

Introduction: Consensus Lost? Disenchanted Democracy in Switzerland

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1 Introduction*

Over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Swiss political system became firmly anchored in three principles of governance: sovereignty, proximity of decision-makers and citizens, and elite consensus. The contributions to this special issue of the Swiss Political Science Review explore to what extent these three principles still adequately describe the functioning and political culture of this country. In our introduction, we discuss the forces that challenge the Swiss political system on all three principles, as well as their consequences in terms of a new, less “enchanted” mode of governance that characterizes Swiss Politics at the beginning of the 21st century.

How and in what forms have the three principles of sovereignty, proximity of politics and citizens, and elite consensus developed over time? The modern Swiss state of 1848, transformed from a previously loose confederation, has put a strong emphasis on federalism and subsidiarity, guaranteeing sovereignty and political autonomy of the cantons towards the center. Similarly, Swiss foreign politics after the WWII has been connected to the image of full-fledged sovereignty. Both within Switzerland, as well as in its embedment in the international system, we find the prevalence of state and politics *proximate to the citizens*. The small scale-societies (*Kleingesellschaften*) of the cantons and municipalities remained comparatively weak states, with an even weaker bureaucracy, and largely depended on extended voluntary self-administration, and on private associations (Linder 1999, 32-6). This found its reflection in the principle that Swiss politics is not professionalized, and offices held by volunteers or part-time MPs (the *Milizsystem*). Towards the turn of the 20th century, the development of extended direct democratic rights also at the federal level just reinforced this tight and direct link between citizens and policy-makers.

Institutionally, numerous veto points – especially the enhanced use of direct democracy at the federal level since the late 19th century – imposed constraints for political moderation and elite-accommodation in the form of inclusive decision-making structures. The gradual political inclusion of the opposition has culminated - in the second half of the 20th century - in a system that was addressed as *consociational* democracy (Lijphart 1968; Lehmbruch 1967) with corporatist decision-making (Katzenstein 1985; Kriesi 1980). In

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Switzerland itself, the *Zauberformel* (“magic formula”) for the government composition became the symbol for political inclusion.

This model of Swiss democracy, and its three “enchanted principles” – sovereignty, proximity to the citizens, and elite consensus – has enjoyed very high popular legitimacy ever since, and provided for stability. This special issue deals with the changes, which the Swiss model of democracy has experienced since the late 20th century. Have these three principles become ‘disenchanted’? What are the main features of Swiss democracy at the beginning of the 21st century? Why have things changed and what consequences should we expect from the changes we observe?

With regards to *sovereignty*, the contributions by Eggenberger and Emmenegger and by Jenni provide striking accounts of an increase of political interdependence, which puts in question the uncompromised national sovereignty. While Swiss federalism is today characterized by intense cooperation between the cantons, Wasserfallen argues that cantons still strongly compete in fiscal matters. Regarding *proximity to citizens*, we argue that this aspect still is highly present in Swiss politics, as testified by the increasing use and continuing popularity of direct democracy. Three reservations are in order, however: first, part-time politicians and volunteers have given way to professionalized elites (as shown by Bailer and Bütikofer). Second, mediatization has increased (Udris, Lucht and Schneider) and third, direct democracy (see the contribution by Leemann) tends to become undermined by an increase of popular initiatives that result from electoral competition. Finally, elite consensus is examined by Afonso and Papadopoulos, Beste, Wyss and Bächtiger, Bochsler and Bousbah, Bornschie, Leemann, and Traber. They all clearly show that conflict has strongly increased in the Swiss political system. Alliances in parliament have become both more diverse and less inclusive and, in particular, the SVP has changed the tone in the political discourse in parliament. Even though Switzerland still displays the institutions of consociational democracy, the political *practice* in this country matches the picture of an ideal-typical consociation much less than thirty years ago.

What have been the main factors driving political change in the last 40 years? Beyond technological and demographic change and mediatization, we consider two factors to be the main drivers for change of Swiss democracy: polarization and integration.

