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# Pre-Election Positions and Voting Behaviour in Parliament: Consistency among Swiss MPs

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*This article examines the determinants of positional incongruence between pre-election statements and post-election behaviour in the Swiss parliament between 2003 and 2009. The question is examined at the individual MP level, which is appropriate for dispersion-of-powers systems like Switzerland. While the overall rate of political congruence reaches about 85%, a multilevel logit analysis detects the underlying factors which push or curb a candidate's propensity to change his or her mind once elected. The results show that positional changes are more likely when (1) MPs are freshmen, (2) individual voting behaviour is invisible to the public, (3) the electoral district magnitude is not small, (4) the vote is not about a party's core issue, (5) the MP belongs to a party which is located in the political centre, and (6) if the pre-election statement dissents from the majority position of the legislative party group. Of these factors, the last one is paramount.*

KEYWORDS: Swiss Elections • Members of Parliament • Pledge Fulfilment • Legislative Behaviour • Vote Advice Applications

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Members of Parliament (MPs) are generally not given much credit by the electorate; this is not surprising when thought about within the broader picture of the public's declining confidence in political institutions and actors (Dalton 2006). There is a persistent, widely held public perception of a positional gap between pre-election pledges and post-election behaviour in parliament: During election campaigns, candidates and parties raise great expectations with the voters. Once elected, policies often come to

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the disappointment of many, and voters get the strong feeling that what politicians actually implement is different from what they presented in the campaign showcase before. In the 2006 “Role of Government IV” poll of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) roughly 30% of the respondents in Switzerland disagreed with the statement: “People we elect as MPs try to keep the promises they have made during the election” while another 33% were undecided. In big democracies like Britain, Germany, or the United States the share of discontent is even higher.<sup>2</sup>

Incongruities between election pledges and legislative behaviour only come to the citizens’ displeasure if we assume the normative criteria of what Mansbridge (2003) calls the “promissory” form of representation: The electorate mainly consists of forward-looking voters who use elections to influence future policy outcomes (prospective voting; Powell 2000) and thus expect that MPs keep their promises. This concept of representation comes fairly close to pluralistic and economic theories of democratic representation, which emphasise ideas of political proximity and issue representation (e.g., Downs 1957; Schattschneider 1942). Mandate-based models are exposed to heavy criticism because of their simplistic or even naive perspective of democracy. For proponents of more interactive, dynamic or deliberative forms of representation the static and purely dyadic demand-input relationship between the represented and the representatives is far from being a realistic analysis of the situation (Eulau and Karps 1978; Pitkin 1967; Wahlke 1971). Nonetheless, promissory forms of representation are still widely used as analytical frameworks in contemporary political research (also in this article). Apart from advantages of simplicity and parsimony, at least three additional reasons may account for this: (1) Scholars usually agree that alternative forms of representation which are guided by different normative criteria can exist in parallel, and that there is no normatively or empirically “superior” concept (Mansbridge 2003; Rehfeld 2009). (2) Since the early days of the mandate model the theory has developed, leading to, *inter alia*, principal-agent approaches taking information asymmetries into account (Strøm 2003), or strategic electoral behaviour theories considering that voters anticipate distorting effects of the voting system or coalition-formation in parliament (Cox 1997; Kedar 2005). (3) Finally, and empirically maybe the most important reason is what Powell (2000) calls the “voter’s eye view” of elections in response to what they are

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<sup>2</sup> Based on our own calculations with data available via Online: <http://www.issp.org/data.shtml> [accessed: 18.9.2009].

offered by parties and candidates during election campaigns. Parties and MPs constitute the main driving forces that keep promissory representation models alive: Engagingly declaimed policy statements, quasi-promises and election pledges establish close connections between citizens and policy-makers. In other words, parties and candidates deliberately stress the “programme-to-policy linkage” before elections (Thomson 2001), resulting in the inseparability of the choice of a party/candidate from the content of their electoral appeals (Mansergh and Thomson 2007).

