



Deutscher Bundestag

## Facts

An overview of the Bundestag:  
its role, bodies and buildings

Fakten über den Bundestag in englischer Sprache



New  
**2023**  
version  
20th electoral term

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The German Bundestag is the only organ of the state that is directly elected by the people, making it the supreme constitutional organ of the Federal Republic of Germany.

As the Basic Law states, in a core tenet of our democracy, “All state authority is derived from the people”. And in a representative democracy, the people – the sovereign body – lend their power to Parliament for a limited time. Every four years, the voters go to the polls in parliamentary elections to determine who will represent their interests in the Bundestag.

State authority is exercised in Germany by the classical triad of legislature, judiciary and executive, each of which checks and balances the others. In the interplay of these three branches, the legislative role devolves on the Bundestag. Only it can enact federal laws that are binding on all people in Germany. This places great responsibility in the hands of Parliament, which guides the nation’s political and social development.

## Role of the Bundestag

The Bundestag, however, does not only make laws. It also elects the Federal Chancellor, who is head of the executive, that is to say of the Federal Government. This shows how closely the constitutional organs are linked in the system of checks and balances, in spite of the separation of powers. The votes of the Members of Parliament also weigh heavily in the election of the Federal President, as the Federal Convention, which elects the Head of State, comprises all the Members of the Bundestag and an equal number of representatives of the federal states (*Länder*).

In addition, the Bundestag is also involved in appointments to other high offices. For example, it elects half of the judges of the Federal Constitutional Court, the President and Vice-President of the Federal Audit Office and the Federal Commissioner for Data Protection and Freedom of Information. The Bundestag

exercises an important power of scrutiny over the Federal Government. No Chancellor or government minister can escape this scrutiny. In votes on government projects, the Federal Chancellor depends on the confidence of Parliament. If a government cannot convince the Members of the Bundestag, it cannot pursue its political aims.

In order to perform this scrutinising function, Members of Parliament must be able to inform themselves about the work of the Federal Government and its plans. To this end they have a number of rights and instruments at their disposal, such as major and minor parliamentary questions and debates on matters of topical interest. The Bundestag also forms permanent committees, whose main task is to participate in the legislative process, and special bodies like committees of inquiry, which are appointed almost exclusively for the purpose of scrutinising the Government.

The Bundestag has regulated its own affairs independently in its Rules of Procedure, which set out the requirements for the performance of its tasks, the conduct of its meetings and the manner of its deliberations.



Election and swearing-in of the Federal Chancellor and swearing-in of the federal ministers in the German Bundestag in Berlin on 8 December 2021

As a result of the elections to the 20th German Bundestag on 26 September 2021, Parliament consists of 736 Members. The election led to new majorities. SPD, Alliance 90/The Greens and FDP have formed a governing coalition (referred to as the ‘traffic light’ coalition) led by Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD). With 206 Members, the SPD replaced the CDU/CSU (197 seats) as the strongest parliamentary group. Alliance 90/The Greens has 118 Members, the FDP 92 and the AfD 78 Members. The Left Party has 39 seats, although it narrowly failed to clear the five-percent threshold. As the party won three constituencies directly, it was nevertheless able to enter Parliament based on its share of the second votes. Six Members are independent. One of them belongs to the South Schleswig Voters’ Association (SSW). As a party representing a national minority, the five-percent threshold does not apply to the SSW.

With 736 Members, the 20th Bundestag is the largest in German history. 268 Members (36.4 percent) are new to Parliament, while 468 already have experience in the Bundestag. The range of ages spans several generations, with the aver-

## German Bundestag – 20th electoral term

age being 47.3 years – around two years younger than in the 19th electoral term. The youngest Member, Emily Vontz (SPD), who was born in 2000, is 59 years younger than Alexander Gauland (AfD). The longest serving Member and thus President by Seniority is Wolfgang Schäuble (CDU/CSU), who has sat in the Bundestag since 1972, making this his 14th electoral term. The proportion of women in the Bundestag is 34.9 percent, an increase from the 19th electoral term (30.9 percent).

## Members' trades and professions

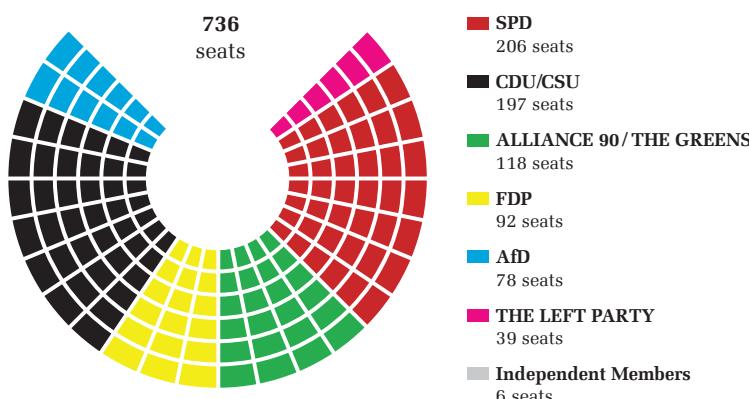
Many professions are represented in Parliament, with skilled trades and medicine represented alongside artistic professions, industry and economics. The largest groups are the Members who have a background in humanities and natural sciences (303) and those qualified in law (168), followed by teachers (43), engineers (26) and doctors and pharmacists (21). 118 Members have a doctorate, while eleven were following a course of study or training prior to their election to the Bundestag. 185 Members had also previously been elected to the 19th Bundestag.

## Members' faiths

A little over half of all Members of the Bundestag declared that they belonged to one of the two Christian churches in Germany. Seven Members are Muslims. Seventy-five Members state that they have no religious affiliation, while two others are atheists.

A room is available in the Reichstag Building for all Members' religious reflection – the Reflection and Prayer Room, a peaceful and unassumingly spiritual haven designed by Düsseldorf-based artist Günther Uecker. On Thursday and Friday mornings when Parliament is sitting, the bells of Cologne Cathedral ring out in the Bundestag at exactly 8.30. The sound of the bells is reproduced on a recording and invites Members to attend morning prayers.

The room has been deliberately designed as a multi-faith place of worship but can be given a Christian, Jewish or Muslim tone by means of religious symbols. The stone edge of a raised section of floor shows where east is, enabling Members to face Jerusalem and Mecca.



Decisions are taken in the Bundestag that affect everyone, because only the Bundestag can enact the federal laws that are binding on all people in Germany. Legislation is an extremely complex task and one to which a great deal of parliamentary work is devoted.

Before the legislative process begins, there must first be an initiative, in other words an idea for a legislative bill. A legislative initiative may come from the Federal Government, from within the Bundestag or from the Bundesrat. Many individual steps have to be taken before a law enters into force. A bill cannot pass through the Bundestag without being carefully examined by Members in parliamentary committees and having its pros and cons documented in amendment motions, committee reports and parliamentary resolutions. For this reason, each bill is discussed three times, as a rule, by Parliament at plenary settings. These deliberations are known as readings.

