

### 43. Chocolate Democracy<sup>1</sup>

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(Chapter prepared for the Oxford Handbook of Swiss Politics, 2023, eds. Emmenegger, Patrick, et al.)

#### 1. Introduction

Swiss citizens take pride in their export industry. Although chocolate figures among those products that the global public most frequently associates with its export industry, Switzerland also stands out thanks to the unique features of its model of democracy. Swiss citizens take pride in their democracy, and externally, the Swiss political institutions are widely considered as contributing to the country's exceptional political stability, despite the historically deep splits between cultural and political communities. However, there is very limited knowledge about the diffusion of the Swiss model of democracy to the world. Democracy promotion finds overwhelming support among Swiss citizens, a 90 per cent majority believe that Switzerland shall promote democracy abroad.<sup>2</sup> This is mirrored by scholarly claims that Swiss democracy could offer 'possible solutions to conflict in multicultural societies' (Linder and Mueller 2021). Among others, 'Presence Switzerland', a governmental PR agency tasked with promoting Swiss interests abroad, also supports initiatives to popularize features of Swiss democracy in the world.

Prominent scholars of Swiss Politics identify in the selective pillars of Swiss democracy—direct democracy, the consociational model, and federalism—advantages that beg imitation abroad: Kriesi and Trechsel (2008, 16) praise the Swiss system as 'an ideal model of "unity in diversity" for European integration', Cheneval and Ferrín (2018) see in the three (municipal, cantonal, and federal) layers of Swiss citizenship a solution for EU citizenship, and Stojanović (2022) recommends direct democracy as a cure against populism. In response to separatist challenges, Linder and Mueller (2021, 95) refer to the bargained cascade of 'sovereignty referendums' that were central to settling the Jura conflict. This academic narrative is mirrored in the claims of political elites, who stress that there are important lessons to learn from the Swiss case: 'Based on the largely positive experience with democracy [...] and the strong popular support for such policies, one would expect Switzerland to be at the forefront of global democracy promotion.' (Geissbühler 2022). Furthermore, due to its neutral foreign policy status, Switzerland indeed sees itself as having a particular responsibility to

contribute to peacebuilding globally (Goetschel 2011). As of 2002, the promotion of democracy abroad has been part of the Swiss Foreign Policy Strategy.

However, how are the four main pillars of Swiss democracy—direct democracy, its consensual executive, the consociational democracy model, and federalism—received abroad, and reflected in the literature on comparative politics?

While the diffusion of institutional innovations among the Swiss cantons has become a classic theme in the literature on Swiss federalism (Walter and Emmenegger 2019; Williams 1914), scholars are more reserved as to whether the historically grown and partly idiosyncratic institutions of Swiss democracy can be used as a template for foreign constitutions (Linder and Mueller 2021, 275). Scholarship on cross-national learning from the Swiss case is scarce, in spite of the praise heaped on its unique institutional models.

The contribution of this chapter is three-fold. First, capitalizing on the work assembled in this handbook, this chapter reviews the showcases from the Swiss political system, and juxtaposes this work from a ‘Swiss Politics’ perspective with the view of Swiss democracy in the comparative politics literature. Second, it asks where Swiss citizens see the strengths of Swiss democracy, and third, it asks whether and how the promotion of Swiss democracy builds on these supposed strengths of Swiss democracy.

The next section analyses Swiss citizens’ self-view in a comparative perspective. The further sections follow four important institutional features (or ‘selling points’) of the Swiss model, direct democracy, the consensus model, consociational democracy, and federalism, followed by concluding remarks.

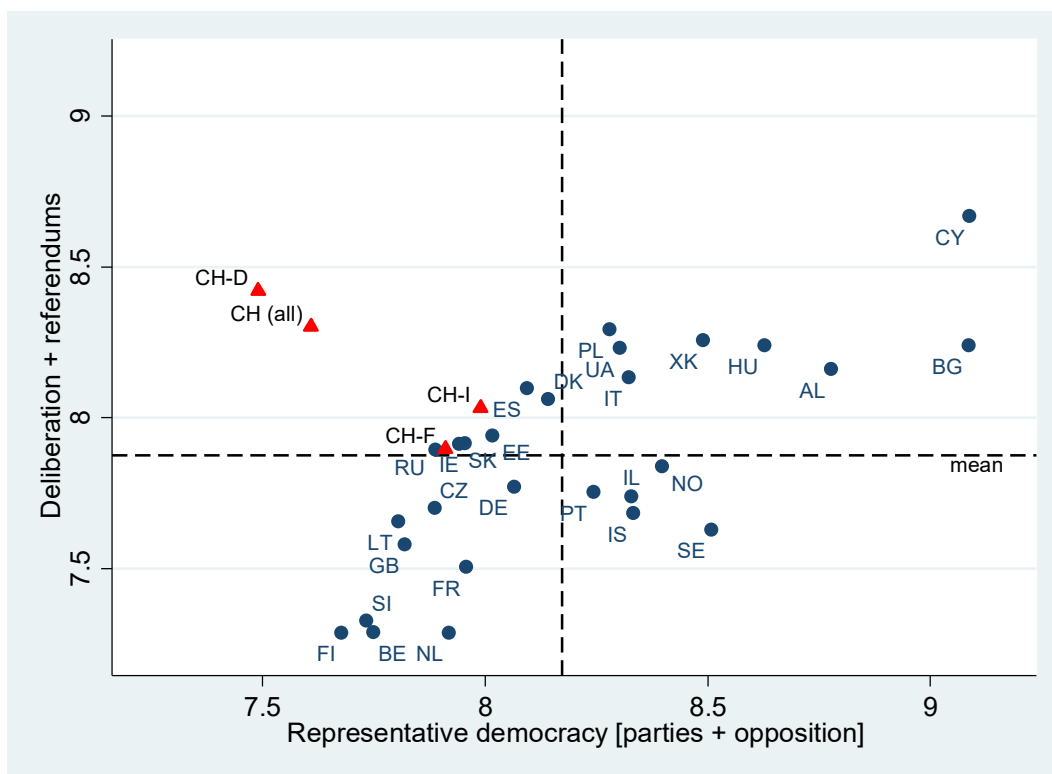
## **2. Constitutional patriotism 2.0? The self-view**

