

Berliner Landeszentrale
für politische Bildung

BERLIN



DEMOCRACY IN BERLIN

Join in and get involved!



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Author: Tanja Binder

Editor: Julia Hasse (State Agency)

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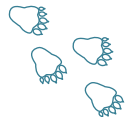
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BERLINERS ARE GETTING INVOLVED!

Berlin is home to around 3.7 million people and the city's population is increasing by thousands of people every year. A wide range of different ways of life, philosophical convictions and religious beliefs, as well as more than 180 nations are represented here. Berlin is varied and diverse: clubs, opera houses, the Biennale and Berlinale festivals, doner kebab, falafel and vegan currywurst. These are just a few of the things that attract students, creative people, start-up businesses and tourists from around the world.

Berlin is Germany's capital city, it is one of 16 federal states and a city with 12 districts. Berlin is also the capital of political involvement: there are few other cities in Germany where more demonstrations, referenda and other political campaigns are held. Political decisions are made all over Berlin: at the Bundestag, the Red City Hall and in the districts.

Many Berliners participate in these and are committed to matters concerning their city - in their neighbourhood, at school, in the workplace or by joining a political party or movement.

What can you do to get involved?

How are democratic decisions made?

And how can you participate in shaping these decisions?

You will find the answers to these questions on the next few pages.

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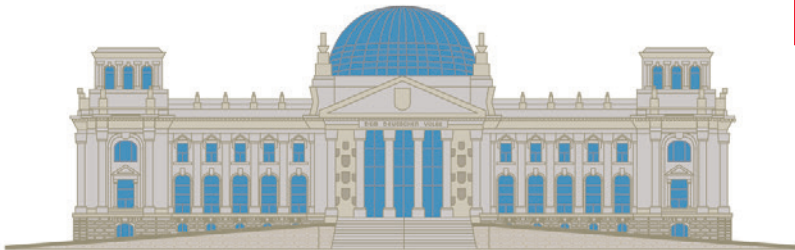
PART 4 DEMOCRACY SHAPED BY BERLINERS

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BERLIN - CITY OF DIVERSITY

Berlin has long been a lively and diverse metropolis. When Greater Berlin was established as a municipality in 1920, it was already home to close to four million people. In the 'golden' 1920s, Berlin became a world city. At the start of the 1940s, the city was home to over four million people, more than today.

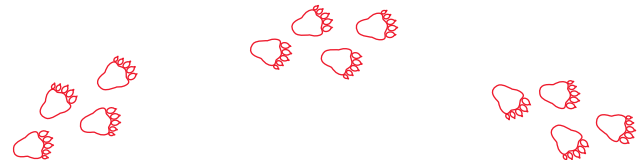
The population decreased significantly over the course of World War II. Only three million people lived in Berlin in 1945. When the Berlin Wall was built in 1961, the city was divided into East and West Berlin. Up to the reunification, around two million people lived in West Berlin and about one million in East Berlin.

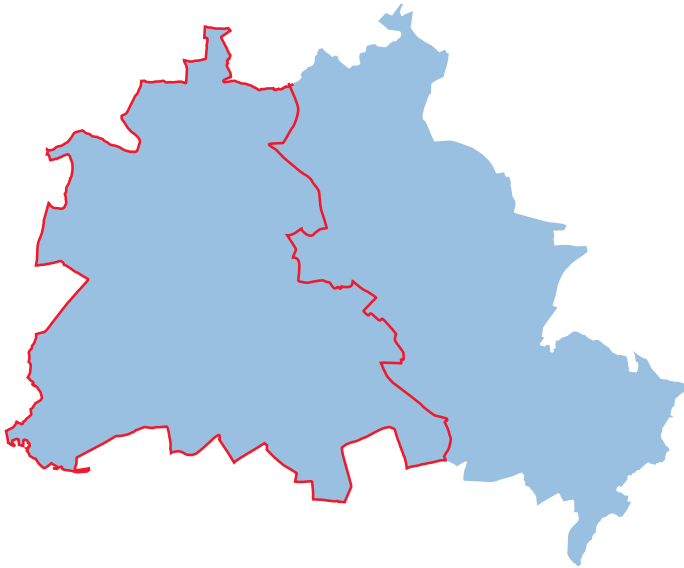


BERLIN IN THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST ERA

In the time of the National Socialist dictatorship (1933-1945), the city became the arena of demonstrations of power of the National Socialists and of violent persecution of Jews, Sinti and Roma, homosexuals and political opponents. At the same time, Berlin was a hub of resistance against the dictatorship. Nowadays, there are many memorial sites across the city to commemorate the crimes that were committed in the National Socialist era.

<https://www.berlin.de/politische-bildung/politikportal/lernorte/nationalsozialismus/>





BERLIN WALL

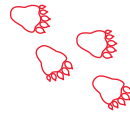
Between 1945 and 1990, Berlin became a symbol of the East-West conflict. The capital city that had been destroyed in the war was first divided into four occupation zones, and from 1961 it was split into two parts by the Berlin Wall. East Berlin became the capital of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), while West Berlin became an island enclosed by the Wall. In the late 1980s, demonstrations across the country and a growing citizen movement put the government of the GDR under ever greater pressure. The Wall fell on 9 November 1989 and Berlin became a hub of global political changes.

More fascinating information about the divided Berlin is available here:

<https://www.stiftung-berliner-mauer.de/>



Berlin's population has been increasing again for a number of years now. It is now the biggest German city and the third biggest city in the European Union. The city is likely to soon be home to more than four million people once again. This is challenging for the city and its politics: there must be enough housing, childcare facilities and schools, and other urban infrastructure - from healthcare through to transport networks - must also grow in line with the population growth.



COSMOPOLITAN BERLIN

Berlin is growing, because people from different countries are attracted to the city for various reasons. This has often been the case, also in the past.

In the 17th century, Berlin was a place of refuge for many Jews who had been expelled from Austria, and for many French protestants who were fleeing from religious wars. The liberal religious policies at the time allowed for peaceful coexistence of people of different beliefs. Berlin is still home to people from various religious groups nowadays. However, most Berliners do not belong to any religious community.

In the time of industrialisation in the 19th century, it was mostly migrant workers from rural areas of East Prussia and Swabia who came to Berlin, hoping to find work in the city.

After the Wall had been built, both East and West Berlin suffered from labour shortages. So-called contract workers were brought to East Berlin, especially from Poland and Hungary, and later also from Vietnam and Mozambique. The majority of people who came to Berlin and were referred to as guest workers, were from southern Europe and Turkey. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, people from around the world came to Berlin in the 1990s, including many refugees. Berlin is now home to more than 1.3 million people who have moved here from other countries.

IMMIGRATION CITY BERLIN

More information about the history of immigration is available here:
<https://www.berlin.de/lb/intmig/veroeffentlichungen/einwanderungsgeschichte/>

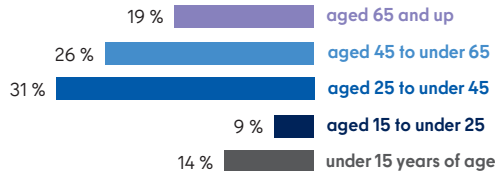


MODERN BERLINERS

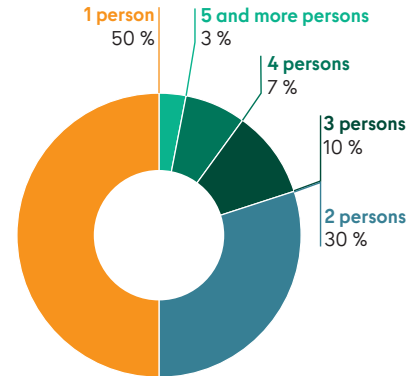
People with a wide range of backgrounds, views and ways of life are living in Berlin these days.

- Berlin is young: Almost half of all Berliners are under 40, almost one in four people is younger than 25. The average age is 42.
- Berliners are women, men and people with another gender identity or sexual orientation, who live on their own or with their partner or spouse. Just under 15,000 same-sex couples are in a registered civil partnership.
- Berlin is a city of singles: More than half of all households are single-person households and one in two Berliners is unmarried
- About 4,000 new Berliners are born every year. Most Berliners are parents, and many of them - women in particular - are single parents.

AGE



SIZE OF PRIVATE HOUSEHOLDS

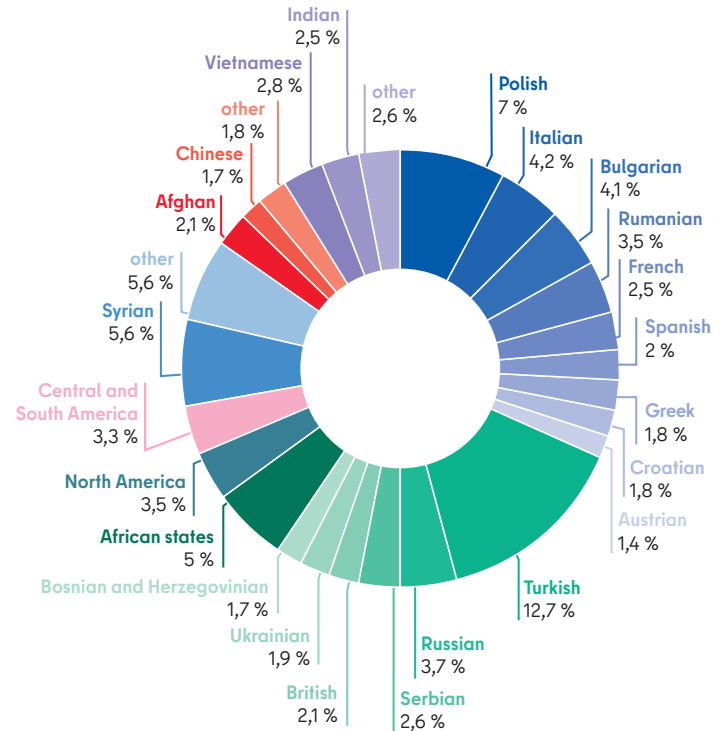


Information based on the statistical report A | 5 - H2 / 21 population register statistic Berlin 31 December 2021 p. 18-22



BERLIN - CITY OF DIVERSITY

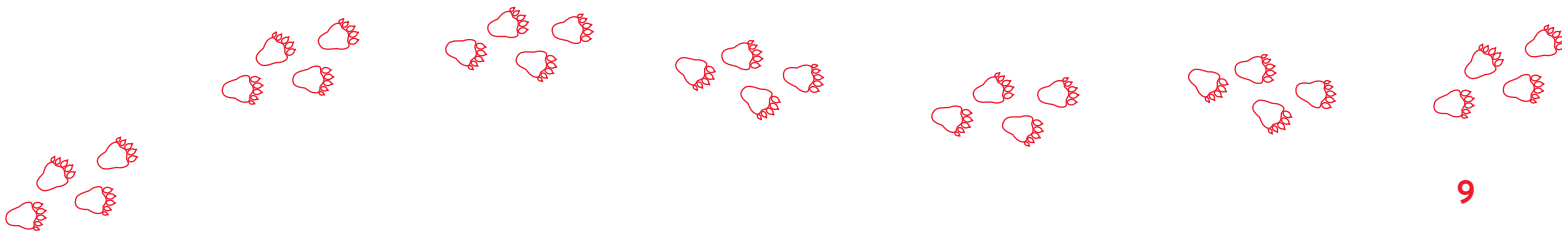
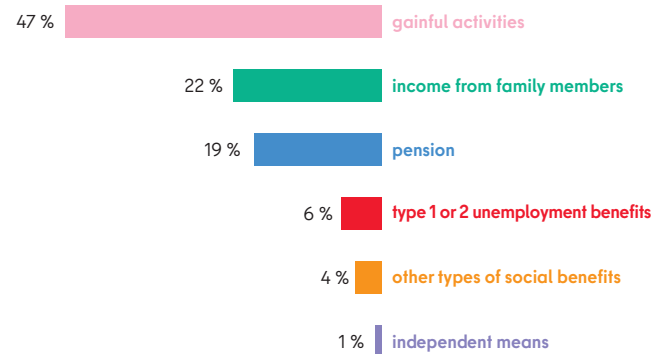
- Berliners are from around the world: The city is home to people from 180 nations. One in three Berliners has a migration background. One in five Berliners does not hold a German passport. Around 270,000 of these people are from states in the European Union (EU), around 100,000 are from an Eastern European country outside the EU (such as Russia and Ukraine), just under 100,000 are from Turkey, close to 90,000 are from a Middle East country such as Syria and just under 22,000 people are from Vietnam.



