

German centrist politics in crisis: the 2026 Landtag elections

**III: On the brink:
the upcoming election in Sachsen-Anhalt**

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The state parliamentary election in Sachsen-Anhalt, 6 September 2026

The AfD has already come first in a state parliamentary election, in the Free State of Thuringia in September 2024. Thanks to the firewall placed around the AfD by the other parties, none would negotiate with it, leaving the largest party in parliament firmly lodged in Thuringian opposition.

Next-door Sachsen-Anhalt is different. Here, polls put the AfD so far ahead that it may be able to form a majority government all on its own. The rule that an election is but halfway on the road to a new German government could go out of the window on Sunday night.

Even if it falls short of a majority, the AfD has, in Sahra Wagenknecht's maverick party, the BSW, the possibility of a negotiating partner who might end up choosing to enable a minority AfD government.

Whichever, the parties that have dominated the German practice of centrist coalition since the beginning – the CDU, FDP, SPD and Greens – would be reduced to impotent bystanders.

Yet the greater damage may be done if they are not all bystanders, if the CDU – or at least some of its parliamentarians in Sachsen-Anhalt – decide that secretly voting the AfD into minority government is better than forming a governing coalition in which the second largest party is the far-left Die Linke.

Drawing on four seemingly similar August opinion polls, alongside comparisons with the last election in the state in 2021, this presentation shows how, in a political landscape strewn with knife-edges, a wide range of parliamentary outcomes remains possible – except, that is, any variety of the standard, German centrist coalition. For in Sachsen-Anhalt, in 2026, the centre is on the brink of losing control.

Background: the German States re-electing their state parliaments in 2026

Germany's 16 states and the 2026 elections



The South-West (March 2026)

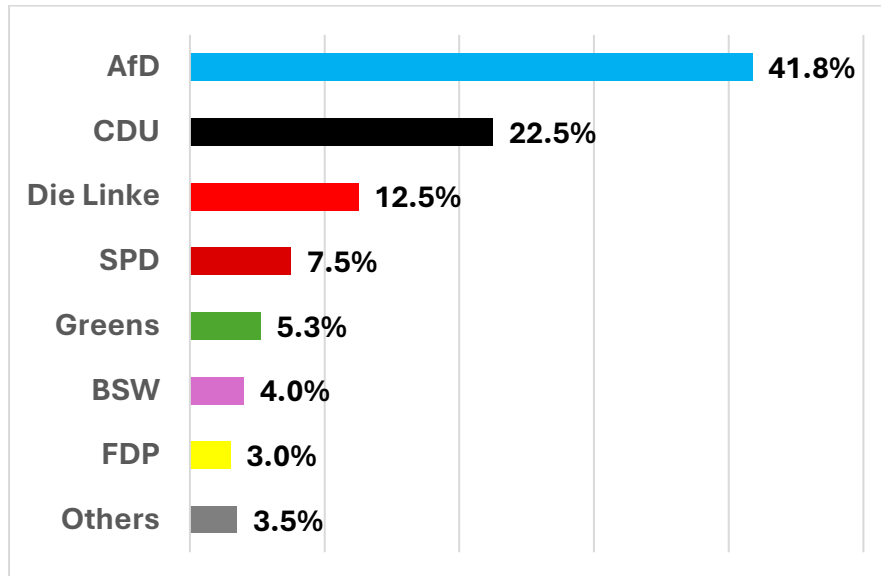
- Baden-Württemberg: the Greens came first by a margin so narrow that they and the CDU have the same number of parliamentary seats; a Green/CDU coalition – the only one possible without the AfD – took office with 112 of the 157 seats
- Rheinland-Pfalz: the CDU came first, ousting the SPD; a CDU/SPD coalition – the only one possible without the AfD – took office with 71 of the 105 seats

The East (September 2026)

