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ABSTRACT
Federalism and decentralisation offer political parties the opportunity to tailor their policy-seeking behaviour to different regional electorates. These electorates often possess different political preferences. However, the regional branches of nationwide parties must be careful not to dilute or even betray the core values of their party, for equally often they remain dependent on central support. This article studies the ensuing tension between regional deviations from national unity by analysing all vote recommendations of the four major Swiss parties on all 251 national referendums held between 1987 and 2015. Vote recommendations constitute an important guidance for voters. Analytically, the article focuses on the conditions of cantonal deviations from federal recommendations as a proxy for decentralised policy-seeking. It finds that ideological (socialism), temporal, vote-specific (distance to next election) as well as vote- and canton-specific factors (regional turnout and contestation) all influence party unity, with some effects varying by policy area and vote type.

Parties are essential for democracy (e.g. Sartori [1976] 2005). They recruit the political personnel; aggregate and channel societal interest; guide voters through cues and identification; and seek and exercise political power. Yet for all their multiple functions, this paper focuses on *policy-seeking* strategies. More particularly, we question the unitary character of parties and ask why regional parties in Switzerland deviate from their national 'parent' party in issuing deviating vote recommendations. We thus contribute to the literature on party politics, adding decentralised policy-seeking to the behavioural repertoire, as well as to studies on federalism and regionalism, analysing the effect of territoriality on parties.

Policy-seeking is defined as the attempt of a party 'to maximize its impact on public policy' and 'consists in taking positions on any number of issues …

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related to public policy. A party's success in pursuing its policies depends on its ability to change public policy toward its most preferred positions or to prevent undesirable changes' (Strom and Müller 1999: 7). Of the three forms of goal orientation highlighted by Strom and Müller (1999), policy-seeking arguably has the most direct impact on citizens as it produces an output felt by them (see Adams and Merrill 2009: 541). Like office-seeking, it can be pursued instrumentally or intrinsically (Budge and Laver 1986: 494–7). Switzerland presents an ideal case to study policy-seeking because of the absence of public party financing (making parties dependent on their adherents; Strom and Müller 1999: 21), its consensus government (Müller and Strom 1999: 288), the strong influence of rank-and-file (Müller and Strom 1999: 292; Vatter 2016: 127), and the extensive use of binding referendums (Vatter 2016: 113).

Moreover, the unitary character of political parties must be questioned in multilevel systems with extensive political autonomy and electoral competition on more than one level of governance, such as the EU or federal, devolved and decentralised states (Bochsler and Wasserfallen 2013; Deschouwer 2006; Hug 1994). In fact, decentralisation offers parties both opportunities and traps. Thus, a *virtue* of decentralisation is that regional parties can run their own, autonomous organisation (Detterbeck and Hepburn 2010; Jeffery 2010; Thorlakson 2013) and/or deviate from the policies of 'their' national party (Grofman 2004: 39). However, a *vice* of decentralisation is that too many regional deviations can damage the national party, e.g. if the party appears split on core issues or if parties in other regions are affected negatively (Léon 2014: 399).

It is no surprise then that one of the oldest debates in the federal and political party literatures tackles the connection between territorial heterogeneity and political parties (see also Caramani 2004). For some (e.g. Filippov *et al.* 2004; Riker 1964), only decentralised parties ensure the continued 'peripheralised' working of a federation. For others (e.g. Chhibber and Kollman 2004; Scharpf 1995; Thorlakson 2009; Watts 2004), decentralised state structures in turn cause corresponding political structures. We add to that debate by analysing the *policy* dimension of party territoriality.

This matters for at least three reasons. First, although a party competes in different regions under a single label, we might be faced with different parties in terms of where they stand on the left–right dimension (or any other dimension; see Elias *et al.* 2015). There might also be a temporal dimension to this (van Houten 2009: 141). Second, to the extent that different regions possess different cultural, economic or topographical characteristics, we would expect different parties to be successful in different areas. However, this only holds true if the party itself is sufficiently homogenous, i.e. offers the same policy solutions across the territory (Grofman 2004: 30). Some parties (typically on the left) might be closer to this ideal than others (Giger *et al.* 2011; Müller 2009). Third, policy heterogeneity might be key to electoral and office success. For example, a regional branch can thus distance itself from an unpopular national government

(Cabeza *et al.* 2017) and/or give precedence to its own region's interests over national concerns (Alonso *et al.* 2015).

Why focus on explaining the policy-specific territorial heterogeneity of Swiss parties? On the one hand, the Swiss federation is highly decentralised politically, fiscally and institutionally and its society is culturally divided, making it a most likely case for territorial heterogeneity. On the other hand, Swiss parties not only participate in elections, but they also issue recommendations on how to vote in referendums. Because both national and cantonal parties issue recommendations or cues on all national referendums, we can compare and analyse resulting differences (see also Sager and Bühlmann 2009).

Our dataset was compiled specifically for this purpose and includes all 1623 deviating vote recommendations by all cantonal branches of all four Swiss government parties on all 251 national referendums held between December 1987 and June 2015.

Literature, theory and hypotheses

On the one hand, policy-seeking is one of three possible party goals (Strom and Müller 1999), but is only rarely studied on its own (Adams and Merrill, 2009; Budge and Laver 1986). Still, the policy dimension refers to what parties actually *do* when it comes to specific outputs (Mazzoleni and Mueller 2016) and thus deserves to be studied as both an instrumental and intrinsic good. On the other hand, in federalism studies, parties are regarded as either the dependent or independent variable (Chandler 1987: 151; Duchacek 1987: 329; Elazar 1987: 34; Swenden 2006; Watts 2004). Often the focus here is on party organisation as evidenced by financing or candidate selection (e.g. Deschouwer 2006; Thorlakson 2009).

Only few have connected policy-seeking to multilevel governance, and even those that do are mostly driven by interest in other outcomes. Müller (2013: 191–2), for example, centres on a regional party's programmatic choices, finding that regional economic conditions and party competition matter, but not as much as toeing the national party line. Stecker (2015: 1319) uses the national policy initiatives of regional parties as a proxy for party positioning, concluding that parties use the policy dimension rhetorically to compensate for lack of actual *Land* autonomy. Cabeza *et al.* (2017) finally tackle the policy heterogeneity of Spanish regional party manifestos, finding that electoral calculations account for playing up or down policies connected to the national government depending on whether one is in opposition or not and how well the economy does.

However, in focusing mostly on vertical relations, all three studies largely ignore horizontal variation across different regions. Moreover, policy-seeking is not analysed as a goal in itself, but used to proxy regional party autonomy or as a means for regional vote- and office-seeking. While an important aspect of

policy diversity, this neglects the intrinsic motivations that can exist alongside (Budge and Laver 1986). For example, parties may pursue regionally varying policy priorities because their region is – in their view – in need of a different output. At its most extreme, differences are so pronounced that parties rupture territorially (Deschouwer 2006). By contrast, allowing regional branches to deviate from nationwide policy stances might ensure their loyalty in the long run (Grofman 2004), particularly if combined with success in exploiting the informational advantage regional parties possess (van Houten 2009).

The Swiss context with its frequent use of referendums provides us with yet another opportunity to analyse parties' policy (dis)unity. All amendments of the federal constitution, including popular initiatives, as well as contested federal acts and important international treaties require a binding popular vote (we use 'referendum' synonymously). Between December 1987 and June 2015, the Swiss decided 251 separate questions (i.e. roughly nine issues per year) on 84 different occasions (i.e. three times a year, on average; BK 2017). On each question, national parties issue what is called a *vote recommendation*, with all cantonal branches having the autonomy to issue their own, deviating and sometimes even flatly contradicting recommendation.

Hug (1994) was the first to systematically collect data on deviating cantonal recommendations, observing eight parties and 137 referendums between 1970 and 1987. The follow-up study is provided by Cappelletti and Dacorogna (2014), covering nine parties and 52 popular votes between 2003 and 2011. Two of their conclusions that deserve highlighting – and which we will corroborate with newer and more fine-grained data – are that left-wing parties behave more homogenously than right-wing parties (Cappelletti and Dacorogna 2014: 103; Hug 1994: 92) and that deviations have decreased for three of the four main parties (Cappelletti and Dacorogna 2014, 103 and 110). Their main explanations for increased unity over time are nationalisation and personalisation as well as the professionalisation of the national-conservative Swiss People's Party (SVP) since the 1990s (Cappelletti and Dacorogna 2014: 111), which encouraged higher levels of unity in other parties, too (see also Hug 1994: 88).

