

# Competitive Consensus

## What comes after consociationalism in Switzerland?

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## Abstract

*Large coalition governments, including all relevant parties, are at the heart of the consociational model of Swiss democracy. Until the 1990s, this model was characterised as “voluntary proportional”. It was based on a stable cooperation of two main blocs of political parties, and on elite-driven agreements on all-inclusive government formulas. Despite growing competition in governmental elections, all-party coalitions have survived in most cantons. This article explains that the political minority could keep and even improve its representation, as a consequence of the divisions in the political majority. While right-wing parties hold the majority in almost all Swiss cantons and at the federal level, they are no longer sufficiently cohesive to control the elections. As a consequence, elections have become more uncertain, and political minorities can capitalise on this in order to win seats. Empirically, this paper investigates elections for Swiss cantonal governments in the period 1971-2011. It combines data on the unity of political blocs with data on government formation. To measure the political unity of the blocs, the paper introduces a novel measure based on the voting recommendations issued by cantonal parties on the occasion of national referendums.*

*Keywords: Consensus democracy; coalitions; multi-member districts; Switzerland; proportionality.*

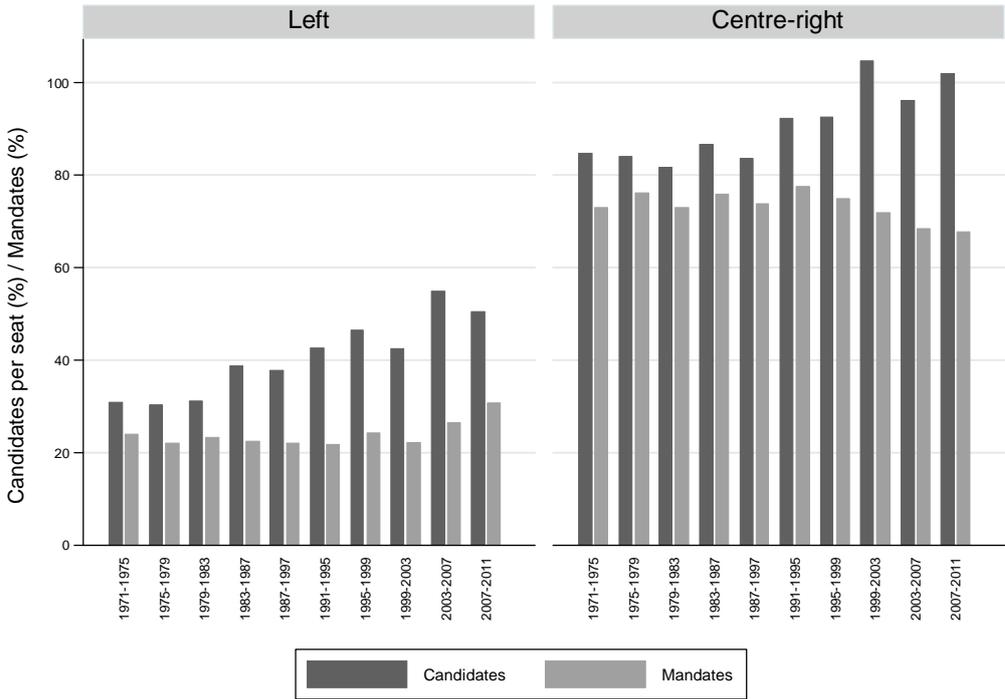
## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Large all-party governments, including all relevant political parties, and which are formed through consensus between the political elites, rather than through elections, used to be the heart of the consociational model of Swiss democracy (Neidhart 1970; Lehmbruch 2003; Lijphart 1977; Vatter 2002). In this model, party leaders voluntarily agreed on quasi-proportional cabinet compositions ("freiwilliger Proporz"), or they implicitly made concessions in order to include the political minorities into power. As a consequence, elections played only a negligible role, and often there were no more candidates competing for election than there were seats to fill.

Since the 1990s, voluntary proportionality has been practiced less and less and elections have become more competitive. However, the increase in right-wing candidates running for government, both at the federal and cantonal level (figure 1, left-hand side), has not led to a decline in the representation of the left-wing minority in governments. To the contrary, the left-wing minority was even able to increase its representation in cantonal governments (Figure 1, left-hand side). This is surprising insofar as there are no formal barriers to political majorities

<sup>1</sup> We gratefully acknowledge coding assistance by Lukas Lauener (party alliances), and Claudia Alpiger (historical data on the composition of the cantonal governments). Georg Lutz kindly shared his dataset of election results in Swiss cantonal governments with us. We are very grateful for comments by Alex Trechsel and Wolf Linder, the three anonymous reviewers, as well as the fellow co-editors.

electing all their candidates into office, because in 24 out of 26 cantons majoritarian electoral systems are in practice.



**Figure 1: Candidates per seat (\*100) and mandates (%) by legislative period (means over cantons)**

Addressing this puzzle, this paper discusses governmental elections in a polarised party system, with multi-seat majoritarian districts. Parties of the right-wing majority (the political majority at the national level and in almost all cantons) have drifted apart and, as a consequence, competition between the blocs is also complemented by within-bloc competition. The political minority can capitalise on this split. As the candidates of the majority start competing against each other, they can no longer capitalise on the unanimous support of voters for the majority, thus rendering it easier for minority candidates to be elected.

This paper introduces a new empirical measure of the positioning of Swiss cantonal parties, available for almost all party branches which are represented in cantonal parliaments since 1971. The measure relies on the voting recommendations issued by political parties on the occasion of national referenda or popular initiatives, and it is the basis of the empirical investigation of the positioning of the political parties, and its consequences for the formation of governments in the Swiss cantons over the period 1971-2011. The paper investigates how the degree to which political majorities are united affects the elections of cantonal governments under plurality or majority rule, particularly looking at the effects on the representation of majorities and minorities.

The next section presents a review of the literature on the Swiss ‘voluntary proportionality’ model, and introduces an alternative explanation, the competitive consensus model. Section 3 discusses the measurement innovations, especially the new measure of party positions, whereas section 4 presents the results of the empirical analysis.

## 2. Theory

The literature on all-party coalitions in Switzerland has flourished since the 1970s. It posits that all-party coalitions are formed as part of the model of consensus politics. We argue that the fractionalisation and the transformation from a bipolar party system with a cohesive majority towards a more plural party competition since the 1990s also affects the formation of all-party governments. In this section, we distinguish three models of government elections in multi-seat majoritarian elections, and discuss the role of the changing party system.

### Elite accommodation through “voluntary proportionality”

Switzerland, and especially its tradition of including all relevant political parties in the government, is one of the most important cases of the consociationalism literature of the 1960s (Lehmbruch 1967; Lijphart 1968), and of consensus democracy (Lijphart 1999). The inclusion of all parties is attributed to explicit agreements made by party elites, or to concessions on the part of dominant elites to the political minority. The elite agreements or concessions are voluntary, as there is no constitutional requirement to build inclusive governments. The formation of governments in the Swiss context is denoted as *voluntary proportionality* (German: “freiwilliger Proporz”).

Governments are elected by majority or plurality rule, usually every four years. While at the national level, elections are indirect (carried out by the parliament), at the level of cantons elections are direct, and only two of the 26 cantons (one, as of 2014) resort to proportional representation.<sup>2</sup> Cantonal general elections take place in multimember districts of five to nine seats (corresponding to the number of cantonal ministers), whereas eventual by-elections take place for single seats (Lutz and Strohmman 1998; Bochsler et al. 2004; Lutz 2014). Plurality or majority rule, when combined with multimember districts, is considered among the most restrictive electoral systems because it usually concentrates all mandates in the largest political party or bloc. In multi-seat districts, this effect is even larger than in single-seat districts, as the same party or bloc can win all district mandates (Niemi et al. 1985; Cox 1997; Taagepera and Shugart 1989).

<sup>2</sup> One additional canton, Zug, switched back from PR to multimember majority rule in 2014, the canton of Ticino applies proportional rule, whereas the canton of Appenzell Innerrhoden elects its executive by means of cantonal assembly (“Landsgemeinde”).

Government formulas in Switzerland seem to be an exception to this rule: they resemble all-party coalitions at all levels (Bochsler and Sciarini 2006). Leonhard Neidhart's (1970) influential work on the formation of all-party coalitions in Switzerland explains them as a consequence of the Swiss referendum democracy. Opposition parties can use referendums as a threat in order to block laws proposed by the government. Eventually, the use of referendums has thus led to the inclusion of political minorities into governments (Trechsel and Serdült 1999). We define as political majority, a party or a group of parties with a high programmatic proximity, winning a majority of votes, which would enable it to dominate any election by plurality or majority rule.<sup>3</sup>

The inclusion of political minorities into cantonal and national governments evolved stepwise. It was the fruit of deliberate, voluntary concessions on the part of political elites. The stepwise inclusion of political minorities at the federal level, until the formation of an all-party-coalition during WWII, was mirrored by the developments in the Swiss cantons. In the after-war period, all-party-coalitions also became the rule at both levels. While the party systems of the cantons vary widely, they can be characterised by similar cleavages as those in the federal party system: the most important of which are the confessional (state-church) and the economic left-right cleavage. Centre-right parties are in a position of majority, or of very large plurality, both at the federal level and in the cantons, with very few, temporary exceptions.<sup>4</sup>

Previous oppositions were included *voluntarily*, as parties of the majority and opposition parties agreed jointly on forming a coalition and dividing government offices among the coalition partners. Alternatively, the majority can unilaterally offer the opposition access to government, by refraining to contest for all seats. This creates 'secure seats' for the minority, i.e. seats not contested by the majority (Gruner 1977, 24; Vatter 2007, 203; Linder 2012, 103-4; Vatter 2000; Lutz 2014). The agreement between the party elites in Switzerland to form all-party coalition governments was driven by a far-going accommodation of political parties (Vatter 2014, 103).<sup>5</sup> The voluntary proportionality model – as usually understood – can thus be characterised by a low degree of polarisation, a low degree of competition for executive elections, and a roughly proportional allocation of seats to parties (table 1).