First, I turn to the self-view by the citizens and residents of Switzerland. Freitag and Zumbunn (in this volume) report that the Swiss citizens express an extraordinarily high satisfaction with their democracy. However, due to the subjective understanding citizens associate with democracy, the normative model of democracy shared by Swiss respondents may be of greater interest. In the European Social Survey in 2012–13, respondents were asked about their expectations of democracy. Four (out of fifteen) survey items highlight a remarkably different understanding of democracy among Swiss citizens and residents compared

to their European counterparts. Empirically, these understandings fall along two dimensions, pertaining to *representative democracy* (the importance of clearly distinct parties and of a critical opposition) and *deliberative and direct democracy* (the importance of debate among voters preceding political decisions, and whether citizens should have a final say in referendums).

Figure 43.1 displays the (average) expectation of citizens by country (analytical weights included). Referendums and deliberations play an important role in the Swiss understanding of democracy. Swiss respondents rate the importance of having binding and final referendums as being equally important as having free elections. As best illustrated by the *Landsgemeinde*, Swiss respondents have a notion of 'Demokratie' that relies heavily on referendums and initiatives, and on deliberation in the course of referendum campaigns, while other democracies are incomplete. My use of the German term 'Demokratie' is deliberate, because German-speakers of Switzerland have much more pronounced views on this, while the Swiss-French and -Italian meaning of democracy is closer to the common European understanding (sample size: 271 and forty-six). Vice-versa, Swiss respondents, especially German-speakers, systematically and strongly de-emphasize the importance of conventional mechanisms and institutions of representative democracy, such as alternation between governments and oppositions, and checks and balances on power.

Figure 43.1: What citizens expect from democracy



Source of data: European Social Survey (2012–13)

The Swiss often serve as prime example of *constitutional patriots*: they are tied together not by a common language or religion, but by their political history and the practice of democracy (Kriesi 1999). Stutzer and Frey (2000) claim that direct democracy makes the Swiss happier. One might be tempted to call this glorification of Swiss democracy as the real essence of *constitutional patriotism*.

### 3. Swiss insights on direct democracy

Switzerland is the global champion in the use of direct democracy, and there is an impressive body of research building on this: empirical evidence from the Swiss cantons shows that frequent referendum and initiative votes boost Swiss citizens' satisfaction with their democracy (Stadelmann-Steffen and Vatter 2012). Meanwhile, non-Swiss political elites and scholars of comparative politics often associate direct democracy with undesirable outcomes: the fears relate to minority rights under majority rule (Gamble 1997) the unpredictability of politics, and changing policies (Dibiasi et al. 2018), or the tendency to increase public spending. Direct democracy is supposed to offer mobilization advantages either for privileged groups, or for populists and demagogues, while voters decide on issues without being adequately informed. It also

supposedly impairs the ability of governments to pursue coherent policies (Schmidt 2002). Accordingly, comparative work finds the most staunch supporters of direct democracy to be citizens with populist attitudes (Mohrenberg et al. 2021).

Research on direct democratic institutions and practice in Switzerland has debunked many of these concerns. Comparative evidence from Swiss cantons shows that direct democracy does not systematically lead to undesirable policy outcomes, such as increased public spending, and referendums may even have a restrictive effect on spending (Emmenegger et al. forthcoming). Further, the direct and indirect effects of direct democratic institutions lead to an improvement of the quality of democracy (e.g. Leemann and Stadelmann-Steffen 2022; Leemann and Wasserfallen 2016), as they help avoid ‘[a gap] developing between the political elite and ordinary citizens’ (Linder and Mueller 2021, 5).

However, moving policies closer to the (median) voter preference also translates into a 'tyranny of the majority' (Gamble 1997), which neglects the rights of political and social minorities. The history of Swiss direct democracy offers numerous examples thereof, from the ban on kosher butchering in 1893, to the rejection of female suffrage in 1959, up to municipal referendums and assembly votes on citizenship issues (Helbling and Kriesi 2004; Vatter et al. 2014). While the cultural rights of domestic linguistic minorities are regularly approved in referendums (Stojanović 2006), rejections of minority rights cover a wide array of structural minorities, including both non-enfranchised groups, as well as other disadvantaged groups: for example, twice, the Swiss people voted against the interests of disabled people (pension reforms in 1995 and 2007), and maternity leave was also twice rejected (in 1987 and 1999), before a more pared-back form was accepted in 2004 (Frey and Goette 1998; Vatter et al. 2014).

