

German Government Information You Should Know

Knowing how the German government operates is to your benefit. As you learn the inner workings of [German politics](#) and operation of the country, you can better comprehend everything you read and hear, giving you more insight into Germany and its peoples.

Executive power lies within the government in Germany, and legislative power comes from both the government and the parliament. There are two dominant or big tent parties:

- Christian Democratic Union (CDU — *Christlich Demokratische Union*)
- Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD — *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*)

There are also three less influential parties, usually in opposition if not in coalition with one of the big tent parties:

- Alliance 90/The Greens (*Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*)
- Free Democratic Party (FDP — *Freie Demokratische Partei*)
- The Left (*Die Linke*)

Laws, Constitution, Chancellor

Separate from the executive and legislative branches, the judicial system is its own independent entity. The individual liberties are laid out within the Constitution or the *Grundgesetz* (Basic Law). It lays out the rights of all, as well as divides the powers of the country between federal and state levels. This document was written originally in 1949.

The [Federal Chancellor \(or the *Bundeskanzler*\)](#) heads the Federal Government. The Chancellor is elected by Germany's parliament and is responsible to the same.

The Federal Chancellor is elected every four years by the majority of members in the *Bundestag* and on the proposal of the President. In the case of the election of the Chancellor, it is required to have a majority vote to ensure a stable government.

The Legislative Power Of The German Government

The German government legislative power is divided. It exists between the *Bundestag* and the *Bundesrat*, with the *Bundestag* holding more weight and elected directly through the German people. The *Bundestag* resides in the *Reichstag* building in [Berlin](#) which is its seat.

Those within the *Bundestag* are elected for a term of four years. There are 598 members, with 16 overhang seats. This means that there are really a total of 614 members.

The *Bundesrat* directly represents the state governments at the Federal level. There are delegates from each of the [16 German states](#). The German federal states (or *Bundesländer*) can have anywhere from 3 to 6 votes in the *Bundesrat*, but it depends on the population of the state.

As an interesting side note, since the German government *Bundesrat* appointments depend on the independent state elections as well as the federal elections, the political orientation differs accordingly. This council can become a real forum for opposition parties.

States, Districts, Cities and Townships

In Germany, the various districts are administration levels between the German states or *Länder* and the municipal levels called *Gemeinden*. If compared with the US, these districts are equivalent to counties, or in other countries, arrondissement.

The councils in the districts are called the *Kreistag*. They are responsible for local administration and are elected every five years. In [Bavaria](#) they are elected every 6 years.

A municipality or township is called a *Kommune*. The chairman of the executive council within these *Kommunen* is called the *Bürgermeister*. It's equivalent to a mayor in the United States. The word itself means "master of the citizens."

This German government position is called someone different titles in different places. In Berlin, the *Bürgermeister* is called *Regierender Bürgermeister*, or "governing mayor." In [Hamburg](#) he or she is called *Erster Bürgermeister* or "First Mayor."

Government in Germany rules successfully within the framework of a Federal parliamentary republic. You can respect the German system and operate within it when you are familiar with the structure.

When you travel to Germany, or even having lived in the country for a part of your life, it's best to learn about the German government so you stay in the loop and understand what is happening around you.