

## The Federal Capital Berlin: Centre Stage of German Politics

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Fall Term 2023: 4 September – 15 December 2023  
(break: 23-27 October 2023)

### CATEGORY

History and Politics

### COURSE STRUCTURE

3 contact hours à 45 min per week (14 weeks + gap week)

### WEEKLY SCHEDULE

#### Time

Day: Wednesday, 4:00-6:30 pm

#### Place

t.b.a.

### COURSE LANGUAGE

English

**Language requirements** (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages)  
English B2

### TARGET GROUP

International exchange students of all subjects with a strong interest in the course topic. Humboldt Perspectives Study Abroad courses are designed for undergraduate students. Master students may participate if their home university agrees.

This course is directed at students interested in wide range of topics: Politics, government and administration, democracy, federalism, political communication, contemporary German history, policy-making in the fields of environmental protection, climate-change, refugee and migration, foreign policy and European Integration.

### CREDITS = 6 ECTS

All courses are accredited according to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

After the Reunification of Germany in 1990 the city of Berlin regained its function as the Nation's Capital, thus becoming **The Centre of German Politics**. The course will explore significant features of the German political system, it will highlight the dominant place of the German parliament, and it will explain the role of political parties and the function of the federal government. The class will address main political actors, interests, and cleavages.

We will discuss and learn about: Why is Germany a Federal State? What are the reasons for its administrative set-up? What makes German domestic politics so difficult? What is the German outlook on European Union integration? What about Germany's approach to international climate change policies? The class work will be supplemented by excursions to the Bundestag, the lower chamber of the national parliament, this will include visits and talks to elected members of parliament and staff, and it will present insights into the work of party foundations.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The objective of this Bachelor-level course is to equip students with an in-depth understanding of the German political system, providing them with profound insights into the democratic and federal foundation of German domestic and European politics. The class will provide students with theoretical and empirical knowledge about the presented topics, and it will enable to develop academic skills and personal competences of political analysis. By the end of the course participants will be able to:

- Identify the specific features of the political-administrative set-up of Germany
- Comprehend the peculiarities of contemporary German democracy
- Provide an overview of political actors, important political issues, and fields of action
- Describe the functioning of the German parliamentary, governmental, and party system
- Analyze and reflect on the process of political deliberation and decision making
- Communicate and discuss theoretical positions, empirical facts, and observations.

## READINGS

- **Eric Langenbacher: *The German Polity*** (Twelfth Edition), Rowman & Littlefield: Lanham, Boulder, New York, London 2021.
- ***Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany*** ("Grundgesetz"), Deutscher Bundestag, Berlin, 2021

## ASSIGNMENT INFO

### Workload and assignments

In order to be granted 6 ECTS, participants will be asked to

- actively attend all sessions (a minimum of 80% attendance is required for classroom and online sessions)
- prepare and revise the classroom/online sessions

- hand in the following **assignments**:
  - an in-class oral presentation, duration 10-15 minutes
  - a written report on one of the excursions / visits / talks, length three to five standard pages DIN A4, Times New Roman, 12 pt., 1.5 line spacing
  - a written research paper on a topic chosen from the seminar schedule, length five to eight standard pages DIN A4, Times New Roman, 12 pt., 1.5 line spacing

Failure to fulfil one of the mentioned components results in failure of the class.

## Assessment Components

The final grade will be composed of the above-mentioned assignments.

The calculation of the final grade will be based on the formula: Oral presentation 25% + written report on excursion 25% + written research paper 50%.

## YOUR INSTRUCTOR

### Prof. Dr. Gert-Rüdiger Wegmarshaus

PhD; academic career, research and teaching at the European University Viadrina (EUV), Frankfurt/Oder; Habilitation in political science; professor (extra-ordinary) since 2006; international academic experience: Estonia, Tartu University 2006-08; Uzbekistan, National University, Tashkent 2012-17, Lithuania, European Humanities University, Vilnius 2017-19; extensive teaching record, BA/MA/PhD supervision; research fields and publications: Political theory; history of ideas; democratic education; post-communist and European studies, theory and history of science and technology, nuclear energy policy.

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## COURSE SCHEDULE

14 weeks + gap week

### Week 1: INTRODUCTION

The first session, being an introduction to the course, will present a topical overview, will familiarize the participants with the pertinent political science vocabulary and terminology, will acquaint with the reading material and the required academic literature, will point at additional audio-visual material, will explain the individual work load, the written and oral assignments and, finally, will show the complete learning schedule consisting of classroom work with lectures, presentations and discussions being supplemented by several external visits and excursions.