Recent developments in the sphere of information and communication technology underscore this point: web-based vote advice applications, so-called VAAs (Ladner et al. 2008a; Walgrave et al. 2008), in which parties or individual candidates enter their political profile by responding to a number of political questions, make the electoral connection even more evident and traceable, and potentially boost the expectation that elected representatives adhere to their pre-election statements.

The article is concerned with the congruence of political positions of MPs before and after elections. To what extent do forward-looking voters see their expectations fulfilled? And how can deviant issue positions be explained? These questions are examined in the Swiss context between 2003 and 2009 by comparing MPs’ pre-election statements in the Swiss VAA “smartvote”<sup>3</sup> with their subsequent positions in parliament as expressed by their voting behaviour.

According to Pétry and Collette (2009) there are surprisingly few studies addressing the extent to which government actions fulfil election promises. This article contributes to this field in several ways: (1) We concentrate on the *Swiss case* which has not yet been studied in the pledge fulfilment literature so far. (2) Since majority building in the Swiss legislature is a matter of ad-hoc coalition formation between rather incohesive party organisations, we compare MPs’ *individual pre-election positions* with their voting behaviour. (3) In addition to studying the extent to which MPs stick to their pre-election statements we are also interested in the *factors which influence positional congruence* of individual MPs. These factors have not yet been studied by other authors in this field.<sup>4</sup>

Before giving further details on the dataset used, the specifications of the dependent and independent variables, and the analysis and discussion

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<sup>3</sup> See Footnote 14.

<sup>4</sup> An exception is Ringquist and Dasse (2004), whose analysis however is limited to environmental issues.

of the results, we proceed first with an overview of the relevant literature on the topic, followed by a brief institutional contextualisation of the Swiss case.

### State of the Literature on Pledge Fulfilment

Existing works on the subject usually compare election pledges in party manifestos or public speeches with governmental policy actions after the election. Early studies focused on the United States and Britain, followed by Canada, Greece, the Netherlands, Ireland, and Sweden.<sup>5</sup> Some of them take a comparative perspective, investigating the differences in the “effectiveness” (Royed 1996) of the various democratic systems in enacting policies as promised before elections.<sup>6</sup> Quite contrary to the common public perception of politicians as a notoriously untrustworthy guild, most investigations find pledge fulfilment rates among government parties of 70% or more and interpret them as being astonishingly high.<sup>7</sup> A general pattern in the literature, which is hardly surprising, is that government parties in parliamentary single-party governments like Britain show the highest pledge fulfilment rates of over 80% (Rallings 1987; Rose 1980; Royed 1996), while the effectiveness of the programme-to-policy linkage in coalition governments<sup>8</sup> and governments which operate in a dispersion-of-powers<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> For the U.S., see Budge and Hofferbert (1990), Fishel (1985), Pomper (1988), Pomper and Lederman (1980), Ringquist and Dasse (2004), Royed and Borelli (1999), Shaw (1998); Britain: Rose (1980); Canada: Rallings (1987); Greece: Kalogeropoulou (1989); the Netherlands: Thomson (1999, 2001); Ireland: Costello and Thomson (2008), Mansergh (2004); Sweden: Naurin (2007).

<sup>6</sup> Comparative studies involve Costello and Thomson (2008), Mansergh and Thomson (2007), Rallings (1987) as well as Royed (1996).

<sup>7</sup> That such findings come as a big surprise to the general public is documented by Naurin (2007) who experienced hostile reactions in Sweden towards her research project after the publication of her results.

<sup>8</sup> The specificities of coalition governments are demonstrated by the following statement of the former German vice chancellor Franz Müntefering: “As a coalition, we are pitted against what has been said in the election campaign. This is unfair.” (*faz.net*, 5 September 2006, own translation).

<sup>9</sup> Following Powell (2000), the term refers to regime types which do not follow a straight parliamentary logic but incorporate ideas of separation of powers, checks and balances, or power sharing.

environment tends to be substantially lower at around 70% (Pomper 1988; Pomper and Lederman 1980; Ringquist and Dasse 2004; Royed 1996; Royed and Borrelli 1999).

