

## 4.2 'THE MORE, THE MERRIER'—GERMANY'S MULTIPARTY POLITICAL SYSTEM

### What is a multiparty political system and how does it work?

<p><b>C3 Framework Indicator</b></p>	<p><b>D2.Civ.2.9-12.</b> Analyze the role of citizens in the U.S. political system, with attention to the various theories of democracy, changes in Americans' participation over time, and alternative models from other countries, past and present.</p> <p><b>D2.Geo.2.9-12.</b> Use maps, satellite images, photographs, and other representations to explain relationships between the locations of places and regions and their political, cultural, and economic dynamics.</p> <p><b>D2.His.5.9-12.</b> Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people's perspectives.</p>	
<p><b>Staging the Compelling Question</b></p>	<p>Students will understand the multiparty political system of the Federal Republic of Germany.</p>	
<p><b>Supporting Question 1</b></p>	<p><b>Supporting Question 2</b></p>	<p><b>Supporting Question 3</b></p>
<p>What are the political parties currently represented in the German <i>Bundestag</i>?</p>	<p>What is a political coalition/political alliance?</p>	<p>What coalitions are currently in place in the German <i>Bundestag</i>?</p>
<p><b>Formative Performance Task</b></p>	<p><b>Formative Performance Task</b></p>	<p><b>Formative Performance Task</b></p>
<p>Students will become experts on parties currently represented in the <i>Bundestag</i>, by reading the listed resources.</p>	<p>As a class define "coalition". Then each "political party" should determine which party or parties they might be able to form a coalition with and why.</p>	<p>In small groups students access information on the current German government and to briefly outline any coalition(s) in place.</p>
<p><b>Featured Sources</b></p>	<p><b>Featured Sources</b></p>	<p><b>Featured Sources</b></p>
<p><b>Source A:</b> German political party (<b>Handout 4.2.1</b>)</p> <p><b>Source B:</b> German Political Parties Jigsaw Activity (<b>Handout 4.2.2</b>)</p> <p><b>Source C:</b> <i>The Guardian</i></p> <p><b>Source D:</b> <i>Deutscher Bundestag</i></p> <p><b>Source E:</b> <i>The Financial Times</i></p> <p><b>Source F:</b> <i>Handbook Germany</i></p>	<p><b>Source A:</b> <i>The National Democratic Institute &amp; The Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights</i></p>	<p><b>Source A:</b> Internet Access</p>
<p><b>Summative Performance Task</b></p>	<p><b>Argument:</b> Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster, essay) that addresses the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from historical or contemporary sources while acknowledging competing views.</p> <p><b>Extension:</b> Using their understanding of the German political parties, students will determine how Germany's political landscape changed during the most recent election, and the possible reasons for this change.</p>	
<p><b>Taking Informed Action</b></p>	<p><b>Understand:</b> Many young Germans are involved in politics, and they often follow a political youth party.</p> <p><b>Assess:</b> Look at some of the political youth organizations in Germany, and explore how they are empowering young people to take part in politics</p> <p><b>Act:</b> Become an active citizen.</p>	

## ? COMPELLING QUESTION

- What is a multiparty political system and how does it work?

### INQUIRY OVERVIEW

This inquiry is designed to give students an understanding of the multiparty political system of the Federal Republic of Germany. Using the most recent election results, students will learn about the different parties currently represented in the German *Bundestag* (national parliament of the Federal Republic of Germany). Students will also study the significance of a political coalition within the *Bundestag*. Then they will consider which parties would most likely want to form a coalition together.

### TEACHER BACKGROUND

The Federal Republic of Germany is a democratic, federal, and constitutional country composed of 16 *Bundesländer* (federal states). It has a bicameral legislature composed of the *Bundesrat* and the *Bundestag*. The *Bundesrat*, the legislative body that represents all 16 states at the federal level, is comprised of 69 members who are not elected directly but are delegates of their respective state governments. The *Bundestag* is directly elected by the German people every four years. Effective with the 2017 elections, there are 709 members of the *Bundestag*. The *Bundestag* has three main responsibilities: legislation, election of the federal chancellor, and control of the government. It is important for students to understand that the chancellor is a member of the *Bundestag* and not elected by the general public (as is the case with the U.S. President, via the Electoral College). The Chancellor is the nation's leading political figure and de facto chief executive. Therefore, the executive and legislative branches of the German system are not as fully separated as they are in the United States. The German President is elected by committee and has little influence on day-to-day politics.