By *polarization*, we mean strong divergence among political parties on the key political questions. Polarization in Switzerland has increased as a result of the pluralization of political parties and economic interest groups. In the 1970s and 1980s, new social movements and new parties entered the political scene with a libertarian-progressive agenda. They deeply changed the left by adding a socio-cultural agenda to the traditionally state-interventionist program of the left (Kitschelt 1994). And – as shown by Bornschie and Leemann in this volume – they triggered a reaction on the right: new political parties on the radical right side were founded in the early 1990s, and the Swiss People’s Party (SVP) started its transformation into a more radical, national-conservative right-wing populist party. These dynamics have broken the traditional alliance of the moderate right-wing parties on which the Swiss government coalition was built, while political-economic changes (internationalization and deindustrialization) have weakened the political cohesiveness of the economic interest groups (Mach 1999). The fragmentation of the right both among parties and economic interest groups has unravelled the stable alliance of right-wing parties and business (*Bürgerblock*) that had dominated Swiss Politics for a long time.

Several contributions in this volume (see e.g. Leemann, Bornschie and Afonso and Papadopoulos) and in other places (e.g. Vatter 2014, 147) (Ladner 2014, 372) emphasize

the increase in party polarization as *the* key factor that has thrown a spanner in the works of the Swiss political system. Yet, it is primarily when locating current Swiss party polarization in the international context that the extent of deviation from a moderate, consensus-oriented political system becomes strikingly visible (see also Armingeon and Engler 2015). To this effect, we show in Figure 1 the extent of party polarization in Switzerland and all other European democracies regarding the two main axes of political conflict in Europe, the economic and the socio-cultural dimension¹. We rely on expert survey data for this purpose, and calculate the weighted standard deviation of the distribution of parties on each axis (Dalton 2008, 906).² Figure 1 shows that Switzerland is among the most polarized party systems in Europe, not only regarding economic issues, but also regarding socio-cultural policies.

Figure 2 complements this first impression by providing the mean location of the main Swiss parties (over 5% vote share in the 2011 elections) compared to the mean location of the other main parties of Western Europe. The size of the circles is proportional to the vote share this party reached in the last parliamentary national election before August 2015. What distinguishes Switzerland (parties marked in bold font) from other countries is that the strongest parties are also the most polarized ones: the Green Party and the Social Democrats are at opposite poles of the Swiss People's Party both on economic and on cultural issues.

Longitudinal analyses (Hug & Schulz 2007) indeed show that polarization, measured on a single left-right dimension, has increased over the last thirty years. Bornschieer (2015) shows that the shift in polarization has substantially improved the issue congruence between parties and voters, especially regarding cultural issues. With his work, Bornschieer extends the understanding of recent research: By looking at *general* preferences, Armingeon and Engler (2015) argue that voters are less polarized than the elites. Bornschieer looks at *actual* policy preferences regarding cultural and economic policies and finds that both, the elite and the electorate are polarized. People seem to prefer moderate positions in general and distinguish more in the specific proposals. Furthermore, the increased polarization –

¹ The “Irecon” dimension in the Chapel Hill Expert Survey data classifies parties in terms of their stance on economic issues. Parties on the economic left (close to 0) advocate an active role of the government in the economy, parties on the economic right (close to 10) instead privatization, lower taxes, less regulation, and a leaner welfare state.

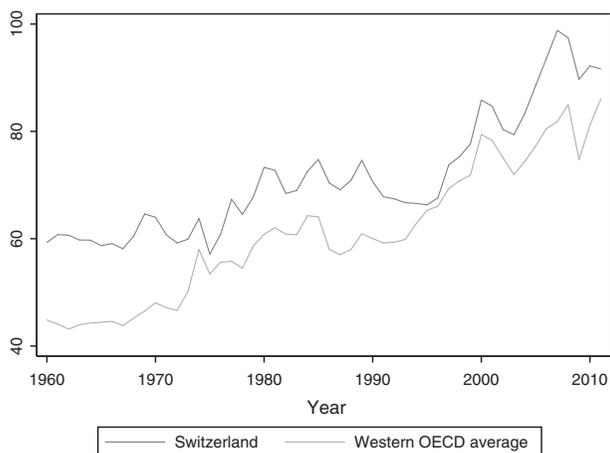
The „gal-tan“ dimension classifies parties in terms of their stance on democratic freedoms and rights. Culturally „libertarian“ (close to 10) parties favor expanded personal freedoms, for example, access to abortion, active euthanasia, same-sex marriage, or greater democratic participation. “Traditional” or “authoritarian” parties (close to 0) instead value order, tradition, and stability, and believe that the government should be a firm moral authority on social and cultural issues.