Current research suffers from a number of methodological problems, as has been put forward by Costello and Thomson (2008) and Gallagher et al. (2006): First, party manifestos only bring up those issues which are highly salient to the party concerned.<sup>10</sup> This results in a constrained choice of selected pledges because issue salience often does not coincide between parties. Second, party manifestos tend to be vague and they often stress “valence issues” (Stokes 1963), i.e. non-ideological statements which nobody is seriously opposed to because they merely assign a positive goal without saying how to achieve it.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the vagueness of some statements often leaves researchers puzzled whether to classify them as explicit election pledges or not. Third, existing studies ignore different mechanisms of law making in legislative-executive relations.<sup>12</sup> They usually apply a parliamentary logic in which government is identical to legislative majority. In such institutional contexts it seems fair to evaluate government actions on the basis of the party manifesto. This is also the reason why these studies focused exclusively on explanatory factors at the political system and party level (e.g. the status as government or opposition party, the existence of a single-party or coalition government, the allocation of ministerial portfolios among coalition partners, pledge agreement between government/opposition parties as well as between coalition partners, the type of pledge, media coverage of the pledges).

For countries operating in a dispersion-of-powers framework (Powell 2000; Samuels and Shugart 2003), party-level analyses seem inadequate for two reasons. First, as soon as different political actors at different state

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<sup>10</sup> “In choosing their issues, parties act rationally, emphasizing the policy areas of their strength and neglecting the strong points of their opponents. They tend to be specific on these issues of direct, distributive benefit to the voters and to resort to rhetoric or vagueness where voters are unclear, uninterested, or divided” (Pomper 1988: 163); see also Budge and Hofferbert (1990).

<sup>11</sup> According to Ostrogorski (1964: 138) a platform “represents a long list of statements relating to politics, in which everybody can find something to suit him, but in which nothing is considered as of any consequence by the authors of the document, as well as by the whole convention.”

<sup>12</sup> An exception is the attention recent studies draw to the effects of coalition governments (Costello and Thomson 2008; Mansergh and Thomson 2007) or minority governments (Naurin 2007), as compared to single-party governments.

levels are forced to govern together, the chances that they can stick to their electoral programmes decrease. A compromise which is likely to find a majority is unlikely to be in line with the electoral programmes of all actors involved. Second, such systems tend to produce weak party systems at national level which allow for party-independent positions of individual MPs.

Before elaborating further on the Swiss institutional context a few words on the notion of “election pledges” or “promises” seem appropriate. Whereas all the above cited studies have used these terms we decided to use the more neutral expression “pre-election statements/positions” instead. A pledge, according to Royed (1996: 79) implies “a commitment to carry out some action or produce some outcome”. However, candidates to the Swiss parliament do not necessarily make such a commitment when filling out the smartvote questionnaire. They merely state where they stand with respect to a certain issue. They have neither the possibility of abstaining from an answer – and thereby not making any statement at all on this issue – nor can they define certain policy areas which are particularly important to them. However, as Ringquist and Dasse (2004: 405) note, such statements can still be considered as election pledges in the wider sense because they are “eminently public”.

### **Switzerland: A Multi-Party Dispersed-Powers Framework**

Political systems based on ideas of separation of powers, checks and balances, or power sharing do not place the responsibility for policy enactment on the government party (or coalition) alone. Dispersion-of-power frameworks often go along with a separation of purpose, i.e. the electorate is given the opportunity to assign different “mandates” to distinct directly elected bodies, or hold separately elected institutions accountable on different grounds (Samuels and Shugart 2003). Because of the – to a greater or lesser extent – mutual independence of the executive and the legislative branch and the federalist state structures, dispersed-powers regimes often feature candidate-centred voting systems and weak party structures which altogether promote the cultivation of personal, party-independent candidate profiles (Carey and Shugart 1995; Mitchell 2000). This creates ideological diversity within parties, whereby personal pre-election statements of candidates gain in importance for “forward-voting” voters, compared to national party platforms in centralised parliamentary systems (see also

Mansergh and Thomson 2007). Therefore, in such systems the research level should shift from parties to individual candidates and MPs.

