

From the Reichstag to the Bundestag

Dates. Pictures. Documents.

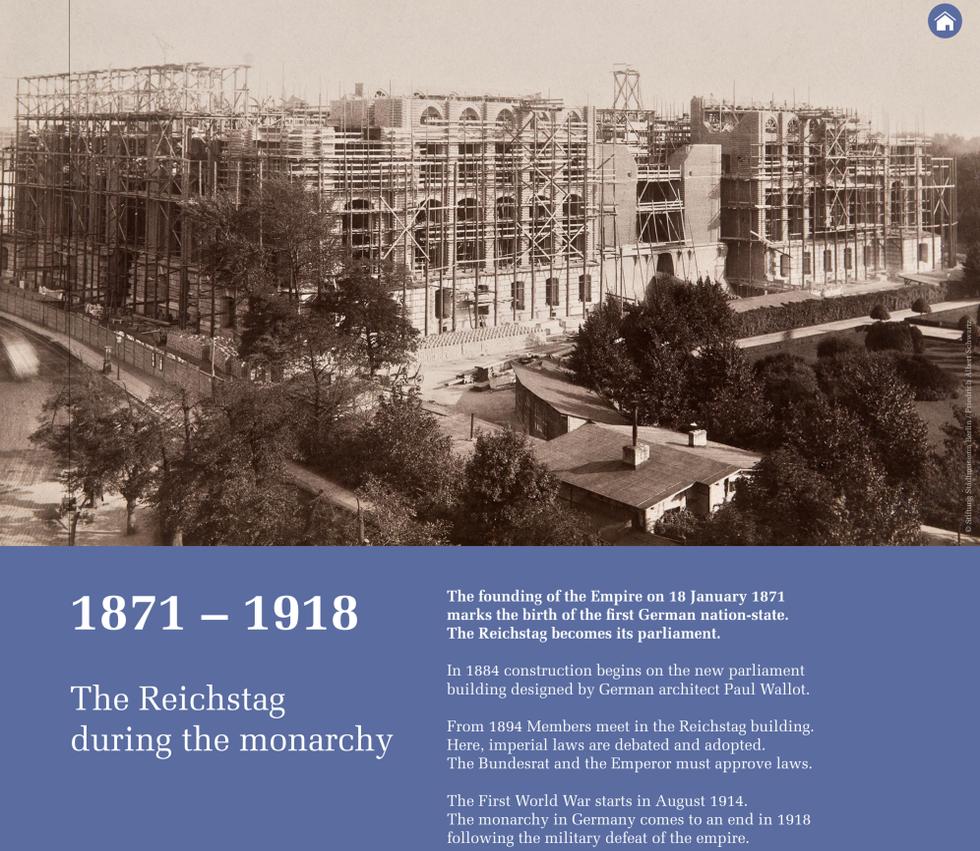


The Reichstag building has a turbulent history. It was built at the end of the 19th century for the German Reichstag. Today it is the seat of the German Bundestag.

Selected photos and documents tell the story of the building from its origins to the present day.

The exhibition takes you further, to other sites of German parliamentary history in Berlin, Weimar and Bonn. It also informs you about suffrage and the role assigned to Parliament in the various constitutions of Germany since 1871.

Further information on the history of parliamentarianism in Germany can be discovered in the German Bundestag's exhibition "Milestones – Setbacks – Sidetracks" in the Deutscher Dom at Gendarmenmarkt, here in Berlin.



1871 – 1918

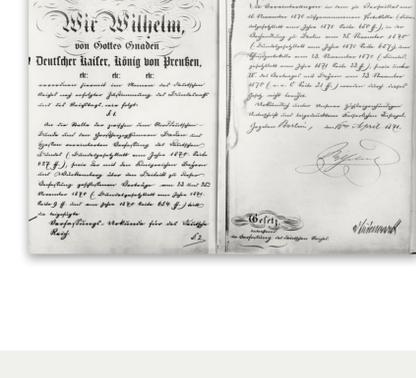
The Reichstag during the monarchy

The founding of the Empire on 18 January 1871 marks the birth of the first German nation-state. The Reichstag becomes its parliament.