² We calculated the polarization index as follows,

$$polarization = \sqrt{\frac{\sum \left(v_p \cdot \left(\frac{LR_p - LR_{mean}}{5} \right)^2 \right)}{\sum v_p}}$$

where v_p is the vote share of party p , LR_p is the left-right position of party p , and LR_{mean} is the mean of all left-right positions of the parties in the party system, weighted by their vote share v_p . For Croatia, Romania and Hungary, we took seat shares in parliament as an indicator of how to divide the joint vote shares that electoral alliances gained.

Figure 3: Total trade (import and export) as % of GDP in Switzerland and Western OECD countries (average) 1960-2011



Note: Data from Penn World Tables

is nothing new for Switzerland. It has always been a “small open economy” (Katzenstein 1985), with foreign trade shares above the OECD-average already in the 1960s, but the share has steadily increased over time (see Figure 3).

In terms of this trade, the EU is by far the most important trade partner for Switzerland. Exports to EU countries account for almost double of exports to all other regions in the world. And this is where economic integration meets political integration: The EU countries have become much more strongly integrated both economically and politically over the past decades. In Switzerland, a spectacular increase in treaties, agreements and regulations with the EU (see Jenni this issue) testifies to the increased interdependence Swiss politics is exposed to and has to deal with. The same applies to the strengthened political integration in other international organizations, such as the OECD, which strongly and effectively affect Swiss politics (see Eggenberger and Emmenegger in this volume).

2 The disenchantment of the Swiss political system

In this section, we discuss in more detail how polarization and integration have challenged and partly changed the key mechanisms of Swiss politics in terms of sovereignty, proximity between decision-makers and citizens, and elite consensus.

2.1 Sovereignty

During the second half of the 20th century, the Swiss elites have portrayed the country as a politically neutral island, with maximal political sovereignty. Although economically highly integrated, the Swiss were hesitant to make any step of political integration (Kriesi and Trechsel 2008, 21-3). At the sub-national level, the Swiss cantons kept their strong political identities (Gruner 1977, 50; Kriesi and Trechsel 2008, 12) and celebrated their traditional far-reaching autonomy, and the sacrosanct principle of subsidiarity.

But the picture of the inviolable political sovereignty – both at the national and subnational levels – suffers. It is challenged by the end of the bipolar international system after the Cold War, the European integration process, but also by socio-economic integration across borders. With the continued disappearance of cantonal press, and with parties losing their cantonal strongholds, the cantons also lose their distinct political identities (Armingeon 1998; Bochsler and Sciarini 2006).

As this special issue shows, the cantons were at least as successful in defending their autonomy vis-à-vis the federal state and the European Union, as the federal state was vis-à-vis its international neighbours. The contribution by Wasserfallen analyses the interdependence of taxation policies between the Swiss cantons. Cantons compete with each other on tax issues, aiming for the best tax payers. Wasserfallen shows that competition between cantons evolves in cycles, determined by (vertical) negotiations between the cantons and the federal level. In periods of vertical negotiations with the federal state, the cantons put competition on hold, and instead cooperate horizontally, in order to strengthen their position against the federal state, only to start competing again, once the vertical negotiations have ended. As social and economic integration makes cantonal borders increasingly irrelevant and ill-suited to the challenges at hand, horizontal coordination between the cantons becomes a crucial feature of federalism in Switzerland. While formally keeping their autonomy, the cantons need to coordinate horizontally, in order to speak with a single voice towards the federal authorities and the European Union (Häusermann 2003), but also in order to succeed in effective policy-making, which increasingly requires solutions beyond cantonal borders, leading to a considerable increase of inter-cantonal agreements over the course of the last four decades (see Bochsler 2009).

This same tension between keeping political sovereignty, but de-facto integration across borders is even more challenging to traditional Swiss democracy in the process of EU integration. Sabine Jenni has systematically analysed the legal integration of EU norms into the Swiss legislation. The most visible legal acts are the sectoral agreements, which Switzerland has agreed on with the EU. However, Jenni shows that the politicization of the European integration process in domestic party politics has become a major obstacle for such sectoral agreements. Since 2004, alternative mechanisms of norm adaptation have become more important: inter-governmental committees behind closed doors and indirect adaptation of national laws and regulations to EU norms, both less affected by the intricacies and adversities of domestic party competition, but clearly indicative of a loss in domestic sovereignty.

