

CDU'S GREAT SUCCESS IN REGIONAL ELECTIONS IN SAARLAND



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The centre-right Christian Democrats (CDU) got one of its best results last Sunday in regional elections for the western state of Saarland. The region - until recently an SPD stronghold - remains in the hands of the CDU, who polled 47.5 percent of the vote. The Social Democratic Party (SPD) received 30.8 percent of the vote.

The leader of the CDU party, Angela Merkel said: "I am very happy. There is clearly a basis of support for the CDU across the country".

Voters have delivered another punishing defeat to Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, whose popularity, long on the wane as the result of his social reform programme, has fallen still further in recent weeks.

The SPD state leader, Heiko Maas, conceded the result was a "clear and bitter defeat", but party officials insisted there was no going back on the government's economic programme.

The result comes after the SPD's worst electoral result for several years in European elections last June and bodes ill for three other regional elections across Germany this month: the Eastern states of Saxony and Brandenburg go to the polls on 19 September and Germany's most populous state, North-Rhine Westphalia - traditionally an SPD stronghold follows on 26 September.