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Policy style(s) in Switzerland

8

Under stress

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Introduction

Switzerland was not included in *Policy Styles in Western Europe* edited by Jeremy Richardson and first published in 1982, but how can the Swiss political system of the 1970s and 1980s be described? Deutsch (1976) presented Switzerland as a paradigmatic case of political integration and, in his comparative work, Lijphart (1984: 23–32) portrayed it as the prototypical case of a consensus democracy. This followed a long tradition of works including Switzerland in the categories of "Proporzdemokratien" (Lehmbruch 1967)[1] and "consociational" polities (Lijphart 1969; Steiner 1974), or emphasizing the cooperative dimension of Swiss policy-making by highlighting its corporatist traits (Katzenstein 1985). Such a way of thinking about politics and policy-making is reflected in the term of "Konkordanz" that is used in Swiss everyday political jargon.

"Konkordanz" means that the main social and political actors have a say in decision-making, and that they display a cooperative attitude, negotiate with each other, and reach compromises. Such a principle that can be considered as a sort of "accommodating informal rule" (Helmke and Levitsky 2006) is part of the prevailing political culture and may be a product of actors' socialization.

Nevertheless, we are also in presence of a rational conduct dictated by the vertical and horizontal fragmentation of power (federalism and multiparty government), as well as by the multiple veto points of the Swiss political system – independence between the executive and the legislature, symmetric bicameralism, and direct democracy (the most distinctive feature in the Swiss policy process) – that act as institutional constraints conducive to cooperative behaviour ("Konkordanzzwänge": Neidhart 1970). Among them, the "shadow" of the referendum over legislation is usually considered as the major driver leading to the inclusion – through participation in government or consultation in policy-making – of actors perceived as able to exercise a "blackmailing" power by threatening with a referendum against unwelcome reforms (Papadopoulos 2001).

How do these features relate to the concept of policy style and allow characterizing the Swiss policy style and its evolution over time? Following the original conceptualization presented in the volume *Policy Styles in Western Europe*, a policy style is a system-level "standard operating procedure" for making and implementing policies in a given country (Richardson 1982: 2). This question is specifically framed from the perspective of the relationships that governments establish with collective actors that are relevant for policy-making. The key dimensions resulting in cross-country variations in policy styles that were identified by Richardson and colleagues correspond to an anticipatory versus reactive problem-solving capacity and to a consensual relationship between the government and organized groups in society as opposed to an impositional relationship.

These differences arise from the mechanics of institutional settings and from the policy paradigms that orient the behaviour of the political actors that populate – and could also reshape – institutions. Policy styles go through path dependent trajectories that can however change over time (cf. the introduction to this volume) in a way that is usually incremental but potentially transformative in the long run (Streeck and Thelen 2005). The present book refines the original typology of policy styles with the goal of updating it in front of current trends, such as the internationalization and increased complexity of policy-making, by putting forward a slightly modified version of the consensus/imposition distinction, presented as a continuum in the inclusiveness of decision-making. The other category of the two-by-two typology posits a new distinction, that is, whether a prominent role in policy-making is assigned to bureaucrats and experts or, respectively, to politicians and the public, whereby the former denotes a more secluded and technocratic, and the latter a more open and politicized policy style.

In that regard, it is worth noting that Switzerland would have shared the reactive/consensus cell in the original typology along with the UK, while it is

now considered in the introduction to that volume as being a member of the category where inclusiveness and politicians/the public are more prominent, together with the US. This makes sense in the light of the "Konkordanz" norm mentioned above, according to which the policy process is not only inclusive and geared towards consensus-oriented decision-making, but also, and as a consequence, relatively slow and capable of only small adjustments (Kriesi and Trechsel 2008). However, the first conceptualization of policy styles did not include a crucial dimension that would have allowed researchers to discriminate between the Swiss and the British case, the formal concentration of power, which is traditionally low in Switzerland and high in the UK (Kriesi et al. 2006: 346), mainly due to differences in the centralization of the political system and in the number of veto points. As we are going to see, the new typology also captures Swiss policy-making style imperfectly, inasmuch as inclusiveness is at the same time weaker and larger than in the past, the role of the public administration is not negligible, and that of the public not new.

The question to be answered is hence double: the extent to which the Swiss policy style evolved since the early 1980s and whether the typology used to make sense of it – which also evolved over time – provides an accurate description of the current situation. With these goals in mind, the present chapter discusses the Swiss case with respect to the inclusiveness and the consensus-oriented nature of the policy process, and, respectively, as regards the role of different arenas and actors in policy-making, namely, the federal government and its bureaucracy, political parties and the parliament, and the public at large.

Swiss traditional policy style

Scholars in the 1980s tended to be critical about the impact in terms of outputs of the consensual policy style and the search for compromise in Switzerland: such a style was considered slow, inimical to the development of synoptic visions, and was thought to reduce the steering and reform capacity of the political system, and generate a deficit in terms of problem-solving due to the search for lowest common denominator solutions (Linder 1983: 303; Schmid 1983: 88). Economists in particular estimated that policy blockade and immobilism were an indirect consequence of the shadow of the referendum: it empowers mainly entrenched interests and short-term rent-seeking actors who gain strong bargaining positions thanks to their blackmailing power (Borner et al. 1990). To return to the original typology of policy styles, according to these authors the consensual Swiss policy-style generated (at best) reactive policy outputs and piecemeal reforms below functional necessities.

Moreover, the idyllic picture of a Swiss "pluralist heaven" was strongly put into question, if not contradicted, by empirical studies such as Kriesi's seminal work on the major federal decision-making processes in the second half of the 1970s. Using a reputational method, the author found that political power was concentrated in a handful of actors belonging to the decisional "core". Key actors in this highly integrated and closed policy community included – apart from the federal executive – the right-wing liberal Freisinnig-Demokratische Partei (FDP)[2] and the major business associations; other political parties, the parliament and trade unions were systematically marginalized (Kriesi 1980).

