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**GOVERNMENT**

## **GERMANY'S ELECTORAL SYSTEM**

**How does Germany's electoral system and political structure shape its democratic governance?**

**High  
School**

How does Germany’s electoral system and political structure shape its democratic governance, and what challenges does it face in balancing democracy, representation, and unity?		
<b>C3 Framework Indicator</b>	D2.Civ.6.9-12., D2.Civ.5.9-12	
<b>Staging the Compelling Question</b>	Highlight how the German party seats are determined and discuss how this system might differ from the U.S. electoral system.	
<b>Supporting Question 1</b>	<b>Supporting Question 2</b>	<b>Supporting Question 3</b>
How does Germany’s electoral system work, and how does it differ from the U.S. system?	What is the significance of Germany’s 5% electoral threshold and the role of coalition governments?	How does the legacy of East and West Germany affect political and social life today?
<b>Formative Performance Task</b>	<b>Formative Performance Task</b>	<b>Formative Performance Task</b>
Electoral System Simulation	Coalition Building Exercise	East-West Germany Debate Analysis
<b>Featured Sources</b>	<b>Featured Sources</b>	<b>Featured Sources</b>
<a href="#">Electoral Reform in Germany.</a> <a href="#">German Politics: Elections &amp; Voting In Germany.</a> <a href="#">How the Attitudes of West and East Germans Compare, 30 Years after Fall of Berlin Wall.</a> <a href="#">Sample Ballot</a>	<a href="#">A Guide to Germany’s Political Parties</a> <a href="#">Germany’s Election Results: Facts and Figures.</a>	<a href="#">East Germany - from Wartime Ashes to Unity.</a> <a href="#">German Unity: Eastern States Still Trail the West.</a> <a href="#">German Reunification: How Two Countries (Sort of) Became One.</a>
<b>Summative Performance Task</b>	<b>Argument:</b> Construct an argument addressing the compelling question, using specific claims and evidence from the lesson. Focus on how Germany’s electoral system, federalism, and political divisions influence its democratic practices and governance. Students may present their findings in a research paper or a multimedia presentation.	
	<b>Extension:</b> Create a political party: Design a political party that would appeal to both Eastern and Western Germans, considering both economic and cultural concerns. Present the party’s platform and coalition strategy.	
<b>Taking Informed Action:</b> Using your voice to make change	<b>Understand:</b> Research the impact of EU integration on Germany’s economy and political structure.	
	<b>Assess:</b> Debate the benefits and challenges of Germany’s social market economy and its balance of social protection and capitalism.	
	<b>Act:</b> Write a letter to a local or national government official in your country, advocating for reforms in electoral representation, militant democracy, or welfare systems based on your understanding of the German model.	

# Germany's Electoral System

Target Grade Level: 12

Target Course: Government

## Compelling Question

How does Germany's electoral system and political structure shape its democratic governance, and what challenges does it face in balancing democracy, representation, and unity?

## Inquiry Overview

This inquiry focuses on the key political, economic, and social systems that define contemporary Germany, examining how the country's electoral process, federal structure, and social policies interact to create a unique form of governance. Students will explore Germany's East-West Divide, its Social Market Economy, and the concept of Militant Democracy that safeguards its democratic institutions, while comparing these features to the U.S. political system. They will engage with the structure of Germany's Cooperative Federalism, its approach to Citizenship and Immigration, and its role within the European Union (EU). Through research, discussions, and activities, students will analyze how these aspects contribute to Germany's stability and prosperity. They will demonstrate their understanding by completing formative performance tasks, culminating in a written argument or presentation that synthesizes the key concepts and reflects on the complexities of Germany's contemporary political landscape.

## Teacher Background Information

Teachers should have a basic understanding of democratic systems, federalism, and the differences between parliamentary and presidential governments. Teachers should have some knowledge of the Cold War and the division of Germany, though this lesson will provide some context on the East-West Divide and its lasting impact. Common misconceptions students might have include oversimplifying the East-West Divide as just economic, misunderstanding Germany's Social Market Economy as socialism, or confusing Germany's Militant Democracy as anti-democratic. The lesson connects to current-day Germany by examining how these concepts shape its governance, addressing issues like populism, nationalism, and its role in the European Union. Through this, students will gain insights into Germany's unique approach to balancing democracy, economic welfare, and political stability.

## Suggested Time Frame

3-4 class periods (60 minutes each)

## Concept List

**Bundestag:** The German federal parliament.

**Bundesrat:** The federal council, which represents the 16 states (Länder) of Germany.

**Proportional Representation:** A system where seats are allocated based on the proportion of votes received by each party.