Recently, Lachat and Kriesi (forthcoming) have offered an alternative view of the model, focusing instead on voters' behaviour: in governmental elections in Swiss cantons, voters tend to cast votes across partisan lines. Hence, all-party governments can be the product of elite

<sup>3</sup> See Lutz (2014).

<sup>4</sup> The centre-right varies with regards to its cohesiveness. In some cantons and periods, there is close cooperation between the parties of the centre-right. In others, the centre-right is divided between secular Liberals and Christian Democrats ('Kulturkampf'). The degree of cohesiveness of the centre-right bloc is considered below.

<sup>5</sup> We refrain from the term coalition, which is usually associated with a programmatic coalition and coalition agreements.

accommodation or of ‘all-party-voters’. However, their finding - voters voting across blocs - mainly applies to non-contested seats and/or incumbent candidates. Once parties start to challenge the government formula, our re-analysis shows that the number of all-party voters might be considerably smaller than previously thought.<sup>6</sup>

### **Bipolarity and fractionalisation**

Changes in party competition since the 1990s have altered the fundament of the Swiss consensus model (Bochsler et al., this issue). Low degree of conflict and polarisation, and high cohesion both of the right-wing majority and the left-wing minority dominated the Swiss party system until the 1980s. It has made way for a period of fractionalisation and polarisation (Ladner 2004a, 138-9, 48-9; Lutz and Selb 2007). Locally scattered ecologist groups have merged into a nationally organised Green party (Baer and Seitz 2008), the Swiss People’s Party (SVP) has transformed from a farmer and smallholder party into a new nationalist-conservative pole (incorporating some marginal parties at the far right), and the centre-right bloc has driven apart (Bornschieer, this issue). While the left-wing bloc is politically united - the Social Democrats and Greens share very similar positions (Bochsler and Sciarini 2010) – the new political conflict around issues of integration and globalisation (Kriesi et al. 2006) has lead to new divides between the parties of the right-wing majority. The re-orientation of the SVP did not only fuel tension between the centre-right parties, but also within the party: the gap between more traditional, moderate branches and cantonal branches, which quickly adopted a euro-sceptic and anti-immigration program was followed by a party split in 2008. After this transformation, the bipolar structure has vanished: on most political issues, the centre-right majority is no longer politically cohesive (Traber, this issue).

### **The consensus model and competitive elections**

We argue that the decreasing bipolarity and the fractionalisation of the party system has also altered the governmental elections in Switzerland. We posit that in more competitive elections, the degree of unity of the political majority is crucial in determining the outcome. Therefore, we distinguish between elections with a cohesive majority and those with a disunited majority. Instead of hypotheses, we state the expected outcomes in table 1.

<sup>6</sup> Results available from the authors. Altering Lachat and Kriesi’s analysis, we introduce incumbency as a control variable, showing that voting for several blocs is mainly prevalent for incumbent candidates. Second, we change the categorical definition of political blocs, and show that once the Liberals are counted as part of the centre, the degree of voting for several blocs drops.

**Table 1: Three types of coalition formation in multimember districts with majority/plurality rule**

<b>Model</b>	<b>Voluntary proportional</b>	<b>Competition, with cohesive majority</b>	<b>Competition, majority disunited</b>
<i>Preconditions</i>			
Bipolarity/ Bloc cohesion	low polarisation, cohesion irrelevant	bipolar: high bloc cohesion	pluralised-multipolar: low bloc cohesion
Electoral alliances	Across blocs	Within bloc	No alliances
<i>Expected outcomes</i>			
Candidates	few	many	many
Representation of majority	roughly proportional	overrepresented	representation varies, can be underrepresented
Representation of minority	roughly proportional	underrepresented	representation varies, often proportionally or overrepresented

Elections in multi-seat districts under the majority or plurality vote system usually provide the majority party or majority bloc with a large seat bonus. If the political majority is cohesive, and can rely on disciplined voters who support the candidates nominated by the majority, it can control the elections entirely and have all its candidates elected. If the party system becomes polarised, we would thus not only expect elections to become more competitive (i.e. more candidates are nominated than seats available), but most importantly, we would expect the political majority to become largely overrepresented in government (see table 1, middle column). In such a system, the political minority will lose its representation in government entirely, or at least it will be substantially diminished.

However, the combination of high polarisation and high cohesiveness of the political majority only occurs in a bipolar party system. Once the majority splits, elections become more dynamic and less predictable.

We posit that such splits in the majority will have important consequences for competitive elections: they undermine the majority's seat bonus, and put the political minority in a position to gain a substantial seat share. On some occasions, this might even allow the opposition to win a larger share of the governmental mandates than its vote share.

In order for voters to vote in a disciplined manner for all candidates nominated by the majority bloc, majority parties need to convince them of their cohesiveness, i.e. that each candidate represents their preferences (almost) equally well as if (s)he were nominated by their own preferred party. In competitive elections, and when there are important differences between the parties constituting the majority, voters will perceive the majority's candidates as rivals.

Certainly, their main antagonist pole in the elections is the political minority. Nevertheless, in competitive elections, voters of majority parties will need to consider the possibility that not all majority candidates will be elected. To increase the chances of election for their favourite candidates they might decide to only include them on the ballot, and not cast any votes for the other candidates of the majority. If voters of all parties constituting the majority make this consideration, then this will substantially weaken the chances of majority candidates while helping the political minority to have its candidates elected.

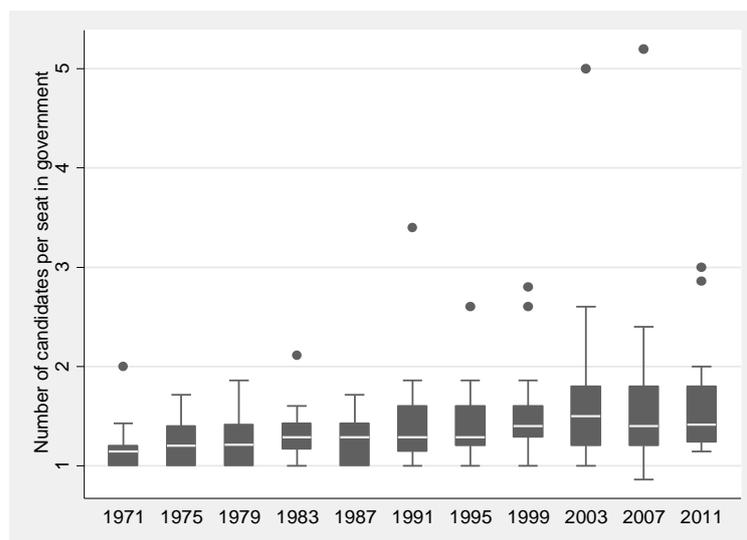
In elections with a cohesive majority – both in programmatic terms and with no major personal rivalries –, such a scenario is out of question due to the unity of the majority and the shared joint program, making it is easier to convince voters of a straight ticket vote.

However, the political unity of the majority matters: if the candidates and parties of the political majority run on very similar positions, voters will have few motives to selectively support only some of the majority candidates, and perceive the political landscape as divided between a united majority and the minority.

Hence, in competitive elections, the political minority wins seats either because of concessions on the part of the majority (“voluntary proportionality”), or because the political majority is not united. The minority can capitalise on these splits, and be very successful in elections, winning seat shares proportional or even larger than their vote shares despite the majoritarian rules. As the political majority is divided in their programmatic positions, the number of mandates won by the majority will be lower, and the number of mandates won by the opposition will be higher.

### **3. Operationalisation and research design**

Empirically, we investigate elections to the Swiss cantonal governments in the time period 1971-2011. The period is characterised by growing competition for government mandates. In the 1970s and 1980s, the number of candidates was barely higher than the number of government seats. The parties agreed ex-ante on an alliance, and competition was low. As of the 1990s, most elections became competitive (Figure 2). The two periods (pre-1991 and post-1991) characterise a major break in the Swiss party system, addressed in this special issue: the new divide on immigration and globalisation has altered the party system as of the 1990s.



**Figure 2: Number of candidates in cantonal governmental elections, by legislative period<sup>7</sup>**

Despite the rise in electoral competition, the political minority – here operationalised as the left-wing parties (see below) – have not only remained part of almost all cantonal governments, but have even increased their share of executive power (see Figure 1 above).