Related enquiries are provided by Ladner and Brändle (2001) and Giger *et al.* (2011). The former rely on a survey conducted in 1997, the latter assess cantonal party manifestos used in 2003. This time, contextual factors are given priority over party-specific attributes. Thus it emerges that the SVP of canton Geneva, an urban and French-speaking canton, placed itself as left as did the Socialists (SPS) of canton Berne, a largely rural and German-speaking canton (Ladner and Brändle 2001: 274); that the overall distance between SVP and SPS has increased over time (Ladner and Brändle 2001: 276–7); and that the centrist Christian Democrats (CVP) and Liberals (FDP) are the most hetero-geneous (Ladner and Brändle 2001: 290–2, 298–9). Giger *et al.* (2011: 277–8), in turn, show that regional characteristics such as religion, language, density

and unemployment significantly influence parties' manifestos (see also Müller 2009, 2013).

In sum, the question about the territorial unity of parties in federal systems points to vital aspects of multilevel government, such as how horizontal and vertical relations interact; whether and why parties and regions differ in their political preferences and policy-seeking; and where, which, how and to what extent societal diversity is accommodated. While some factors pertaining to Swiss parties have been assessed already but need updating, others still await inclusion in explanatory models. The two broad hypotheses that we derive next are whether regional context or strategic reflections matter more in predicting cantonal policy deviations.

Regional context

Our first set of hypotheses builds on party responsiveness to context (Müller 2013). Different cantons possess different historic, cultural and economic properties. To the extent that all parties somehow reflect the underlying social texture in which they operate, parties' stances on specific policies should vary systematically across regions, too. After all, the very idea of federalism and political decentralisation is that it allows for tailoring *policies* to specific regional preferences (see also Giger *et al.* 2011; Ladner and Brändle 2001). However, what matters for our purposes is not so much cantonal distinctiveness vis-à-vis the national society, but rather how that distinctiveness relates to the character of parties at the national level.[1] Historically, the two main cultural cleavages that have mattered in Switzerland are religion and language, both somehow expressing centre–periphery tensions (e.g. Linder *et al.* 2008). Nevertheless, consequences for parties differ.

The divide between Catholics and Protestants, one of the reasons for the civil war of 1847, is the only cleavage to have given birth to a distinct political formation, the Catholic-Conservative Party (which later became the CVP), which for a long time defended the Catholic cantons against 'centralisers' from mainly Protestant Switzerland. While religious affiliation does not matter as such anymore, it has left a legacy of specific values translating into distinct political behaviour (e.g. Bolliger 2007: 67; Davis and Robinson 2012). Catholics, for example, are said to prefer more state intervention, particularly regarding the welfare state, compared to Protestants, who encourage self-sufficiency and competition (e.g. Siroky *et al.* 2017). In the 1970s (and confirmed, by and large, in 2013 and 2017), even the creation of canton Jura perfectly followed the Catholic–Protestant divide (Siroky *et al.* 2017). Still today, the CVP is much stronger in Catholic areas than in Protestant ones, although present throughout the country. Consequently, the following hypothesis can be deduced:

H$_{1a}$: Cantonal party deviations are explained by the dominant religion in that canton: less deviation in strongly Catholic cantons for the CVP; more deviation in strongly Catholic cantons for the SVP, SPS and FDP.

The second major cultural divide in Swiss society is language, with three main ones spoken throughout the country. As with religion, what interests us here are consequences for political behaviour: particularly French-speaking Swiss are more open towards Europe and the world than German-speakers and more inclined to regulate nationally in view of achieving uniformity (Bolliger 2007: 86; Kriesi *et al.* 1996). The mechanisms through which this happens are shared communication channels within the respective linguistic space (Bolliger 2007: 143; Tresch 2008) and cultural influence from the outside (Mueller and Dardanelli 2014). But unlike religion, language has never given rise to distinct parties, which is why we expect the linguistic factor to matter equally for all four main parties. To the extent that all four parties are dominated numerically by German-speakers at national level, we expect that:

H$_{1b}$: Parties operating in linguistic minority cantons (i.e. where a majority speaks French or Italian) more often deviate from their national party than parties in German-speaking cantons.

A third important cleavage, and one which seems to have gained in importance in recent decades not only in Switzerland, is the one between urban and rural areas (e.g. Kriesi 2015). While citizens in urban areas tend to vote in a way that is more progressive, centrist and open towards the outside, those in rural areas have more conservative, sovereigntist views (Bolliger 2007: 79). As with religion, this may have different consequences for different political parties: urban sections of parties with a progressive outlook will not need to deviate, whereas rural sections of conservative parties can likewise toe the national party line. Because the Socialists and Liberals are strong in the cities and the Christian Democrats and Conservatives in rural areas, we expect the following:

H$_{1c}$: Cantonal party deviations are explained by degree of urbanity of that canton: the SVP and CVP will have more deviation coming from urban cantons whereas the SPS and the FDP will see more deviations from rural cantons.

Or strategic reflections?

Our second set of hypotheses focuses on strategic reflections of regional parties (see also Cabeza *et al.* 2017). Across Switzerland, elections are held every four years; they still constitute the primary activity of parties (van Houten 2009), even in direct-democratic Switzerland. This can be thought to influence cantonal deviations via proximity and cycle effects (see Schakel and Dandoy 2013; Selb 2006).

On the one hand, the looming of an election might heighten the importance to get special mention in media outlets and to be regarded as catering

to cantonally specific policy needs. Cantonal party deviations might be a useful tool to achieve both: contradicting the national party is more likely to be reported in the news than simply adopting the same recommendation, and in justifying its deviation the cantonal party can present itself not only as truly autonomous and worthy of votes, but also as prioritising cantonal interests over party loyalty. Hence,

> H_{2a}: The closer an upcoming election, the more likely it is that cantonal parties deviate from their national party.

Finally, at the level of the vote itself, we can imagine the characteristics of the referendum to have an independent effect on whether a cantonal party deviates or not. Two aspects seem particularly worthwhile to pursue: relevance and contestedness. *Relevance* means that the question to be decided in a referendum is particularly important for the citizens of a given canton – for example, the fiscal equalisation reform in 2004 saw higher turnout in cantons either receiving or having to pay a lot (Mueller *et al.* 2016a). As a measure of truly territorial interest, relevance is thus likely to produce cantonal deviation:

> H_{2b}: The more relevant a specific referendum in a canton, the more likely a cantonal party is to deviate from its national party.

Contestedness, on the other hand, refers to higher levels of insecurity over what the result (in a canton and overall) might be. Kriesi (2006: 608–9) shows the closeness of a vote to be related to campaign intensity, which in turn raises citizen awareness and diversifies their opinions. However, while he argues government defeat at the national level to be a product of cantonal party deviations through contradictory clues provided by the elite (Kriesi 2006: 613), he also finds inter-party disagreement to correlate with intra-party disunity (Kriesi 2006: 605; also Bolliger 2007: 299). In other words, what divides parties horizontally (party competition) also separates them vertically (party disunity). Our argument here is that party disunity is *itself* a function of the contested nature of a policy proposal. Contestedness is often the case when a referendum question does not fall neatly into the traditional left–right dimension. This splits both camps and, with the right being Switzerland's 'natural majority' (Kriesi 2006: 618), makes for a more insecure result (see also Bochsler and Bousbah 2015 on cantonal government elections). As organisations deeply embedded in their cantonal context, parties are likely to respond to this contestedness. Thus:

> H_{2c}: The more contested (i.e. the closer the result of) a specific referendum in a canton, the more likely parties from that canton are to deviate from their national party.

Controls

In our subsequent analyses, we include a number of controls. A first is time. The Swiss political system has undergone profound changes in the last decades that

could be mirrored in cantonal party deviations. To summarise these changes is to say that, firstly, a new cleavage has emerged between openness to Europe and the world on the one hand and national isolation on the other (e.g. Kriesi 2015). Second, this cleavage has been activated and used by, and thus its intensity is correlated with the rise of, the SVP. From barely 12% of the national vote in 1987 the party has risen to become by far the largest party, reaching almost 30% by 2015 (Mueller and Gerber 2016). Polarisation, measured as the advantage of the combined SPS+SVP vote shares over the combined CVP+FDP vote shares, has equally exploded, from –15% to more than 20% in the same period (Mueller *et al.* 2016b: 3). Fourth and finally, the party system has moved from a bi-polar (left vs. the rest) to a tri-polar system with shifting alliances depending on specific issues (Bochsler and Bousbah 2015; Vatter 2016). One effect of such intensified inter-party competition could be that parties have become internally more unified over time in a kind of 'rally 'round the flag' effect (see Mueller 1970).