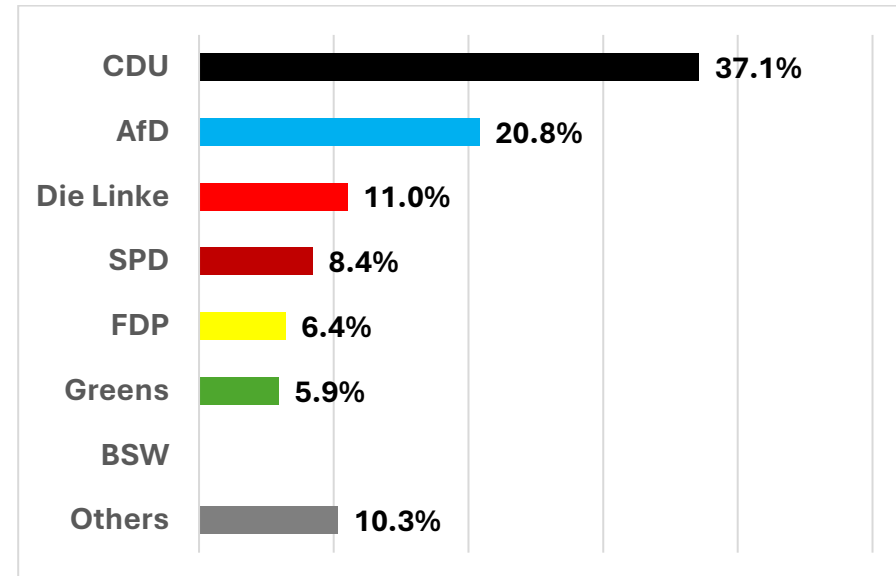
- 6th September, Sachsen-Anhalt: opinion polls put the AfD far ahead of the CDU in second
- 20th September, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Berlin: while polls show the AfD leading in one and joint second in the other, it is nowhere near as strong as in Sachsen-Anhalt

Share of the vote by party: Sachsen-Anhalt 2026 (projected) and 2021 (actual)

2026: average four August opinion polls



2021: share of second round vote



- The AfD is set to be 1st, with more votes than the CDU (2nd) and Die Linke (3rd) combined

- The CDU was 1st, with more votes than the AfD (2nd) and Die Linke (3rd) combined

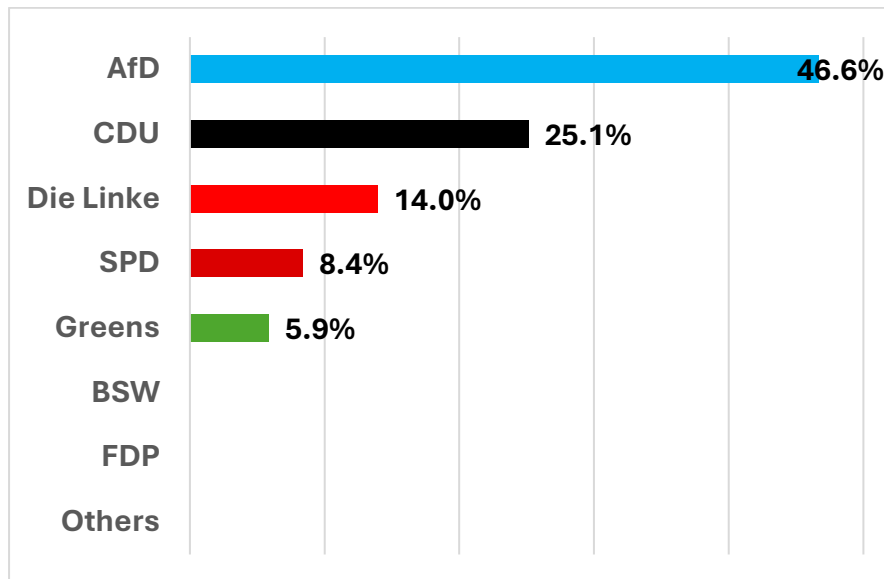
The big fall in CDU support since 2021 is misleading – it's really support for the centre that's plunged

- Opinion polls just before the 2021 election gave the CDU 28% – most of the additional votes that it actually won (taking it to 37%) came at the expense of support for the other centre parties
- The vote share for the CDU, SPD, FDP and Greens combined is down from 58% in the 2021 election to 38% now; even at its previous low point in the 2016 election, the share stayed above 50%

Parliamentary strength: the traditional coalition parties reduced to a minority

The combined weakness of the four parties that have dominated German coalition governments opens up the prospect in Sachsen-Anhalt – of this centre being unable to control what happens next

2026: estimated share of parliamentary seats
(parties with 5% of the second round vote only),
based on average of four August polls



Consequences of the centre lacking a majority

- The four parties can no longer stop the AfD on their own from forming a government
- A centrist coalition that would keep the AfD out requires working with Die Linke
- The CDU, which has a firewall around Die Linke as well as the AfD, now faces a choice: should it continue to seek any viable anti-AfD coalition (with Die Linke) – or somehow allow the AfD to govern?

