

The Structure of State Governments

Each German state has a State Parliament: the **Landtag**. In the city-states (Berlin, Bremen, Hamburg) the parliament is called the Council of Citizens (**Bürgerschaft=Landesparlament, Senat=Landtag**).

The operations of these representative bodies are based on the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany or on the constitution of the individual states.

Each state has a “Ministerpräsident” who is chosen by the State Parliament. The Minister President then chooses his own cabinet, the members of which may or may not be members of the State Parliament.

The primary members of the state’s executive usually also belong to the legislative body. The number of seats a state parliament has varies from state to state. The party with the largest number of seats selects the president of the state legislature.

In the Federal Republic of Germany **the individual states have many powers** and responsibilities, for example:

Culture

The federal states decide on the cultural activities in their region.

Education

The educational system (elementary schools, high schools and higher education) is the responsibility of each individual state. The individual states regularly discuss the ongoing education problems, reforms and changes with each other through the Cultural Ministry Conference of the Federal States.

Police and State Courts

Environmental Protection

Problems that concern more than one state are handled by the Federal Ministry for Environmental Protection

Local governments

The state legislature sets standards for local administration of the individual communities and sets the tax rates and oversees the collection of taxes.

State-wide Planning

Press, Radio and Television

The **state government** shapes the political activities for a federal state. The state legislature is a control organization in that it oversees the administration and the workings of the government.

The **state legislature** transfers some of its political power to the executive branch of state government. The Minister President of the state is not directly elected by the people, but is chosen by the party in power in the legislature. The Minister President then chooses the other ministers to form the executive branch. The state legislature also transfers some political power to the judicial branch (judges also selected by the legislature). The division of power is intended to prevent any one political institution from having too much power. Each federal state is provided with several ministries (for example the Education Ministry, the Interior Ministry, the Environmental Protection Ministry, etc.).

Unique to some states like Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Hesse, Lower Saxony and Northrhine-Westfalia are the so called **Regierungsbezirke or administrative districts**. The number of administrative districts depends on the size of a state. The administrative districts act as intermediary between the ministries of the state governments and smaller districts, called **Kreise** (counties), and municipalities. There are also city councils and district legislatures, which consist of citizens who are directly elected in local elections (i.e., not appointed by the state legislature).