

FUN WITH COALITIONS

Fans of the television show, *The Big Bang Theory*, will be familiar with *Fun With Flags*, a livestreaming show that Sheldon Cooper films in the living room of his apartment along with his able assistant/girlfriend/wife, the incomparable Amy Farrah Fowler. Sheldon and Amy (mostly Sheldon) share all sorts of fun little factoids and bits of trivia about flags around the world.

The world of German politics has its own version of this show, albeit in a somewhat different context. German governments at all levels – whether federal, state, or local – are often composed of coalitions of different parties. Germany’s current government is actually a “grand coalition” (*Große Koalition*) of a center-right party and a center-left party. Sometimes, these coalitions consist of three parties. This is where the *Fun With Flags* reference comes into play. The Germans have come up with fun little nicknames for these three-party coalitions. Some of these nicknames incorporate a national flag theme.

To understand how this works, it is important to become familiar with the color that is associated with each of the main parties in Germany. For The Greens, of course, this is obvious. The color of the main center-right party in Germany, the CDU, is black. For the SPD, it is red. And, for the main classical liberal party, the FDP, it is yellow. Following the last federal elections in 2017, the CDU (and its Bavarian sister party, the CSU), The Greens, and the FDP, held negotiations to form a three-party national government. These negotiations failed. However, if they had succeeded, this coalition would have been referred to as a Jamaica coalition since the color for each of these three parties make up the colors of the Jamaican flag. A Jamaica coalition is currently in power in the northern German state of Schleswig-Holstein. A coalition consisting of the CDU (black), SPD (red), and The Greens is referred to as a “Kenya” coalition, given the color combination of the Kenyan flag. Kenya coalitions are in power in the eastern German states of Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, and Brandenburg.

The national flag theme does not work for every variation. A coalition of The Greens, the SPD, and the FDP, for example, would be referred to as a “Traffic Light Coalition” (*Ampelkoalition*).

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