

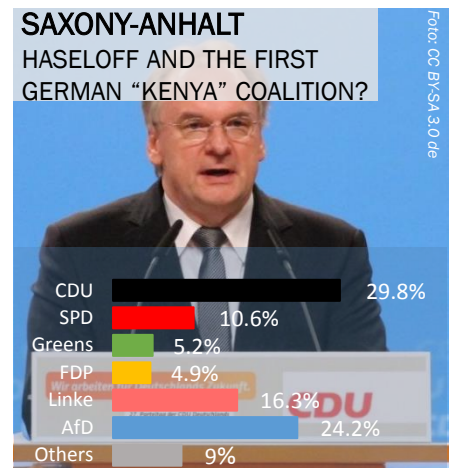
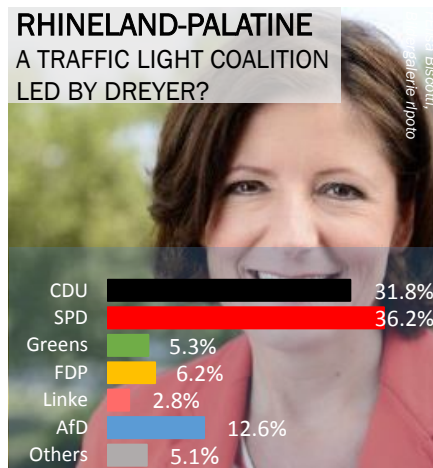
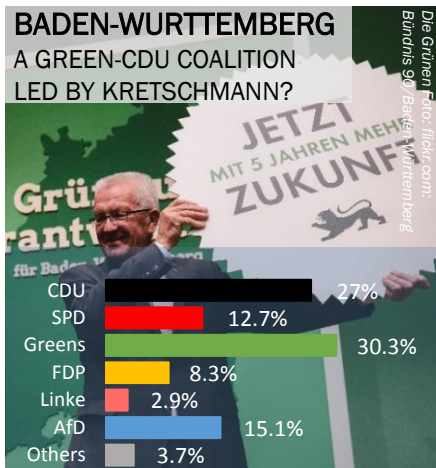
**MERKEL AND THE POLITICAL CENTRE WEAKENED**

The results of the Super Sunday key regional elections in Baden-Wurttemberg, Rhineland-Palatinate and Saxony-Anhalt have shaken up German politics. **IN ALL THREE STATES**, the parties of the incumbent **MINISTER-PRESIDENTS CAME OUT ON TOP** in what were personality-driven elections, but all will still be forced to build new coalitions to form a government. Above all, the centre-right CDU, the party of Chancellor Merkel, and the centre-left SPD took substantial losses. As both form a “Grand Coalition” in Berlin and the next General Elections are only 18 months away, the results will have significant consequences for German and also European politics. Merkel and her Government have been weakened and Germany now has an established populist party similar to neighbouring countries. This will impact and potentially weaken the role of Germany as a leader in these critical times for the EU.

For the first time, CDU and SPD are not able to form a majority to build a “Grand Coalition” in either Baden-Wurttemberg or Saxony-Anhalt. In contrast, the Liberal FDP began its comeback. The coalition constellations across Germany are going to be more

complex than ever before. Significantly, the right-wing populists are on the rise with the Alternative for Germany (AfD) achieving double-figure results in all parliaments, and even becoming number two in Saxony-Anhalt securing almost 25% of the vote.

In **BADEN-WURTTENBERG**, the Green Party was the leading party in a federal state for the first time with the incumbent Winfried Kretschmann (Green Party) being spectacularly reinstated as Minister-President. Both major parties, the CDU and SPD, suffered bitter losses. In **RHINELAND-PALATINATE**, to much surprise, the incumbent Malu Dreyer (SPD) scored a clear victory over Julia Klöckner (CDU), who was long considered the favourite to win. The Greens only narrowly managed to regain seats in the regional assembly, in contrast to the Liberal Party (FDP) which managed this more convincingly with 6.2% of the vote. In **SAXONY-ANHALT**, the CDU, represented by the incumbent Minister-President Rainer Haseloff, came out as the leading party despite making some losses.



**BADEN-WURTTENBERG**

The incumbent Minister-President Winfried Kretschmann and the Green Party replaced the CDU as the leading power in the conservative state of Baden-Wurttemberg and achieved the best result in the party’s history in state elections (30.3%). The popular Kretschmann managed to take votes from its coalition partner the SPD, its main rival, the CDU, as well as from former non-voters. The disastrous result for the CDU (27%) in its former fiefdom is sending shockwaves through the party. The CDU lost 12 percentage points. The SPD lost 10.4 percentage points and only managed to secure 12.7% of votes. The SPD arrived behind the AfD (15.1%) putting it in fourth position overall, which is not enough to build a coalition with the Greens. The strengthened FDP (8.3%) could become the decisive force in the ensuing coalition negotiations. However, it recently ruled out going into a coalition with the Greens and the SPD. It is doubtful too whether a so-called “Germany Coalition” between CDU, SPD and FDP (named because the party colours match those of the German flag) is possible. Although the CDU’s lead candidate, Guido Wolf, stated his intention to form a government on election night, a coalition led by the Greens with the CDU as a junior partner is looking more likely.