The Swiss power-sharing system (Lijphart 1984, 1999; Linder 1994; Vatter 2008) is characterised by highly dispersed powers not only in terms of federalism and direct democracy, but also with regard to a joint government of the most important parties and alternating ad hoc coalitions within government and parliament (Schwarz 2009). Incentives to form a stable coalition – both in government and parliament – are low because the executive and legislative branches enjoy high mutual independence once the members of the Swiss consensus government have been elected by the parliament.<sup>13</sup>

Ad hoc majority building in the bicameral Swiss legislature takes place within a multi-party context. Case-by-case coalitions in parliament mean that participation in government and legislative success are uncoupled (Jegher 1999; Linder and Schwarz 2008). Unlike in strictly parliamentary systems, government parties are not always on the winning side, and non-government parties are not always losing. In the last 10 to 15 years, the Swiss party system has developed into a triple-pole system of roughly 30% vote share each: left-wing parties (mainly the Social Democratic Party/SPS and the Green Party/GPS), right-wing parties (primarily the Swiss People's Party/SVP), and moderate centrist parties (such as the Christian Democratic Party/CVP and the Liberal Party/FDP) (see Hug and Schulz 2007; Kriesi 2001; Ladner 2007). Centrist parties regularly play the role of legislative majority builders by deciding whether they ally with the parties on the right or on the left and thus regularly constitute the most “successful” actors in the Swiss parliament (Hug and Sciarini 2009; Kriesi 2001; Lüthi 2007; Schwarz et al. forthcoming).

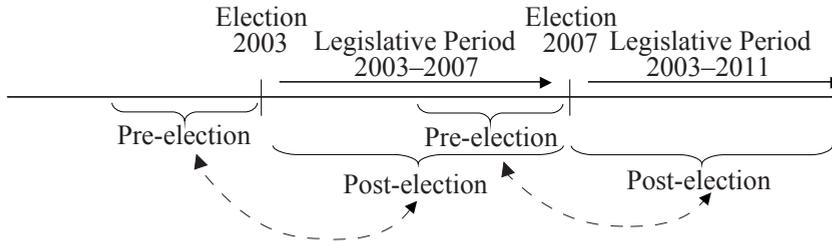
### **What We Look At: Database and Dependent Variable**

Using the case of Switzerland, we look at a political system where the linkage between electoral promises of collective party platforms and legislative behaviour of individual MPs is supposed to be loose, justifying a change of the methodological perspective from party to individuals. This is recently made possible by using VAA data. Instead of looking at party manifestos

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<sup>13</sup> Parliamentary or governmental rights to dismiss each other during the constitutionally fixed legislative period of four years are entirely lacking.

Figure 1: Pre- and Post-election Spheres 2003–09 Taken into Account



and comparing them with actual government performance, we use personal statements of MPs as recorded in the Swiss VAA “smartvote”<sup>14</sup> and compare them with MPs’ individual legislative voting behaviour in Switzerland’s first chamber, the National Council. In doing so our research focus is not directed at the collective enactment of political programmes by fixed parliamentary majorities, but rather at the commitment of individual MPs to enact their own – sometimes party-independent – agenda.

The article compares the answers given in the smartvote questionnaire with identical (or nearly identical) parliamentary votes. The inspection of the parliamentary debates between 2003 and 2009 detected 34 roll call votes that match with an item in the smartvote questionnaire and cover a number of important policy dimensions (see listing in Appendix 1). We took into account that pre-election statements do not last forever; thus for the answers of the MPs in the 2003 questionnaire, only the 2003–07 debates were inspected, and for the answers in the 2007 questionnaire only the debates from 2007 onwards.<sup>15</sup> The maximum time span between the promise and the related parliamentary vote is therefore four years (see Figure 1).