In order to understand how the left-wing minority was able to defend its executive strength despite the growing competition, we analyse the variance in government representation over time and between the Swiss cantons. Cantonal party branches are autonomous and able to deviate from their national parties in their positioning. There are considerable differences between cantons in the size and the composition of the party systems (Ladner 2004a). The impact of the new political conflict centred on integration and identity has affected the cantonal party systems at different times and at different speeds. Changes in the party programs of major parties and changes in the composition of the party system began in one or a few cantons, and soon after affected other cantons (Bochsler and Bousbah 2011). Our time-series cross-sectional analysis capitalises on this variance. We investigate all general elections to cantonal governments in the period 1971-2011, and analyse the impact of bloc disunity on competition and on the elected representatives in cantonal elections under plurality and majority rules. We further profit from the fact that parliamentary elections are held mostly on the same day, or with little time delay, and are almost exclusively conducted under proportional rules, so that we can rely on parliamentary election results as a measure of the electoral strength of political blocs and parties. Our new dataset combines information about the party composition of governments and parliaments, the positioning of parties at the cantonal level, and electoral alliances in the governmental elections. Information on the government and parliamentary composition is

<sup>7</sup> Note: Candidates per number of seats in government, candidates of "other" (e.g. non-partisans, candidates of very small local parties) excluded.

compiled from the Federal Statistical Office (2013b), the *Année Politique Suisse* (several years). Information on the nominated candidates and the election results are compiled from cantonal sources, extending earlier work by Lutz (2014). We further consider the variance in the electoral rules - elections by plurality or by majority rule (see Appendix).

As the degree of unity/disunity of the centre-right majority is one of the main variables of our model, we need to rely on a temporally and spatially stable definition of the majority and the minority, and we will investigate the variance between elections and cantons, with political blocs as our unit of analysis (cases listed in supplementary material). In the Swiss context this is straightforward as there is a clear and stable cleavage between the left and the right on the economic dimension. Parties from the political left were the last of the major parties to be included in executive power not only at the national level, but also in many cantons (Vatter 2002). Two slightly differing definitions of the parties belonging to the left and to the centre-right bloc are listed in Appendix.

### **A novel measure bloc cohesiveness in the Swiss cantons**

To analyse the bipolarity of the party systems, we introduce a new measure for party positions at the cantonal level. Previous measures, based on cantonal party manifestoes (Giger et al. 2011), are only available for a subset of 95 cantonal parties, and in most cases only for a single election. Instead, we rely on the referenda and initiatives regularly held in Switzerland, with around a dozen issues being voted on every year (similar: Hug and Schulz 2007). The number of issues ranges from a minimum of one (2011) to a maximum of 16 (1992, 1993, 2000). Political parties issue voting recommendations for almost all referenda or initiatives, and cantonal party branches frequently use their autonomy to deviate from their national parties, issuing their own recommendations on national-level issues (Bochsler and Wasserfallen 2013; Sciarini and Bochsler 2005; Cappelletti and Dacorogna 2014).<sup>8</sup> This allows us to measure systematically the position of cantonal party branches over 40 years on all issues brought to referenda and initiatives. As they encompass a very large variety of issues which are also salient in election campaigns we are confident of having gathered data which represents the party positioning.

For each legislative term, we estimated the most important political dimensions by running a principle component analysis on the voting recommendations. The split into legislative terms allows us to measure temporal change in the underlying dimensions and in the voting recommendations. In each legislative period, the model includes between 77 and 167 cantonal party branches (units of analysis), and 16 to 52 propositions or issues under scrutiny (variables)

<sup>8</sup> Sources: Federal Statistical Office (2013a), the Federal Assembly (2014), and Swissvotes database (*Année Politique Suisse* 2013).

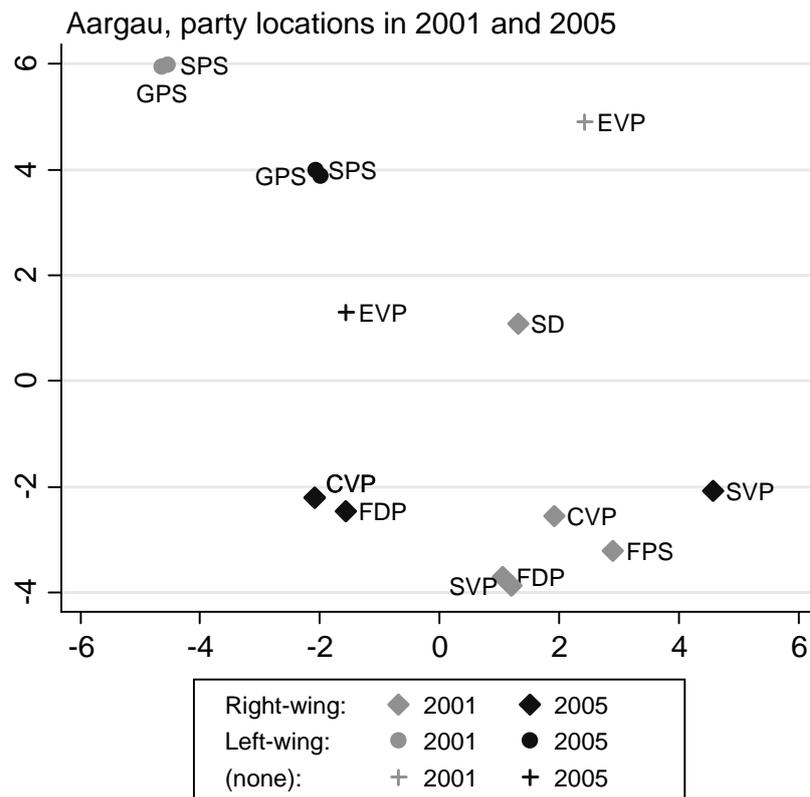
on which parties issued voting recommendations.<sup>9</sup> While major political parties usually issue recommendations for all ballot issues, smaller parties might occasionally miss a few referenda or initiatives (for technical details of the analysis, see appendix). Deviating voting recommendations are fairly common in years with a high number of popular votes. However, voting recommendations have become more common in recent legislative terms. In the period 1971-1975, for each voting issue, on average 4.16 cantonal branches issued a deviating recommendation. This rate more than doubled to 10.16, in the period 1991-1995 (see table A.1 in the appendix). The factor analysis was carried out separately for each legislative term, for a total of ten legislative terms between 1971 and 2011. We identified between two and four policy dimensions. Our measures strongly correlate with the left-right positions for cantonal party branches, which Giger et al. (2011) have estimated for a small sub-sample of our cases, using manifesto data.<sup>10</sup>

The transformation of the party landscape can be illustrated exemplarily by the changes which occurred between 2001 and 2005 in the canton of Aargau. Figure 3 presents the two most important dimensions in the periods 1999-2003 and 2003-2007. While the figure does not show whether the polarisation between the two blocs increases,<sup>11</sup> it displays the relative location of the parties in the two-dimensional space. In 2001 (grey-shaded dots), the party system essentially consists of two poles, the left-wing parties (SP and GPS), against the centre-right (CVP, FDP and SVP). By 2005 (black-shaded dots), the party system moves towards a tri-polar system: the first dimension (horizontal) distinguishes the left-wing from the centre-right parties. On the second dimension (vertical), the CVP and FDP have moved closer to the left-wing parties, and are now clearly distinguishable from the SVP, which stands isolated at the right-wing conservative pole.

<sup>9</sup> Note: Labels for cantons only displayed for centre-right parties, due to the limited space. Figure A.1 in Appendix A.

<sup>10</sup> For our estimates, the dimensions vary between legislative periods, so that we re-estimate the correlation for each period. For the legislative period 1999-2003, the socio-economic left-right measure of Giger et al. correlates with our first dimension at 0.904 (Pearson's correlation coefficient) (N=16), for the period 2003-2007 at 0.592 with our third and 0.543 with our first dimension (N=41), for the period 2007-2011 at 0.826 for our second dimension (N=77). See also figure A1 in the appendix.

<sup>11</sup> The underlying dimensions are estimated separately for 4-year-periods (identical to the legislative periods of the national parliament). The estimated positions allow us to derive relative distances between the parties, i.e. to compare the distance between the left-wing and the centre-right parties with the variation of positions within the bloc, separately for each period.



**Figure 3: Mapping the political parties in the canton of Aargau, 2001 and 2005**

A novel index of bloc disunity measures the political cohesion or differences within the blocs (relative to the overall polarisation of the party system). For each of the two blocs (left-wing and centre-right<sup>12</sup>), the disunity measure calculates the relative variance of party positions on all estimated dimensions of the political space. The measure is relative, as the within-bloc deviation of party positions is standardised by the overall variance of party positions in the cantonal party system for each legislative period. The standardisation also allows us to compare the disunity across time, even though the issues brought to the vote keep changing. The degree of disunity weights for the relative importance of each of the issue dimensions (using the eigenvalue of the factor analysis), and the party size (see appendix for technical details). The disunity measure ranges from 0 (unity) to 1 (disunity).