Germany has a multiparty system with six major political parties currently represented in the federal government. (There are actually more than six political parties currently active in Germany, but a party has to earn a certain percentage of votes to make its way officially into the federal government.) Each party is represented by a color (e.g. the SPD is red, CDU is black). This is similar to the U.S. where the two parties are represented by either red or blue in election results. The German system generally results in no single party having a clear majority of the votes in a legislative election. Multiparty systems, like the German one, usually result in coalition governments, formed by more than one party. As of the 2017 election, the parties in the *Bundestag* are the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU), the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Free Democratic Party (FDP), The Left (*Die Linke*), The Greens (*Die Grünen*), and the Alternative for Germany (AfD).

During elections for the *Bundestag*, every citizen age 18 and over gets two votes. The first vote lets you vote for a specific candidate running for election to represent their constituency. These direct candidates compete with each other in the 299 German constituencies. Direct candidates do not need to belong to a party, and they can run as “independents,” although many candidates are directly nominated by their parties. Every German citizen who is 18 or older can run for this office. Candidates who receive the most votes in each constituency win what is known as a *Direktmandat* (direct mandate) and automatically become members of parliament. These representatives make up 50% of the *Bundestag*.

A second vote is used to vote for a particular party. The proportion of the total vote each party receives determines the total number of seats that each party will hold in the *Bundestag*. The second vote therefore determines a party's “proportional representation” in parliament. Not every party will make it into the parliament—they need at least 5% of the second vote nationwide,

or they need to win at least three constituencies as direct mandates to sit in parliament. Representatives elected from votes for parties make up the other 50% of the *Bundestag*.

Before elections are held, each party in every state prepares a "state list" (*Landesliste*) with the names of candidates the party would like to nominate as members of the *Bundestag*. These are the people who would represent their party in the *Bundestag* as a result of the second vote. Direct mandate winners automatically get a seat; the remaining 50% of seats are then assigned for each party in the order of names listed on that party's state list.

If candidates running under a specific party receive more votes with the first vote than their party did with the second vote—for example they get 55 direct mandates, but only 50 party seats in the parliament according to the second vote, the extra 5 direct mandates still automatically go to the *Bundestag* as "overhang seats" (*Überhangsmandate*). The other parties must not be at a disadvantage, so they then receive "leveling seats" (*Ausgleichsmandate*). This increases the number of parliament representatives for all other parties on a percentage basis (in the example above they would receive an extra 10% of their election results, since 5 extra out of 50 is 10%). This restores the balance to the share of seats relative to the overall results of the second vote. (This concept also explains why the total number of *Bundestag* members varies from election to election.)

Once seats have been assigned to the different parties, the parliament then needs to form a government. More than half (50%+) of the seats are needed to form a majority government. It is very unlikely for one party to earn that many seats during an election, so this is where coalitions come into play. Parties are usually only able to achieve the 50% needed by forming a coalition with other parties. Since 1945, there has only been one time (1957) that one party alone won the majority. Forming coalitions can take time, as parties need to agree on their objectives and priorities, and each party has to make compromises. The agreed-upon terms are defined in a coalition agreement that all involved parties must approve. To simplify these coalition pairings for the man-on-the-street, nicknames based on the parties' color combinations are often used by politicians and the press. For example, the Jamaica coalition, referring to the colors of the Jamaican flag (black for CDU/CSU, yellow for FDP, and green for the Greens), the Traffic Light coalition (red for SPD, yellow for FDP, and green for the Greens), and the Christmas coalition (red for SPD and green for the Greens) are all common nicknames recognized by most Germans. Another coalition possibility is the Grand Coalition, which consists of the two major parties, whichever two those happen to be at that time. Typically, a coalition consists of one major party and one smaller party.


Once a majority government has been formed, the chancellor can then be elected by the government.

#### ► Resources

- Korte, Karl-Rudolf. "Das Personalisierte Verhältniswahlrecht: Bpb." Bpb.de, Bundeszentrale Für Politische Bildung, 19 May 2009, [www.bpb.de/politik/wahlen/bundestagswahlen/62524/personalisierte-verhaeltniswahl?p=all](http://www.bpb.de/politik/wahlen/bundestagswahlen/62524/personalisierte-verhaeltniswahl?p=all).
- Mendelson, Marc., Rauer, Georgia. "Wie wird der Bundestag gewählt?" Deutscher Bundestag, Referate Öffentlichkeitsarbeit, Druckhaus Waiblingen Remstal-Bote GmbH, Aug. 2016, <https://www.btg-bestellservice.de/pdf/70129500.pdf>.

