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Political system

Switzerland is a federalist state. This means that power is distributed over 3 levels of government. There is the Confederation, the cantons and the communes. Each level of government has its own task.

Direct democracy enables the population to have a say in decisions at all political levels.

Switzerland is governed by the [Bundesrat](#) (🔗 [Federal Council: supreme executive and executive authority of the Confederation with 7 members](#)). That's 7 members of different parties.

Federal [Bundesrätinnen und Bundesräte](#) (🔗 [Members of the Federal Council](#)) are elected by the [Bundesversammlung](#) (🔗 [Parliament of the Swiss Confederation \(consisting of the National Council and the Council of States\)](#)). This consists of a large and a small chamber.

The Grand Chamber is the [Nationalrat](#) (🔗 [National Council: Grand Chamber of Parliament with 200 members](#)), which represents the people. The small chamber is the [Ständerat](#) (🔗 [Council of States: small chamber of parliament with 46 members](#)), which is responsible for representing the cantons.

In the canton of St.Gallen, there are at the cantonal level:

- the [St.Galler Kantonsregierung](#) (🔗 [Cantonal government: leading authority and executive power of the Canton of St.Gallen with 7 members](#)) with **7 members**
- the [St.Galler Kantonsrat](#) (🔗 [Cantonal Council: Parliament of the Canton of St.Gallen with 120 members](#)) with **120 members**

The separation of powers

Power within the 3 levels of government is divided among 3 state authorities (so-called separation of powers): the parliament (legislative), the government (executive) and the courts (judiciary). These have the following tasks:

- Parliament makes and changes the laws.
- The government carries out the laws.
- The courts decide whether the laws are properly applied.

The separation of powers ensures a better distribution and control of power.

At the federal level, there is the parliament, consisting of the [Nationalrat](#) (🔗 [National Council: Grand Chamber of Parliament with 200 members](#)) Council and the Council [Ständerat](#) (🔗 [Council of States: large chamber of parliament with 46 members](#)) (legislative), the [Bundesrat](#) (🔗 [Federal Council: supreme executive and executive authority of the Confederation with 7 members](#)) (executive) and the [Bundesgerichte](#) (🔗 [supreme judicial authority in Switzerland](#)) (judiciary).

In the Canton of St.Gallen, these 3 powers are:

- [St.Galler Kantonsrat](#) (🔗 [Cantonal Council: Parliament at cantonal level with 120 members](#)) (legislative)
- [St.Galler Kantonsregierung](#) (🔗 [Cantonal government: leading authority and executive power of the Canton of St.Gallen with 7 members](#)) (Executive)
- [Kantonsgerichte](#) (🔗 [Cantonal court: the 2nd instance in civil or criminal proceedings](#)) (Judiciary)

Federalism

Switzerland has a federal structure. The Confederation, the 26 cantons and the almost 3000 municipalities share the tasks of the state.

The Confederation is solely responsible for those areas that are explicitly entrusted to it by the Federal Constitution, such as foreign policy, economic and monetary policy.

The cantons have a great deal of autonomy. They carry out tasks such as the organisation of education, construction, health care and the police.

The smallest political unit in Switzerland is the municipality. The municipalities are responsible for tasks such as garbage collection, the construction

and maintenance of local roads, water and natural gas supply, sports and leisure facilities.

Participation of the population

In Switzerland, the political participation of the people is very important.

From the age of 18, all persons with Swiss citizenship who live in Switzerland can participate in federal, cantonal and municipal votes and vote at the ballot box. Under these conditions, they can also launch a popular initiative, hold a referendum and sign both.

The national representatives are elected by the people. The cantonal and municipal governments are also elected by the people.

Video by SWI swissinfo.ch

Foreigners cannot vote or vote in elections at the federal level. They only have the right to vote at cantonal and municipal level. Foreigners **cannot vote** in the Canton of St.Gallen.

Petition

All persons – including foreigners – have the right to petition authorities at municipal, cantonal and federal level. Petitions may contain suggestions, complaints, or requests.

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