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### CHAPTER

## 2 Switzerland: A Paradigmatic Case of Political Integration



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### Abstract

Contrary to widespread assumptions, Switzerland has not always been as peaceful, prosperous, and politically inclusive as it appears today. This chapter analyses how the Swiss polity achieved the political integration of a society that consisted of peoples speaking different languages, practising different religions, and possessing different cultural origins. Achieving national unity in 1848 was accompanied by violence and conflict between the constituent cantons. At the intersection of three main European cultures (French, German, Italian) and torn between Catholicism and Protestantism, the path to societal integration was a long and troublesome one. Proportionality and power-sharing were critical elements for success. This chapter discusses their evolution and explains their effects on political integration. While each institutional change came with integration benefits for specific groups, none of them was achieved without a struggle that, in some cases, lasted for decades. We conclude with the question of what significance Switzerland, as a 'paradigmatic case of political integration', may have for other socially fragmented societies.

**Keywords:** [Switzerland](#), [Integration](#), [Proportionality](#), [Cleavages](#), [Conflict](#), [Peace](#), [Stability](#)

**Subject:** [Comparative Politics](#), [Regional Political Studies](#), [Politics](#)

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# 1 Introduction

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The central thesis of this chapter is that, despite its many cleavages, Switzerland is stable, peaceful, democratic, and prosperous. More specifically, we suggest that this can be attributed to the political institutions that were created—some copied, others invented—and adjusted to accommodate the country's linguistic, religious, territorial, economic, and political diversity. But rather than presenting the Swiss case as a model to be imitated by others, the purpose of this chapter is to provide an analytic description of how this cultural diversity might be reconciled with political, social, and national unity. The Swiss case illustrates how the political integration of various social groups can happen without eliminating or marginalizing sub-national identities. At the same time, it also underscores the many conflicts and struggles that needed to be settled so that integration could advance. However, even today, we can see that there are clear limits to what the principle of proportionality can achieve for certain groups.

First, let us say a word about stability. With only a short interruption, the seven-member Swiss government has been composed of the same four parties for over sixty years, since 1959 (e.g. Giudici and Stojanović 2016 and own updates). Together, these four parties have represented between 70 and 90 per cent of the Swiss electorate (FSO 2022). The longest-serving party, the Liberals, has been in government without interruption since 1848. Moreover, although every year the people directly vote on some six proposals to change the federal constitution (average for 2000–2021; Swissvotes 2022), Switzerland is not a country of political revolutions—most policy areas are characterized by piecemeal adjustment.<sup>1</sup>

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That said, as well as conflict between urban and rural cantons, there is no single *lingua franca*, but rather four distinct linguistic regions (German, French, Italian, Romansh). Also, the religious divide between Protestants and Catholics, which played an important role during the civil war of 1847 and preceding centuries (e.g. Church and Head 2013), continues to impact the party system today. Yet outsiders wonder about not only Swiss conservatism but also the seeming absence of serious social, economic, or cultural conflicts. In the context of Swiss history, this outcome is all the more puzzling, since the initial conditions for state- and nation-building were anything but favourable. It would thus be fundamentally wrong to think of Switzerland as a country without historical conflicts. Modern Switzerland was *not* created by one homogeneous ethnic people, but by different groups speaking different languages and adhering to different religions. Nation-building was a slowly evolving, bottom-up process. Moreover, just as in other countries, nation-building and the processes of urbanization, industrialization, and modernization were accompanied by sundry societal conflicts.

Karl Deutsch (1976), a scholar looking at Switzerland from the outside, noted that Switzerland represented a 'paradigmatic case of political integration'. Yet the Swiss became a nation with its own, distinct identity *only through and because of its political institutions*. The role of institutions was fundamental in uniting territorial communities of four different languages, two different religions, and many disparate regional—cantonal and local—histories. Perhaps most spectacularly, these political institutions managed to turn the disadvantages of cultural diversity, such as fragmentation and conflict, into advantages, such as experimentation and tolerance.

The remainder of this chapter is structured around the three main cleavages in Switzerland—religion, language, and class (sections 2–4)—that have given rise to political contestation and to their institutional solutions. We then discuss one crucial institutional component that enabled political integration: proportionality (section 5). The final section concludes with general insights regarding political integration, where its limits lie today, and what broader lessons we may be able to draw from the Swiss case.