This is also reflected in the comparison of two studies of decision-making in Switzerland: In the 1970s, out of the 13 most important decision-making processes, only one (the free trade agreement on industrial products with the EC) was “internationalized” (Kriesi 1980). A replication study by Sciarini et al. (2015) finds that, thirty years later, over a third of the most important decision-making processes identified by the replication study were internationalized. In a similar way, Fischer (2014, 615) concludes that internationalization plays an important role also for Switzerland as a non-EU member state. Thus, Switzerland nowadays is far more dependent on and interdependent with its international environment

Similarly, the regulations in the banking sector provide an impressive account of the clash between international pressure and domestic political dynamics. In their analysis, Eggenberger and Emmenegger compare the reaction of Switzerland and Liechtenstein to new international norms regarding cross-national tax policies and banking regulations after the onset of the economic crisis. Torn between diverging economic interests, the

Swiss business associations failed to agree on a joint strategy to face the threat towards the Swiss banks. As a result, partisan politics come to the forefront, leading to a standstill on the matter. As a result, the Swiss answer towards international pressure remained much more reactive, and as the authors argue, much more costly than the anticipatory reaction by Liechtenstein. The interdependency between international and domestic politics occurs also in direct democracy if a referendum or an initiative conflicts with international law (Linder 2014, 161). Jointly, the contributions to our volume that deal with the question of sovereignty show that horizontal cooperation, as practiced between cantons and between Switzerland and the EU, works reasonably well under favourable conditions (i.e. low saliency), but they risk to fail once cooperation becomes politicized, or if diverging interests do not allow for broad coalitions of support. More generally, they provide a striking picture of “disenchantment” regarding national and sub-national independence.

2.2. *Proximity to Citizens*

For a long time, two institutional elements have provided for a high proximity of Swiss citizens to their political elites: the availability of a wide array of direct democratic instruments, and the principle that political offices are voluntary or part-time jobs, allowing elites to stay in their jobs after taking political office (*Milizsystem*). While both principles have partly survived in the 21st century, they have changed their face.

Purely numerically, the use of popular initiatives has increased at the national level, since the 1970s. Leemann’s analysis shows that the use of initiatives has been largely driven by electoral competition and by lower hurdles in terms of signature requirements (relative to the size of the enfranchised population). The actual use of the initiative right questions the myth that direct democracy really is in the hands of the citizens. Rather, parties (even government parties³) and politicians increasingly use direct democratic rights as a tool for electoral competition. As Leemann shows, this is a reflection of increased electoral competition, following the re-emphasis of the second dimension of conflict in Swiss politics, and it contributes to a picture, in which direct democracy is (also) an instrument for parties and politicians to act strategically for electoral purposes. Simultaneously – and this is a second caveat regarding the role of direct democracy in generating proximity between citizens and elites - with the success of popular initiatives at the polls since the 1990s, many initiatives, even if approved by the majority, only get partly implemented, at best. Either, they are in conflict with international law, or the majoritarian logic of Swiss direct democracy conflicts with consensual decision-making: the same parliamentary majority, which has previously opposed a popular initiative, needs to translate it into legislation (Bochsler 2014). These two elements raise doubt regarding the extent to which direct democracy still generates proximity. However, even if parties increasingly use direct democratic instruments for strategic purposes, this does not necessarily conflict with the argument that direct democracy might bring politics closer to the citizens (for an overview of research on Swiss votes see Milic et al. 2014). The use of direct democracy by the elites corresponds to a long historical tradition: minority actors among the elite, who fail to have their demands included in policy reforms can still resort to referenda and initiatives. This strengthens their own position at the negotiation table,

³ Before 1990, there were never more than three popular initiatives launched explicitly by government parties per decade, while this number rose to nine from 2000 to 2010 and is already at eight since 2010. Regarding referenda, government parties launched one in the 1980s, two in the 1990s, seven in the 2000s and already four since 2010.

and allows voters to issue a verdict on these issues. When political issues are brought to the polls, citizens have better opportunities for debate, and news media allow for an exchange of arguments (Hänggli 2015) allowing citizens to understand the political process.

More pronounced changes, affecting the proximity of elites and citizens, stem from an increasing professionalization of Swiss politics. In the past decades, MPs who perform their mandate as a small part-time job have largely disappeared. Following this trend of (semi-)professionalization, Bailer and Bütikofer observe an increasing centralization of the party structures, pushed by the increased polarization of Swiss politics. Parties do not only rely on more financial resources and a more centralized and professional communication strategy, but they push also to a more united appearance in the parliament. This gradually reduces the autonomy of single MPs, who – in a non-professional system – were keeping their roles as ordinary citizens and the link to fellow citizens.

