

German state election in Baden-Württemberg: Parties compete with concessions to big business at the expense of the workers

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On Sunday, the German state of Baden-Württemberg will hold elections to its state parliament. 7.7 million of the state's 11.2 million inhabitants are eligible to vote, including 16- and 17-year-olds for the first time.

The election takes place one week after the US and Israel attacked Iran, setting the entire Middle East ablaze and causing devastating economic consequences for Europe. Germany's federal government fully supports this criminal war of aggression.

Baden-Württemberg's economy, which employs 330,000 people in the automotive and supplier industry and another 340,000 in mechanical engineering, is already in free fall. The industrial "model state" has become Germany's leading job killer. Last year alone, more than 40,000 people lost their jobs, and further job cuts and austerity programs are in the works. Hardly a day goes by without the announcement of further job cuts.

The media and analysts are talking about deindustrialization that threatens to turn Stuttgart into a second Detroit. Large sections of the working population are worried about losing their jobs and the drastic consequences for their families.

All the parties running for election are responding with a shift to the right. They promise corporations far-reaching concessions at the expense of workers in order to bring Baden-Württemberg back to the top of the export rankings, demand trade war measures, support the German government's war policy, and call for tougher measures against refugees, who they scapegoat for the social crisis.

Baden-Württemberg has been the only federal state governed by a Green minister-president, former Maoist Winfried Kretschmann, for the past 15 years. Initially, he formed a coalition with the Social Democrats (SPD), but for the past ten years he has governed in alliance with the Christian Democrats (CDU), the German Chancellor's party. This coalition is unlikely to change on Sunday. The question remains open as to whether the Green Party's Cem Özdemir or the CDU candidate Manuel Hagel will succeed Kretschmann, who is not running for re-election. In the latest polls, the Green Party and the CDU are neck and neck with 28 percent each.

For the first time, the SPD is well below 10 percent. With 5.5 percent in its former stronghold, the Free Democrats fear losing their place in the state parliament. The Left Party could make it into the state parliament for the first time with 5.5 percent.

Only one party has made significant gains in the polls: the Alternative for Germany (AfD). It has 18 percent support, almost twice as high as in the last state election. It has clearly benefited from the shift to the right by the other parties. The AfD is led in Baden-Württemberg by Markus Frohnmaier, who is on the far right of the right-wing extremist party.

Although Frohnmaier is not standing for the state election himself as a member of the state parliament, he is playing an important role in the election campaign.

The AfD is unlikely to play a role in the formation of a government in Stuttgart, but its performance is seen as a barometer for other state elections this year, particularly in the eastern German states of Saxony-Anhalt and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania in September. There, the AfD is well ahead in the polls. In Berlin, where the state parliament will also be re-elected in September, it is now neck and neck with the SPD and the Left Party.

There are growing calls in the media and within the CDU for the AfD to be included in the government. The fascists are needed to intimidate and suppress the growing resistance to layoffs, social spending cuts, and militarism. The election in Baden-Württemberg shows how the SPD, the Greens, the Left Party, and the trade unions, which act as co-managers in enforcing layoffs in the factories, are paving the way for the AfD. The IG Metall union, which has close personnel ties to the SPD, has nearly 400,000 paying members in the southwestern state.

The decline of the municipalities

The decline of the automotive, supplier, and metal industries is affecting not only individual workers, but entire municipalities. Due to slumping business tax payments from large companies, they are heavily indebted. Sindelfingen, home to the largest Mercedes-Benz site, expects to receive only €30 million in 2026, more than four times less than the €128 million originally planned.

The city of Stuttgart had budgeted revenues of €1.2 billion for 2025, which have now been reduced to €750 million. The city expects a financial shortfall of €800 million for 2026 and 2027.

Cities such as Karlsruhe, Mannheim, Heidelberg, and Ulm recorded per capita debt of more than €10,000 at the end of 2025. Several other cities are on the verge of insolvency. This has led to drastic budget cutting, resulting in massive social spending cuts.