## 2 Political Catholicism: from segmentation to integration

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In the middle of the nineteenth century, the Catholic minority comprised about 40 per cent of the Swiss population. The existing twenty-five cantons more or less represented religiously uniform entities. In 1860, ten cantons had over 75 per cent Protestants, eleven rather smaller cantons had over 75 per cent Catholics. Only four (Geneva, Grisons, Aargau, St. Gall) had a more even distribution. Eight of the most Catholic cantons had previously formed a special alliance (*Sonderbund*) to preserve the confederal status quo but were defeated in the 1847 civil war by urban-protestant centralizers. Although Catholic Conservatives achieved a satisfying constitutional compromise in the form of the 1848 federal constitution, their integration was at first hampered by self-segregation. Politically, they retired to the strongholds of 'their' cantons and let the Radical majority ↵ (from which the Liberal Party later emerged) take the initiative in forging national unity for the new federal state.

Catholic regions were mostly rural and cut off from the process of industrialization with which the more progressive, Protestant, and increasingly urban counterparts were mainly concerned. The First Vatican Council of the Catholic Church, held in Rome in 1871, was hostile to the modernization of society and to scientific progress, opposed the separation of religion and state, and tried to enforce the Pope as the sole and binding authority on all aspects of life. This led to isolation and segregation. Many Catholic cantons continued to let the Catholic Church run public education, or they maintained segregated primary and secondary schools. Even in the few mixed cantons, religious segregation in public schools continued well into the second half of the twentieth century (see also 'Education Policy' in this volume). The first Catholic university was founded in Fribourg in 1889, and a tight web of social organizations kept Catholics together and close to the Church—both in their home cantons and in the diaspora regions where Catholics constituted a minority.<sup>2</sup>

Catholics not only had their own political party, the Catholic Conservatives (from which the Christian-Democrats later emerged). They also had their own trade unions, newspapers, and bookshops. In mixed regions, they remained loyal to the Catholic butcher, restaurant, plumber, and carpenter—even when the quality of a Protestant competitor was said to be better (Altermatt 1991, 147). This kind of segmentation also existed among Protestants, but to a much lesser extent: Protestant Switzerland lacked both the political leadership of a single confessional party and the moral pressure of a universalist Church to integrate all social classes on a continuing basis.

No wonder, then, that conflicts over religious issues, especially in the mixed cantons, became acute. Swiss history books speak of the 'cultural struggle' (*Kulturkampf*), for the divide went far beyond religion and extended to different views of the role of the state in and for society. This struggle heavily influenced the first total revision of the federal constitution in the 1870s, which reached its peak just then. The constitution of 1874 aimed at a fully secularized state and eliminated most public functions of the Church. Several articles of the constitution confirmed the anti-clerical character of the federation and the isolation of Catholics.

Insofar as these provisions discriminated against Catholics, they were eliminated from the constitution in the second half of the twentieth century. Today, the regulation of the relationship between the Church and the state is the sole responsibility of the cantons. These relations, therefore, vary from canton to canton. Usually, there is an incomplete separation of state and Church: Protestant, Roman-Catholic, and small Christ-Catholic Churches are all recognized as public institutions, called *Landeskirchen*. Some cantons, for instance Zurich, have given a similar status to the Jewish community, but not to the Muslim community, which has grown rapidly in the last few decades.

The historical conflict between Catholics and Protestants, at least in its early form, has since faded away. The establishment of a modern, liberal democracy has settled many of the issues, which reduced the direct

influence of religious organizations on the state. However, the more than four generations during which federalism permitted ↪ ‘in-between’ solutions to these conflicts need to be noted. Thus, it is less accurate to claim that cultural issues were ‘settled’ than to say that they were simply given time to cool down.

Several factors aided the decline of the confessional schism. First, modernization helped to overcome the separation of society into Catholic and Protestant ‘pillars’. A strong and steady migration between Catholic and Protestant regions also increased religious tolerance and cooperation. Internal migration led to desegregation, which further helped integration. The declining influence of religion on people’s lives opened up the path to pragmatic solutions: smaller communities, instead of building two churches, constructed one for both Catholics and Protestants. Marriage between Protestants and Catholics became more common. Industrialization and the modern economy did not distinguish between Catholic and Protestant money. Divisions also disappeared as more and more Catholics gained equal access to those economic and social activities which had once been seen as typically Protestant. Cultural and political Catholicism itself developed pluralist attitudes towards the state. At the beginning of the 1970s, the Catholic Conservative Party renamed itself the Christian-Democratic Party. The new label suggested more universal values of Christian belief and culture, signalling the acceptance of a clear separation between state and religion. This resembled the programmes of Christian-Democrats in Germany and Italy after WWII. In 2020, Swiss Christian-Democrats went even further and merged with the Citizen-Democrats (BDP) into a new party called ‘The Centre’ (*Die Mitte/Le Centre*, cf. e.g. Swissinfo 2020), demonstrating just how much religion had become less relevant for political mobilization.

