



## Legal and methodological bases of representative electoral statistics

### What is the legal basis of representative electoral statistics?

Since the 2002 Bundestag Election, electoral statistics have been compiled on the basis of a separate law. The legal basis is the Law on the General and the Representative Electoral Statistics at the Elections to the German Bundestag and at the Election of the Members of the European Parliament from the Federal Republic of Germany (Law on Electoral Statistics – WStatG) of 21 May 1999 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1023) as amended by Article 1 of the Law of 17 January 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 412).

The Law on Electoral Statistics is available for download on the website of the Federal Returning Officer at [www.bundeswahlleiter.de](http://www.bundeswahlleiter.de) on the webpage “Elections to the German Bundestag” under “Legal bases“.

### What purpose do representative electoral statistics have?

Representative electoral statistics serve information requirements in many spheres of society. They inform about the voting behaviour of various population groups, namely about **the voter turnout and the casting of votes by age, sex and Länder**.

### How are the secrecy of the ballot and data protection ensured?

**The overriding principle governing all surveys of electoral statistics is safeguarding the secrecy of the ballot. The following measures prescribed by law ensure that the secrecy of the ballot is not violated when representative electoral statistics are compiled:**

- The ballot papers used in that specific evaluation procedure merely have a distinguishing imprint for the sex and five age groups. Like all other ballot papers, they do **not carry any personal data** such as name, address or date of birth.
- To determine the voter turnout, the voters’ register is analysed only with regard to sex and ten age groups of the persons entitled to vote and the voters.
- The processing of the ballot papers and the register counts are strictly separate organisationally.
- A minimum size has been laid down for the polling districts selected: ballot box districts had to comprise at least 400 persons entitled to vote at the 2009 Bundestag Election. Postal ballot districts had to have comprised at least 400 voters at the 2005 Bundestag Election.
- To safeguard the secrecy of the ballot, results must not be published for individual polling districts belonging to the sample.

**These measures ensure that no conclusions can be drawn about whether and how an individual person has voted.**



## How are representative electoral statistics compiled?

For the 2009 Bundestag Election, a total of 2,861 sampling districts were selected at random by means of mathematical sampling from the around 90,000 polling districts. Among them were 2,523 of the about 75,000 ballot box districts and 338 of the about 15,000 postal ballot districts. The size of the sample ensures that the results of the districts selected are representative of the entire electoral area and of the individual Länder. The districts are selected by the Federal Returning Officer in consultation with the Land returning officers and the statistical offices of the Länder.

In the polling districts selected, the official ballot papers for recording the votes cast by the voters for the individual parties carry a distinguishing imprint for the sex and five age groups. Additionally, the breakdown by sex and age of those entitled to vote and the voter turnout are determined by analysing the voters' registers of the polling districts selected with regard to sex and ten age groups.

The persons entitled to vote are informed at the polling station or as they receive the postal ballot documents that they will contribute to the production of representative electoral statistics.

## What characteristics are covered?

In the election to the 17th German Bundestag, the **voter turnout** was determined with a breakdown **by sex** and by the following ten **age groups** as in the 1972 Bundestag Election (except for the years of 1994 and 1998 when the compilation of representative electoral statistics was interrupted):

Year of birth	Corresponding age
1989 to 1991	18 to 20 years
1985 to 1988	21 to 24 years
1980 to 1984	25 to 29 years
1975 to 1979	30 to 34 years
1970 to 1974	35 to 39 years
1965 to 1969	40 to 44 years
1960 to 1964	45 to 49 years
1950 to 1959	50 to 59 years
1940 to 1949	60 to 69 years
1939 and earlier	70 years and over

The **casting of votes** was determined (also since 1972) by **sex** and the following five **age groups**:

Year of birth	Corresponding age
1985 to 1991	18 to 24 years
1975 to 1984	25 to 34 years
1965 to 1974	35 to 44 years
1950 to 1964	45 to 59 years
1949 and earlier	60 years and over

Since voters are classified to ten or five age groups, it is impossible to come to conclusions about the votes cast by individual voters, and the secrecy of the ballot is guaranteed.



### Who evaluates the results?

The results are processed by the statistical offices of the Länder and the Federal Statistical Office. First the data obtained from the sample results are extrapolated by Länder to the total number of persons entitled to vote and of voters. Then they are aggregated to the result for the entire territory of the Federal Republic, and the results for the Federation and the Länder are published.

### What is the difference to voter interviews?

Representative electoral statistics reflect the **actual** voter turnout and casting of votes as it is based not on survey data but on the processing of voters' registers and ballot papers in the polling districts selected by sample. It thus mirrors the voting behaviour at the time the votes are cast. In contrast to that, electoral research institutes survey those entitled to vote before election day and voters on election day after they have cast their votes.

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