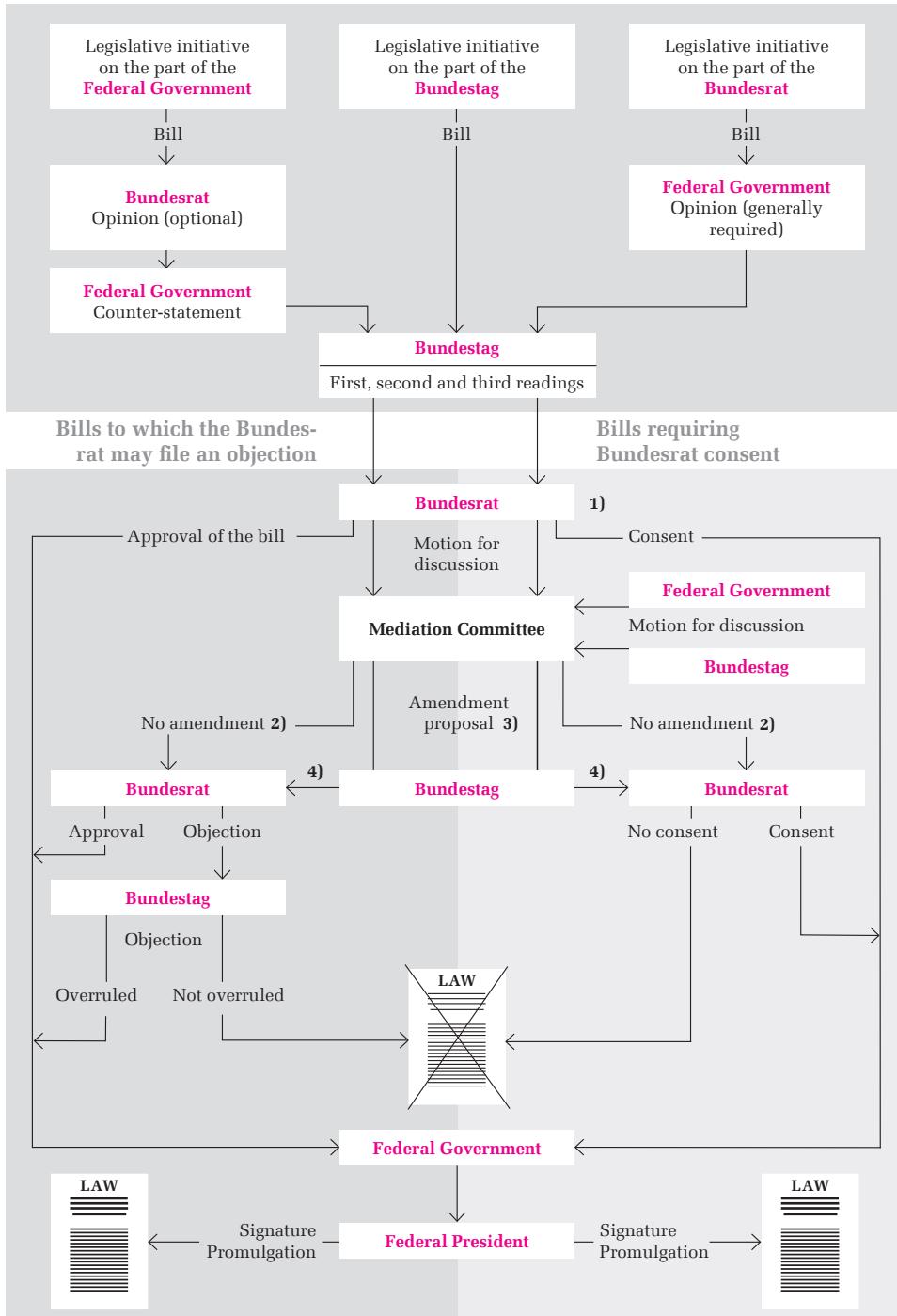
## The Bundestag makes the laws

At first reading, the discussion is generally about basic principles. In many cases, the House will decide to shorten this stage by referring the bill “without debate” to the competent committees. In committee, the bill is probed by specialised politicians from all of the parliamentary groups, who examine its substance and its implications. Hearings of experts can also be arranged for this purpose. The second reading of the bill is then held in the plenary chamber; at this stage it is generally accompanied by proposed amendments. Only after this discussion can the third reading and the final vote take place.

This means that the Members of Parliament vote on every bill, which they do either by standing up or by a show of hands. It can happen that the result is not clear or that the Presiding Committee cannot agree on the outcome. In such cases the long-standing parliamentary tradition of the *Hammelsprung* system of division doors is used, in which all Members leave the chamber and re-enter it by one of three doors, marked *Ja*, *Nein* and *Enthaltung* (abstention). Two Members who have been designated as secretaries are stationed at each door to count the Members through, and in this way a clear result is obtained. The *Hammelsprung* method is also used if doubts are expressed before a vote as to the presence of a quorum and the Presiding Committee does not ascertain that there is a quorum. In the 19th electoral term (2017–2021), 547 laws were passed and the plenary met for 239 regular sittings.



View from the interior courtyard of the Paul Löbe Building into a committee meeting room



Through the Bundesrat, the 16 federal states (*Länder*) play a part in national legislation. Bills affecting the interests of the *Länder* require the explicit consent of the Bundesrat. In the case of other bills, the Bundesrat may lodge an objection to their adoption. If the Bundestag and Bundesrat cannot agree on a bill, they can refer the matter to the Mediation Committee. This committee, comprising 16 representatives each from the Bundestag and Bundesrat, tries to find a compromise. The role of the Mediation Committee can be particularly important when the majority groups in one House are in the minority in the other. If the Mediation Committee arrives at a compromise, this must be put to the vote in

the Bundestag and then in the Bundesrat before the new act can enter into force. Sometimes differences of opinion between the Bundestag and Bundesrat prove irreconcilable. In the case of a bill requiring the consent of the Bundesrat, this signals the final defeat of the proposal. In cases where the Bundesrat only has the right of objection, however, the Bundestag can overrule its objection.

#### The legislative process

- 1) immediate rejection: referral by the Bundestag or Bundesrat is possible
- 2) confirmation of the legislative decision or no motion for amendment
- 3) if amendment motion is rejected, original legislative decision prevails
- 4) if withdrawal is proposed and the Bundestag gives its consent, the bill is defeated, otherwise it is referred to the Bundesrat

As the head of the government, the Federal Chancellor has a powerful position. He or she determines the guidelines of government policy and proposes candidates for ministerial office to the Federal President. The Chancellor is elected by the Members of the Bundestag at the start of the electoral term.

## The Bundestag elects the Chancellor

The Bundestag may also depose the Federal Chancellor by means of a constructive vote of no confidence, in which the majority of Members of Parliament express their lack of confidence in him or her, while at the same time electing a successor (hence, “constructive”). In parliamentary practice in Germany this mechanism is very seldom used and presupposes the loss of a parliamentary majority for the Chancellor, for example if a coalition is dissolved or splits. This is why there have only ever been two constructive no-confidence motions in the history of the Bundestag. The first was in 1972, when a CDU/CSU motion to replace Willy Brandt (SPD) was defeated, and the other was in 1982, when Helmut Schmidt (SPD) had to give way to opposition leader Helmut Kohl of the CDU/CSU.

The Federal Chancellor may also table a confidence motion in order to establish whether the majority of the House still supports his or her policies. If the Bundestag denies the Chancellor a vote of confidence, the Basic Law prescribes that the Federal President, acting on a proposal from the Federal Chancellor, may dissolve the Bundestag within 21 days. A confidence motion may, therefore, pave the way for early elections. The Bundestag need not be dissolved, however, if a majority of its Members elects a new Chancellor. There have been five confidence motions, the most recent having been tabled by then-Chancellor Gerhard Schröder in 2005. The Bundestag did not give him a vote of confidence, as a result of which the Federal President dissolved the Bundestag and called fresh elections.



Swearing-in of Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD) by President of the Bundestag Bärbel Bas (SPD).

One of the traditional functions of a parliament in a democratic state is the scrutiny of government. This role is naturally performed first and foremost by the opposition groups, i.e. the groups which do not support the government, although the parliamentary groups in the governing coalition engage in scrutiny too through their participation in parliamentary processes.

Among the key instruments of parliamentary scrutiny are the budgetary powers of the Bundestag. In the annual Budget Act, the Bundestag determines the level of public revenue and expenditure, for which the Federal Minister of Finance is accountable to Parliament. The budget debates are often a highlight of the parliamentary year: government policy is under scrutiny, and the Government must justify its policies to Parliament. The German Bundestag has a wide range of other instruments with which it can scrutinise the work of the Government. For example, individual Members can submit written questions to the Government, and government representatives are required to give direct answers to Members' questions at a question-and-answer session with ministers after cabinet meetings and at parliamentary Question Time.

## The Bundestag scrutinises the Government

In addition, the parliamentary groups in the Bundestag can demand written information on particular issues by means of ‘major’ and ‘minor’ parliamentary questions. Answers to major questions quite often lead to parliamentary debates in which the Government is required to present its case and answer questions. There is also the debate on a matter of topical interest, an instrument used chiefly by the opposition groups to subject government policy to critical analysis. The debate, focusing on an issue of general interest, is held at the request of a parliamentary group or at least five per cent of the Members of the Bundestag or on the basis of an agreement reached at a meeting of the Council of Elders.

During the 19th electoral term from 2017 to 2021, the Members of the Bundestag put 25,671 written and 5,150 oral questions to the Federal Government. 547 laws were passed and the plenary met for 239 regular sittings. The size of the parliamentary workload is reflected in the fact that more than 31.000 Bundestag printed papers, as parliamentary documents are referred to, were published in total in the 19th electoral term.

Committees of inquiry have proved to be an incisive instrument for the parliamentary scrutiny of government activity. These committees can be appointed at the request of at least a quarter of the Members of the Bundestag. The Members serving on committees of inquiry can require the submission of government files, summon government representatives as witnesses and question them, which is sometimes even done in front of live television cameras. The Bundestag also scrutinises the Government through the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces. The Commissioner is appointed by the Bundestag for the purpose of parliamentary scrutiny of the armed forces. He or she keeps Parliament up to date on the situation in the Bundeswehr and intervenes in cases where the fundamental rights of military personnel are infringed. The Bundeswehr is often described as a “parliamentary army”, because the Federal Government cannot send its troops on armed missions abroad without the consent of the Bundestag.



The government benches with Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD) and the Federal Government Ministers.

Is membership of the Bundestag an occupation like any other? Certainly not, for Members of Parliament are representatives of the whole people – for a limited time – and must seek a vote of approval from the electorate at each general election. Members of the Bundestag have a mandate, or commission, to represent the interests of the citizens to the best of knowledge and belief. In order to perform this function, Members have rights and duties that are enshrined in the Basic Law and other legislation (such as the Members of the Bundestag Act in particular) and regulations. In principle, any person who is eligible to vote in the Federal Republic of Germany may stand as a candidate for election to the Bundestag. Candidates are normally put forward by a party whose political aims they share.