The second factor was more political. Federalism, and more precisely extensive levels of self-rule or regional autonomy in areas such as education, culture, and language (Dardanelli and Mueller 2019), permitted Catholics to maintain the particularities of their culture in their ‘own’ cantons during the first decades of the nation-state. Later, the devices of direct democracy permitted the Catholic minority to participate, with considerable success, in federal decision-making. Notably, the introduction of the facultative referendum in 1874 enabled Catholic Conservatives to successfully challenge proposals by the Radical-dominated parliament. Simple majoritarian politics, therefore, became increasingly unmanageable—Catholics had to be integrated through participation in the government. Moreover, in 1918 a coalition of Catholic Conservatives and Social-Democrats succeeded in imposing proportionality rules for elections to the National Council—this time using the popular initiative. That spelled the end of an absolute majority for the Radicals in the Swiss parliament, while for Catholics it marked the commencement of real power-sharing (Altermatt 2021). Finally, with class struggles growing in importance (see below, section 4), the Catholic opponent of the nineteenth century became the closest ally of the Radicals in the twentieth century. The political integration of Catholic Conservatives into the federal executive thus occurred, above all, via struggles in the direct-democratic arena.

Beyond participation in the Federal Council—one seat out of seven in 1891, a second one in 1919 (Vatter 2020, 203)—and other key positions in the federal administration, ↪ power-sharing meant compromises on legislative issues between Radicals and Catholic Conservatives. Power-sharing thus brought significant political influence, recognition, and success to the Catholic part of society, which have endured to the present.

Although religious cleavages have largely disappeared, the former Christian-Democratic Party (now The Centre) still constitutes one of the four governing parties and is the largest party in the Council of States (FSO 2022). Economically, they have become advocates of business interests almost as much as their Radical partners in government; at the same time, they often defend social policies together with the Left. Even before the merger with the BDP and the name change to The Centre in 2020, the Christian-Democratic Party was a pragmatic centrist party. Nevertheless, it should be noted that some crucial questions of the cultural schism—such as the prohibition of Jesuits, who in the nineteenth century were regarded by Protestants as conspiratorial promoters of counter-reformation—were only resolved long after the practical relevance of

the issue had disappeared. In short, in Switzerland disputes regarding fundamental values and religious beliefs were not resolved overnight, but it took considerable time and effort before they could be considered more or less settled.

### 3 Multilingualism: understandings and misunderstandings

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Multilingualism constitutes a second component of the integration of cultural minorities into Swiss society (McRae 1964; Windisch 1992; Du Bois 1999). Today, approximately 73 per cent of Swiss citizens speak German, 21 per cent French, 4 per cent Italian,<sup>3</sup> and 0.6 per cent Romansh.<sup>4</sup> The issue of multilingualism differs in two ways from the question of religion: With the important exception of the Jura problem (see Linder and Mueller 2021, 38–40), language never became as divisive as religion. However, the issue never really cooled down and it remains an important aspect of Swiss politics to this day (e.g. Mueller and Heidelberger 2022).

Switzerland affords numerous institutional protections for linguistic minorities. First, federalism and local autonomy again permit the Romansh-, Italian-, and French-speaking minorities to live according to their own culture within the boundaries of ‘their’ cantons and municipalities. Moreover, as a majority in several cantons, they also have a political voice in the decision-making of the central government. The historical importance of this kind of voice is well illustrated by the fact that, until 1974, the members of the National Council were seated in linguistic blocs (Swiss Federal Archives 2011, 2).

Second, there are statutory rights for linguistic minorities. The principle of ‘territoriality’ guarantees linguistic autonomy, and the cantons are obliged to guarantee the traditional language(s) of their region. Hence, newcomers need to adjust to whatever language is spoken in a given territory, and no municipality can be forced to change its official language. German, French, Italian, and Romansh are all defined as national languages.<sup>5</sup> Banknotes and the most important federal government documents are worded in all four languages, whereas less important legal texts are translated ‘only’ into German, French, and Italian.

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Third, proportionality leads to political quotas. An unwritten rule says that two of the seven members of the Federal Council should be French- or Italian-speakers, and over time this has been largely observed (Giudici and Stojanović 2016; Altermatt 2019). In governmental expert and parliamentary committees, too, linguistic proportions are observed. Complaints about ‘German predominance’—more common among French- than Italian-speakers—are not well founded when looking at federal personnel statistics: at all levels of government, proportionality is observed to a high degree (Table 2.1). Nonetheless, in daily interactions and informally, German and especially Swiss-German can become dominant (Kübler et al. 2020, 45ff.).