### Electoral alliances

We complement this approach based on party positions with a direct measure of electoral alliances, i.e. whether political parties run jointly in governmental elections. Political parties can either join an all-party alliance – along the lines of voluntary proportionality model – including all major political parties regardless of their position, or they can form alliances within their own

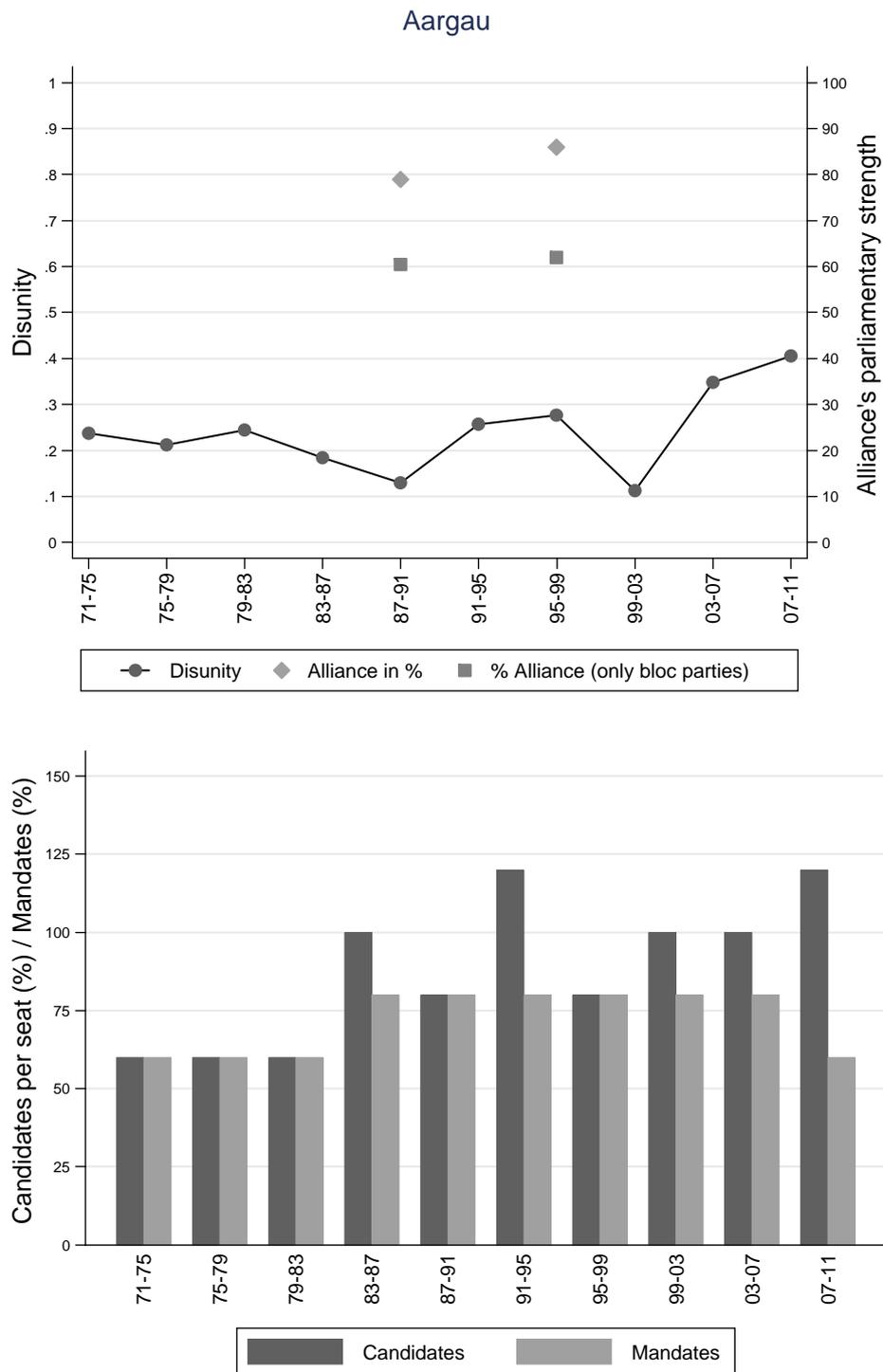
<sup>12</sup> See the appendix for the definition of the blocs.

bloc (here: of the parties of the centre-right majority), or they can run alone. In contrast to party positions, electoral alliances will often be a consequence of electoral strategies, and are thus endogenous in our models. We have used qualitative sources to code the existence of inter-party alliances for governmental elections in the Swiss cantons, as well as the parties included in these alliances. Information was retrieved from the *Année Politique Suisse* (all issues from 1971 to 2011), and the reports in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* on cantonal governmental elections, published in the four months preceding the election (for the period 1993-2011). We consider either formal electoral alliances (e.g. joint electoral lists, joint campaigns, joint programs), or of informal alliances (e.g. reciprocal support for candidates). We analysed the impact of the width of the electoral alliances (cumulative parliamentary seat share of all allies) on the competition and outcomes of elections.<sup>13</sup>

The impact of bloc disunity and electoral alliances on election outcomes can be illustrated by the example of the canton of Aargau. Figure 4 shows that the re-location of the SVP to a new conservative pole of the party system is also related to changes in the governmental elections. Until 1981, governmental elections were not contested and the centre-right nominated only three candidates, leaving two seats to the left-wing minority. In two later instances (1988 and 1996), all parties agreed to an electoral alliance encompassing all major centre-right wing and also the main left-wing party, the Social Democrats (Figure 4, upper part, electoral alliances).<sup>14</sup> The alliance broke apart in the 2000 elections. On the one hand, the centre-right supported a dissident member of the Social Democrats in a by-election in 1999, and the official representative of the Social Democrats lost its mandate. On the other hand, the division within the centre-right bloc has magnified since 2003, so that the parties could no longer agree on an alliance. In 2004, the SVP nominated an extra candidate, challenging the previous alliance partners. The left-wing parties were able to profit from this split. Despite being in a clear minority, in the 2008 elections (with several vacancies in the government, including the seat of the dissident Social Democrat), they achieved a landslide victory, winning two out of five seats in government.

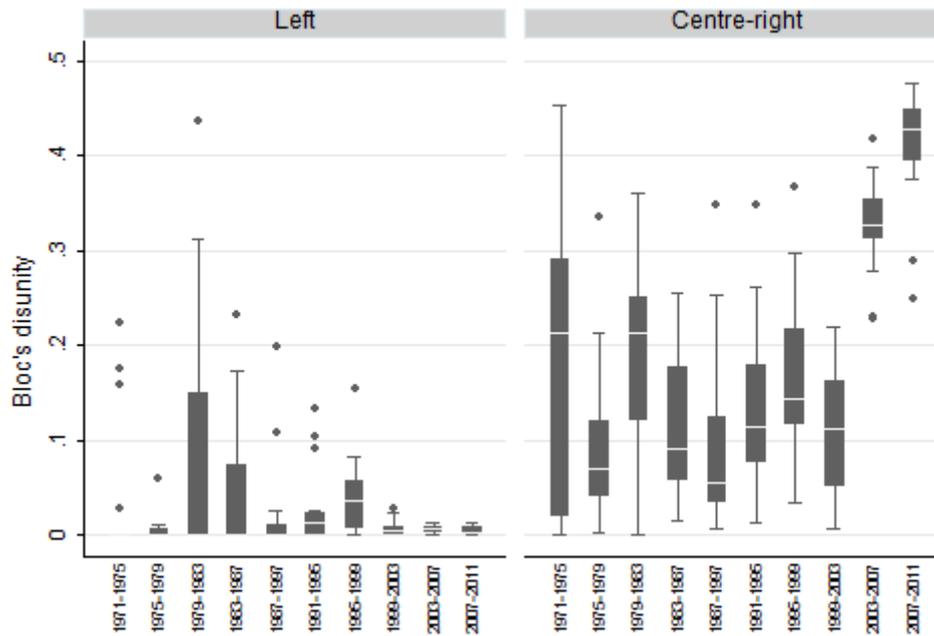
<sup>13</sup> Results remain robust if we re-run the models with a measure only including the seat share of centre-right parties included in the alliance.

<sup>14</sup> In the 1992 elections (simultaneously with a first increase in disunity of the right), the SVP nominated an extra candidate in an (failed) attempt to alter the government formula.



**Figure 4: Centre-right disunity and alliance strength - Nomination strategy and electoral success in the canton of Aargau (over legislative terms)**

The splits in the centre-right majority are representative of the developments in other cantons (Figure 5). In the 1990s, we measure a growing disunity of the centre-right in a few cantons, but since the 2000s, most cantons are characterised by a new, tri-polar pattern of competition, with the centre-right majority being split between two poles, whereas the left-wing minority is politically united.



**Figure 5: The disunity of the political blocs (by legislative term)**

### **Variables included in the analysis**

Table 2 offers an overview of further variables included in the analysis. We consider a set of variables which are helpful to explain the composition of governments in the Swiss case: the size of the centre-right or the left-wing bloc (measured by their cumulative seat share in parliament),<sup>15</sup> the share of mandates in the previous government term, incumbency, district magnitude (i.e. the number of seats in government), electoral rules (plurality or majority rule, see appendix). Further, electoral alliances were introduced into the analysis as the percentage of left-wing parties included in a centre-right electoral alliance.

<sup>15</sup> Information on vote shares is not available for all cantons. Furthermore vote shares in national elections are not a good proxy for party strength in small cantons (with small constituencies in national elections) (Bochsler and Wasserfallen 2013).

