

Hallo Bundestag

Embedding Constituency Days in Politics.

Objectives

With the Constituency Days, *Hallo Bundestag* aims to institutionalise a permanent, low-threshold dialogue format between randomly selected people and members of the federal German parliament. The goals are:

- Institutionalise Constituency Days throughout Germany to expand the positive effects of the format,
- establish a nationwide network of local partner organisations and enable them to organise Constituency Days independently,
- further research the impact of the format and make it more visible: Over the next three years, the project will engage 150 members of parliament and 1,250 randomly selected people in 50 constituencies.

The Constituency Day

- A one-day dialogue format in which approximately 25 randomly selected people from a constituency engage in constructive exchange with one another and with their members of the Bundestag.
- We select participants using the Outreach Random Selection Method, which specifically focuses on including people who would not otherwise participate (with a particular emphasis on those who are not eligible to vote, those who are politically disengaged, and those who are structurally disadvantaged).
- We develop topics through a participatory process involving politicians and residents and prepare them on a scientific basis. They touch on the realities of people's lives and are relevant at the national level and across party lines. Issues range from fundamental questions (e.g. how to reduce polarisation in society) to concrete political topics (e.g. healthcare, mobility, economic development).
- Professional facilitation creates a safer space in which even controversial issues can be discussed respectfully.

Previous successes of Constituency Days

Constituency Days are one of the most tried-and-tested and well-researched democratic innovations. Positive effects that strengthen democracy were observed both during the pilot phase (2021) and during the proof of concept (2023–2024). Constituency Days are effective because they:

- build trust in politicians, political parties and (national) political processes – particularly among participants who, prior to attending the Constituency Day, expressed little interest in or trust in politics,
- boost participants' sense of self-efficacy and political engagement,
- enable MPs to establish valuable contact with groups that are otherwise difficult to reach.

Why now?

With Constituency Days, we are addressing three crises affecting German democracy:

Crisis of representation: Distance and mistrust between people and (federal) politics are growing – on both sides.

➔ Constituency Days make representation tangible and thereby revitalise the relationship between politics and the public. Institutionalising this format strengthens representative democracy and brings politics and people closer together once again.

Crisis of social cohesion: Polarisation, polemics, and disinformation are undermining trust in our pluralistic society and confidence in the future.

➔ Institutionalised Constituency Days promote lasting social cohesion by enabling respectful, constructive dialogue on even controversial issues, familiarizing people with alternating realities of life, and allowing nuanced perspectives to be heard.

Crisis of engagement: Inequalities in access to resources for political participation are increasing.

➔ Constituency Days enable political participation and self-efficacy, especially for groups that have so far remained invisible or unheard. The evaluation shows that the format strengthens participants' democratic engagement over the long term. By encouraging networking and empowering local organisations – such as museums, libraries, adult education centers, and volunteer initiatives – we translate participants' activation during Constituency Days into sustained local engagement, thereby diversifying structures of volunteering and civic participation.

Pathways to political institutionalisation

- An advisory board comprising experts from the fields of academia, constitutional law, politics, public administration and civil society will develop and refine scenarios for embedding the initiative within the political system. These scenarios could range from a public-civic partnership to the (re)establishment of a dedicated unit within the Bundestag.
- We will conduct interviews and workshops with key actors within the federal administration and political institutions to identify the conditions necessary for institutional integration and to contribute ideas at an early stage. We already have excellent contacts in place for this purpose.
- By organising 50 Constituency Days in collaboration with local organisations, we are laying the groundwork for the nationwide establishment of Constituency Days and other democratic innovations.

Collaboration and capacity building with local partner organizations

- We work with umbrella organisations of museums and libraries, as well as with the German Foundation for Civic Engagement and Volunteering (*Deutsche Stiftung für Engagement und Ehrenamt*), to select local implementation partners in line with clearly defined criteria such as political party neutrality.

- Partner organisations receive close support from the project team, for example through training sessions and the development of a handbook, facilitation guides, checklists and key supporting materials relating to public relations, agenda setting, participant support, etc.
- The project team provides academic support and ongoing external evaluation, as well as monitoring the work carried out with partner organisations.
- An advisory board comprising civil society experts in working with marginalised or disadvantaged groups (such as migrant and youth organisations, as well as organisations for people with disabilities) will work with the project team to further develop the format to suit specific target groups. To this end, existing contacts will be expanded.

Can MPs from all political groups take part in Constituency Day?

Hallo Bundestag is a cross-party project based on the fundamental values of the liberal democratic basic order. We want to bring people and MPs together to facilitate constructive dialogue, even on controversial issues. There are several reasons why MPs from non-democratic and, in some cases, confirmed far-right parties might also take part in Constituency Days:

- The institutionalisation of the Constituency Day is not an end in itself. The aim is to explore how the challenges posed by the involvement of the aforementioned parties can be addressed. Should the measures taken fail to ensure the resilience of the format and its positive effects, there is no basis for the political continuation of the format.
- If democratically elected MPs, as elected representatives and therefore representatives by virtue of their party affiliation, are systematically excluded, the format loses credibility in the eyes of the people who voted for them.

Here is a selection of measures we are implementing to safeguard the liberal democratic basic order:

- (1) The format has the greatest impact on strengthening democracy when several MPs from different parties take part. At least two MPs must therefore jointly initiate a Constituency Day. Other MPs from the constituency will be invited once the date has been set.
- (2) The decision on whether to invite additional elected representatives is made on a case-by-case basis. The key factors taken into account include, in particular, their specific public conduct, statements made, and compatibility with the fundamental principles of the project. Based on clear criteria, the decision is made not to invite individual elected representatives in specific cases.
- (3) MPs attend the Constituency Day in their capacity as elected representatives, not as representatives of their party. Their role is primarily that of listeners, and their speaking time is strictly limited. A culture of democratic dialogue forms the basis for cooperation at the Constituency Day. The protection of all participants, particularly structurally disadvantaged groups, is the top priority. In the event of breaches of the discussion rules communicated in advance, or if there is any discriminatory, misanthropic or other disruptive behaviour, the moderators will intervene decisively – up to exclusion from the event.

Project Schedule

- **2026:** Network building & development of training materials, first 15 Constituency Days with partner organisations, launch of the institutionalisation strategy: stakeholder mapping & kick-off embedding workshop, securing academic support.
- **2027/28:** a further approx. 35 Constituency Days, expansion of partner networks, further development of the embedding strategy through papers & events.
- **2029:** publication of embedding paper, political negotiations on embedding to accompany the federal election.

Who is behind the project?

Demokratie Innovation e.V. is a non-profit association based in Berlin. Known for its former initiative “Es geht LOS”, it promotes innovative, lottery-based, and inclusive participation formats and their institutionalisation.

In addition to piloting the Constituency Day format in 2021 and the proof of concept in 2023-2024, the association has designed, implemented, and institutionalised other innovative participation formats: municipal mission statement processes in two cities in Eastern and Western Germany, a youth council to develop a youth participation concept in Brandis (Saxony), and the first lottery-based university committees at HRW University.