Information based on the statistical report A I 5 - H2 / 21 population register statistic Berlin 31 December 2021 p. 18-22

- Thousands of Berliners are naturalised every year - more than 7,000 Berliners were granted German citizenship in 2021.
- Berliners are pupils, students, trainees, pensioners, home-makers, employed and unemployed persons. Almost one in two Berliners is an employee of a company, about one in five people is a pensioner and one in ten people is still in school.
- Berlin is poor and rich: There are many people with a low income in Berlin, but also people with very high incomes. About one in ten Berliners is considered rich, while almost twice the number of people is regarded as poor.
- The average income of Berliners is also significantly lower than is the case in many other German cities. The average (net) household income in Berlin was EUR 3,145 in 2020.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME



CITY OF RENEWAL AND INNOVATION

There have been many instances where the city's diverse population gave rise to innovations and change. Berlin and its people have always been very innovative, committed and frequently also insurgent:

- 1953** a strike of East Berlin construction workers advocating for better pay and working conditions turns into a GDR-wide protest movement that is violently suppressed in June
- 1968** West Berlin becomes a hub of student protests against war and for a new social order
- 1971** the first organic food store opens in Kreuzberg
- 1973** the first doner kebab snack bar opens in Charlottenburg
- 1989** the GDR's biggest opposition rally takes place on Alexanderplatz in East Berlin on 4 November, and the Berlin Wall 'falls' just a few days later
- 1991** a lawyer with Turkish roots is appointed as a judge in Berlin for the first time
- 1996** the first inter-cultural carnival takes place in Kreuzberg
- 1996** a rainbow pride flag is raised on three Berlin district town halls for the first time
- 2005** the memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe is opened in the city centre as Germany's central Holocaust memorial
- 2019** International Women's Day on 8 March becomes a public holiday in Berlin

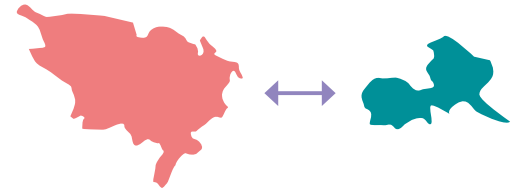
BERLIN: A CITY STATE, 12 DISTRICTS AND MANY NEIGHBOURHOODS

The districts and the many neighbourhoods of Berlin are just as diverse as the city's population. Berlin is divided into 12 districts that handle local tasks independently. Each of these districts is like a city in its own right.

CITY STATE OF BERLIN

Berlin is one of Germany's 16 federal states. Unlike most of the other states, which cover large areas and are divided into many municipalities, Berlin is a so-called city state. City states are limited to the size of the city itself, and are a municipality and a federal state at the same time.

This means: Berlin has to perform the political and administrative tasks of both a federal state and a municipality, as far as these are relevant to the entire city. Most municipal matters are, however, handled by the districts.



THE BIGGEST - THE SMALLEST

There is plenty of space in Treptow-Köpenick. At around 168km², it is the biggest district. Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg is the district covering the smallest area. However, its 20km² are home to more than 289,000 people, making it the most densely populated district. The district with the greatest number of inhabitants is Pankow with around 413,000 people. Spandau has the fewest inhabitants, but its population of around 247,000 still corresponds to the size of a city.

THE YOUNGEST AND THE BABY BOOMERS



The 'youngest' district is Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg with an average age of 38. Steglitz-Zehlendorf is a little more mature with an average age of 46. The greatest number of babies were born in Pankow and Mitte in 2021.

THE MOST (MULTI-)CULTURAL



The greatest number of cultural sights - historic buildings, monuments, museums - can be found in Mitte. At around 55%, it is also the district with the greatest share of people with a migration background. Further districts that are home to an above-average number of people, who came to Berlin from around the world, are Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg and Neukölln.

SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS

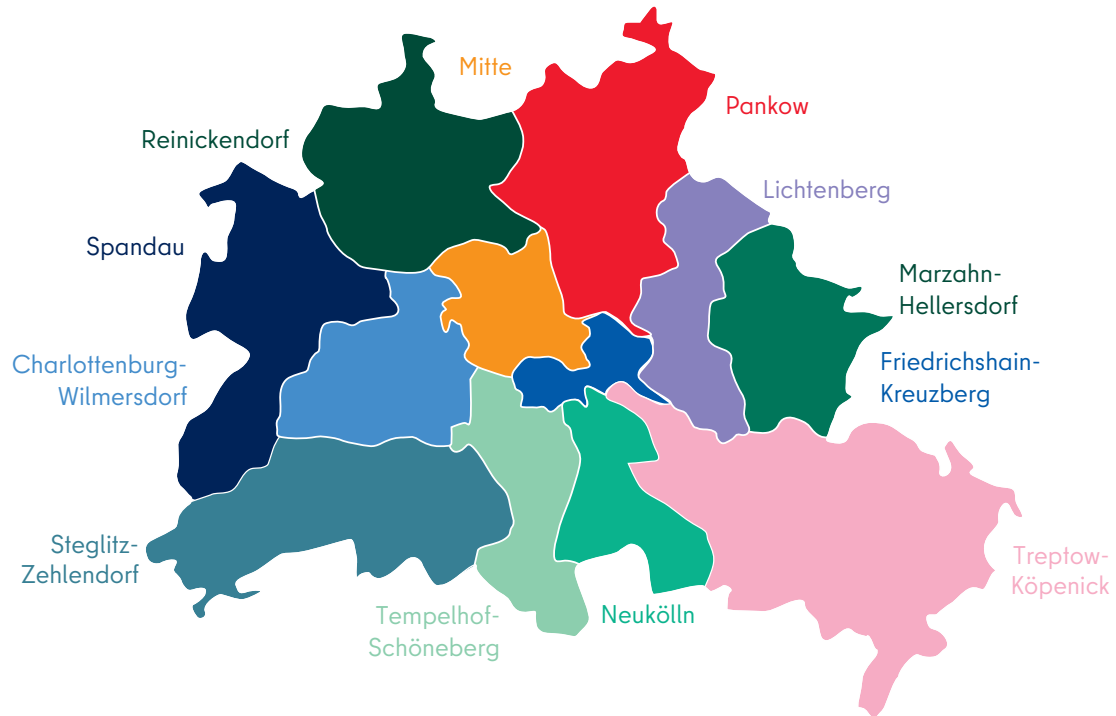
Treptow-Köpenick is the district with the greatest share of forested areas and bodies of water, and also home to Berlin's biggest lake: Großer Müggelsee. The biggest inner-city outdoor area can be found in Tempelhof-Schöneberg alongside one of the world's largest buildings: Tempelhofer Feld. Europe's biggest parkland zoo can be found in Lichtenberg: Tierpark Berlin is home to over 6,500 exotic animals.



PLATTENBAU MADE IN BERLIN

The biggest housing estate is called Gropiusstadt and is located in Neukölln. Marzahn-Hellersdorf, too, is famous for its many prefabricated buildings called 'Plattenbau', however, the district also features one of Berlin's biggest residential areas with single-family homes. Plenty of new housing was built all across Berlin in recent years, and all new neighbourhoods were created in several districts.





Berlin's total surface area: just under 892 km²

BERLIN: CITY OF POLITICS AND INVOLVEMENT

It is more apparent in Berlin than in any other German city that Germany is a democratic federation. Political decisions are made all over Berlin and all political levels are visible:

- The Bundestag and the federal government, who are based in Berlin-Mitte, make decisions for the whole of Germany and all those who live in Germany.
- The Berlin House of Representatives - the city's parliament - and Berlin's government in the 'Red City Hall' make decisions in matters that are relevant to the federal state of Berlin or the entire city.
- Berlin's 12 districts with their District Councils and city halls decide upon local, district-related matters and take care of all municipal administrative functions.

Political decisions are made across all levels. This means that rules are made that apply for all those who live here. All of these decisions are made democratically, by elected representatives and with the involvement of citizens.

However, such participation in democratic decisions is needed not only in the voting booth and not only on election days. Democratic involvement takes place every day and all over the city: in your neighbourhood, at school, in the workplace and in the streets.

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN FEDERAL POLITICS?

This brochure is mostly about Berlin as a federal state and a city. If you are interested in how the Bundestag and the federal government work and in ways to get involved, you should visit the Federal Agency for Civic Education (bpd):

<https://www.bpb.de/themen/politik/>





GERMANY: A DEMOCRATIC FEDERATION

A federation consists of a number of territorial units that can make independent decisions in certain matters. In Germany these are the 16 federal states which in turn are divided into municipalities or districts. Each of these units has its own parliament that was elected by its inhabitants, as well as its own government and courts of law. This is why each federal state also has its own state constitution that - in the same manner as the Basic Law - provides for important fundamental principles of social coexistence and of the democratic political system.

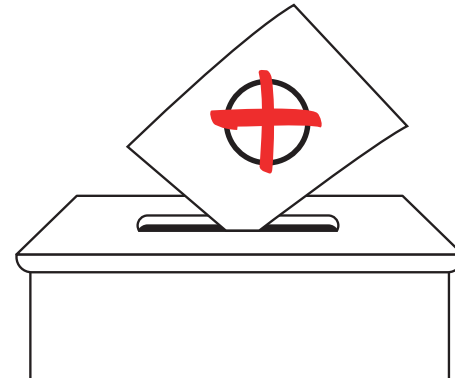
BERLIN IS SHAPED BY ITS RESIDENTS

- LEARNING - DISCUSSION - PARTICIPATION - PROTEST - LISTENING - HAVING A SAY -

Find out here, where your ideas are needed and how you can get involved in the democratic city society to help shape Berlin. All Berliners are welcome to get involved. There are many people in Berlin who are not allowed to vote - especially young people and those without a German passport - but there are many other ways to get involved in shaping the city that are open to everyone.

WHO CAN JOIN IN?

- All those with a particular interest in a topic by joining citizens' groups and associations
- Everyone through petitions to the House of Representatives or residents' enquiries addressed to the district
- Most people in a political party of their choice - the parties are free to decide, whether a minimum age or other conditions must be met to qualify for membership
- All residents of Berlin aged 16 and up as citizen delegates for their district, in people's initiatives or in a residents' request addressed to the district
- Children and youths from Berlin in pupils' councils, child and youth advisory councils or the child and youth parliaments of their districts
- Parents in parents' councils and committees
- Employees in labour unions, works and staff councils
- Students and trainees in student and trainee committees
- Berliners with a migration background in migration and integration advisory councils
- Dedicated individuals in advisory councils for people with disabilities that promote an inclusive society



- Senior citizens in seniors' advisory boards and committees
- German nationals and nationals of other EU states aged 16 and up in elections for the District Councils, in public petitions and referenda on the district level
- German nationals aged 18 and up in elections for the Bundestag and the Berlin House of Representatives, in plebiscites, petitions for referenda and referenda

This means that you, too, can take part in political decisions and get involved in shaping Berlin, your district, your neighbourhood and our life together. Don't leave politics to others – join in!

VOTING FOR EVERYONE

An expansion of voting rights has been discussed repeatedly in recent years. These debates are mostly about lowering the right to vote to 16 years of age and expanding municipal voting rights to include people who are not German nationals. These demands are backed by a large number of initiatives, however, the required political majorities have not been obtained to date.



BERLINERS AND THEIR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

WHY DO WE NEED A CONSTITUTION?

A constitution is a set of rules that determines the fundamental order of a society. In its state constitution, Berlin has laid down its structure as a federal state and a city and the structure of its districts. These principles and rules for coexistence in society rank higher than all other laws of the state of Berlin. All political decisions must comply with the principles that are specified in the state constitution.

In addition to these fundamental rights, Berlin's state constitution also comprises other important rules that ensure that Berlin is governed democratically.