**Mixed-Member Proportional System (MMP):** Germany's electoral system, combining single-member district elections and proportional representation.

**Chancellor:** The head of government, similar to a prime minister in parliamentary systems.

**Coalition Government:** A government formed by multiple political parties coming together to control a majority in the Bundestag.

**5% Threshold:** A rule that requires a party to get at least 5% of the national vote or win three electoral districts to gain seats in the Bundestag.

**Political Parties:** The major political parties in Germany (e.g., CDU, SPD, Greens, FDP, AfD) and their platforms.

**East-West Divide:** the lasting political, economic, and cultural differences between Eastern and Western Germany, especially after reunification, stemming from their distinct political systems during the Cold War.

**Social Market Economy:** Germany's economic model that combines free-market capitalism with social policies aimed at ensuring social welfare, equality, and economic stability.

**Militant Democracy:** a concept that allows Germany to take measures to protect its democratic institutions from being undermined by anti-democratic or extremist movements.

**Cooperative Federalism:** in Germany, a system where the federal government and states work together

**Dual Federalism:** in the U.S., a system that emphasizes a clearer separation of powers between the federal and state governments.

**European Union (EU):** a political and economic union of European countries that enables free trade, the movement of people, and coordinated policies, while also maintaining national sovereignty

## Instructional Resources

- Video: A video explaining the Mixed-Member Proportional System in Germany.
- Electoral System Diagram: Visual breakdown of the MMP system, showing the relationship between direct mandates and proportional representation.
- Election Data: Charts with results from Germany's 2021 Bundestag elections, including seat distribution and coalition breakdowns.
- Case Study: A review of the formation of Germany's most recent coalition government (post-2021 election).
- Primary Source: Excerpts from German party platforms (e.g., CDU, SPD, Green Party).
- Visual Aids: Sample Election Ballots, Maps showing East and West Germany

## NCSS Thematic Strands

- Civic Ideals and Practices (Strand 10): Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic.
- Power, Authority, and Governance (Strand 6): Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create, interact with, and change structures of power, authority, and governance.

## C3 Framework Indicators

**D2.Civ.6.9-12.** Critique relationships among governments, civil societies, and economic markets.

**D2.Civ.5.9-12.** Evaluate citizens' and institutions' effectiveness in addressing social and political problems at the local, state, tribal, national, and/or international level.

## Outcomes for Student Learning

**Content:** Students will understand Germany's electoral system, including proportional representation and coalition governance. They will also analyze how the East-West divide and the legacy of reunification shape modern German politics.

**Skills:** Students will engage in critical thinking by analyzing Germany's political structures, participating in simulations, and using evidence to form arguments on political systems and policies.

**Knowledge:** Students will explore the concepts of militant democracy, social market economy, and EU integration, and discuss how these affect contemporary German society and governance.

## Germany-Related Learning Goals

- Understand Germany's Mixed-Member Proportional (MMP) system and its effects on representation in the Bundestag.
- Compare the East and West German political, economic, and social divide and its ongoing impact after reunification.
- Evaluate Germany's social market economy and its balance between capitalism and social protection.
- Examine the role of the European Union in shaping German politics and global trade.
- Analyze how Germany's political system protects democracy and prevents extremism, specifically through militant democracy mechanisms.

## Compelling Question

**How does Germany's electoral system and political structure shape its democratic governance, and what challenges does it face in balancing democracy, representation, and unity?**

## Introductory Activity

**Activity:** Show a brief clip from Germany's 2021 election (see Resources Performative Task 1). Highlight how the parties' seat shares were determined and discuss how this system might differ from the U.S. electoral system.

**Ask students to consider:**

Why do you think Germany uses a proportional system for allocating seats?

What challenges could arise from having multiple parties in a coalition government?

- Introduce the concept of militant democracy and ask, "Can democracy ever be at risk from its own citizens? How can we protect it?"
- Visual Aids: Graphs showing the East-West divide, map of East/West Germany

## Supporting Question 1

**How does Germany's electoral system work, and how does it differ from the U.S. system?**

## ► Formative Performance Task 1

### Electoral System Simulation

- Students will simulate a Bundestag election by creating their own political parties, writing platforms, and competing in a classroom election using two votes: one for a candidate and one for a party.
- In a fishbowl discussion, students will simulate coalition-building and how different parties must collaborate to govern.

## ► Resources

Infographic on Germany's MMP system

- Siefken, Sven. "Electoral Reform in Germany." American-German Institute, 15 Aug. 2024, <https://americangerman.institute/2024/08/electoral-reform-in-germany/>.