In 1884 construction begins on the new parliament building designed by German architect Paul Wallot.

From 1894 Members meet in the Reichstag building. Here, imperial laws are debated and adopted. The Bundesrat and the Emperor must approve laws.

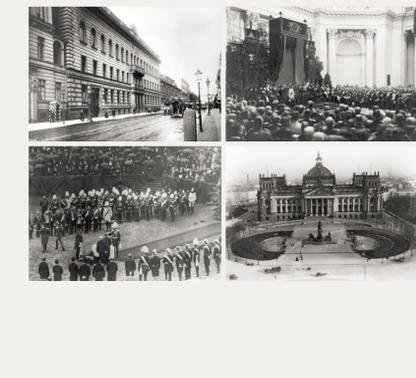
The First World War starts in August 1914. The monarchy in Germany comes to an end in 1918 following the military defeat of the empire.



Constitution of the German Empire

“We William, by the Grace of God”: on 16 April 1871 Emperor William I issues the constitution of the German Empire. The Reichstag can influence legislation and approves the Emperor's budget. The Imperial Chancellor does not answer to Parliament, but solely to the Emperor.

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Meeting venues

The Parliament meets in the former Royal Porcelain Manufactory from autumn 1871 (top left). In 1884 Emperor William I lays the foundation stone for the Reichstag building (bottom left). His grandson Emperor William II inaugurates it in December 1894 (top right). The Reichstag now has its own building (bottom right).

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The right to vote

Men aged 25 and over are entitled to vote. The women of the Empire cannot take part in Reichstag elections, nor can soldiers in active military service and people receiving paupers' assistance from public funds. This flyer from 1911 documents the calls for women to be allowed to vote.

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Parliamentary beer evening

Although Imperial Chancellor Otto von Bismarck takes a sceptical view of Parliament, he occasionally seeks conversation with the Members.

© hpk / Stiftung Preussische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg

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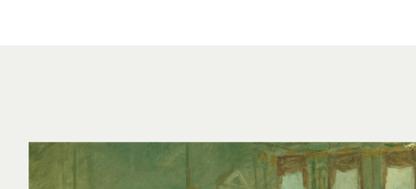


“Kulturkampf”

In this 1875 caricature Bismarck and Pope Pius IX are depicted playing a game of chess. The political background is the conflict between the Empire and the Catholic Church. Bismarck is also keen to reduce the political influence of the Catholic Centre Party.

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Social legislation

Material hardship and poor working conditions lead to repeated protests and strikes. At the initiative of Imperial Chancellor Bismarck the Reichstag passes several social security laws in the 1880s. These social policy measures are also intended to reduce the social democratic voter base.

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The First World War

This notice announces the outbreak of war. Decisions must now be taken in the Reichstag regarding the granting of war credits.

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A political truce

At the outset of war in 1914, Emperor William II calls for national cohesion and loyalty. The parties initially assure him of their support.

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Inscription

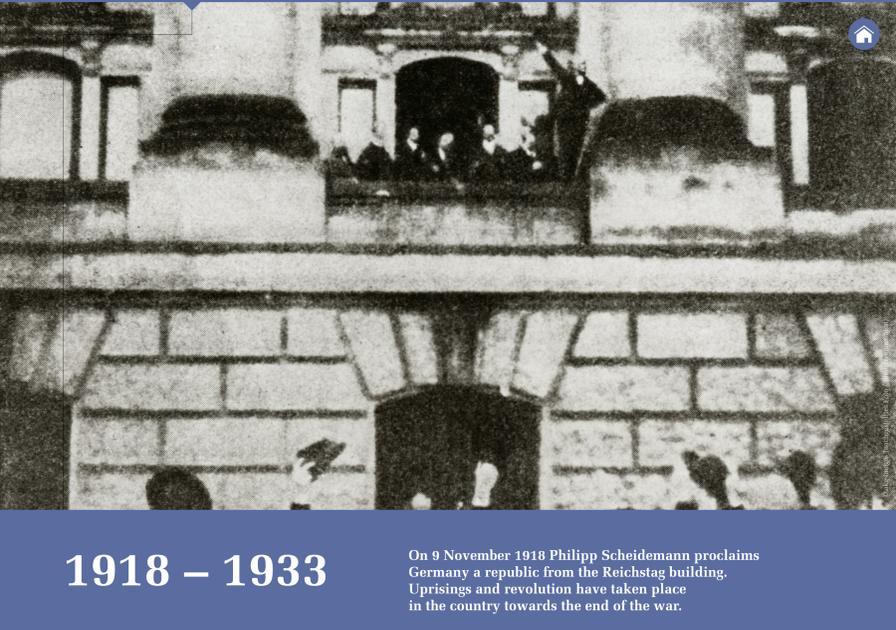
In 1916, in the midst of the First World War, the words Dem Deutschen Volke (To the German people) are inscribed on the Reichstag building. The initial enthusiasm for the war has been replaced by war weariness and protests. The First World War ends in 1918 with the defeat of Germany.