## Members of Parliament – representatives of the people

## **Freedom of conscience and cooperation**

Parliamentary work is wide-ranging, which makes consultation and coordination imperative. This is the task of the parliamentary groups. As political alliances of Members of Parliament, they prepare Bundestag decisions and are indispensable to the work of Parliament as a whole – without parliamentary groups, the Bundestag would fragment into hundreds of individual interests.

The groups have their own parliamentary rights, such as the right to introduce bills and motions, to demand a debate on a matter of topical interest or a recorded vote in plenary and to address major and minor parliamentary questions to the Federal Government.

None of the Members of the German Bundestag can be forced to subscribe to the opinion of his or her parliamentary group. This principle is laid down in Article 38 of the Basic Law, which guarantees the free exercise of a mandate. It states that Members of the Bundestag are representatives of the whole people, not bound by orders or instructions and

subject only to their conscience. This freedom has frequently been in evidence, chiefly in connection with particularly momentous decisions, such as those on military missions, on the choice of capital city and seat of government in 1991 and on matters relating to the regulation of abortion and mandatory vaccines.

Even Members who do not belong to a parliamentary group, besides being entitled to speak and vote in plenary, have numerous rights that no majority can deny them. For example, in plenary debates they can move points of order and table amendments, deliver oral or written explanations of vote, put questions to the Federal Government and be a non-voting member of a parliamentary committee.



In a recorded vote, Members place their voting cards in a ballot box, which due to the pandemic is located here on the plenary level of the Reichstag Building.

Under Article 46 of the Basic Law, all Members of Parliament have two privileges – immunity and indemnity. Immunity means that criminal investigations or a formal charge may only be made against individual Members of the Bundestag with the consent of the House, except in cases where the Member is arrested while committing a criminal offence or on the following day. Immunity is limited to the duration of a person's membership of the Bundestag and can only be lifted by a decision of the Bundestag. Indemnity means that Members of the Bundestag may at no time be subjected to court proceedings or disciplinary action or otherwise called to account outside the Bundestag for a vote cast or for any speech or debate in the Bundestag or in any of its committees. This indemnity does not apply to defamatory insults. These rules are chiefly designed to guarantee the proper working of Parliament.

## **Between Parliament and constituency**

Members of Parliament normally have two places of work: the Bundestag and their constituency. Regardless of whether they were elected to the Bundestag as constituency Members or from a regional list, they look after their constituents. They engage with the public, are frequently involved in local politics and report on their parliamentary activities. In regular surgery sessions, they learn of the problems and interests of local people and feed this knowledge into their deliberations in Berlin.

Constituency issues are not sold short in Berlin either. Although Members have a particularly tight schedule in the weeks when Parliament is sitting in Berlin, every parliamentary group has regional subgroups in which Members discuss the political concerns of their federal state and local area.



Compulsory attendance: Members are required to sign an attendance register on days when Parliament is sitting.

## No time for a media circus

There is a widespread myth that Members of Parliament spend their time moving from one talk show to another. Television viewers are often irritated too when they see a sitting of the Bundestag with the chamber only half full. The public are largely unaware of the wide range of tasks a parliamentarian also has to perform outside of plenary sittings. Day after day legislative bills, amendment motions, parliamentary questions and government replies, as well as opinions and reports on topical issues, appear on each Member's desk. The bulk of Parliament's legislative work is actually done in committee. Applying the principle of division of labour, Members organise themselves into committees, subcommittees and working groups. In addition, there are numerous appointments to be kept with experts, members of the public and journalists.

In particular, a Member of the Bundestag needs to be in the chamber for agenda items that are relevant to a committee on which the Member serves or to the constituency he or she represents, for landmark debates or government policy statements and certainly for votes. Prior to plenary debates, Members must engage with a large number of in many cases lengthy parliamentary printed papers. They must be read and processed, then discussed at meetings of working parties, parliamentary groups and committees. Many of them are subsequently the subject of a decision in the plenary chamber. Instead of holding speeches, Members often meet behind the scenes to seek solutions and compromises.



In the public eye: the media keep a close watch on proceedings in the Bundestag.

	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
<b>8.00</b>		Discussion	Press appointment	Office work	
<b>9.00</b>	Arrival from constituency	Meetings of working parties and working groups	Committee meeting	Plenary sitting (all day), normally two core-time debates followed by other debates and possibly a debate on a matter of topical interest	Plenary sitting
<b>10.00</b>					
<b>11.00</b>					
<b>12.00</b>					
<b>13.00</b>		Meetings of project groups and thematic groups	Plenary sitting with post-Cabinet questions to the Government, Question Time and, if required, debate on a matter of topical interest	At the same time: group of visitors from the constituency, press interview, office work	
<b>14.00</b>	Office work				
<b>15.00</b>	Preparation for the sitting, meetings of working parties	Parliamentary group meeting			Press appointment, meetings with representatives of associations and with scientific or academic experts
<b>16.00</b>					
<b>17.00</b>	Meeting of the parliamentary group executive		Continuation of committee meeting		
<b>18.00</b>				Exceptionally, meeting of a parliamentary body	Departure for constituency
<b>19.00</b>	Political talks	Evening events (panel discussions and lectures)			
<b>20.00</b>	Land group meeting		Group of visitors from the constituency		Evening event in constituency
<b>21.00</b>					
<b>22.00</b>					

A full schedule:  
timetable for a sitting week

## Sitting weeks

If it is to run smoothly, the work to be performed in a sitting week needs a clear basic structure and a fixed timetable. After returning from their constituencies, the Members of Parliament prepare with their staff on Monday for the parliamentary week, determining their activities and priorities. On Monday afternoon the parliamentary group executives and the executive bodies of the parties hold meetings.

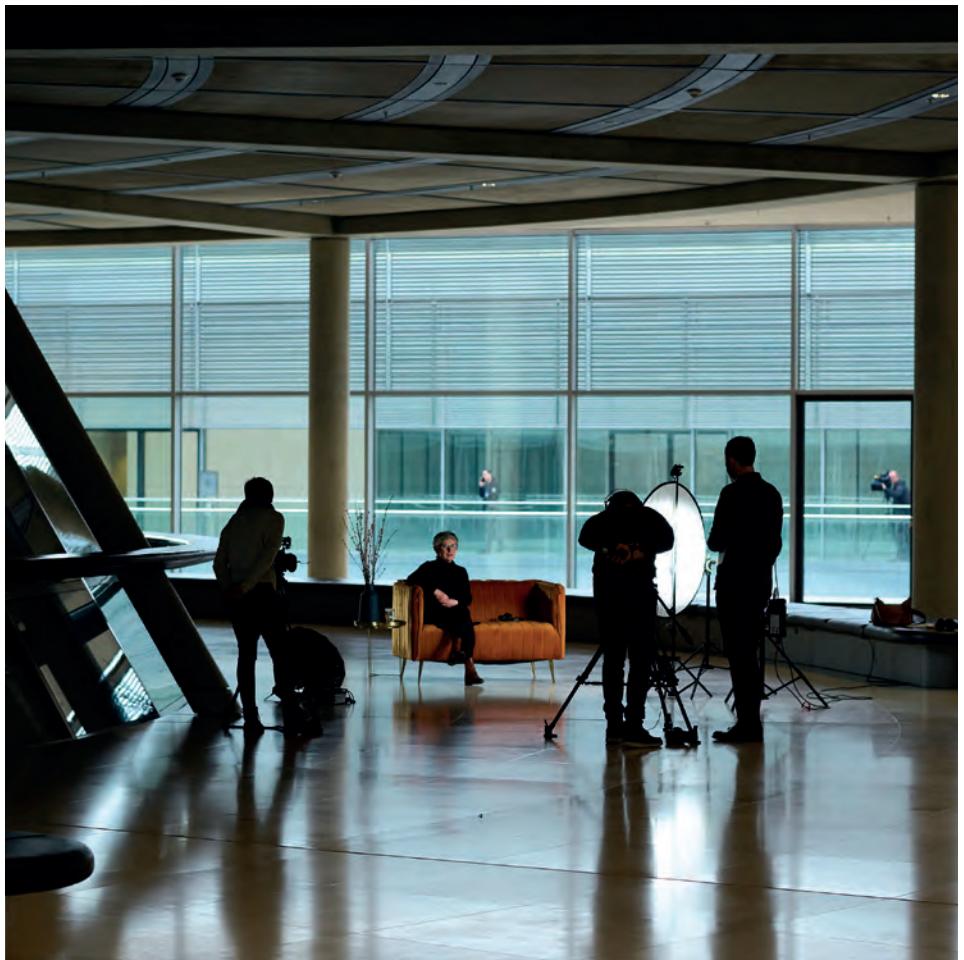
On Tuesday the parliamentary groups convene to discuss the items on the agenda. In the morning, the groups' working parties meet to prepare for the meetings of the parliamentary committees, which normally take place on Wednesdays. The permanent committees, whose members are drawn from all the parliamentary groups, are the bodies that perform the specialised work of Parliament. At the committee meetings the groups present their views on legislative proposals, thrash out compromises and prepare drafts designed to attract majority support. These are then discussed and put to the vote in the public plenary sittings on Thursday and Friday.