## **Week 2: POLITICAL HISTORY – Cold War and Division of Germany after 1945, the Fall of the Berlin Wall and German Reunification 1989-1990**

The second session will deal with Germany's post-WWII history, it will show and explain the political developments during Cold-War confrontation resulting in the division and partition of Germany. The class will learn about the reasons for overcoming the destructive logic of political conflict in Europe providing the chance for breaking-down the Berlin wall, for opening-up the inner-German border and finally paving the way to German reunification in 1990.

Literature: **Eric Langenbacher: *The German Polity***, chapter 2: From Division to Reunification, pp. 23-45; **Mary Fulbrook: *A History of Germany 1918 – 2008. The Divided Nation***, Malden, Mass., Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, Chapter 13: The East German Revolution and the End of the Postwar Era, pp. 267-292.

## **Week 3: POLITY – The Federal Republic of Germany: Constitutional order and administrative set-up**

The third session will acquaint the participant with the basic constitutional provisions of the political order of Germany; students will learn about the core of democratic ideas and liberal principles forming the legal-political framework of the Federal Republic of Germany. The class will be instructed about key features of the current political-administrative set-up of Germany, it will learn the geographic, territorial, the economic, demographic, and cultural composition of the contemporary German Nation-state.

Literature: **Eric Langenbacher: *The German Polity***, chapter 9: Subnational Units: Federalism and Local Government, pp. 305-335; ***Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany*** ("Grundgesetz"), Deutscher Bundestag, Berlin, 2021, pp. 14-25; 26-36.

## **Week 4: POLITY - *The Bundestag*: Legal and political Role and Functions**

The fourth session is devoted to the study of the *Bundestag*, the German Parliament. The class will learn about the principal legislative role and the political functions of this lower chamber of the German legislature. Students will become knowledgeable about the Parliament's structure and organization, about the procedural order of law making; they will learn about *Bundestag*'s current party (factional) structure, about the three-party ruling majority in parliament, which has started in 2021 a far-reaching reform agenda. Attention is also given to the opposition parties in the Bundestag, representing political attitudes ranging from the far left over the center to far right/populist positions.

Literature: **Eric Langenbacher: *The German Polity***, chapter 7: Policy-Making Institutions I: Parliament and Executive, pp. 225-270, especially pp. 225-236; ***Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany*** ("Grundgesetz"), Deutscher Bundestag, Berlin, 2021, pp. 37-42.

### **Week 5: POLITY – *The Bundesrat (Second Chamber of the German Parliament): Role, Functions, Structure; The Federal President: Role and Functions***

The fifth session introduces into the Bundesrat (Federal Council), Germany's second legislative body, being composed of representatives of the 16 German "Bundesländer" which form the Federal Republic. This chamber plays a vital, indispensable, often decisive role in the national law-making process. In a second step the class will learn about the constitutional role and the political functions of the German Federal President, being the Head of the State, representing Germany on the international stage and holding crucial prerogatives of power.

Literature: **Eric Langenbacher: *The German Polity***, chapter 7: Policy-Making Institutions I: Parliament and Executive, pp. 236-241, 259-263; ***Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany*** ("Grundgesetz"), Deutscher Bundestag, Berlin, 2021, pp. 43-47; 48-51.

### **Week 6: POLITY - *The Federal Government: Role, Functions, Structure***

The sixth session will study the structure, the ministerial composition, and the political functions of the German federal government; participants will learn both about the established tradition and the difficulties of running coalition governments in Germany. The class will receive an up-to-date picture of the current federal government, its ambitious reform agenda alongside with its shared goals and objectives; at the same time the seminar will also explore the involved party cleavages as well as hidden or open conflict lines between the coalition partners.

Literature: **Eric Langenbacher: *The German Polity***, chapter 7: Policy-Making Institutions I: Parliament and Executive, pp. 241-259; ***Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany*** ("Grundgesetz"), Deutscher Bundestag, Berlin, 2021, pp. 52-55.

### **Week 7: POLITICS - "Bundestag" Parliamentary elections: election law, campaigns, recent results**

The seventh session will touch upon the German electoral law, it will scrutinize its peculiar construction combining traits of majoritarian and proportional political representation, reflecting in a specific way the lessons learned from the tragic failure of the German pre-WWII parliamentary democracy at the end of the fragile "Weimar Republic". The class will learn about socio-economic and cultural cleavages in the German electorate, it will get insights into campaigning and discuss political results of the latest federal and regional elections.

Literature: **Eric Langenbacher: *The German Polity***, chapter 6: Elections and Voting Behaviour, pp. 189-223.