In addition, signs of polarization were not absent from political life, despite the existence since 1959 of a stable grand coalition federal government with a proportional representation of the four major parties (FDP, the socialist SP, the Christian-democratic CVP, and the agrarian-conservative SVP).[3] The lengthy and inclusive decision-making process is expected to produce convergence: indeed, the governmental parties largely shared the same positions in parliamentary votes, but it appeared that in case of a referendum they were more strongly split than in the initial decision-making phases (same for the convergence between the major business and trade unions), mainly due to a cleavage between Left and Right. Contrary to expectations, homogeneity increased towards the end of the process within the Left and the Right camp, whereas it decreased between them (Lehner 1984: 32). Between 1970 and 1987, the governmental parties appeared united in slightly more than half of the referendum votes, while a Left-Right cleavage that split them took place in about 30% of the referendum votes.[4] In addition, minor parties that were not part of the federal government – especially those of the nationalist Right – were successful in drawing voters' support for their voting recommendations much beyond their (small) electoral constituencies (Hug 1994: 173–174). This "reservoir" prefigured the rise of the SVP which, shifting from an agrarian-conservative to a national-populist party, continuously increased its score since 1987 (fourth in terms of electoral strength with 11% of the vote) and became in 2003 the first party in the National Council, reaching 29.4% of the vote in 2015. Actually, it seems that polarization in the direct democratic phase was subject to cyclical fluctuations in the 1970s and 1980s: the voting recommendations of the liberal FDP and the SP converged in 75% of votes in 1971–1975, but only in 56% thereof in 1975–1979 (and just 48% in 1983–1987); similarly, the proportion of legislative acts that was challenged by a referendum was just 9% in 1971–1975, but increased to 44% in 1975–1979 (and was thereafter reduced again), and the proportion of constitutional and legislative bills that failed in a referendum increased from 13% to 38% in the same periods, to decrease anew in the subsequent periods (Papadopoulos 1994: 213).

Policy style(s) today

In this section, we would like to highlight changes in policy style related to the more prominent role of the Federal Assembly in decision-making, and to the much higher degree of partisan polarization than in the past. We also aim to show how the system retains its policy-making capacity in spite of the blocking potential of polarization that adds now to the existence of the institutional veto point of direct democracy.

Parliamentarization

Kriesi's study has been replicated and extended in different ways more than thirty years later. Sciarini et al. (2015a) studied the eleven most important (according to experts' judgments) decision-making processes at federal level between 2001 and 2006. They found a number of important changes compared with the end of the 1970s (Sciarini et al. 2015a: 51ff.): the "core" of the system remains small and cohesive, there are still many interactions between public and non-public actors, but the federal executive and state agencies play an even more crucial role, and the (reputational) power of the governmental parties increases to the detriment of the power of interest groups;[5] the peak business association "Economiesuisse" is the only interest group that retains a high policy influence, whereas small business and farmers' associations, as well as trade unions, lose influence. In his dissertation on the same processes, Fischer (2012) comes to nuanced conclusions with regard to the degree of conflict, although the latter has increased: he observes a conflictual process in most cases, but also three cases of "consensus" and five cases with a "hegemonic" coalition whose dominance is not threatened in spite of the existence of conflict. Furthermore, the winning coalitions are issue-specific, so that there are no permanent winners and losers in the decision-making system. Notwithstanding the existence of a significant level of conflict, the system retains its integrative capacity. This may seem surprising in a period of high partisan polarization (see the next section in this chapter), and therefore a more detailed explanation of the current policy dynamics at federal level is necessary.

Let us start be reminding that a direct consequence of the referendum threat is the development of a sophisticated and frequently decisive pre-parliamentary phase leading to early compromises in the policy process and predefining the scope of parliamentary debates and thereby policy outputs (Neidhart 1970: 266ff.). The anticipation of a possible referendum induces policymakers to elaborate pre-parliamentary procedures to include all relevant actors and limit the potential for conflict. This phase was considered as

the Swiss functional equivalent of neo-corporatist arrangements: most nota-
bly, extra-parliamentary committees, composed of executive members of the
administration, representatives of business associations and trade unions,
cantonal officials, and external experts, would serve as forums for compromise-
building, and their outputs were subsequently endorsed by the government
and ratified in parliament without any major amendments. More recently,
the frequency of reliance on, and impact of, extra-parliamentary committees
declined, both due to their reduced ability to forge compromises in a period
of polarization, and to the professionalization of the bureaucracy that devel-
oped its own in-house expertise. Their number decreased from 373 in 1979
to 119 in 2017 and, while 37% of legislative acts were prepared in such commit-
tees (with a higher frequency for the most important ones) during the
1971–1976 legislative period, this percentage dropped to 18% in 1995–1999,
and to 14% in 1999–2006 (Sciarini 2011: 194). Further, the composition of
extra-parliamentary committees became more pluralist, and technocratic
expertise gained weight to the detriment of interest representation. These
trends have been interpreted as a weakening of the neo-corporatist traits in
the policy-making system, and similar trends have been observed in Nordic
countries such as Norway and Denmark (Rommetvedt 2005; Christiansen
et al. 2018).

On the other hand, the proportion of formal consultations (usually in
written form) of parties, groups, cantons and stakeholders has increased:
they took place for 39% of legislative acts in 1971–1976, 46% thereof in
1995–1999, and 49% in 1999–2006 (Sciarini 2011: 194 ff.). However, in spite
of that, it is more generally the influence of the whole pre-parliamentary
phase over policy outcomes that is now to some extent put into question:
78% percent of the interviewees in Kriesi's survey considered this phase
as more important compared with the parliamentary phase, as opposed
to 61% in a recent survey by Sciarini et al. (2015a: 35). As a matter of fact,
a process (re-)parliamentarisation took place, with the Federal Assembly
"emancipating" itself from the Federal Council (government). This can be
explained by more ideological politics, but above all by the professional-
ization of the parliament that, following some important reforms in the
1990s such as the creation of permanent committees that allow the spe-
cialization of MPs on policy issues, benefits now from additional resources
in terms of expertise. One can consider for example as signs of a parlia-
mentary empowerment the fact that the impulse for legislation comes
more frequently from the Federal Assembly than in the past (Vatter 2016a:
297–298), that the parliament rejects more governmental bills (Häfliger
2015) – although such bills resist more than in the US presidential system
(Schwarz et al. 2011) and the proportion of amended drafts has remained
stable (just over 40%) since the beginning of the 1990s (Vatter 2016a: 300) – and

that the lobbying arena has now largely shifted to the parliament (Eichen-
berger 2017).