Short video explaining how coalition governments form in Germany and the 2021 election

- "German Politics: Elections & Voting In Germany." YouTube, DW Euromaxx, 17 Sept. 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hiCZUN9mUqM>.

Graphs showing East West Divide

- Gramlich, John. "How the Attitudes of West and East Germans Compare, 30 Years after Fall of Berlin Wall." Pew Research Center, Pew Research Center, 18 Oct. 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/10/18/how-the-attitudes-of-west-and-east-germans-compare-30-years-after-fall-of-berlin-wall/>.

Sample ballot from German Election

- Feasibility Analysis of Prêt à Voter for German Federal Elections - Scientific Figure on ResearchGate. Available from: [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Ballot-paper-for-the-German-Federal-Election-in-2009\\_fig1\\_262353880](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Ballot-paper-for-the-German-Federal-Election-in-2009_fig1_262353880) [accessed 6 Jan 2025]

## Supporting Question 2

**What is the significance of Germany's 5% electoral threshold and the role of coalition governments?**

## ► Formative Performance Task 2

Coalition-building Exercise

- Students will be assigned to represent different German political parties (e.g., SPD, CDU/CSU, AfD, Greens, FDP).
- They will discuss and negotiate potential coalition agreements, taking into account each party's priorities and the necessity of reaching the 5% threshold for parliamentary representation.

## ► Resources

Article on the different political parties in Germany

- Goldenberg, Rina. "A Guide to Germany's Political Parties." Deutsche Welle, Deutsche Welle, 16 Dec. 2024, <https://www.dw.com/en/spd-green-party-fdp-cdu-left-party-afd/a-38085900>.

Chart of the current party representation in the Bundestag

- Hasselbach, Christoph. "Germany's Election Results: Facts and Figures." Deutsche Welle, Deutsche Welle, 30 Sept. 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/germanys-election-results-facts-and-figures/a-59343789>.

### Supporting Question 3

## How does the legacy of East and West Germany affect political and social life today?

### ► Formative Performance Task 3

#### East-West Germany Debate and Analysis

Students read articles on the East-West divide and then participate in a structured debate:

- "Has reunification fully integrated East Germany, or do lingering divisions still affect politics and society?"
- Half of students will be assigned the position "Former East and West Germany are fully integrated" and the other half of students will be assigned the position "There are still political and social divisions between the former East and West Germany"

### ► Resources

Timeline of the East-West German divide and reunification

- "East Germany - from Wartime Ashes to Unity." Reuters, 9 Nov. 2009, <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/-east-germany-from-wartime-ashes-to-unity-idUSTRE5A32D4/>.

Article on economic differences between former East and West Germany

- Deutsche Welle. "German Unity: Eastern States Still Trail the West." Deutsche Welle, 7 July 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/german-unity-eastern-states-still-lag-economically-but-catching-up-report-says/a-58187437>.

Video about experiences post-reunification

- DW News. "German Reunification: How Two Countries (Sort of) Became One." YouTube, YouTube, 10 Oct. 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1LUObwxfhl&t=18s>.

### Summative Performance Task

<b>Essay / Presentation</b>	Prompt: Construct an argument addressing the compelling question, using specific claims and evidence from the lesson. Focus on how Germany's electoral system, federalism, and political divisions influence its democratic practices and governance. Students may present their findings in a research paper or a multimedia presentation.
<b>Extension</b>	<b>Create a political party:</b> Design a political party that would appeal to both Eastern and Western Germans, considering both economic and cultural concerns. Present the party's platform and coalition strategy. Students should keep in mind the Grundgesetz (Basic Law) of Germany, which emphasizes human dignity, equality before the law, freedom of expression, social justice, and protection from violence, when creating their party platform and coalition strategy.

## Taking Informed Action

<b>Understand</b>	Research the impact of EU integration on Germany's economy and political structure.
<b>Assess</b>	Debate the benefits and challenges of Germany's social market economy and its balance of social protection and capitalism.
<b>Act</b>	Write a letter to a local or national government official in your country, advocating for reforms in electoral representation, militant democracy, or welfare systems based on your understanding of the German model.

## Modifications for Differentiation

**For ELL students:** Provide vocabulary lists, simplified articles on key topics, and allow extra time for tasks. Use visual organizers to assist with understanding concepts like coalition-building and electoral thresholds.

**For students with IEPs:** Use graphic organizers and provide additional support during group activities. Pair students with peers to offer additional scaffolding and guidance. Use visual aids and organizers to support development of ideas and essay writing.

**For advanced learners:** Encourage independent research on topics like the European Union's role in shaping German policy or the implications of militant democracy in protecting democratic values.



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