



**HS/PO 351 STRUGGLES FOR DEMOCRACY:
A HISTORY OF MODERN GERMANY (1848 – PRESENT)**

IES Abroad Berlin

DESCRIPTION:

Germany's path to democracy has been marked by revolutions, wars, divisions, and (re)unifications. Drawing an arc from the failed 1848 revolutions to today's unified federal democracy, this course offers a history of modern Germany with a focus on Germany's democratic struggles. Through academic coursework, site visits, and a methodology workshop, students will trace continuities and ruptures, dead-ends and evolutions that have shaped Germany's history of democracy and continue to reverberate in today's Germany. Rather than providing a complete overview of German history, students will explore periods and moments in German history that define the nation's path towards democracy and unity, starting from the revolutions of 1814-49 to the rise and fall of the German Empire, the evolution and dissolution of the Weimar Republic, Nazi dictatorship, post-war division with two German state models, and the emergence of a reunified Germany and its ongoing challenges. At the same time, students will tackle the relationship of government and opposition, the role of political parties and movements, the place of women in Germany's democratic struggle, and the resiliency of today's democratic system. Berlin, a city that has witnessed dictatorship and liberation, division and unification, serves as the perfect backdrop for understanding this turbulent history. Designed for students interested in history and politics, this course provides a unique opportunity to examine Germany's democratic struggles, analyze the emergence of Germany's current political system, its impetus and contestations, and foster a deeper understanding of contemporary challenges to democracy worldwide.

CREDITS: 3 credits

CONTACT HOURS: 45 hours

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION: English

PREREQUISITES: Students should have already completed one political science, general history, or similar course.

ADDITIONAL COST: None

METHOD OF PRESENTATION: Lectures, seminar discussions, use of multimedia resources, course-related excursions, Moodle.

Class discussion: Most of each class will consist of discussions of key themes. Each class will be structured around a separate topic, which will be addressed with the help of one or more texts posted on Moodle beforehand. Students will be expected to prepare for class by reading and reflecting upon the assigned texts and to participate in class discussions, showing that they have understood and critically evaluated the authors' arguments. Students are expected to come prepared with personal notes on the readings.

Course-related trips: There will be several course-related trips such as:

- Cemetery of the "March Fallen" who died during the March Revolution of 1848 in Berlin
- Walking Tour: Women's Roles in the Proletarian Movements of the 1920s and 1930s
- Topography of Terror
- Stasi Museum Berlin
- Documentation Center for Displacement, Expulsion, Reconciliation

Workshop on Historical Methodology: In this in-class workshop, students will engage with a set of primary sources, closely related to the topic, to analyze and experience how historians use these sources as a basis for their work. Depending on the disciplinary focus, they will apply the methods and tools they have learned in their final research paper.

Lectures: The instructor will supplement class discussions with lectures to help the students interpret the material provided in the class readings, to tie the readings together, and provide summaries of theoretical approaches to the subject.



REQUIRED WORK AND FORM OF ASSESSMENT:

- Reading assignment – 15%
- Midterm exam – 25%
- Presentation – 20%
- Final research paper – 30%
- Participation – 10%

Reading assignment

Students submit one written review of a core reading (600 words) which they also present in class (5-7 minutes). Students will sign up for their reading assignments during week 1 and receive guidance on how to conduct the review.

Midterm exam

The midterm exam will focus on the first four topics of the course: the back and forth of the German struggle for democracy from 1848 until the end of the Nazi dictatorship in 1945. It will be an in-class exam (90 minutes, 3-5 essay questions).

Presentation

Each student will present an outline of their research project, elaborating on their research question, research method, assessment of 5-8 core readings as well as the chapters and key messages envisaged for the final research paper (8-10 minutes / 6-8 slides) in week 10. Please hand in your topic and research question via Moodle by the end of week 8. -> Moodle section "presentation of research project". Students will receive comments from their professor (and fellow students) to be incorporated into their final research paper.

Final research paper

Students will submit a 2,000-word research paper on the topic and research question presented in week 10. The final paper is due by the end of week 13 (Thursday, 24:00) -> Moodle section "Final research paper".