BERLIN'S STATE CONSTITUTION

Following the city's unification, Berlin's state constitution was carefully revised in the 1990s. In 1995 it was adopted by the House of Representatives and in a referendum among Berliners with a very large majority. Any changes to the constitution require a resolution of the Berlin House of Representatives with a clear majority: at least two thirds of the Representatives must agree to such a change. An additional referendum is required in some cases.

Fundamental rights are enshrined in the German Basic Law and Berlin's state constitution to ensure that all Berliners can live freely and participate in society.

Our everyday lives are governed by these fundamental rights and they apply for everyone – also for you:

- the inviolability of human dignity
- the right to free development of one's personality



Berlin's constitution guarantees a right to education and the state thus undertakes to provide all human beings with access to education and culture.

- the right to life and physical integrity
- the right to equal treatment before the law and protection against discrimination (principle of equality)



Protection against discrimination explicitly includes sexual identity in Berlin.

- freedom of faith, conscience and religion
- freedom of opinion, information and the press
- freedom of assembly and association



Berlin grants freedom of assembly and association to all people in Berlin, in the Basic Law these freedoms are only granted to German nationals.

- inviolability of privacy of correspondence, postal items and telecommunication
- inviolability of the home
- protection of marriage and the family



In addition to particular protection of marriage and the family, the protection of single parents and children's rights are also enshrined in Berlin.

- the right to free choice of profession
- the right to own property
- the right to petition

DID YOU NOTICE ANYTHING?

The constitution grants you rights and freedoms and it does not provide for any obligations. These rights are designed to protect you and everyone who lives in Berlin and in Germany against state arbitrariness. These fundamental rights must not be removed through political decisions, and they must only be restricted if exceptional reasons apply. They can be claimed before a court.

DEMOCRATIC BERLIN

As one of Germany's 16 federal states, Berlin is bound by the Basic Law. It provides that all federal states, municipalities and districts in Germany are composed based on democracy, the rule of law and social principles.

DEMOCRACY:

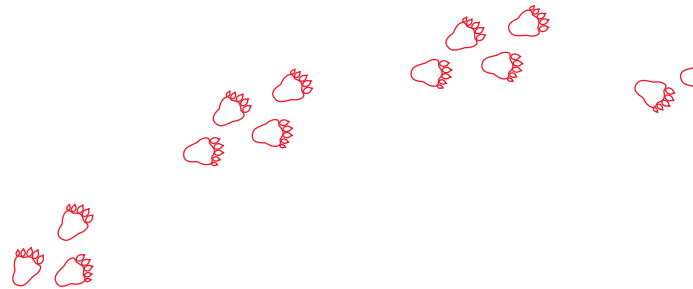
The constitution determines how the people should rule ('demo-cracy' = 'people's rule'). It must be regulated, how citizens can participate in governance and how they can control it: How Representatives - in Berlin the House of Representatives and the District Councils - are elected. How the government and administration - in Berlin the Senate and the District Offices - and other central state bodies such as courts are appointed. Other aspects that are specified in a constitution include the rules for making political decisions, who has the right to vote and the principles for holding elections and votes.



The Berlin state constitution provides for various forms of direct democratic involvement that enable Berliners to directly participate in political decisions on the state and district level. You will find out more about this from page 49.

SEPARATION AND CONTROL OF POWERS:

A constitution determines who is allowed to make which decisions for the general public. It defines how laws are made, what are the tasks, rights and duties of the parliament as the legislative power, the government and its administration as the executive power and the courts as the judiciary. In a democracy, duties must be divided between these three powers that must control each other.



CONSTITUTIONAL STATE:

Democratic decisions should exist not only on paper but must be applied in reality. In addition, citizens must be protected against state arbitrariness. This is why the principle of the constitutional state is enshrined in the constitution. This means that state bodies such as the government and authorities must only act based on existing laws. A very important point is that rights can be claimed before a court and that the courts are independent.

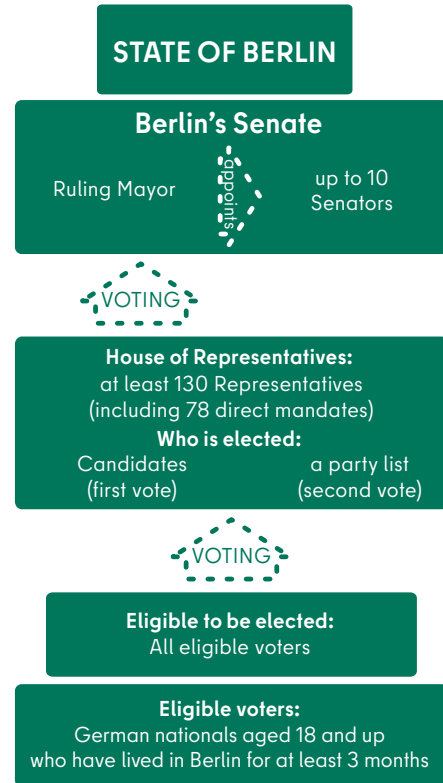
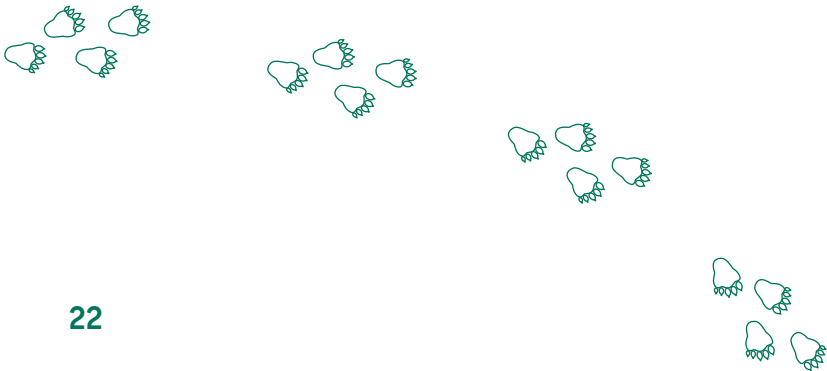
STATE OBJECTIVES

So-called state objectives can also be specified in a constitution. These are fundamental objectives and values that a society pursues. These are not enforceable, but are intended to provide guidance for political decisions. Berlin, for example, set itself the objective to protect the right to work by creating jobs and to promote the right to adequate housing through residential construction measures.



HOW IS BERLIN GOVERNED?

Berlin is governed democratically. This means that the parliament and the government are formed through regular elections. The Berlin House of Representatives is the parliament that is directly elected by eligible voters from Berlin. The Representatives then elect the Ruling Mayor who forms the government – the Senate – together with 10 Senators. The House of Representatives, the Senate and the administrative bodies are jointly responsible for the political affairs of the federal state of Berlin and the city as a whole.



WHAT DECISIONS ARE MADE IN BERLIN?

Many political decisions in Germany are made by the Bundestag and the federal government. However, the state of Berlin does decide upon various matters that are relevant to our everyday life. The most important areas of responsibility include:

- **Education offerings for children, youths and adults** – child-care facilities, primary schools, secondary schools, higher education institutions and other education facilities such as the Berlin State Agency for Civic Education
- **Cultural offerings and cultural promotion** – the state museums and other cultural facilities of the state such as the Deutsche Oper, the four state theatres, the philharmonic orchestra, memorials and libraries, as well as exhibitions, festivals, readings and concerts and support for artists
- **Regional development and urban planning** – housing construction, local public transport and traffic planning, major construction projects, landscape and nature protection, energy and water supply and waste removal
- **Business development** – establishing of new companies, consultation services, practical support and financial assistance through the Berlin investment bank for companies
- **Public security and order** – measures under regulatory law, organisation of the police, justice, tax authorities, protection of the state constitution and the Berlin fire brigade
- **Organisation of the state administration** – human and financial resources for authorities and division of tasks between the authorities
- **The state budget** – income and expenditure of the state of Berlin, determination of state tax amounts and land transfer tax and distribution of expenditure for the different tasks – in other words: how much money is spent on what in Berlin.

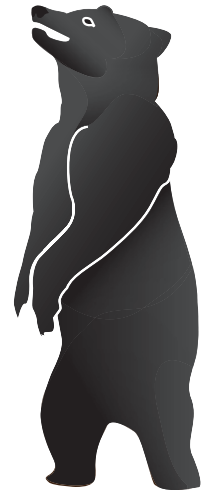
PARTICIPATION IN SOCIETY FOR EVERYONE

Furthermore, Berlin has also set itself the target to improve participation of all people in the city's democratic society. This is why Berlin has had rules in place since 2010 that are designed to promote social involvement of people with a migration background. The corresponding law was thoroughly revised in 2021. The goal is to achieve equal participation opportunities for people with a migration background across all areas of social, cultural, economic, political and societal life. Specific measures were drawn up to ensure that matters that are relevant to people with a migration background receive stronger consideration, that participation opportunities are improved and that more people with a migration background are employed in public administration.

People with a migration background are also to be protected against discrimination and disadvantages, based on the General Equal Treatment Act (AGG) at the national level and the State Anti-Discrimination Act (LADG) at the state level. The objective of the General Equal Treatment Act is to prevent and remove disadvantages due to racism, ethnic background, gender, religion, ideology, disabilities, age or sexual identity.

The State Anti-Discrimination Act enables people to take action in case of discrimination by public bodies of the state of Berlin.

<https://www.berlin.de/sen/lads/recht/ladg/ombudsstelle/>



THE PARLIAMENT: THE BERLIN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The House of Representatives is the parliament, Berlin's legislative assembly. The Representatives make important political decisions on behalf of all Berliners.

HAVE YOU EVER WATCHED YOUR REPRESENTATIVE AT WORK?

The House of Representatives meets in the building of the former Prussian state parliament on Niederkirchnerstrasse 5 in the Mitte district. Parliamentary sessions and committee meetings are usually open to the public.



You need to register to attend a session (www.parlament-berlin.de/service/besucherdienst).

No registration is necessary, if you would like to watch the Representatives via the live stream:

www.parlament-berlin.de/mediathek/parlament-live



The most important duties of the House of Representatives as the parliament include:

- **Political decisions** are prepared, discussed and taken by the Representatives. Strict rules that determine the process apply for law-making.
- The Representatives decide on Berlin's **budget**. This means that they decide, whether taxes should be raised or lowered in Berlin and how much money is spent on what.
- The **Ruling Mayor** is elected with a majority vote of the House of Representatives. The Representatives can force the Mayor to resign through a motion of censure, if they are unhappy with their work. More than half of the Representatives must agree to such a motion. The House of Representatives can also dismiss itself - new elections must be held if two thirds of the Representatives vote in favour of the decision.
- The Representatives **control Berlin's government and administration**. They check, whether the decisions made by the House of Representatives are put into practice, whether the government, administration and authorities are performing their tasks adequately and whether money is being spent as agreed. This task is performed by the opposition parties in particular.

BERLIN VOTES

Every five years, Berlin's voters decide, who should join the House of Representatives to make decisions for all of Berlin. The most recent elections took place on 26 September 2021.

The House of Representatives has at least 130 members in total. They are referred to as Members of the House of Representatives. 78 of these are elected as direct candidates with the first vote – the person that gets the highest number of votes in their constituency is voted directly into the House of Representatives. This is called a direct mandate. The remaining Representatives are determined by the party lists and the parties' shares of the second votes. The number of second votes determines the total number of seats a party will hold in the House of Representatives.



THE FIVE-PERCENT HURDLE OR ELECTION THRESHOLD

Only parties that have received at least five percent of second votes cast across Berlin are granted seats in the House of Representatives for their second votes. Voters could choose between 34 parties in the parliamentary elections held in 2021. If so many different parties were represented in the parliament, it would be extremely hard to obtain a majority for decision-making. The so-called election threshold was introduced to make it easier to obtain a political majority.