***BREAK: 23 – 27 October 2023***

## **Week 8: POLITICS - Political Parties in Germany – Historical roots, ideologies, performance**

The session analyses the German political party system. Students will learn about the history of the nowadays influential political parties, the class will dwell on socially and historically grounded cleavages between the political camps of Conservatism, Liberalism, Socialism, Feminism and Ecological Activism; and the class will be instructed about the current electoral performance of the major political parties in Germany.

Literature: **Eric Langenbacher: *The German Polity***, chapter 5: The Party System and the Representation of Interests, pp. 137-187; ***Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany*** ("Grundgesetz"), Deutscher Bundestag, Berlin, 2021, Article 21, p. 27.

## **Week 9: POLITICS - Excursion and visit to the German Parliament "*The Bundestag*"**

This session is entirely devoted to the visit of "The Bundestag". The class will make an excursion to the German parliament residing in the former building of the "Reichstag" in the very center of Berlin. Depending on the schedule of parliamentary work there will be either a chance of making a guided tour through the entire building, learning both about its history and its contemporary modernist reconstruction; or there will be the opportunity to pay a visit to the plenary hall and to watch a debate session from the elevated visitor stages.

Literature: **Eric Langenbacher: *The German Polity***, chapter 5: The Party System and the Representation of Interests, pp. 137-187; ***Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany*** ("Grundgesetz"), Deutscher Bundestag, Berlin, 2021, Article 21, p. 27.

## **Week 10: POLITICS - Excursion and visit to political foundations**

The tenth session is destined for visiting political party foundations. Participants will have the chance of getting first-hand information on their political objectives, ideological orientation, guiding principles, support and funding, social and educational activities in the society-at-large. Depending on the availability within the work schedule of the foundations the class may pay a visit to the headquarters of foundations being affiliated either with the Christian Democrats, the Social Democrats, the Liberals (Free Democrats), or the Green-Ecological Party.

## **Week 11: POLITICS – Encounter and discussion with members of parliament, politicians, and advisors**

The eleventh session will once more take place inside the German parliament, this time for a meeting and a discussion in the offices of parliamentarians, their staff, and advisors. During this visit participants will get first-hand information about the daily work of parliamentary communication, interest representation, and political decision making. Students are encouraged to prepare their own points of interest for a stimulating exchange of opinions.

### **Week 12: POLICIES - Environmental and climate change policies**

The twelfth session deals with analysis of a policy field located in the very center of the current German societal and political agenda. The pressing issues of global warming and climate change, of protection of the biological habitat and of preservation of the natural environment spur heated debates about the appropriate measures within the political, social, and economic domains. German politics at the national, regional, and local levels increasingly responds to these new challenges. Students will learn about the specific approaches and solutions the German political system is offering and implementing.

### **Week 13: POLICIES - Migration- and refugee policies**

The thirteenth session will focus on German migration and refugee policies vis-à-vis the challenges of forced and voluntary migration in- and outside Europe. The class will get to know of the political debates and civil society activities in Germany aimed at finding remedies and solutions for the mounting, albeit diverse migration problems, ranging from deliberate, voluntary migration into the German labor market to the humane treatment of refugees and asylum-seekers. The Seminar will be based on recent research literature and on topical news coverage.

### **Week 14: POLICIES - German approaches to EU integration and international affairs**

The fourteenth session is devoted to the European and the foreign policy dimensions of Germany's state-political orientations. Germany, the most populous and economically most powerful member-country of the European Union is destined to play a decisive role in the process of European-Integration. Students will learn about German approaches in the controversies about the supra-national objective of an "*ever closer Union*" versus the inter-governmental model of "*a Europe consisting of nation-states*". A discussion about Germany's role in international conflict resolution and joint peace keeping missions will conclude the seminar.

Literature: **Eric Langenbacher: *The German Polity***, chapter 10: The Increase and Limits of German Power: The Federal Republic's Foreign and European Policy, pp. 337-377.

## **TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS**

- Registration on Moodle (HU's e-learning platform)

### **in case of online sessions**

- Fully functional device (laptop, tablet, PC)
- Stable internet connection
- Software: Zoom (video/audio)
- *Recommended* hardware: external headset for better sound quality

## EXPECTATIONS & POLICIES

**Preparation for lively discussions:** be on time, have at least the required readings completed, and points in mind for discussion or clarification.

**Assignments:** complete all assignments according to the specified requirements on the schedule including handing them over to the lecturer.

**Commitment:** pay particular attention to the lecturer and respect differences of opinions in this international classroom.

**Academic guidelines:** Comply with academic integrity policies, especially the academic honor code and the student code of conduct. Plagiarism in even a small assignment will result in failing the entire course.

**Attendance policy:** Students must contact their class teachers to catch up on missed work – to excuse absence please contact the lecturer.

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The course and its syllabus are subject to change. Last update: 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2023