

# Symbolic

# Mayoral

# Election 2023

Whoever lives here belongs to here - regardless of passport: The symbolic mayoral election for non-eligible Mannheim (Germany) residents



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## “Symbolic Mayoral Election 2023”

Whoever lives here belongs to here - regardless of passport: The symbolic mayoral election for non-eligible Mannheim (Germany) residents.

### Index

Background Information.....	2
Summary.....	3
Goals.....	3
How does it work?.....	4
Results.....	6
Evaluation.....	6
Who benefits?.....	7
Source of funding and resources used.....	7
Replicability.....	7
Bibliography.....	9

## Background Information

<b>Title</b>	Symbolic Mayoral Election 2023 (Symbolische OB-Wahl 2023)
<b>Geographic area</b>	Germany
<b>City</b>	Mannheim
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<b>Website</b>	<a href="https://www.mannheim.de/de/stadt-gestalten/politik/migrationsbeirat/symbolische-ob-wahl-2023">https://www.mannheim.de/de/stadt-gestalten/politik/migrationsbeirat/symbolische-ob-wahl-2023</a>
<b>Start Date</b>	May 23, 2023
<b>End Date</b>	June 10, 2023

## Summary

Almost 15 percent of Mannheim residents aged 16 and older are excluded from the official mayor election because they do not have German or EU citizenship and are therefore not eligible to vote. Nevertheless, they can make their voice visible in a symbolic mayoral election, which the Mannheim Migration Advisory Council organizes together with cooperation partners citywide. In this way, the public and politicians are to be sensitized to the deficient political participation of those who do not have the right to vote and are thus excluded from important democratic decision-making processes. At the same time, it is a new and exciting experience for many non-electors to raise their voices. The

# Symb~~o~~lische OB-Wahl

campaign solicits support from native society and migrant communities for the introduction of municipal voting rights for third-country nationals. During the "Shape Academy", the municipal right to vote was highlighted as an urgent need and the Symbolic Election was identified as a good practice.

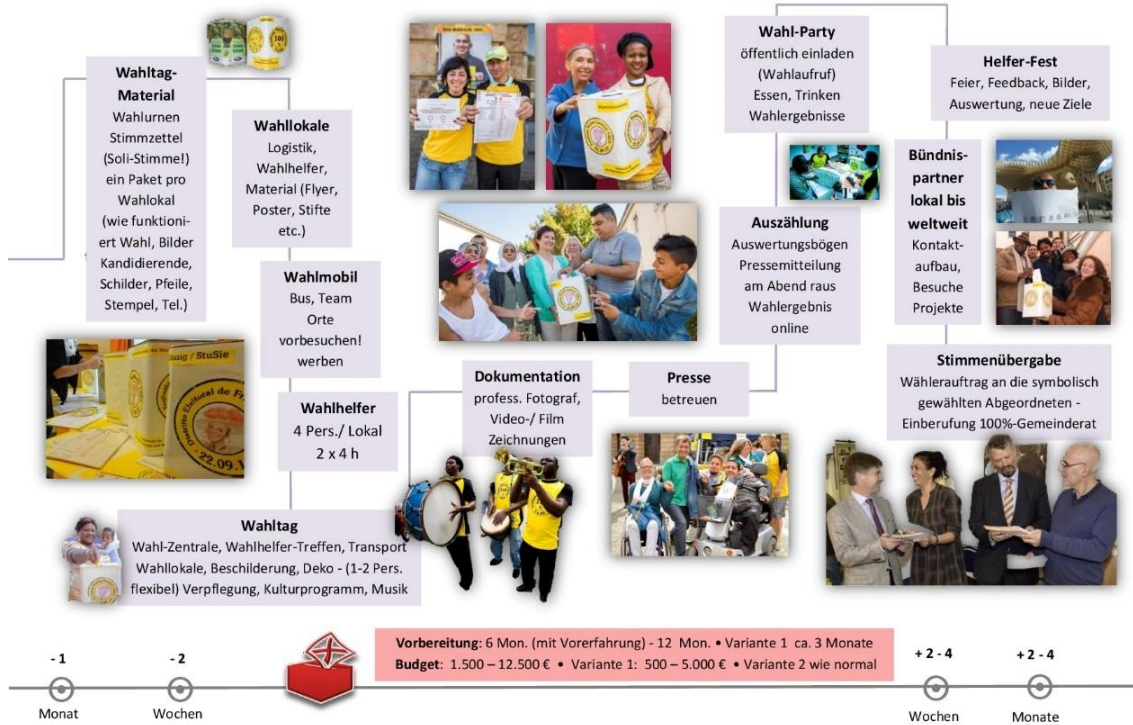
## Goals

More than 5.3 million adult residents in Germany are not allowed to vote in federal, state, or local elections. They have neither a German nor an EU passport but have lived here for an average of 16 years. There is a need for change here: The right to participate in elections is a fundamental principle of every democracy. The right of foreign residents to vote promotes integration and is an expression of social and political equality. It is already the practice in 14 of 27 EU countries. Those who are affected by political decisions and pay taxes should be involved in the making of political decisions through their right to vote. Almost 15 percent of Mannheim residents aged 16 and older are excluded from the official mayoral election because they do not

have German or EU citizenship and are therefore not eligible to vote. The Symbolic Mayoral Election gives them a voice and raises awareness for the problem.