The smartvote questionnaire provides for four answer options (fully agree, weakly agree, weakly disagree, fully disagree), while parliamen-

<sup>14</sup> Online: <http://www.smartvote.ch>. Smartvote was launched in the run-up to the 2003 Swiss general elections and applied for a second time in 2007. In 2003, the smartvote questionnaire consisted of 70 questions on political issues (73 questions in 2007) which allows for a reasonably precise analysis of the ideological positions of candidates and parties (Ladner et al. 2008b). In 2003, smartvote covered 69.5 percent of all elected MPs in the 200-seat National Council, in the 2007 elections this share grew to 93.5 percent (see also Thurman and Gasser 2009).

<sup>15</sup> There are five exceptions to this rule when we took into account parliamentary votes of the preceding term, but very close to the election day (items no. 1, 15, and 17–19 in Appendix 1).

Table 1: Proximity Matrix (Congruence) Between Smartvote Answer and Legislative Behaviour (Dependent Variable)

Smartvote Answer	Legislative Behaviour	
	Yea	Nay
Fully Agree	1	0
Weakly Agree	1	0
Weakly Disagree	0	1
Fully Disagree	0	1

*Note:* Non-participation in smartvote as well as abstention votes or absenteeism in a related legislative vote are treated as missing values.

tary votes allow for only three options (yea, nay, abstention). Moreover, smartvote participants have to answer all questions (no opt-out allowed) whereas elected MPs have at least two options if they feel unable to make a decision: abstaining or not voting at all. In order to make the two datasets comparable we created a simple proximity matrix (binary dependent variable) which matches the opinions given in the smartvote questionnaire and the legislative vote (see Table 1): Positional congruence (1) is assumed if a (fully or weakly) disagree/agree answer matches with the corresponding no/yes vote in parliament, otherwise positional incongruence is assumed (0).<sup>16</sup> Neither abstentions nor absenteeism in the parliament, nor non-reply to the smartvote questionnaire are taken into account in our analysis.<sup>17</sup> Regarding the moderate-centrist parties in our analysis (like the Christian Democrats or the Liberals) the binary structure of the dependent variable

<sup>16</sup> Since we operate with a latent dependent variable, alternative definitions with a higher number of ordinal categories are conceivable. The underlying rationale for the binary option as specified in Table 1 is that more categories might create too many “artificial” subdivisions which increase statistical noise but have no substantial meaning in reality. Statistical tests with such alternative specifications with up to five ordinal categories (ordered logit models) have largely confirmed the results of our binary response model.

<sup>17</sup> In all these cases we could only speculate about the reasons why an MP abstained or did not vote at all. Therefore it seems safer to exclude them entirely. This reduces the number of cases by 143 due to abstention and by about 1’800 because MPs either did not respond to the smartvote questionnaire or did not take part in the legislative vote. The number of remaining cases is 4’820 (see also the distribution of cases in the dependent variable in Table 2).

Table 2: Distribution of Cases in the Dependent Variable (Percentages in Brackets)

Smartvote Answer	Legislative Behaviour					
	Yea		Nay		Total	
Fully Agree	1'701	35.3%	167	3.5%	1'868	38.8%
Weakly Agree	395	8.2%	228	4.7%	623	12.9%
Weakly Disagree	151	3.1%	340	7.1%	491	10.2%
Fully Disagree	128	2.7%	1'710	35.5%	1'838	38.1%
Total	2'375	49.3%	2'445	50.7%	4'820	100.0%

has the additional advantage of not systematically “punishing” them for their moderate positions in the smartvote questionnaire. That is to say a change, for instance, from “weakly agree” in smartvote to “yea” in parliament is treated the same way as the combination fully agree/yea.<sup>18</sup>

Absenteeism, the exclusion of abstention votes, and the fact that MPs may resign during the term (and get replaced by newcomers) produce an unbalanced data-sheet. Table 3 depicts some basic information on the dataset.