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1918 – 1933

The Reichstag during the Weimar Republic

On 9 November 1918 Philipp Scheidemann proclaims Germany a republic from the Reichstag building. Uprisings and revolution have taken place in the country towards the end of the war.

The National Assembly meets in Weimar and adopts the constitution of the first German parliamentary democracy on 31 July 1919. It enshrines basic civil rights and freedoms such as equality before the law, freedom of assembly and freedom of belief and conscience.

Life and politics in the Weimar Republic are shaped by strong ideological differences, social hardship and anti-democratic propaganda. Too few passionate democrats support Germany's first parliamentary democracy.



Weimar

From February 1919 the constituent German National Assembly meets in the Weimar National Theatre. Friedrich Ebert gives the opening speech. Away from the unrest in Berlin, the elected Members draft a constitution in Weimar. Germany becomes a parliamentary democracy.

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Weimar Constitution

On 11 August 1919 Reich President Friedrich Ebert and members of the government sign the new Constitution of the German Empire. Parliament is now responsible for legislation, budgetary law and oversight of the government. Elected directly by the people, the President has far-reaching powers under the constitution.

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Berlin

From 1920 the Reichstag meets in Berlin. The consequences of war and financial crises dominate Members' work in the years that follow.

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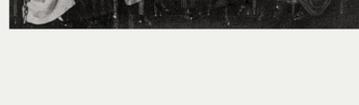


Deliberations

The Reichstag building also houses meeting rooms for parliamentary groups and committees. This image shows a meeting of the Committee on Foreign Affairs.

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Suffrage

Female parliamentarians from various parties gather for a photo, including: Marie-Elisabeth Lüders (back row, 2nd from right), later President "by age" of the Bundestag, and Marie Juchacz (back row, 3rd from right), founder of the Worker's Welfare Committee. The right to vote in general, equal, direct and secret elections is introduced for women and men aged 20 and over in the German Empire in 1918.

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Campaigns and street fights

Street campaigning plays a major role when competing for votes. Politically motivated fights in the street are also part of life in the Weimar Republic. Extremist parties from the left and the right seek to undermine democratic parliamentary order.

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Fragmentation

A distinctive feature of the Weimar Republic is the anti-republican mood in the country effectively during its election campaign (bottom). Due to the lack of an electoral threshold many parties can enter Parliament despite receiving a low share of the votes. This, too, fuels political instability: a total of 16 governments serve during the Weimar Republic in only 14 years.

© Iphk

Reichstagswahl Wahlkreis 12 (Ehringen)		
1	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (Hitler)	1
2	Christlichsozialer Partei Deutschlands (Hug)	2
3	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (Thälmer)	3
4	Deutsche Zentrumspartei (Hug)	4
5	Christlichsozialer Volksdienst (Hug)	5
5a	Sozialer Mittelstand (Hug)	5a
7	Deutsche Christenpartei (Hug)	7
8	Deutsche Christenpartei (Hug)	8
9	Christlich-sozialer Volksdienst (Hug)	9
9a	Christlichsozialer Volksdienst (Hug)	9a
10	Reichspartei des deutschen Mittelstandes (Hug)	10
13	Christlicher Mittelstand (Hug)	13
14	Deutscher Volksdienst (Hug)	14
17	Christlichsozialer Volksdienst (Hug)	17
18	Christlichsozialer Volksdienst (Hug)	18
20a	Deutscher Volksdienst (Hug)	20a
20b	Nationalsozialistische Partei des Mittelstandes (Hug)	20b
21	Christlichsozialer Volksdienst (Hug)	21
25	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (Thälmer)	25
26	Nationalsozialistische Partei (Hug)	26
27	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (Thälmer)	27
28	Christlichsozialer Volksdienst (Hug)	28
29	Christlichsozialer Volksdienst (Hug)	29
30	Nationalsozialistische Partei (Hug)	30



