

German election fever: the TV ads are here

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There is now less than a month to go before Germany's general election. The summer holidays are mostly over. Children are either back at school, or due to return on Monday, in 12 of Germany's 16 *Bundesländer*. And that means the so-called "hot phase" of the campaign is getting under way and the main parties are releasing their election TV ads.

Here is a quick round-up of some of the more notable ads hitting the airwaves ahead of the September 22 election.

Christian Democratic Union (CDU)

This is Chancellor Angela Merkel's party. Not surprisingly, the CDU has focused on the woman who has led Germany and Europe since 2005 and remains far and away the country's most popular politician.

(Getty)



The message here: You can trust me to do the right thing. Ms Merkel kicks off with a reminder that being chancellor is not easy ("There are moments when there is a lot at stake; in the eurozone crisis, for example"), before pointing to her record and emphasising how she personally has to weigh up the big decisions:

I have to be sure that we do the right thing. The right thing isn't always doing what is demanded most loudly. The right thing is what in the end will help people. Germany is in a good position: a strong economy, more people in employment than ever before — this is not self-evident, this is something we have achieved together. This should not be put at risk with higher taxes and more social security payments.

And so on. The video is shot (apparently by someone who graduated from the MTV school of shaky camera action) almost exclusively in a rather grey room. The only external shot shows Ms Merkel standing on a rooftop moodily surveying Berlin. The sound track is serious but hopeful. Not quite Ronald Reagan's famous "It's morning in America again" ad. But Ms Merkel's message is twofold: The economy is doing great, and as for that external economic threat — I am on it.

Social Democratic Party (SPD)

A completely different approach from the SPD, whose leader Peer Steinbrück is hoping to replace Ms Merkel in the Chancellery and struggling. The polls put the party a distant second with around 25 per cent of the vote to the 41 per cent that is predicted for the CDU and its Bavarian sister party CSU.



This features people we are meant to assume are ordinary voters being asked what they want from the elections. In a uniquely German touch, everyone gets to stand behind a podium with two big microphones. (German television is very big on people standing behind podiums and desks to address the camera.) The man in the garage wants straight talking, the woman with tattoos would like a nursery place for her child and the man in a rather nice garden says no one can afford a family any more, and so on.

At the end we finally see Mr Steinbrück behind the same podium (now in a corridor) and he tells the camera:

That is why I want to be federal chancellor. Because Germany has been thrown off course and things must become more just in our country. So I'm asking for your vote.

There is no music at all. It has a nice flavour of different interior and exterior shots of Germany (check out the view of the Alps behind the woman at 1:01 in the video as she talks about people in their 70s having to work as cleaners to supplement their pensions).

The Liberals (FDP)

The FDP is the junior coalition partner in Ms Merkel's government. Her preference is to form a new government with the same coalition partner, but the FDP is languishing with 6 per cent in the opinion polls, perilously close to the 5 per cent threshold for entering parliament. Were the FDP to fail to get into the Bundestag, Ms Merkel would have to consider trying to form a "grand coalition" with the SPD, or the SPD could attempt to form a government with the Greens.

Alas the FDP has not yet released its election TV ad, but here is their YouTube page.

Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)

And this is the new eurosceptic party, Alternative for Germany, that could cause an upset for the FDP if it surprises pollsters by actually getting enough votes together to enter parliament.



The style, intriguingly, is a bit like the SPD video with more "ordinary voters" asking questions, albeit generally more angrily. This is interspersed with the AfD's answers to their questions. The first man asks "Have you asked yourself why all of our money is going to Greece? And not towards our broken streets and bridges?" [Spoiler: it isn't, but it just underlines the assumption that German guarantees and loans used to bail out Greece and other eurozone countries is money that will never be seen again.] The AfD wants Greece to leave the eurozone.

The Greens

The Greens, polling around 13 per cent, have an ad that is entirely negative but quite funny.



The fake naturalist is discussing the common snail who, you guessed it, is a representative of the CDU/FDP government.

As they linger in their natural resting place we can see that, due to their lack of spines, they do not orient themselves with an inner compass but just point their feelers whichever way the wind is blowing.

The Left party

To the left of the SPD, the Left party is polling around 8 per cent. It traces its roots the the communist party that ran East Germany as well as former SPD members. The message of its ad is that it will take your problems seriously (after touching on many of the same themes raised in the other campaign ads).



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