

German centrist politics in crisis: the 2026 Landtag elections

II: Centrism as it's meant to work?

**Continuity and change in Baden-Württemberg's new
government**

Peter Kenway

July 2026

Baden-Württemberg's new government: German centrism as it is supposed to work?

A new government only comes into being following a German election when a coalition agreement, negotiated between the parties, wins the support of a majority of members of the new parliament.

The result of the state election in Baden Württemberg in March left only one possible majority coalition (excluding the AfD), between the Greens and the Christian Democrats (CDU).

Immediately after the election, the success of the negotiation between the Greens and the CDU

being played for high stakes, with national implications, and where at least one side may judge there are incentives not to reach agreement at all

looked uncertain. But when the new state parliament voted for the Greens' Cem Özdemir as Minister-President, on 13 May, it showed that an agreement had been reached, and in good time.

This prompts two questions:

- First, why was an agreement reached – to all appearances – quite so easily?
- Second, what kinds of message does the agreement deliver, both in general terms, and specifically?

To provide material for second question, summaries of two of the agreement's chapters are presented, one to do with the economy and the other to do with justice and migration.

The allocation of government departments between the coalition parties

The most important page in a coalition agreement – at least for its immediate impact – is the one showing which government department will be led by the Greens and which by the CDU

The key point is the continuity of political leadership in 2026 compared with 2021

Departments by party lead: 2021 and 2026

	2021	2026
Minister-President		
Interior, Digitalisation, Europe		
Economics, Trade, Tourism		
Rural, Agriculture, Home		
Justice and Migration		
State Development, Housing		
Culture (including education)		
Environment, Climate, Energy		
Finance		
Science, Research and Arts		
Social Affairs, Labour, Health		
Transport		

Compared with 2021:

- Three departments switch party leadership, two to the CDU (transport, culture) and one to the Greens (state development/housing)
- The CDU gains a ministry because of its improved parliamentary strength vs. Greens (56-56 in 2026; 42-58 in 2021)

The 2021 allocation likely suited both parties:

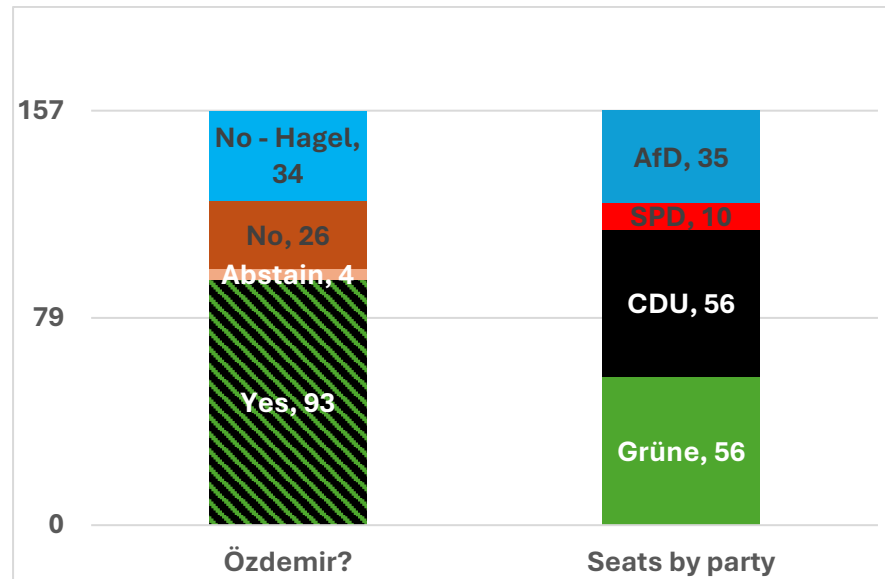
- The Greens, because their bargaining position in 2021 was strong
- The CDU, because the departments it led in 2021 were ones it (or its CSU ally) chose to lead at federal level in 2025
- The CDU's "new" departments are also ones it leads at federal level

The extent of support from coalition parliamentarians for the new Minister-President

The key vote in Baden-Württemberg's state parliament was the secret ballot (13 May) to approve the Greens' Cem Özdemir as Minister-President

By implication, this is also a vote to approve the coalition agreement

Votes for and against Özdemir; seats by party



- A candidate for Minister-President needs the support of a majority of all members (here 79)

With 93 votes, Özdemir won comfortably

- But at least 19 of the 112 coalition members didn't back him (compared with just five – out of 100 – in the equivalent vote in 2021)
- The AfD proposed CDU leader Manuel Hagel instead (without his agreement)

Speculation about coalition members who failed to support Özdemir pointed both to:

- The CDU, e.g. in protest at the Greens' refusal to share presidency?
- The Greens: e.g. in protest at Özdemir's "pragmatism" (the environment chapter shorter than the economy chapter)?