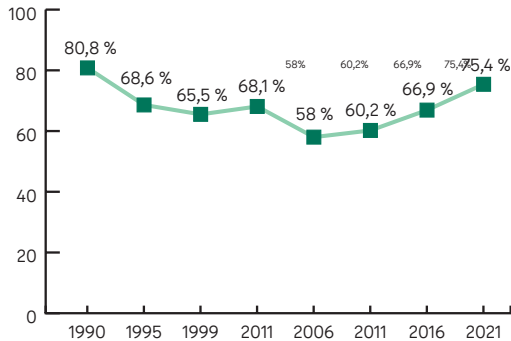
147 Representatives from six parties have formed the House of Representatives since the elections in 2021. There are more than 130 Representatives, as the number of direct mandates that some parties won with their candidates was greater than the total number of Representatives they would have been entitled to based on second votes. So-called overhang seats are used to accommodate the surplus direct mandates. As the balance of power between the parties must correspond to their share of votes, the other parties are granted so-called levelling seats.

Of the just under 3.7 million people who live in Berlin, around 2.4 million were eligible to vote at the most recent parliamentary elections held in 2021. Three quarters thereof took the opportunity and contributed to changing the balance of power in the House of Representatives and the governing coalition.

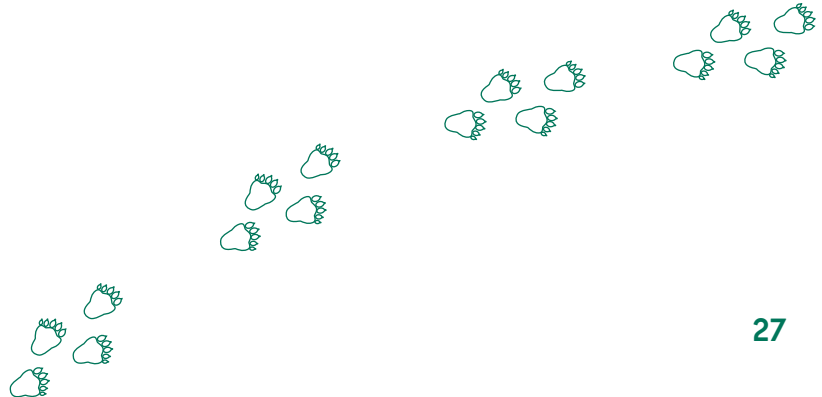
Willingness to vote has decreased considerably since 1990. While around 80% of Berlin's eligible voters cast their vote in the House of Representatives election in the year of the unification, voter turnout was at an all-time low in 2006 with only 58%. However, turnout increased once again for the 2016 and 2021 elections.

THE ROLE OF VOTERS

Citizens are able to express their political wishes in elections. Political parties and Representatives are elected and are instructed to make political decisions for everyone. Elections are also a means for holding politicians accountable: if the voters are not (or no longer) happy with their decisions, politicians must expect that they will not be elected again.



Voter turnout for Berlin's House of Representatives



POLITICAL PARTIES

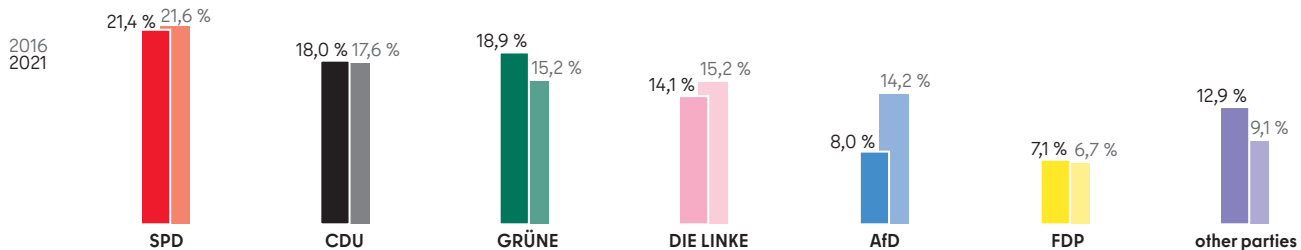
Would you like to make an informed voting choice, get politically involved or maybe even stand in an election yourself? In this case, you should find out which party comes closest to your personal views. The different parties represent different opinions about which political issues are most pressing and what are the best ways to solve societal problems.

Political parties are important and even essential organisations in a modern democracy. They represent the interests and views of their members in political decisions and nominate candidates for elections. Members of parties are involved in making decisions about factual political issues, as well as concerning the party's political personnel – you are guaranteed to be able to participate here!

VOTERS ALSO ENSURE FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR THE PARTY OF THEIR CHOICE

Parties must fund their work and their election campaigns. State party financing is an important source of income, alongside membership fees and donations. The amount of money a party receives from the state of Berlin depends in particular on the number of votes it received in the election. This means that by voting for a party, voters also support the party in question financially. This rule applies for all parties that received at least 1% of votes.

VOTING RESULTS FOR THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



28 Note: Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD); Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU); Alliance 90/The Greens (Grüne); Alternative for Germany (AfD); Free Democratic Party (FDP)

DUTIES OF THE REPRESENTATIVES

All Representatives meet for a plenary session every two weeks on a Thursday, to discuss political decisions and pass resolutions. The Representatives must come prepared: they must know what is on the agenda and may need to prepare a speech. However, this is just a small part of their work. Many other jobs need to be done in the 14 days between plenary sessions:

- Participation in committee and faction meetings
- Involvement and participation in their party - almost all Representatives are members of a party
- Activities in and for other associations and organisations
- Attending public events
- Consultations with staff members, colleagues, experts, stakeholders and conversations with Berliners

SALARIES OF REPRESENTATIVES: FAIR REMUNERATION OR UNJUSTIFIED ENRICHMENT?

Being a member of the House of Representatives is a full-time job. A salary is paid to ensure that not only wealthy people but everyone can be a Representative regardless of their income. Each member of the Berlin House of Representatives gets EUR 6,657 per month. The Representatives have to pay tax on this income. In addition, there are allowances for certain purposes: EUR 2,779 for travel costs, working materials and running an office and up to EUR 6,930 a month for paying staff (as of 2022). The salary and the additional allowances are linked to the development of incomes in Berlin and the inflation rate, which are calculated by the Statistics Office for Berlin-Brandenburg - the Representatives do not set these amounts themselves.

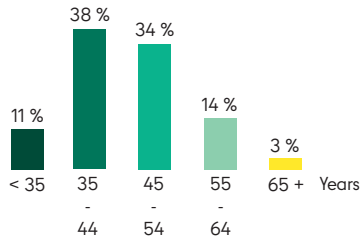
WHO ARE THE REPRESENTATIVES?

The share of women varies significantly between the different parliamentary parties. More than half of the Representatives are women only in the case of GRÜNE and DIE LINKE. 39 percent of the SPD Representatives are women. For the parties that have no quota system in place – CDU, FDP and AfD – the share of female Representatives ranges between 17 and 13 percent.

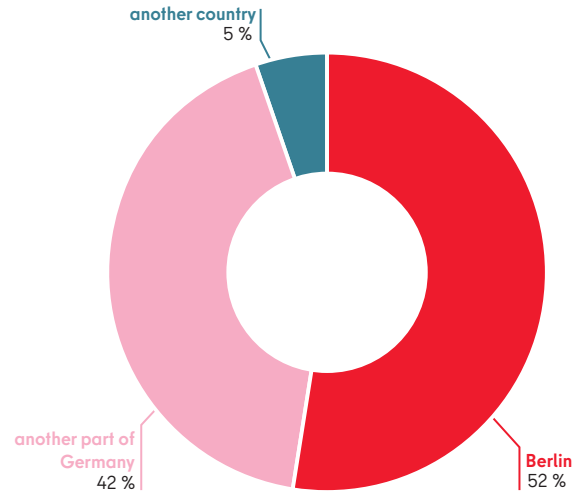
More interesting information about political involvement of women in Berlin is available here:
<https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/berlin/19040.pdf>



The Representatives are 45 years old on average. The youngest one is 21 and the oldest is 74 years old.

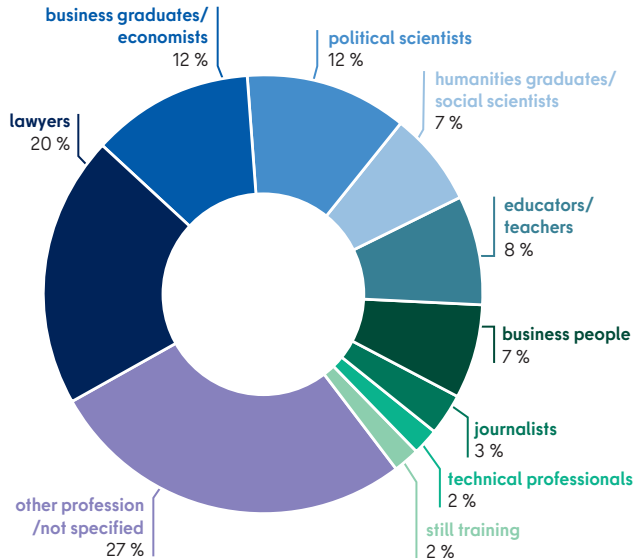


GEOGRAPHICAL ORIGIN



Source: <https://interaktiv.morgenpost.de/neues-abgeordnetenhaus-2021-berlin-wahl-abgeordnete-parlament/>

PROFESSIONS



Source: <https://interaktiv.morgenpost.de/neues-abgeordnetenhaus-2021-berlin-wahl-abgeordnete-parlament/>

DO YOU KNOW YOUR REPRESENTATIVES?

How about getting in touch with the Representatives for your constituency? Many Representatives are also available for question time sessions with citizens - in person, on the phone or virtually. Those sessions are opportunities for you to ask questions about current political affairs and to address problems.

The easiest way to find your Representatives is to visit this website: <https://www.parlament-berlin.de/das-parlament/abgeordnete>

Information about contact options can be found on the websites of the individual parties of the House of Representatives.



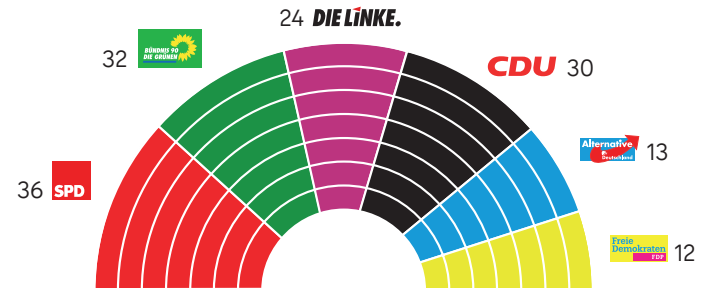
HOW DOES THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES WORK?

In every parliament, work is split among the representatives as it is impossible for everyone to do everything. This is why the Berlin House of Representatives has different factions and committees, in which Representatives meet in smaller groups on a regular basis. This makes it easier to find compromises and make decisions.

FACTIONS

Representatives with similar political views, usually from the same party, join forces by forming factions. In their faction they will discuss current problems, possible solutions and agree on shared political goals which they then advocate for together in the plenary sessions. This approach makes it easier for the different factions in the House of Representatives to come to an agreement on controversial issues, than would be the case if each Representative spoke for themselves.

A faction must consist of at least seven Representatives. Each Representative cannot be part of more than one faction. To make sure that the factions can work well and independently, they are provided with equipment and facilities such as faction rooms. They also receive money from the state budget for funding staff and material costs for their work at the House of Representatives.



Since the 2021 elections, there have been six factions in the House of Representatives



COMMITTEES

Most of the work for the House of Representatives takes place in the committees. Decisions are prepared and possible solutions are discussed, which are then presented to all Representatives to vote on. Representatives are working as experts for particular topics in the committees. In line with its size, each faction nominates one or multiple Representatives for each committee.

Since the 2021 elections, there have been 17 committees and five sub-committees. The Representatives decide, which committees they would like to form. There are only two committees that are prescribed as mandatory in the constitution: (1) The petition committee that processes and deliberates citizen input. (2) The committee for the protection of the constitution that exercises parliamentary control over this authority.

The other committees are each in charge of different subject areas:

- Education, Youth and Family
- Digitalisation and Data Protection
- Civic Involvement, Federal Affairs and Media
- Health, Care and Equality
- Interior Matters, Security and Order
- Integration, Work and Social Affairs
- Culture and Europe
- Mobility
- Sports
- Urban Development, Construction and Housing
- Environment, Consumer and Climate Protection
- Protection of the Constitution
- Constitutional and Legal Matters, Rules of Procedure, Anti-Discrimination
- Economy, Energy and Enterprises
- Science and Research.
- The main committee is responsible for all matters regarding the budget and finances.