**Table 2.1:** Proportional representation of linguistic groups (in per cent)

	German	French	Italian	Romansh
Swiss population (5.4 million)	71.5	23.7	6.1	0.6
Federal Council (7 members)	57.1	28.6	14.3	0
National Council (200 members)	73.0	23.0	4.0	0.5
Council of States (46 members)	73.9	21.7	4.3	0
Federal Supreme Court (38 members)	60.5	31.6	7.9	0
Expert committees (ca. 1900 people)	65.1	25.5	8.6	0.8
Federal administration (ca. 40 000 employees/36 000 Full-Time Equivalents):				
- All personnel (2021)	70.1	22.7	6.7	0.5
- Top management (2018)	70.3	24.0	5.7	0

Data source: Own calculations based on OFS (2022), Federal Council (2016), Delegate for Plurilinguism (2019), Federal Personnel Office (2022).

Note: Population data only for Swiss citizens who are 15 years and older (2020); data for the Federal Council and parliament from February 2019; data for expert committees from 2016. Population totals greater than 100% since more than one main language could be indicated.

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In contrast to many other countries, the Swiss quota system is not based on hard legal rules. While some quotas are written as general regulations in law, most are informal, that is, they are obeyed as a matter of political custom. As Table 2.1 illustrates, these general regulations and informal quotas produce astonishing results in terms of the fair representation of different cultural groups. Yet proportional representation does not necessarily translate into proportional *influence*. Take, for example, the Federal Council with seven members, of which in 2022 two were French- and one is Italian-speaking. Here, the proportionality rule favours linguistic minorities. However, the four German-speakers could easily overrule them, without even talking to or listening to the French- and Italian-speakers. Moreover, the latter might be forced to learn German just to understand the discussions. Of course, minority representatives have the *formal* right to speak their language, but being able to present a key argument in German is advantageous. Even learning 'high' German may not suffice, since French- and Italian-speakers may also face a situation when the German-speaking majority begins to converse in their regional dialect(s), which even French- and Italian-speakers fluent in 'high' German would find barely intelligible. By contrast, some German-speakers may willingly speak French with their counterparts, and even make it the official language of discussions (Linder and Mueller 2021, 37).<sup>6</sup>

At the federal level, discussions in the National Council are simultaneously translated into all three official languages. Although the official record of Swiss laws and regulations is published in Italian, French, and German, the documentation for parliamentarians is frequently available in only one or two languages. The same is true of many government reports. Canada, for instance, goes much further, requiring every official document to be published in both English and French.

The Swiss are very conscious of the need for multilingualism: in schools, children are instructed in at least two languages. It is a myth, however, that these efforts have produced widespread bi- or trilingualism (Werlen 2008, 211f.). Most people rarely read newspapers or listen to the news in a language other than their own, which means that they perceive politics according to different media systems in the three linguistic

regions. When face to face with a person speaking another language, one often observes a greater effort to be multilingual. Traditionally, German-speakers try to speak French to a *Romand*, even if their French is poor (the term *français federal* captures such efforts). Today, young people, all of whom are taught English at school, tend to use English as the informal *lingua franca* among themselves. Incidentally, the same appears true in the federal administration (Kübler et al. 2020, 84ff.).

The Swiss are rather proud of the multilingual aspect of their society and would find the question of whether German-, Italian-, French-, or Romansh-speakers are ‘better’ Swiss people rather silly (cf. also Schmid 2001). Multilingualism requires public expenditure and fiscal redistribution in favour of minorities, both of which the Swiss have been willing to bear. There are four complete public radio and television networks, one for each linguistic group. The networks of the linguistic minorities get a more-than-proportional share of the national budget. For instance, in 2018, *Radio Télévision Suisse* generated only 23 per cent of all revenue but received 33 per cent (SRG 2019, 41).

Cultural differences also extend to lifestyle (Windisch 1992). There is a popular saying that German-speakers live to work, whereas French- and Italian-speakers work to live. While these and other distinctions may sometimes create difficulties in communicating, they are accepted as part of normal life and enrich Swiss society. Whereas religious cleavages have become less salient, linguistic diversity and segmentation have not disappeared but instead are maintained and protected within the boundaries of cantons and municipalities (e.g. Mueller 2022). Finally, differences also appear in political behaviour. For instance, French-speakers favour a more open foreign policy, while on the armed forces they are more sceptical than German-speakers. Also, green and left-wing parties have consistently fared better in the West than in the rest.<sup>7</sup>

With one important exception (the Jura case, see Linder and Mueller 2021, 38–40), language has not been a major political problem for Swiss society. The virtues of pluralism may lie partly in the fact that the different cultures are separated from each other by the political autonomy of their cantons and, in multilingual cantons, of their municipalities. It may also be true that globalization makes many societal differences between the cantons diminish or even disappear. Still, federalism provides a kind of horizontal segmentation that enables the three main regions of German-, French-, and Italian-speakers to live simultaneously apart and together (Watts 1991; Schmid 2001; Windisch 1992).