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics by bloc**

Variable	Centre-right (majority)				Left (minority)			
	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
<i>Dependent variables</i>								
Candidates (per seat*100)	90.71	29.37	42.86	260.00	40.79	27.25	0.00	200.00
Elected (%)	73.38	14.92	28.57	100.00	24.25	13.38	0.00	60.00
<i>Explanatory variables</i>								
Disunity (own bloc)	0.19	0.14	0.00	0.48	0.03	0.07	0.00	0.45
After 1991	0.51	0.50	0.00	1.00	0.50	0.50	0.00	1.00
Bloc strength (%)	67.50	14.54	31.00	93.33	26.60	11.49	5.00	52.31
Disunity (other bloc)	0.03	0.07	0.00	0.45	0.18	0.13	0.00	0.48
Effective number of parties	2.47	0.48	1.55	3.95	1.58	0.48	1.00	3.42
Government mandates (t-1)	69.59	21.91	0.00	100.00	22.13	13.89	0.00	60.00
Incumbents	3.53	1.24	0.00	6.00	1.13	0.84	0.00	4.00
District magnitude (seats in gov.)	6.12	1.09	5.00	9.00	6.13	1.09	5.00	9.00
Electoral rule (ln)	3.79	0.18	3.51	4.07	3.79	0.18	3.51	4.07
Alliance strength (%)	29.81	34.59	0.00	100.00	19.04	32.14	0.00	100.00
N	212				208			

#### 4. Models and results

This section analyses whether under plurality or majority rule, political minorities are included in government in the Swiss cantons. Our units of analysis are political blocs in elections, nested within cantons. We estimate one set of models for the centre-right majority and a second set for the left-wing minority. We analyse both the competitiveness of elections (number of candidates running for each of the political blocs), and the composition of governments (percentage of mandates won by the bloc) as dependent variables.

For both dependent variables, we ran the following model, where  $i$  is the election year, and  $j$  are the cantons.

$$y_{i,j} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{disunity}_{i,j} + \beta_2 \cdot \Delta \text{ period}_j + \beta_3 \cdot \Delta \text{ period}_j \cdot \text{disunity}_{i,j} + \beta_4 \cdot \text{controls}_{i,j} + \varepsilon_{ij}$$

The analysis relies on linear regressions, with binary variables for the cantons, in order to account for fixed effects. Our main interest lies in the effect of the political coherence of the two major blocs (measured as disunity). We distinguish two periods, before and after the 1991 national election, which stands for important changes in the Swiss party system (see Table 3).<sup>16</sup>

We expect the number of candidates to increase in the post-1991 period, as we move from a voluntary proportionality to a competition model. Bloc disunity should not affect competition at this stage. For our second dependent variable, the seat shares retained in government, we expect disunity to hit the representation of the political majority, and to boost the representation of the

<sup>16</sup> We refrain from introducing a three-way interaction with the political bloc, thus privileging separate models to simplify the analysis.

political minority. Electoral alliances have the opposite effect. This effect should come into play particularly in the second period.

## Candidates

The first set of models (table 3, specifications 1-4) addresses the number of candidates nominated by the parties. The number of candidates is largely determined by previously held mandates in government, and whether these office-holders run again as incumbents. The cumulative vote share of the parties (bloc size) affects the nomination strategies of the left, but not of the right-wing bloc. Instead of finding consistent evidence for the voluntary proportionality model (where vote shares translate into nomination strategies), the effects instead point to a status quo effect – i.e. parties consider the ex-ante number of seats in their nomination strategies.<sup>17</sup>

The effect of disunity on the number of candidates is displayed in Figure 6 (upper part). In neither of the investigated periods is there a statistically significant effect of disunity on candidate nominations. Instead, the number of candidates can be explained by a set of control variables.

## Representation of the majority and the minority

Turning to the dependent variable measuring the government composition (number of mandates), we find that incumbency, the fractionalisation of the party system, and the vote share of the bloc considerably affect the number of seats held by each bloc (Table 3, specifications 5-8). While we thus find that the composition of government is to a large extent a matter of vote-seat proportionality, the models explaining the nomination state (specifications 1-4) did not show any correlation between bloc size and the number of candidates. Hence, our models did *not* confirm that the proportional result is a consequence of a voluntary restriction on behalf of the parties to put up few candidates. Instead, we find effects which are consistent with our expectations about competition and the cohesion of the blocs (Figure 6, lower part; Table 3, specifications 5, 7). If the centre-right bloc is disunited, the left-wing parties profit, whereas the centre-right tend to lose in representation. The effect is statistically non-significant in the pre-1991 period, but it becomes stronger and statistically significant in the post-1991 period, when elections became more competitive. In those cantons in which the centre-right is split, the left-wing party starts gaining ground in the cantonal executives. In cantons, where the majority is most disunited (disunity of 1), the majority tends to lose a share of 7 percent of the seats in

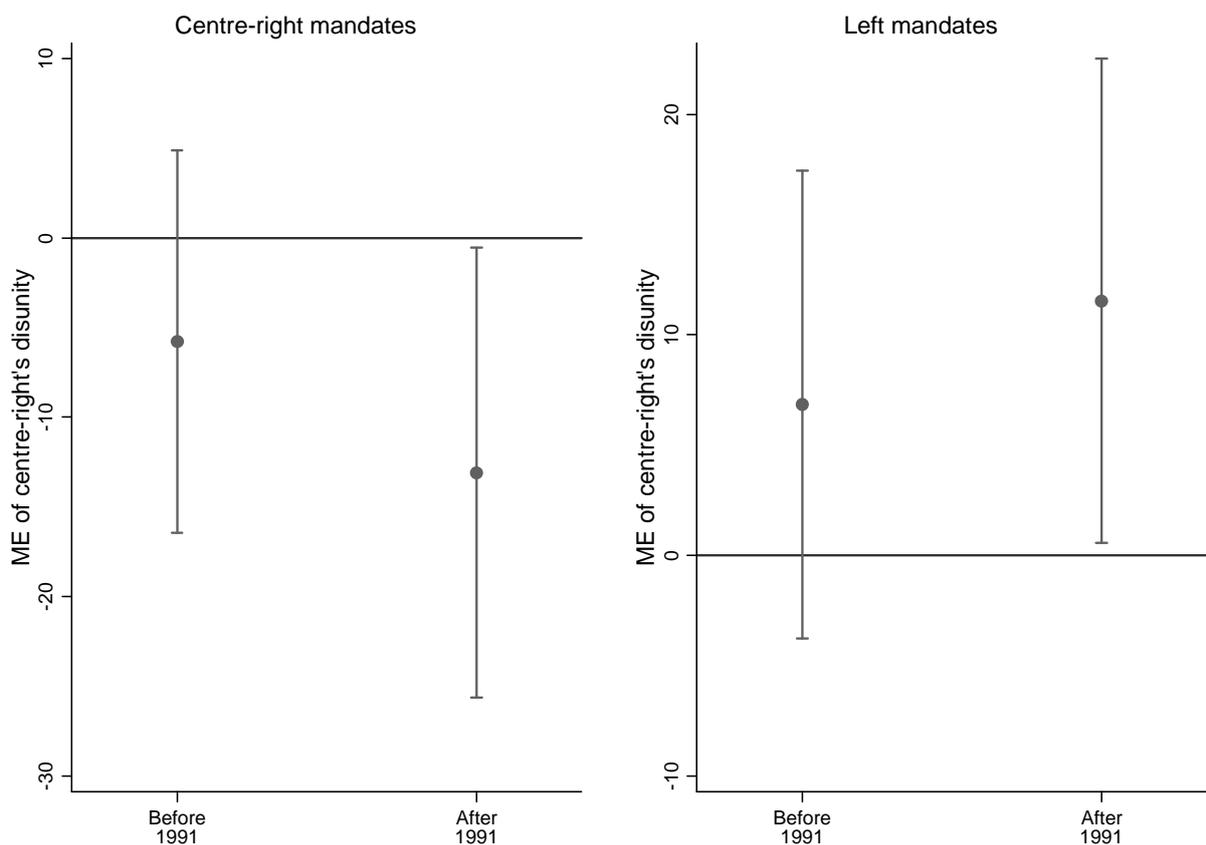
<sup>17</sup> See also Lutz (2014) for a related argument, but contrary results. Different from Lutz, our analysis distinguishes the effect of parties conserving or improving upon the number of seats held in the previous election period, and the effect of incumbency (i.e. ministers running again in elections).

government, whereas the left-wing minority tends to gain a 6 percent seat share. This effect corresponds to the model of competition in which the cohesiveness of political blocs plays a major role. It contradicts the voluntary proportionality model according to which relative party positions and the cohesiveness of the blocs should not matter.