POLITICAL DECISIONS: HOW A LAW COMES INTO EXISTENCE

Laws are political decisions that apply for everyone and that govern our coexistence in society. A law can only be passed by a majority of the elected Representatives or of eligible voters - in case of a referendum. Different interests and the rights and arguments of minorities should be taken into account as far as possible. This is why it is important that as many people as possible get involved and contribute. It is stipulated in the state constitution, how a law must come into existence.

Step 2 - Debate:

At least two debates must take place in plenary sessions. The details and any changes are coordinated by the committees in charge between those sessions.

FOUR STEPS TO CREATE A LAW

Step 1 - Draft law

Suggestions for a new law, changes to an existing law submitted by:

- State Government (Senate)
- one or more factions / at least ten Representatives
- a public initiative / a petition for a referendum

Exceptional case: The state budget is also passed as a law - the 'State Budget Act'. It can only be proposed by the state government. As is the case for all other laws, the Representatives can demand changes.





HOW IS BERLIN GOVERNED?



Step 3 - Passing:

The majority of Representatives agree → the law is approved;

No majority approval → the draft law has failed

Exceptional case: If the law provides for a change to the constitution, two thirds of Representatives must agree.



Step 4 - Entry into force:

The law is issued by the parliamentary president and published in the Journal of Laws and Ordinances for the State of Berlin.

EXCEPTIONAL CASE - LAWS REQUIRING A REFERENDUM:

A fusion of the federal states of Berlin and Brandenburg and any changes to the provisions regarding plebiscites and referenda stipulated in the state constitution require additional agreement of the majority of Berlin's eligible voters.

All laws and regulations must be published in the Journal of Laws and Ordinances for the State of Berlin. This enables everyone to review all rules that are in force.

<https://www.berlin.de/sen/justiz/service/gesetze-und-verordnungen/artikel.261829.php>



Once a law has been passed, it can only be changed through another amendment or a ruling by the Constitutional Court.

POLITICAL DECISIONS UNDER CONTROL

The powers in a democracy control each other: the parliament monitors the actions of the government and the courts check if the decisions made by the parliament and the government are legal.

ABGEORDNETE KONTROLLIEREN DIE REGIERUNG

The Senate always needs approval of the majority of Representatives for its endeavours. If the majority of Representatives is opposed to a plan of the government, a compromise must be found or the project will fail.

The Representatives are also able to critically question the government's actions: they can submit oral or written requests to demand information about particular governmental or administrative matters. If the Representatives feel that something is going seriously wrong, they can also set up an investigative committee. The opposition parties in particular use these instruments to criticise the actions of the government and to raise public awareness of controversial plans.

BERLIN'S STATE BUDGET

The state budget is particularly significant with regard to parliamentary control of the government. In the budget it is specified in advance, how much Berlin will be spending for which purposes. To this end, the Senate presents a draft State Budget Act for the Representatives to discuss and adjust, and which they must approve with a majority vote. Only then can the budget enter into force for the next two years, and can Berlin spend money on its facilities, projects and employees.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW IF PUBLIC FUNDS ARE HANDLED ADEQUATELY IN BERLIN?

This is checked by the Berlin Court of Auditors that will point out any wastefulness and mismanagement:

<http://www.berlin.de/rechnungshof/>



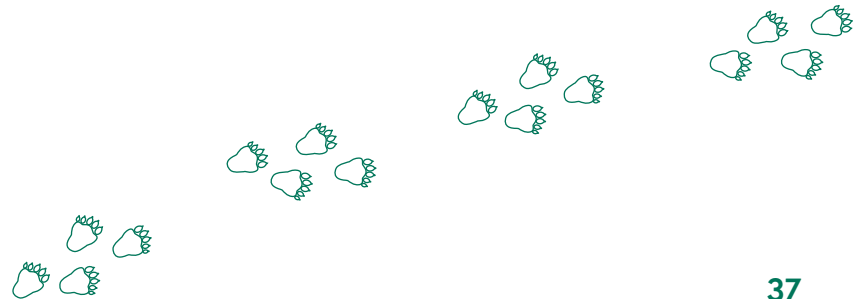
WHERE IS THE MONEY FROM THAT BERLIN IS SPENDING?

To be able to spend any money, Berlin also needs earnings, of course. The most important sources of income are:

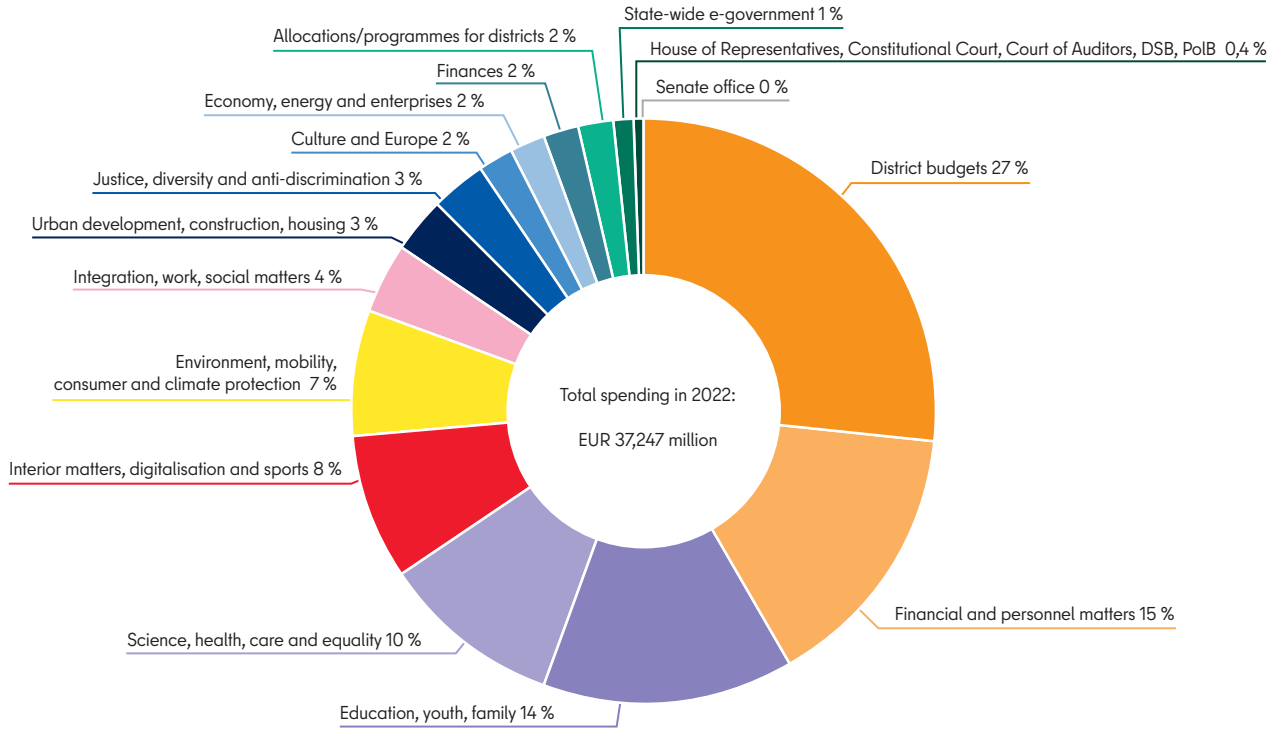
- Income from state taxes such as land transfer tax
- Income from duties, fees and fines
- Income from property and sales, shareholdings of the state, such as of Berliner Wasserbetriebe
- Berlin gets a share of national taxes, such as wage and income tax
- Resources from the fiscal equalisation scheme that provides for income of wealthier federal states to be redistributed to poorer states
- Berlin also receives funding from the federal government for tasks that Berlin carries out on behalf of the federation. This applies for most social benefits, for example.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO GET INVOLVED IN DECIDING HOW MUCH MONEY IS SPENT FOR WHICH PURPOSES IN BERLIN?

A state-wide participatory budget is planned for the 2023/24 budget, where citizens can get involved in deciding how a part of the budget funds are allocated.



WHAT DOES BERLIN SPEND THE MONEY ON?



THE GOVERNMENT: THE SENATE OF BERLIN



Berlin's government - the Senate - consists of the Ruling Mayor and up to ten Senators. The Ruling Mayor is elected by the House of Representatives and is usually a member of the strongest party. At least half of all Representatives must vote for this person. The Ruling Mayor will then nominate ten Senators. No approval from the House of Representatives is required. The Senate is bound by the laws in its actions, and requires approval from the majority of Representatives for all endeavours and decisions.

Would you like to find out about the plans of the current governing coalition?

The 2021-2026 coalition agreement can be found here:

<https://www.berlin.de/rbmskzl/regierende-buergermeisterin/senat/koalitionsvertrag/>



COALITION GOVERNANCE

It has been a long time since the majority of Representatives were last from a single party. Berlin has been governed by coalitions since 1975. This means that a government alliance is formed by at least two parties, who agree on important political endeavours and goals in a coalition agreement, and who share the Senate work. After all, a majority in the House of Representatives is needed for the government to make any important decisions. The existing coalition of SPD, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen and Die Linke was continued after the elections in 2021. CDU, AfD and FDP are the opposition parties.

TASKS OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE BODIES OF THE SENATE

The Senate is responsible for matters concerning the state and for municipal affairs that are relevant for the entire city.

The Ruling Mayor determines the general political objectives (guidelines). The Senators share the work according to subject areas by forming departments. They are independently in charge of these task areas and are responsible for them. This also includes running the corresponding Senate Administration with its authorities, offices and staff. Officials and public sector workers provide services and information for Berliners and companies here.

Berlin's Senate Administration with its staff of around 80,000 comprises various facilities, such as: the police and fire brigade, authorities ranging from the Fisheries Agency to the Berlin State Agency for Civic Education, the registry office, as well as tax offices, state theatres and museums, prosecution offices and courts ranging from the District Court through to the Social Welfare Court.

In addition, the state is also responsible for higher education institutions and the state's own enterprises, such as the public swimming pool operator Berliner Bäderbetriebe, the waste management company Berliner Stadtreinigungsbetriebe (BSR), the public transport provider Berliner Verkehrsbetriebe (BVG) or the water supplier Berliner Wasserbetriebe (BWB).

YOU DON'T KNOW, WHO TO TURN TO?

All services from A to Z and further information can be found on the service portal of the Senate Administration:

<http://service.berlin.de/>



DISTRICT POLITICS

Berlin has been divided into twelve districts since 2001, previously there were 23 districts. Each district is a city in its own right and with its own characteristics, thanks to the districts' population and area size. Some districts are trendy, others are a little more laid-back. Urban flair is combined with green oases in every district – some have more of the former, others more of the latter.

THE DISTRICTS' DUTIES

The districts make independent political decisions in public matters and they are responsible for carrying out all tasks related to municipal administration. The House of Representatives and the Senate are only responsible for matters that are relevant to the whole city of Berlin. One example of this is the future use of the large site of the former Tegel Airport. The District Offices and District Councils are in charge of all other local jobs.

MANY ASPECTS THAT MAKE LIFE IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD ATTRACTIVE ARE DECIDED IN THE DISTRICT

The district decides about maintaining and operating youth centres, sports fields and playgrounds, public swimming pools, parking-space management or about the spots in parks where barbecues are permitted. The district also makes sure that the district infrastructure is functional: cycle paths and streets, green spaces and squares, school buildings and their equipment and so on.

Since Berlin is a city state, the districts are not independent municipalities, as is the case in other parts of Germany. They are not entitled to levy taxes and duties, or to pass their own local laws (statutes). However, the districts are still responsible for various tasks that have an impact on everyday life in Berlin's districts and neighbourhoods. The most important tasks include:

- Drawing up land-use and landscape plans, maintaining the districts' own green spaces and transport routes and housing construction
- Maintaining and equipping general education schools
- Delegating tasks to private providers, e.g. for youth facilities
- Buying and selling shareholdings or land plots of the district
- District business promotion, providing advice to enterprises and start-ups and promoting the establishment of new enterprises
- Cultural and education offerings near people's homes, such as community colleges, music schools or district libraries
- Organisation of citizens' offices and public order offices
- Organisation of youth welfare offices and youth services
- Organisation of social welfare offices that provide advisory services for people in need and process applications for social benefits, such as subsistence allowances or housing benefits

HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED REAL-LIFE DISTRICT POLITICS?