## 4 The challenges of socio-economic inequality

### 4.1 A working class without a homeland

Compared to other European countries, the industrialization of Switzerland took place earlier and was in some ways distinct. Instead of concentrating in urban areas, important industries—watchmaking, textiles, embroidery—tended to thrive in rural areas. This decentralized industrialization prevented the sudden concentration of a mass proletariat in cities. But, as in every capitalist country, industrialization led to growing inequalities and the impoverishment of a new social class of workers, whose jobs were insecure and whose earnings were low. As in other countries, democracy did not protect workers from economic exploitation and inhumane working conditions.

In mid-nineteenth century Switzerland, neither a socialist party nor a strong trade union for workers existed. However, a faction of the Radical Party sought to defend the interests of the working class through a policy of ‘entrepreneur-socialism’. That faction was the driving force behind the first regulations to protect workers and ban the use of child labour. The liberal wing strongly opposed these policies and, in the fashion of ‘Manchester liberalism’, wanted to avoid any government intervention in the free market. This period

marks the emergence of two new economic questions, which slowly superseded the older cultural schisms in Swiss politics: First, to what extent should the government protect Swiss industries against international competition and intervene in the free market? Second, what role should the government play in compensating for growing social inequalities created by competition?

p. 23 Business itself was divided on the question of the free market. Whereas some export industries pushed for unconditional liberalization, farmers wanted to be protected from international competitors through import tariffs. Small trades and crafts were organized ↴ into corporations and also sought protectionist regulations. The first vocational schools, for instance, were run by trade and craft corporations, but the state provided subsidies and declared professional schools mandatory for apprentices. This eliminated the problem of free riders—enterprises that abstained from investing in professional training, but which would hire employees from other enterprises that had invested in them (Linder and Mueller 2021).

Thus, from the very beginning, Switzerland's economy tended to develop organized relations with the state. In a kind of highly fragmented corporatism, many professional and business organizations cooperated with the state. They sought specific advantages through state regulations or subsidies, attempting to eliminate some of the risks arising from competition. In return, they helped implement government activities. The farmers' association, for instance, furnished the statistical data used for drafting agricultural policies, which helped to keep the number of public administration staff at bay. The strong and influential relations of organized professions and businesses with the national government have persisted until today, despite their rhetoric of economic liberalism and anti-statism (Farago 1987; Church 2004, 71–81; see also 'Interest Groups' in this volume).

In the race for the organizational protection of economic interests, workers came late and did not organize until the end of the nineteenth century. Although they had a common interest to defend—the betterment of their economic conditions—, it proved more difficult for them to organize. Workers were spread out all over the country and were to a large degree isolated in smaller towns and villages. While traditional social ties and paternalist patterns dampened the effects of economic inequality, they also hampered the collective identity formation among and political organization of the new working class. When the Social-Democratic Party was eventually founded in 1888 (Vatter 2020, 107), however, it achieved rapid electoral success. Social-Democrats and trade unions were also among the first to use the new instrument of the popular initiative at the federal level. In 1894, they demanded the right to work and a proper industrial policy—forty years before Keynes. But the hope that direct democracy would be the lever of social reform was soon dashed: over 80 per cent of voters and all cantons rejected the Social-Democratic proposal (Federal Chancellery 2019).

p. 24 Another reason for the relatively late organization of the working class was that cultural ties often proved stronger than shared economic interests. The Catholic Conservative Party and its trade unions successfully united Catholic workers, but not other workers. Thus, the working class movement was divided. While this did not prevent the Social-Democrats from becoming one of the largest parties, they never managed to form a coalition of equal strength to the centre-right, bourgeois forces. Neither did trade unions succeed in influencing industrial policy as much as businesses did. This minority position of labour in politics and industrial relations has remained a core characteristic of Swiss politics (Farago 1987; Kriesi 1980). By contrast, other small European countries, such as The Netherlands, Austria, Norway, or ↴ Sweden, have established more of an equilibrium between labour and capital, and between the political left and right. Territorial decentralization and cultural segmentation were thus two obstacles to the organization of the Left in Switzerland, and labour has never been able to catch up with the organizational strength of either businesses or farmers.



## 4.2 From class struggle to economic partnership

During the first decades of the twentieth century, conditions for the Swiss working class worsened. Regarding the period before WWI, historians have noted the development of a conservative, nationalist, and sometimes reactionary and anti-democratic political right, which engaged in a 'class struggle from above' (Gruner 1977; Jost 1992). Politically marginalized by bourgeois forces, the Social-Democrats and trade unions could not prevent the working class from bearing most of the burden of the economic setbacks during and after WWI.

The worldwide economic crisis of the 1930s also brought mass unemployment to Switzerland. Federal troops suppressed several strikes, more than once ending in bloodshed. The Left was denied what Catholics (in 1891) and farmers (in 1929) had achieved: recognition, participation, and political influence in the Federal Council. Proportional principles were used to integrate cultural minorities, but not yet to address the growing socio-economic cleavage.