**Table 3: Determinants of centre-right and left nomination strategies (candidates per seat) and electoral successes (mandates in %) in Swiss cantonal government elections (1971-2011)**

	Candidates (per seat*100)				Mandates (%)			
	Centre-right (majority)		Left (minority)		Centre-right (majority)		Left (minority)	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Disunity (own bloc)	7.645 (22.31)		-21.79 (28.15)		-5.773 (6.47)		2.453 (6.82)	
After 1991	11.47 <sup>+</sup> (6.11)	8.995 <sup>+</sup> (4.74)	10.54* (4.21)	10.37*** (2.98)	1.333 (2.26)	-1.972 (1.76)	0.419 (1.92)	2.337 (1.55)
After 1991* Disunity (own bloc)	-15.79 (24.74)				-7.320 (10.29)			
Bloc strength (%)	0.234 (0.33)	0.238 (0.34)	1.123** (0.36)	1.203*** (0.36)	0.719*** (0.14)	0.752*** (0.15)	0.992*** (0.23)	0.989*** (0.22)
Disunity (other bloc)	-42.95 (32.37)	-42.32 (29.05)	17.51 (16.40)	7.273 (11.10)	-7.173 (7.89)	-11.72 (7.85)	6.841 (6.44)	10.80* (4.94)
Effective number of parties	9.208 (11.60)	5.923 (10.73)	9.616* (4.85)	10.81* (4.54)	-5.194* (2.57)	-7.545** (2.56)	-4.452 <sup>+</sup> (2.26)	-4.830* (2.25)
Government mandates (t-1)	0.218* (0.09)	0.234* (0.10)	0.423** (0.15)	0.413** (0.14)	0.0163 (0.03)	0.0296 (0.03)	0.123 (0.08)	0.110 (0.08)
Incumbents	-2.707 (2.45)	-2.768 (2.45)	-6.537** (2.09)	-6.617** (2.06)	2.493*** (0.72)	2.232** (0.73)	4.237*** (1.12)	4.133*** (1.12)
District magnitude (seats in gov.)	-0.422 (8.10)	-0.387 (7.75)	-0.112 (3.46)	0.999 (3.50)	-1.597 (1.89)	-1.623 (1.94)	1.856 (1.67)	2.203 (1.67)
Electoral rule (ln)	22.34 (19.31)	25.87 (17.67)	-8.986 (13.64)	-7.191 (9.09)	19.11 <sup>+</sup> (10.78)	23.51* (9.28)	-4.747 (14.42)	-6.103 (13.85)
Electoral alliance (%)		-67.37 (47.34)		-25.70 (27.20)		-36.90 (22.51)		18.57 (13.69)
After 1991 * Electoral alliance (%)		9.616 (45.06)		-79.16* (32.32)		58.15** (21.88)		-42.42* (16.66)
After 1991 * Disunity (other bloc)			-14.93 (19.04)				4.707 (8.58)	
Constant	-44.67 (93.19)	-48.95 (84.25)	13.39 (59.72)	-6.364 (50.35)	-24.22 (43.43)	-35.82 (38.81)	-6.241 (53.48)	-3.548 (51.52)
Observations	212	212	208	208	212	212	208	208
R <sup>2</sup>	0.351	0.361	0.642	0.662	0.714	0.720	0.716	0.724

Robust standard errors in parentheses; Cantons fixed-effects not displayed; + p < 0.10, \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001



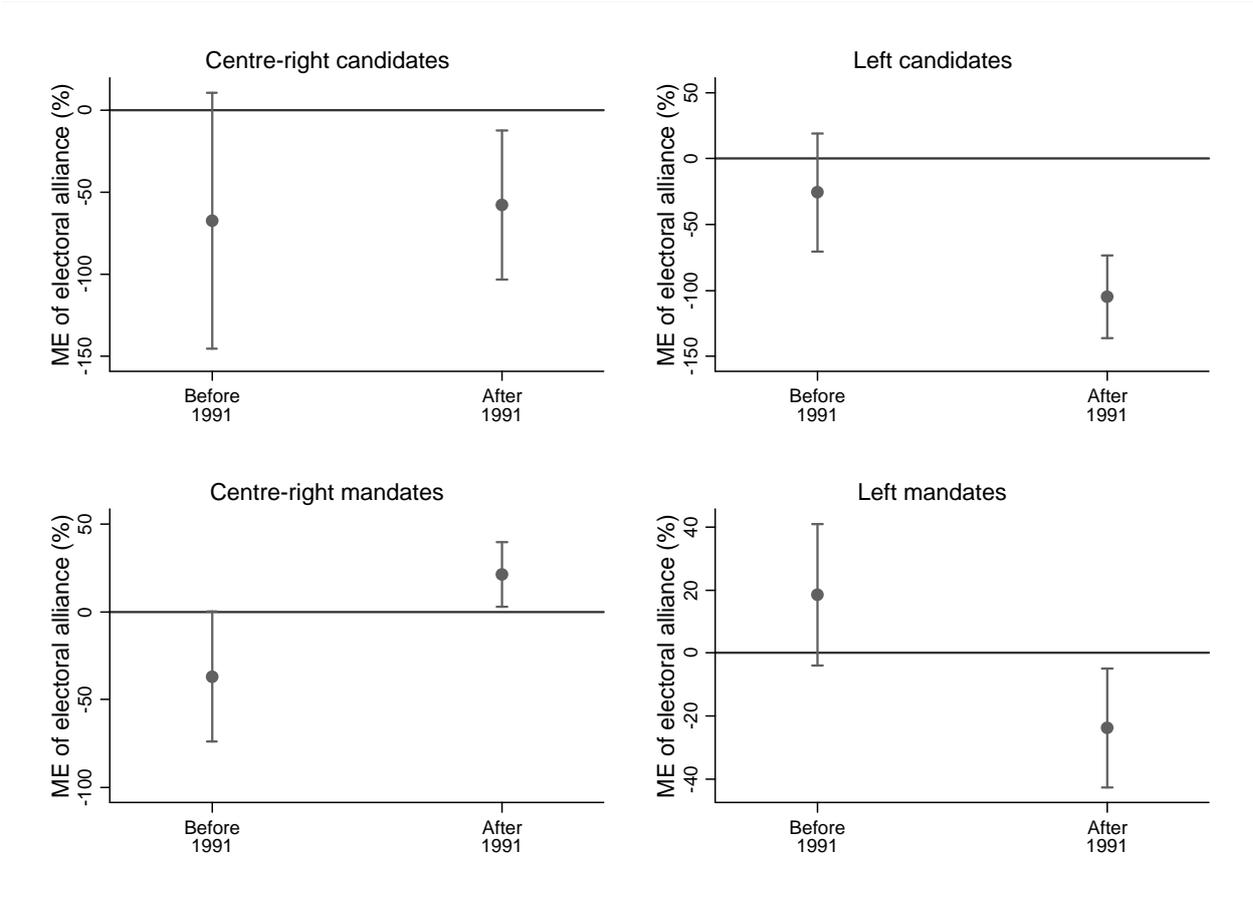
**Figure 6: Marginal effects of centre-right disunity on electoral success in Swiss cantonal government elections, before and after 1991, (90%-CIs)**

For a more direct measure of cooperation within the party blocs, we also analyse whether the same effects occur as we turn to information on electoral alliances in governmental elections. It captures the size of pre-electoral alliances for governmental elections (cumulative seats of the alliance parties in parliament, percentages).

First, we find a statistically significant effect on the number of candidates (figure 7, upper part; Table 2, specifications 2 and 4): inclusive alliances tend to reduce the number of candidates in both blocs. The effect is statistically significant and stronger in the second period, 1992-2011, and fails to reach statistical significance before this point. Note, however, that the effect might be driven by more complete information on alliances on which we were able to rely for the second period.

With regards to the seat allocation (second dependent variable), the effect of alliances changes between the two analysed periods (Figure 7, bottom part; Table 3, models 6 and 8): it benefits the left-wing minority in the pre-1991 period, and the centre-right majority in the 1991 period. We interpret this as a change in the patterns of alliances: in the 1970s and 1980s, alliances were part of the voluntary proportionality model, guaranteeing the inclusiveness of governments, and especially also of minorities. After 1991, alliances are no longer all-inclusive, but they become a

tool to coordinate parties of the centre-right majority.<sup>18</sup> Henceforth, they become relevant in determining the success of the centre-right in retaining its seats in the executive.



**Figure 7: Marginal effect of electoral alliances (%) on the nomination strategy and electoral success in Swiss cantonal government elections before and after 1991, (90%-CIs)**

**Robustness checks**

Several robustness checks were conducted. In order to account for the limited nature of our dependent variables, we carried out censored linear regressions. Furthermore, we used an alternative definition of political blocs, also including smaller parties (see Appendix) and introduced disunity as a lagged variable. The robustness checks showed results consistent with the findings of the linear regression.<sup>19</sup>

Results also remain robust if we alter the year, at which we split the sample, with 1987, 1991 and 1995 as possible cut-off points. When we chose 1995 to split the sample, the marginal effect of centre-right disunity on the mandates of the centre-right and left bloc is no longer statistically significant, which is most likely due to the limited cross-sectional variance in bloc disunity in the

<sup>18</sup> See Figure A.1 in the Appendix (graphs in the centre)

<sup>19</sup> We additionally find a statically significant effect of centre-right disunity on both left and centre-right candidates before 1991 by lagging the disunity measure.

post-1995 period. Also, the effects do not prevail over the entire period, but only in the second period. Our hypotheses posit that in the period, when voluntary proportionality prevailed, bloc cohesion does not matter for the election outcomes (table 1).

Finally, we have re-run the models, excluding variables, which are collinear with the main explanatory variables (fragmentation, size of own bloc), with still stable results. Results of the various robustness checks are available from the authors.

