International Perspectives on Elections Systems
The German Perspective
Outline

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  ◦ What role do parties play in the election process?
  ◦ How are candidates selected?
How does voting work in Germany?
How does voter registration work in Germany?

- All permanent residents of Germany are required to register at the local government in a residents register.

- This register contains information such as name, date and place of birth, gender, citizenship, religion, current and former address, marital status, passport/identity-card number etc.

- Based on this information every polling station will get lists of all eligible voters resident in the neighbourhood served by this particular station.
Requirements for becoming a voter

Federal elections
- German citizenship and three months of living in Germany.
- Minimum age is 18 years.

State elections
- German citizenship and up to three months of living in the state (some states require less time).
- Minimum age is 18 years with the exceptions of Hamburg, Bremen, Schleswig-Holstein and Brandenburg where 16 is the minimum age.

Local elections
- German or EU citizenship and up to three months of living in the state (some states require less time)
- Minimum age is 16 years in Baden-Wurttemberg, Brandenburg, Bremen, Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, Saxony-Anhalt and Schleswig-Holstein and 18 years for the other eight states.
What happens at the polls?

◦ Eligible voters will automatically receive a notification card via mail some weeks before election day. This card contains information about the location of the polling station.

◦ Election are always held on Sundays. On the election day, polling stations will be open from 8:00 AM to 6:00 PM.

◦ Voters must identify with their passport or identity card. They should also provide their notification card for inspection. In case of a loss of the notification card voting is still possible.

◦ Voting must take place personal in the ballot booth. The votes are counted in public.

◦ Postal voting is possible without any costs.
Election security

- Germany uses only pen and paper for elections. Voting machines are not directly ruled out, but the technical requirements have not been met yet. Therefore, the security of the election process itself is not a serious concern in Germany.

- Growing concerns about systemic influencing of the public opinion through social bots, fake news and leaks.
How is participation promoted?

- Participation is relatively high compared to the US, but nevertheless a wide range of promotion programs exist.

Voter turnout

- Germany
- US

Graph showing voter turnout from 1940 to 2020 for Germany and the US.
Germanys multi-party system
What role do parties play in the election process?

- German voting system, called “personalized proportional representation”, is especially designed for Parties.

- It consists of two votes, one for a local district candidate and one for a party. Anybody who has passive suffrage can become a district candidate, but only a party can create lists.

- There are 299 wards, which represent one half of all seats of the Bundestag (first vote).

- The other 299 seats are distributed according to relative amount of the parties’ second votes.

- To prevent an unfair representation of bigger parties which tend to win more districts than percentage seats, smaller parties will receive additional seats.
What role play parties in the selection of candidates?

- List candidates are selected only by the parties.

- Getting direct candidates without party membership or at least an affiliation into office is highly unlikely expect from some exceptions on local levels.

- Primaries are a rare expectation and are not public.

- In theory, candidates are chosen at state conventions. Practically, party structures have a huge influence.