Local authorities have suspended necessary renovation work on schools and either completely stopped or reduced sports funding. Museums have increased admission prices and shortened opening hours. Indoor and outdoor swimming pools have been permanently closed. Youth centres have cut staff and reduced or eliminated youth services. Counselling centres, for example for debt counselling and immigrant integration, are

on the chopping block.

Bosch, the largest automotive supplier, announced in 2025 that it would save 2.5 billion euros annually and cut 22,000 jobs, causing turmoil throughout the region. It has already been decided to close entire sites in Waiblingen and Schwäbisch Gmünd. Several hundred employees have already been laid off. Negotiations are currently underway between company management and the IG Metall union regarding the closure of further plants.

Mercedes Benz announced a cost-cutting program in 2024 with the code name “Next Level Performance.” The goal is to save €5 billion by 2027, with half of that being achieved by the end of 2025. As a result, 20,000 jobs were cut through an agreement between management and IG Metall. Analysts predict that Mercedes could achieve the savings as early as 2026. Nevertheless, the company has announced that it will intensify budget cutting through stricter staffing and additional efficiency projects, rather than announcing a new program.

The single biggest factor in the industrial decline is the nearly 70 percent drop in car exports to China between 2022 and 2024. The slump in exports has been exacerbated by the Trump administration's tariff policy. At the same time, imports of machinery from China more than doubled between 2020 and 2022. Germany became a net importer of machine tools from China as early as 2015.

War and trade war

The German government's response to this is to prepare for war to conquer the world market. All parties agree with the government in the election campaign and are competing to increase profits for the economy at the expense of the working population.

Cem Özdemir, the Green Party's lead candidate, wrote on X about the war of aggression against Iran: “For over 46 years, the Iranian people have suffered under the mullahs' regime of terror. The death of the current leadership is therefore a liberation for the people.” He has refrained from warmongering in the election campaign, aware that widespread opposition to war would cost him votes.

He declared that his campaign slogan was “economy, economy, economy” and called for trade war measures against China. The European Union must increase its pressure on China, he said. If European manufacturers sell their products in China, they are forced to build factories there and work with local partners. Similarly, Chinese companies operating in Germany should be forced to build factories and work with local suppliers instead of exporting. “Buy European” should be the slogan, he asserted.

Özdemir reiterated that the automotive industry in the region has a promising future. He boasted that the Greens have long been in dialogue with the major car companies. Winfried Kretschmann paved the way for the future early on with the automotive strategy dialogue. Last December, Michael Brecht, chairman of the Daimler Truck general works council, spoke on behalf of the automotive industry at the Green Party's state party conference.

Manuel Hagel, the CDU's lead candidate, says that the economy has “priority.” Baden-Württemberg should “once again become Germany's strong economic engine” and “Europe's strongest innovation region.” He promises to drive innovation in automotive and mechanical engineering in order to regain leadership. The CDU is calling for the EU to scrap its ban on the production of cars with combustion engines, which it has now done.

The promotion of industries such as defence, photonics, biotechnology, life sciences, and artificial intelligence must be achieved by creating

“investment-friendly conditions.” To this end, Hagel called for the Working Hours Act to be amended and supplemented with a maximum weekly working time, i.e., the current weekly working time of 37.7 to 40 hours should be abolished.

Outgoing Minister President Winfried Kretschmann (Green Party) has called for everyone to work more: “The idea that we want to work less in a crisis is completely unrealistic.”

In February, Chancellor Merz visited Beijing accompanied by managers from Volkswagen, Mercedes-Benz, Siemens, BMW, Bayer, and Adidas. Although the visit was described as pursuing a “comprehensive strategic partnership,” it was in fact an attempt to rebalance increasingly uneven economic relations through a more aggressive foreign trade policy. According to the German Institute for Economic Research, Germany is heading for a record trade deficit with China of around €87 to €90 billion in 2025.

