPD by anywhere from about five to fifteen points. Thus, for the moment at least, The Green Party seems to be the main left-of-center party in Germany.

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