In sum, the proximity of citizens to decision-makers has suffered in the parliamentary arena. While direct democracy is still an instrument more often used by political elites than groups of citizens, its lively use still allows keeping tight links between citizens and decision-makers.

2.3. *Elite consensus*

Over the 20th century, Switzerland became not only one of the main examples of a consociational democracy (Lehmbruch 1967; Lijphart 1968), but it has remained a country which – still in the early 21st century – closely resembles the ideal typical case of a consociational democracy at the level of *institutions*. Nevertheless, with regard to the *behavior* of political elites and citizens, the consociational-corporatist model of Swiss politics has undergone important changes, linked mainly to polarization and pluralization in domestic politics. The Swiss party system used to be segmented along strong social cleavages, and much longer than in most European democracies, political parties were organized along territorial divides, resulting in a majority of cantons with basically dominant-party systems (Gruner 1977). Decision-making was centred around a stable alliance of right-wing parties and business associations (*Bürgerblock*).

With the new cultural conflict emerging so saliently in Swiss politics, the party system has become more nationalized and unified, but at the same time, Swiss politics has also become much more an expression of plural voices: since the 1990s, political parties compete nationally for votes, and thereby they pluralized competition in the cantonal electoral arenas. While this process has polarized the position of both parties and voters in the national arena, it also has improved the match between the voters' issue positions and their representatives: as Bornschieer shows, political parties match the composition of their electorate on the left-right and on the new cultural dimension much better since the 2000s than in the 1970s.

As in the sphere of partisan politics, the corporatist system of fairly integrated associations of business and labour has given way to a pluralization of voices and alliances. On the side of trade unions, it was not so much organizational fragmentation, but a structural decline in membership, a more difficult economic context and a reinforced parliament that limited its importance and inclusion in Swiss decision-making processes (Häusermann et al. 2004; Oesch 2007; Sciarini et al. 2015).

Pluralization was a more central element of change among business associations. Just as in the partisan realm, the formerly stable, market-liberally dominated alliance of business

sectors (the *Bürgerblock*) imploded in the 1990s as a consequence of increasing international pressure and a more competitive political strategy of the export-oriented sector and their main association *economiesuisse*. As a result, formerly powerful associations of small business owners or farmers were increasingly less integrated in decision-making processes and lost power (Mach 1999; Sciarini et al. 2015). With the simultaneous increase in party polarization, agreements between parties and associations became more and more difficult. Both the inclusiveness and the power of the corporatist realm of decision-making have declined over the past two decades (Häusermann et al. 2004; Sciarini 2014; Sciarini et al. 2015).

Hence, *within* the basically stable Swiss institutional framework of a consociational and corporatist system, Swiss politics has become more competitive, and as a consequence less predictable regarding both elections and policy-making. Government elections, formerly *the* key element of the consociational model, are no longer consensual. Both at the cantonal and the federal levels, they have become more competitive (Bochsler and Bousbah), mediatized (Udris, Lucht and Schneider), and much more uncertain: in cantonal government elections, the rather stable and inclusive government formulas have given way to competition. Since the centre-right parties do no longer form stable alliances, the outcome of these elections is now more open. Grand coalitions are not an “informal rule” anymore, but more majoritarian outcomes of center-right or center-left coalitions are also possible.

Several contributions in this issue show how this dynamic has also altered decision-making in the national parliament. As Traber shows, large alliances between all government parties, as they were very common in policy-making until the 1980s, have become much less frequent, and they gave way to more narrow and more sectoral coalitions, altering between different policy fields. Both the Social Democratic Party and the Swiss People’s Party – the main protagonists of polarization in the Swiss party system – participate in policy coalitions in those areas, which are less salient in their party manifestos, while walking alone in those fields, which they emphasize in the electoral competition.

This is also reflected in the quality of the debates in the national parliament: Analyzing debates on immigration issues, Beste, Wyss and Bächtiger show that MPs of the Swiss People’s Party – the main protagonist of polarization on this issue – have indeed moved to more narrow, less nuanced ways of political argumentation. More generally, however, polarization does not harm the quality of the debates in the national parliament, as these debates keep being characterized by a higher deliberative quality than parliamentary debates in rather majoritarian systems. Even on the issue of immigration - one of the central issues for the transformation of the Swiss party system (see Bornschier 2015) – the discursive quality remains high (with the before-mentioned exception), and characteristic of a consociational system.

