

A Majority of the German Population want Soldiers to Pull Out of Afghanistan: Germany's Left Party Expelled from Bundestag

By [Derek Scally](#)

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Germany's Left Party was expelled from the Bundestag yesterday after its members held up signs bearing the names of Afghan civilians killed in a German-ordered airstrike last September.

The protest came in the middle of a parliamentary debate on extending Germany's nine-year military mission to Afghanistan by a further year.

Some 429 MPs voted for and 111 against the new mandate - 16 fewer votes in favour than last time - allowing troop numbers to be increased by 850 to 5,350.

The opposition Green Party abstained and, after being re-admitted, the Left Party MPs contributed to the 111 votes against the mandate.

"This was no routine vote, we reject the war in Afghanistan," said Gesine Löttsch, the Left Party's designate co-leader, after MPs held up about 70 signs with names of victims. One read: "Ali Mohammad, farmer, 35 years old, nine children.

"This was a dignified way of remembering individual people with names and biographies who have died, deaths that have brought calamity on their families."

The expulsion of the entire 76-member Left parliamentary party, a first for the Bundestag, underlined the controversy that still surrounds Germany's first post-war military deployment outside Europe. The revised mandate will increase by five to 1,400 the number of Germans training Afghan soldiers.

Underlying public scepticism towards the mission has hardened into deeper cynicism since September's bombing of two petrol tankers near Kunduz that killed about 140 people, including dozens of civilians. Full details are still scarce, with a parliamentary inquiry into the incident meeting often in closed-door session.

Some 69 per cent of Germans want soldiers to pull out, according to a December poll for ARD public television, up 12 per cent in three months.

Green Party MP Hans-Christian Ströbele, a veteran of Germany's pacifist scene, said that, after the bombing, yesterday's parliamentary expulsion sent "completely the wrong signal

to Afghanistan”.

Bundestag president Norbert Lammert defended his actions, pointing out that protests in the chamber breach parliamentary guidelines.

Parliamentary expulsions are a rare but not unheard of phenomenon in German politics. In 1949 then Social Democrat (SPD) leader Kurt Schumacher became the first person to be thrown out for calling Konrad Adenauer the “Allied Chancellor”. The most celebrated expulsion came in 1984 during a row between the then Bundestag president and Green Party MP Joschka Fischer.

“With permission, Mr President, you’re an asshole,” said Mr Fischer, who was then expelled for two days.

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