German anti-lockdown, anti-mask protestor in Kassel compared herself in the anti-Nazi resistance hero Sophie Scholl, prompting a security guard working the protest to walk off the job. German chancellor Angela Merkel is enjoying a kind of popularity unheard of for someone who has been in office for 15 years. Though she will not run for re-election in 2021, her party, the Christian Democratic Union, is well placed to end up as the largest party come September.

But in the context of the coronavirus outbreak, the street protests, and the roll-out of the coronavirus vaccine due to take place in 2021, the rise of the corona-sceptic, anti-vaxxer movement will be a test for German democracy, civil society and its Jewish community.

Simone Rafael of the Antonio Amadeu Foundation in Berlin told the JC she is sceptical about whether a mainstream political party will try and pick up on the movement and attempt to harness its power in order to win votes.

The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party has shown an interest in the corona-sceptic movement. Politicians belonging to the party have taken part in protests and compared coronavirus-related laws to Adolf Hitler’s 1933 Enabling Act.

But the AfD “is deeply divided at the moment,” Ms Rafael said. “Part of the AfD would very much like to be seen as the corona protest party, but if that part of the party gets its own way, then the AfD will have become an openly extreme right and anti-democratic party” and would lose voters as a result.

The corona-sceptic demonstrators in Germany are united in their antisemitism and hatred of democracy, Ms Rafael observed, and to that end they represent a challenge not to Germany democracy from participants but rather as wreckers from without, challenging and undermining the system itself.

“To what extent [the corona-sceptic movement] will damage the forthcoming federal elections remains to be seen,” Ms Rafael told the JC.