Participation

Lectures and assigned readings are designed to complement each other. The texts for each class should be read in advance since this will allow for better participation in class and a more fruitful interaction between students and the teacher. Students should read each item on the list closely and come to class for a detailed discussion.

The following questions may help to prepare for the discussion:

- What outcome(s) is the author seeking to explain?
- What is this author(s) main argument?
- Where does this reading fit into the literature and how does it seek to contribute?
- What is the nature of this reading's empirical research design and findings?
- What are the paper's strengths and weaknesses?

This class is based on discussion of materials and topics and cannot function properly without an active participation of the students. Class participation includes:

- Asking questions and commenting on the weekly readings and topics of the day
- Responding questions on the readings,
- Participating actively in class discussions

A rubric for participation will be posted on Moodle.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Analyze key events in German history from 1848 to present, with a focus on the back and forth of the German struggle for democracy

- Evaluate the causes and consequences of Germany's shifts between monarchy, dictatorship, and democracy
- Explore the historical significance of Berlin as a site of political transformation and memory
- Trace the continuities and ruptures that mark German history
- Analyze the rise of political parties and movements and their role in the nation's struggle for democracy
- Assess contemporary political challenges facing Germany and other modern democracies
- Develop advanced German language skills through academic discussions and immersive cultural experiences

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance and punctuality in all courses and field studies are mandatory. Absences can only be excused for valid reasons. Unexcused absences can affect students' grades. Students who miss 25% or more of all class sessions will fail the course. Missed exams cannot be taken at another time except in case of documented illness. Late submission of term papers and other work will result in grade reduction unless an extension due to illness or an emergency is approved. Please consult the IES Berlin Academics Manual on Moodle for additional details.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

Students are expected to abide by the IES Abroad Academic Integrity Code. Assigned papers need to be properly and amply footnoted where appropriate, with all sources attributed, including images. Suspicious papers may be checked with plagiarism-detecting software.

CONTENT:

Session	Content	Assignments & Readings
Week 1 Introduction to German History and Democracy	Session 1 • Presentation: themes, problems, challenges • Definition and characteristics of democracy (a discussion) • Guidelines for reading assignments (literature review)	Sign-up for reading assignments (literature review)
	Session 2: • Germany in 1848: Political and social conditions	Readings: • Anderson, Benedict. <i>Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism</i>. Revised Edition. Verso, 2016. (Ch. 3 "The Origins of National Consciousness" pp. 37–46) • MacGregor, Neil. <i>Germany: Memories of a Nation</i>. Vintage, 2016. (Ch. 15 "Two Paths from 1848" pp. 263–281) • Smith, Helmut Walser. <i>Germany: A Nation in Its Time: Before, During, and After Nationalism, 1500-2000</i>. Liveright, 2020. (III "The Age of Nationalism" pp. 191–234)

Week 2 The Revolutions of 1848-49 and Their Legacy	Session 3: • Causes and key events • What is a revolution? What is a failed revolution? • The role of the Frankfurt Parliament • Why did the revolution fail, and how does it still influence Germany today?	• Clark, Christopher. <i>Revolutionary Spring: Fighting for a New World 1848-1849</i>. Allen Lane, 2023. (Ch. 9 "After 1848" pp. 684–742)
	Session 4: <u>Excursion</u> to the Cemetery of the "March Fallen" (Friedhof der Märzgefallenen) who died during the March Revolution of 1848 in Berlin	• Flakin, Nathaniel. <i>Revolutionary Berlin: A Walking Guide</i>. Pluto Press, 2022. ("Introduction" pp. 1–37)
Week 3 The German Empire (1871-1918) and the Beginnings of Modern Nationalism	Session 5: • Authoritarian rule and limited democracy • The emergence of nationalist and populist movements • The formation of the German party system • The German workers movement and the emergence of the modern welfare state • first wave of feminism	• Anderson, Margaret Lavinia. <i>Practicing Democracy: Elections and Political Culture in Imperial Germany</i>. Princeton University Press, 2000. (Ch. 8 "Disabling Authority" pp. 239–277)

