

## **A Study of Party-Government Relations at Federal and State Levels During Merkel's Third Grand Coalition (2018-2021)**

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### **Abstract**

This article discusses party-government relationships between the CDU, CSU and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) during Merkel's third grand coalition between March 2018 and 2021, through the lenses of theories of competitive party behavior and of the party system. During this period, the three ruling parties experienced numerous changes in party leadership, which reflect the strength of party leadership and recruitment structure. For the actors involved, obtaining official posts in state government remained the most important goal, so political parties sought to maximize the votes received in state parliamentary elections.

An analysis of the composition of the two levels of governments after state and federal parliamentary elections reveals the number of parties, and fragmentation, increased in the years 2018-2021. Segmentation decreased and coalition building between left and the right increased. After the federal election in the September 2021, the SPD, the Green and the FDP established the first "traffic light" coalition cabinet, while the CDU/CSU failed to hold onto power following Merkel's 16 years in office. To understand these developments, it is necessary to evaluate Merkel's governance and the competition and cooperation between parties in the 2021 federal election.

**Key Words:** Merkel, German party system, grand coalition, refugee policy, COVID-19 epidemic