Swiss politics in the 21st century offers insights, which are relevant for the study of consociationalism and consensus democracies in a comparative perspective. It offers an ambivalent picture of the functioning of consociational political institutions in polarized contexts. The Swiss system keeps being shaped by multiple veto points, which require broad-based compromises for successful policy-making. The consociationalism literature (Lijphart 1968, 34) would expect that these institutions require an accommodation of the elites, whereas polarization and non-cooperation of elites would lead to a “centrifugal democracy”, characterized by stalemate and political crisis (Lijphart 1977, 114-9; Vatter 2014, 561-7). The Swiss account at this stage is more nuanced.

Even if often more by chance than by agreement, large governing coalitions have so far survived in most cantons and at the federal level (Bochsler and Bousbah). And despite the loss of generalized elite agreement, the pluralization of interests, and the reinforcement of the second conflict-dimension, political blockages have so far occurred only in specific, though highly important policy fields, such as social policy and European integration (Afonso and Papadopoulos). In the fields of energy policy and tax policy (corporate tax reform), we see ongoing major policy-processes, which have started on a fairly consensual basis, but the early consensus seems to be eroding quickly as the reforms enter parliament. Given the substantial importance of these reforms, their further development can be seen as test cases of the reform capacity of the Swiss decision-making processes in a polarized context.

While the jury is thus still out on the reform capacity of the current Swiss political system in the area of domestic policies, the loss of elite cohesion has clearly lowered the capacity of the Swiss political system to quickly adapt to the changing international environment, as exemplified by Eggenberger and Emmenegger regarding banking regulation. This is an important change, since small, consociational democracies were considered to use their flexibility in adapting to the international context as a comparative economic advantage (Katzenstein 1985). With diverging interests of the Swiss business community, declining corporatist consensus and the increasing use of veto power through direct democracy, such flexibility is increasingly lost.

Last but not least, the erosion of elite consensus arguably also had certain positive consequences in terms of the quality of democracy: While in the “enchanted” era of consensus democracy, political power was concentrated among a narrow core of actors close to the main economic associations and the centre-right parties of the *Bürgerblock*, Swiss politics in the 21st century is more pluralized, power has gradually moved from corporatist interest groups to political parties, and it is more broadly distributed (Traber, this issue; Sciarini et al. 2015).

3 Discussion

Through the contributions to this special issue, we overall observe a fascinating picture of both institutional continuity and political change in the Swiss political system. Institutions have remained largely stable, and both government-formation and policy-making still work in a more inclusive way than in most other European democracies. Federalism is alive and well, and direct democracy is more popular and widely used than ever. However, beneath these elements of stability, we also observe tendencies towards an increasingly „disenchanted” political system in Switzerland: the particularly pronounced proximity of decision-making and decision-makers to the people is weakened through the erosion of the system of semi-professionalized representation and the increased need to coordinate problem-solving beyond the traditional (sub-)states in trans-governmental committees, which are largely removed from popular control. Regarding direct democracy, a growing use of referenda indicates the stronger competition between political parties, as well as the increasing difficulties of the political system to produce consensual, broadly accepted solutions. “Disenchantment” regarding the other two principles of the traditional Swiss political system is even more blatant. Regarding elite consensus, a traditional pattern of government by inclusive coalitions, moderate party competition and quiet politics has given way to party polarization and pluralization. Finally, the picture of a politically independent and sovereign, but economically globalized and Europeanized country has

become questioned in a range of – partly still ongoing – highly salient, contentious political battles regarding notably the institutional future of the bilateral agreements with the EU and tax policies. These battles potentially imply ruptures both with political sovereignty and with economic integration and thereby question the traditional functioning of Swiss politics quite fundamentally.

As extensively developed above, this relative disenchantment of the Swiss political system results from an increasing mismatch between polarized political parties and interest groups on the one hand and an institutional framework that requires moderation and compromises for effective decision-making on the other hand. In conclusion, we want to discuss the likely consequences and implications of this configuration of institutional and behavioural constraints for Swiss politics and for Switzerland in an increasingly integrated context. The highlighted pattern of consensus-requiring institutions and – simultaneously – polarized elite behavior is not unique, as we can refer to several recent examples:

Both in Belgium and the Netherlands, countries with strong consociational institutions, internal decision-making mechanisms in the coalition governments became more important to resolve political conflicts (Timmermans and Moury 2006). In Belgium, however, the parties were unable to form a coalition government in several instances in the 2000s and 2010s. Nevertheless, the country could quite successfully avoid political blockages. The relatively weak parliament has experienced an increase in power, and with no stable parliamentary majority, policy-making evolved in flexible and issue-specific coalitions (Van Aelst and Louwerse 2014; Pilet 2012), quite similarly to the Swiss case.