For a few vocal Swiss scholars, journalists and/or activists, the advantages of direct democracy prevail. They translate their enthusiasm into a global agenda: ‘[Most] places in the world suffer from an absence of, or severe weaknesses in the ability of citizens to be directly involved in policy and decision-making’ (Kaufmann et al. 2010, 108). Thereby, Kaufmann et al. (2010, 108) advises against occasional referendums, scheduled top-down by the government, or turnout quorums, as they ‘wreak serious harm on the basic idea of direct democracy’. In less emotional language, Cheneval and El-Wakil (2018) recommend mechanisms that allow citizens to trigger referendums, and Linder and Mueller (2021, 5) see in the ‘abundance [of direct democratic votes] not an obstacle, but key to success’ of Swiss democracy. Swiss scholars see referendums

as the beating heart of the Swiss political culture of compromise (Fleiner and Basta Fleiner 2004, 386), a means to fight populism (Stojanović 2022), or a solution for secessionist conflicts. According to Fleiner, a cascade of sovereignty referendums that were used to settle the Jura conflict, could have been applied in the Serbia-Kosovo conflict, and they should become the international standard for secessionist conflicts.<sup>3</sup>

It is nobody less than the Swiss Minister of Foreign Affairs, Micheline Calmy-Rey, and the Swiss President, Doris Leuthard, who have signed two of the most important English-language manuals of direct democracy, the IDEA Handbook of Direct Democracy (Beramendi and et al. 2008) and IRI's Guidebook to Direct Democracy. The president's praise appeared under the headline 'No fair and decent globalisation without direct democracy', in a volume that was co-financed by the Swiss ministry of Foreign Affairs and 'Presence Switzerland' (Kaufmann et al. 2010).

Certainly, there is not a lack of curiosity around the globe about Switzerland's direct democracy. However, the number of imitators remains limited. Uruguay borrowed elements pertaining to consensus/consociational features (see section 5) and the direct democratic model in constitutional reforms in 1917, 1934, and 1967 (Altman 2011). In 2012, the president of Mongolia published a five-year-plan 'to reduce centralization through direct democracy and citizens' participation', inspired and advised by Swiss experts, and co-financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Corporation (SDC 2012, 16). In several semi-democratic or authoritarian regimes, referendums have offered a way to paint a democratic facade onto controversial amendments to the constitution. Venezuela's president Hugo Chavez relied on advice from Fleiner's group in designing direct democratic instruments in his plan for '21<sup>st</sup> century socialism'.<sup>4</sup> Azerbaijan and Russia held referendums in 2009 and 2020 which altered term limit rules for the incumbent president or abolished them altogether. In Venezuela and Bolivia, similar attempts failed (Durán-Martínez 2012).

In European democracies, bottom-up direct democratic rights at the national level are usually related to high hurdles, impeding the frequent use of these rights (Qvortrup 2017). At the subnational level in Germany, we find more accessible direct democratic institutions. Furthermore, the Bundesland Baden-Württemberg engages in regular dialogue with the Swiss canton of Aargau about direct democratic practices (Auer and Holzinger 2013). The country whose direct democratic institutions bear the closest resemblance to Switzerland is arguably Slovenia with its bottom-up direct democratic rights.<sup>5</sup>

#### 4. Consensus or dissent?

With its all-party governing coalition and the rotating presidency, the Swiss political system has many exceptional features. However, non-majoritarian democracies, and institutions for power diffusion are widespread elsewhere: on the European continent, they are the most common type of democracy. It is believed that non-majoritarian democracies are 'kinder and gentler' than their majoritarian counterparts, as they provide for a stronger welfare state, protect human rights better, are less repressive, produce more sustainable policies, and lead to broadly accepted decisions (but see Armingeon 2002; Lijphart 1999, 275-276,293-300).

The Swiss institutional order represents an alternative to unconstrained rule by the majority. However, scholars do not agree what the type of cure it actually constitutes. Language is an issue here. The term used in Swiss Politics, also in the French-German edition of this handbook, is 'concordance' (F) or 'Konkordanz' (D). Its English translation is ambivalent, either translated as 'consensus democracy' or 'consociational democracy', both of which were coined by the same author, Arend Lijphart. However, these two English terms do not mean the same, which makes it somewhat surprising that Lijphart uses Switzerland as a prime example of both of these concepts (Lijphart 1969, 1999). For the literature on Swiss Politics, and exemplified also by this handbook, the term 'consensus democracy' is central: it is cited 15 times more often than consociational democracy. The consensus type refers to a set of rules about elections and government formation, large party systems and strong economic interest groups (corporatism), regularly resulting in multi-party coalition governments (Lijphart 1999, 31-41).<sup>6</sup> In contrast, my count of the English language literature citing Switzerland (via Google Scholar<sup>7</sup>), reveals that references to the 'consociational democracy' type is much more frequent than the consensus democracy type. Consociational democracy, also often referred to as 'power-sharing', is a regime type for societies with persistent identity-based divides, e.g. ethnically divided societies. It is about a culture of inclusion, cooperation, and decision-making by compromise. Formal or informal institutions conducive to consociational rule are governments that include all politically relevant groups, strong group autonomy (e.g. federalism), and veto rights for minorities (Lijphart 1969). There are considerable overlaps with the consensus type, and in many aspects Lijphart's work does not clearly distinguish between his two types of non-majoritarian rule (Andeweg 2000; Bogaards 2000, 411-413).