## How does it work?

The model of the symbolic election differs from known lobby and campaign work (resolutions, signature collections) by an elaborate but sustainable activation and participation of the directly affected migrants, who can thereby also express themselves as individuals with their vote. Every Mannheim resident over the age of 16 without German or EU citizenship could take part in the symbolic OB election. The same candidates stood for election as in the real OB election. The Symbolic Election began at the public meeting of the Migration Advisory Board, to which all non-eligible and interested parties were invited. In the days that followed, other Symbolic Polling Stations were open in various locations around the city. The last Symbolic Polling Station closed one week before the official OB election - to prevent possible confusion of the two elections. The result of the Symbolic Election was published after the official election result was announced. An election result can also be published before the official elections and is attractive information for the media. Numerous civil society organizations provided polling stations. The more locations over a longer period are available, the easier it is for voters to participate, which increases the turnout. The Migration Advisory Board is a member of the nationwide network "wir wählen" (we vote), which campaigns for the introduction of local elections for all. The network offers easily accessible information and materials such as checklists and a "step-by-step" guide on its website in German (<https://wir-wählen.org>) and English ([https://wir-wählen.org/wevote\\_en/](https://wir-wählen.org/wevote_en/)) to organize symbolic elections.



„Step by step“ guide of the network “we vote” to organize symbolic elections.

<https://wir-wählen.org/>  
[wevote.eu/](http://wevote.eu/)



## Checkliste

### WAHLTAG

- Wahlurnen
- Stimmzettel
- Solidaritätsstimme
- Kugelschreiber (optional als Geschenk/ Erinnerung)
- Wahlinfo – wie funktioniert die Wahl?
- Stempel/ Stempelkissen
- Beschilderung, Deko
- Auswertungstabellen
- Presseerklärung („vorläufiges amtliches Endergebnis“)
- Wahlhelfer
  - 2x2 pro Wahllokal, Auszählung 3-6,
  - 2-3 back-up (Wahllokale, Verpflegung, Wahlparty)
  - Liste mit Telefonnummern und Aufgabe, Zeit
- Wahlzentrale
- Raum
- Wahlmobil (opt.)
- Kulturprogramm (am besten: Musik, mobil, laut)
- Dokumentation
  - Foto, Video (mind. semi-prof. + alle)

### VORHER

- Wahllokale
  - Orte, Genehmigungen, Verabredung Wahltag,
  - Info- und Werbematerial, Plakate
- Wahlaufrufe
  - Aufruf, Info zu Wahllokalen und Wahlverfahren
  - Mehrsprachig, Übersetzungen
- Plakate
- Medien (Verteiler anlegen, Kontakte) & virtuelle Kampagne
- T-Shirts für Wahlhelfer, Stände, Verkauf
- Wahlaufrufe + Wahlplakate verteilen  
(Wahllokale, Migorg, Geschäfte, Stadtteilzentren, Kultur ...)
- Tour durch die Vereine
- Parteien besuchen, einbeziehen  
(ist auch ihr Wahlkampf, begegnen Leuten ohne Wahlrecht, bei Wahlstand Wahlaufrufe vorbeibringen)
- Straßen - Stände Genehmigungen, Material
- Wahlprüfsteine (optional)
- Wahlveranstaltung (opt.)
- Wahlwerbespot (opt.)
- Dial Democracy  
(Liste mit Tel.nr. für Erinnerungs-Anruf am Wahltag; opt.)

Checklist of the network “we vote” to organize symbolic elections.

<https://wir-wählen.org/>  
[wevote.eu/](http://wevote.eu/)

The network also provides an overview of members by region so that potential partner organizations can be found for networking and support.

The preparation time is about 6 months with previous experience, 6 - 12 months without previous experience. The budget can range from 1.500 to 12.000 €.<sup>1</sup>

## Results

- Residents, some of whom have lived in Mannheim for years, were allowed to go into a voting booth with a ballot paper for the first time and vote on an important decision in their city, even if only symbolically.
- Migrants get the message that they belong to the society and should have a say in the future of their city, regardless of their social class or gender.
- People get politicized and encouraged to get involved for more political participation.
- People set a sign for more democracy with their vote and make their demand for political participation clear.
- Eligible voters with a migration background get motivated to use their right to vote.
- Low threshold approaching on the street can activate people from disadvantaged social classes, who are often excluded from political processes.
- Civil society networks are established, maintained, and strengthened.
- The native society is made aware of the issue through the presence of the campaign on the streets and in the media.
- Political decision-makers are made aware of the issue through campaigning, media coverage and personal involvement, such as a personal handover of the symbolic election results to the new incumbent.
- The actual distribution of votes, which are not representative, occupies a subordinate role.