	Session 6: <u>Workshop on Historical Methodology:</u> Guided by a local expert on museum and archive resources, students will engage with a variety of primary sources, related to the topic.	TBA
Week 4 The Weimar Republic (1919-1933) and the Fragility of Democracy	Session 7: - The creation of Germany's first democracy and lessons for modern democratic resilience - The revolutions and uprisings of 1918/19 - The achievements of Weimar: women's suffrage and social reform - Political polarization and violence	- Botstein, Leon. "Walther Rathenau (1867—1922) Bildung, Prescription, Prophecy." <i>Makers of Jewish Modernity: Thinkers, Artists, Leaders, and the World They Made</i>, edited by Jacques Picard et al., Princeton University Press, 2016, pp. 126–43. - Fulbrook, Mary. <i>A History of Germany 1918 - 2014: The Divided Nation</i>. John Wiley and Sons, 2014. (Ch 2. "The Weimar Republic: Origins and Orientations pp. 15–39) - Stern, Fritz. <i>Five Germanys I Have Known</i>. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007. (Ch. 2 "Weimar" pp. 51–88)
	Session 8: <u>Walking Tour:</u> Women's Roles in the Proletarian Movements of the 1920s and 1930s	Sneeringer, Julia. <i>Winning Women's Votes: Propaganda and Politics in Weimar Germany</i>. University of North Carolina Press, 2002. (Ch. 1 "Onwards my Sisters!" pp. 19–68)
Week 5 The Nazi Dictatorship (1933-1945) From the Destruction of Democracy to the Holocaust	Session 9: - The coordination ("Gleichschaltung") of German society and consolidation of Nazi power - Political repression, propaganda, and mass mobilization	- Aly, Götz. <i>Why the Germans? Why the Jews?</i> Translated by Jefferson Chase. Picador Paper, 2015. ("Introduction: The Question of Questions" pp. 8–26) - Arendt, Hannah. <i>The Origins of Totalitarianism</i>. Harcourt, 1973. (Ch. 11 "The Totalitarian Movement" pp. 241–263) - Fritzsche, Peter. <i>Life and Death in the Third Reich</i>. Harvard University Press, 2008. ("Heil Hitler" pp. 19–25) - Evans, Richard. <i>The Coming of the Third Reich</i>. Penguin UK, 2004. ("Volksgemeinschaft" pp. 38–55) - Kaplan, Marion. <i>Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany</i>. Oxford University Press, 1998. (Ch. 2 "In Private: The Daily Lives of Jewish Women and Families, 1933—1938" pp. 50–73)

	Session 10: <u>Course-related Trip:</u> Topography of Terror	Ladd, Brian. <i>The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape</i>. University of Chicago Press, 1997. ("Nazi Berlin" pp. 127–173)
Week 6	Midterms	Midterm Exam
Week 7 Session 11-12 Capitulation and Reconstruction: West Germany's Democratic Evolution after 1949	Session 11: - The Basic Law (Grundgesetz) and its democratic structures - The "Economic Miracle" - The Modern Party System and Its Continuities - Democratic Repression? The Banning of the KPD and the "Radikalenerlass"	- Fulbrook, Mary. <i>A History of Germany 1918 - 2014: The Divided Nation</i>. John Wiley and Sons, 2014. (Ch. 6 "Occupation and Division" pp. 113–141) - Stern, Fritz. <i>Five Germanys I Have Known</i>. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007. (Ch. 6 "The Federal Republic: New Beginnings" pp. 194–228)
	Session 12: - Denazification 1968 student protests and their impact - The role of women's movements and environmental movements in shaping German democracy	- Evans, Richard. <i>The Third Reich in History and Memory</i>. Oxford University Press, 2017. (Ch. 24 "Was the Final Solution Unique?" pp. 365–389) - Frei, Norbert. <i>Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration</i>. Columbia University Press, 2002 ("The Amnesty Law of 1949" pp. 5–26) - Neiman, Susan. <i>Learning from the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil</i>. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019. (Ch. 2 "Sins of the Fathers" pp. 40–80) - Pendas, Devin O. <i>Democracy, Nazi Trials, and Transitional Justice in Germany, 1945–1950</i>. Cambridge UP, 2020. (Ch. 2 "The Antinomies of German Law: Motivation, Action and Guilt" pp. 53–79)
Week 8 Life Under Dictatorship – The GDR and State Surveillance	Session 13: - The political system and repression under the SED regime - The role of the Stasi and resistance movements - Civil Society and the role of the churches	- Fulbrook, Mary. <i>The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker</i>. Yale University Press, 2005. (Ch. 2 "The East German Social Revolution" pp. 23–48) - Funder, Anna. <i>Stasiland: Stories from Behind the Berlin Wall</i>. Granta Books, 2004. ("Stasi HQ" pp. 54–66)