Presented merely as a disagreeable choice – far-left or far-right? – misses the fact that opting for the AfD, openly or tacitly, means abandoning the CDU's national strategy for containing the far-right party

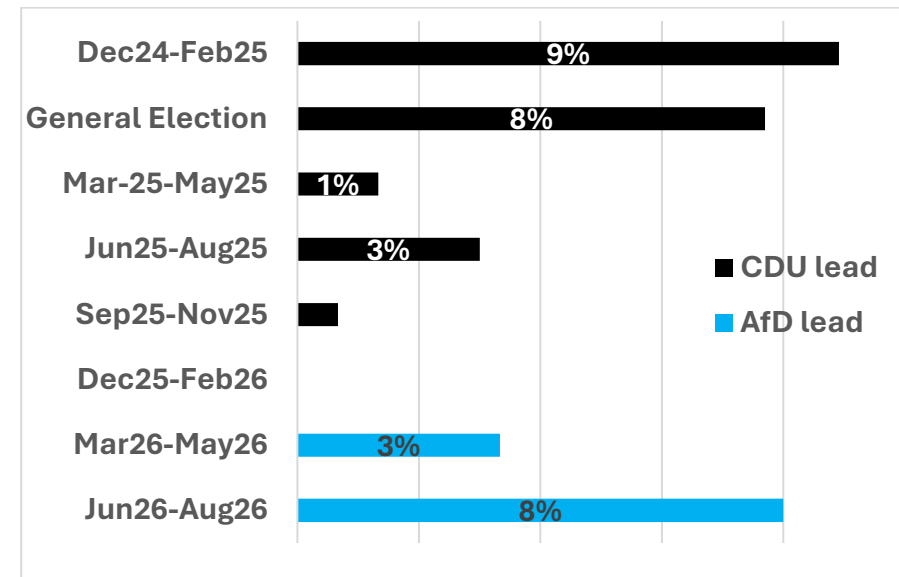
The CDU's national strategy for containing the AfD: the polls' verdict

AfD support is as high in Sachsen-Anhalt as anywhere; but the reason the CDU now faces this choice is that its national strategy for stopping the AfD, born during the last general election, hasn't worked

“The national CDU strategy for stopping the AfD

- Launched by Friedrich Merz days after a fatal attack in Aschaffenburg in January 2025, the strategy boils down to: “the AfD is right but the CDU (and CSU) will deal with it”
- Addressing parliament, Merz set out policies for “effective action” against the inflow of refugees and those who remained illegally
- His language – Germany’s “massive problem” with foreign criminality, “above all among asylum-seekers” – was an AfD framing; the motion only passed with AfD support

Who leads? CDU/CSU vs AfD: three-month nationwide opinion poll (and Feb 25 Election)



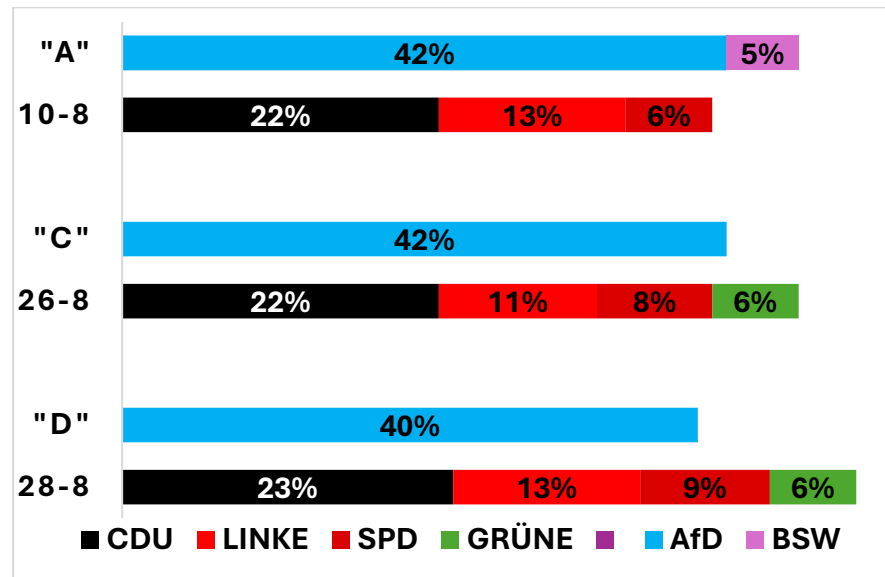
There's been no suggestion that Merz's Interior Minister, the CSU's Alexander Dobrindt, has failed to deliver on this pledge of effective action