Polarization

Today, we would no longer describe Switzerland as the prototypical case of
consensus democracy as Lijphart (1884) did. Vatter (2016b) evokes centrifugal
tendencies in the political system, so that Switzerland remains according to
him a consensus democracy, albeit an ordinary one and no longer the most
emblematic case of this group of polities.[6] As a matter of fact, the parliamen-
tarization of the policy process took place in a context of much more acute
partisan polarization than in the past, mainly related to the electoral gains of
an increasingly radicalized SVP. Polarization is closely related to the increas-
ing relevance and salience of a second social-cultural dimension – along the
traditional social-economic dimension – in Swiss politics. The following graphs
(Figure 8.1) show the partisan landscape respectively in 1985–1990 and in 2010–
2014.[7] They are based on parties' recommendations in federal referendums (the
central point indicates the preferences of the media voter; large circles indicate
the position of the national party, smaller dots those – sometimes deviating – of
cantonal sections). In 1985–1990 party politics was dominated by the Left-Right
axis; on that dimension polarization already existed, although the system was
quite fragmented. The second axis (called here "progressive/liberal vs con-
servative") was not discriminating yet: all major parties were closer to the
"progressive/liberal" end, and only minor parties (Nationale Aktion, EDU,
Autopartei) expressed conservative (traditionalist and nationalist) preferences
on that axis. Twenty-five years later, the social-economic (Left-Right) dimen-
sion continues to discriminate strongly, but the cultural dimension has gained
in importance: the SVP has moved to the conservative end, while the other
major parties (FDP, CVP, SP) continue to be closer to the liberal end.[8]

Comparative data even show that – quite paradoxically for a consensus-style
democracy (at first glance at least) – the Swiss party system counts now among
the most polarized. According to an index developed on the basis of survey
(CSES) data, Switzerland ranked third (after South Korea and Hungary) among
twenty-two democracies in the amplitude of the increase in partisan polariza-
tion between two survey waves in the 2000s (Dalton 2008: 907). In a similar
vein, Figure 8.2 (based on an index developed in the Chapel Hill expert sur-
vey CHESS 2014) suggests that the Swiss party system counts among the most
polarized on both cleavage dimensions, the economic (horizontal) and the cul-
tural (vertical, "GAL/TAN") one (Bochsler et al. 2015: 478).

The internationalization of politics has strongly contributed to the rising
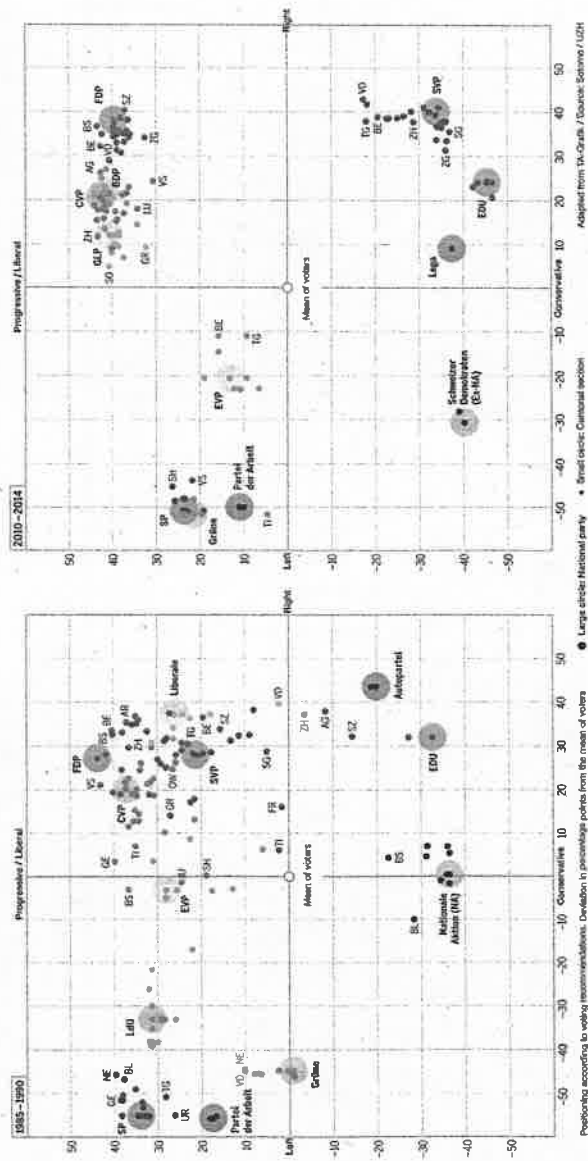salience of the cultural dimension as a driver of polarization. As we know (see for