## Head-to-head debate – speaking times in the chamber

Who is allowed to speak in the plenary sittings and for how long depends on the relative size of the parliamentary groups. The allocation of speaking time to the individual groups is regularly determined in an agreement at the start of the electoral term. In addition to the relative sizes of the groups, other factors are generally taken into consideration, including a bonus for smaller groups and extra time for the opposition. Within the agreed framework it is up to parliamentary groups themselves to decide which Member can speak for how long on a particular topic. Under the Basic Law, the members of the Federal Government and the Bundesrat are generally permitted to speak for an unlimited amount of time. In practice, their speaking times are credited to the relevant parliamentary group. Independent Members are allocated speaking time separately.

Collage: Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz gives a speech during the general debate on the budget for the Federal Chancellery. The monitor in the plenary chamber provides an overview of the speakers and speaking times during a debate.



Member of the Bundestag Britta Haßelmann (Alliance 90/The Greens) is interviewed on the parliamentary group level in the Reichstag Building.

## **Terms of employment – offices, remuneration and allowances**

The President of the sitting ensures that speaking times are observed, along with the principle that arguments are heard for and against the motion. They can also direct speakers to discontinue speaking or, if need be, turn off the microphone.

The fixed sessions in the sitting weeks provide a framework for work. In addition to the work in the parliamentary groups, committees and plenary sittings, there are a range of other events such as conferences, presentations and conversations with the press or with representatives from associations. In addition, there are often groups of visitors or school pupils from the constituencies who wish to meet their representative in Parliament.

The nature of membership of Parliament, which is limited to an electoral term, dictates that a person's career must not be impaired if he or she is elected to Parliament and performs his or her wide-ranging tasks in a responsible manner. For this reason, all Members of the Bundestag are entitled to monetary allowances and benefits in kind, including furnished and equipped offices in the Bundestag and the right to use domestic transport services in the performance of their official duties. These benefits are supplemented by a flat-rate expenses allowance, from which a Member of the Bundestag meets the cost of maintaining a constituency office and a second residence in Berlin, for example. A staffing allowance enables Members to pay their employees – research assistants and office staff – in Berlin and in their constituency office. Their own pay – known as Members' remuneration – is taxable. The level of Members' remuneration is prescribed by law.

### **President of the Bundestag**

On 26 October 2021, Bärbel Bas (SPD) was elected President of the Bundestag at the constituent sitting of the 20th German Bundestag, making her the chief representative of Parliament. The President and the Vice-Presidents form the Presidium, the supreme authority of the Bundestag. In national protocol, the President of the Bundestag takes second place in order of precedence below the President of the Federal Republic and above the Federal Chancellor and the presidents of the other organs of the Constitution. This reflects the precedence of the legislative over the executive branch, of the Bundestag over the Federal Government.

## The main organs of the Bundestag and other Bundestag bodies

The President of the Bundestag is the chief officer of Parliament. Together with the Vice-Presidents in the Presidium and the Council of Elders, he or she directs the business of the Bundestag. The President safeguards the rights of Parliament and represents it externally. The President of the Bundestag exercises the proprietary and police powers in the premises of Parliament and, together with the Vice-Presidents, takes the major decisions concerning the staff of the Bundestag Administration. He or she is elected for the duration of the electoral term and chairs the plenary sittings in rotation with the Vice-Presidents.

The status of the President and Vice-Presidents is particularly evident when they preside over the plenary sittings of Parliament, where they are required to conduct the deliberations fairly and impartially, ensure that the debating rules are observed and that duties are properly performed and maintain order in the House. If a Member of the Bundestag infringes the code of parliamentary conduct, the President or presiding Vice-President may issue a reprimand or a call to order, withdraw the Member's right to speak, impose a fine or suspend him or her from sittings and committee meetings for up to 30 sitting days.

## Presidium

The President of the Bundestag and the Vice-Presidents form the Presidium, which is elected for the duration of an electoral term. A member of the Presidium cannot be relieved of his or her office by a resolution of the Bundestag. The Presidium meets regularly in every sitting week to discuss matters pertaining to the management of the House. In the 20th electoral term, Bundestag President Bärbel Bas (SPD) is assisted by Vice-Presidents – in order of parliamentary group strength – Aydan Özoguz (SPD), Yvonne Magwas (CDU/CSU), Katrin Göring-Eckardt (Alliance 90/ The Greens), Wolfgang Kubicki (FDP) and Petra Pau (The Left Party).



The President of the Bundestag and the Vice-Presidents: (top row from left) Bärbel Bas (SPD), Aydan Özoguz (SPD), Yvonne Magwas (CDU/CSU), (bottom row from left) Katrin Göring-Eckardt (Alliance 90/ The Greens), Wolfgang Kubicki (FDP) and Petra Pau (The Left Party).

## The parliamentary groups

### Council of Elders

The Presidium is assisted in conducting the business of Parliament by the Council of Elders, the composition of which reflects the relative numerical strength of the parliamentary groups. Its members need not be the oldest Members of the House, but they are experienced parliamentarians. The Council of Elders, which is chaired by the President of the Bundestag, comprises the members of the Presidium and 23 other Members. Its meetings are also attended by a representative of the Federal Government.

The Council of Elders assists the President of the Bundestag in the performance of his or her duties and takes decisions on the internal affairs of the Bundestag, except where such matters are reserved for the President or the Presidium. The foremost duty of the Council of Elders consists in setting the work programme of the Bundestag and the agenda for its plenary sittings. In addition, it is the task of the Council of Elders to deal with disputes concerning the dignity and rights of Parliament or the interpretation of the Rules of Procedure and, if possible, settle them.

Parliamentary groups are the political heart of the Bundestag. Their size and composition mirrors the results of the parliamentary elections. They play a key role in shaping the political work of the Bundestag. To form a group, it is necessary to muster at least five per cent of the Bundestag membership.

The relative strengths of the groups determine the composition of the Council of Elders and the parliamentary committees as well as the allocation of committee chairs. The groups can be viewed firstly as the links between political initiatives throughout the country and their practical attainment in Parliament. Secondly, the groups combine these political initiatives in Parliament, thus acting as trailblazers for decisions of the Bundestag. To this end the various parliamentary groups form working parties covering one or more committee portfolios; these working parties examine the issues that are being discussed by the specialised committees and prepare the position of the group. For this reason, it is not only Members of Parliaments who have staff to assist them in their work; the parliamentary groups also engage assistants to coordinate and support them in their work.





The chairs of the parliamentary groups in the 20th electoral term: (top row from left) Rolf Mützenich (SPD), Friedrich Merz and Alexander Dobrindt (CDU/CSU), Katharina Dröge and Britta Hafemann (Alliance 90/The Greens); (bottom row from left) Christian Dürr (FDP), Dr Alice Weidel and Tino Chrupalla (AfD), Amira Mohamed Ali and Dr Dietmar Bartsch (The Left Party).

