



Fact Sheet

Federal Council of Germany

Research Office
Legislative Council Secretariat

FSC17/14-15

General Information	
Overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The German Parliament is a bicameral legislature made up of (a) the Federal Diet ("Bundestag" in German) and the Federal Council ("Bundesrat" in German). Bundestag is the lower House of Parliament and Bundesrat the upper House.• The Bundesrat is made up of Members appointed by the state governments, and such membership composition provides a channel for the states to directly involve in federal legislation and administration.
Organizational structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Bundesrat is supported by the Secretariat consisting of around 200 public servants and employees. It has also established the following committees to support its conduct of business:<ul style="list-style-type: none">(a) 16 permanent committees to receive regular briefings from the government and examine bills relating to their designated policy areas;(b) the Chamber for European Affairs to study the EU legislative proposals; and(c) Permanent Advisory Council tasked to manage internal affairs of the Bundesrat and provide assistance and advice to the Bundesrat President.
Composition of Bundesrat	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The 69-member Bundesrat is comprised of representatives from each of the 16 federal states in Germany. The representatives are appointed by each of the state cabinets; not directly elected by the people. The number of seats for each state is based on the population size of a state, ranging from three to six seats. At present, the composition of the Federal Council by state is as follows:

General Information (cont'd)	
Composition of Members (cont'd)	<p>(a) six Members for each of Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Lower Saxony and North Rhine-Westphalia;</p> <p>(b) five Members for Hesse;</p> <p>(c) four Members for each of Berlin, Brandenburg, Rhineland-Palatinate, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, Schleswig-Holstein and Thuringia; and</p> <p>(d) three Members for each of Bremen, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Saarland.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volker Bouffier has been the President of the Bundesrat since November 2014. The presidency rotates annually among the 16 states.
Meetings of the Bundesrat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Bundesrat is permanently in session. It schedules plenary session which is convened once every three to four weeks to conduct the parliamentary business. Committee sessions are convened as the need arises.
Specific legislative and scrutiny powers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To counterweight the powers of the Bundestag and defends the states' interests in the federal legislative and administrative process, the Bundesrat is granted with specific legislative and scrutiny powers. For example, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) most draft bills prepared by the federal government are passed through the Bundesrat before they are presented to the Bundestag for scrutiny and vote,⁽¹⁾ and (b) bills to amend the constitution, affect states' budgetary revenue and administration must obtain the Bundesrat's approval to become law. The Bundesrat may also veto a bill that substantially affects the state interests.

Note: (1) One exception to this arrangement is the draft budget bill that has to be submitted simultaneously to the Bundestag and the Bundesrat for consideration.

References

1. *Bundesrat*. (undated) Available from: http://www.bundesrat.de/static/Web/EN/Home/homepage__node__nnn-true.html [Accessed February 2015].
2. *Facts about Germany*. (2015) Available from: <http://www.tatsachenueber-deutschland.de/en/head-navi/home.html> [Accessed February 2015].
3. Federal Republic of Germany. (1949) *Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany (last amended on 11 July 2012)*. Berlin: Federal Ministry of Justice.

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26 February 2015
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