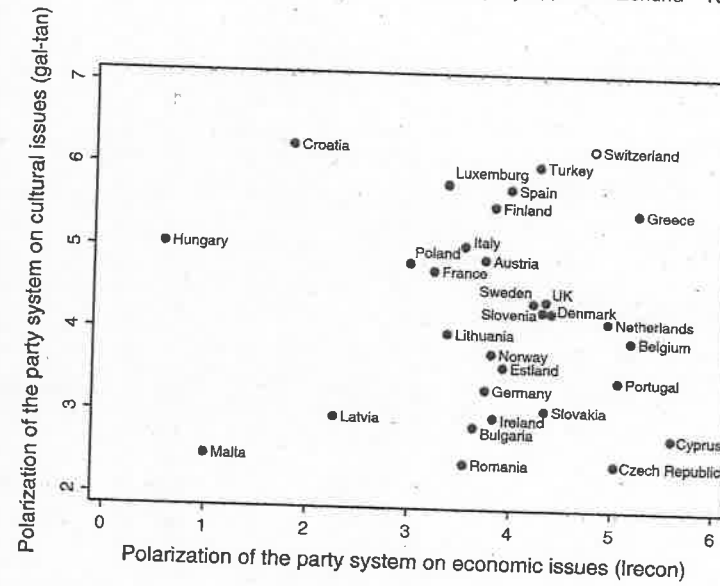Figure 8.1 The partisan landscape, 1985–1990 and 2010–2014

Figure 8.2 Party system polarization on cultural and economic issues

instance Kriesi 2015), the latter is largely due to the electoral rise of the nationalist-populist SVP. This has been clearly favored by the accelerating European integration and by migration issues, that made the SVP's anti-EU and anti-immigrants discourse increasingly appealing to Swiss voters. Obviously the European and the migration issue also entail an economic dimension (mainly related to the liberalization of the labor market), but concerns related to identity and sovereignty clearly impacted on the SVP's success. Furthermore, the higher mediatization of politics – by no means a phenomenon confined to Switzerland – served as a reinforcing factor: Landerer (2015) showed through content analysis that the media cover twice as much the activities of SVP and SP than those of the center-right parties (FDP and CVP); admittedly SVP and SP are electorally stronger than the other parties, but interviews with MPs also show that parliamentarians belonging to SVP and to SP have better integrated the importance of the media role and adopt more consciously "self-mediatization" strategies, that they consider as a "natural" component of the political landscape (Landerer 2015).

As to the Left-Right cleavage, and as already noted, it has been present intermittently in the past despite the consensual nature of Swiss democracy. Data on parliamentary behaviour are available only since 1995.[9] Figure 8.3
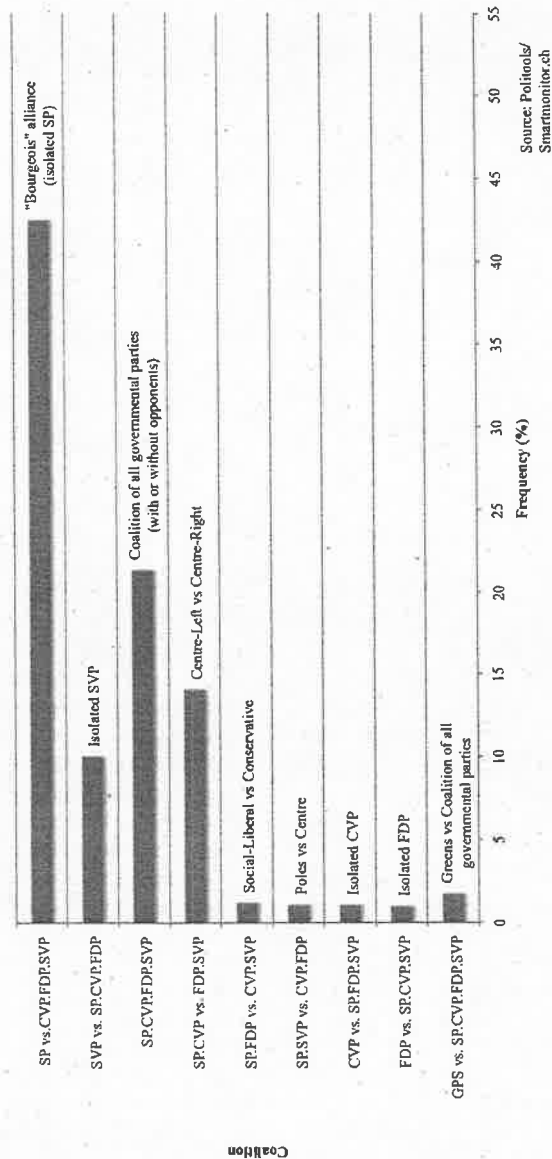
shows the cleavage structure in parliamentary votes (1st Chamber: National Council) during the 1995–1999 legislative period. About twenty years ago, the most frequent cleavage – in about 45% of votes – was between Left- (SP) and Right-wing (CVP, FDP and SVP) governmental parties, even if they were part of the same federal executive. In such a configuration, the Left was put in minority. The configuration with all governmental parties united followed second, appearing in about a quarter of the votes. This is not much, and would be inconceivable for a parliamentary system where the incumbent governmental coalition is responsible towards the parliament. Two other noticeable patterns were an opposition between Left-of-Center (SP and CVP) and Right-of-Center (FDP and SVP) governmental parties (in about 15% of votes), and the opposition between the SVP – in a radicalization process in the 1990s – and all other three governmental parties (SP, CVP and FDP) that was visible in slightly more than 10% of votes. Hence, in the second part of the 1990s the governmental parties were seldom united in parliament, and the social-democratic Left frequently counted among the losers of the parliamentary phase of policy-making.

If we look now into the parliamentary votes in 2011–2015 (Figure 8.4), the situation has changed substantially. The Left-Right cleavage continues to be the most important one, albeit less prominently than in the past (it occurs in about one third of the votes). The governmental parties are even less united than in the past: in less than 15% of the cases. A crucial change is the much more frequent isolation of the SVP: about two times more than in 1995–1999 (in about a quarter of the votes). As a result of its radicalization and its transformation into a national-populist party, the SVP lost influence in parliament. Interestingly, this happened despite its considerable electoral gains, that are in all likelihood due to the same transformation. Finally, the social-democratic Left is now slightly less isolated than in the past, even though its electoral score decreased in the recent years.

