

23rd legislative period

The Bürgerschaft

Parliament's role and functions



HAMBURGISCHE
BÜRGERSCHAFT





Carola Veit is the President of the Bürgerschaft. She chairs and represents the Hamburg Parliament.

The Parliament meets every two weeks.



The democratic separation of powers

The philosopher Charles de Montesquieu (1689–1755) wrote, *“All would be lost if ... the same body were to exercise all three powers – the power to enact laws, the power to execute the decisions of the public authorities, and the power to pass judgement on crimes and disputes between individuals ...”*

The separation of powers is an essential characteristic of a representative democracy. The Bürgerschaft as the Parliament of the State [Land] of Hamburg exercises legislative power, the Senate as the Government holds executive power, and the courts hold judicial power.

The most important functions of the Bürgerschaft, alongside the enactment of laws and budgetary power, are scrutiny of the Senate, election of the First Mayor as the head of Hamburg’s Government and ratification of the appointment of Senators. The Hamburg Parliament is the supreme representative and decision-making body of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg and is directly elected by the citizens of Hamburg.

The Bürgerschaft – the State Parliament of Hamburg – 121 Members representing the people

“All state power emanates from the people,” says the Hamburg Constitution (Art. 3.II.1). Every five years the people of Hamburg elect the Members who will represent them in Parliament. The Members are subject only to their own consciences, and not bound by orders or instructions from third parties. They are obliged to work for the common good.

The Bürgerschaft is a part-time Parliament. Many of its Members have another job apart from exercising their political mandates. That is why the meetings of the Assembly, the Committees, the Working Groups and Parliamentary Groups are usually held in the afternoons and evenings.

Hamburg City Hall: seat of both Parliament and Government.





The Assembly and Committees of the Hamburg State Parliament

With the exception of parliamentary vacation periods, the Assembly – that is, the plenary meeting of all 121 Members – meets every second Wednesday. The public sittings, which are also broadcast as a livestream, start at 1.30 p.m. and last into the evening.

The real substantive parliamentary work takes place in the specialist Committees, which are made up of representatives of all Parliamentary Groups and are also usually open to the public. The make-up of the Committees is based on the size of the Parliamentary Groups. Committee members discuss parliamentary initiatives and Senate proposals and work objectively with Senate representatives to find political solutions. There are hearings of experts and exchanges of opinion. The Committees submit written reports on the results of their discussions and make recommendations, which are then put to a vote in the Assembly.

*The **Members vote in the Assembly** on the recommendations of the committees.*

To prepare decisions on complex subjects, the Parliament can set up Study Commissions and Parliamentary Committees of Inquiry, where independent experts deliberate together with Members of all Parliamentary Groups on problems and possible strategies for their solution.



The Council (Presidium) exercises authority in the Parliament

In the current legislative period, the Council comprises the President, the First Vice-President, three further Vice-Presidents and two Secretaries. The Members of the Council are elected at the beginning of the legislative period. The Council makes decisions among other things on issues related to the chairing of the Assembly sittings.

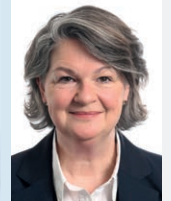
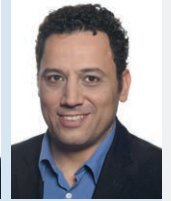
According to parliamentary convention, the largest Parliamentary Group is entitled to nominate the President. She is the chief representative of the Parliament, representing the Parliament and the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg in public, and is responsible for protecting the rights of Parliament and its Members and upholding the dignity of Parliament. She exercises authority and has the right to issue orders on parliamentary premises – in the left wing of the City Hall. The duties of the President and the Council include impartially chairing the Assembly sittings and ensuring that Parliament keeps to the order of business. The Parliament Chancellery, its administration, is answerable to the President.



The Council of the Bürgerschaft



consists of
Carola Veit, President
(SPD, main photo)



and (from top left to bottom right)
André Trepoll, First Vice-President (CDU),
Frank Schmitt, Vice-President (SPD),
Mareike Engels, Vice-President (GRÜNE),
Deniz Çelik, Vice-President (Die Linke),
Oktay Özdemir, Secretary (SPD),
Dr. Kaja Steffens, Secretary (CDU).

The bell is placed on the council desk at every Assembly meeting. The Members of the Council use it to make themselves heard.



The Parliament comprises **five Parliamentary Groups** (these are their chairs) SPD: Dirk Kienscherf (right), CDU: Dennis Thering (top left), GRÜNE: Sina Imhof, Michael Gwosdz (top right), Die Linke: David Stoop, Heike Sudmann (bottom left), AfD: Dirk Nockemann (bottom right).

The Parliamentary Groups: centres of decision-making

As a rule, Members from the same party form a Parliamentary Group to promote their political interests and goals in parliament. Independent Members may also join a group if they agree with its political goals.

Parliamentary Groups have a special status, giving them more rights than the individual Members of Parliament. For example, they receive state subsidies to finance their parliamentary work. Parliamentary Groups also have priority rights compared to individual Members of Parliament in deciding on the agenda and allocation of speaking time in Assembly sittings.



The Parliamentary Groups prepare decisions and deliberations in their meetings, focusing political interests and representing them in Assembly sittings.