Comment: why was reaching a coalition agreement seemingly so straightforward?

A starting point acceptable to the both parties

- If the first job of a coalition agreement is to divide leadership of the departments between the parties, the starting point in 2026 (that is, the allocation in 2021) was already favourable

Reinforced by an election result that rewarded both parties, but gave neither a decisive advantage

- The Greens got the most votes and so held on to the position of Minister-President
- But the CDU increased its vote share, strengthening its position and giving it an extra department

Supported by the coalition's big majority, making parliamentary approval easier to secure

- With 112 of the 157 members of parliament, dissenters in the coalition ranks have less sway

And a 163 page coalition agreement that usually avoids specifics

- More vision and values than policy programme?
- At times different sections clearly written by different parties – to be understood as a statement of what one party believes and the other can live with? – though some sections explicitly jointly owned

For example: the commitment to a free, compulsory final year of kindergarten

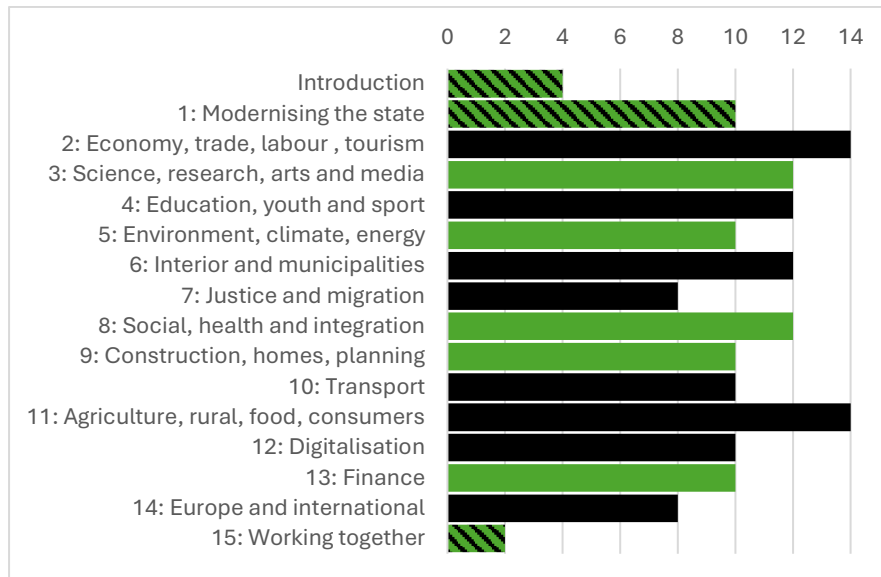
- The agreement confirms the promise of this made in both party manifestos (“we will bring in ...”)
- But gives no date for its introduction, leaving the practical and financial challenges for later
- With the responsible department now CDU-led, a key Green party commitment is out of its hands

The scope and emphasis of the coalition agreement

15 chapters and 163 pages

If the allocation of departments between the coalition parties is marked by continuity, the coalition agreement itself is marked by its emphasis on change

Chapters, length, coalition lead (or shared)



Chapter subtitles convey a message, e.g.:

1: “For a modern, digital and citizen-oriented state” – modernisation in first place?

2) “For a growth agenda for Baden Württemberg and workplaces with a future” – growth, but change too?

5) “For effective climate protection, a secure energy supply, and a rich natural environment” – energy security at the heart of a green message?

7) “For a strong rule of law, and order in migration” – Controlled migration rooted in law?

Overview of the coalition agreement: chapter 2, the economy

The challenge - and the vision of how to meet it

- The business model that has served Baden-Württemberg well for decades may no longer do so
- “Technologies that create value-added worldwide should be developed, produced and scaled-up in Baden-Württemberg” – allowing it to retain its status as the #1 region in Europe for innovation

These technologies include AI, robotics (“its most important field of application”), green tech, hydrogen and batteries, semi-conductors, quantum, life sciences, vehicle tech, security, defence ...