#### ► Further background information

- "How do German elections work?" *YouTube*, uploaded by CNBC International, 14 September 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gn45xqIK0uA>.
- "How the German Government Works." *YouTube*, uploaded by Bertelsmann Foundation, 16 October 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LqVqzE1utKw/>.
- "The German election system." *YouTube*, uploaded by explainitychannel, 19 January 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xnvPoRethYI>.

 **TIME:** 2–3 45minute periods

## CONCEPTS LIST

- Federal Republic of Germany
- Parliament
- *Bundestag*
- *Bundesland / Bundesländer*
- *Bundesrat*
- Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU, *Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands/Christlich-Soziale Union*)
- Social Democratic Party (SPD, *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*)
- Free Democratic Party (FDP, *Freie Demokratische Partei*)
- The Left (*Die Linke*)
- The Greens (*Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*)
- Alternative for Germany (AfD, *Alternative für Deutschland*)
- Democratic
- Federal
- Constitutional
- Coalition
- Proportional representation

## INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES

- Political Parties in Germany (**Handout 4.2.1**)
- German Political Parties Jigsaw Activity (**Handout 4.2.2**)
- Clarke, Sean. "German elections 2017: full results." *The Guardian*, 25 September 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2017/sep/24/german-elections-2017-latest-results-live-merkel-bundestag-afd>.
- "Definition Coalition." *Coalitions: A Guide for Political Parties*, First edition, The National Democratic Institute & The Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights, 2015, Washington, DC, (p. 13), [https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Coalitions\\_A%20Guide%20for%20Political%20Parties%20%281%29.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Coalitions_A%20Guide%20for%20Political%20Parties%20%281%29.pdf).
- "Distribution of seats in the German *Bundestag* 2019." *Official website of Deutscher Bundestag*, last updated January 2019, <https://www.bundestag.de/en/parliament/plenary/distributionofseats>.
- "Figure 1: Advantages and Disadvantages of Coalition Building." *Coalitions: A Guide for Political Parties*, First edition, The National Democratic Institute & The Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights, 2015, Washington, DC, (p. 21), [https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Flyer%2010.22\\_0.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Flyer%2010.22_0.pdf).
- "German Political Parties." *Handbook Germany*, 2018, <https://handbookgermany.de/en/rights-laws/political-parties.html>.
- "Germany's election results in charts and maps." *The Financial Times*, <https://www.ft.com/content/e7c7d918-a17e-11e7-b797-b61809486fe2>.
- "Germany's Voting System Explained." *Spiegel Online*, 19 September 2013, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/german-election-system-explained-a-923243.html>.
- "How do German elections work?" *YouTube*, uploaded by CNBC International, 14 September 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gn45xqIK0uA>.
- "How the German Government Works." *YouTube*, uploaded by Bertelsmann Foundation, 16 October 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LqVqzE1utKw/>.
- "Jigsaw instructions." *The Teacher Toolkit*, last updated January 2018, <http://www.theteachertoolkit.com/index.php/tool/jigsaw>.
- Staudenmeier, Rebecca. "How does the German general election work?" *Deutsche Welle*, 24 September 2017, <https://www.dw.com/en/how-does-the-german-general-election-work/a-37805756/>.
- "The German election system." *YouTube*, uploaded by explainitychannel, 19 January 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xnvPoRethYl>.

All handouts  
can be found at  
[www.goethe.de/  
germanyinfocus](http://www.goethe.de/germanyinfocus)

## INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

View the video, "How do German elections work?" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gn45xqlK0uA> for an overview of how German elections work.



## ? SUPPORTING QUESTION #1

### What are the political parties currently represented in the German Bundestag?

#### ► Formative Performance Task

Divide students into groups of 6. This will be their 'home group.' They will be responsible for teaching their assigned reading selection to the members of this group.

Next using **Handout 4.2.1**, assign one of the German political parties that currently have seats in the *Bundestag* to one individual student in each 'home group.' Now, separate the students again, calling them out by which political party they have been assigned. This group forms their 'expert group.' (The number of students in each 'expert group' will depend on the total in the class.)

Each expert group should read the assigned selection together, discuss the information, complete the corresponding section on **Handout 4.2.2**, and determine how best to present their information to their home groups. To distinguish themselves by party when they get back to their home groups, you might even ask them to make nametags in the color of their assigned party.