## Evaluation

The project was not evaluated externally. Within the project, the conductors of the Symbolic Mayoral Election realized that even more advertising, especially personal addressing and approaching, would have further increased the outreach of the Symbolic Election. However, this time-consuming work can hardly be done sufficiently within voluntary work.

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<sup>1</sup> Hauser, 2015

The commitment of the cooperation partners, the support of the city leadership and the interest of the local media were important and positive contributions. As a voluntary body, the Migration Advisory Board is dependent on sufficient financial resources, cooperation partners who provide polling stations, and its own office that is endowed with a full-time force, which took over a large part of the overall coordination.

In addition, a Symbolic Election cannot sufficiently teach the population regarding the relevance of communal politics for the individual person. Here, it crystallized that knowledge in this regard is low. In this respect, a Symbolic Election cannot replace accessible and wide-spread political education as a basis for political participation and the development of political interests.

The greatest challenge, however, is to reach non-voters and motivate them to participate. This can be achieved by targeted approaching and explaining the relevance of elections.

## Who benefits?

1. All Migrant Groups
2. Residents over the age of 16 of all backgrounds from non-EU countries.

## Source of funding and resources used

The Symbolic Election was financed by funds provided to the Migration Advisory Council for its political work by the municipality. Costs were incurred primarily for the printing and purchase of flyers and posters, election documents, ballots, voting booths, ballot boxes and the financing of the supporting program.

## Replicability

Goodwill on the part of the authorities is most likely a prerequisite for making this project feasible without conflicts. In Mannheim, the city council and the outgoing mayor actively supported the project. Both politics and the administration have thus signaled that they are committed, within the scope of their possibilities, to a municipal right to vote for third-country nationals. The project can also possibly be carried out without the support of the authorities if those involved are willing to deal with conflicts with the authorities. However, it is likely that the project would then lose its character as a ceremonial symbolic election intended to encourage participation, and that the integrative appeal directed at the whole society would be lost.

Furthermore, the structures, such as a municipal migrant representation with good contacts to the city administration, seem important to involve active and well-connected actors for this project. The Migration Advisory Board of the City of Mannheim has been the official representative body of Mannheim residents



with migration biographies vis-à-vis the city council and the city administration since 2000. Therefore, it can rely on established structures and contacts, and enjoys legitimacy as a representative body of migrants vis-à-vis the administration, politics, and civil society. A functioning civil society and civic associations that can and want to provide polling stations for the symbolic elections and that can activate migrants are another necessary resource.

The association Freiburger Wahlkreis 100% mentions as further preconditions for good success:

**Multilingualism.**

Addressing the issue in the native language not only increases awareness and dissemination of the issue and the election appeals, but also takes into account challenges the primary target group faces and their perspectives. Especially active visits and exchanges on the ground create credibility for the initiative.

**Allies and infrastructure.**

Cooperation with organizations that are close to the content is crucial for success, e.g., for rooms, permits, public relations, distributors, flyers, posters, events, interns. Also affects the time factor. Maintaining contacts is essential.

**Diversity.**

Diversity in the composition of the initiative and the highest possible proportion of migrant backgrounds strengthens the group and radiates.

**Street.**

Being present and campaigning on the streets is vital for feedback, publicity, and a sense for people's concerns. A campaign requires time and energy. Therefore, it needs a committed group that brings ideas and conviction.<sup>2</sup>

If the Symbolic Election were held on the day of the official election, going to the polling station on the same day as neighbors, friends, and colleagues, including the parallel rituals - election workers, polling station, counting, projections, election results, election party - would have a stronger personal as well as public symbolic power.<sup>3</sup> However, this is a balancing issue against the risk of confusion with the official election.

Symbolic elections are a practice in many other European places and contexts. Across Germany, there are comparable initiatives in many cities.<sup>4</sup> Presumably, these can draw on similar structures. Migrant advocacy groups and organizations in Europe have formed coalitions and networks, such as the nationwide network

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<sup>2</sup> Hauser, 2015

<sup>3</sup> Hauser, 2015

<sup>4</sup> <https://wir-wählen.org/#Liste>

"Wir Wählen" in Germany or "J'y suis, j'y vote" in France. In 2020, the Europe-wide network VRAR (Voting Rights for All Residents)<sup>5</sup> was founded, which includes voting rights initiatives from 6 European countries.<sup>6</sup>

## Bibliography

1. Clemens Hauser, 2015. *Das kleine Handbuch symbolische Wahlen: Eine politische Aktion für Partizipation und das gleichberechtigte Wahlrecht von Migrantinnen und Migranten*. Freiburger Wahlkreis 100% e.V.

[https://wir-wählen.org/Downloads/Wirwaehlen\\_Manual.pdf](https://wir-wählen.org/Downloads/Wirwaehlen_Manual.pdf)

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.votingrightsforall.net/>

<sup>6</sup> [https://wir-wählen.org/wevote\\_en/](https://wir-wählen.org/wevote_en/)