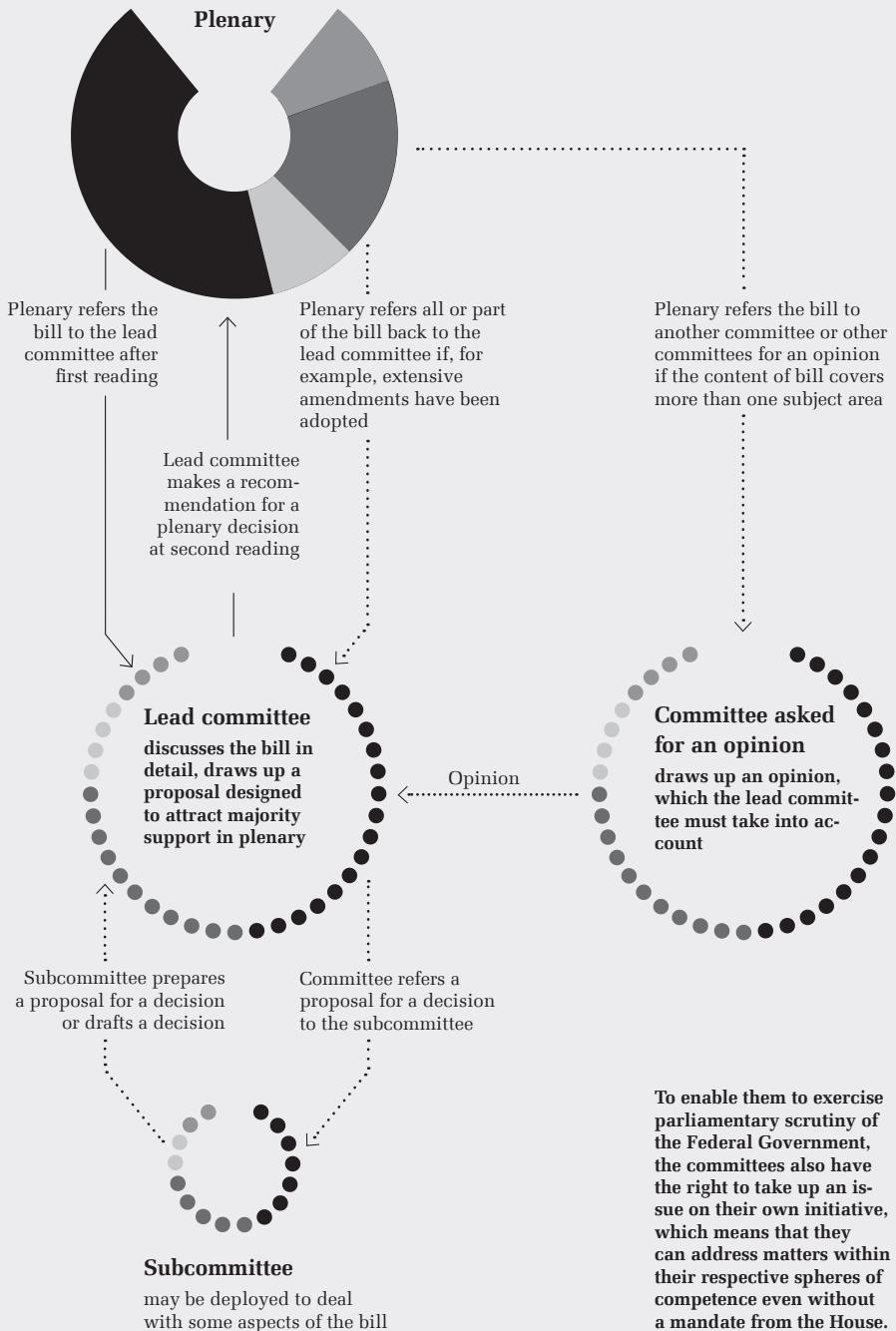
Top: View from the terrace of the parliamentary group level up to the illuminated dome of the Reichstag Building.

As alliances of all the Members of Parliament belonging to a party or, as in the case of the CDU/CSU group, related parties, the parliamentary groups are important and often vital cogs in the machinery of Parliament, not only because they decide on the formulation of new bills or on political strategies for plenary debates but also because they are often a kind of ‘parliament within Parliament’. Even though the members of a group concur in their fundamental political positions, it happens time and again that a wide variety of opinions are held on specific issues. At the discussion stage, when the collective will is still taking shape, the group members are not necessarily all of one mind. As happens in the chamber between groups, there are frequently lively and sometimes heated debates before the various positions are ascertained and, if possible, reduced to a common denominator. This, too, makes the groups crucial actors in the political process within Parliament.

## **Committees**

The Bundestag appoints committees to prepare its resolutions. In the 20th Bundestag there are 25 permanent committees, each comprising between 19 and 49 full members and the same number of substitute members. The committees are organs of the whole Parliament; for this reason, their composition reflects the relative strengths of the parliamentary groups. The parliamentary groups decide how many committees are to be appointed, what the remit of each committee will be and how many members each will have. There are, however, four committees whose appointment is prescribed by the Basic Law. These are the Defence Committee, the Committee on Foreign Affairs, the Committee on the Affairs of the European Union and the Petitions Committee.

How the Bundestag committees work.



The remits of the Bundestag committees generally match the portfolios of the various government ministries, which also helps to ensure parliamentary scrutiny of the Federal Government. There are exceptions, however, through which the Bundestag pursues political priorities of its own. These include the Committee for the Scrutiny of Elections, Immunity and the Rules of Procedure, the Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid, the Committee on Tourism and the Sports Committee. As a rule, the committees do not meet in public.

Parliamentary work on new legislation takes place predominantly in committee, where the plenary transactions of the Bundestag are prepared. In the committees, Members of Parliament focus on a specific policy area. They discuss all the bills referred to them by the House and try to find a compromise in committee on individual matters that prove controversial. If necessary, committees may avail themselves of external expertise by arranging hearings. The outcome of the committee proceedings is a recommendation for a decision, on the basis of which the Bundestag adopts a bill.

## **Committees of inquiry**

A significant instrument of the Bundestag for scrutinising the Federal Government is the right enshrined in Article 44 of the Basic Law to appoint committees of inquiry. Indeed it is required to do so at the request of at least one quarter of its Members. Committees of inquiry investigate possible abuses in government and administration and possible misconduct on the part of politicians. To this end, it can hear witnesses and experts and can order the submission of files for its perusal. The committee of inquiry sets out its findings in a report to Parliament, which is considered in plenary. In order to guarantee effective parliamentary scrutiny of the armed forces, the Defence Committee is entitled to constitute itself as a committee of inquiry at any time.



Public meeting of the Petitions Committee in the conference room of the Marie-Elisabeth Lüders Building. View of the doorplate.

## **Study commissions**

On the motion of at least one quarter of its Members, the German Bundestag is bound to appoint a study commission to prepare decisions on wide-ranging and significant issues. Study commissions comprise Members of the Bundestag and external experts. They submit reports and recommendations to the Bundestag.

## **Petitions Committee**

By means of petitions, anyone in Germany can influence public policies or the organisation of social interaction, by requesting that the Bundestag address their concern. Petitions provide everyone in the Federal Republic of Germany with a means of direct recourse to Parliament. The right of petition is a fundamental right that has been enshrined in the Basic Law since 1949. Requests or complaints to the Bundestag are dealt with by the Petitions Committee, which examines and discusses the petitions. In this way, the members of the Petitions

Committee learn first-hand how legislation affects ordinary people, for example. Among the options open to the Committee is referral of a petition to the Federal Government for action, consideration or information.

## **Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces**

Every member of the armed forces is free to address complaints direct to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces without going through service channels. Dr Eva Högl has held this position since May 2020. As a rule, the Commissioner always acts upon learning of circumstances that seem to indicate a breach of the fundamental rights of military personnel. The Commissioner investigates particular occurrences on the instructions of the Bundestag or its Defence Committee or acts on his or her own initiative. In this way, the Commissioner for the Armed Forces functions as an auxiliary organ of the Bundestag for the purpose of parliamentary oversight of the armed forces. The Commissioner reports to the Bundestag once a year on the results of his or her work.



Dr Eva Högl, Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces at the German Bundestag (left), during a Bundeswehr field visit to the Air Force Installation Protection Regiment "Friesland" in Schortens (Lower Saxony). Here in conversation with Squadron Commander Dirk Polter (right).

## **Federal Parliamentary Commissioner for the Victims of the SED Dictatorship**

The role of the Federal Parliamentary Commissioner for the Victims of the SED Dictatorship is to act as an ombudsman for the interests of victims of the Soviet Occupation Zone/SED dictatorship in the political and public spheres, and to contribute to the recognition and acknowledgement of victims of Communism in Germany. On 17 June 2021, Parliament elected Evelyn Zupke the first Federal Parliamentary Commissioner for the Victims of the SED Dictatorship. The Commissioner has an advisory role for

the German Bundestag and its committees and supports the work of victims' associations and the institutions and organisations that deal with the reappraisal of the GDR dictatorship. Once a year the Commissioner submits a report on the situation of the victims to the German Bundestag.



Providing a voice to the victims of SED injustice: Federal Parliamentary Commissioner for the Victims of the SED Dictatorship Evelyn Zupke delivers initial recommendations for policy action to Bundestag President Bärbel Bas (SPD).





In a democracy, the power of the state emanates from the people. The voters entrust the representatives of the people with power for a limited time. Who governs the country and makes the laws depends on two crosses that the electorate make on their ballot papers. In the elections to the 20th German Bundestag on 26 September 2021, all German citizens who had reached their 18th birthday by election day were eligible to vote.

## Parliamentary elections

Any German national aged 18 or over can stand as a candidate. Those who are elected to the Bundestag are said to have received a mandate from the people. The word comes from the Latin *mandatum*, meaning an instruction or commission. They represent the people for a limited time until a new Bundestag is elected. At every parliamentary election, voters have two choices to make. With their first vote, they choose the person whom they wish to be their personal representative in Berlin. Every candidate who wins the largest share of the vote in his or her constituency is directly elected to the Bundestag.

The Federal Republic is divided into 299 constituencies, from Flensburg in Schleswig-Holstein, which is Constituency No 1, to Homburg in the Saarland, which is numbered 299. What determines the balance of power between parties in the Bundestag is the second vote. By making this cross on their ballot papers, voters determine which par-

ty or coalition will win a large enough share of the vote to elect one of its members to serve as Federal Chancellor. Every party can campaign for seats in the Bundestag by drawing up *Land* lists of candidates. The party submits such a list in one or more federal states, listing in sequence the candidates it deems suitable. If a party wins enough second votes in a given *Land* to merit the allocation of ten seats and has won four constituency seats in that *Land*, the party's top six list candidates take the remaining six seats. Parties campaigning in an election are subject, however, to the 5% threshold, whereby a party must win at least five per cent of the national vote in order to enter the Bundestag.