The District Council meetings are generally open to the public. The Councillors can only decide in justified cases that the public should be excluded. You can attend the public sessions on site or in most districts also via live streaming.

More information is available from your District Council

<https://www.berlin.de/politische-bildung/politikportal/politik-in-berlin/hauptverwaltung-und-bezirksverwaltung/bezirksverordnetenversammlungen>



ELECTED IN THE DISTRICT: THE DISTRICT COUNCIL

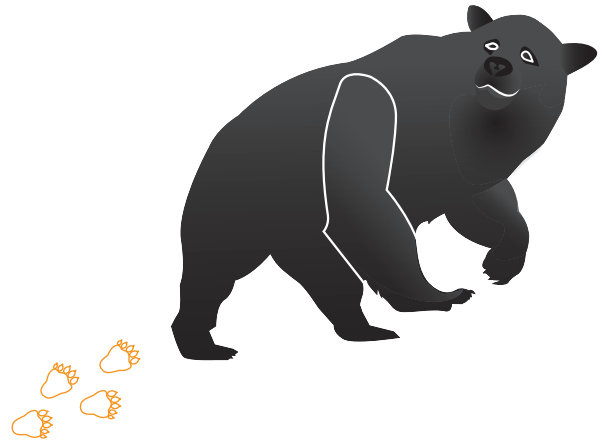
Berlin's districts are also organised democratically. There is a District Council that is elected by eligible voters who live in the district. The District Council is responsible for the district's self-governance together with the District Office and it controls the District Office.

DO YOU KNOW YOUR DISTRICT COUNCILLORS?

You will find all of them on the page of your District Council. Why not get in touch with the District Councillors, if you have suggestions or ideas regarding the development of your neighbourhood or district?

Find your District Council here:

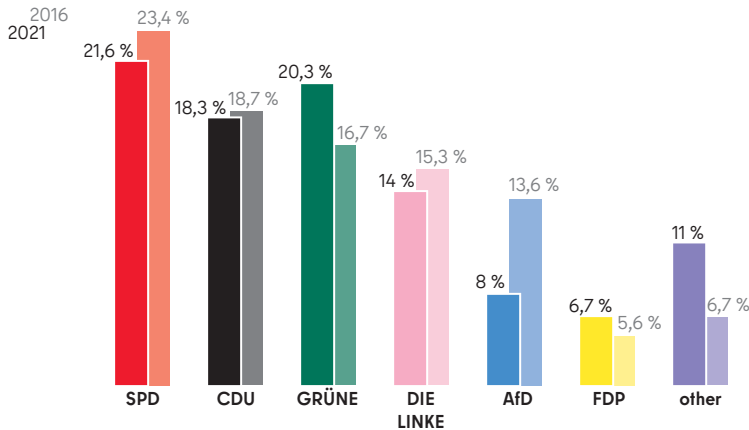
<https://www.berlin.de/politische-bildung/politikportal/politik-in-berlin/hauptverwaltung-und-bezirksverwaltung/bezirksverordnetenversammlungen>



DISTRICT POLITICS

Each District Council comprises 55 elected District Councillors. Parties and voters' associations with lists of candidates in a fixed order can run for the District Council. Individual candidates cannot put themselves forward for election.

Depending on the number of votes a party or voters' association receives in the district election, it is awarded seats in the District Council. However, a so-called election threshold applies for the District Council elections, too: only parties and voters' associations that received at least three percent of the votes cast in the district are awarded District Council seats in line with their share of votes.



12 Districts in Berlin

District Office

District Mayor
and 5 City Councillors



District Council

55 District Councillors

Who is elected:

a list of a party or voters' association



Eligible to be elected:

all eligible voters who are
at least 18 years old

Eligible voters:

German and EU nationals aged 16 and up
who have lived in Berlin for at least 3 months

TASKS OF THE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Unlike the House of Representatives, the District Council cannot pass any laws, but many issues that have an impact on the everyday lives and quality of life of Berliners in their districts and neighbourhoods are discussed by the District Council.

The most important tasks of the District Council include:

- **Decision-making:** The District Council makes decisions for its district. The District Council influences the work of the District Office through proposals, recommendations and requests. By passing its own decisions, the District Council can also nullify decisions made by the District Office.
- **Budget:** The District Council decides about the district's budget, that is how much money will be spent on what. However, the House of Representatives must approve each district budget. Unlike the state of Berlin, the districts are not able to determine and collect levies and taxes. The districts receive the money for their budget from the state of Berlin.
- **Electing the District Councillors:** The District Council elects a District Mayor and the five District City Councillors. The Mayor is usually elected based on a suggestion made by the strongest party. For a majority of District Councillors to agree to this choice, it is usually necessary for multiple factions to join up and agree on a person, also in the District Council. The City Councillors are then elected to proportionally represent the parties. This means that depending on its size, each faction may suggest one or multiple City Councillors. Unlike in the Senate, it is therefore the case that many different parties are represented in the District Offices.
- **Controlling the District Office:** The District Councillors check if the District Office and the administration are carrying out their tasks on behalf of the district adequately, and are acting according to the decisions made by the District Council. The District Council can request information from the District Office and review all files that relate to endeavours at the district level.



THE WORK OF THE DISTRICT COUNCIL: COMMITTEES AND FACTIONS

The District Councillors share the work to carry out all of these tasks: they form factions and committees. The way a District Council works is similar to that of the Berlin House of Representatives in this respect:

Factions: To form a faction, at least three District Councillors must join forces, who are members of or stood as candidates for the same party or voters' association.

Committees: Each District Council is free to decide which committees dedicated to different topics it would like to set up. Only three committees are mandatory: the Youth Welfare Committee, the Participation and Integration Committee, and the Petitions and Complaints Committee.



DISTRICT COUNCIL - VOLUNTEER WORK

Unlike the members of the House of Representatives, all District Councillors are volunteers. This means that they perform the regular District Council and committee meetings and preparation for such meetings alongside their professional duties and recreational activities.

As compensation for the large amount of time a District Council mandate requires, all District Councillors receive an expense allowance of EUR 995 per month, as well as an attendance fee of EUR 20 for each committee meeting and EUR 31 for each plenary session, and a travel cost allowance of EUR 41 (as of 2022).

THE DISTRICT OFFICE

The District Office is headed by a District Mayor and five City Councillors that are elected by the District Council. They manage the District Office together and are each responsible for one particular task area.

DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEAS OR CRITICISM FOR YOUR DISTRICT?

In all districts, the District Mayors and District City Councillors hold regular consultation hours for residents. Please check the page of your District Office to find out when and where these consultation hours take place. Links to the twelve Berlin District Offices are available here:

<https://service.berlin.de/bezirksaemter/>



The District Office is structured based on six central task areas:

- Finances and Personnel (District Mayor), responsible for the budget, personnel and business promotion
- School and Sports Office, responsible for maintaining and equipping schools, school planning, sports promotion
- Public Order Office, responsible for public order, the industrial inspectorate and the food inspection agency
- Urban Development Office, responsible for public planning, construction and housing supervision, monument protection and neighbourhood management
- Social Welfare Office, responsible for job centres and social services
- Youth Welfare Office, responsible for youth services, family support and childcare facilities

The members of the District Office are free to decide, how they would like to distribute the other task areas – e.g. further education, culture, department for roads and green spaces, environment and nature protection, citizens' offices.

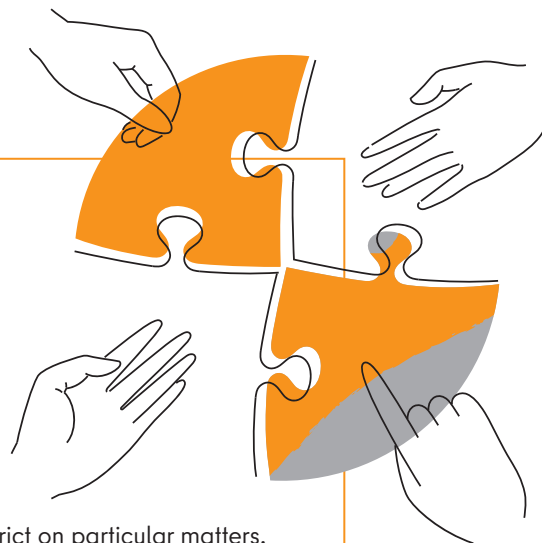


WOULD YOU LIKE TO GET MORE STRONGLY INVOLVED IN YOUR DISTRICT?

There are many other ways to contribute to shaping your district's policies:

- In the short term by submitting a **residents' enquiry or request**
- In the medium term through a **public petition or referendum**
- In the long term by becoming a **member of an advisory board** - for example the seniors' advisory board or the advisory board for participation and integration. Here you are able to provide advice to the district on particular matters.
- As a **citizen delegate** you can get involved in a committee of the District Council. Competent Berliners who are at least 16 years old can become citizen delegates. They are elected by the District Council upon suggestion by a faction.
- You could also run for a seat in the District Council in the next elections.

More information about the committees, you might be able to get involved in, is available from your District Office.

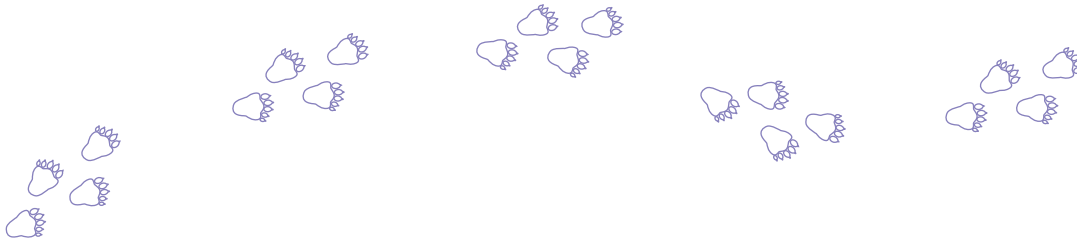
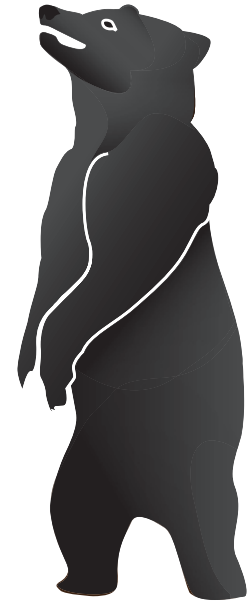


DEMOCRACY SHAPED BY BERLINERS

Democratic participation does not start by completing a ballot paper or joining a political party. Participation starts if you express your opinion on issues that affect the general public and put them up for discussion. By joining a demonstration, supporting an online petition or putting up a banner in front of your window: you can contribute to shaping opinions and intentions in society.

It is the Berliners themselves, who make the democratic urban society come to life, by joining in and getting involved in decision-making – every day and all across the city.

There are various options for getting involved in shaping politics and society, also for you: through permanent commitment or by joining in spontaneously, by following established routes or through alternative forms of involvement.



INFORMATION AND CIVIL RIGHTS FOR EVERYONE

Information and civil rights form important bases for active democratic involvement. All Berliners have these rights and can use them:

- **Freedom of opinion:** Everybody is allowed to publicly express their opinions about societal issues and criticism.
- **Freedom of the press:** It guarantees diverse and critical reporting across different types of media - information offerings online, daily newspapers, television.
- **Freedom of assembly:** Everybody is allowed to meet others to discuss societal and political issues or to protest together.
- **Freedom of association:** Everybody can form a group, initiative or society with others to pursue a common interest.
- **Freedom of information:** Everybody can inspect the files of the facilities of the state of Berlin to seek information about operations in administrative bodies, subordinate authorities and enterprises of the state of Berlin and the districts.

USE YOUR FREEDOMS: GET INVOLVED!