In contrast, Germany in the early 2000s – also a veto-ridden polity with, then, strong electoral competition – had become almost unable to implement reforms, as all government proposals were prevented for partisan reasons in the two chambers of parliament. Germany overcame the reform blockade by building a grand coalition of SPD and CDU/CSU. While this has fuelled opposition parties, it has also weakened the strong antagonism between these two major parties. Switzerland, however, has had a grand coalition of all major political parties for almost six decades: the increasing polarization and antagonism between political parties and between interest groups has actually emerged while the institutions that are supposed to foster elite consensus (grand coalition and corporatism) were firmly in place. Hence, Switzerland indeed seems caught in a mismatch between increasingly polarized elite behavior and institutions that require moderation and compromise to produce effective policy output.

We are not the first to observe such an increasing contradiction between what actors do and what institutions require in Switzerland (e.g. Sciarini 2011; Vatter 2014, 561-7; Kriesi this issue). What are the implications and possible strategies to resolve this contradiction? In the public discussion and several political science contributions, two ways forward for the Swiss political system are usually discussed: a) to adapt the institutions to the behavior of the elites and b) to adapt the behavior of the elites to the institutions. What does this mean? Adapting the institutions to the behavior of the elites would ultimately require breaking away from a grand coalition and shifting to a more majoritarian model based on alternating government majorities of center-left or center-right (Sciarini 2011). Such a model of democratic decision-making would imply an explicit government program and improved democratic accountability. The main counter-argument against alternating majority governments in Switzerland has always been that the opposition parties could then use direct democratic instruments to block the political process (as the left did, for example, quite successfully in the 1940s). However, given the massive increase in the use of initiatives and referenda by government parties, this counter-argument falls largely flat, as

inclusion in the government does not seem to exert a “disciplining” effect on these parties anyway. Much rather, the transition to a system of alternating majorities is highly unlikely in Switzerland because the grand coalition still enjoys enormous support among the population, as it is one of the key features of the Swiss political system many of its citizens identify with.

The other – equally unlikely – way forward would be to adapt the behavior of actors to the institutions, in other words to reinvigorate moderation and consensus-seeking through strengthened inclusiveness. In the current context, this might mean including the poles of the polarized party system (the SVP and the Greens/SP) more strongly in government. Such an inclusion could be tied to conditions, as was done with the Social Democrats in the 1940s and 1950s. Such conditions would, however, always remain informal. Hence, it is highly uncertain, if giving additional weight to the poles of the party system would indeed lead to a return to moderate party polarization, for three reasons: first, polarization has increased while parties were fully integrated in government. Second, pluralization and polarization mean that parties increasingly cater to more narrowly delimited constituencies rather than targeting the median voter and third, after two decades of party polarization, Swiss citizens have become strongly polarized as well (see the contribution by Bornschieer 2015).

Hence, we think that both ways “out” of the mismatch between elite behavior and institutional constraints are unlikely. The most likely “model” of Swiss politics for the years to come is the current status quo: pluralization and polarization in a veto-ridden institutional framework. This most likely scenario can imply different consequences for the performance of the Swiss political system in terms of policy-output. There is a potential for both flexibility and deadlock. Flexibility might be enhanced because alliances have become more unstable, opportunistic and policy-specific. In the more polarized context, even clearly right- or left-wing proposals may at times pass in parliament without a broad consensus, thereby possibly introducing more audacious reforms in a system that was traditionally characterized by small steps and incrementalism. At the same time, however, the risk of deadlock is clearly there, too: both political parties and interest groups consider themselves not committed by government decisions (irrespective of their participation in government), alliances or to coherent reform strategies. They give more weight to visibility and electoral competition than to pragmatic policy-performance, particularly in their core areas of policy-making. Accordingly, they may also increasingly try to use their veto power by referring to direct democratic instruments. The increasingly integrated international context adds to this risk of deadlock as polarization stands in the way of pragmatic compromises and flexible policy adaptation.