The second set of control variables are party dummies. The aggregate changes over time detected by Cappelletti and Dacorogna (2014) in comparison to Hug (1994) might also be due to the increased professionalisation and nationalisation of the Swiss party system (Bochsler and Wasserfallen 2013). Several new parties were created in the political centre that might account for increased party unity also on the right-hand side of the political spectrum. There are reasons to expect that especially the pole parties (SPS and SVP) have become more unified over time than centre parties. Of the two, however, the Socialists are not only the most centralised organisationally (Thorlakson 2009: 165), but also more homogenous from an ideological point of view (Ladner and Brändle 2001: 263, 290–3, 298). This should also be reflected in policy unity (Hug 1994).

Data and method

Swiss parties are built from below, with national parties consisting of cantonal parties (Gruner 1984: 151; Ladner and Brändle 2001: 253; see, however, Appendix Table A1). Cantons serve as the constituencies for federal elections, and for federal referendums on constitutional change, next to a popular majority a majority of consenting cantons is also needed, whereby the popular majority within a canton determines that canton's vote. Before each federal referendum, parties issue so-called vote recommendations. These take one of three forms: 'yes', 'no' or 'vote freely', which means the party either could not agree on whether to recommend a yes or a no or the result of the vote is not regarded as very important. All cantonal parties are free to adopt their own recommendation (Cappelletti and Dacorogna 2014: 101; Hug 1994). Of the ensuing nine possible constellations, two can be counted as full contradictions, three as congruence and four as partial contractions (Table 1).

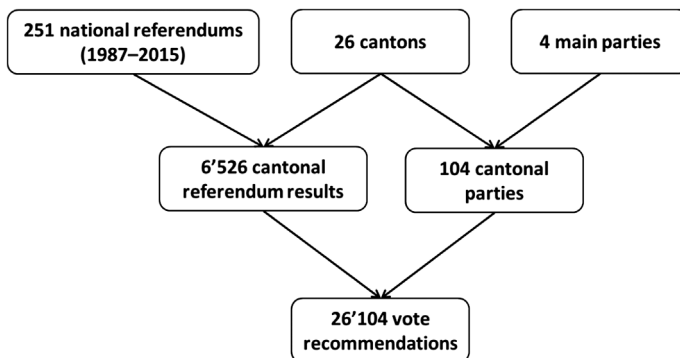**Table 1.** National vs. cantonal party vote recommendations.

Cantonal party vote recommendation	National party vote recommendation		
	Yes	No	Vote freely
Yes	Congruence	Contradiction	Partial contradiction
No	Contradiction	Congruence	
Vote freely	Partial contradiction		Congruence

To assess the programmatic heterogeneity of Swiss parties, we have investigated whether, for each of the 251 votes held between 1987 and 2015, the national party's vote recommendation was deviated from by any one of its cantonal branches. We have observed all four main parties: SPS, FDP, CVP and SVP. All were, with one exception (SVP during 2008), always part of the Swiss government and together add up to some 80% of the national vote. The time span is dictated partly by data availability, partly by the significant changes in Swiss politics over these three decades (see above).

Our data structure is visualised in Figure 1. At the very top we find the 251 national referendums, the 26 cantons and the four main parties. At the middle level are the 6526 cantonal referendum results and the 104 cantonal parties. All this makes for an ideal total of 26,104 cantonal vote recommendations.[2]

Data on votes, recommendations and cantonal deviations are provided by the Swiss Parliament (2017), the State Chancellery (BK 2017), Swissvotes (2017) and the Federal Office for Statistics (BFS 2017). Contextual data on language, religion and urbanity are from the BFS (2017). The timing of votes relative to elections is measured using both national and cantonal elections (see also Appendix Table A2).

Methodologically, we rely on descriptive statistics as well as Bayesian cross-classified multilevel regression models. The models implement the structure depicted in Figure 1. Each model is cross-classified as cantons and votes are both treated as overlapping contexts, together with the distinction between

Figure 1. Data structure.

parties creating explanations at the level of cantonal parties and cantonal voting. The dependent variable is located at the level of vote recommendations per cantonal party and vote ($N = 26{,}104$):

$$dev(i) \sim dbern(p_{dev}(i))$$

$$p_{dev}(i) = 1/(1 + \exp(-z(i)))$$

$$z(i) = \alpha_0 + \alpha_{0.cant.vote}(idcv(i)) + \alpha_{0.cant.party}(idpv(i))$$
$$+ \beta_{cvp} * cvp(i) + \beta_{sps} * sps(i) + \beta_{svp} * svp(i)$$

$$\alpha_{0.cant.party}(m) \sim N(\mu_{0.cant.party}(m), \sigma_{0.cant.party})$$

$$\alpha_{0.cant.vote}(o) \sim N(\mu_{0.cant.vote}(o), \sigma_{0.cant.vote})$$

$$\mu_{0.cant.party}(m) = \alpha_{0.cant}(idc(m))$$

$$\mu_{0.cant.vote}(o) = \alpha_{0.canton}(idc(o)) + \alpha_{0.vote}(idv(o))$$
$$+ \gamma_{turnout} * turnout(o) + \gamma_{contest} * contest(o)$$

$$\alpha_{0.canton}(j) \sim N(\mu_{0.canton}(j), \sigma_{0.canton})$$

$$\alpha_{0.vote}(k) \sim N(\mu_{0.vote}(k), \sigma_{0.vote})$$

$$\mu_{0.canton}(j) = \gamma_{german} * german(j) + \gamma_{catholic} * catholic(j) + \gamma_{urban} * urban(j)$$

$$\mu_{0.vote}(k) = \gamma_{time} * time(k) + \gamma_{distance} * distance(k) + \gamma_{distance2} * distance(k)^2$$

The dependent variable is modelled assuming a logistic distribution to accommodate its binary measurement level. Party dummies capture the general argument that ideology affects unity. The other independent variables are located at the specific levels of analysis, modelled using four not fully nested random intercepts (such as $\beta_{0.canton}$): the 26 cantons (j), the 251 votes (k), the 104 party-canton (m) and the 6526 canton-vote pairs (o). Normal distributions are assumed for the random intercepts as well as the diffuse priors for parameter estimates β and γ. The combination of R with JAGS (Just Another Gibbs Sampler) is used to calculate three simulations chains per model, using 5000 iterations each for burn-in and inference. The chains converge reasonably well

and both autocorrelation and non-normality are largely absent. The posterior distributions of the parameters estimated are used to illustrate the effects and their levels of uncertainty.

Analysis

Descriptive analysis on temporal, cantonal and partisan patterns

In total, between 1987 and 2015 we observed 1633 deviating cantonal vote recommendations. By far the majority of them constitute full contradictions (81%), whereas all partial deviations together account for only 19% of all deviations.[3] To facilitate further analyses, we summarise all deviations, both partial and full, as constituting an autonomous choice by the cantonal party to deviate from the national party. Separate analyses on the type of the vote as well as their policy area are presented below.