	Session 14: <u>Course-related Trip:</u> Visit to the Stasi Museum Berlin	- Garton Ash, Timothy. <i>The File: A Personal History</i>. Harper Collins, 1997. (Ch. 1 pp. 1–20) - Gieseke, Jens. <i>The History of the Stasi: East Germany's Secret Police, 1945-1990</i>. Berghahn Books, 2014. (Ch. 5 "Resistance, Opposition, Persecution") Please hand in the topic of your research via Moodle by the end of week 8 - > Moodle section „presentation of research outline (exposé)“
Week 9 The Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Origins of the "Berlin Republic"	Session 15: - The Peaceful Revolution of 1989 - The role of civil society	Sarotte, Mary. <i>The Collapse: The Accidental Opening of the Berlin Wall</i>. Basic Books, 2014. (Part II "The Competition for Control in East Berlin" pp. 85–126)
	Session 16 - Steps towards a unified democratic state - Economic and social challenges after reunification	Jarausch, Konrad Hugo. <i>The Rush to German Unity</i>. Oxford University Press, 1994. (Ch. 9 "Forging Unity" and "Conclusion" pp. 177–210)
Week 10	Session 17-18: <u>Presentations</u> - Students present their research outlines (exposé) - Discussion with class - Feedback from professor and peers for finalizing the research paper	
Week 11 Germany Reunified? The Ongoing Struggle for Unity and the Emergence of a New Party System	Session 19: - The East/West Divide—a Wall Within People's Minds? - Continuity of the East-West divide?	Fulbrook, Mary. <i>A History of Germany 1918 - 2014: The Divided Nation</i>. John Wiley and Sons, 2014. (Part III "the Divided Century" pp. 281–318)

	Session 20: - The rise and fall (and rise) of Die Linke - The rise of the AfD and right-wing populism in East and West Germany	- Dziadosz, Alex. "The Trial of Björn Höcke, the 'Real Boss' of Germany's Far Right." <i>The Guardian</i>, 2 Apr. 2025. - Wüstenberg, Jenny. <i>Civil Society and Memory in Postwar Germany</i>. Cambridge University Press, 2017. (Ch. 1 "Civil Society Activism, Memory Politics and Democracy" pp. 1—31)
Week 12 Germany in the 21st Century – Democracy in Crisis?	Session 21: - The impact of digitalization on democracy: Fake news, social media, and polarization - Defensive Democracy? Free speech and political extremism in the German context - How resilient is German democracy today in the face of the rise of populism?	Kaase M. "Germany: A Society and a Media System in Transition". <i>Democracy and the Media: A Comparative Perspective</i>, ed. by Gunther R, Mughan A, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000: pp. 375-401.
	Session 22: <u>Course-related Trip:</u> Documentation Center for Displacement, Expulsion, Reconciliation	TBA
Week 13	Finals	Final Research Paper due by the end of week 13 (Thursday, 24:00)

COURSE-RELATED TRIPS:

- Cemetery of the "March Fallen" who died during the March Revolution of 1848 in Berlin: The March Revolution of 1848 stands for demands for social justice, freedom, equality and democracy. The Cemetery of the March Fallen is a place of democratic tradition building, a place of learning about European democracy. Created for the dead of the March Revolution, it is not only a unique testimony, but also a product of the revolutionary events. It also serves as a memorial to two revolutions: In November and December 1918, the victims of the 1918/19 revolution were also buried in the Cemetery of the March Fallen.
- Walking Tour: Women's Roles in the Proletarian Movements of the 1920s and 1930s: Women played an important role in the German workers' movements, although they were confronted with less influence and rights than their male counterparts. They campaigned for better working conditions, equal rights and social reforms, but also contributed to the mobilization and organization of women workers. Particularly noteworthy in this context are women such as Clara Zetkin,

who played a leading role in the socialist women's movement, Rosa Luxemburg, who was committed to social justice and the labor movement, and Käthe Kollwitz, who addressed the social situation of women workers through her art. We will follow in the footsteps of these women on the walk.