In the direct democratic phase (e.g., optional referendums) that may follow the parliamentary one,[10] in the 1970s and 1980s the governmental parties often (although by far not always) appeared united, while a Left-Right split occurred less frequently. This is not to say that partisan polarization was absent, but it had ups and downs (see above). The situation has dramatically changed in the last decades: between 1995 and 2017 a Left-Right cleavage among governmental parties took place in 43% of votes, while the proportion of votes with all governmental parties united dropped to a mere 16%.[11] Figure 8.5 shows the more significant trends in the course of the last two decades: although cycles continue to be present, the overall picture shows an increasing prevalence of the Left-Right cleavage and of the opposition between SVP and the other governmental parties, and the steep decrease of convergence among the four major parties that form the government.

Figure 8.3 Coalition-building in parliamentary votes (National Council), 1995–1999

Source: Politools/Smartmonitor.ch

Coalition (x-axis categories):
SP vs.CVP.FDP.SVP — "Bourgeois" alliance (isolated SP)
SVP vs. SP.CVP.FDP — Isolated SVP
SP.CVP.FDP.SVP — Coalition of all governmental parties (with or without opponents)
SP.CVP vs. FDP.SVP — Centre-Left vs Centre-Right
SP.FDP vs. CVP.SVP — Social-Liberal vs Conservative
SP.SVP vs. CVP.FDP — Poles vs Centre
CVP vs. SP.FDP.SVP — Isolated CVP
FDP vs. SP.CVP.SVP — Isolated FDP
GPS vs. SP.CVP.FDP.SVP — Greens vs Coalition of all governmental parties

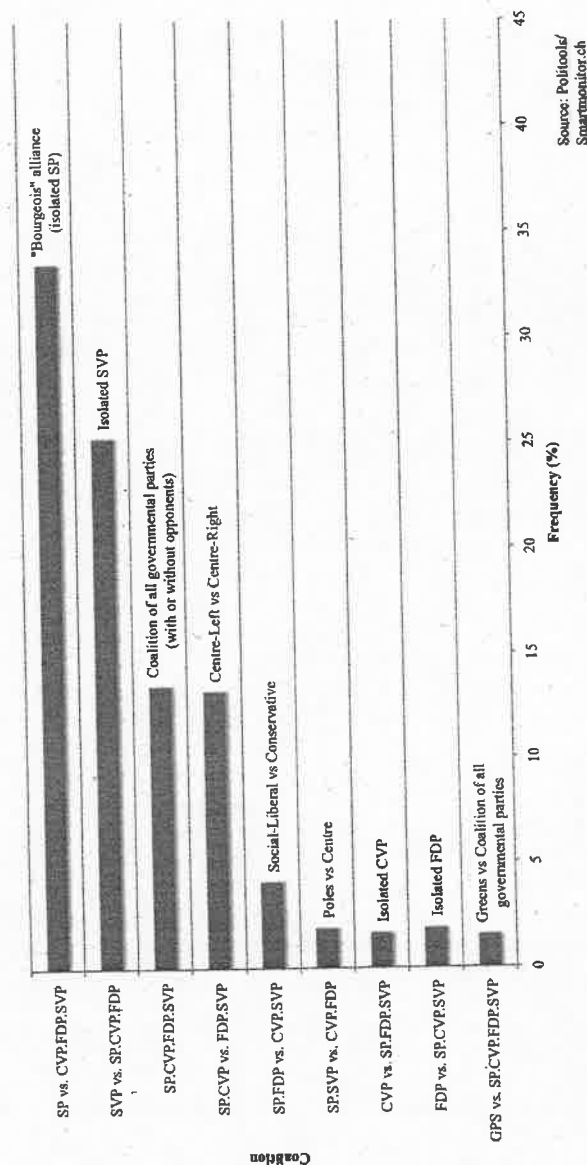Frequency (%): 0, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, 55

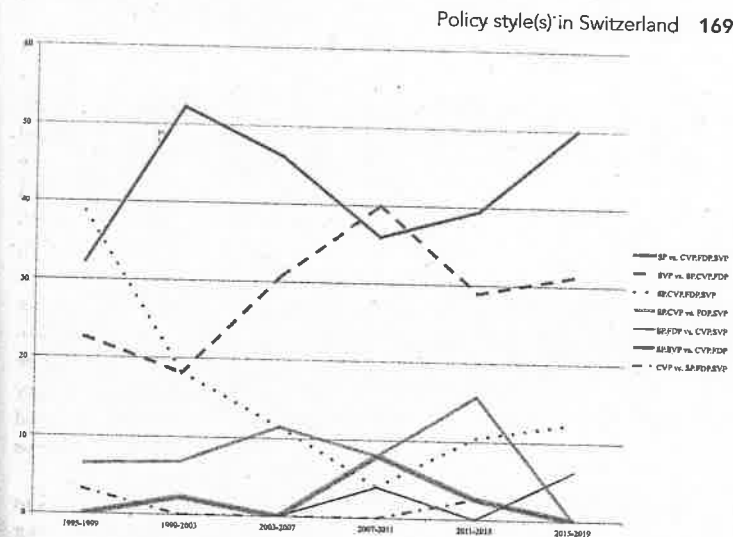Figure 8.4 Coalition-building in parliamentary votes (National Council), 2011–2015

Figure 8.5 Evolution of party coalitions in referendum votes: % per legislative period

Policy-making capacity in spite of polarization

As we have seen, the Swiss party system counts among the most polarized, while Switzerland continues to be, even though less prominently than in the past, a consensus-style democracy; this situation can be described with the expression "polarisierte Konkordanz" (Linder 2017: 464–465). How can this paradox be explained? The explanation runs through the existence of "Konkordanzzwänge": the partisan and interest group dynamics may have changed in a centrifugal direction, institutions are however particularly "sticky" and continue to impose their structural constraints. As a result, there is a decoupling between the logic of politics and the logic of policy-making:[12] bargaining and compromise have become more difficult in a polarized system, yet they are inescapable to avoid policy blockade. Bochsler et al. (2015: 485) note in that respect the existence of "an increasing mismatch between polarized political parties and interest groups on the one hand and an institutional framework that requires moderation and compromises for effective decision-making on the other hand".