On top of all that, the Socialist movement was itself divided. A communist faction criticized bourgeois democracy as fake and an instrument of the capitalist class, arguing that the betterment of the working class could arrive only through political and economic revolution. Mainstream Social-Democrats, on the other hand, insisted on proportional participation in all democratic institutions and trusted in limited reforms, even if the state remained dominated by a bourgeois majority. Social-Democrats also aspired to have a mixed economy, with a strong public sector and state intervention to minimize social inequality (Nobs 1943). This would not only improve the situation of workers but also protect the Swiss economy from the worldwide market crisis that at the time seemed inevitable.

For almost four decades, that is until WWII, the workers' movement, politically discriminated against and internally divided, wavered between radicalizing the class struggle and cooperating in the hope of achieving integration. In the end, outside events gave the latter strategy the upper hand. Faced with the threat from Hitler's Germany, the Social-Democrats modified their pacifist stand and supported the modernization of the army. An important treaty between the employers' organizations and trade unions in the mechanical-engineering industry was signed in 1937: The so-called 'Labour Peace Convention' (*Friedensabkommen*) accepted unions as representative organizations for workers, proposed to resolve all conflicts by negotiation, and vowed to end all strikes. Economic and social inequalities—the predominant political issues of the twentieth century—thus finally began to be addressed through cooperation and integration, the tried and tested means of accommodation. The Social-Democrats accordingly obtained their first seat in the Federal Council during WWII and adequate, i.e. proportional, representation as of 1959. They have held onto these two seats until this day.

In hindsight, the unifying experience of the generation that defended Swiss independence and neutrality between 1939 and 1945 may also have had a benevolent effect on the integration of the Left. By the 1950s, ideological differences between the political left and right had shrunk. A broad consensus amongst all political forces allowed for the creation of social security, health care, and higher education systems, which collectively addressed many areas of social and economic inequality. Coupled with the continued use of direct democracy to press for government inclusion—this time by trade unions—, economic growth gradually led employers' and workers' organizations away from confrontation towards more cooperation. Collective contracts, similar to the 1937 Labour Peace Convention, became the norm. Even though the labour force was less unionized than in other European countries, Swiss workers and employees obtained a fair share in the growth of prosperity (Linder 1983). By the late 1950s, the number of working days lost due to strikes across Switzerland had basically reached zero—from a high of eighty per 1,000 workers just after World War II (Vatter 2020, 162).

By the early 1970s, the highest-ever degree of integration across different social classes in Switzerland had been achieved. Employers and workers had become accustomed to partnership, and the Left had been integrated into the once purely bourgeois state. Political parties and economic organizations were able to achieve consensus by compromise, and power-sharing seemed to prove effective. However, since that time, the level of social integration in Swiss society has noticeably declined. When economic growth turned into a recession in 1974, the Left learned that proportional participation did not mean proportional influence. In 1984, a minority of the Social-Democrats even considered quitting the Federal Council because political power-sharing had not shifted influence from the 'haves' to the 'have-nots'. Unions, willing to share the burden of recession by accepting pay cuts, were losing members and political influence. In recent decades, while achieving less from employers by way of contracts, unions have instead tried to promote social policy by way of legislation. This has led to a shift from a liberal to a post-liberal welfare regime in which social partnership plays a slightly less important role (Trampusch 2010; see also 'Interest Groups' in this volume).

In the last three decades, finally, globalization and liberalization have led to new conflicts between capital and labour and between urban and rural areas.<sup>8</sup> Despite polarization between the Right and the Left, political power-sharing has persisted thus far, but the partnership between employers and unions has become more difficult to sustain, and the Swiss model of political integration has increasingly confronted limits to what it can achieve.

## 5 Proportional representation: the key to the doors to power

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In the preceding sections, we observed how linguistic and religious minorities were politically and socially integrated, and then how conflicts arising from industrialization were resolved. Conflict resolution in Switzerland relies very much on power-sharing rather than on a winner-take-all approach. This section takes a closer look at the proportionality rule that underpins Swiss power-sharing.

The proportional rule is the key that unlocks the door to almost all political institutions. As Table 2.2 shows, proportionality applies to different criteria—or groups—in the same body. Party membership is, of course, the main affiliation that aspiring political representatives must possess—whatever a person's specific party stands for at any given moment (e.g. a specific religion or class, historically, or a given area, today). Yet, even in the 'magic formula' of the seven-member Federal Council, party affiliation is not the only criterion. The Federal Assembly also follows the rule of linguistic proportionality, normally granting French- and Italian-speakers two or three seats. Until 1999, a provision in the constitution stated that there could not be more than one representative from the same canton. This criterion has been abandoned in favour of a new rule stipulating appropriate representation for the various language regions. Gender balance has not (yet) become a formal rule but is increasingly important; in 2010, there briefly was a female majority in the Federal Council. Not only candidates for the Federal Council, but also high officials of the federal government must fulfil one or more criteria of proportionality to be eligible for a position. Proportionality is also practised in many cultural organizations and sports. It would be unimaginable, for instance, that the executive committee of the Swiss Football Association consisted of German-speakers only.

