

The political system in Switzerland

Political power in Switzerland operates at three levels: the Confederation (for the whole of Switzerland), the cantons and the municipalities. The Swiss usually vote four times a year to influence political decisions.

The Swiss Confederation

The Swiss Confederation has existed in its present form since 1848. The capital is Bern.

Switzerland is a country of several cultures, languages and religions. It is a neutral country in international politics.

Federalism

Switzerland is a federal country, a confederation of states. This means that it is made up of several states: the cantons. The cantons have a great deal of autonomy.

They can decide many things for themselves. This is called federalism.

There are 26 cantons and more than 2,000 municipalities with their own organisation. For example, the Canton of Jura has its own constitution, government, parliament and courts.

Federal laws apply throughout Switzerland, but the cantons also have their own laws. Municipalities may also pass laws (regulations).

The cantons and municipalities deal with various tasks such as education, health, security and transport.

Schools, for example, may operate differently in different cantons and communes.

The Confederation, cantons and municipalities collect taxes to finance their services. For example, schools, hospitals, culture.

Separation of powers

In Switzerland, power is divided into three branches:

- The legislature (which makes the laws)
- The executive (which enforces the laws). This works to make the laws a reality in daily life.
- The judiciary (which applies the laws)

Powers for the whole of Switzerland (at federal level):

- The legislative: the Federal Assembly. This is composed of the National Council (200 members) and the Council of States (46 members). Members are elected every four years by the people
- The executive: the Federal Council (seven members elected every four years by the Federal Assembly)
- The judiciary: several national courts. The Federal Supreme Court is the highest court (judges and prosecutors are elected by the Federal Assembly)

Powers in the Canton of Jura (cantonal level):

- The legislative: the parliament (60 members elected every five years by the people)

The executive: the Government (five members elected every five years by the people)

- The judiciary: the Cantonal Court (2nd instance), the Court of First Instance, the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Juvenile Court (judges and prosecutors are elected by parliament).

Powers in the municipalities (municipal level):

- The legislative: the Municipal Assembly (or the General Council)
- The executive: the Municipal (or Communal) Council.

Democratic rights (participating in voting and elections)

All Swiss citizens aged 18 and over have the right to vote and can be elected.

They vote on political affairs, elect representatives and may stand as candidates at municipal, cantonal and federal level.

In the Canton of Jura, foreigners, who have lived in Switzerland for 10 years and in the canton for one year can vote at cantonal and municipal level.

They can also be elected at the municipal level (but not as mayor).

Initiatives

Citizens can propose new laws (popular initiatives).

To do this, they must collect a number of signatures (for Switzerland: 100,000 signatures; for the canton of Jura: 2,000). Then the people can vote on these popular initiatives.

Fundamental rights (right to life, right to protection, freedoms)

The Federal Constitution is the main law in Switzerland.

It describes the functioning of the Confederation and its relations with the cantons.

It guarantees the rights of the population and sets the objectives of Swiss politics.

The Federal Constitution stipulates fundamental rights such as:

the right to life, assistance in emergencies, protection against any form of discrimination. Discrimination means treating someone unfairly because of their origin, race, religion, ability, gender or sexual orientation.

In Switzerland, freedom of religion, opinion, association and the press are guaranteed.

The Bureau de l'intégration des étrangers et de la lutte contre le racisme (Office for the Integration of Foreigners and the Fight against Racism) provides counselling for those who are victims or witnesses of discrimination in the Canton of Jura.

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

www.bonjour-jura.ch/en/canton-jura/the-political-system-in-switzerland