

Did you know that the Great Council

- is the parliament of the canton of Basel-Stadt and at the same time that of the city of Basel?
- is the parliament of the canton which has the smallest geographical area (37 km²), but also of Switzerland's third-largest city in terms of population?
- represents 190,000 inhabitants, of whom almost 110,000 are entitled to vote?
- has 100 members belonging to nine parties? The red-green parties hold 46 seats and the centre-right parties 43, the remaining seats being spread over centre parties.



Some politics: Switzerland's federal structure means that the Great Council has extensive decision-making powers. It enacts cantonal laws and supervises the executive, administrative and judiciary functions. It determines taxation and other duties. Major expenditure by the executive requires the approval of the parliament.

The Great Council is unique in Switzerland in that it is both a cantonal and city parliament. Other cities have their own parliaments.

Like all parliaments in Switzerland, the Great Council is a "Milizparlament", i.e. its members hold office on a part-time basis. Elections are held every four years. The presidency of the Great Council changes each year.

The Great Council is organised into 14 standing committees which advise on legislation, expenditure etc. Both the committees and individual Council members can also use a variety of parliamentary instruments which give them the right to ask the executive to act on a particular matter and, for example, to bring out a new law.

... and a little history: The history of the Great Council goes back to the 14th century, when most of its members were representatives of the guilds. The Great Council did not become a parliament in the modern sense – i.e. with the separation of powers – until 1875. Women have been allowed to sit in parliament only since 1966. (Women currently account for 35% of members.)

The parliament normally meets two days per month in the Basel Rathaus (Town Hall). Meetings are open to the public. The historic council chamber in its present form dates from 1904.

Come and see us!

in person:

- guided tours: every Thursday evening at 6 p.m. Meet at the Town Hall. Booking not required, entry free of charge.
- individual guided tours can be booked through "Basel Tourismus".
- online: www.grosserrat.bs.ch





How national and cantonal politics work

Switzerland has a federal-based structure on three levels: federal government, cantons and municipalities. The 26 cantons have extensive areas of responsibility (including education, hospitals, police, roads and social services). They also levy a major share of direct taxation.

Voters have extensive rights of participation at each of the three levels. They are able to institute popular initiatives or referenda at federal, cantonal and municipality level, and to vote in these (direct democracy).

In the canton of Basel-Stadt, 3000 voters can use a popular initiative to request an amendment to the constitution or to legislation. Popular initiatives and constitutional amendments must be submitted to a vote by the people, who have the final say (compulsory referendum).

In addition, if voters do not agree with a new law, a change in the law or a spending resolution passed by the Great Council, they have 42 days in which they can send in 2000 signatures and thus force a referendum (optional referendum).

A number of referenda are held each year in the canton of Basel-Stadt.



The Great Council of the Canton of Basel-Stadt

Did you know... ?

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