**Table 2.2:** Use of the proportional rule: institutions and criteria

Institution	Language	Party	Gender
Federal Council	x	x	x
National Council	(x)	x	(x)
Council of States	x	x	(x)
Federal Supreme Court	x	x	x
Parliamentary committees	x	x	(x)
Expert committees	x	(x)	x
Nomination of high government officials	x	(x)	x

Note: x = criteria normally used, (x) = criteria sometimes important.

p. 27 There is some criticism that this system means that the ‘real’ job requirements are all too often neglected. Yet there is flexibility in this approach, which permits over- or under-representation temporarily insofar as it is compensated over time. Nor is there necessarily a tendency towards reification of objective identity markers, which is commonly found with more rigid or ‘corporate’ quotas (Stojanović 2021, ch. 8). Indeed, we cannot even speak of formal ‘group rights’ because, in most cases, these are mere political claims that cannot be enforced by law (but are respected nonetheless). Also, the great majority of Swiss are opposed to rigid legal quotas and prefer the idea that all groups of society should be fairly represented in public bodies. Proportionality, therefore, is an element of political culture rather than legal practice.

There are two more fundamental criticisms of proportionality as practised in Switzerland. First, with six rather than four main political parties (i.e. including the Greens and Green-Liberals), practising proportional representation in government and elsewhere has become more difficult. Second, needing to rely on inter-elite bargaining always carries the risk of a populist backlash. Indeed, populism had an early rise in Switzerland but is usually tamed by direct-democratic voting (e.g. Stojanović 2021, 67–70).

## 6 Conclusion

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, Switzerland was neither a unified society nor an integrated state. It was composed of several small societies with differing traditions, languages, and religions that had become too limited to survive independently. The state created in 1848 was based on a common constitution, but *not* on a common language or religion. It was artificial, a product of historical circumstances, and could easily have failed. It lacked a coherent social basis. Finally, surrounded by much more powerful cultural nations, the Swiss political project could simply have been divided up among larger kin nations (Altermatt 1996).

Yet, thanks to its political institutions and several fortunate circumstances, including cross-cutting cleavages, Switzerland found its own identity as a modern society, and became an example of how different cultures can be successful integrated and how socio-economic inequalities can be redressed.

The key to this process, we have suggested, was *proportional representation*. It was introduced, fought for, and won, mainly through referendums—step by step—for all institutions of the central state. By now, it encompasses parliament and its committees, the government, the courts, and expert committees as well as

the federal administration. Proportional representation is applied not only to party affiliation but also to linguistic groups, and belatedly also to gender, thus giving different societal groups adequate recognition, voice, and influence.

p. 28 With these developments also came a more general shift to *political power-sharing* broadly understood. Swiss democracy developed differently from the majoritarian or ‘Westminster’ model of parliamentary government. Instead of competition between government and opposition, where ‘the winner takes all’ for at least four years, Switzerland possesses an oversized government coalition which, ironically, needs to bargain its way through parliament for each individual proposal (see also ‘The Federal Government’ in this volume). Rather than majoritarian or even plurality politics, decision-making in Swiss politics is fundamentally characterized by negotiation, consensus-seeking, and compromise. Unlike competitive democracy, power-sharing has thus far largely managed to avoid the alienation of minorities that can easily arise from a perpetually winning majority.

Two further political institutions enabled this development. The first is a *non-ethnic concept of the nation-state*. Switzerland never had the choice of building a state based on one religion, one culture, or one language. Forming a nation-state on that basis, even if it were possible, would have entailed excessive social cost. Instead, the different peoples of the cantons recognized each other as having equal rights regardless of differences in religion, language, or cultural heritage. Switzerland is thus above all a political nation, held together by the political will to live under the same constitution.

The second facilitating institution is *federalism*. Regional self- and shared rule were essential for the bottom-up process of nation-building and for anchoring proportionality and power-sharing. Federalism allowed for a compromise between the opponents and advocates of a strong central state and it still provides the cantons and their different cultures with the utmost autonomy, while also ensuring national unity. In cutting across linguistic regions, federalism also contributes to weakening the potential for cultural conflict (e.g. Mueller 2022).

