

Merkel claims victory in German election as far-right party joins parliament



Christian Democratic Union CDU party leader and German Chancellor Angela Merkel reacts on first exit polls in the German general election (Bundestagswahl) in Berlin, Germany, September 24, 2017. Photo By Kai Pfaffenbach/Reuters

German Chancellor Angela Merkel appears to have secured enough votes to retain the country's highest office for a fourth term, according to the latest projections.

Exit polls showed that her conservative coalition, made up of Merkel's Christian Democratic Union party and the Christian Social Union, combined to take an estimated 33 percent of the vote, the lowest number since the 1940s.

"Of course we had hoped for a slightly better result," Merkel said. "But we mustn't forget that we have just completed an extraordinarily challenging legislative period, so I am happy that we reached the strategic goals of our election campaign."

According to projections, the anti-immigration Alternative for Germany (AfD) party wrangled 13.1 percent of the vote, which would make it the first far-right

party to join the German parliament for more than 50 years, Reuters reported.

Merkel's main challenger, Martin Schulz, of the Social Democratic Party, was trailing in the polls with roughly 20 percent of the vote. He said he would leave Merkel's "grand coalition" government and join the opposition, the Associated Press reported.

"For us it is very clear that the voters have given us the task of going ahead as the strongest party in opposition," said Manuela Schwesig, a deputy party leader with the Social Democrats.

A move by the liberal Social Democrats to leave the government would create a challenge for Merkel, who will be tasked with forming a new parliament that may involve piecing together smaller parties that made gains in this year's election.

"We are the strongest party, we have the mandate to build the next government - and there cannot be a coalition government built against us," Merkel said.

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