Figure 2 traces the share of vote deviations over time and by party, using the official legislative periods as grouping variables. The trend is negative for all parties except the CVP. Overall, the Socialists have both the lowest relative (3% per legislative period, on average) and lowest absolute number of deviating recommendations (219; CVP: 433; FDP: 469; SVP: 512). This gives credence to the left-right distinction evoked earlier: the SPS was and remains the most homogenous. However, the largest drop in the relative number of deviations per legislative period happened for the SVP (from 14% to 7%; SPS: from 7% to 1%), despite a massive increase in cantonal parties from 15 to 27. The FDP provides the third largest decrease in heterogeneity (−4%), whereas the CVP −
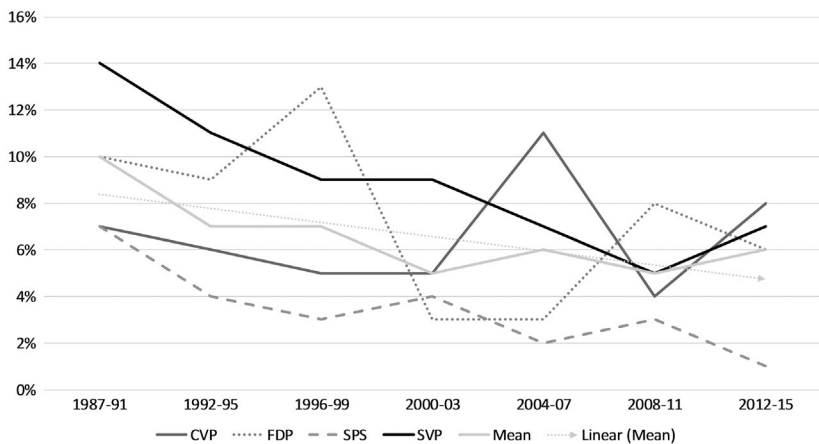
**Figure 2.** Deviations by party, 1987–2015 (% of possible deviations).
Note: Displayed are cantonal party deviations as a proportion of the product of the number of votes and the average number of party sections per legislative period (see Appendix Table A1). French- and German-speaking parties of canton VS are counted separately if and when existing.

the first to have sections in all 26 cantons – has become slightly more hetero-geneous (+1%).

A final element of descriptive statistics is provided by the territorial distri-bution. In Figure 3, we see the cultural divide that also Giger *et al.* (2011) and Ladner and Brändle (2001) alluded to: All six cantons with a French-speaking majority (VD, JU, GE, FR, VS-f, and NE) are located to the left (the 'party rebels'). Also visible is the distinct behaviour of the SVPs of cantons Grisons (37 deviating vote recommendations), Berne (35) and Glarus (21), where in 2008 the splinter Conservative-Democratic Party (BDP) was founded (Bühlmann and Hohl 2017: 3). The other end of the graph is composed of rather rural, conserv-ative and German-speaking cantons plus the *Oberwallis* (the 'party faithful').

The determinants of deviating vote recommendations

Figure 4 displays the results of a first Bayesian cross-classified multilevel regression model, which includes party dummies and the share of the variance explained by cantons, votes and cantonal party sections only. This 'empty' model indicates that compared to the FDP (baseline), the CVP and the SVP do not show much difference in the general use of deviating voting recommendations, while the SPS appears more unitary, thus confirming prior studies (Hug 1994; Ladner and Brändle 2001). Regarding the structure of the contextual variance of deviating vote recommendations, properties of the votes themselves explain
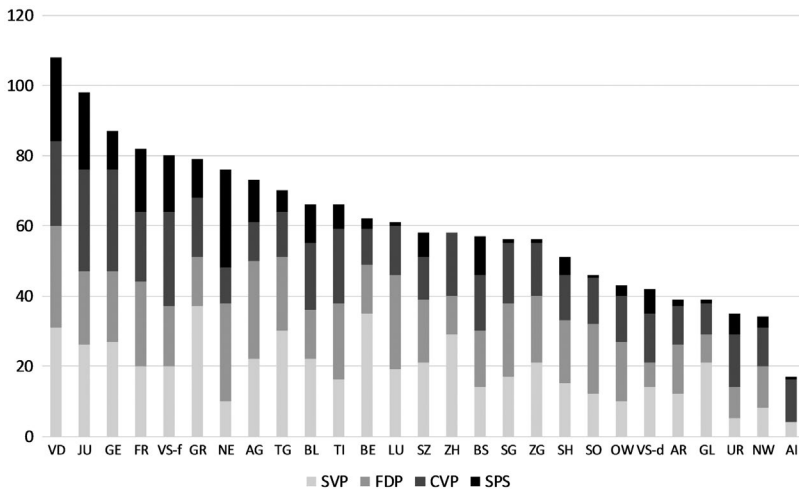
Figure 3. Number of deviations by canton and party, 1987–2015.
Note: 'VS-f' = French-speaking, 'VS-d' = German-speaking parties of canton Valais. The six SVP VS deviations between 2000 and 2002 have been allocated to both the VS-f and the VS-d bars, as the party (created in 1999) only split in September 2002. Key: AG = Aargau, AI = Appenzell Inner-Rhodes, AR = Appenzell Outer-Rhodes, BE = Berne, BL = Basel-Countryside, BS = Basel-City, FR = Fribourg, GE = Geneva, GL = Glarus, GR = Grisons, JU = Jura, LU = Lucerne, NE = Neuchâtel, NW = Nidwalden, OW = Obwalden, SG = St. Gall, SH = Schaffhausen, SO = Solothurn, SZ = Schwyz, TG = Thurgau, TI = Ticino, UR = Uri, VD = Vaud, VS = Valais, ZG = Zug, ZH = Zurich.
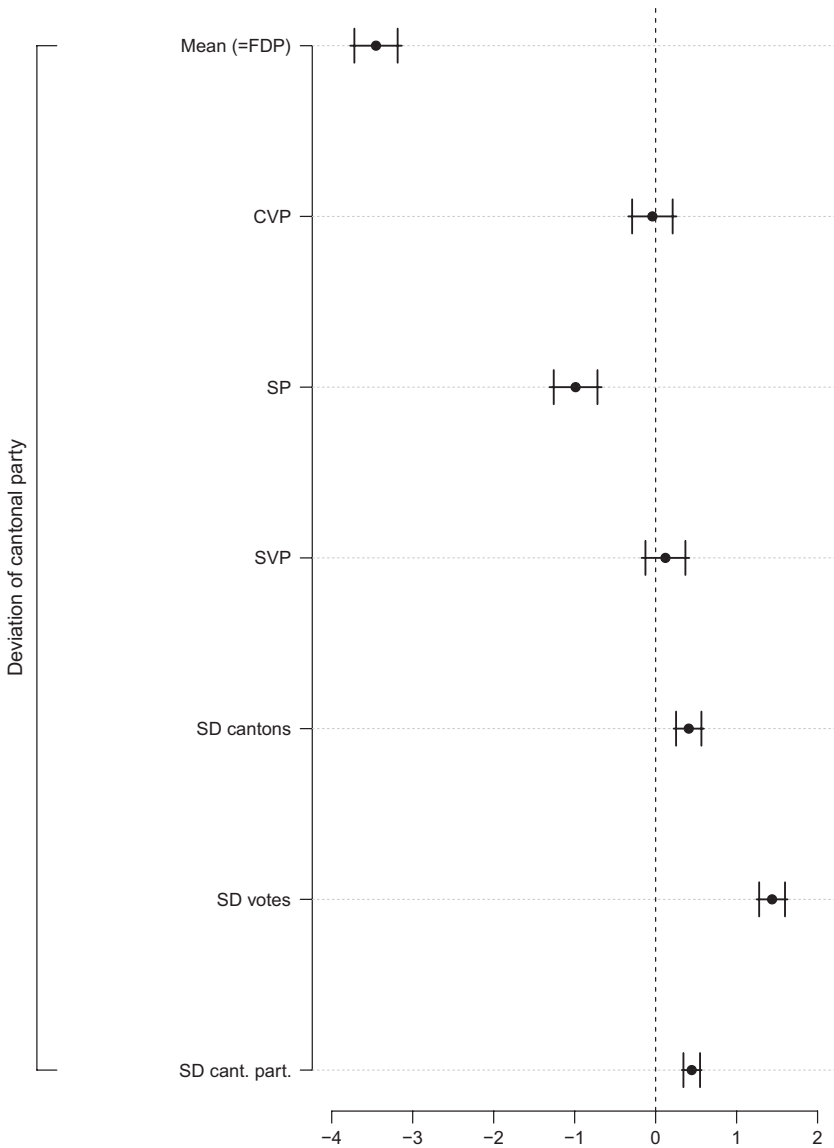
Figure 4. 'Empty' model (251 votes, 1987–2015).
Note: Logistic Bayesian cross-classified multilevel model predicting deviations of cantonal parties at single national referendum votes. Constant = FDP, with party dummies for SVP, SPS and SVP. Horizontal (vertical) bars indicate the 95% (90%) highest posterior density (~confidence/credibility) intervals. Burn-in: 5000 iterations; inference: 5000 iterations.

