

At a glance

Population: 83.2 million, including 21.2 million with a migration background

Surface area: 357,137 km²

Time zone: CET

Currency: euro (€1 = 100 cents)

Capital: Berlin

Form of government: parliamentary democracy

Official language: German

Politics & EU

The Constitution guarantees stability

Germany looks back on a long history. It has existed as a state, in today's sense of the word, since 1871. Many ups and downs have followed, including two world wars, the barbarous dictatorship of the National Socialists and the division into two German states. Yet the Federal Republic of Germany, which was founded in 1949, has learnt from its history and the country's democratic constitution guarantees that those lessons will not be forgotten.

The constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany is known as the Basic Law. It begins with Article 1: "Human dignity shall be inviolable. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all state authority." Among the guaranteed basic rights are freedom of opinion, information, and the press (Article 5); equality before the law (Article 3); freedom of faith and conscience (Article 4); freedom of association (Article 9); the right to choose an occupation, a workplace and a training centre (Article 12) and the right to protection from political persecution (Asylum, Article 16a). The Basic Law defines Germany as a:

- **Constitutional state:** all actions of the state are subject to judicial control.
- **Federal state:** political sovereignty is divided between the **16 Länder** and the central state – a system often described as "federalist".
- **A welfare state:** the government makes provisions to ensure social equity and to guarantee that citizens are provided with the requisite social welfare. This includes ensuring that citizens have a decent standard of living in the event of unemployment, disability or illness, and in old age.

The basic rights, the democratic form of government, the federal state, and the welfare state all have an irrevocable character. This means they may not be abrogated in the future either by subsequent alterations to the Basic Law or by a new constitution.

A federal state with five permanent constitutional bodies

Germany is a federal state. Until 1990, the Federal Republic comprised 11 federal states, or Länder. Following reunification with the German Democratic Republic in 1990, these were joined by a further five. Since then, the federal capital and seat of government has been Berlin, although several federal ministries still have a presence in Bonn, the former capital. Germany has been a stable democracy for over 60 years now, and this democratic culture is endorsed and embodied by the country's citizens.

The five permanent constitutional bodies of the Federal Republic of Germany are the Federal President (the head of state), the Bundestag (the elected representative assembly of the German people), the Bundesrat (the representative of the Länder and a second chamber of parliament, alongside the Bundestag), the Federal Government (the Federal Chancellor and the Federal Ministers) and the Federal Constitutional Court (the supreme court).

The separation of powers – i.e. the division of state powers among a number of bodies of state – is an important component of the constitution. The legislature, the executive and the judiciary must never fall under the control of a single authority.

Political parties and elections

According to the terms of the Basic Law, it is the task of the political parties to participate in the formation of the political will of the people.

The **19th German Bundestag** [↗](#), elected on 24. September 2017, is made up of the CDU (Christlich Demokratische Union) along with its sister party, the CSU (Christlich-Soziale Union), and the SPD (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands), which together form the coalition government; the opposition parties are the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland), the FDP (Freie Demokratische Partei), Die Linke and Bündnis 90/Die Grünen.

The elections to the Bundestag and the Länder parliaments are free, confidential and equal (each vote counts the same). These elections are also direct. This means that people vote directly for members of parliament via a list. In Germany, elections to the Bundestag and the Länder parliaments are general elections. This means that all citizens aged 18 and over are eligible to vote and to stand for election.

The EU & Germany's partners

Through various alliances, partnerships and memberships in organisations, Germany maintains a friendly relationship with many countries and works with them to promote peace, democracy and respect for human rights. Germany is a member of the European Union, which allows Germany and all other EU citizens for example the freedom of movement. This includes free travel, living, shopping, study or working inside of the EU. The freedom of movement is valid for the movement of people, goods, services and capital on the domestic market. Furthermore, any kind of discrimination against EU citizens due to their nationality is prohibited. You can obtain further information about the free movement of EU workers on the website of the **Office for the Equal Treatment of EU Workers** [↗](#).

Next to the EU, Germany is a member of the United Nations and NATO, as well as the group of permanent representatives of the G7 and G20. Numerous bilateral partnerships and trade agreements complement these wide-ranging cooperations.

Safe and secure

Since its founding, the Federal Republic of Germany has been a very politically stable country. The government is divided into the legislative, executive and judicial branches. The purpose of this structure is to prevent a concentration or abuse of political power. Moreover, the separation of powers guarantees a high degree of legal certainty. In other words, you can rely on Germany's laws and respect for the law, and on its administrative structures and judicial system. Often, the freedom of the press is mentioned as the fourth power (Article 5 of the Basic Law) which is of great value in Germany.

In comparison, Germany is one of the safest countries worldwide. In the world's leading ranking "**Global Peace Index** [↗](#)", Germany is one of the top 20 most peaceful countries in 2020 (ranked 16 out of 163 countries and regions). Iceland is classified as the world's safest country, followed by New Zealand and Portugal. The peacefulness of a country is determined for this index, from, for example, an intact government and corruption rate.

The government invests in programmes covering security-related issues such as research in security and stability matters. In addition to the challenges of protecting society from terrorism or the consequences of natural disasters, this also includes the examination of other complex tasks. In case of emergency, Germany provides a network of security authorities and ambulance services for civil protection at high technological and organisational standards.

Information on the web

The Federal Government

Website of the Federal Government

Federal Office for Migration and Refugees

The political and legal system

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Federal Agency for Civic Education

Things to know about German political parties

Gesetze im Internet

The Basic Law for download

Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community

Information about security in Germany

Information about the Freedom of the movement

<https://www.make-it-in-germany.com/en/living-in-germany/discover-germany/politics-eu>

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