Conceptual rigour matters if Switzerland is to be analysed with a comparative agenda: the institutional features of consociational democracy are in the focus for analyses where Switzerland is studied as a possible solution for heterogeneous societies, while the consensus democracy framework may be more appropriate to analyse the executive party coalition or economic policies. The two theoretical frameworks also differ widely in their implications for the quality of democracy.

Switzerland stands out from the family of consensus democracies due to the exceptional position of its executive vis-à-vis the legislative, the weak checks by its Federal Court, and its 'magic formula'.

First, the long-living government formula ('magic formula') relieves governments from their electoral accountability to voters. Even single seats have changed party only in exceptional circumstances, so that the voters have little or no chance to unseat the incumbent. The Swiss case thus nourishes the widespread belief that coalition governments are only weakly accountable to their voters, because incumbents can always bypass the disapproval of their voters by finding new coalition partners (Bartolini 1999; Kaiser et al. 2002, 326). Systematic empirical scrutiny reveals this supposed immunity of incumbents in consensus democracies against electoral losses to be a myth (Lundell 2011). However, Switzerland does deviate from this pattern, upholding the myth, due to the informal agreement on the all-party-coalition government. However, this also implies that stability and lack of electoral accountability is a consequence of all-party-coalitions, which are particularly associated with consociational democracies. Possibly, all-party coalitions as in Switzerland should be considered as a very different type from two- or three-party majority coalitions that are much more common in consensus democracies (Lijphart 1999, 91-96, 103-104).

Second, Switzerland differs from the conventional consensus model due to its lack of judicial review in constitutional matters, or even with regards to federal laws. This shifts the balance of power between the judiciary and the legislative towards the legislative. The lack of constitutional review avoids conflicts between the highest court and the people as a legislator (see chapter 'The Judicial System' in this volume), and it is attached to some early predecessors of consociational democracy in Switzerland. By minimizing checks by actors outside the party coalition, the parties retain a maximum degree of autonomy to engage in bargaining. In 1848, the constitution-makers opted for this model in order to uphold segmental autonomy, and thus the possibility for each confessional group governing with minimal federal interference (Bochsler and Juon 2021, 417-418).



Third, both the lack of strong judicial power to intervene in the legislative process, as well as the weak electoral control that voters have over the government, is to be understood in the context of the strong direct democratic institutions. The weak electoral accountability of the government to voters is substituted by a strong (direct democratic) control which citizens have over policies. Additionally, if the government composition no longer matches the voters' preferences, referendums might lead to political blockages and thereby push for a change in the composition of the coalition.

Despite the exceptional stability of the informal coalition agreement and the institutional context, the polarization of party politics over the recent decades alters the functioning of political institutions and their output, and this has preoccupied scholars of Swiss Politics.

There are different readings of the recent changes. More pessimist interpretations argue that the political space to reach joint solutions on major reforms is vanishing. This renders, 'policy outputs [...] less predictable' (Sciarini et al. 2015, 21) and has even resulted in political gridlock, not only in Swiss–EU relations (Kriesi 2015, 737), but also in policy fields as diverse as pension reform, climate change mitigation, or tax reform (Afonso and Papadopoulos 2015; Bochsler et al. 2015, 484; Vatter 2016).

A different reading points to more dynamic and inclusive decision-making processes. All-party coalitions in parliament have become less frequent, and parliamentary decision-making has become more conflictual (Traber 2015), but they have been replaced by issue-specific coalitions, 'at variable geometry' (Sciarini et al. 2015, 254). This also represents gains for the quality of democracy: As 'parties have gained power and importance in Swiss politics' (Traber 2015, 705) see also chapter 'Swiss Parliament' in this volume), political power has become more pluralized and the decision-making process more transparent (Bochsler et al. 2015).

This change is echoed by calls for a major reform of the system of government, moving towards a three-party coalition model, with proper coalition agreements on programmatic grounds, proposal that also termed the 'small concordance' (Sciarini 2011, 216-217). In this scenario, Switzerland would become a conventional consensus democracy.

The Swiss consensus model, with its institutional specificity ('magic formula') which sets it apart from all other consensus democracies, represents a poor paradigmatic case for scholars of comparative politics. Also, the question of polarized party systems is only rarely pointed to in the comparative politics literature on

consensus democracies (e.g. Lowell 1896, 70,73-74). However, there are some isolated cases globally with similar elements: Uruguay has built a political system with important similarities to Switzerland. In Northern Ireland, the Swiss ‘magic formula’ regulating government coalitions became a constitutional rule, and is calculated after every election based on the D'Hondt formula. As such, both Uruguay and Northern Ireland would though fit the consociational democracy type best (see next section).

## **5. A model democracy for multicultural societies?**

Two recent books by Swiss scholars, Wolf Linder, Sean Mueller (2021), and Nenad Stojanović (2021) propagate the idea of the Swiss model as a solution to divided societies. Both build in different ways on the consociational features of Swiss democracy. Switzerland is one of the four 'classical' cases of ‘consociational democracy’, yet today scholars of Swiss politics have been questioning to what degree contemporary Switzerland can still be considered as such.