- Yet having beaten the AfD by 8% in the 2025 election, national polls now put the CDU/CSU 8% adrift of the AfD

The importance of small parties: three similar polls, three very different outcomes

A government only comes into being when a candidate for Minister-president wins the support of an absolute majority of MPs – in a poll conducted by secret ballot

Projected vote share: three August opinion polls



- Only parties expected to get the 5% needed to enter the parliament are shown – making this indicative of parliamentary strength

Poll A (10 August)

- The AfD (42%) lacks an absolute majority only because of the BSW (5%) – but if the BSW were willing to support an AfD candidate, a minority AfD government could form

Poll C (26 August)

- The AfD (42%) lacks an absolute majority only because of the Greens (6%); a CDU-led, four-party coalition might need the support of all their parliamentarians in a secret ballot

Poll D (28 August)

- A weaker AfD (40%) means a more resilient four-party coalition; but a minority coalition (supported by Die Linke) is not yet in reach

Whether the BSW, Greens or even SPD clears the 5% hurdle has a unduly big impact on the outcome

The next government of Sachsen-Anhalt: wildly different outcomes are still possible

Outcomes if one of the August opinion polls is right

1. A four-way coalition (poll C): the CDU's determination to govern points this way, but internal dissent (from all sides) could weaken its capacity to govern – and even stop it from forming
2. No new government is formed, triggering fresh elections: with no traditional coalition or single party majority available (polls, A, C, D), this is quite possible, but in itself solves nothing
3. Minority AfD government, voted in with BSW support (per poll A): centrists are sidelined as the BSW provides the AfD with what it has lacked so far, namely a post-election negotiating partner
4. Minority AfD government voted in with some CDU support (poll C): the CDU starts to fragment, undermining its national strategy for containing the AfD – and Merz as Chancellor

Outcomes if one of the August opinion polls is slightly off

5. A majority AfD government (poll A, but with the BSW just failing to clear the 5% hurdle): with no other polls showing the BSW getting into parliament, entirely plausible
6. A minority CDU/SPD/Green coalition voted in with some Die Linke support (poll D plus say 3%, as per the 2021 polls' underestimate of these parties' vote): a more stable variant of outcome 1

A majority AfD government in Sachsen-Anhalt poses the greatest threat to Sachsen-Anhalt; a minority AfD government voted in with some CDU support poses the greatest threat to Germany

Sources and notes

Page 2

- Map created with mapchart.net

Pages 3, 4,5 and 6

- All the opinion poll data and relevant election results, for both for Sachsen-Anhalt and Germany as a whole, is sourced from the immensely useful [Wahlrecht.de](https://wahlrecht.de) site.

Page 3

- The four August 2026 opinion polls, the May/June 2021 opinion polls and the 2016 and 2021 election results in Sachsen-Anhalt are sourced [here](#).
- The four August polls used are those from INSA (published 10 August), pollytix (12 August), infratest dimap (26 August) and Forschungsgruppe Wahlen (28 August).
- The three polls immediately before the 2021 election are those from infratest dimap (27 May), Forschungsgruppe Wahlen (3 June) and INSA (4 June).

Pages 5

- The CSU (Christian Social Union) is the Bavarian sister party of the CDU: national polls refer to them as a single entity.
- The data for the graph showing the changing national standings of the CDU/CSU relative to the AfD since February 2025 is the monthly YouGov Poll (a personal preference reflecting both the accuracy with which this company

forecast the 2025 general election and the fact of the poll's regularity) sourced [here](#).

- The source for the Merz quotes is the Bundestag's [Plenarprotokoll for 31 January 2025](#), specifically: p27038: „nach Magdeburg und nach Aschaffenburg jetzt endlich wirksame Entscheidungen gegen den Zustrom illegaler Flüchtlinge nach Deutschland und gegen den illegalen Aufenthalt der Flüchtlinge in Deutschland getroffen werden“; and p27039: „Wir haben in Deutschland ein massives Problem mit der Ausländerkriminalität, vor allem unter den Asylbewerbern.“
- In reviewing the Merz quotes in the original, I note two more points. The first is Merz's explicit reference to the first attack during the election, on the Christmas Market in Magdeburg (the state capital of Sachsen-Anhalt). This merits further attention.
- The second is that the quoted remarks were made during the second Bundestag debate (31 January), whereas the debate on the motion that was won, with AfD support, happened two days before.