

Is a 'Jamaica' coalition possible? The Greens, the FDP, and the struggle to become Germany's third political force



Although Angela Merkel's CDU/CSU has a strong lead in opinion polls, it is still far from clear what kind of coalition will take power after Sunday's German election. [Julian Göppfarth](#) assesses the campaigns run by two potential junior partners in the next coalition, the Greens and the liberal FDP, as well as the likelihood of a so called 'Jamaica coalition' between the CDU/CSU, Greens and FDP being formed.

With only one day to go before the 2017 German federal election, Angela Merkel's CDU/CSU is widely expected to emerge as the largest party. But her next coalition partner will depend on the results of the parties behind her. At present, the FDP and the Greens are two parties with a solid opportunity to become junior members of the next government. Both parties have recently formed coalitions with the CDU at the state level, two of which are so-called 'Jamaica' coalitions (alluding to the respective parties' colours of black, green and yellow) suggesting a similar model could also work at the federal level. But do their programmes really allow for them to find common ground?

The FDP

After a disastrous result in the 2013 elections, the liberal FDP has successfully managed to rebrand itself, most importantly thanks to the party's young and charismatic leader, Christian Lindner. The FDP has received around 7-10 per cent in the polls throughout the campaign, making it a likely candidate for junior party in a CDU-led government. Its campaign is built around Lindner and portrays him as a German equivalent to Emmanuel Macron. The key message is that they are embracing the challenges of the future rather than retreating into German 'angst'.

In their [manifesto](#), the party tries to position itself economically to the CDU's right, but socially to its left. On the one hand, it calls for more freedom for entrepreneurs and start-ups. On the other, it recognises Germany as a country of immigration and, like the SPD, calls for a Canada-style immigration law. The FDP uses the digital agenda to reassert some of the values that have characterised the party since its foundation in 1948, above all liberalism and the protection of citizen's rights.

Accordingly, the manifesto critiques government interference and obstacles imposed on the economy under the current CDU-SPD-government, as well as its half-hearted data protection efforts. Like most of the other parties, the FDP calls for more investment in education, adding a suggestion to promote entrepreneurialism at universities and schools. The party goes even further when it proposes a tax-free period for start-ups, the introduction of a venture capital law, a swiss-style start-up fund, and strengthening the sharing economy in Germany explicitly referring to such sectors as homesharing and taxi businesses.

The focus on digitisation is linked to a critique of the current "expansive" welfare state and bureaucracy, which is claimed to undermine entrepreneurial freedom. In line with its reputation as a "tax-cut-party", it suggests tax cuts worth 30 billion euros. Above all, liberalisation of the market remains a core aim of the party when it calls for selling off federal shares in *Deutsche Telekom* as well as *Deutsche Post*, arguing that this would allow for more competition.

The FDP is well aware that the Green party has been able to lure away some of its voters in the past. Accordingly, the FDP also supports "green topics" such as strengthening the circular economy or "blue growth" linking ecology and growth through innovative technologies. Even the legalisation of cannabis is supported, a claim equally supported by the Greens and rejected by the CDU and SPD alike. On the other hand, the FDP goes further than the CDU when it comes to international security calling for an investment of 3 per cent of GDP in the long term.

Immigration, Asylum and integration – beyond exclusive nationalism and “naïve multiculturalism”

The FDP follows what it calls a “pragmatic approach” to immigration, avoiding “naïve multiculturalism” and the exclusivism of a German “Leitkultur”. Instead, it aims to turn Germany into a modern immigration country held together by constitutional patriotism and legally based on a Canada-style point system aimed at the immigration of highly-skilled workers. The party aims to establish a more systematised integration, first and foremost via the labour market and through programmes tailored to the needs and skills of immigrants. The party approaches Green and SPD positions when it calls for upholding dual citizenship and allowing refugees with a long-term outlook to work.

It equally rejects any cap on refugees and thus takes a clear stand against the CSU. Instead, it calls for replacing Dublin III with an EU-wide quota system. Countries refusing to take up refugees are to pay money into a common fund providing financial aid to the countries neighbouring the EU that are most affected by immigration – an idea similar to SPD proposals on the matter. While the paragraph suggesting English as a secondary working language in public administration to help refugees and immigrants will not be easy to sell to more conservative voters, Lindner has not forgotten that the AfD has been able to attract parts of his electorate. Accordingly, he has called the Krim situation a [“permanent provisional situation”](#) – a claim supported by many voters of the AfD.

The Eurozone, EU and Brexit – striking the balance between a decentral and supranational Europe

In terms of the EU, the FDP adheres to the dogmatic ordoliberalism that gave birth to the AfD. It supports a continuous reduction of the debt and refrains from calls for investment programmes. Along these lines, the party opposes Eurobonds and any form of communitarisation of debt and calls for a strengthening of the no bailout clause. The manifesto goes as far as to call for the end of the European Stability Mechanism, which it claims incentivises “wrong economic and financial choices”. Instead, it proposes a European mechanism for insolvent states helping countries in crisis to restructure their debts based on a system of rules and overseen by an independent body. With regards to the European stability and growth pact, the party supports automatic sanctions to guarantee more budgetary discipline.