Three objections to the classification of Switzerland as a consociational democracy have been put forward. The first pertains to Switzerland’s cultural divides: there is doubt whether Switzerland has any ‘ethnic groups’ or a deep cultural divide, usually considered a basis for consociational democracies. Political scientists employ different terms to describe cultural divides in Switzerland, such as ‘strongly segmented subcultures’ (Steiner 1974), ‘multicultural society’ (Linder and Mueller 2021) or ‘multilingual society’ (Stojanović 2021), thereby addressing different dimensions of cultural divides. The Swiss federal state and the liberal elites that founded it have constructed ‘a national myth of the civic, republican type to shape the national identity of the populations of all the cantons’ (Kriesi and Trechsel 2008, 16). Andreas Wimmer (2011, 719) characterizes Swiss identity as a ‘multiethnic nationhood, where the nation is defined as comprising several sub-national [...] ethno-linguistic communities’, with no aspiration to become a nation. Neither the Catholics nor the Protestants, the two groups related to the historical divide (‘Kulturkampf’), see themselves as ‘nations’ (Wimmer 2011, 726), and there was never a larger movement to recognize neighbouring states as ‘cultural homelands’ in either of the linguistic communities. The definition of ‘Swissness’ as a multicultural identity, based on civic nationalism, and political inclusion and compromise as the mode of government was the only possible response which would embrace the multiple lines of diversity in Switzerland (Neidhart 1970; Wimmer 2011). Whether Switzerland was, and still is a consociational

democracy, depends on the definition of the politically relevant cultural divides, and the political inclusion of groups along these divides.

Second, of the four 'classical' cases, Austria and the Netherlands are no longer consociational, because their socio-cultural divides have declined. In Belgium, the old cultural conflict has been replaced by more recent conflict between linguistic communities. Political institutions have been reformed, and as of the 1970s, Belgian federalism has been aligned along the linguistic divides (Bogaards et al. 2019). As for the fourth case, Switzerland, assessing whether it is still consociational and why, requires a more nuanced approach. The interpretations related to the classification of contemporary Switzerland in the comparative politics and in the Swiss politics literature differ. Swiss political scientists emphasize the importance of the historical Catholic-Protestant and conservative-liberal divide for the emergence of the constitutional institutions. The federal constitution of 1848, with its bicameral parliament and double majority rules, offered the Catholic-conservative minority an indirect veto right. The first historical extension of the executive coalition in 1891 was preceded by a elite confrontation in parliament and in the direct democratic arena (Bolliger and Zürcher 2004, 70-74). It came in reaction to a growing threat from the neighbouring states, where the idea of nations was gaining political ground, with fears that this could spill over to the Swiss linguistic communities (Wimmer 2011, 730-731). Further extensions of the coalition in 1919 and 1943 came after periods of contention and after the establishment of a corporatist arrangement in the economic sphere (see 'The Historical and Institutional Formation of Swiss Political Culture' in this volume), but these extensions were unrelated to cultural divides. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the same four-party-coalition persists, as well as the constitutional rules that were introduced as a reaction to the confessional divide. However, the cultural (and liberal-conservative) divide has become largely irrelevant.

Third, the linguistic divide, which is still subject to some degree of power sharing, does not even come close in its salience to the historical cultural conflict. The linguistic divide draws attention at times, for example in the context of the debate about international cooperation and European integration in the 1990s, but is limited to few issues. Some regionalist or local movements in Ticino, Geneva, and the regional party splits in Jura/Jura Bernois could be interpreted as parties along linguistic and cultural divides,<sup>8</sup> but they remain marginal at the national level.

The linguistic divides are, however, the most important basis for characterizing Switzerland as a persistent

case of a consociational democracy,<sup>9</sup> as scholars of comparative politics do (Bogaards et al. 2019, 350; Helms et al. 2019). More importantly, a recent branch of this literature in comparative politics has identified Switzerland (at the federal level) as the archetype of the ‘liberal’ consociational subtype, defined as follows: ‘Liberal consociation rewards whatever salient political identities emerge in democratic elections, whether these are based on ethnic or religious groups, or on subgroup or transgroup identities’ (McCulloch 2014, 502). The Swiss institutional order of 1848 introduced protections of the catholic minority, though by indirect means. Thus, the same constitutional rules (double-majority rule for constitutional referendums and the bicameral parliament) that once constituted a veto card for the Catholic-majority cantons, can in contemporary Switzerland serve other political minorities, or allow alliances across multiple conflict lines to exert a veto. This sets Switzerland, and a few other liberal constitutions, such as Nigeria or Iraq, apart from the ‘corporate’ consociational type, represented by Belgium. In the latter type, constitutional guarantees of political inclusion and veto rights are either directly codified as the rights of specific ethnic groups, or with federal units designed to separate these groups, and are thus only relevant for these specific groups. In Belgium, political reforms of the 1970s created a federal state, with the linguistic communities as the de facto constituent parts.