Reichspräsident von Hindenburg nach der Eidesleistung, beim Abschieden der Front vor dem Reichstagsgebäude am 12. 5. 25.

The "substitute Emperor"

Reich President Paul von Hindenburg inspects a military formation in 1919 after being sworn in. As head of state he has extensive powers: he can dissolve the Reichstag, issue emergency decrees and declare a state of emergency; he appoints and dismisses Chancellor and ministers. Under Hindenburg the extent of these powers contributes to the Weimar Republic's collapse.

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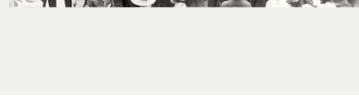
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Myths and burdens

Demonstrators protest in front of the Reichstag in 1919 against the Treaty of Versailles (bottom). The Treaty conditions, such as the high reparations to be paid, weigh heavily on the Republic. Right-wing parties blame democratic forces for the defeat in the First World War. According to the propaganda of the "stab-in-the-back" myth, the democrats betrayed the soldiers on the front (top).

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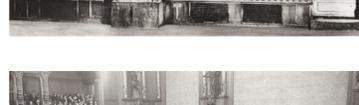
National Socialists

The National Socialist Party (NSDAP) uses the anti-republican mood in the country effectively during its election campaign (top). Members of the NSDAP attend a sitting of the Reichstag in uniform (bottom).

Reich President Paul von Hindenburg appoints Adolf Hitler as Chancellor on 30 January 1933. After the elections of 31 July 1932 his party forms the largest parliamentary group in the Reichstag.

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Brandstiftung: Reichstags-Gebäude in Flammen

Kuppel und Saal ein Feuermeer.

Brandstifter verhaftet und geständig.

1933 – 1945

The Reichstag during National Socialism

Arson: on the night of 27/28 February 1933, fire ravages the Reichstag's plenary chamber. In March 1933 the Reichstag adopts Hitler's Enabling Act at the Kroll Opera House. Parliament thus deprives itself of its powers.

The National Socialists destroy democracy: they rescind basic rights and establish a dictatorship led by Hitler. Terror and propaganda dominate politics and daily life in the "Third Reich". The National Socialists systematically persecute, arrest and murder millions of people.

The Second World War unleashed by the German Reich claims over 50 million lives. It ends with the unconditional surrender of the Wehrmacht on 8 May 1945.



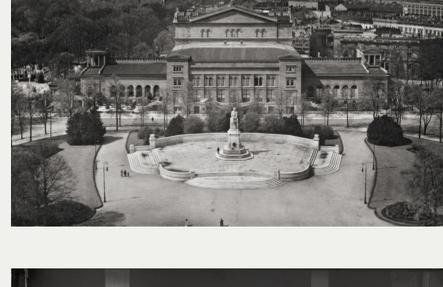
Reichstag fire

The National Socialists blame political opponents for the fire in the Reichstag in February 1933. The actual course of events remains unclear.



Destruction

The plenary chamber is destroyed by the fire and is not reconstructed. Other parts of the building continue to be used, during the war as a hospital and maternity ward.



Sham parliament

After the fire Parliament meets in the Kroll Opera. It is here that the Enabling Act submitted by Adolf Hitler is passed on 24 March 1933. Parliamentary democracy is cast aside. The SPD unanimously rejects the law. Communist Members are excluded from the vote. The Reichstag is now a sham parliament.