## **5. Conclusions**

Major changes in the Swiss party system have also affected the core of the Swiss consensus model: the formation of governments. This paper provides new evidence about the election of governments in the Swiss cantons. It argues that the principle of voluntary proportionality is in decline: elections in which the main parties agree ex-ante on a seat allocation, and self-restrict their number of candidates, are becoming rare. Instead, elections have become increasingly competitive since the 1990s. However, despite the elections under a majoritarian voting system in multi-seat districts, cantonal governments have remained inclusive. Results suggest that the left-wing parties, which are in the position of a minority in almost all Swiss cantons, could profit from increasing political splits within the centre-right majority. As the majority faces difficulties in competing as a united front, elections have become competitive, but have simultaneously allowed the left-wing minority to keep and occasionally even to increase its representation. Empirically, this paper investigates the elections to the Swiss cantonal governments in all 23 cantons electing their governments in direct elections and by plurality or majority rules, in the period 1971-2011.

The voluntary proportionality model, which continues to dominate the literature on Swiss politics (Lehmbruch 1967; Neidhart 1970; Vatter 2002; Linder 2012), argues that all-party governments are the consequence of an elite compromise. According to the model, the centre-right parties (the political majority in almost all cantons) leave some of the seats in government to the left-wing parties, in many cases, by nominating fewer candidates than there are seats available. Empirically however, with the increasing fractionalisation and polarisation of the Swiss party system (Lutz and Selb 2007), and the party systems in the Swiss cantons (Ladner 2004b; Bochsler and Wasserfallen 2013), cantonal government elections have become more competitive since the 1990s, so that the voluntary proportionality model is no longer in play.

Instead, the period since the 1990s is characterised by a combination of elements of competition and consensus. In elections by majority or plurality vote, the centre-right majority is highly successful if it is politically united, whereas political splits reduce the discipline of the voters of

the centre-right, and put political alliances at risk. As a result, centre-right candidates compete against each other in elections. Elections have become more competitive, and the political left can capitalise on this disunity. Empirically, this paper provides a new measure of party positions at the cantonal level, which is based on national referenda and popular initiatives brought to the vote in Switzerland. On the occasion of every popular vote, parties issue voting recommendations, and cantonal party branches often deviate from the recommendations of national parties. These voting recommendations can thus serve as a measure of the political location of cantonal parties over the past 40 years. The results show that since the 1990s, the party system of Switzerland has increasingly moved towards a tri-polar pattern, although this change has not occurred simultaneously in all cantons. The resulting disunity of the centre-right has had a major effect on governmental elections: where the centre-right is disunited, it tends to lose governmental seats, to the benefit of the left-wing parties.

The cantonal level allows for systematic comparative tests of the hypotheses. We argue that the effect is not unique to the cantonal level: the transformation has also similarly affected the election of the Swiss Federal Council,<sup>20</sup> and changed policy-making at the national level (cf. Traber, this issue). While increasing polarisation and competition has thus strengthened the Swiss model of consensus government in a first instance, the results are fragile governing coalitions: the inclusion of the political left depends on the incapability of the centre-right to forge alliances.

<sup>20</sup> Elections have become increasingly competitive, but did not profit the political majority. Due to space restrictions, we do not include the results in this article.

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## Appendix: Operationalisation

### Measure of party positions

Voting recommendations issued by parties on the occasion of national popular votes build the fundament of our measure of party positions. Voting recommendations are regularly issued and usually follow from party internal votes during party congresses. In addition to the national voting recommendations, cantonal branches are free to either reaffirm the recommendation of the national party, or promulgate a diverging one. To determine a cantonal party's political position, we generally used national voting recommendations, but used cantonal voting recommendation whenever they issued a deviating voting recommendation. The number of popular votes and thus issues varies slightly between legislations from a minimum of 16 issues in the period 1979-1983 to a maximum of 52 issues in the period 1991-1995.

**Table A. 1: Popular votes and number of issues at the national level (1971-2011)**

Legislation	Period	Number of popular votes	Number of deviating voting recommendations
39	1971-1975	25	104
40	1975-1979	47	381
41	1979-1983	16	242
42	1983-1987	35	420
43	1987-1991	25	308
44	1991-1995	52	547
45	1995-1999	34	327
46	1999-2003	47	316
47	2003-2007	26	161
48	2007-2011	27	188

The analysis covers all cantonal parties holding at least a seat in parliament in a specific legislative period (between 77 and 167 cantonal party branches per legislative period) and with less than 10% of voting recommendations missing. Recommendations were coded on a metrical scale, where approval was coded 1, opposition 0, whereas the intermediate category (0.5) was used for ‘empty ballot’ or ‘permissive vote’ recommendations. The permissive vote (dt.: “Stimmfreigabe”) is a quite frequent recommendation where political parties after a discussion decide deliberately to not issue any recommendation on this issue. This occurs typically if the party is split. While major political parties usually issue recommendations for all ballot issues, smaller parties might occasionally miss a few referenda or initiatives. In cases for which this amounts to less than 10% of all issues in a legislative term, we have imputed their position from the other referenda and initiatives. For the Bourgeois-

democratic party, which split in 2008 from the Swiss People's Party, we have imputed 5 out of 36 issues, all of which were voted on in the very beginning of the legislative term when the party did not yet exist.

For each legislative term, for a total of 10 legislative periods between 1971 and 2011, we estimated the most important political dimensions by running a principle component analysis on the voting recommendations and applying the Kaiser criterion (eigenvalue larger than 1). The division into legislative terms allows us to measure temporal change in the underlying dimensions and in the voting recommendations (table A.2).

**Table A. 1: Factor analysis - Retained components, eigenvalue, proportion of explained variance, proportion of total variance explained**

Legislative period	Retained components	Component 1	Component 2	Component 3	Component 4	Proportion of explained variance (total)
		Eigenvalue / Proportion	Eigenvalue / Proportion	Eigenvalue / Proportion	Eigenvalue / Proportion	
1971-1975	4	4.97/ 0.22	4.94/ 0.21	4.60/ 0.20	2.68/ 0.12	0.75
1975-1979	4	13.01/ 0.29	7.71/ 0.17	6.06/ 0.13	4.36/ 0.10	0.70
1979-1983	4	4.19/ 0.26	3.08/ 0.19	2.37/ 0.15	2.20/ 0.14	0.74
1983-1987	4	11.3/ 0.33	4.48/ 0.13	4.30/ 0.13	3.46/ 0.10	0.69
1987-1991	4	12.80/ 0.51	3.10/ 0.12	2.75/0.11	2.41/0.10	0.84
1991-1995	4	10.69/0.20	7.63/0.15	5.90/0.11	5.48/0.09	0.57
1995-1999	4	6.88/0.21	5.26/0.15	4.35/0.13	3.85/0.11	0.61
1999-2003	4	15.70/0.33	7.89/0.17	6.88/0.15	5.40/0.11	0.76
2003-2007	4	7.65/0.29	7.46/0.29	5.18/0.20	1.95/0.08	0.78
2007-2011	4	10.61/0.39	8.21/0.30	3.33/0.12	1.29/0.05	0.87

## Definition of the blocs

Table A. 3: Party classification by blocs - main definition and alternative definition

Political bloc	Parties	Parties (alternative definition)
<b>Centre-right</b>	Free Democratic Party (FDP), Christian Democratic Party (CVP), Swiss People's Party (SVP), Liberal Party (LPS), Conservative Democratic Party (BDP)	Free Democratic Party (FDP), Christian Democratic Party (CVP), Swiss People's Party (SVP), Liberal Party (LPS), Conservative Democratic Party (BDP), Green Liberal Party (GLP), Swiss Democrats (SD), Federal Democratic Union of Switzerland (EDU)
<b>Left</b>	Social Democratic Party (SP), Christian Social Party (CSP), Green Party (GPS), SolidaritéS (Sol.), Ring of Independents (LdU), Evangelical People's Party (EVP).	Social Democratic Party (SP), Christian Social Party (CSP), Green Party (GPS), SolidaritéS (Sol.), Ring of Independents (LdU), Evangelical People's Party (EVP) Party of Labour (PdA), Autonomous Socialist Party (PSA), Progressive Organisation of Switzerland (POCH)

## Calculation of the disunity measure

The position of cantonal parties as determined by the principal component analysis (see above) was then used to measure the level of disunity within the centre-right and the left political bloc. The measure was constructed as follows:

$disunity\_abs$  is an absolute measure of disunity of the political bloc ( $bloc$ ).

$$disunity\_abs(bloc) = \frac{\sum_{d=1}^D \left( eigenvalue_d \cdot \left( \sum_{p=1}^{P(bloc)} (pos_{p,d} - \mu_{bloc,d})^2 \cdot seats_p \right) \right)}{\sum_{d=1}^D eigenvalue_d \cdot \sum_{p=1}^{P(bloc)} seats_p}$$

The political space consists of  $D$  dimensions  $d$ , and a political bloc ( $bloc$ ) consists of  $P$  parties  $p$ .

$pos_{p,d}$  denominates the position of party  $p$  on dimension  $d$ ;  $seats_p$  its number of seats in parliament (as a measure of the importance of each party). The measure of disunity has been rescaled (disunity rescaled = 1 - (1/disunity)) to range between 0 (unity) and 1 (maximal theoretical disunity within a bloc).

$\mu_{bloc,d}$  is defined as the mean position of all parties  $p$  of the bloc on dimension  $d$ .