The 736 Members of the 20th Bundestag meet in the Reichstag Building in Berlin.

There is one exception: if a party wins at least three constituency seats, it enters Parliament with the number of seats corresponding to its percentage of second votes even if it falls short of the 5% threshold. This threshold is designed to prevent a splintering of the party system that might weaken Parliament. In principle, half of the seats in the Bundestag are distributed on the basis of the *Land* lists, while the other half are constituency seats. This, however, accounts for only 598 of the 736 seats in the 20th Bundestag. The additional 138 seats comprise 34 overhang mandates and 104 balance mandates.

Overhang mandates occur when the number of constituency seats won by a party in a particular *Land* exceeds the number of seats to which it would be entitled on the strength of the second vote. There are six parliamentary groups in the Bundestag in the 20th electoral term: SPD (206 seats), CDU/CSU (197 seats), Alliance 90/The Greens (118 seats), FDP (92 seats), AfD (78 seats) and The Left Party (39 seats). There are also six independent members\*. The CDU/CSU received 23 overhang mandates, the SPD ten and the AfD received one. Since the parliamentary election of 2013, the effect of these overhang mandates has been offset by the allocation of additional seats, known as balance mandates, the purpose of which is to ensure that the ultimate distribution of seats accurately reflects the proportional distribution of the second votes. For this reason, in the 20th electoral term, the SPD has been allocated 26 balance mandates, Alliance 90/The Greens 24, CDU/CSU 18, FDP 16, the AfD 13 and The Left Party seven.

The meaning of first and second votes in parliamentary elections.

\* As at: March 2023

## Ballot paper

### First vote – candidate

- A  Direct mandate  
B  Direct mandate  
C  Direct mandate

### Second vote – party

- Land list with candidates O 1  
 Land list with candidates O 2  
 Land list with candidates O 3

### Winner takes all

Constituency candidate  
(first vote)



Direct mandates

The proportion of second votes  
determines the number of seats  
won by each party.

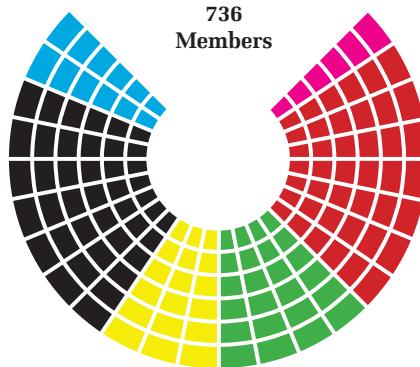
### Proportional representation

Land lists  
(second vote)



Candidates from the Land list

**299**  
Members



**437\***  
Members

\*Including 34 overhang mandates  
and 104 balance mandates at the  
start of the 20th electoral term.





On 20 June 1991, the German Bundestag decided that the seat of Parliament and Government would be moved to Berlin. In accordance with a decision taken by the Council of Elders, the new home of Parliament was to be the Reichstag Building. Following international architectural competitions, a new parliamentary quarter emerged in the Spreebogen area, where the River Spree arches northward, its focal point being the re-structured Reichstag Building with its walk-in glazed dome. Every year some three million people from all parts of the world visit the parliamentary buildings in Berlin.

Three new parliamentary buildings were constructed around the Reichstag Building following Parliament's move from Bonn to Berlin. These are the Jakob Kaiser Building, the Paul Löbe Building and the Marie-Elisabeth Lüders Building. Since the end of 2021, the newly-constructed Luisenblock West provides around 400 additional offices to reflect the increased number of Members. These structures combine imposing and transparent architecture with highly functional design and innovative green technology.

## Bundestag buildings



The Reichstag Building in Berlin,  
the heart of parliamentary demo-  
cracy in Germany.

## The Reichstag Building

An imposing building with monumental facades, the Reichstag has an immediate powerful effect on the beholder. Entering the building, its visitors find a modern interior equipped with state-of-the-art technology. British architect Norman Foster managed to preserve the historic shell of the Reichstag Building while creating the interior space for a modern, outward-looking Parliament. The outer shape of the Reichstag Building has not changed, but modern elements have been incorporated, and so the old architecture blends with rather futuristic forms, the whimsical complementing the starkly functional in innovative harmony.

The basement and ground floor contain facilities belonging to the Parliamentary Secretariat and the technical building services as well as supply installations. Above them, on the first floor, is the plenary level with the main debating cham-

ber. Next comes the intermediate visitors' level, and the following floor is the presidential level. Above this is the area occupied by the parliamentary groups, and finally there are the roof terrace and the dome.

The plenary level on the first floor, recognisable by its blue doors, is reserved for Members of Parliament, their staff and members of the Federal Government, while the western lobby is also accessible to media representatives.

All around the plenary chamber there is room for the parliamentary activity that takes place outside the chamber. First of all, there are the mingling areas – the traditional lobby – along with a reference library and the eastern lobby. There are also lounges for Government members and a counting room for recorded votes or secret ballots.

The focal point of the Reichstag Building is the plenary chamber with its floor area of 1,200 square metres. Measuring 24 metres from floor to ceiling, it covers virtually the full height of the building, and its interior is visible from almost all the floor levels of the surrounding structure as well as from the inner courtyards and from many other viewpoints.



Members in front of the entrance  
to the plenary chamber.

## **Plenary chamber and seating plan**

For visitors to plenary sittings, a mezzanine floor was constructed above the plenary level. The visitors' gallery in the plenary chamber provides an excellent view of the Members of the Bundestag at work. Six tribunes arranged in a semi-ellipse offer a total of about 430 seats for visitors, official guests of the Bundestag and journalists. From these tribunes the visitor's eye is drawn straight to the glazed wall behind the podium where the large Bundestag eagle is suspended. Beneath it are the seats of those who preside over the sitting, namely the President (Speaker) of the German Bundestag or one of his or her deputies and the two secretaries – one Member from a group in the governing coalition and the other from an opposition group. In front of them is the podium and the shorthand writers' bench.

On the left of the President or Vice President, as seen from the visitors' tribunes, are the government benches, while the benches to the right of the President are for the representatives of the Bundesrat. Between the Bundesrat benches and the President sits the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces. Facing the presidential rostrum are the Members' seats, arranged by par-

liamentary group. From the perspective of the Chair, the first group on the right is the AfD, followed by the FDP and the CDU/CSU. To the left of them are Alliance 90/The Greens, then the members of the SPD parliamentary group. On the far left are the seats for the parliamentary group of The Left Party (see the graphic on page 5).

## **The Presidium and the parliamentary groups**

Above the visitors' level (which has dark green doors), on the second floor with its burgundy doors, are the offices of the President of the Bundestag and the senior management of the Bundestag administration, as well as the meeting room of the Council of Elders.

The third floor, which is distinguishable by its grey doors, is home to the parliamentary groups; their meeting rooms and the press lobby, which can also be used for receptions, are all on this level.



A study in burgundy: the presidential level directly overlooks the plenary chamber.

## The Reichstag dome: a magnet for visitors

Above the third floor, where the parliamentary groups have their rooms, stretches the extensive roof terrace. From here, visitors have access to the dome, which has a diameter of 40 metres at its base and offers a panoramic view of Berlin from a height of 47 metres. The cupola is open at the top and bottom, which makes it appear like a floating spatial shell with its vertex 54 metres above street level. From the base of the dome, visitors can also look down and see into the plenary chamber when light conditions permit.

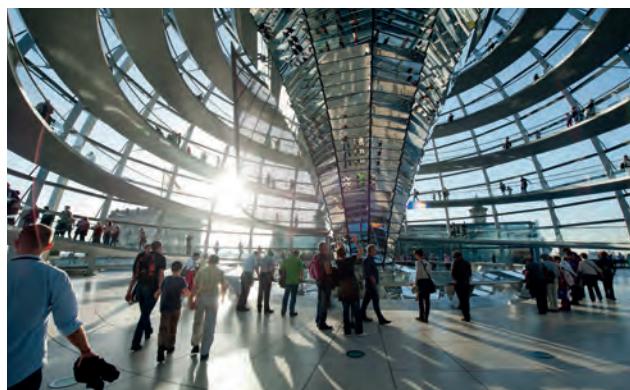
## Environmentalism on the sunny side

The Reichstag Building and the surrounding Bundestag edifices are equipped with environmentally sensitive low-energy technology. The energy-saving strategy formulated by the Bundestag and the Federal Government

has been successfully incorporated into the construction and refurbishment of these buildings.

In the Reichstag Building, the cone-shaped light sculptor with its 360 mirrors at the core of the glass cupola funnels daylight into the plenary chamber. Concealed within this cone, a heat-recovery system operates, to support the heating of the building.