This means that, notwithstanding polarization, political elites need to find "escape routes". To be sure, one should no longer expect all parties composing the grand coalition government to converge; however, this is not necessary.

Take coalition behaviour in parliament: we have seen that there are two main patterns, with the first one mirroring a Left-Right cleavage (SVP-FDP-CVP vs SP), and the second one being associated with the isolation of the nationalist-populist SVP (SP-FDP-CVP vs SVP). Convergence among the governmental parties is now usually limited to three of them, with the fourth one – usually the "pole" parties SP or SVP – being isolated. However, this suffices to achieve a majority in the National Council and to overcome thus the parliamentary veto point. As shown by data from the last completed legislative period (Figure 8.6), the "bourgeois" block is able to defeat the Left in parliament, and when the SVP is isolated, this party cannot do much against the dominance of the other governmental parties. Moreover, the study of important decision-making processes by Sciarini et al. (2015a: 219ff.) suggests that not only blockade can be overcome, but also that a significant amount of policy innovation – contrary to the standard description of the Swiss political system – is possible, provided that decision-makers prove able to design a process that favours consensus between competing advocacy coalitions and relies on a small set of actors.

On the other hand, such a configuration of "variable geometry" allows to preserve much of the potential of "negotiation" democracy since it does not
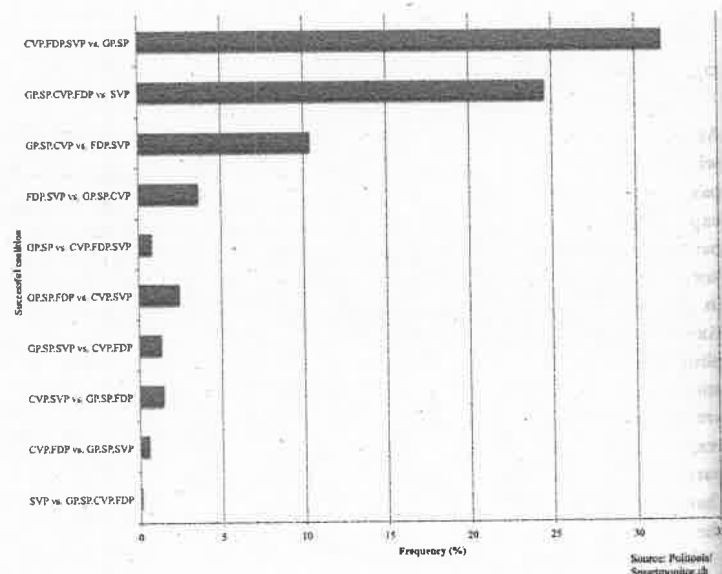

Figure 8.6 Success of coalitions in parliament (National Council) 2011–2015

generate any structural losers. The center-right parties FDP and CVP have lost much of their parliamentary strength: in the National Council they held almost half (93) of the 200 seats in 1987, and only 60 since the 2015 election. However, they continue to be pivotal as they can coalesce either with the SP or with the SVP, and as a result steadily remain on the winning site in 80% to 90% of the votes.[13] The SVP has dramatically increased its parliamentary representation: from 25 MPs in 1987 to 65 in 2015. As already noted however, due to its radicalization it counts now less frequently among the winners in parliament. Even less successful is the SP, whose parliamentary representation remained fairly stable. Nevertheless, both the SVP and the SP remain on the winning side in about 60% of the votes, due to the partial ability of each of these parties to coalesce with the other major parties.

Nowadays the party system follows a tripolar logic: SP, SVP, and the frequently overlapping in their positions FDP and CVP. Such a tripolar logic is the consequence of an increasing degree of polarization related to the consolidation of two major structural cleavages, the social-economic and the social-cultural one. At the same time, tripolarity allows coping with polarization. To a large extent the FDP and CVP continue to be "Königsmacher" despite their significant electoral losses, since they can alternatively coalesce with the SP or the SVP.

Moreover, one should not forget that the Federal assembly is a bicameral legislature. The second Chamber (Council of States) is more consensual than the first Chamber. Although the Left-Right cleavage is also the most frequent therein, the four major governmental parties appear united more frequently, and the SVP is seldom isolated (Vatter 2016a: 334). It is also known that the majoritarian electoral system in that Chamber favours the representation of moderate parties to the detriment of those of the "poles". As a result, FDP and CVP have suffered fewer losses in elections to the Council of States and are overrepresented therein: in 1991 they held together 34 out of 46 seats, and continue to control together a majority of 26 seats after the 2015 election.[14] In sum, not only they retain a pivotal role in the National Council, but cannot either be easily circumvented as veto players in the Council of States, which has exactly the same competencies as the first Chamber (perfect bicameralism). In spite of the sweeping changes in the electoral scene, such a configuration injects a dose of stability in policy-making.

Policy-making capacity despite the veto point of direct democracy

Institutional constraints force political actors to negotiate in spite of polarization, and tripolarity allows coping with it. However, one should also consider the potential role of direct democracy as a veto point. Remember the situation

in the 1970s and 1980s, where – before the rise of the SVP – marginal tradition-alist and xenophobic parties were able to mobilize voters in referendums much beyond their limited electoral constituencies. Remember also that in the face of referendums the governmental parties only exceptionally appear united. One could expect the direct democratic phase – similarly to polarization – to limit the policy-making capacity of the system. However, political elites have managed not only to cope with polarization, but also to "tame" the destabilizing potential of direct democracy. How is it so?