Interact with people with different opinions and those who share your views. Seek information, ask questions, find fellow campaigners for your concern and contribute your suggestions! On the next few pages you will find lots of tips and ideas for joining in and helping to shape our city and our life together.



DIRECT DEMOCRACY IN BERLIN

Berliners are able to question political decisions of the House of Representatives or in their districts and to get involved:

- through petitions, people's initiatives, public initiatives and plebiscites or in referenda concerning decisions made by the House of Representatives;
- through residents' enquiries and requests, public petitions and referenda in district-related matters.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO ADVOCATE FOR A PARTICULAR ISSUE?

In this case you should first find out, who is responsible for solving the problem - your district or the state of Berlin - and which are the best means for reaching your goal.



WHY WE DON'T MAKE ALL DECISIONS OURSELVES

Most political decisions are made by elected representatives and the population only decides directly in exceptional cases. There are a number of reasons for this:

- **Required time:** Imagine you had to attend regular meetings and spend hours discussing and voting on all sorts of matters. You would also need to seek information in advance, so the process would require a significant amount of time.
- **Expertise:** Some matters are complicated and specialist knowledge is required to ensure sound decision-making. Nobody is equally knowledgeable in all areas of public life. Elected politicians also seek expert advice in difficult matters.
- **Protection of minorities:** The fact that referenda are always decided by the majority of voters can give rise to the risk that the opinions and rights of minorities can go under. This can divide a society and jeopardise democratic principles.
- **Protection of the common good:** Owing to the fact that the decisions involved apply for everyone, it is important to bear in mind the welfare of everyone. It is often difficult to do justice to the many different interests represented in society in a vote decided with 'yes' or 'no'. Negotiations and compromises are often better suited for preventing decisions from being driven too much by selfish and self-serving motives.



EVERYONE CAN SUBMIT A PETITION - EVEN YOU

You believe that a decision of Berlin's authorities is taking too long, is unfathomable or even wrong? You can submit a petition to the House of Representatives.

Every Berliner has the right to submit a petition, a suggestion or a complaint. This rule also applies for underage persons and those without German citizenship. You just need to make sure that Berlin is responsible for the matter in question. If you are having trouble with the citizen's office or the job centre, for example, or feel that the police is treating you unfairly, or if you find the situation at a school or childcare facility unacceptable, you can start a petition on your own or with others.

A petition must be submitted in written form, this is also possible online:

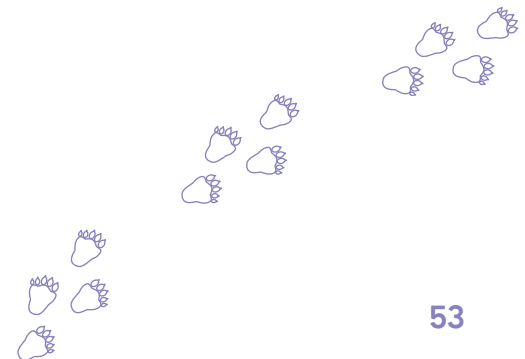
<https://www.parlament-berlin.de/das-parlament/petitionen/online-petition>



EVERY PETITION IS REVIEWED

The petition committee of the House of Representatives is obliged to review every complaint. If a complaint is justified, the authority or facility in question will be asked to solve the problem.

In 2020, the petition committee completed discussions about 1,879 submissions from Berliners. A decision in favour of the affected individual was made in over a quarter of cases. For almost one in two petitions, the committee was at least able to help by providing information.



PEOPLE'S INITIATIVES – A PETITION BY MANY

A people's initiative is a way for Berliners to prompt the House of Representatives to look into a particular suggestion or issue. This can be a change to a law, passing of a new law or an upcoming political decision for Berlin. However, the budget and financial matters are taboo topics.

A people's initiative can be started by individuals, by a group, an association or a party. All residents of Berlin that are at least 16 years of age can start or support an initiative.

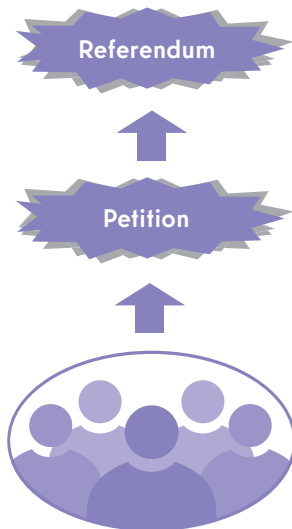
If at least 20,000 Berliners express their support of the initiative with their signature, the House of Representatives must address the suggestion within four months: the representatives of the initiative must be heard by the responsible expert committees and a parliamentary debate must take place. However, the Representatives are not obliged to adopt a decision in the matter.

Despite the fact that people's initiatives are 'only' suggestions, they do promote public and parliamentary discussion of topics that the Representatives may not have been aware of.



BERLINERS AS CO-DECISION-MAKERS: PETITIONS FOR REFERENDA AND REFERENDA

Eligible voters from Berlin can get actively involved in changing, repealing and passing laws through petitions for referenda and the related referenda. A referendum can only take place following a petition for such a referendum.

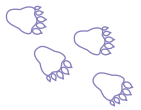


WHO CAN GET INVOLVED?

In the case of petitions for referenda and the related referenda, all Berliners who are at least 18 years old and have German citizenship are eligible to support the issue and to vote.

WHAT CAN BE CHANGED THROUGH PETITIONS FOR REFERENDA AND THE SUBSEQUENT REFERENDA?

This instrument is only available for matters in which Berlin can make a decision. The state budget, salaries, levies or pay rates determined by the state or personnel decisions of the state are excluded. The same topic can be the subject of a petition for a referendum only once per election period. It is also possible to request a change to the state constitution or dismissal of the House of Representatives, however, higher obstacles must be overcome in these cases.



PETITIONS FOR REFERENDA AND REFERENDA STEP BY STEP

Step 1: Application for approval

At least 20,000 signatures of eligible voters from Berlin are needed to initiate a petition for a referendum. Before these signatures can be collected, a cost estimate must be applied for with the Senate Administration, and be drawn up. This estimate will show the costs the general public would have to bear if the petition is successful.

Exceptional case: At least 50,000 signatures are needed if the purpose of the petition for a referendum is to change the state constitution or to dismiss the House of Representatives.

Step 2: Handling the petition

Once all requirements listed in Step 1 have been met, the House of Representatives can decide in favour of the petition. In this case, the process ends here. If the majority of Representatives rejects the proposal or if no decision is made within four months, a petition for a referendum may be realised by request. The petition must be signed by 7% of all eligible voters within 4 months, this corresponds to around 175,000 signatures.

Exceptional case: Far more signatures are needed if the petition concerns a change to the state constitution or dismissal of the House of Representatives (20% of eligible voters, about 500,000).



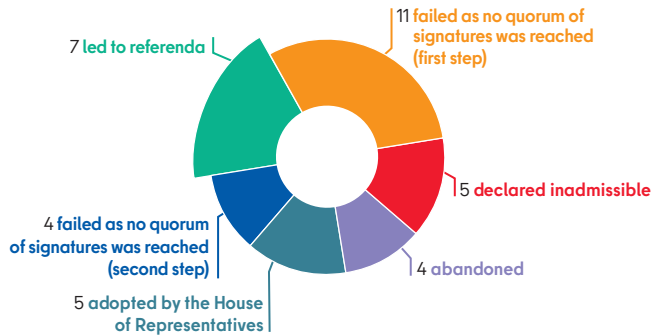


Step 3: Referendum

If the petition for a referendum has received the required level of support, a referendum is held. No referendum is needed if the majority of members of the House of Representatives explicitly adopts the draft law or decision of the petition. If this is not the case, all eligible voters from Berlin are asked to vote on the matter. The draft law or decision is accepted if more than one quarter of all eligible voters agreed and the majority (50%) of those taking part in the referendum voted “yes”.



PETITIONS FOR REFERENDA UP TO 2021:



In the referenda ‘Expropriate Deutsche Wohnen & Co’ (2021), ‘Berlin Needs Tegel’ (2017), ‘Tempelhofer Feld’ (2014) and ‘No more secret contracts – return water to Berliners’ (2011) that took place in recent years, Berliners objected to the respective majority votes of the House of Representatives.

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN INITIATING A PETITION FOR A REFERENDUM?

Further information is available from the Senate Administration Office for Interior Matters, Digitalisation and Sport:

<http://www.berlin.de/sen/inneres/buerger-und-staat/wahlen-und-abstimmungen/volksinitiative-volksbegehren-volksentscheid/volksbegehren-und-volksentscheid/artikel.24015.php>

or the state election supervisor for Berlin

<https://www.berlin.de/wahlen/abstimmungen/>



BERLINERS LIKE TO TAKE POLITICAL MATTERS IN THEIR OWN HANDS

Direct democracy processes are very popular among Berliners. A total of 36 petitions for referenda were applied for and completed by 2021. Seven of these led to a referendum. While most processes fail due to a lack of support – so-called quorums – they do tend to trigger broader public discussion of an issue.

BERLINERS IN THEIR DISTRICTS: HAVE A SAY AND GET INVOLVED

Through residents' enquiries and requests, public petitions and referenda, Berliners can also set political developments into motion in their districts.

RESIDENTS' ENQUIRIES

Do you have a question for your district?

Residents' enquiries are an opportunity for all residents to ask the District Council a question. This option is also available to residents who are not eligible to vote. The question will be answered in the question session of the next District Council meeting.

RESIDENTS' REQUESTS

Do you have a specific request and would like to suggest a particular decision for your district?

Just like the District Councillors, residents of a district can also submit a request to the District Council. Such requests must concern a district matter and the District Council must be authorised to make a decision in the matter.

Who can join in? All residents of a district who are at least 16 years old, can submit a residents' request.

RESIDENTS' REQUESTS STEP BY STEP

Step 1: For the District Council to be required to address the concern, the request must be submitted by at least three people in the first step.

Step 2: Once the District Office has confirmed that the request is formally admissible, another 1,000 residents of the district must support the request with their signature.

Step 3: If this requirement has been met, the District Council must discuss the request within two months, consult those who have submitted it and make a decision in the matter. However, the District Council can also reject the request.

PUBLIC PETITIONS AND REFERENDA

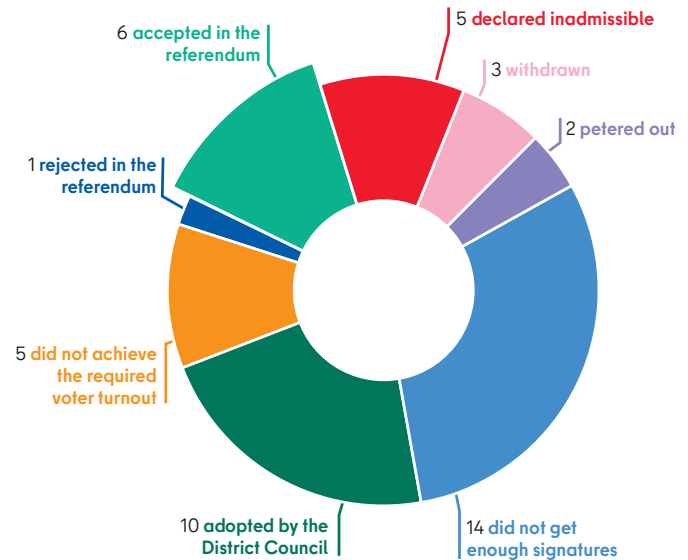
Referenda are an opportunity for residents of a district to make their own decisions for their district. A referendum in a particular matter can only take place following a public petition.

Who can join in? All residents of a district that are eligible to vote with respect to the District Council - that means all German and EU nationals aged 16 and up.

What can be voted on? Public petitions can be initiated for matters of the district in which the District Council is authorised to make decisions. The result of a referendum is usually binding, except for decisions concerning the district budget, certain regulations concerning land-use and landscape plans and regulations that concern the whole city, in which case they are merely non-binding recommendations for the District Council and the District Office.

BERLINERS LIKE TO TAKE THEIR DISTRICTS' POLITICAL MATTERS IN THEIR OWN HANDS

A total of 46 public petitions were initiated in Berlin's district up to 2021. 12 of these led to referenda.