Sham election

Voters no longer have a choice: with the introduction on 14 July 1933 of a law banning the creation of new political parties, the NSDAP becomes the sole party permitted in Germany.



The Second World War

National Socialist war propaganda: with the invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939 the German Reich unleashes the Second World War. It ends with the unconditional surrender of the Wehrmacht on 8 May 1945 and the downfall of the National Socialist dictatorship in Germany.



Rubble and ruin

The Reichstag building is severely damaged. Red Army soldiers occupy the Reichstag Building as a symbolic act, mistakenly regarding it as the political centre of the Third Reich. Soviet soldiers leave their permanent mark with graffiti on the walls of the Reichstag building.



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1933 – 1945

1933 – 1945

1933 – 1945

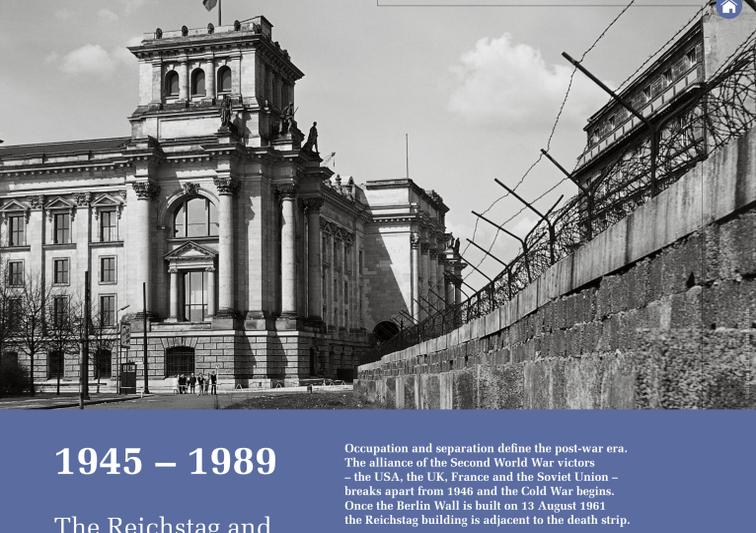
1933 – 1945

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1945 – 1989

The Reichstag and divided Germany

Occupation and separation define the post-war era. The alliance of the Second World War victors – the USA, the UK, France and the Soviet Union – breaks apart from 1946 and the Cold War begins. Once the Berlin Wall is built on 13 August 1961 the Reichstag building is adjacent to the death strip.

In the West a parliamentary democracy is created in 1949 in the shape of the Federal Republic. The Parliamentary Council promulgates the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany on 23 May 1949. The country is a democratic, social federal state.

In Eastern Germany a socialist state in the Soviet mould is created in the form of the GDR. Under the Constitution of the GDR of 7 October 1949 the People's Chamber is the supreme organ of the state. In reality power is held by the SED, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany.



After the war

Berliners plant potatoes and vegetables near the Reichstag building and in the Tiergarten (top). In 1955 the German Bundestag decides to rebuild the Reichstag building under the direction of architect Paul Baumgarten. The Platz der Republik hosts cultural events and demonstrations (bottom).

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1945 – 1989



Meeting place

Bundestag parliamentary groups and committees occasionally meet in the Reichstag building. Pictured from top: the CDU / CSU, FDP and SPD groups. The Four Power Agreement of 1971 forbids plenary sittings of the Bundestag in Berlin, however.

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1945 – 1989



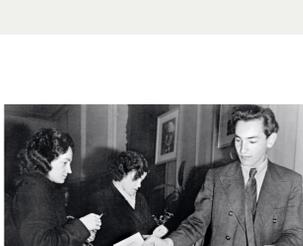
Exhibition space

The exhibition "Questions on German History" can be viewed in the Reichstag building from 1971. Around 17 million visitors explore the history of Germany here until 1994.

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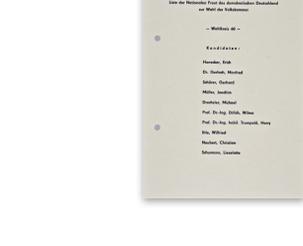
People's Chamber

In 1976 the Palace of the Republic opens in East Berlin. The infrequent meetings of the GDR sham parliament, the People's Chamber, are held in the smaller hall. The large chamber is used for cultural events and promoting the image of socialism, as seen here at the 11th SED party conference in 1986.