Swiss citizens are strongly attached to direct democratic instruments (Christin and Trechsel 2002), and direct democracy is a core "myth" constitutive of Swiss "Verfassungspatriotismus". This is not to say however that political elites do nothing to prevent, whenever possible, referendum votes to take place – by coopting in government parties that gain a reputation as successful players in direct democracy, by formulating more moderate counter-projects to citizens' initiatives, and by taking into account the preferences of opponents when drafting legislation – or to prevent a negative outcome when a vote is mandatory, as in constitutional amendments and in major international treaties (Papadopoulos 2001). Consequently, despite the proliferation of the advocacy groups and coalitions that claim access to the political agenda and the polarization of politics, one cannot talk about an explosion in the use of direct democratic instruments. Obviously the "supply" of initiatives and referendum requests is not completely elastic: making use of referendum devices requires investing resources, and organized actors have no other choice than filtering demands. However, it is noticeable that the proportion of bills that are challenged by referendum remains contrary to expectations stable and low, much below 10%. Moreover, in a proportion of about two out of three optional referendums that took place since the formation of the "all-party" government in 1959 the challenged bills have been accepted by voters. As to popular initiatives, their number has indeed skyrocketed since the 1970s. This is however mainly due to the fragmentation of societal interests, and they should also be considered as negotiation tools, since their proponents often expect from public authorities an indirect and partial response to their claims. Besides, in a context of high mediatization where visibility is necessary, they are increasingly used for self-promotion – including by well-established parties that could use instead the parliamentary venue to attain their goals. Furthermore, their overall success rate barely exceeds 10%. Finally, there have been numerous pieces of legislation that required a mandatory referendum, but about 75% of them have been accepted, despite the higher threshold of concurrent majorities (of voters and cantons). Such legislation became less frequent in the last two decades, reflecting perhaps the inability of parties in a more polarized parliament to find majorities around major issues.[15]

Overall, policy outputs prove to be resistant to referendum challenges ("referendumsfest") despite the more acute polarization. This can be explained by the fact that although parliamentary majorities are nowadays narrower than in the past, politicians are aware of the fact that there is in many cases a correlation between the breadth of parliamentary support and the chances of success in the direct democratic phase. A large parliamentary consensus is a necessary, albeit not always a sufficient condition, to reduce the risk of a bill being challenged by a referendum and to avoid a defeat in the direct democratic phase (Sciarini 2017: 549–553). Direct democracy as a potential veto point strongly induces legislators to reach de facto qualified majorities in parliament, in order to prevent the uncertainty that is related to the existence of direct democratic instruments.

As a matter of fact, there is a high degree of congruence between the outcomes of the parliamentary and of the direct democratic phase. Figure 8.7 shows not only that when the governmental parties are united in the national Council, voters follow their decisions, but also that whenever the SP or the SVP has a dissenting position voters follow the parliamentary majority built around the three other governmental parties in more than 80% of referendum votes.

Last but not least, whenever political elites are not able to prevent the use of direct democracy instruments, they seek to "steer" the direct democratic phase. As we have seen they issue voting recommendations, but they actually go much beyond that since they also invest considerable organizational and financial resources in referendum campaigns (Bernhard 2012), and seek thereby to become "prime movers" in the formation of public opinion (Kriesi 2005). Although one should not too hastily conclude that such investments
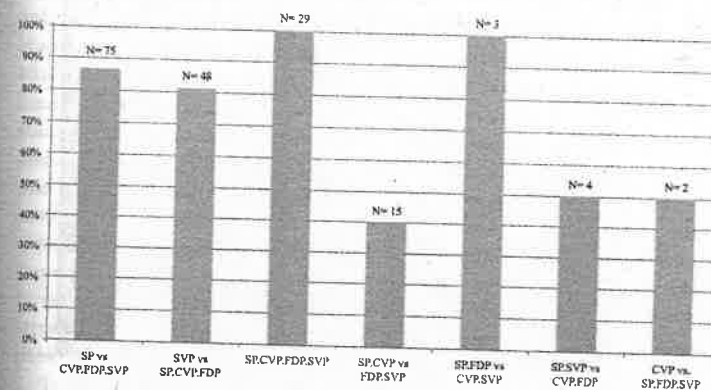

Figure 8.7 Congruence between parliamentary decision and outcome of popular vote (1995-mid-2017)

yield the anticipated returns, the overall level of conformity with parties' voting recommendations is high. In other words, voters typically cast a vote that is congruent with the recommendation of their preferred party, although this does not necessarily mean that they "follow" such a recommendation explicitly (sometimes they don't even know it). Figure 8.8, based on the VOX/VOTO surveys that are carried out on every federal referendum vote, shows that at least 70% of voters of all governmental parties cast the vote their preferred party would like them to cast.

Actually, the degree of congruence between parties and voters is even higher than suggested by the data, because it happens sometimes that cantonal sections issue voting recommendations deviating from those of the national party. However, Figure 8.8 also shows a high amplitude of the standard deviation for all major parties. This means that voting patterns tend to diverge depending on the kind of partisan cleavage on the voting issue (Milic et al. 2014: 338–344). In sum, although political elites are not able to "colonize" direct democracy, they usually do manage to "tame" its inherent uncertainty and the disruptive potential that goes with it.
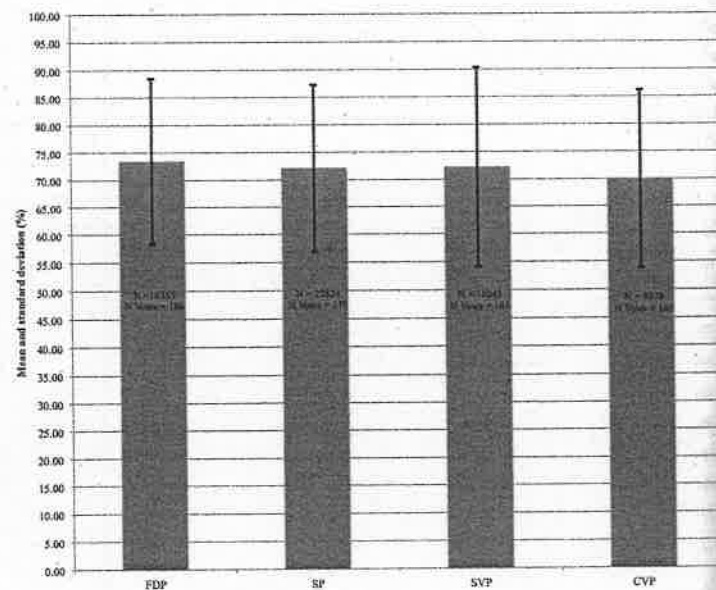