Despite the prominence of Switzerland in this typology, the Swiss Politics literature has not engaged with this argument. A closer look at the Swiss archetype casts doubt on the argument that liberal consociational rules can accommodate different divides (Stojanović 2020, 33). An excellent case for this is the very limited relevance of Swiss consociational institutions for the linguistic divide: linguistic communities gain extensive autonomy through the federal organization of the state. However, as Stadelmann-Steffen and Leemann (in this volume) show, the key mechanisms that used to provide for confessional power-sharing (bicameral system, double-majority rules) disfavour the linguistic minorities, as cantons of linguistic minorities are under-weighted in relation to their voting population. Instead, the double-majority rules play in favour of rural areas and the conservative-nationalist pole.<sup>10</sup> For linguistic minorities, there is a new, but weak and unspecific constitutional rule concerning government inclusion (Giudici and Stojanović 2016), replacing an earlier informal rule (Wimmer 2011). Weak quotas (aka: ‘goals’) aim for inclusion of linguistic minorities in the public administration (Kübler et al. 2020). Finally, rigid protections of linguistic minorities exist only at the cantonal level (Bern: special representation rights for the Bernese Jura in parliament and the executive;

Valais, indirect rules via territorial quotas).

Novel cultural divides are tangential to the institutional rules, or the rules in vigour may even prevent these divides from becoming manifest in Swiss political institution, as many residents with a migration background are excluded from the franchise. Ironically, the double majority rule, introduced to protect political minorities, was pivotal in the landmark constitutional referendum of 1994, and was the reason why citizenship was not liberalized (see chapter ‘Federalism’ in this volume).

The decline of the relevance of consociational institutions has done no harm to the external view of Switzerland as a successful application thereof, and especially as one avoiding quota rules (Lanz 2021, 66-69), and Switzerland can capitalize on this as a credible mediator for institutional engineering in post-conflict societies.

Recent work has started to investigate the origins of consociational rule globally, and external actors and learning effects from abroad both play a role here: Wucherpfennig and co-authors show that consociational rule emerges in particular in former British colonies, with a tradition of indirect rule (2016). Juon and Bochsler (2022) analyse whether countries introduce liberal or corporate types of constitutional rules. The institutional design is affected by the diffusion of constitutional rules among neighbours, and after civil wars also by the institutions of the external countries active as mediators in the peace process. Thus, the comparative politics literature highlights the importance of external peacebuilding experts in the constitution-making process.

The promotion of peace has become one of the pillars of Swiss foreign policy since the end of the Cold War, with an emphasis on civil/political instruments. Through Swisspeace, the government also sustains a research and policy institute for peacebuilding. Swiss mediators took part in the negotiation of constitutional orders after conflicts involving Burundi, Nepal (Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2006, following a Maoist insurgency), Macedonia, and Sudan (Greminger 2011, 18-19). However, Swiss scholars are sceptical about the idea of a ‘direct export of institutions’: a constitution must be grown and adjusted to the respective political, social, and historical context (Linder and Mueller 2021, 275). In practice, the mediation efforts of Swiss experts appear to have occurred with hardly any reference to the idea of institutional learning from the Swiss experience with power-sharing itself. None of the four highlighted cases bears significant similarities to the Swiss power-sharing model. Moreover senior diplomats describe the function of Swiss peacebuilding

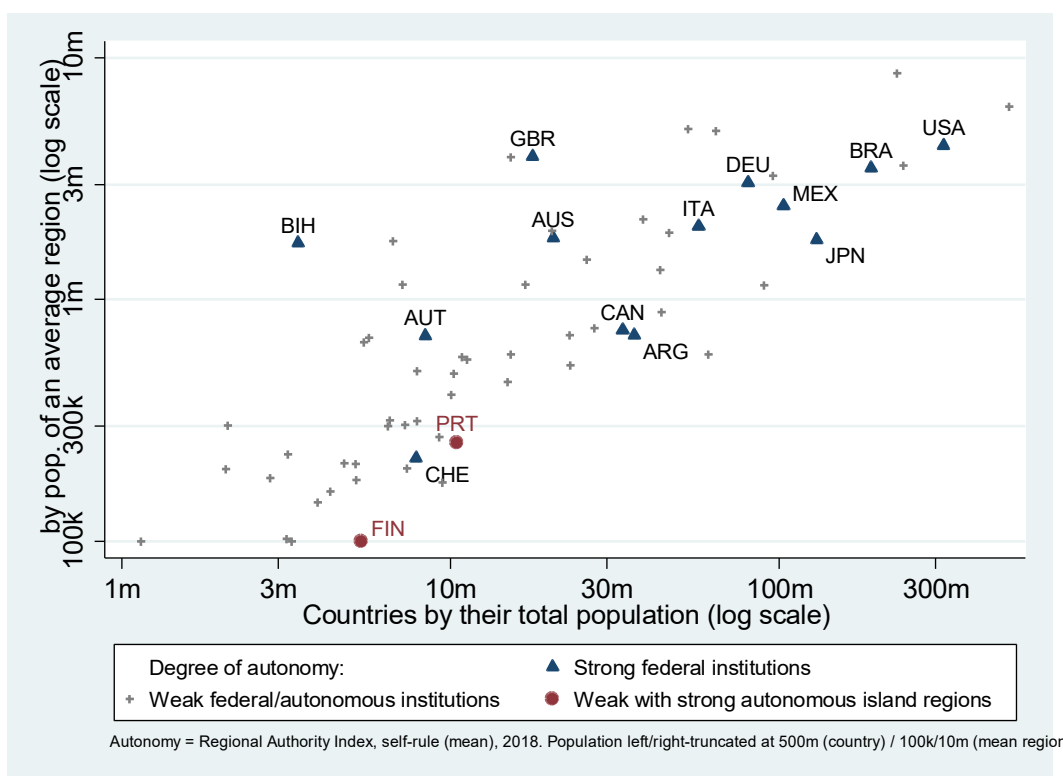
professionals as using their expertise to support the host states in order to find constitutional solutions suited to their specific political and social context (Baechler and Frieden 2006; Greminger 2011, 18-19). Reports by Swisspeace experts on power-sharing primarily refer to comparative expertise and evidence from post-war societies (e.g. Lanz et al. 2019; Raffoul 2019), and much less to the Swiss case (Iff and Töpperwien 2008).

