



Germany, the land of freedom

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German democracy works well and the results are clear.

German history has dark pages, as everyone knows, but the last generations have been doing a great job to change this image. Starting in 1949, West Germany built a solid democracy, with accelerated economic development. In 1989, the people of East Berlin tore down the “wall of shame” with their bare hands. This week’s elections show a stable democracy where dialogue reigns and polarization is not created — exactly the opposite of what is observed in much of the world.

Four parties will control 612 (or 83.3%) of the 735 seats available in Parliament. I refer, from the most to the least voted, to the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Christian Democracy Union (CDU/CSU), the Green Party (Grüne) and the Liberal Democratic Party (FDP). There are radicals in the German Parliament, but they are a minority and they still shrank in the 2021 elections.

As no party obtained a majority, the government will be formed by a coalition. It’s not a serious problem. After all, polarization does not paralyze local politics, quite the contrary. In recent years, the government was formed by an alliance between Christian Democrats and Social Democrats. In other words, a conservative party of Christian origin has joined a socialist party of Marxist origin. Can the reader imagine something similar in Brazil?

The SPD socialists, with the most votes in the 2021 election, are indisputably democratic. Olaf Scholz, favored to assume the post of chancellor, was minister to Angela Merkel. He is seen locally as an extremely pragmatic and moderate politician. In the past, the SPD has led Germany in coalition governments with Christian Democrats, Liberals and Greens. There was no authoritarian shift in any of these experiences.

German democracy works well and the results are clear. Meanwhile, the United States suffers from a lack of political dialogue, with governments paralyzed by the difficulty of reaching agreements on budgets and fiscal rules. The difficulty of reaching an agreement on Brexit shows that the UK is on the same path. Brazil, then, is not even talked about...

The Germans teach political liberalism and thus manage to sustain a solid market economy. German public debt has fallen in the last decade, going against what happened in several advanced economies (such as the US) and emerging ones (such as Brazil). International trade is intense, thanks to the European Union, which has Germany as its strongest pillar. The inevitable climate transition has been much faster there, and this pioneering spirit tends to pay off big for the German economy as the world follows the same path.

The United States and the United Kingdom are often associated with freedom and liberalism, unlike Germany, which is often associated with you-know-who. It is an injustice, as any book on the history of liberalism shows. One of the best and most recent (“Lost History of Liberalism” by Helena Rozenblatt) is extremely happy to address this point. Helena, an American historian, shows that US dictionaries in the early 20th century associated the word “liberalism” with a European ideology.

This European ideology was largely built in Germany. Many remember John Stuart Mill, the great thinker of British liberalism in the 19th century. Few remember that the German Wilhelm von Humboldt was Mill’s main reference and was, to a large extent, one of the founding intellectuals of the liberal tradition.

If the Germans abandoned liberalism in the 1930s and 1940s, the fact is that the tradition was taken up in West Germany after World War II and persisted in unified Germany. After a few decades, Germans enjoy a market economy governed by free competition and a functioning democracy, where dialogue takes precedence over polarization.

In the Cold War, it was understandable to cite the US as a model of liberalism. Fortunately, the Cold War is over and our political references need updating. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, Germany has been recognized as one of the strongholds of liberalism, perhaps the most solid on the planet.

This is not mere rhetoric. In these times marked by the advance of anti-liberal forces, it is important to remember who, with success, continues to carry out the defense of democracy, tolerance, human rights and the market economy, among other indisputable values.

Equally important is to realize that liberalism does not depend on American values. In the Human Freedom Index, organized by the Cato Institute, Germany ranks ahead of the United States and the United Kingdom, ranking highest among the most populous nations in the world. Yes, I’m talking about the same country where Nazism flourished. Fortunately, history has moved and whoever persists in the old references will be left behind.