Figure 8.8 Proportion of party sympathizers whose vote is congruent with parties' recommendations, 1996–2017

Conclusion

The style of Swiss politics has undergone a process of significant change in the last decades by becoming far less accommodative. Having said that, one must also conclude that changes in politics are only partially mirrored in changes in policy-making, mainly due to continuing institutional constraints. We observe therefore stability within change, taking into account the relative decoupling between the sphere of politics and the sphere of policy-making. In spite of a much less favorable context due to increasing dissensus among the major political forces, the system retains its policy-making capacity. It does so precisely by privileging a less inclusive policy style than in the past regarding the degree of consent expected by the major political parties for the formation of legislative coalitions, whereas lobbying became at the same time more pluralist with the decline of policy control by corporatist actors. In this sense, the political system loses some of its peculiarities and becomes more similar to other multiparty systems and consensus democracies.

Furthermore, compared with the 1970s and the 1980s, we observe an emancipation of the Federal Assembly from the federal government, that clearly denotes a reversal of deparliamentarization trends towards concentration of decision-making power within the executive. Does that mean that policy styles are now more strongly dominated by politicians and the public? The answer is not straightforward. Firstly, parliamentarization does not necessarily imply a weakening of the administration (Sciarini et al. 2015a: 24ff.): MPs often have to rely on bureaucratic expertise, and we have seen that the professionalization of the federal administration is one of the factors that led to the decline of the influence of the neo-corporatist circuit, which resulted into a more prominent role for the partisan arena. As to the broader public, there is not much novelty since its role has always been important in the Swiss political system, with the existence of direct democratic instruments. However, one should not idealize such a role since the "public" is a fiction: in direct democracy, turnout is a function of one's political interest, as well as of one's feelings of competence and efficacy, all attributes that are not evenly distributed, even though they also vary depending on the issue at stake and its media salience (Sciarini et al. 2015b; Colombo 2018). Besides, although it would not be correct to argue that elites and organized interests are able to manipulate the outcomes of referendum votes, we have seen that they are by far not inactive and powerless in the direct democratic process. Therefore, it would be exaggerated but not utterly wrong to consider that "votes count, but resources decide" in policy-making (Rokkan 1966: 197).

To sum up, with respect to the proposed typologies of policy styles, we can confirm that the Swiss case tends to correspond nowadays to the "consensual/ politicians and the public" cell. This is mainly due to the institutional setting,

especially the shadow of direct democracy, which empowers the public and at the same time creates incentives for consensual policy-making by political elites. However, the persistence of this policy style – notwithstanding some changes outlined above – is at odds with the trajectory of Swiss politics towards more polarization and party politics, creating a situation where the two spheres – politics and policy-making – are increasingly decoupled. Since institutions do not only shape actors' behaviour, but they also evolve under the impulsion of human agency, the open question is whether the growing tension between the two spheres will eventually result in a punctuation altering the logic of the political system, or whether the pattern of stability within change will endure in the long term.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1 The proportional allocation of resources (such as seats in parliament and in government) to the major political forces can be seen as one of the main dimensions of power-sharing. Later Lehmbruch (1996) used the concept of "Verhandlungsdemokratie" (negotiation democracy).
2 The precursor of today's "Die Liberalen" (FDP).
3 Switzerland was the only one among the twenty-one democracies included in Lijphart's comparative study to be governed uninterruptedly by a grand coalition since the end of the Second World War (Lijphart 1984: 61).
4 Data from Papadopoulos (1994: 219).
5 This may be related to the growing role of parliament; the latter also facilitates access to decision-makers of public interest groups, such as those representing consumer or environmental interests (Eichenberger 2017), contributing thus to more inclusiveness and pluralization of interest representation.
6 Sciarini et al. (2015a) see "the consensus model under pressure" and Bochsler et al. (2015) refer to a "disenchanted" democracy in Switzerland.
7 Source: Michael Hermann and Iwan Städler, "Wie sich die SVP aus dem Bürgerblock verabschiedet hat", *Tages Anzeiger Datenblog*, 21 April 2014 [https://blog.tagesanzeiger.ch/datenblog/index.php/1791/wie-sich-die-svp-aus-dem-buergerblock-verabschiedet-hat (accessed 4 October 2017)].
8 The cultural axis described in that study is not exactly similar to the more standard "GAL/TAN" axis used in comparative studies. When Swiss parties are located on that axis (source: Chapel Hill expert survey 2014) SVP appears as clearly "TAN", CVP is moderately "TAN", FDP in the middle, and SP clearly "GAL". We do not use the "GAL/TAN" classification here because there are no comparable data from the 1980s.
9 Data from Smartmonitor, Koalitionsbildung [URL: http://smartmonitor.ch/?page_id=194 (last accessed: 18 October 2017)].

10 Referendum votes are mandatory for constitutional amendments and some international treaties, and optional (on petition) for legislative acts.
11 Data based on parties' voting recommendations: own calculations from Swissvotes (www.swissvotes.ch/page/integralerdatensatz).
12 This seems to be a more general phenomenon (Papadopoulos 2013: 43ff.).
13 Data from "Smartmonitor".
14 In that chamber it is mainly the SP that managed to increase significantly its representation, from three seats in 1991 to twelve in 2015, mainly thanks to well-known candidates that have been able to attract votes much beyond the "reservoir" of the Left.
15 Data from the Centre for Research on Direct Democracy (C2d): www.c2d.ch/inner.php?table=continent&sublinkname=country_information&tabname=results&menuname=menu&continent=Europe&countrygeo=1&stategeo=0&citygeo=0&level=1 (accessed 14 October 2017).

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