A few weeks before the federal election, Merz described China, along with Russia, Iran, and North Korea, as part of an “axis of autocracies” and warned German companies: “The decision to invest in China involves a great deal of risk.”

“Reducing bureaucracy”

In the name of “reducing bureaucracy,” all parties are calling for the elimination of protective measures for workers and legal restrictions on industry.

The CDU wants to support and relieve companies by speeding up the granting of permits and reducing reporting requirements. It wants to enshrine the “one in, two out” principle in law. For every new regulation that is introduced, two existing ones must be abolished. Existing regulations would be systematically reviewed to determine whether they are necessary.

Specifically for start-ups, the CDU intends to make it possible to digitally establish new companies within 48 hours, supported by tax breaks and a new “Baden-Württemberg Future Fund.”

Özdemir went one step further and said that if he wins the election, he will immediately introduce an efficiency law that stipulates that “all reporting obligations will be abolished without replacement by 2027” in order to relieve companies in Baden-Württemberg of excessive bureaucracy.

The Green-CDU coalition government already presented and passed the draft of the “Regulatory Relief Act” in July 2025. The Baden-Württemberg Entrepreneurs' Association (UBW) welcomed this, saying: “The state government is thus taking up a central demand of the local and business associations from the ‘Relief Alliance for Baden-Württemberg.’”

The CDU, Greens, and SPD are competing with the AfD in their attacks on refugees and foreigners, which is not surprising. The anti-immigration law, the “GEAS Amendment Act,” which was passed by the Bundestag on February 27, undermines fundamental and human rights and puts German migration policy on a par with the fascist practices of US President Trump. All parties agree on consistently restricting immigration and controlling it more strictly.

Kretschmann already repeatedly helped push through the tightening of asylum law in the Bundesrat, Germany's second chamber of parliament, even though this contradicted official Green Party conference resolutions. Özdemir told *Welt am Sonntag*, following on from Kretschmann: “We depend on cosmopolitanism. But immigration must be controlled much more strictly. This means that we must take the issue of irregular migration and its limitation seriously.”

A new stage in right-wing, green politics

Özdemir, who belongs to the right-wing, so-called “Realo” faction of the Greens, which is strongly represented in Baden-Württemberg, is initiating a new stage of right-wing politics for the Greens in his election campaign. At the party conference in Hanover in November, he already warned that voters could not be won over with “radical slogans” or “pie in the sky” promises.

According to *Der Spiegel*, he met last summer with two representatives of the Baden-Württemberg state association, and Werner Graf and Bettina Jarasch from the Berlin Greens, who espouse slightly more left-wing rhetoric. They agreed on a kind of standstill agreement without mutual attacks until election day.

Özdemir brought Boris Palmer, the mayor of Tübingen, into the election campaign as a close confidant. Palmer had to leave the Greens at the end of 2023 because he openly propagated racist and discriminatory policies against refugees and foreigners, similar to those of the AfD.

Palmer has since appeared alongside Özdemir at rallies and discussions and continued to represent his AfD-like positions. He is pursuing a ministerial post if the Greens win the elections.

In December 2025, during the party conference at which Özdemir was nominated as the lead candidate, Kretschmann said in a speech about his 15-year record as minister-president that the Greens in Baden-Württemberg were “something special”: We have always thought big, but we have also thought about how this can be implemented in a down-to-earth and pragmatic way, he stated.

In fact, over the past 15 years, the Greens have developed into a party that is unmatched in its pro-capitalist, anti-worker, and militaristic policies.

Kretschmann added, “That’s who we are, and that’s who Cem Özdemir is! Dear Cem, my legacy would also be in good hands with you.” Özdemir replied, “You have led us for 15 years. Kretschmann’s work is not a legacy, but a mission.” He intends to continue this work, Özdemir concluded.



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