At this point, it is too early for an assessment of the overall policy performance of the current political dynamic in Switzerland, but one implication of the “new Swiss politics” is already clear: while the quality of representation (issue congruence) has improved, policy outputs have become more uncertain, more unstable and – given the lack of party political orientation of the government on the one hand and flexible alliances on the other hand – rather unpredictable. And this in itself is a major change from the traditional model of Swiss democracy.

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Appendix: Party labels in Figure 2

Party label	Party name	Country
ADR	Alternative Democratic Reform Party	Luxembourg
AP	Labour Party	Norway
BDP	Conservative Democratic Party	Switzerland
BE	Left Bloc	Portugal
C	Center Party	Sweden
CD&V	Christian Democratic and Flemish	Belgium
CDA	Christian Democratic Appeal	Netherlands
CDUG	Christian Democratic Union of Germany	Germany
CDUP	Democratic Unitarian Coalition	Portugal
CONS	Conservative Party	United Kingdom
CSU	Christian Social Union in Bavaria	Germany
CSV	Christian Social People's Party	Luxembourg
CVP	Christian Democratic People's Party	Switzerland
D66	Democrats 66	Netherlands
DF	Danish People's Party	Denmark
DP	Democratic Party	Luxembourg
EELV	Europe Ecology - The Greens	France
EL	Red-Green Alliance	Denmark
FDP	FDP. The Liberals	Switzerland
FF	Soldiers of Destiny	Ireland
FG	Family of the Irish	Ireland
FI	Forward Italy	Italy
FN	National Front	France
FP	Liberal People's Party	Sweden
FPO	Freedom Party of Austria	Austria
FrP	Progress Party	Norway
GLP	Green Liberal Party	Switzerland
GPS	Green Party	Switzerland
GRENG	The Greens	Luxembourg
Groen	Green	Belgium
GRUNE	The Austrian Green Party	Austria
Grunen	Alliance '90/The Greens	Germany

Appendix: Continued

Party label	Party name	Country
H	Conservative Party	Norway
KESK	Finish Center Party	Finland
KKE	Communist Party of Greece	Greece
KOK	National Coalition Party	Finland
KrF	Christian Democratic Party	Norway
LA	Liberal Alliance	Denmark
LABI	Labour	Ireland
LABUK	Labour Party	United Kingdom
LIBDEM	Liberal Democratic Party	United Kingdom
Linke	The Left	Germany
LSAP	Luxembourg Socialist Workers' Party	Luxembourg
M	Moderate Party	Sweden
M5S	Five Star Movement	Italy
MP	Environment Party - The Greens	Sweden
MR	Reformist Movement	Belgium
ND	New Democracy	Greece
N-VA	New Flemish Alliance	Belgium
OVP	Austrian People's Party	Austria
PD	Democratic Party	Italy
Potami	The River	Greece
PPP	People's Party	Portugal
PPS	People's Party	Spain
PSB	Socialist Party	Belgium
PSD	Social Democratic Party	Portugal
PSF	Socialist Party	France
PSOE	Spanish Socialist Workers' Party	Spain
PSP	Socialist Party	Portugal
PvdA	Labour Party	Netherlands
PVV	Party for Freedom	Netherlands
SAP	Swedish Social Democratic Party	Sweden
SC	Civic Choice	Italy
SDD	Social Democrats	Denmark
SDP	Social Democratic Party of Finland	Finland
SDS	Sweden Democrats	Sweden
SF	We Ourselves	Ireland
SPA	Socialist Party Different	Belgium
SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany	Germany
SPN	Centre Party	Norway
SPNL	Socialist Party	Netherlands
SPO	Social Democratic Party of Austria	Austria
SPS	Social Democratic Party of Switzerland	Switzerland
SVP	Swiss People's Party	Switzerland
SYRIZA	Coalition of the Radical Left	Greece
TeamStronach	Team Stronach for Austria	Austria
TF	True Finns	Finland
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party	United Kingdom
UMP	Union for Popular Movement	France

Appendix: Continued

Party label	Party name	Country
VAS	Left Alliance	Finland
VD	Venstre, Liberal Party of Denmark	Denmark
VIHR	Green League	Finland
VLD	Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats	Belgium
VN	Liberal Party	Norway
VS	Left Party	Sweden
VVD	People's Party for Freedom and Democracy	Netherlands
XA	Popular Association - Golden Dawn	Greece

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