PUBLIC PETITIONS AND REFERENDA STEP BY STEP

Step 1 - Submitting an application

At least 3 people, individuals, groups, associations or parties are needed for submitting an application.

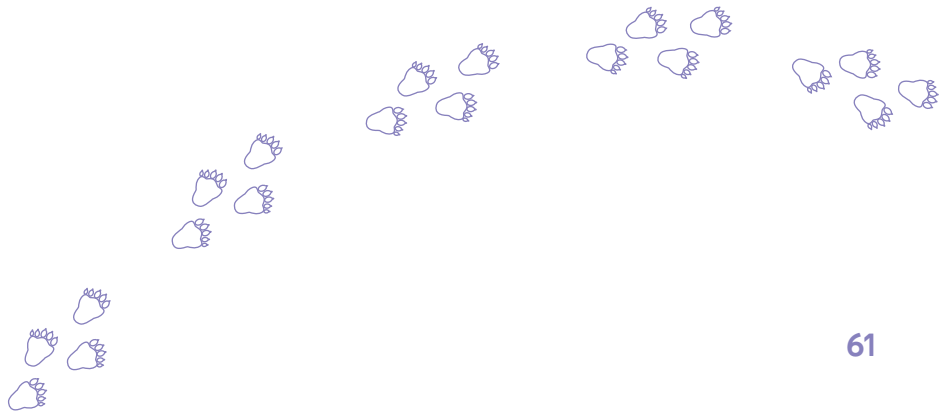
First it is reviewed, whether the public petition is admissible, whether it addresses a district-related matter. A cost estimate is drawn up so everybody understands the costs the suggestion would give rise to.

Step 2 - Handling a public petition

If the public petition is approved, at least 3% of eligible voters in the district must express their support with their signature within six months.

Step 3 - The referendum

If this was successful, a referendum must be held concerning the suggestion within four months. No referendum is required if the District Council accepts the suggestion itself within two months. The referendum is successful if half of those taking part vote in favour of the matter and if those voters correspond to at least 10% of the district's eligible voters.



BERLINERS ARE GETTING INVOLVED: CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

This type of participation procedures are an opportunity for you to get involved in matters that affect your district or neighbourhood. With regard to urban planning and construction projects in particular, you can have direct influence on what is happening on your doorstep: for example, when it comes to plans for a new street layout, new bicycle paths or for redesigning a square. The districts are required to inform residents about any major plans in good time and to take their views and reservations into account.

Involvement can take place in various different ways - for example by means of residents' meetings, round-table discussions, future workshops, ideas competitions or online dialogues. Some districts have also set up participatory budgets or district cash boxes that enable residents to find out about their district's budget and to take part in decision-making for a share of the spending planned by the district.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION TAKES TIME

It may be a lengthy process at times, but everybody benefits from participation procedures in the end:

- The requirements of affected individuals can be considered more effectively.
- Planning errors and unnecessary expenditure can be avoided.
- The different and often contradictory interests of the population can be considered more effectively.
- Acceptance of public institutions is increased and they are more resilient as a result.

**WOULD YOU LIKE TO FIND OUT ABOUT THE CURRENT PROJECTS IN BERLIN, IN YOUR DISTRICT
OR YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD WHERE YOUR OPINION OR INVOLVEMENT IS APPRECIATED?**

Visit the participation platform meinBerlin to learn more: <https://mein.berlin.de/>



IN YOUR INTEREST

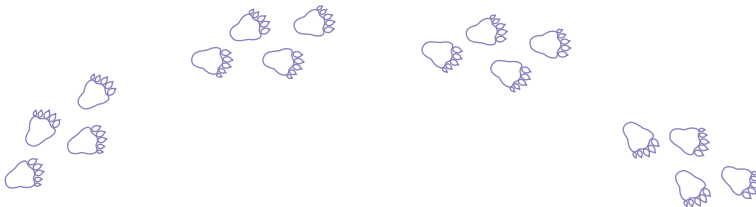
As a general rule, everybody can form associations with others and advocate for a common interest. There are countless such groups across Berlin and Germany that are dedicated to a wide range of topics - movements, citizens' groups, clubs and associations.

NGOS

These are often referred to as NGOs (non-governmental organisations), as they are independent and not organised by the government. These organisations can be active locally, regionally or globally. NGOs pursue charitable, socio-political goals such as to enforce human and civil rights, to improve protection of the climate, the environment or animal welfare, better health-care, social justice or to secure peace. They provide support to people in exercising their rights, help people in need and raise awareness of certain issues in society.

Particular population groups and professional groups also choose this type of organisation to offer leisure activities or counselling and represent the interests of their members - e.g. women, youth or senior citizens' associations, LGBTIQ* societies or tenant associations. NGOs frequently play a key role in organising protests and have an impact on political decisions in their capacity as interest groups.

Do you have a problem you need help with? Or would you like to get involved and promote a particular issue, in Berlin or around the world? There is bound to be an NGO that is dedicated to this topic.



REPRESENTING SPECIAL INTERESTS

District advisory councils

In all Berlin districts, there are advisory councils or representatives for particular groups of persons or regarding particular issues, in which committed residents use their expertise or experience as affected individuals to provide advice to the District Council and District Office. There are an advisory board for participation and integration, women's advisory boards, advisory councils for people with disabilities, senior citizens' representatives, allotment advisory councils, environment and climate advisory councils and culture advisory councils, to name just a few. It is usually for the districts to decide themselves, which types of advisory councils they would like to set up. The structure of such advisory councils also varies. The advisory councils represent the rights of affected individuals and provide advice for decision-making. The advisory councils are not eligible to vote in the District Council or their committees.



Advisory councils for all of Berlin

Advisory councils also exist for Berlin as a whole. They advise the House of Representatives and the Berlin Senate Administration in certain matters. Here are a few examples: the state advisory council for integration and migration issues, the state advisory council for people with disabilities, the state senior citizens' representatives and the state senior citizens' advisory council, as well as the advisory council for women's affairs. In 2021 it was decided that an advisory council for issues concerning Roma and Sinti would be set up in the future.

Representation of children and young people

In all of Berlin's districts there are facilities that represent the interests of children and young people in particular. The names of these organisations vary from district to district: children's and youths' office, children's and youths' representatives or children's and youths' parliament. They enable children and teenagers to make their concerns known and to contribute to shaping their districts.

OTHER PLACES TO GET INVOLVED

Opportunities for participation and involvement are not limited to state institutions. You can help to shape your immediate environment in other areas of life, too. For education facilities and workplaces in particular, there are legal provisions for Berlin and Germany that enable pupils, parents, students and employees to participate in decision-making.

Interest groups in education institutions

Pupils' councils: There are elected pupils' councils at every school, in every district and for Berlin as a whole. Berlin's education act requires spokespersons to be elected for each class or year and for the entire school. These represent the interests of pupils, they are involved in shaping school life and in decisions related to education and school policy.

Parents' councils at schools and daycare facilities: A parents' council is elected for each class or year of a school. Together these form the school's parents' assembly. Among other jobs, the parents' assembly of a school participates in decisions made by the school conference and the district parents' committee. Parents' representatives from all districts are delegated to join the state parents' committee (LEA) that is involved in the Senate Administration's education and school policy decisions in an

advisory role. There are also rules for elected parents' councils for daycare facilities, who participate in the daycare district parents' committee (BEAK) and the daycare state parents' committee (LEAK). More information about parents' representation at Berlin's schools and daycare facilities is available here:

<https://leaberlin.de/> and <https://www.berlin.de/familie/de/informationen/mitbestimmung-von-eltern-in-der-kita-301>



Students' councils: In line with Berlin's higher education act, there is a students' parliament (StuPa) and a general students' committee (AStA) at each higher education institution in Berlin. The StuPa makes decisions in matters of the self-governing student body and it elects the members of the AStA. The AStA represents the interests of students in the university's committees, such as the Academic Senate. The StuPa cannot make any decisions regarding general concerns of the higher education institution, such as examination rules. However, it can participate in such decisions through the AStA.

REPRESENTATION OF INTERESTS IN THE WORKPLACE

Employee representatives: Employees can participate in decisions made in their company through elected employee representatives. In private-sector companies, these representatives are called the works council, and in public-sector organisations they are referred to as the staff council. A works or staff council represents the interests of employees and can influence decisions regarding hiring and firing of staff members, working time and break rules or how salaries are determined. It is stipulated in the works constitution act that employees have the right to form and elect a works council. The provisions of the federal or state staff representation law apply with regard to staff councils.

Labour unions: Labour unions are employees' associations. One of the key tasks of unions is to arrange for collective agreements in which wages or salaries, working hours and other working conditions are negotiated and determined with the employers' associations. Strike action is an important tool for conflicts with the employers that can be used to achieve compromises in these collective negotiations. A labour union also represents its members in court in the case of conflicts with employers, and provides support to works and staff councils. Labour unions can also exert influence with regard to general politics, in particular with regard to social and economic rights of employees.

Everybody can join a labour union. As voluntary, independent and democratically organised associations, they are generally open to everyone.



JOINING IN, PARTICIPATING, GETTING INVOLVED - WHAT REALLY MATTERS

Many people choose to leave decision-making to elected politicians and others who choose to get involved. Many of us feel that they do not have enough time to get involved. Others claim that they are not interested. However, social and political involvement takes many different forms and everybody is able to join in and get involved.

Too busy? - Getting involved with minimal effort

- Even if life is keeping you busy, you can participate in shaping what is happening in your environment, even with minimal effort:
- Attend an event, a demonstration or a residents' meeting in your district that is dedicated to an issue you care about.
- Go to the parents' assembly at school or the works meeting in your workplace.
- Provide input for a participation procedure in your area – information about ongoing procedures is available here: <https://mein.berlin.de/>

- Sign a collective petition, a public initiative, a petition for a referendum, a residents' request or a public petition for your district in a matter you find important.
- Cast your vote at the elections for the House of Representatives and the District Council, at a referendum, a plebiscite or a local referendum in your district.

Many offerings are now available online, so you won't have to travel far.



“I don’t care...” - Really?

Are you sure you don’t care:

- about the state of the school your child or grandchild attends;
- whether more affordable or more “fancy” apartments are built in Berlin;
- about the state of roads and cycling paths that you use every day;
- how Berlin treats people who need help, whether they are refugees, unemployed, sick or elderly;
- whether there is good public transport that will take you to school or to work;
- which leisure activities and cultural offerings are available for children, young people and adults;
- whether Berlin will stay an open-minded, cosmopolitan city in which people with different views and ways of life coexist peacefully?

Politics do not begin at the House of Representatives but right on your doorstep. You, too, are affected by social and political decisions – every single day.



Sounds interesting?

Further information about involvement in a democratic urban society in Berlin is available here:

Berlin State Agency for Civic Education (Berliner Landeszentrale für politische Bildung)

The Berlin State Agency for Civic Education helps Berliners to take responsibility for democracy, to bring their interests to the democratic discourse and to participate in political life. To this end, the Berlin State Agency for Civic Education offers publications, organises events and campaigns and promotes civic education projects.

<https://www.berlin.de/politische-bildung/>

Political foundations and educational organisations dedicated to communal-political matters also offer a wealth of interesting information and events.

Political foundations

August-Bebel-Institut:

<http://august-bebel-institut.de/>

Bildungswerk Berlin der Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung:
<http://www.bildungswerk-boell.de/de>

Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung:
<https://www.freiheit.org/>

Helle Panke e. V.:
<https://www.helle-panke.de/>

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Akademie Berlin:
<http://www.kas.de/akademie/>

Educational organisations dedicated to communal-political matters

Bildungswerk für Alternative Kommunalpolitik Berlin e. V. BiWAK:
<http://www.biwak-ev.de/>

Kommunalpolitisches Forum e. V. Berlin:
<http://www.kommunalpolitik-berlin.de/>

Kommunalpolitisches Bildungswerk Berlin e. V. KBB:
<http://www.kbb-berlin.de/>

Berliner Landeszentrale
für politische Bildung

BERLIN



Berliner Landeszentrale für
politische Bildung
Hardenbergstraße 22-24
10623 Berlin
[www.berlin.de/politische-
bildung](http://www.berlin.de/politische-
bildung)

