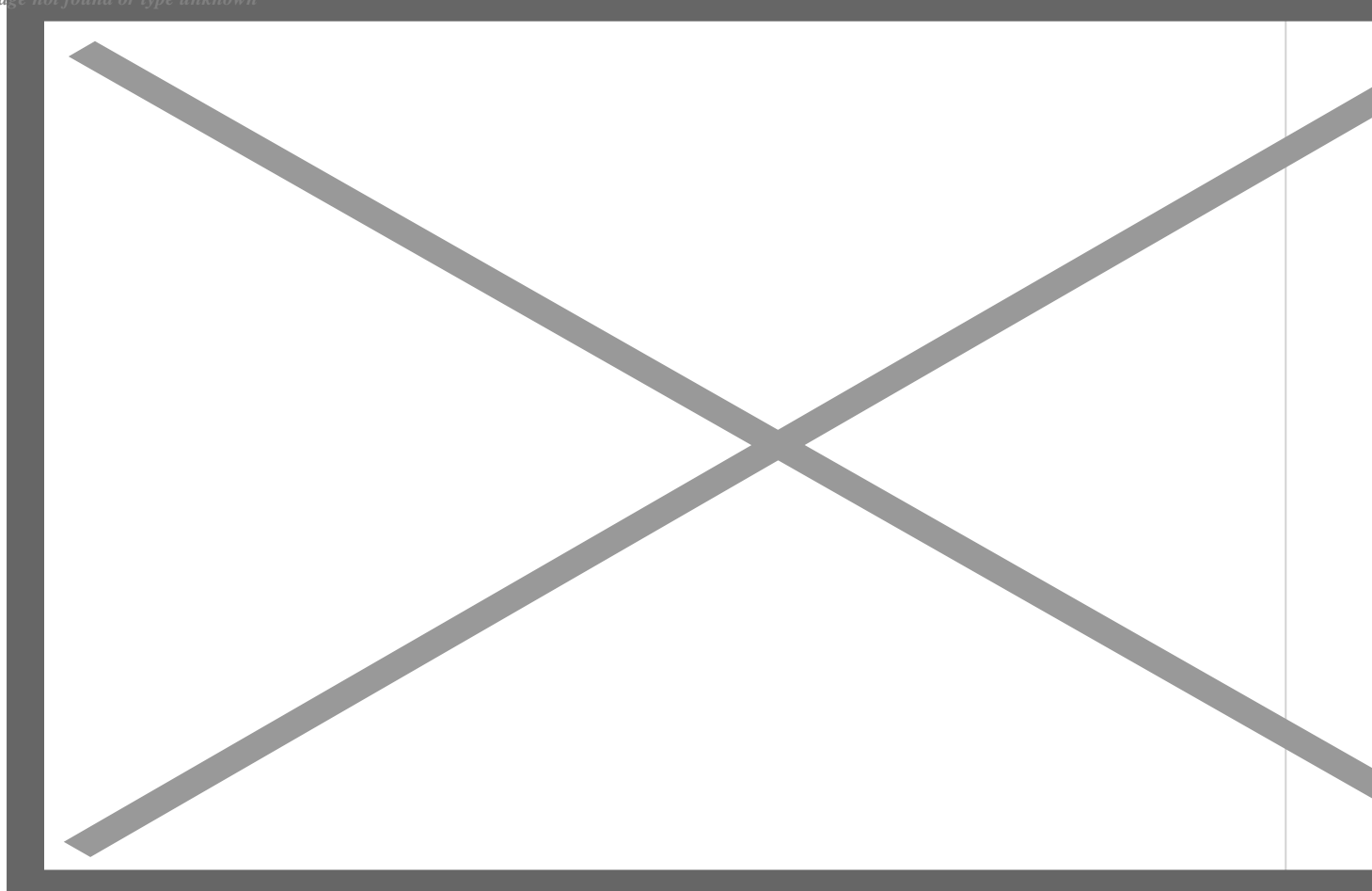


Germany votes in most unpredictable elections in years

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Germany is holding federal parliamentary elections on Sunday with little idea who will win [File: Sean Gallup/Getty Images]

Berlin, September 26 (RHC)-- For the first time in well over a decade, German voters entered polling booths for federal elections on Sunday with no clear idea which party will win, who will be the next chancellor, or what governing coalition will be formed.

Only a razor's edge separates the centre-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) from the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU), according to the latest poll by the Allensbach Institute, which puts the archrivals at 26 percent and 25

percent, respectively.

Other polls released in recent days put the SPD's lead at two to four points, with a margin of error of about 3 percent. Experts have urged caution when interpreting polling data due to the uncertain influence of an historically high number of undecided voters, as well as an expected surge in postal voting.

Exit polls will be released when voting ends at 6 p.m. local time (16:00 GMT) on Sunday, and results will emerge throughout the night into Monday morning.

Angela Merkel's decision to depart as chancellor after 16 years has upended German politics and led to the most unpredictable race in years. At various points in the campaign, the SPD, CDU/CSU and the Greens have each been leading the polls.

Climate change has dominated party programs and televised debates more than any other issue. On Friday, more than 100,000 protesters joined a Fridays for Future demonstration outside the German parliament building in Berlin, where activist Greta Thunberg told crowds that "no political party is doing even close to enough" to avoid climate disaster.

Other points of debate included social welfare spending and raising the minimum wage, overhauling Germany's rickety digital infrastructure, and the country's role in the NATO alliance.

Success and failure in the campaign have largely been determined by party leaders' ability to frame themselves as a natural heir to Merkel, who remains Germany's most popular politician.

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