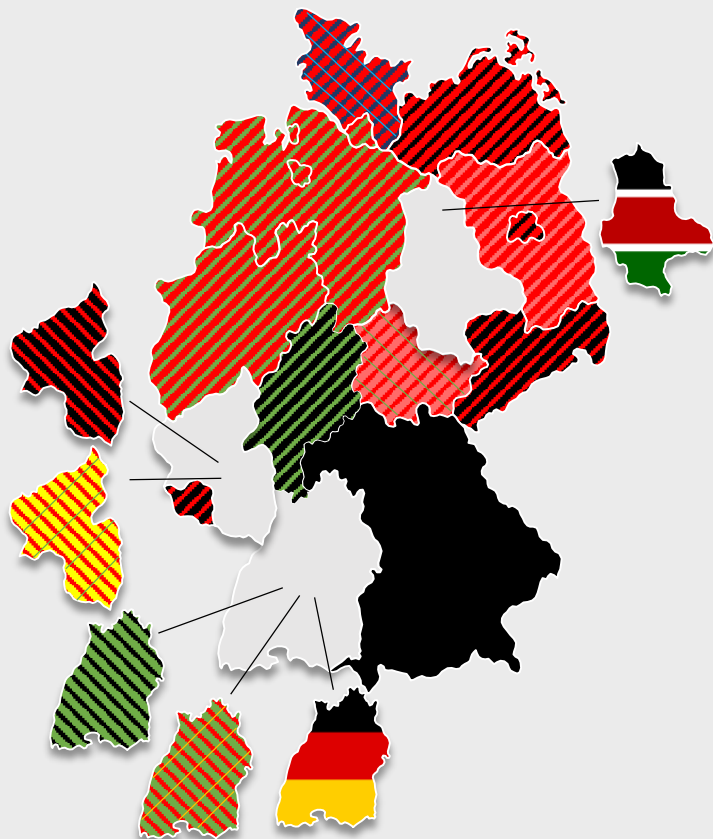
**RHINELAND-PALATINE**

With a four-seat lead over the CDU, the incumbent SPD Minister-President, Malu Dreyer, firmly stood her ground. She offered the SPD its only victory of the evening. Her opponent, Julia Klöckner (CDU), lost despite running a campaign that attracted attention from across Germany. She was long heralded as being the new Minister-President, but ended up obtaining the worst ever result for the CDU in this state. Nevertheless, the existing SPD-Green coalition was still voted out. That was mainly down to the poor showing for the Green Party. With 10.1% loss of votes, these elections were a severe defeat for the Greens. After the Fukushima nuclear disaster, the Greens had managed double-figure scores in 2011, whereas yesterday they almost failed to cross the 5% minimum threshold needed to gain seats in the state legislature. Similarly to then, voters were polarized around one single topic. Indeed, it was the refugee crisis debate that secured the AfD 14 seats in the state legislature with 12.6% of the total vote. The Liberal FDP’s return to the state legislature was a source of joy at the Liberals’ Party headquarters in Berlin. Although a “Grand Coalition” between the SPD and CDU would theoretically be possible, Malu Dreyer, the re-elected incumbent has said that she is envisaging a so-called “Traffic light Coalition” with the FDP and the Greens.

## SAXONY-ANHALT

With a score of 24.2%, the AfD managed the highest first showing for a new party in a German regional election. The refugee crisis polarized voters particularly. The AfD was voted in as the second most important party in the Saxony-Anhalt parliament. The party was able to pull off this success by taking votes not only from former non-voters, but also from the SPD and the CDU. In comparison to 2011, the losses made by the CDU were less severe making it the top party with 29.8% of the vote. Its former coalition partner, the SPD suffered a historic defeat with a showing of only 10.6%. A “Grand Coalition” between the two mainstream parties will therefore not be an option in Saxony-Anhalt. It will only be possible to form a government in a three-party coalition with CDU, SPD and the Greens, a so-called "Kenya" coalition. As was the case with all of the established parties, the Left Party (-7.4%) also lost voters and will become the third party in the regional parliament due to its result of 16.3%. Although the Liberal FDP Party saw a rise in support, with a score of 4.9%, it narrowly missed its chance to take seats in the parliament failing to overcome the minimum 5% threshold.

## THE REGIONAL GOVERNMENT COALITIONS IN THE FEDERAL STATES



## MORE THAN JUST REGIONAL ELECTIONS

Germany is facing turbulent political times with the election results weakening Merkel, her CDU party as well as the SPD. Although German society and politics remain anchored in the political centre, the rise of the AfD is a warning sign for the other parties that dissatisfaction is on the up, despite the positive economic outlook. The question remains on the right strategy needed to deal with the AfD, its voters and its agenda. The answers are not going to be easy to find, but the results of the General Elections in 2017 will depend on them. The contest is wide open, more than ever before since 2013.

Last Sunday's regional elections revealed trends that will heavily impact the 2017 General Elections and other regional elections. The prevailing topics were the refugee situation and Chancellor Merkel's politics which are polarizing Germany - with considerable differences between East and West.

### Politics is back

The regional elections were marked by increased voter turnout. This high turnout together with mobilisation from former non-voters points to heightening interest in politics across society after ten relatively quiet years. Moreover, the question of how to manage the influx of refugees is going to shape the political agenda in Germany until the General Elections and is set to continue to polarise society.

The traditional party system is shaken, and Sunday's elections represent a turning point. The two mainstream “people's parties”, the CDU and the SPD, are continuing to lose voters. In their place, the AfD is attracting voters of all political colours and managing to mobilise former non-voters. State legislatures made up of five or even six parties are likely to become the norm. At the same time, the elections in Rhineland Palatinate and Baden-Wurtemberg have highlighted that the Left Party is continuing to struggle to gain a foothold in the western Länder. The Liberal FDP party managed a small comeback by securing its return to the state legislature in Rhineland-Palatinate and made an improved showing in Baden-Wurtemberg. The race is going to remain exciting right up until the General Elections.



*Christian Thams is COO at Burson-Marsteller Germany. He advises international and national clients on public affairs, government relations and political communications. Christian specialises in political strategy, integrated political and media campaigns and digital public affairs.*