Institutionally, it calls for a multi-speed Europe with different degrees of integration and agrees with most of its competitors on the establishment of a European army controlled by the European Parliament. When it comes to reforming EU governing bodies, the manifesto shares many of the positions of the SPD and the Greens: the introduction of transnational lists in elections for the European Parliament, endowing the parliament with the right to initiative or the creation of a European public prosecutor – the latter being a proposition equally shared by the CDU. However, it strictly opposes SPD and Green calls for a more social Europe and a European unemployment insurance. Rather, the final goal for the party is neither a return to the nation state nor the creation of a centralist ‘superstate’ but a decentral and federal EU.

The party also briefly refers to Brexit, stating that the UK continues to be a strong partner, but it firmly rejects any concessions on the issue of the single market. At the same time, it explicitly calls for an open door to EU membership to be kept open for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

In sum, the FDP has done a good job in rebranding itself and giving its liberalism a fresh touch. The polls prove the success of this strategy. It remains to be seen if this will be enough for a CDU-FDP government to be formed. If the results allow for it, this will be the most likely outcome simply because in terms of economic and social policy both parties are closer to each other. Nevertheless, one should keep an eye on the Green party given that a majority for a CDU-FDP coalition is far from secure.

The Greens

The Greens conservative, so-called “Realo” wing has been growing stronger in recent years and the two party leaders Cem Özdemir and Kathrin Göring-Eckhart have shown [sympathy for Merkel](#). Baden-Württemberg’s Green Minister President, Winfried Kretschmann, himself leading a Green-CDU-coalition government, has stated that he [“prays for Merkel”](#), who in return has said that she deeply appreciates Kretschmann. The party has even surprised many observers by showing affinities to hard right positions, when Freiburg’s Green mayor Boris Palmer expressed a [fervent critique of Merkel’s asylum policy](#).

However, these advances have done little to lift the party up in the polls, where it has been stagnating around 6-8 per cent. Neither are the overtures in line with the general direction of the Green [manifesto](#), which clearly points to the SPD, not the CDU, let alone the FDP. Similar to the FDP, the party embraces a positive message using the word “*Mut*” – courage – in the manifesto title. However, where the FDP focuses on digitisation, the Greens stick to their core issue – the environment and climate protection. Where the FDP calls for market liberalisation, the Greens underline a strong welfare state, public investments and strict quotas for a more ecological economy. Where the FDP calls for more German investment in international security, the Greens side with the SPD and call instead for money to combat European youth unemployment and improve education.

What about Europe? The Greens agree with the SPD and FDP on replacing the Dublin system, but unlike the CDU, SPD and FDP they are critical of granting the European border agency Frontex more power. With regard to the Eurozone, the Greens diverge from the CDU and FDP positions when they criticise the lack of German solidarity with crisis ridden member states. The manifesto instead calls for a Green New Deal for Europe to end austerity, invest in a circular economy and digitalisation in Europe. The Greens thus share the SPD's call for a social Europe that provides EU citizens with a common unemployment insurance and minimum standards of social protection.

When it comes to the future of European integration, the Greens are critical of a multi-speed Europe, but agree with most of the parties on building a common European foreign, security and defence policy. Another point in common with the FDP is the rejection of a Brexit à la carte that could curb freedom of movement (a position taken by most of the parties). The Greens also underline the importance of the UK as a partner beyond Brexit while keeping the door open to Scottish or Northern Irish EU membership. Unique to the Greens is the idea of providing easy access to German and thus EU-citizenship to Brits already living in Germany.

Jamaica for Germany – a possible scenario?

Given the often opposing views of the Greens and the CDU/FDP, and the current strength of the FDP in the polls, a more traditional CDU-FDP coalition seems to be likely. This is also the option [preferred by a majority of Germans](#). Nevertheless, there is no guarantee of a CDU-FDP majority and other coalitions are possible in principle. For example, there are points linking the SPD, Greens and FDP, specifically when it comes to immigration and asylum policy. Yet, this option of a so-called ‘traffic light’ coalition is rarely discussed. The differences over economic issues are perceived to be too large for this to be possible.

Whether the Greens are ready to look past the core issues of their manifesto and attempt a Jamaica coalition depends on the influence of the ‘Realo’ wing. If these voices within the party take a lead over the negotiations, both a Jamaica or even a CDU-Green coalition could be possible. But even if [Merkel is said to be open to a collaboration with the Greens](#), it is hard to imagine the CSU, the CDU's right populist sister party from Bavaria, and the ecological Greens working in one government. But who knows? The option of power might be more tempting than four more years in opposition.

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