At the heart of the parliamentary quarter's environmental strategy are the central combined heat and power (CHP) plants, with generators which run on biodiesel produced from rapeseed. In accordance with the trigeneration principle, waste heat created by electricity generation is used to heat the parliament buildings. Overall, this technology enables the plants to generate, as a long-term average, 70 percent of heating requirement and half of the electricity needed to the technical network of the parliament buildings. Unused waste heat can be used for cooling purposes in an absorption chiller or can be stored in summer in a layer of porous rock some 300 metres below the surface in the form of warm water and pumped up again in winter.



Getting on top of Parliament: every year some three million people visit the dome of the Reichstag Building.

## Chronology of the Reichstag Building

*5 December 1894*

The Reichstag Building, which had taken ten years to build, was formally opened; the architect was Paul Wallot.

*9 November 1918*

Philipp Scheidemann (SPD) proclaimed the German Republic from a window of the Reichstag Building after Imperial Chancellor Prince Max of Baden, acting on his own authority, had announced the abdication of Emperor William II at noon on the same day.

*27 February 1933*

Shortly after Adolf Hitler came to power, the Reichstag fire signalled the end of parliamentary democracy in Germany and served as a pretext for the persecution of political opponents.

*May 1945*

At the end of the Second World War, the red flag of the Soviet army was flown above the Reichstag Building as a sign of victory over National Socialist Germany.

*9 September 1948*

More than 350,000 Berliners gathered for a demonstration in front of the Reichstag Building during the Soviet blockade of Berlin. Against the backdrop of the severely damaged edifice, Ernst Reuter, Mayor of Berlin, delivered his famous appeal: “Peoples of the world ... look at this city”.



Cyrillic graffiti by Second World War Soviet soldiers on the walls of the Reichstag Building on the plenary level.

### *13 August 1961*

The Berlin Wall was built, part of it running right next to the Reichstag Building. Nevertheless, the restoration of the building was completed on the basis of designs by Paul Baumgarten; from 1973, it served as the home of an exhibition on German history and provided meeting rooms for parliamentary groups and other parliamentary bodies.

### *4 October 1990*

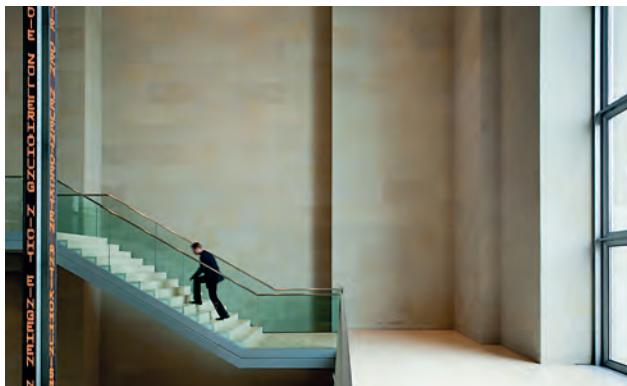
The first Bundestag elected by the whole of Germany held its inaugural sitting in the Reichstag Building.

### *20 June 1991*

The Bundestag in Bonn decided by 338 votes to 320 to return the seat of the German Parliament to the Reichstag Building in Berlin. Following an architectural competition, Sir Norman Foster was commissioned to reconstruct the building.

### *May 1995*

After some lively debates, the Council of Elders opted for the construction of a modern glass dome with integrated walkways.



### *June/July 1995*

Artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude wrapped the Reichstag Building in fabric. At the end of this art event, the reconstruction of the building began.

### *19 April 1999*

The Bundestag took over the reconstructed Reichstag Building in Berlin. Sir Norman Foster presented Wolfgang Thierse, President of the Bundestag, with a symbolic key to the building.

### *The summer of 1999*

The Bundestag moved from Bonn to Berlin. The first sitting week of the Bundestag in Berlin began on 6 September.

Reflections on parliamentary history: Jenny Holzer's *Installation for the Reichstag Building*, which displays the text of speeches delivered by Reichstag and Bundestag Members.

## The Paul Löbe Building

Next to the Reichstag Building stands the Paul Löbe Building. Named after the last democratic President of the Reichstag in the Weimar Republic, the building forms part of the ribbon of federal buildings in the *Spreebogen* (a bend in the River Spree), a ribbon that stretches across the Spree and across the former division between East and West Berlin. The Paul Löbe Building, some 200 metres in length and 100 metres in breadth, houses the two-storeyed meeting rooms of the committees in eight rotundas. The Paul Löbe Building also has about 510 rooms for Members of the Bundestag and 450 offices for committee secretariats and administrative departments, including the Visitors' Service.

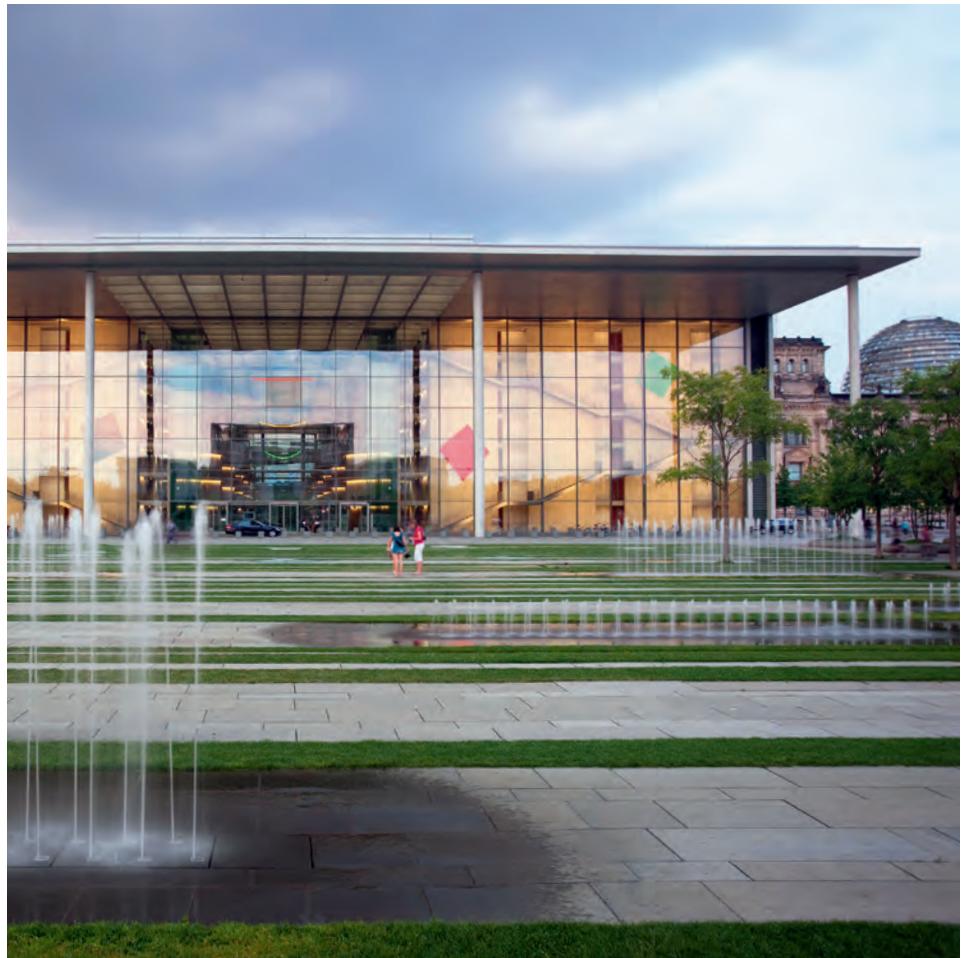
### Paul Löbe (1875–1967)

*Social Democrat Paul Löbe became a Member of the Weimar National Assembly in 1919. In 1920, he became a Member of the Reichstag and President of the Reichstag – an office from which he was ousted in 1932 by Hermann Göring of the National Socialists.*

*He was held in custody for six months on the pretext that, as editor of the SPD newspaper Vorwärts, he had allegedly embezzled party funds. He later established contact with the resistance group assembled by Carl Friedrich Goerdeler and was imprisoned again after the attempt on Hitler's life on 20 July 1944. Once the war was over, Löbe immediately resumed his SPD and editorial activities and in 1948/49, as a member of the Parliamentary Council, was instrumental in the formulation of the new constitution, the Basic Law. As President by age, he opened the constituent sitting of the first German Bundestag in 1949.*



View through the Paul Löbe Building towards the Marie-Elisabeth Lüders Building



Invitingly spacious: the west entrance to the Paul Löbe Building.

## The Marie-Elisabeth Lüders Building

The new Bundestag building bearing the name of Liberal politician Marie-Elisabeth Lüders serves as the parliamentary information and service centre, housing the large library, the archives and the Press Documentation Division. The library in the Marie-Elisabeth Lüders Building, with more than 1.5 million volumes, is one of the largest parliamentary libraries in the world.

