

## 5.3 THE BUNDESTAG AND GERMANY'S MULTIPARTY POLITICAL SYSTEM

### ? FOCUS QUESTIONS:

- How are legislatures structured to reflect the different political ideologies of the populace?
- Are there advantages of one organizational pattern over another? In what ways are two-party and multiparty political systems similar and different?
- What are some of the advantages and challenges of each system?

### STANDARD #6 POWER, AUTHORITY AND GOVERNANCE.

#### LESSON OVERVIEW:

This lesson is designed to give students an understanding of the operation of the German *Bundestag* (the national parliament of the Federal Republic of Germany) through a simulation activity in which they will represent one of the five major political parties on a committee of the *Bundestag*. Students will be able to develop solutions to a major problem in Germany today. Students will be able to analyze the various domestic, political, economic and social factors of national and foreign policy development in Germany. Students will learn about the differences between a multiparty parliamentary system, such as the one in Germany.

#### TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Before beginning the activities of this unit, students should learn that the Federal Republic of Germany is composed of 16 *Bundesländer* (states) and that the Federal Republic of Germany is a democratic, federal and constitutional country. It has a bicameral legislature, composed of the *Bundesrat* (legislative body that represents all 16 states at the federal level) and the *Bundestag*. The *Bundesrat* is currently comprised of 69 members who are not elected directly, but delegates of their respective state governments. The *Bundestag* is elected every four years. Since the 2009 elections there are 622 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 population at large (as in the case of the U.S. President). Therefore, the executive and legislative branches of the German system are not fully separated—similar to the British system.



Unlike the two-party system of the United States and Great Britain, Germany has a multiparty system with, currently, five major political parties. The German system generally results in no *one* party having a clear majority of the votes in a legislative election. Multiparty systems, therefore, usually result in coalition governments which can be less stable than a single-party government in two-party systems. The current 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) and the Alliance 90/The Greens (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen).

Like the American system, there are numerous committees, which discuss the major issues of the day and debate proposed bills before they can reach a plenary ses-

sion of the *Bundestag*. German parliamentarians tend to vote along party lines: prior to debates, party members decide how they will vote and normally all members follow the decided party line.

### TIME:



(10) 45 minute class periods

### INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES:

- Access to Internet or a computer lab for the entire class
- Government Structure and Political Parties in Germany (**Handout 5.3.1 on Instructional Resource Disc**)
- Access to the Official website of the German *Bundestag*: [www.bundestag.de/htdocs\\_e/parliament/](http://www.bundestag.de/htdocs_e/parliament/)
- Access to YouTube



### PROCEDURE:



#### DAYS 1-2:

**Anticipatory Set:** The teacher should ask the students about their understanding of how the United States Congress functions. What are the three branches of government? How are the House of Representatives and the Senate structured? It is important that students have an understanding of the American political system, the different political parties and how congressional elections affect the U.S. government.

The teacher should divide the students into five groups and assign each group a political party represented in the German *Bundestag*: Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU), Social Democratic Party (SPD), Free Democratic Party (FDP), The Left (Die Linke), Alliance 90/The Greens (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen). The groups should not consist of an equal number of students, but instead reflect the proportion of seats each party has in the *Bundestag*. [Based on the results of the 2009 election, the CDU/CSU has 38% of the seats, SPD has 24%, FDP has 15%, Die Linke has 12%, and the Green Party has 11% (Bundestag, 2011)]. After dividing students into groups, the teacher should distribute the Government Structure and Political Parties in Germany Handout (**Handout 5.3.1 on Instructional Resource Disc**) for basic information on the parties of the German government. The first task for students as political representatives is the creation of a PowerPoint presentation about their assigned party. This will require Internet research.

#### DAYS 3-4:

The teacher should instruct the students that they will be representing their respective political parties in two parliamentary committees in the *Bundestag*. The teacher (alone or with the students) should decide which of the following contemporary issues should be discussed:

- Social Services
- Education
- Health Care
- Deployment of German Soldiers Abroad (e.g. Afghanistan)
- Use of Nuclear Energy
- Immigration and Integration
- European Union

Depending on the issue, one of the following *Bundestag* committees will meet in the simulation, respectively:

- *Labor and Social Affairs*

- Education, Research and Technology Assessment
- Health
- Foreign Affairs
- Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety
- Internal Affairs
- Affairs of the European Union

A committee is a forum in which members are able to concentrate on a single, specialized area of policy. The committee discusses all bills that have an impact on their respective fields of governance and attempt to find a compromise at the committee stage that is capable of commanding majority support in the plenary sessions. *Information on each of the committees and its members can be found at [www.bundestag.de/htdocs\\_e/committees](http://www.bundestag.de/htdocs_e/committees).*



#### DAY 5:

Using Microsoft Publisher (if available) the committee members should work together to create a brochure outlining the basic problem, short- and long-term effects and possible solutions concerning the topic of their committee. The brochures will be circulated among the rest of the members of the classroom *Bundestag*. After the class has been briefly presented with the two issues, it should vote (as members of their assigned political parties) on which issue they consider the most pressing, and this issue will become the focus of the debate.

#### DAY 6:

Students should discuss the topic(s) with the other members of their party. Students should come to class the next day with a one-minute speech outlining their position on the topic as well as their proposed solution(s). To give students an idea what a *Bundestag* committee session might look like, show a short clip of an actual session available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21MlrowJqqc>.



#### DAYS 7-8:

Each student should be given a placard with his/her party name on it. The class should simulate a session of the plenary. The teacher should act as the chair, recognizing speakers, keeping track of speaking time, etc. Students should raise their placards to be recognized by the chair. The parliamentary rules are available from:

[http://www.bundestag.de/htdocs\\_e/bundestag/function/legislation/index.html](http://www.bundestag.de/htdocs_e/bundestag/function/legislation/index.html)



After each student has given an introductory speech, students should debate the proposed solutions. A student may motion for an un-moderated caucus for a set period of time, during which students may form alliances with other parties and begin to draft a bill addressing the topic. If possible, students should continue to work on their bill outside of class.

#### DAYS 9-10:

Students, representing the different political parties, should come to class with several copies of their draft bills for their fellow plenary members. Students must motion to introduce their bill. The introduction of each bill should be followed by a brief moderated caucus discussing its merits. After all bills have been discussed, the class should vote on each bill following the Rules of Procedure, which can also be found at: [http://www.bundestag.de/htdocs\\_e/bundestag/function/legislation/index.html](http://www.bundestag.de/htdocs_e/bundestag/function/legislation/index.html)



### WHOLE GROUP REFLECTION:

- The teacher should facilitate a debriefing of the simulation. What were the merits of the bill that passed? What would happen to the bill after it passed their committee? In what ways is the process similar to and different from the legislative process in the United States? Does the bill have a chance at effectively dealing with the problem?

**MODIFICATION:**

- This simulation is a lengthy activity, which could be slightly accelerated if the teacher pre-selected a debate issue.

**EXTENSIONS:**

- As a follow-up, the teacher may assign the students an essay discussing one of the other contemporary issues not selected for the *Bundestag* simulation.
- Students may wish to compare the British or Canadian systems to that of Germany.

**Source:**

Deutscher Bundestag. (2010). *Official Results for the 2009 Bundestag Election*. Retrieved January 2011 from [www.bundestag.de/htdocs\\_e/bundestag/elections/results/index.html](http://www.bundestag.de/htdocs_e/bundestag/elections/results/index.html)