

Alliance Politics in Germany

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What is the issue?

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- In a welcome development, Ms. Merkel's CDU has reached a tentative agreement with its long-term ally 'SDP' to renew their alliance.

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- But the strain between their respective constituencies could pull them apart.

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What caused the stalemate?

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- The conservative "Christian Democratic Union" (CDU) of Ms. Angela Merkel has been at the helm in Germany for more than a decade.

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- They've had a longstanding coalition with the leftist "Social Democratic Party" (SPD), and have cohabited power.

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- **Election** - Both parties registered their worst performance in recent times in the September 2017 elections, which developed strain in the alliance.

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- After the election results, the SPD had initially proposed that it wants to sit in the opposition and build its organisation and ideology.

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- As CDU lacked the numbers, Ms. Merkel made a subsequent outreach to the greens and the liberals, which too failed due to ideological differences.

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- Hence, Germany came close to calling for fresh elections, which was desired.

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What were the options?

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- Euro-sceptic ultra-right “Alternatives for Germany” (AfD) party, had bagged 13% votes in the current elections and is on an upswing.

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- Hence, if fresh elections were called, it might possibly strengthen AfD which isn't desired by any of the mainstream political forces.

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- The only way out was for Ms. Merkel to lead a minority government with an external support from the SPD, which wasn't appealing to either.

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- Hence, to break the impasse, despite the initial rhetoric, the CDU and SPD seem to have agreed for renewing the coalition for national interest.

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- Notably, the wider crisis European Union too would've pressured the alliance ahead as currently, EU's future largely hinges on Germany's polity.

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What are the strains in the alliance?

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- While the alliance renewal has indeed brought cheer, there is considerable disillusionment in both party camps on the concessions made for the other.

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- SPD has bagged six ministries, including finance, which has annoyed fiscal hawks within the CDU.

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- Notably, these people are against bankrolling financially weaker EU countries although Germany enjoys a huge budget surplus.

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- Also, the joint programme must first be approved by the SPD party delegates, who themselves are internally divided on some issues.

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- Parties have struck a pragmatic compromise for the time-being to safeguard the political middle-ground and preventing extremism from spreading.

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- But voices of dissent could veer things to the extremes, which is a risk.

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Source: The Hindu

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