

How Germany's Greens Lost Their Luster

The party was riding high when it entered the government two years ago. Now it is stumbling, blamed for driving voters to the far right.



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Reporting from Berlin

Nov. 1, 2023, 12:01 a.m. ET

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Germany's Green Party entered the government in 2021 with the best election showing of its history, establishing itself for the first time as a true mainstream party with the potential of one day even yielding a chancellor.

It won five cabinet positions in the three-party coalition, including the powerful economy and foreign ministries. It seemed to have a strong mandate to advance the country's economic transition toward a greener future.

What a difference two years make. And a Russian invasion of Ukraine. And rising energy costs. And a host of missteps that some even within the party concede has stalled the Greens' momentum.

Today the Greens are widely viewed as a drag on the government of the Social Democratic chancellor, Olaf Scholz, which one poll gave a mere 19 percent approval rating. The Greens have drawn withering attacks from even their own coalition partners. To their opponents, the Greens have overreached on their agenda and become the face of an out-of-touch environmental elitism that has alienated many voters, sending droves to the far right.

In important state elections this month, all the parties in the governing coalition took a beating, but the Green Party was singled out for special attack as populists and the far right surged.

"They've made the Greens public enemy No. 1," said Sudha David-Wilp, director of the Berlin office of the German Marshall Fund, a research institute.

The reversal of fortunes for the Greens is the story of a party that has long struggled to transcend its roots as a niche, environmentalist party to become a more pragmatic

political force capable of broader appeal to lead the country.

Formed in 1980, the Greens built their base by taking a relatively hard line on environmental issues and climate change. Previously their pinnacle of power was as a coalition partner in the government of Chancellor Gerhard Schröder from 1998 to 2005.

But in Mr. Scholz's government, which also includes the pro-business Free Democrats, the Green presence has been weightier, and the party's stumble raises questions about whether the German economy, Europe's biggest, can make progress toward its ambitious climate targets.



Annalena Baerbock, center left, and Robert Habeck, center right, of the Greens with politicians from other parties in the government coalition in Berlin in 2021. Clemens Bilan/EPA, via Shutterstock

The Greens hold the high-profile portfolio of foreign minister, under Annalena Baerbock, 42. They also have the important ministry for economic affairs and climate action, under Robert Habeck.