What general lessons can we distil from the Swiss case? First, it took time to overcome the deep conflicts between Catholics and Protestants and between capital and labour. While the religious and linguistic cleavages have cooled down, the class cleavage has become more salient—and might ignite again if material inequalities continue to widen and overlap with new value divisions and urban–rural polarization. Second, while integration was successful for the main linguistic and religious groups of civil society, other minorities remained discriminated against. Women, for instance, received their political rights much later than in other countries. Immigration equally represents a new challenge for Swiss integration precisely because it cannot easily be solved by the political mechanisms deployed for the integration of indigenous groups.

Finally, external factors which once helped create and maintain national unity today threaten it. Pressure from the outside was one of the main motivations for the creation of the federation in 1848: The Swiss cantons, surrounded by much bigger nation-states, wanted to keep their autonomy and independence. Armed neutrality also allowed Switzerland to stay out of the wars between Germany and France. With the end of the Cold War and NATO enlargement, armed neutrality lost much of its practical importance in foreign policy, yet it is still a commonly shared value of all Swiss citizens (see also ‘Switzerland’s Position in Europe and the World’ in this volume).

p. 29 Yet today, pressure from the outside has a fundamentally different effect. Instead of unifying, it is dividing the country. For the last thirty years, Switzerland has been undecided on the question of European integration, split between (a dwindling number of) protagonists of full EU membership and those who prefer bilateral treaties with the EU. Globalization has changed Swiss politics more than anything else. It has led to new social tensions between ‘winners’ (especially the highly qualified in cities) and ‘losers’ (the less

skilled in the countryside, mainly). Even political neutrality, the long-standing constant in Swiss foreign affairs, is now being questioned.

These dividing pressures from the outside have accompanied the rising political polarization and populist challenges from the inside. If elite political behaviour no longer finds or even seeks consensus, blockages ensue. While many deplore the dwindling persuasiveness of political compromise, Clive Church (2016) went further and declared the Swiss model of societal integration dead (see also Bochsler et al. 2015).

We are less pessimistic. The main problem lies in the fact that politics has fundamentally changed in Switzerland, while the basic political institutions and standard solutions have not: Proportional representation, direct democracy, and federalism have remained in place. As seductive as majoritarian politics may appear to some Swiss, it is an institutional non-starter. As a result, the Swiss have no other choice than to revive their lost political culture of consensus politics and compromise. To this day, the Swiss are constitutional patriots and feel as a 'nation of political will', as 'being different from others'. While lacking a common language or religion and despite inevitable conflicts, the Swiss are proud of what they all share as citizens: their political architecture and its attendant civic rights.

However, this traditional narrative of national *political* integration must be revitalized with convincing arguments for the future. Ironically, the very same issues that today often cause heated debates could provide the framework; for instance: What does it mean to be neutral in today's increasingly interdependent world? What place to accord to federalism and cantonal autonomy in an internationalized society where local particularisms have lost much of their meaning and where the integration of immigrants remains a challenge? And how can the absolutist notions of sovereignty and independence be transformed into more pragmatic and flexible definitions of national autonomy and international cooperation?

Adhering to the traditional narratives and instruments that have permitted Switzerland to become integrated also means constantly re-evaluating, re-thinking, and re-affirming those very elements of Swiss political nationalism. This task is all too often forgotten or decried as heresy.

## Notes

1. See 'Social Policy', 'Family Policy', and 'Gender and Equality+ Policy' in this volume. More generally, see 'The Historical and Institutional Formation of Swiss Political Culture' in this volume.
2. For further details, see Linder and Mueller (2021, 31ff.).
3. If the total population, including the 25 per cent foreign nationals, is taken into consideration, the share of Italian-speakers doubles, whereas the proportion of German-speakers decreases.
4. Romansh is a language largely descending from Latin and rooted in some Alpine regions of south-eastern Switzerland.
5. In 1938, Romansh was added as the fourth national language of Switzerland. This was the result of a 1935 request by the executive of Canton Grisons, at the height of Italian fascism under Mussolini. The initiators understood the request 'primarily as an aid to Romansh in its uphill struggle for survival against the inroads of modern communications and tourism' (see McRae 1964, 9). With an amendment to the constitution in 1996, Romansh also became the official language for state authorities 'when communicating with persons who speak Romansh' (Art. 70 para. 1 Cst.).
6. This is much less likely to occur with Italian.
7. Between 1971 and 2019, left-wing parties (Social-Democrats, Greens, and radical left) scored an average of 28 per cent of the National Council vote in German-speaking versus 35 per cent in French-speaking Switzerland. Their combined score in 2019 was 29 per cent in the former but a record 42 per cent in the latter (FSO 2022).
8. See Linder et al. 2008, who observed steep rises for both of these conflict dimensions. See also 'The Ideological Space in

Swiss Politics: Voters, Parties, and Realignment' in this volume.

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