

Political System

The political power in Switzerland is distributed over three levels: the confederation, the cantons (states), and the communes. The Swiss can vote on political matters.

The Swiss Confederation

The Swiss Confederation has existed since 1848. The capital is Bern. There is no uniform ethnicity, language or religion in Switzerland. Different cultures have come together of their own free will. This is why the country is known as the "Nation by Choice" (Willensnation).

Federalism

The 26 cantons and over 2,000 communes in Switzerland are highly independent politically, in a system known as "Federalism". Each canton and each commune has its own state structure. Canton Basel-Stadt has its own constitution and government, a parliament, and courts. The cantons and communes are responsible for many public duties. For instance, the school system is structured differently in the different cantons. Federal laws apply throughout the country. In addition, cantons have their own laws which apply only within the canton. Even communes can enact their own rules. In order to fulfil their duties, the cantons and communes as well as the confederation raise taxes.

Separation of Powers

Political power should not be concentrated on few individuals or bodies. For this reason, state power in Switzerland and the cantons is divided among three independent powers: the legislative power, the executive power and the judiciary power. In Canton Basel-Stadt, the following authorities exercise these powers:

- Legislative power: Cantonal Parliament (Grosser Rat) (100 members, elected by the public every four years)
- Executive power: Cantonal Government (Regierungsrat) (7 members, elected by the public every four years)
- Judiciary power: Various courts (Gerichte) at the cantonal level

Basel-Stadt has a special characteristic: the parliament, the government and the courts of Canton Basel-Stadt are also responsible for the city commune of Basel. The two communes of Riehen and Bettingen also have a legislative body (Communal Parliament, Einwohnerrat) and an executive body (Communal Council, Gemeinderat). At the federal level, the legislative power is split among two chambers: the national government and the council of states (Nationalrat und Ständerat). The national government (7 members) is called the Federal Council (Bundesrat). On the national level, there are various courts. The Federal Tribunal is the highest instance where, for example, appeals against cantonal rulings can be made.

Democratic rights

The Swiss have the right to vote and to stand as candidates. They elect the political bodies on a communal, cantonal and federal level and can run as candidates. In addition, popular votes are held on political matters. Here, citizens can take decisions in their commune and canton and at the federal level (direct democracy). Popular initiatives enable citizens to bring issues that are important to them to vote. Foreigners who live in Canton Basel-Stadt do not have the right to vote or to run as candidates. They may, however, address the authorities by filing a petition. Moreover, they often have the possibility to get involved in commissions, interest groups or associations.

Fundamental Rights

The fundamental legal principles of Switzerland are documented in the Federal Constitution (Bundesverfassung). The fundamental rights, which are based on the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), form an important part of the Federal Constitution. They protect human existence, such as the right to life or the right to assistance when in need, and protect individuals from state violence or protect groups from majorities. They are intended to guarantee that nobody discriminates against others based on origin, race, religion, sex, or sexual orientation. Victims of racial discrimination receive free support and advice in Canton Basel-Stadt. Freedom of religion, freedom of speech and freedom of the press prevail in Switzerland.

Additional information (links, addresses, information sheets, brochures)

www.hallo-baselstadt.ch/en/canton-basel-stadt/political-system