more than both the cantons and the cantonal party sections, with all three levels showing some systematic influence. Hence, we next include the variables needed to test our hypotheses on deviating vote recommendations located at these different levels.
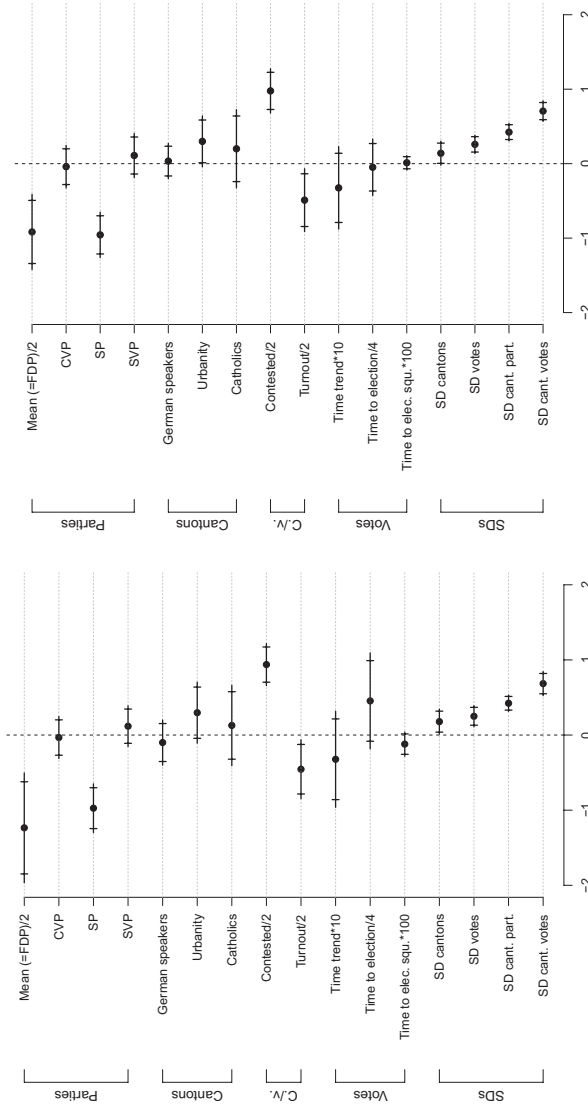
Figure 5. Full model (251 votes, 1987–2015); distance to national (left) and cantonal elections (right).

Note: Logistic Bayesian cross-classified multilevel model predicting deviations of cantonal parties at single national referendum votes. Constant = FDP, with party dummies for SVP, SPS and SVP (effects indicate difference to FDP). Horizontal (vertical) bars indicate the 95% (90%) highest posterior density (~confidence/credibility) intervals. Burn-in: 5000 iterations; inference: 5000 iterations. Turnout: steps of 0.5%; time to election: steps of 25 days.

Figure 5 analyses all 251 votes and extends the cross-classified nature of the model, as some of the explanations reflect cantonal properties of votes (e.g. cantonal voting turnout) while others vary only at the level of cantons (e.g. urbanity) or votes (e.g. temporal distance to the next election). Two variants are computed, one featuring time until the next national (left-hand panel of Figure 5) and the other until the next cantonal election (right-hand panel of Figure 5). Explanations varying at the level of cantonal parties are modelled using random intercepts. As the standard deviations at the bottom of Figure 5 indicate, some contextual variance at all levels remains even after including all the explanations introduced above, especially at the level of cantonal parties and cantonal votes. In other words, explanations of deviating vote recommendations also reflect specific combinations of the referendum vote and cantonal or partisan context.

Nevertheless, three main conclusions emerge: the SPS is clearly more united in its policy-seeking strategy than the other three government parties and deviations are more likely when votes are contested but less likely given high turnout. Noting that we follow a Bayesian interpretation of parameters as distributions (implying less of a focus on rather arbitrary thresholds of statistical significance),[4] the 95% posterior density (credibility) intervals of the parameter estimates do not include zero. In tendency, there is also more deviating behaviour by cantonal parties in urban settings as well as less over time and in the middle of legislative periods (interplay of 'time to election' and its squared variant). The latter finding only holds when the distance to the next election is measured in national instead of cantonal terms. By contrast, there are no systematic effects for the share of Catholics or German speakers.

Table 2. Results of the four main parties separately.

Variables	SPS	SVP	FDP	CVP
Mean	-5.49 [-9.87; -3.48]	-3.89 [-5.16; -2.80]	-4.05 [-5.87; -2.32]	−4.47 [−7.42; −3.24]
German speakers	-1.35 [-3.47; 0.18]	-0.37 [-1.44; 0.91]	0.75 [-0.65; 2.13]	0.65 [−0.46; 1.85]
Urbanity	1.94 [-0.17; 4.26]	-0.39 [-1.94; 1.01]	-1.41 [-2.99; 0.53]	−0.38 [−1.70; 0.86]
Catholics	-0.08 [-3.45; 3.04]	-1.23 [-3.61; 0.78]	-1.36 [-3.75; 0.73]	1.55 [-0.50; 3.68]
Contested	0.89 [-0.48; 2.41]	0.45 [-3.92; 1.37]	0.76 [-0.45; 1.78]	0.11 [-1.13; 1.14]
Turnout	0.47 [-1.50; 2.52]	-0.20 [-1.76; 1.17]	-0.76 [-2.52; 0.73]	0.05 [-1.34; 1.48]
Time trend	-0.02 [-0.05; 0.02]	0.00 [-0.02; 0.02]	-0.01 [-0.04; 0.02]	0.00 [-0.02; 0.02]
Distance to federal election	1.33 [-3.56; 9.53]	0.37 [-3.92; 3.80]	1.30 [-4.47; 6.03]	1.04 [-2.84; 6.74]
Distance squared	0.00 [-0.01; 0.00]	0.00 [0.00; 0.00]	0.00 [0.00; 0.00]	0.00 [0.00; 0.00]
SD cantons	0.88 [0.11; 1.87]	0.58 [0.13; 1.23]	0.51 [0.06; 1.13]	0.52 [0.06; 1.14]
SD votes	2.47 [1.87; 3.10]	1.96 [1.62; 2.35]	2.59 [2.13; 3.09]	2.07 [1.76; 2.53]

Note: Mean and 95% credibility intervals of the Bayesian estimations reported. As only one party is analysed per model, the levels of cantons and cantonal parties collapse into a single one, and the lowest level equals cantonal votes; $N = 6526$.

To tap into more specific relationships, Table 2 lists the results when we analyse each party separately. These are generally not in line with expectations, but shed some light on the heterogeneity of the effects of the cantonal context, depending on the party studied. We can see that urbanity is particularly an issue for the SPS and the FDP, but with opposite effects: in the former, it tends to contribute to deviations; in the latter, it tends to reduce them. By contrast, the share of Catholics tends to contribute to cantonal party deviations in the CVP, but has little influence for the other three parties. French-speaking sections of the SPS, however, are less likely to deviate in tendency. Note that the level of uncertainty is high throughout the coefficients reported in Table 2 (zero is included in the 95% credibility intervals most of the time), also related to the smaller samples studied.

To further probe the link between cantonal party behaviour, regional context and strategic reflections, we next analyse deviating recommendations along the type of the referendum as well as its policy area.

Vote type and policy area

Figure 6 (left) shows the share of deviating vote recommendations per vote type. It reveals that popular initiatives are associated with the highest levels of party unity: only about 4% of all cantonal party sections issue a recommendation not in line with the national party. For counter-proposals, which are relatively rare ($N = 11$ in our period of investigation), disunity is much higher. This could be due to the highly strategic function of counter-proposals, which are meant to incorporate the demands of a popular initiative without however being that extreme. Party unity during obligatory and facultative referendums is located in between. In sum, there appear to be different mechanisms at work for the different vote types. Hence, in a further step of the analysis, the explanatory model will be applied to popular initiatives ($N = 110$) vs. all other types ($N = 141$).

In showing deviations per policy area of a referendum, Figure 6 (right) follows a similar logic. The range covered is from about 4% to 9%, and some distinct patterns emerge. For 'social policy, health and welfare', 'education and research' and 'public finances', parties appear to display stronger unity. The reason might be that these areas are strongly affected by the left–right cleavage, being related to taxation, spending and welfare. By contrast, most deviations are observed for votes on 'environment and planning' and 'culture, religion and media', which cut across traditional left–right debates and concern typically regional or private conscience-related issues. As both the number ($N = 74$ out of 251) and salience are considerable for votes on 'social policy, health and welfare', we repeat our model for all cases in this area vs. all others.