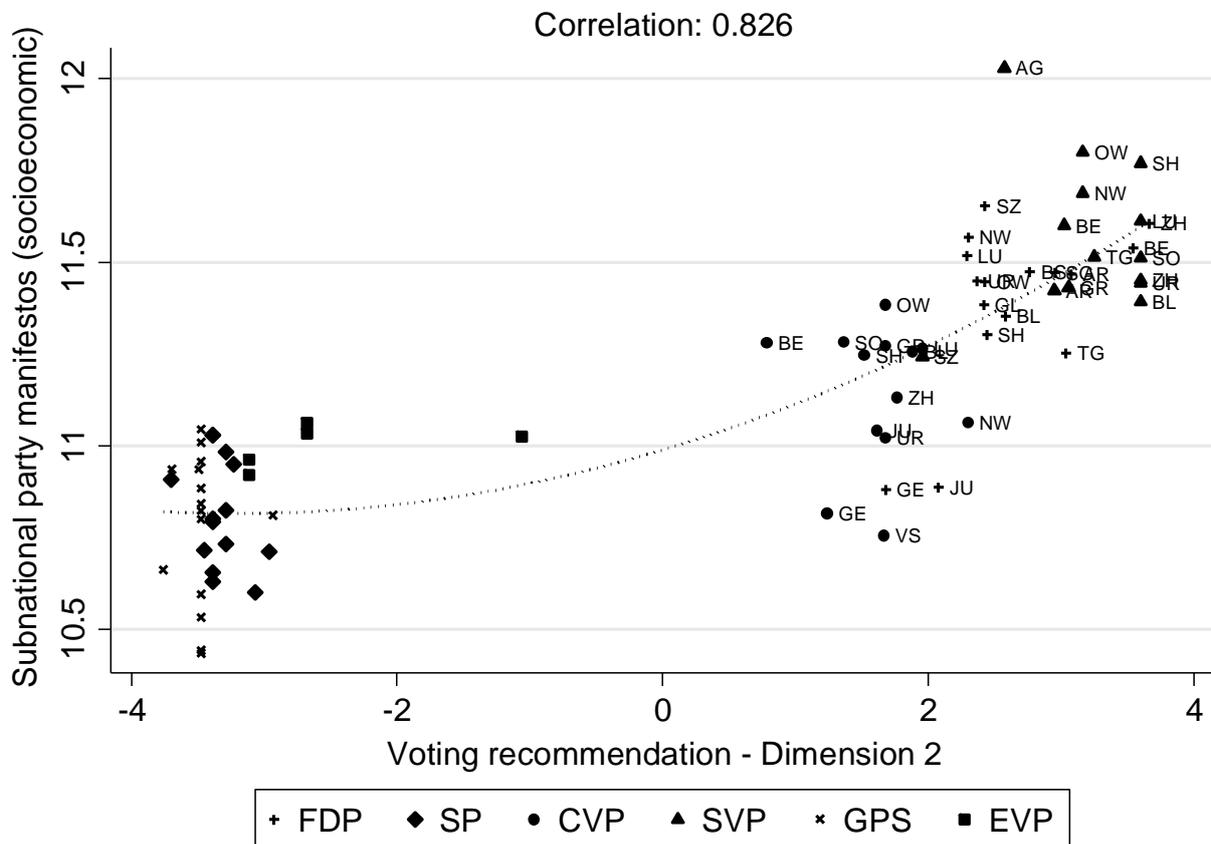
$$\mu_{bloc,d} = \frac{\sum_{p=1}^{p(bloc)} pos_{p,d} \cdot seats_p}{\sum_{p=1}^{p(bloc)} seats_p}$$

Disunity is a relative measure of disunity of the bloc, considering the overall variation in party positions. We have transformed it, so that it ranges from 0 (unity) to 1 (disunity).

$$disunity(bloc) = 1 - var_{TOT} / disunity\_abs(bloc)$$

$$var_{TOT} = \frac{\sum_{p=1}^P seats_p \cdot \frac{\sum_{d=1}^D |pos_{p,d}| \cdot eigenvalue_d}{\sum_{d=1}^D eigenvalue_d}}{\sum_{p=1}^P seats_p}$$

## Validity tests



Note: Labels for cantons only displayed for centre-right parties, due to the limited space.

**Figure A. 1: Correlation party positions: voting recommendation (dimension 2) and socioeconomic left-right dimension from party manifesto, legislature 2007-11 (Giger et al. 2011)**

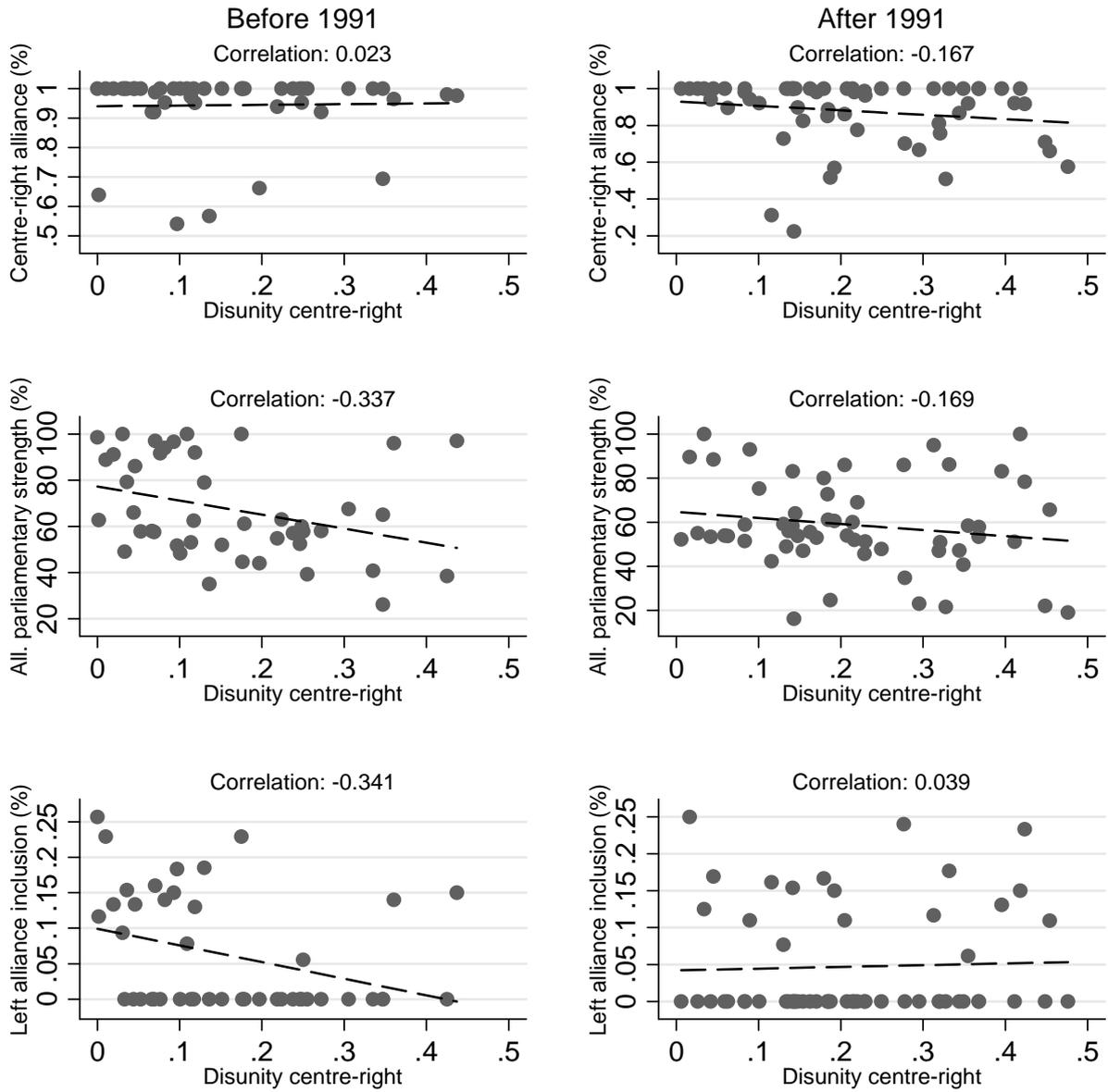


Figure A. 2: Correlation centre-right disunity and electoral alliances, before and after 1991

## **Election rules**

The Swiss cantons profit from wide autonomy in setting up their own constitutional order, and while most cantons use the plurality or majority rule to elect their governments, they differ in the definition of the threshold applicable in the first round of elections. In the “majority rule” cantons, all votes, including empty votes, count for the determination of the absolute majority, so that to be elected a candidate needs to be listed on every second ballot.

In the “plurality rule” cantons, empty votes are not counted for this purpose. As voters in cantons with five-seat-executives, on average only cast three or four votes, and voters in cantons with seven-seat-executives cast on average five votes, up to one third of the votes remain empty. As a result, candidates can be elected even if they are only listed only around 35% of the ballots (50%, diminished by the rate of empty votes). This is more or less the threshold which is considered typical as an entry threshold in plurality vote systems (Lijphart 1994).

Two cantons, Geneva and Grisons, used to apply different rules with the thresholds amounting to 33% of the ballots (Geneva) or (de facto) to 58% of the ballots (Grisons).

We operationalise majority rule with the level of the threshold (logarithmised). In all models, we have excluded the two cantons with proportional electoral rules (Ticino and Zug), and one with a cantonal assembly ("Landsgemeinde", Appenzell Innerrhoden).

The rules were coded from Lutz and Strohmman (1998) and from the cantonal election laws.