- Topography of Terror: The Topography of Terror Documentation Center is a place of information and learning. It provides information at the historical site about the central institutions of the SS and police in the “Third Reich” and the crimes they committed throughout Europe.
- Stasi Museum Berlin: The museum offers insights into the Ministry for State Security as a crucial stabilizing factor of the GDR regime by means of various original documents and artifacts.
- Documentation Center for Displacement, Expulsion, Reconciliation : The Documentation Center offers a comprehensive overview of refugee movements in the 21st century and is particularly dedicated to the movement of refugees from the Near and Middle East to Germany since 2015.

REQUIRED READINGS:

- Aly, Götz. *Why the Germans? Why the Jews?* Translated by Jefferson Chase. Picador Paper, 2015.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised Edition. Verso, 2016.
- Anderson, Margaret Lavinia. *Practicing Democracy: Elections and Political Culture in Imperial Germany*. Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Arendt, Hannah. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Harcourt, 1973.
- Botstein, Leon. “Walther Rathenau (1867—1922) Bildung, Prescription, Prophecy.” *Makers of Jewish Modernity: Thinkers, Artists, Leaders, and the World They Made*, edited by Jacques Picard et al., Princeton University Press, 2016, pp. 126–43.
- Clark, Christopher. *Revolutionary Spring: Fighting for a New World 1848-1849*. Allen Lane, 2023.
- Dziadosz, Alex. “The Trial of Björn Höcke, the ‘Real Boss’ of Germany’s Far Right.” *The Guardian*, 2 Apr. 2025.
- Evans, Richard. *The Coming of the Third Reich*. Penguin UK, 2004.
- ———. *The Third Reich in History and Memory*. Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Flakin, Nathaniel. *Revolutionary Berlin: A Walking Guide*. Pluto Press, 2022.
- Frei, Norbert. *Adenauer’s Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration*. Columbia University Press, 2002.
- Fritzsche, Peter. *Life and Death in the Third Reich*. Harvard University Press, 2008.
- Fulbrook, Mary. *A History of Germany 1918 - 2014: The Divided Nation*. John Wiley and Sons, 2014.
- ———. *The People’s State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker*. Yale University Press, 2005.
- Funder, Anna. *Stasiland: Stories from Behind the Berlin Wall*. Granta Books, 2004.
- Garton Ash, Timothy. *The File: A Personal History*. Harper Collins, 1997.
- Gieseke, Jens. *The History of the Stasi: East Germany’s Secret Police, 1945-1990*. Berghahn Books, 2014.
- Jarausch, Konrad Hugo. *The Rush to German Unity*. Oxford University Press, 1994.
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- Kaplan, Marion. *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*. Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Ladd, Brian. *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape*. University of Chicago Press, 1997.
- MacGregor, Neil. *Germany: Memories of a Nation*. Vintage, 2016.
- Moeller, Robert G. “The Third Reich in Post-War German Memory.” *Nazi Germany*, edited by Jane Caplan, Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 246–66.
- Neiman, Susan. *Learning from the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019.
- Pendas, Devin O. *Democracy, Nazi Trials, and Transitional Justice in Germany, 1945–1950*. Cambridge UP, 2020.
- Sarotte, Mary. *The Collapse: The Accidental Opening of the Berlin Wall*. Basic Books, 2014.

- Smith, Helmut Walser. *Germany: A Nation in Its Time: Before, During, and After Nationalism, 1500-2000*. Liveright, 2020.
- Sneeringer, Julia. *Winning Women's Votes: Propaganda and Politics in Weimar Germany*. University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- Stern, Fritz. *Five Germanys I Have Known*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.
- Wüstenberg, Jenny. *Civil Society and Memory in Postwar Germany*. Cambridge University Press, 2017.

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