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1945 – 1989



Sham election

Votes cast openly at the first elections to the People's Chamber on 15 October 1950; while the GDR constitution provides for secret ballots, the reality could not be more different – using a voting booth is considered suspicious.

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A single list

1971 People's Chamber election in Karl-Marx-Stadt: candidates from one list only appear on the "ballot paper".

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1945 – 1989



Opening

Ceremony establishing the Parliamentary Council on 1 September 1948 in the Museum Koenig in Bonn: delegates of Land parliaments in the three Western occupation zones draft a constitution for the Federal Republic of Germany.

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1945 – 1989



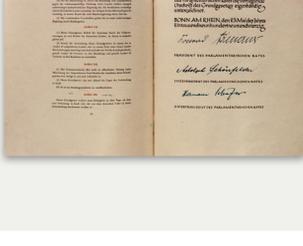
Parliamentary Council

The 65 voting members, along with five non-voting deputies from Berlin, meet in the main hall of the Pedagogical Academy in Bonn. Citizens follow the meetings with great interest.

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1945 – 1989



23 May 1949

As President of the Parliamentary Council, Konrad Adenauer announces the promulgation of the Basic Law for the Federal Republic. Pictured next to him: Helene Weber, Hermann Schäfer, Adolf Schönfelder and Jean Steuck.

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1945 – 1989



Founding statutes

The Basic Law's entry into force marks the birth of the Federal Republic of Germany. The preamble states that: "The entire German people are called upon to achieve in free self-determination the unity and freedom of Germany."

© Bundeszentrale / Egon Richter



Elections

The first Bundestag elections on 14 August 1949 take place in the shadow of the war's aftermath. Contemporary campaign posters reflect political issues, such as the future of Germany's former eastern territories and denazification. With a voter turnout of over 78 percent it is also evident that the people approve of the new Basic Law.

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1945 – 1989



Bundeshaus

The Federal Eagle by sculptor Ludwig Gies displayed in the plenary chamber of the Bundeshaus in Bonn is the symbol of parliamentary democracy in the Federal Republic of Germany. A parliamentary district is built by the River Rhine. The city of Bonn is intended only as a temporary location for the government headquarters, yet the division of Germany continues.

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1945 – 1989



A new home

The Bundestag meets temporarily in a converted former waterworks (top). Günter Behnisch designs a new Plenary Chamber. Glass panels and open-plan architecture symbolise Germany's transparent democracy (bottom). When Parliament moves into the new building in 1992 the transfer to Berlin has already been decided.