The most relevant case of imitation of some of the consociational pillars from the Swiss model is Uruguay. It has an inclusive executive with a rotating presidency and an extensive system of quotas in the public administration and publicly owned companies. These institutions serve to provide a balance and power rotation between the two main political identities, the blancos and colorados (Altman 2011). However, Uruguay is neither federal, nor are there strong institutions to provide groups political autonomy or veto rights. The second parliamentary chamber is elected in a single nationwide constituency, offering no indirect advantages to territorial groups.

## **6. Federalism: Autonomy as an illusion?**

Switzerland belongs to a small group of countries with very strong federal institutions: with Switzerland ranked among the top three federations worldwide when it comes to levels of subnational government revenue and tax autonomy (Filippov et al. 1999, 6-7). However, Swiss federalism is also peculiar because of the combination of federalism with a strong direct democracy (Mueller 2021) and because of the small size of the country and the cantons. Figure 43.2 maps federal democracies and democracies with regional autonomies according to the strength of their institutions of federalism or regional autonomy and in relation to the population size of the countries and the first-level federal units. The institutional degree of autonomy/federalism is measured using the Regional Authority Index (Hooghe et al. 2016).<sup>11</sup> Democracies with strong federal/autonomous institutions are represented by triangles. Switzerland appears as an extreme case on this map. On the X-axis (country population), it is among the three smallest countries that have strong federal institutions, alongside with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Austria. The Y-axis (average population size of the segment-states) shows that the Swiss cantons are the smallest regional units worldwide which possess strong levels of autonomy. The only rivals in this group are Portugal and Finland, marked by circles, because both are unitary states featuring island regions which possess of strong regional autonomy (FI: Aland, PT: Azores, Madeira).

Figure 43.2: The size of federal countries and their (median) autonomous units, global comparison



Source of data: Regional Authority Index.

Despite institutional stability, the character of Swiss federalism has changed. In the founding period, the cantons had an important function on the input-side of democracy, as they accommodated for the largely territorial political divides, but they no longer play this role. A direct measure for the territoriality of the political splits, available for the largest period of the modern Swiss state, are the results of the federal referendums and popular initiatives by canton: in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, referendum results varied considerably between the cantons, but by the 1980s this between-cantonal variance had declined to just a third. This systematic assessment, based on salient political issues, corroborates the results reported in the previous section about the historical cultural cleavage: we find the main political divides are no longer related to the federal structure (Bochsler 2017).

Furthermore, the function of cantons on the output-side of democracy, in the provision of public policies, has declined. While cantons have largely been able to retain their policy competences, they are increasingly cooperating with each other in the provision of these policies, especially in domains with territorial interdependencies, e.g. public transportation in metropolitan areas, or in dealing with ecological problems that do not stop at cantonal borders (Bochsler 2009; Bolleyer 2006). Joint state services include, for instance,

pooled IT services, inter-cantonal state universities, hospitals, or police training institutions. To alleviate the consequences of fiscal autonomy and tax competition, cantons and the federal state have set up a complex system of fiscal péréquation, which requires periodic adjustment. This periodic negotiation process also has an impact on tax competition itself—the more the cantons cooperate, the less they compete for the best tax payers (Gilardi and Wasserfallen 2016; Wasserfallen 2015). Thus, while cantons have resisted centralization, an inter-cantonal system of institutions of ‘shared rule’ has hollowed out their political and fiscal autonomy (see chapter ‘Federalism’ in this volume). However, these inter-cantonal institutions have multiple democratic deficits, due to weak institutions, unanimity rule for decision-making, and only indirect controls by cantonal parliaments and citizens (Bochsler 2009; but see Wasserfallen 2015). A territorial reform, which might reconcile political boundaries with socially and economically relevant geographical spaces and create units that are large enough to function autonomously, is politically unfeasible. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, attempts to merge cantons have failed in both the Léman and the Basel region (see chapter ‘Metropolitan Areas’ in this volume).

Despite these symptoms of fatigue, scholars and practitioners still consider federalism a key institutional feature of the Swiss system suited for the promotion of democracy abroad. Two legal scholars, Fleiner & Basta Fleiner (2004, 634), see in the Swiss federal institutions the basis for a culture of compromise in a multicultural democracy. They recommend federalism as the guiding principle of state organization in other multicultural states in order to ensure the protection of minorities (Fleiner and Basta Fleiner 2004, 654-655). The political scientists Linder and Mueller emphasise that Swiss federalism, ‘rather than just focusing on autonomy and differences, also allows for participation and coming-together for the purpose of joint problem-solving’ (Linder and Mueller 2021, 4). For institutional engineers, they offer a handy checklist for determining whether federalism might be successful, based on lessons learned from the Swiss case: among others, minorities should be effective political minorities in a sub-national unit, and a perfect geographical separation of ethno-cultural groups into federal units is to be avoided.