Figures 7–10 show split-sample analyses to investigate whether the mechanisms established vary by vote type and/or policy area. For popular initiatives (Figure 7), the SPS again tends to display more unity, but now the cantonal
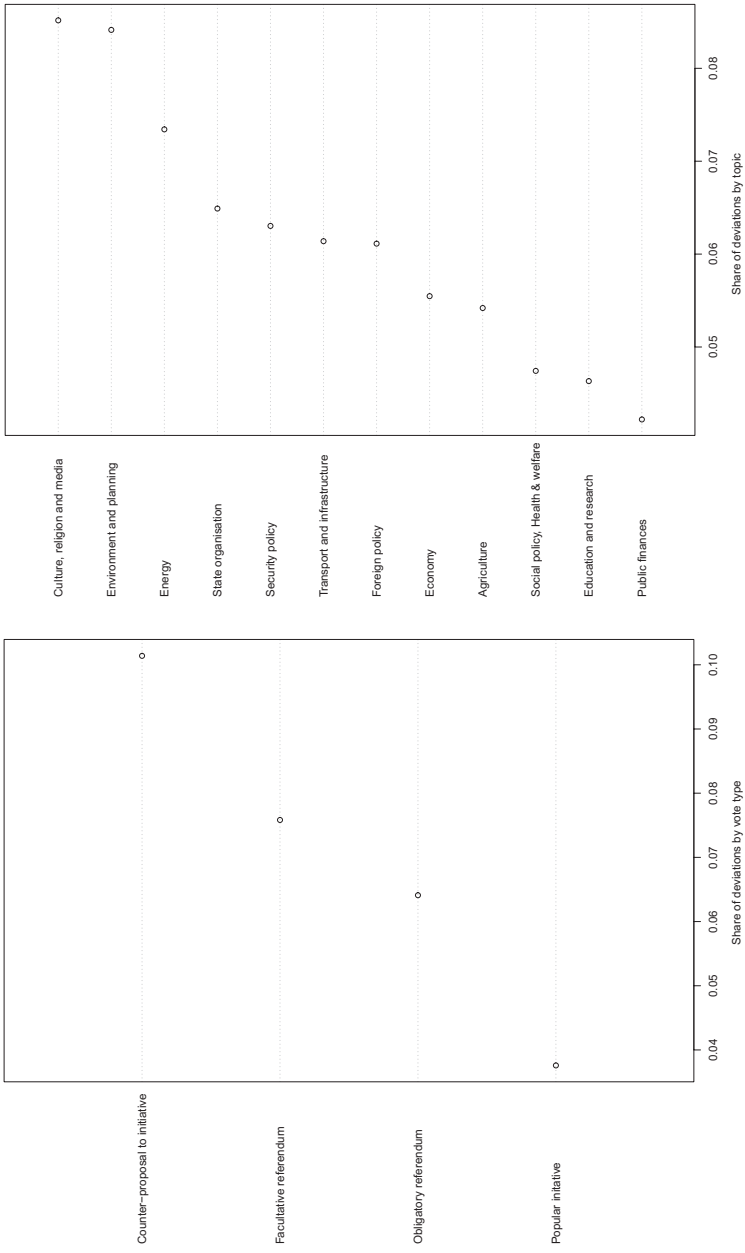
Figure 6. Party (dis)unity by type of referendum (left) and policy area (right).
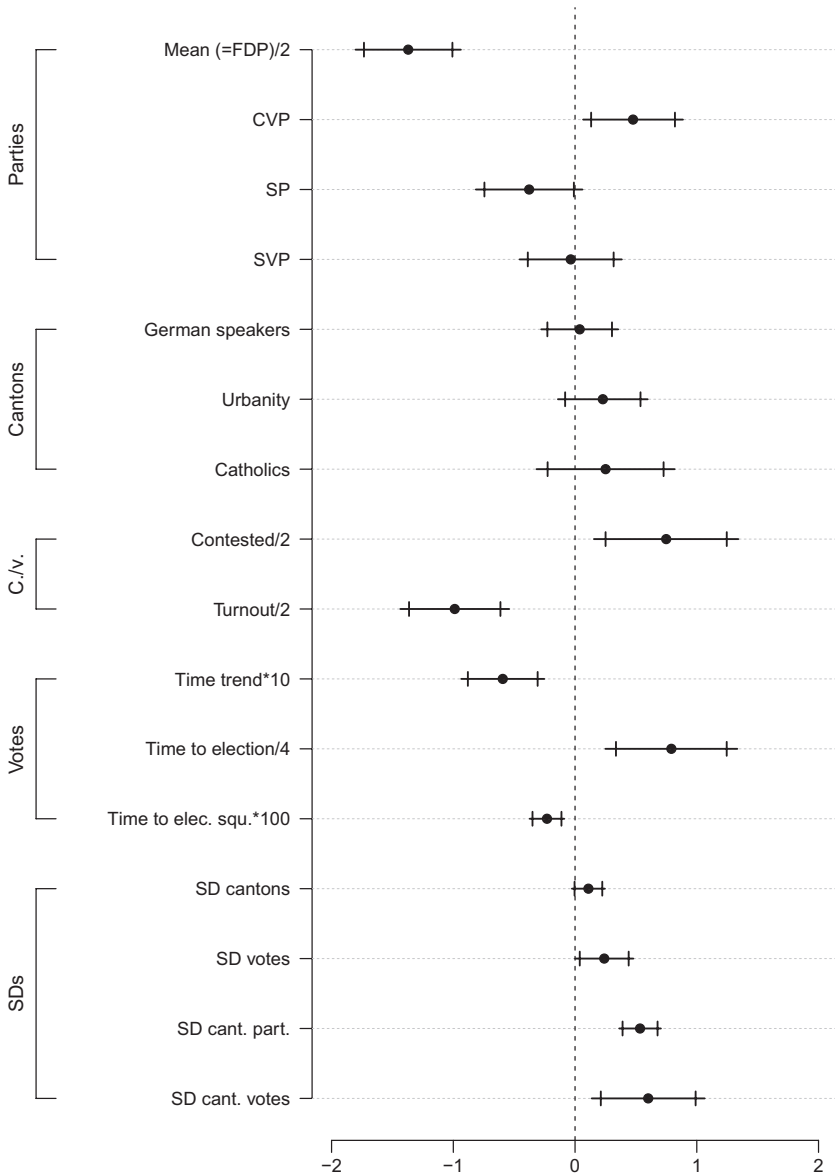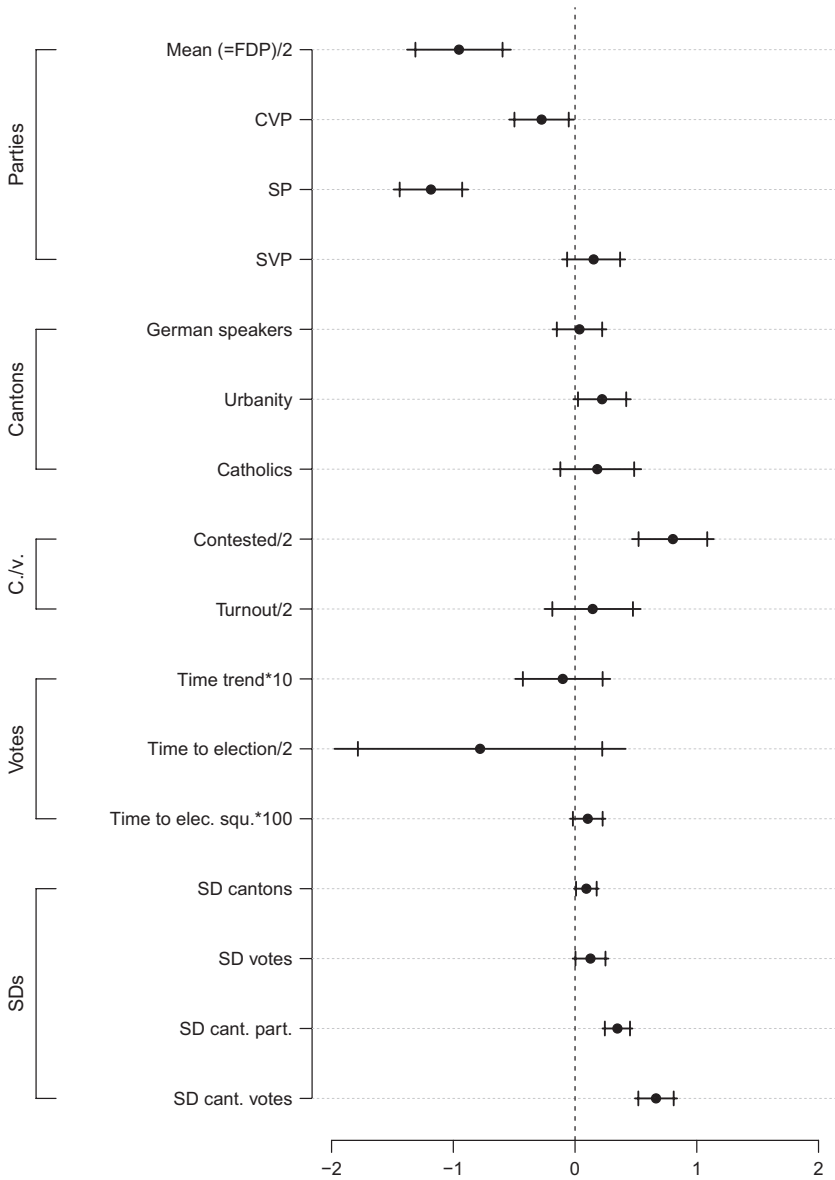
Figure 7. Full model, initiatives only (110 votes).