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1945 – 1989



1989 – 1990

Two parliaments and reunification

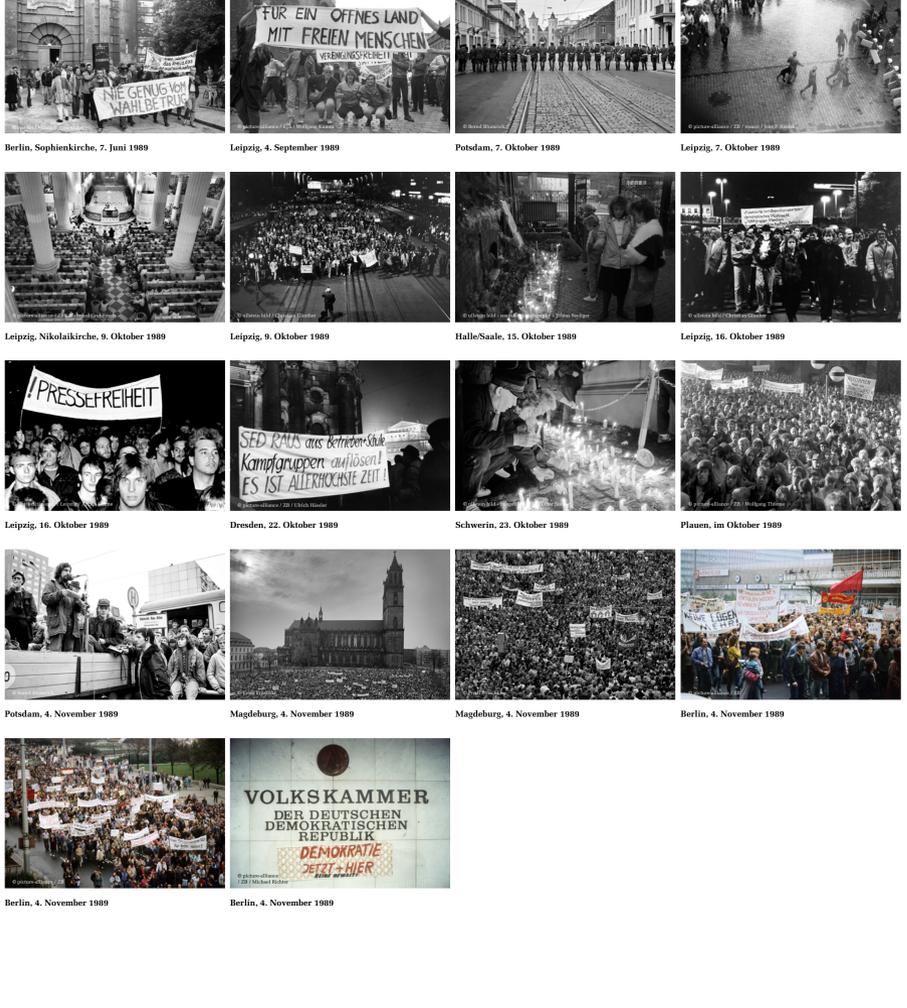
“We are the people” is the slogan of the Peaceful Revolution in the GDR in autumn 1989. The Wall comes down on 9 November 1989.

On 18 March 1990 the first democratic elections are held in the GDR. The People’s Chamber votes for accession of the GDR to the area of application of the Basic Law. The Bundestag and the Federal Government in Bonn set the course for German unity.

The Allied powers of the Second World War give their approval in the Two Plus Four Agreement: the road to reunification is clear. On 31 August 1990 representatives from both German governments sign the Unification Treaty.

The Peaceful Revolution in the GDR

Encouraged by political reforms in other communist states in Eastern Europe, resistance against the dictatorship also grows in the GDR. Throughout the country people gather together for peace prayers and public protest. They call for freedom and democracy. Many people are arrested. Faced with huge numbers of peaceful demonstrators, the state authorities ultimately surrender. The Wall falls on the evening of 9 November 1989.



Berlin, Sophienkirche, 7. Juni 1989

Leipzig, 4. September 1989

Potsdam, 7. Oktober 1989

Leipzig, 7. Oktober 1989

Leipzig, Nikolaikirche, 9. Oktober 1989

Leipzig, 9. Oktober 1989

Halle/Saale, 15. Oktober 1989

Leipzig, 16. Oktober 1989

Leipzig, 16. Oktober 1989

Dresden, 22. Oktober 1989

Schwerin, 23. Oktober 1989

Plauen, im Oktober 1989

Potsdam, 4. November 1989

Magdeburg, 4. November 1989

Magdeburg, 4. November 1989

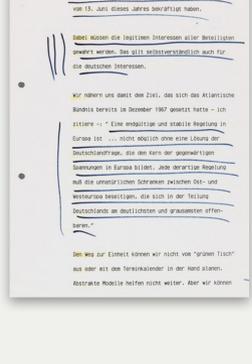
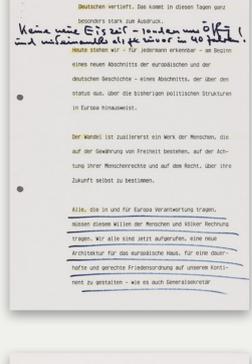
Berlin, 4. November 1989

Berlin, 4. November 1989

Berlin, 4. November 1989

1989 – 1990

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Programme

Excerpt from a speech manuscript: on 28 November 1989 Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl presents the Bundestag in Bonn with his “Ten-point programme for ending the division of Germany and Europe”.

