

Elections for the State Legislature

The **elections of new legislature** in all federal states is every 4 or 5 years. The exact number of years is determined by the constitutions of the individual states. Like all other elections these state elections are free, secret, equal, and direct. All German citizens may participate who are of majority age (18). All citizens may be elected who have German citizenship and who are at least 18 years old.

There are several larger political parties that appear regularly on the ballot in both state and federal elections, as well as numerous smaller parties or organizations of voters that apply for seats in state legislatures.

Here's how the votes are cast in a state election. In the voting locations individual voters may cast two votes. With one vote they choose a candidate from their voting district, the voting district seat. With the other vote the citizens choose a representative for an at-large seat. On each half of the ballot (one list for district and one list for at-large representatives) only one nominee may be marked. If more than one nominee is marked, or if there are additional marks made on the ballot, it is invalid.

The number of votes a party receives determines how many seats it holds in a state legislature. The party with the most seats forms the state government. In most states it is necessary for the parties to form coalitions, which form a common state government.

Voters who cannot be present in their polling places on election-day (because they are traveling or are sick) may vote with an absentee ballot through the mail. Sunday is the day in the week, when Germans vote.

The most influential parties are:

Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD)

This is a social reformist party. It supports a social market economy based on private ownership, with controls on economic power. It calls for equal labor representation on corporate boards and a reform of the social and educational system in favor of the population with a lower income. It supports a strong European Union, a maintenance of the Atlantic alliance, and good relations with Eastern Europe.

Christian Democratic Union (CDU)

This party advocates the individual's responsibility for itself and within the society, private ownership combining free competition with social responsibility of the enterprises within the model of a social market economy and expanding European Union, a strong Atlantic alliance, and peaceful relations with the reforming states in Eastern Europe.

Alliance 90/The Greens (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen)

This party was formed when Bündnis 90, an eastern German grassroots movement, merged with The Greens, a western German party. The Greens evolved from citizens' initiatives and the environmental movement; they formally established themselves as a party in 1980. This party stands for social justice, peace and disarmament, human rights, equal rights for men and women, protection of minorities and environmental issues.

Free Democratic Party (FDP)

This party advocates a maximum of individual's liberty from state influence, economic freedom, and a cultural and educational policy free from church influence. In foreign policy the party strives for a strong western alliance, European integration, and peaceful relations towards Eastern Europe.

Christian Social Union (CSU)

This party is confined to Bavaria, where the CDU does not present itself for election, but is also strongly involved in policy making at the national level. The orientation is similar to the CDU's but slightly more conservative. In the Federal Parliament it forms a common fraction with the CDU.

PDS

This party is the successor of East Germany's Party of Socialist Unity (SED).