sections of the CVP are also more likely to issue deviating vote recommendations than those of the FDP. Higher turnout still fosters party unity, while urbanity tends to have the reverse effect. A negative overall time trend in party unity is observed as before, with the 95% posterior density interval now clearly not involving zero. Contested votes are again more likely to be the subject of deviating vote recommendations. However, we now observe cycle effects: The

Figure 8. Full model, non-initiatives only (141 votes).

farther away the next federal election, the more likely a deviating vote recommendation by a cantonal party.

Results on referendums and counter-proposals are reported in Figure 8. This time, while the SPS maintains its most united character, the CVP appears to show more *unity* instead of diversity. This could be due to the fact that we are
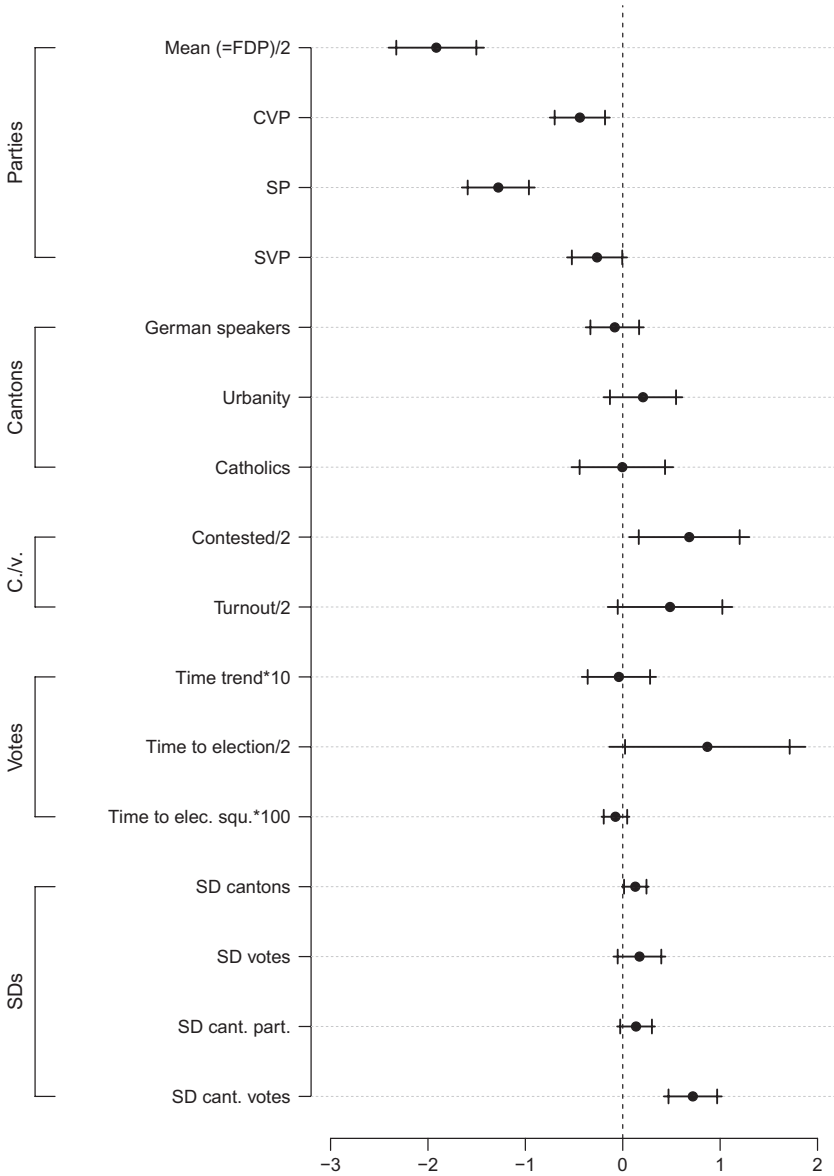
Figure 9. Full model, social policy, health and welfare only (74 votes).

now dealing with parliamentary proposals, and that the CVP as a governmental party since 1891 feels obliged to support its federal representatives. Contested votes are again associated with less party unity, but other effects – including turnout, time and cycle effects – have disappeared.

A further differentiation, this time by policy area, is reported in Figures 9 and 10. In the former, the CVP again shows more unity than the FDP, along
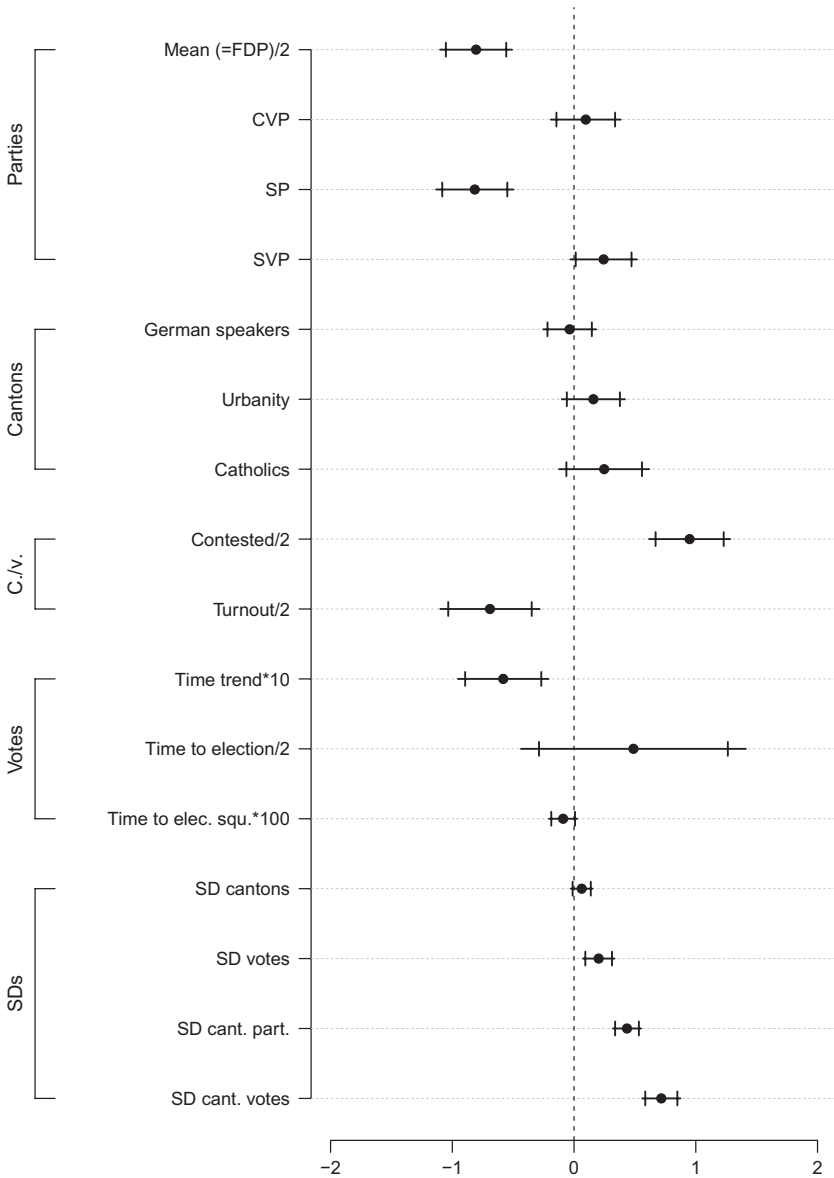
Figure 10. Full model, areas other than social policy, health and welfare only (177 votes).

with the SPS and now joined by the SVP. Closer votes are still associated with a higher probability of deviating vote recommendations, but turnout does not show a systematic influence, rather trending in the direction of a positive effect. We interpret this as cantonal parties seizing local opportunities to strategically use the contested nature (and, compared to other areas, potentially also their salience) of votes. In addition, there is some impact of the temporal distance

to the next election (but not for the squared term) – again a sign that policy disunity is more likely when the next election is far away.