Turning to the four post-conflict countries where Switzerland was particularly engaged in engineering political institutions, results have been mixed (see section 5). Nepal was officially renamed the ‘Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal’, and Sudan became a ‘decentralized state’, with an autonomous South Sudanese region, but according to the RAI index, effective regional self-rule is minimal in both cases.



Macedonia has been decentralized by creating strong municipalities, but avoids references to federalism. Whether Swiss peacebuilders have contributed to these reforms must be relegated to further research.

## **7. Concluding reflections**

Shops in many countries worldwide sell Swiss chocolate, and along with watches, it is one of the top two best-known Swiss exports. Meanwhile, Switzerland is not popularly known as a major exporter of democracy. Some are aware that Uruguay's political order follows in substantial parts the Swiss model, with direct democratic rights. Beyond that, there are no other equally clear-cut cases of institutional learning from the Swiss democratic institutions. However, the degree to which Switzerland has an impact on the establishment of democratic constitutions worldwide depends on the dimension of its political institutions under analysis.

Comparative research shows that institutional learning—or the 'export of democratic institutions'—is not uncommon. For instance, electoral systems (Bol et al. 2015) or (after conflicts) power-sharing institutions are subject to institutional diffusion (Cederman et al. 2018). However, we know much less about the actors and mechanisms that facilitate this institutional learning, e.g. comparative research has only recently started to investigate the role of international actors and mediators after conflicts (McCulloch and McEvoy 2018). This chapter looks at the Swiss case and discusses the domestic view (citizens' and academic) on the assets that Swiss democracy offers for potential imitators, the external view (in the comparative politics literature), as well as some of the footprints that Swiss democracy promotion has left worldwide (cf. Bochsler and Juon 2022).

While the Swiss masses see in direct democracy and consensus government the essence of democracy, these two pillars are not among the most successful pillars of the Swiss democracy promotion diplomacy: consensus democracy is the most common model of democracy in Europe, but its historically grown Swiss version is possibly too antiquated to find imitators today. In contrast, the elites' and activists' call for more direct democracy in the world is echoed primarily by authoritarian or hybrid regimes. Elites in democratic countries and scholars of comparative politics doubt whether complex political issues should be decided by supposedly badly informed citizens. In particular, they warn that strong direct democratic institutions would increase spending and hurt minorities, although evidence from the Swiss practice dismisses these concerns.

The Swiss power-sharing institutions, also termed consociational democracy, are most relevant for the comparative politics literature, practitioners of democracy promotion, and political peacebuilding. Switzerland is active as a mediator after conflicts. Even though Swiss peacebuilding experts benefit from the Swiss experience with institutions of consociational democracy, they do not specifically rely on the Swiss constitutional order, but on a broader set of consociational solutions (Bochsler and Juon forthcoming). There is no evident footprint of Swiss constitutional rules being applied in cases where Switzerland was actively mediating. Rather, Swiss peacebuilding experts emphasise that political institutions need to take into consideration the specific political and historical contexts in the countries where they are introduced.

Consociational democracy in Switzerland itself is a prime example of how context matters for constitutional rules. The consociational democracy of Switzerland, which inspired the Swiss democracy promotion and peacebuilding agenda, dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, the cultural divide that was the basis for the Swiss consociational model is no longer relevant. For today's minorities—linguistic minorities and Swiss residents with migration backgrounds—the same institutions offer far less or no minority protection at all. This does no harm for its exports: chocolate companies promote their long history of production in marketing, and similarly, the Swiss promotion of democracy relies on Switzerland's past. Political history has no expiration date.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to the editors and to Alexandre Raffoul for helpful comments.

<sup>2</sup> According to a survey conducted in 2021 (Geissbühler 2022).

<sup>3</sup> Fleiner, Thomas. 2012. 'Kreativer Minderheitenschutz', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 27 March 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Gmür, Heidi. 2007. 'Der Berater von Hugo Chávez.' *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 19 August 2007.

<sup>5</sup> The Italian referendum rules, which also entail strong bottom-up instruments, rely primarily on the abrogative referendum, which can also be used against existing laws, deviating from the Swiss practice (Qvortrup 2017).

<sup>6</sup> A second dimension thereof relates to multiple mechanisms of power diffusion, such as federalism and constitutional courts.

<sup>7</sup> 2,660 times 'consensus democracy', 3010 'consociational democracy' and 16,300 'power-sharing', in work published as of 2000. This handbook (German/French language version) almost only refers to consensus (seventy-three times), as opposed to four mentions of consociational, and one of power-sharing. The German/French terms 'Konkordanz'/'concordance' are used ambivalently. Some of the authors select different concepts, depending on whether they analyse decision-making processes in Swiss politics (e.g. Sciarini et al. 2015, , this volume), or Switzerland in a comparative perspective (Hug and Sciarini 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Stojanovic (2021) further refers to the organization of national parties in multilingual cantons.

<sup>9</sup> The main comparative datasets used to measure power-sharing consider either linguistic groups as the

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politically relevant communities (Vogt et al. 2015), or complement them with the larger communities of migrants (Birrir et al. 2018),.

<sup>10</sup> Bochsler, Daniel. 2013. 'Die CVP verliert das Wallis und das Ständemehr.' *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 5 March, 9.

<sup>11</sup> The data refers to the year 2018. The figure displays all countries whose units have an average self-rule index of thirteen or above, as those with strong autonomy. The Swiss cantons have a self-rule index of eighteen.