Students now regroup with their home groups. Each student is responsible for teaching the students in their home group about their assigned party. Members of the home group complete the corresponding section of **Handout 4.2.2** as information on each political party is shared.

After they have information about each party listed on **Handout 4.2.2**, prompt the students to demonstrate their understanding individually, using the political view scale on **Handout 4.2.2**, and arrange the German parties from left to right, with the left having the most liberal views and the right having the most conservative views.

**\*Note:** "Jigsaw instructions." *The Teacher Toolkit*, last updated January 2018, <http://www.theteachertoolkit.com/index.php/tool/jigsaw>.



#### ► Resources

- Information on **one (1)** German political party cut out from: Political Parties in Germany (**Handout 4.2.1**)
- German Political Parties Jigsaw Activity (**Handout 4.2.2**).
- Clarke, Sean. "German elections 2017: full results." *The Guardian*, 25 September 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2017/sep/24/german-elections-2017-latest-results-live-merkel-bundestag-afd>.
- "Distribution of seats in the German *Bundestag* 2019." *Official website of Deutscher Bundestag*, last updated January 2019, <https://www.bundestag.de/en/parliament/plenary/distributionofseats>.
- "Germany's election results in charts and maps." *The Financial Times*, <https://www.ft.com/content/e7c7d918-a17e-11e7-b797-b61809486fe2>.
- "German Political Parties." *Handbook Germany*, 2018, <https://handbookgermany.de/en/rights-laws/political-parties.html>.



## ❓ SUPPORTING QUESTION #2

### What is a political coalition/political alliance?

#### ► Formative Performance Task

As a class, brainstorm the definition of a coalition then share the following definition:

A coalition is usually a temporary pact or partnership between two or more political parties, for the purpose of gaining more influence or power than the individual groups or parties can hope to achieve on their own. (*Coalitions: A Guide for Political Parties* p. 13.)

Working in the same political party groups from task #1, each group should determine the advantages and disadvantages for their political party in forming a coalition using “Figure 1: Advantages and Disadvantages of Coalition Building” listed in the resources, as a guide.

Using the information about each political party from task #1, each political party should then determine which party or parties they might be able to form a coalition with and why.

#### ► Resources

- “Definition Coalition.” *Coalitions: A Guide for Political Parties*, First edition, The National Democratic Institute & The Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights, 2015, Washington, DC, (p. 13), [https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Flyer%2010.22\\_0.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Flyer%2010.22_0.pdf).
- “Figure 1: Advantages and Disadvantages of Coalition Building.” *Coalitions: A Guide for Political Parties*, First edition, The National Democratic Institute & The Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights, 2015, Washington, DC, (p. 21), [https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Flyer%2010.22\\_0.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Flyer%2010.22_0.pdf).



## ❓ SUPPORTING QUESTION #3

### What coalitions are currently in place in the German Bundestag?

#### ► Formative Performance Task

In small groups ask students to access information on the current German government and to briefly outline any coalition(s) in place. Which issues have those parties agreed to pursue together? Which barriers do they recognize as possibly preventing any of those parties from achieving their objectives as a result of this coalition?

As a class discuss the findings. Based on their understanding of Germany's political parties, were there any surprises?

#### ► Resources

- Internet Access

## ☑️ SUMMATIVE PERFORMANCE TASK

### What is a multiparty political system and how does it work?

Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster, essay) that addresses the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from historical and contemporary sources while acknowledging competing views.

### ✚ EXTENSION (OPTIONAL) TASK

Using their understanding of the German political parties, students will determine how Germany's political landscape changed during the most recent election, and the possible reasons for this change. Analyze the results of the most recent German election results you can find online.

### ★ TAKING INFORMED ACTION

**UNDERSTAND** Many young Germans are involved in politics, and they often follow a political youth party.

**ASSESS** Look at some of the political youth organizations in Germany, and explore how they are empowering young people to take part in politics: *Junge Union* (Youth Union), *Jungsozialisten/innen* (Young Socialists), *Junge Liberale* (Young Liberals), *Linksjugend* (Left Youth), *Die Grüne Jugend* (Green Youth). Which youth organizations for political parties are there in your country?

**ACT** Become an active citizen. Attend school board meetings to learn about current issues that may affect students in your district; attend town or city council meetings to hear the plans and problems being addressed; keep current with news about your state government and legislation being considered.