After the debate comes legislation

Enacting laws is the primary purpose of any parliament, for example for schools and universities, the police and cultural policy.

Bills (draft legislation) are introduced by Members of Parliament or by the Senate. They are debated and voted on in two readings, so as to prevent overhasty decisions. A majority of Members must vote for a bill for it to become law. An amendment to the Hamburg Constitution requires a two-thirds majority.

Draft legislation is first deliberated in the Parliamentary Groups and in Committees. Opinions are often sought from professional associations, chambers of commerce and industry, and other organisations and official bodies. Committee hearings are often devoted to individual drafts.

Since 1996, citizens have been able to exert influence through direct legislation. In order to push through a new law or amend an existing one, they can launch a popular initiative and, with the required number of signatures, initiate their own draft legislation.

Parliament holds budgetary powers

The budgetary powers of the Hamburg Parliament are particularly important. It is Parliament that decides on the allocation of the City of Hamburg's public funds. First the Senate has to submit a draft budget.

This sets the political priorities of the Senate's work and indicates how much money it intends to spend for what purposes. There are two readings of the budget in plenary sittings of Parliament, after the specialist Committees and the Budgetary Committee have dealt with the individual items over a period of several weeks. Each Parliamentary Group can propose amendments to the Senate's bill, and these are put to the vote in the Committees and in the Assembly.

The minutes and documentation resulting from Committee meetings and Assembly sittings fill many volumes. Before new legislation can be adopted by Parliament, discussions are held in various bodies.



The gold-plated copper figures in the City Hall's Great Banqueting Hall symbolise the virtues of "**Wisdom**", "**Justice**", "**Strength**" and "**Diligence**".



Checks and balances: parliamentary scrutiny of Government

The Parliament not only elects the First Mayor and confirms the Senators appointed by him, it also scrutinises the official acts of the Senate.

Scrutiny of government is one of the Parliament's most important tasks.

It can use a wide range of supervisory instruments:

- ▷ Any Member of the Hamburg Parliament can put a **minor interpellation** to the Senate, which is required to reply within eight days.
- ▷ Five or more Members may submit a **major interpellation**; the Senate then has four weeks to reply.
- ▷ A debate on matters of **topical interest** takes place at the beginning of every Assembly sitting for which four Parliamentary Groups may specify subjects for discussion.
- ▷ The Senate must **submit files** at the demand of one fifth of Members.
- ▷ At the demand of one quarter of Members, the Parliament is required to establish a **Committee of Inquiry** to examine specific problems or irregularities.



Every Tuesday, the Senate meets in the Council Chamber in the Senate wing. The decisions that are made here are subject to critical scrutiny by Parliament.



Democracy depends on participation

Politics affects us in practically all areas of life. Democracy needs people to participate. There are many and varied forms of political engagement:

- ▶ participating in elections
- ▶ attending a public hearing on a specific subject by a Committee
- ▶ working in political parties
- ▶ participating in action groups, associations, trade unions, chambers of commerce and trade, etc.
- ▶ submitting citizens' initiatives, citizens' petitions, or referenda
- ▶ presenting a petition to the Parliamentary Petitions Committee
- ▶ public expression of opinion, whether through dialogue with Members of Parliament or, for example, taking part in demonstrations



How to contact our Parliamentary Groups:

SPD-Bürgerschaftsfraktion Hamburg
 Phone **+49 (0)40 42831 - 1325**
 E-Mail info@spd-fraktion.hamburg.de



GRÜNE-Bürgerschaftsfraktion Hamburg
 Phone **+49 (0)40 42831 - 1397**
 E-Mail info@gruene-fraktion-hamburg.de



CDU-Bürgerschaftsfraktion Hamburg
 Phone **+49 (0)40 42831 - 1382**
 E-Mail rathaus@cdu-hamburg.de



Die Linke-Bürgerschaftsfraktion Hamburg
 Phone **+49 (0)40 42831 - 2250**
 E-Mail info@linksfraktion.hamburg.de



AfD-Bürgerschaftsfraktion Hamburg
 Phone **+49 (0)40 42831 - 2518**
 E-Mail info@afd-fraktion.hamburg.de



You can see all the Parliamentary Groups at a glance using the QR code.



Imprint

Publisher | **Hamburg State Parliament**
Chancellery

Rathausmarkt 1 | 20095 Hamburg

Phone +49 (0)40 42831 - 2409

E-Mail kontakt@bk.hamburg.de
hamburgische-buergerschaft.de

Or follow us on:



@buergerschaftHH

Livestream of Bürgerschaft sittings:

hamburgische-buergerschaft.de/buergerschaft-live

Information about the media centre:

hamburgische-buergerschaft.de/mediathek

Information about accessibility:

hamburgische-buergerschaft.de/barrierefreiheit

Editorial board Helene Heise (responsible for content),
Susanne Ahrens

Photos Hamburgische Bürgerschaft: Karen Ahrens,
Susanne Ahrens, Jessica Mintelowsky,
Daniel Posselt, Frank Wartenberg,
Michael Zapf, Canva (p. 10, p. 15)

Design sm(art)direction · Martin Schauer

Printed by Druckerei Weidmann, Hamburg

Status November 2025