Finally, Figure 10 relies on a sub-sample of 177 votes in areas other than social policy, health and welfare. Once more, the SPS is the most united party, turnout fosters unity and contested votes show more deviations. The SVP displays less unity than the FDP in these areas. We equally observe a negative time trend along with parts of the cycle effect.

Concluding discussion

This article has analysed party (dis)unity in Switzerland, a highly decentralised federal system. Through direct democracy and regional autonomy, cantonal parties can issue vote recommendations on specific policy questions that deviate from, and even flatly contradict, their national party on all national referendums. As main explanatory factors for national party (dis)unity measured through such behaviour, we have hypothesised the impact of regional context (religion, language and urbanity) versus strategy dictated by a referendum's distance to the next national or regional election as well as its relevance and contestedness in the canton where the party operates.

Empirically, we assessed the unity of all four Swiss governmental parties across all 26 cantons on all 251 referendums held between 1987 and 2015. We employed both descriptive statistics and Bayesian cross-classified multilevel models. Our two most consistent findings across the various analyses are that overall party unity has increased (that is, cantonal deviations have declined in importance from an already low degree) and that the Socialists have remained the most unified. Moreover, although descriptively parties from the French-speaking cantons more often deviate than parties from small German-speaking cantons, the effect of linguistic and religious distinctiveness disappears in the Bayesian models and partially plays out differently for different parties. This contradicts prior studies (e.g. Giger *et al.* 2011 and Ladner and Brändle 2001) – regional context might influence self-professed ideology and party manifestos, but when it comes to specific vote recommendations, other factors seem more important. All this can also be taken as a sign that Swiss politics has become increasingly nationalised (Bochsler and Wasserfallen 2015; Cabeza *et al.* 2017) in that cantonal parties more frequently adopt the policy stance of their federal parent.

Moreover, attributes such as turnout and contestedness also appear to affect parties' deviating vote recommendations: the more contested a vote in a given canton, the more likely is party *dis*unity; whereas the higher the turnout, the more likely is party unity. So parties do respond to regional context, though not in the sense of static cultural differences, but rather in view of flexible adaptation to specific conflict and salience patterns within their political habitat. In short, cantonal parties unite on important votes but seek their own fortunes

in contested ones. The importance of strategy is corroborated by repeating our analyses for 2x2 sub-samples: popular initiatives vs. all other votes and referendums on social policy, health and welfare vs. all others.

While further research is needed to fully make sense of these variations, the overall conclusion is that structural, institutional, ideological and strategic elements all shape party (dis)unity. Other variables that could be included in model extensions are cantonal or federal election results as well as objective measures of cantonal and/or a party's median voter (see also Giger *et al.* 2011: 262–4), for example by including the direction of vote recommendation and referendum result.

Despite these limitations, two general conclusions can be drawn for the study of territorial and party politics. A first is that federalism as an institutional structure is mirrored in the behaviour of political parties. Next to decentralised organisation, staffing, financing or candidate selection, this is reflected also in the territorial variation of policy-seeking. This diversity is possibly what yet awaits countries that have only recently decentralised, such as Italy, Spain or the UK. The second inference goes in the opposite direction: unity. With a political system becoming more centralised, parties too will become more united in their policy-seeking, not least also because of increased professionalisation and mediatisation (see also Bochsler and Wasserfallen 2013). One obvious case with which to compare this evolution is the EU. However, considering that not until 2017 did all four main Swiss parties have sections in all 26 cantons, proper Europarties might still take a while to appear.

Notes

1. Federal parties decide on their vote recommendations at so-called delegates' assemblies. However, because the rules determining the number of delegates for each cantonal party vary across parties and time (i.e. they are based on membership size, votes gained, seats obtained, or a combination thereof), for the sake of analysis we equate the composition of national party assemblies with the party as such.
2. Note that not until June 2017, when the FDP AI was created, were all four parties present in all 26 cantons. However, since we counted actual deviations, we automatically only included parties that did in fact exist. For canton Valais, whose party system is split along linguistic lines, we have counted deviations individually (see also note to Figure 3).
3. Calculations exclude the SP of Basel Countryside, which in 1989 issued no recommendation at all (national level: vote freely).
4. We use 'in tendency' if the 95% credibility interval contains zero.

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Appendix 1

Table A1. Number of cantonal parties, 1987–2017.

Year[1]	FDP	CVP	SPS	SVP	Legislature
1987	26	25	25	15	43
1988[2]	26	26	25	15	
1989	26	26	25	15	
1990	26	26	25	15	
1991[2]	26	26	25	18	
1992[2]	26	26	25	20	44
1993	26	26	25	20	
1994	26	26	25	20	
1995	26	26	25	20	
1996[2]	26	27	25	21	45
1997	26	27	25	21	
1998[2]	26	27	26	22	
1999[2]	26	27	26	25	
2000	26	27	26	25	46
2001[2]	26	27	26	26	
2002[2]	26	27	26	27	
2003	26	27	26	27	
2004	26	27	26	27	47
2005	26	27	26	27	
2006	26	27	26	27	
2007	26	27	26	27	
2008	26	27	26	27	48
2009	26	27	26	27	
2010	26	27	26	27	
2011	26	27	26	27	
2012[2]	26	27	27	27	49
2013	26	27	27	27	
2014	26	27	27	27	
2015	26	27	27	27	
2016[3]	25	27	27	27	50[4]
2017[2]	26	27	27	27	

Notes: [1]Number of cantonal parties in existence by the end of the respective year; French- and German-speaking parties of canton VS counted separately if in existence.
[2]The following cantonal parties were founded since 1987: CVP AI (est. 1988); SVP BS, SVP SO, SVP ZG (all 1991); SVP LU, SVP SG (both 1992); SVP AI, CVP NE (both 1996); SVP UR, SP OW (both 1998); SVP NW, SVP OW, SVP VS (all 1999); SVP NE (2001); SVP Oberwallis (2002); SP AI (2012); FDP AI (2017).
[3]In 2016, the French- and German-speaking sections of the FDP VS merged into a single party.
[4]Not analysed here.
Sources: Ladner (2004: 344ff.) and own research.

Table A2. List of variables.

Variable	Measurement	Source
Deviations	Deviating vote recommendation of cantonal party at national referendum vote (1/0)	Swiss Parliament (2017), State Chancellery (2017), Swissvotes (2017), Federal Office for Statistics (BFS 2017)
Party dummies	Baseline: FDP, three dummies (1/0) for CVP, SPS and SVP	–
German speakers	Share of German-speaking population in a canton, in %	BFS (2017)
Urbanity	Share of population living in urban areas in a canton, in %	BFS (2017)
Catholics	Share of Catholic population in a canton, in %	BFS (2017)
Contested	Absolute distance of % yes votes from a 50% vote share, per canton and referendum	BFS (2017)
Turnout	Cantonal turnout, in % of valid votes, per canton and referendum	BFS (2017)
Time trend	Number of years since 1987, per referendum	BFS (2017)
Time to election 1	Temporal distance between date of vote and the next federal election, in days	BFS (2017)
Time to election 2	Temporal distance between date of vote and the next cantonal election, in days	BFS (2017)