Below the information and advice level of the library rotunda is a section of the Berlin Wall within an otherwise empty room. The piece of what was known as the hinterland wall follows the former course of that wall and is a reminder of the history of the site. The building also contains a large hearing room, which is chiefly used by study commissions and committees of inquiry. On completion of the construction of an extension to the Marie-Elisabeth Lüders Building, the Bundestag Art Room, where exhibitions of contemporary art with a parliamentary and political flavour are held, will once more be open to the public.

**Marie-Elisabeth Lüders (1878–1966)**  
*Liberal politician Marie-Elisabeth Lüders is regarded as one of the most important social campaigners and one of the leading representatives of the women's movement in Germany. In 1912 she became the first woman in Germany to obtain a doctorate in political science; in the period up to 1918 she performed several leading functions in the realm of social work and in the effort to improve conditions for women. In 1919 she became a member of the constituent National Assembly; from 1920 to 1921 and from 1924 to 1930 she was a Member of the Reichstag. In 1933 the National Socialists banned her from exercising her profession and from publishing her writings; in 1937 she had to endure four months of solitary confinement. From 1953 to 1961, she represented the FDP in the Bundestag and opened two of its constituent sittings as President by age.*



Under construction: when the extension designed by architect Stephan Braunfels is completed, the Marie-Elisabeth Lüders Building will boast a total floor area of 44,000 square metres.



Exterior view of the Marie-Elisabeth Lüders Building

## The Jakob Kaiser Building

The main purpose of the largest of the new parliamentary buildings, the Jakob Kaiser Building, is to provide office accommodation for the parliamentary groups and their staff. The Jakob Kaiser Building, in which more than 2.000 people work, integrates existing architecture and incorporates elements of the old street plan, thereby preserving the traditions of urban development in Berlin. Five teams of architects worked on the building, which is actually a complex of eight structures. Among the occupants of the Jakob Kaiser Building are the Vice-Presidents of the Bundestag, the parliamentary groups' executive committees, the Bundestag's Press Office and media services. Around 60 % of the Members of the Bundestag have their offices here; all of them have three rooms with a floor area of about 18 square metres each for themselves and their staff. The allocation of office space to the parliamentary groups is determined afresh by a commission of the Council of Elders after each general election. As is the norm in the Bundestag, allocation is based strictly on the relative numerical strength of the groups.

### Jakob Kaiser (1888–1961)

*In 1912, he became a member of the Centre Party, which he represented in the last freely elected Reichstag. In 1934 he joined the resistance against the National Socialists and spent several months in the custody of the Gestapo in 1938 on suspicion of plotting high treason. He narrowly escaped capture in the wave of arrests that followed the abortive coup of 20 July 1944 and was the sole survivor from the inner circle of the trade unionists' resistance movement in Berlin.*

*After the war, he was involved in the establishment of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and became party chairman for Berlin and the Soviet occupation zone. Because of his opposition to the assimilation policy, however, the Soviet Military Administration stripped him of the chairmanship in 1947.*

*Kaiser was a member of the Berlin City Parliament and participated in the drafting of the Basic Law as a member of the Parliamentary Council. From 1949, he was a Member of the Bundestag and Minister for All-German Affairs.*



Vanishing lines: the Jakob Kaiser Building offers an impressive study in perspective.



Jakob Kaiser Building on the  
Reichstagsufer with the Reichstag  
Building.

## The Luisenblock West

Since December 2021, a seven-storey modular building with an H-shaped layout has stood at the “Luisenblock West” site to the north of the Marie-Elisabeth Lüders Building – a plot of land where GDR-era prefabricated concrete buildings were located until the end of the 1990s.

In just 15 months, under the management of the Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning (BBR), 400 offices for Members were constructed on time and within budget, in order to accommodate at short notice the increase to the current number of 736 Members of the Bundestag following the 2021 elections.

The height and cubic volume of the new building follows that of the Marie-Elisabeth Lüders Building opposite, allowing it to integrate seamlessly into the surrounding environment. At the same time, coloured panels on the facade provide fresh accents that give the building its own unique character.

The office building was constructed in line with the plans of the Berlin-based architectural firm of Sauerbruch Hutton. The concept stood out particularly in terms of efficiency and sustainability. The office spaces were built using a modular timber construction method, with the approximately 460 wooden modules being prefabricated predominantly in Berlin, in order to shorten transport distances and thus lower emissions. The two core areas of the building, where the central stairwell is located, were constructed from prefabricated reinforced concrete units with exposed concrete surfaces. Due to the modular construction, the building can be dismantled, allowing the modules to be reconstructed at another site and thus reused. The sustainable approach also includes what is referred to as the Wood Cycle concept. The bidding consortium pledged to ensure that the 2500 cubic metres of timber used in construction will be replaced by newly planted trees which will grow back and be able to absorb CO<sub>2</sub> within 15 years. In addition, a significant share of the new building's electricity supply is covered by the photovoltaic panels installed on the roof, with a generating area of approximately 590 square metres.



The colourful facade of the modular building is highly recognisable.



The entrance to the  
Luisenblock West.

The Bundestag is one of the world's most-visited parliaments. Every year some three million people from all parts of the world visit the Reichstag Building and the other Bundestag buildings in the parliamentary quarter. They are looked after by the Visitors' Service of the German Bundestag.

In addition to a tour of the dome on the Reichstag Building, the Visitors' Service also offers guided tours focused, for example, on the architecture of the Bundestag buildings or their art works. During the periods when the Bundestag is not sitting there are lectures in the plenary chamber on the tasks, working practices and composition of the Bundestag as well as on the history and architecture of the Reichstag Building. There are special events for children and young people, such as children's days, parliamentary seminars or role-playing games in which young people learn through experience about the workings of parliamentary democracy. Information about attendance at a plenary sitting or lectures in the visitors' gallery of the plenary chamber and about guided tours of the buildings can be obtained from the Visitors' Service through the Bundestag website at [www.Bundestag.de](http://www.Bundestag.de) > English > Visit the Bundestag, or by phone on +49 (0)30 227 32152 or 35908.

## More about the Bundestag

## Dome visits and audio guides

The roof terrace and the dome are open from 8 a.m. to midnight daily (last admission at 9.45 p.m.). Advance registration is required.

Visitors can register online at [www.Bundestag.de/en](http://www.Bundestag.de/en) > Visit > Dome, roof terrace, by fax (+49 (0)30 227-36436), or by post (Deutscher Bundestag, Besucherdienst, Platz der Republik 1, 11011 Berlin).



An audio guide is available for your tour of the dome, providing 20 minutes of information about the Reichstag Building and its surroundings, the Bundestag, the work of Parliament and the sights you can see from the dome. The audio guide can be obtained on the roof terrace and is available in eleven languages. There are also audio guides for children, in simple German and for blind visitors to the dome as well as a video guide for deaf visitors.

## Information material

The Public Relations Division of the Bundestag provides information on the work of Parliament by means of brochures, films and online information. Some information about the Bundestag is available in simple German and easy-read text, as well as several foreign languages. Bundestag information material can be downloaded at [www.btg-bestellservice.de/informationsmaterial/55/56](http://www.btg-bestellservice.de/informationsmaterial/55/56) or ordered by post free of charge.



Wide-ranging facilities:  
The Bundestag Visitors' Service offers guided tours based on various themes and tailored to all age groups.

## **Exhibitions, mobile information unit and communication stand**

Temporary exhibitions in the Paul Löbe Building on political and parliamentary themes provide information on current issues. More information in German is available at [www.Bundestag.de](http://www.Bundestag.de) > Besuch > Ausstellungen > Politischparlamentarische Ausstellungen.

Through travelling exhibitions, appearances at trade fairs, and the mobile information unit, the Bundestag visits citizens at locations throughout Germany and provides opportunities for contact with Members. With its travelling exhibition, the Bundestag brings information on the work of its Members to the constituencies. The Bundestag has a communication stand at major consumer fairs. Meanwhile, the Bundestag's one-of-a-kind mobile information unit is on tour across Germany, bringing discussions, online information and quizzes to the public. More information is available at [www.Bundestag.de/en](http://www.Bundestag.de/en) > Visit > The Bundestag on the move.



## **Wall Memorial**

The Marie-Elisabeth Lüders Building houses the Wall Memorial, parts of the inner or 'hinterland' Wall having been rebuilt there as a reminder of the former division of Germany.

[www.Bundestag.de](http://www.Bundestag.de) > Besuch > Kunst > Mauer-Mahnmal (only available in German).

## **The German Bundestag's exhibition on parliamentary history**

The exhibition is open Tuesday to Sunday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. (7 p.m. from May to September), Mondays only on public holidays.

Deutscher Dom, Gendarmenmarkt 1, 10117 Berlin [www.Bundestag.de/en](http://www.Bundestag.de/en) > Visit > Historical Exhibition





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Deutscher Bundestag (DBT)/Marc-Steffen Unger; p. 15, p. 45, p. 59 DBT/Simone M.

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