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1989 – 1990

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Elections

The People’s Chamber removes the SED’s claim to leadership from the GDR constitution on 1 December 1989. Various parties are now able to stand in the first democratic elections on 18 March 1990. The result of the first and only free elections to the People’s Chamber of the GDR is also a vote for reunification.

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1989 – 1990

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Accession

President of the People’s Chamber of the GDR Sabine Bergmann-Pohl informs Bundestag President Rita Süßmuth of the accession decision of 23 August 1990.

© DBT



Unification Treaty

On 31 August 1990 representatives of both German governments sign the treaty on the “Establishment of German Unity”.

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1990 – 1999

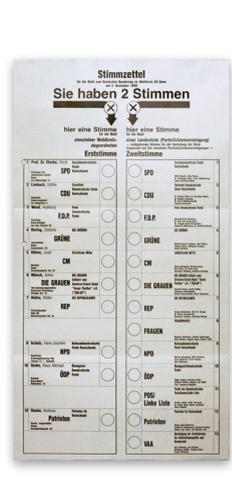
Parliament and German unity

On the night of 2 / 3 October 1990 thousands of people joyfully celebrate German reunification in front of the Reichstag building.

In December 1990 Germans elect a parliament for their reunified country. In 1991 the German Bundestag votes to move its seat to Berlin.

In the summer of 1995 the artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude wrap the Reichstag building. Reconstruction of the building follows, according to plans by British architect Norman Foster. A glass dome on top of the Reichstag building becomes an eye-catching visitor attraction.

The Bundestag commences work in Berlin in 1999, with the Reichstag building as its seat once more.



Elections

The first all-German Bundestag elections take place on 2 December 1990.

© Bundesregierung / Klaus Lehnartz

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1990 – 1999

Opening

On 20 December 1990 the Members of the first all-German parliament meet in the plenary chamber of the Reichstag building for the constituent sitting.

© picture alliance / Wolfgang Kumm

1990 – 1999

Decision on the capital

On 20 June 1991 Members of the German Bundestag decide whether Parliament will meet in Bonn or Berlin in future: a slim majority vote for Berlin.

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1990 – 1999

Meeting place

The German Bundestag meets in the new plenary chamber in Bonn from autumn 1992 until its move to Berlin in 1999.

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1990 – 1999

Taking the oath

On 1 July 1994 Roman Herzog is sworn in at the Reichstag building in Berlin following his election as Federal President by the Federal Convention.

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1990 – 1999

Art

In 1995 the Reichstag is wrapped for 14 days. Artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude are able to realise their project after many years of planning. Five million people visit the artwork.

© Wolfgang Volz © 1995 Christo

1990 – 1999

Major building site

The Bundestag decides to reconstruct the Reichstag building in Berlin. British architect Norman Foster wins the competition to design it. Construction work starts in July 1995.

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1990 – 1999

Reichstag dome

Architect Norman Foster presents Bundestag President Rita Süssmuth with his designs for a glass dome to be constructed at the express wish of the Bundestag's Members.

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1990 – 1999

Handover of the key

On 19 April 1999 Bundestag President Wolfgang Thierse receives the key for the new seat of Parliament.

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1990 – 1999

Beginnings

On the day the key is handed over the plenary chamber is also inaugurated. The German Bundestag commences its work here in autumn 1999.

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1990 – 1999

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Legal notice



German Bundestag
Parliament of the Federal Republic of Germany

Deutscher Bundestag
Platz der Republik 1
11011 Berlin
Germany

Tel.: +49 (0)30 227-0
Fax: +49 (0)30 227-36878
E-Mail: mail@bundestag.de

Legal representative
The President of the German Bundestag

VAT registration number
DE 122119035

“From the Reichstag to the Bundestag” – An exhibition by the German Bundestag

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Coordination: German Bundestag Research Services,
Research Section WD 1 – History, Contemporary History and Politics

E-Mail: vorzimmer.wd1@bundestag.de

The exhibition is located on the roof terrace of the Reichstag building and can be visited free of charge. However, registration in advance is required.