To this end, the government will:

- Introduce a “high-tech strategy”, linking universities and research bodies with start-ups, SME’s and industry
- Set up a “Futures Fund”, to leverage in private capital, for start-ups and for scaling-up
- Clarify rules and speed-up processes to turn B-W into a leading start-up region
- Strengthen training, applied research and tech transfer to lift innovation in engineering and the machine tool sector
- “Do everything” to see that “the car of the future” is developed and built in B-W
- “Keep cutting bureaucracy” – a “one in, two out” rule for new regulations; a sunset clause state reporting requirements
- Reform the framework for qualifications and further education
- Support a stronger internal market and free international trade
- Support tourism (which “benefits localities as well as our guests”), through training, digital, infrastructure and a “future tourism network”

Overview of the coalition agreement: chapter 7, justice and migration

Principles and their implementation

- “An independent and capable system of justice is the backbone of the rule of law and fundamental to our democracy: we will continue to strengthen it”
- “Baden-Württemberg is a land of opportunity for hard-working people: those who speak our language, respect our laws and values are welcome; we will manage and limit migration

To strengthen justice, the government will:

- “Modernise the system, in terms of its personnel, technology and organisation”
- Make justice as a career more attractive, including through a reform of legal training
- Make the system more open and transparent
- “Fight criminality effectively”, with a special focus on financial and economic crime
- Require judges and lawyers to put “victim support before perpetrator support”
- Raise staffing levels in the penal system

- To manage migration, the government will:
- “Distinguish clearly between asylum – a fundamental human right – and migration”,
- “Support immigration by skilled workers, in line with clear regulations and conditions”
- “Bring consistently to an end the stay of migrants who have no prospect of remaining”
- “Continue our proven system of state-wide and local refugee welcome centres, with an emphasis from the outset on integration
- “Make identity verification – essential for both arrival and bringing a stay to an end – easier”

Conclusion: four observations

Summaries are selections, but by reflecting the chapter section headings, the two presented here can reasonably claim to be representative. Four observations:

Baden-Württemberg's prosperity means that the economy chapter's challenge is very unusual

- Regional economic narratives are usually about levelling-up, but this one is about staying in front
- Technological innovation and its application, to create new marketable products or services, are seen as the key to success

The Agreement is more vision and values than policy detail

- Policy detail is strongest when administrative reform is discussed (in the economy chapter, how growth-stifling bureaucracy is to be reduced; more generally in the justice/migration chapter)

Failure to acknowledge political continuity deprives learning from experience of the weight it deserves

- Little here is wholly new: had the record of the last government been the starting point, course corrections now judged necessary would have more prominence and credibility
- Similarly, the way other evolving technologies are handled already offers an established, even if imperfect, template for taking the very latest technologies (above all, AI) forward now

The emphasis on “workplaces with a future” begs the question about workplaces without one

- The social partnership between employers and unions is said to be valued, but there is no mention of the partnership's central role in the orderly wind-down of workplaces without a future

Sources and notes

Pages 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8

- “Coalition Agreement, 2026-31”, Government of Baden-Württemberg, [Der grün-schwarze Koalitionsvertrag](#), („[Aus Verantwortung fürs Land](#)“ (hereafter KV26)

Page 2

- Departments by party lead: 2021, Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, „[Koalitionsvertrag von Grünen und CDU Baden-Württemberg \(Ministerium\)](#)“; 2026, KV26, p 163.
- Landtag seats: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, „[Das Wahlergebnis zur Landtagswahl 2021](#)“ and „[Ergebnisse zur Landtagswahl 2026 in Baden-Württemberg](#)“.
- Federal departments led by CDU (or CSU) in 2025: Coalition Agreement, 21st Legislature, [Koalitionsvertrag](#), p143.

Page 3

- The vote for Özdemir as Minister President: Landtag von Baden-Württemberg, [Plenarprotokoll 18/2, 13 Mai 2026](#), Stuttgart, Mittwoch, 12 noon, Thomas Strobl.

Page 4

- Kindergarten commitment: „Wir werden ein verbindliches und kostenfreies letztes Kindergartenjahr einführen“, KV26, p47

Page 5

- Chapter subtitles: pp 10, 20, 58, 80.

Pages 6 and 7

- Section headings, (asterisks indicate that material from the section is cited in the text) by chapter
- 2: intro paragraphs*; innovation and investment*; high-tech strategy B-W*; progressing targeted key technologies*; sustainable economies; Future Funds BW*; progressing Startupland*; simplifying the funding jungle; leading industry into the future*; a strong internal market and international free trade*; strengthening SME's, skilled trades and retail; supporting tourism*; unleashing growth – consistently reducing bureaucracy*; skilled workers, training and development*; priority for jobs and fair working conditions
- 7: intro paragraphs*; modern and strong justice*; justice as an employer*; justice and society*; fight criminality effectively*; support victims before perpetrators*; the penal system*; manage and limit migration*; clear rules for skilled worker immigration*; a high-performing reception system*; clear rules for deportation and departure*; strengthen expert group on “dangerous foreigners”; make identity verification easier*; make state institutions more resilient; support political education and memorials.

Page 8

- Value of social partnership: „Für uns hat die Sozialpartnerschaft ... einen hohen Stellenwert“, KV26 p32