A first glance at the dependent variable reveals that – contrary to common perception but in line with findings from (party-level) research cited above – the members of the Swiss National Council stick to their pre-election statements in some 85% of the selected votes (see Table 4).<sup>19</sup> There are however quite large differences between parties. The highest congruence rates between pre- and post-election positions can be found among the leftist parties – the Social Democrats (SPS) and the Greens (GPS) – with values exceeding 90%, and the right-wing national-conservative SVP with 86%. The two centrist parties, the Christian Democrats (CVP) and the Liberals (FDP), show substantially lower congruence rates: their average rates vary between 74 and 80%.

<sup>18</sup> MPs of the CVP and FDP gave in roughly one third of the cases a “weakly (dis-)agree” answer, while among SPS, GPS and SVP MPs this share drops to 15–20%.

<sup>19</sup> The table shows the average positional congruence of MPs (grouped by party) over all 34 selected items. The figures have been calculated in two steps so that each MP is represented only once (i.e. average of the mean congruence values of all MPs of a specific party).

Table 3: Number of MPs and MP Votes in the Dataset (Per Party)

	Number of MPs Included	Number of MP Votes Included	Average Number of Votes per MP
CVP	38	734	19.3
FDP	44	702	16.0
GPS	27	474	17.6
SPS	62	1'301	21.0
SVP	61	1'267	20.8
Other Parties	22	342	15.5
Total	254	4'820	19.0

Moreover, we find that positional consistency within parties depends on the policy area at stake. Relying on the smartvote classification of the 34 selected items into eight policy areas<sup>20</sup>, Table 5 summarises for each party the three areas with the lowest/highest congruence rates. The summary shows that in most parties foreign policy and immigration issues have the highest congruence rates, while financial and law and order issues are ranking at the bottom. Some topics seem to be party-specific: for instance, SPS and SVP MPs stay quite firmly in social welfare questions, GPS and FDP MPs in environmental issues (FDP members also stay quite firm in the area of economic policy).

These preliminary findings confirm that the commitment to stick to pre-election positions is not evenly spread among MPs but contingent on additional factors like party membership and issue areas. These factors shall be further examined in the following sections.

### **What Factors Might Explain a Change of Mind?**

Why do some MPs stick to their pre-election positions while others tend to change their minds more frequently? In this section we introduce the

<sup>20</sup> According to Appendix 1, the policy areas covered in this study are: foreign policy, economy, finances and taxes, law and order, immigration, environment, social welfare, society and ethics.

hypotheses and briefly define the operationalisation of the related variables (for details, see Appendix 2). In the next section we will test our hypotheses in a multivariate model. We expect the following variables to have a direct influence on MPs' position change:

*Positional incongruence with the party group majority:* Positional congruence by an MP is more likely if the majority of the party group takes up the same stance on the issue. If an MP finds out after the election that the majority of his or her fellow party members take another position the propensity should increase that he or she will eventually conform to the majority position. This change is most likely due to peer-group pressure, as Swiss party group leaders do not have strong formal instruments at hand to discipline their group members (Damgaard 1995; Hertig 1978; Lanfranchi and Lüthi 1999). This variable is binary, analogically defined to the dependent variable.<sup>21</sup>

*Positional centrality of the party:* Swiss legislative parties do not form a permanent coalition, but operate on a case-by-case basis. Beneficiaries of this situation are mainly the moderate parties in the political centre which regularly play the role of legislative majority builders by deciding whether to ally with the parties on the right or the left side of the council (Hug and Sciarini 2009; Jegher 1999; Kriesi 2001; Linder and Schwarz 2008; Schwarz 2009). The preliminary results in the previous section further suggest that this "constructive" role of centrally located actors comes at least partly at the expense of positional congruence. We therefore hypothesise that centrist parties tend to have a lower positional congruence. We integrate the party variable in two different ways, depending on the estimated multivariate model: First, as a dummy variable in which the CVP, FDP, and some smaller moderate parties<sup>22</sup> are considered as centrist parties in the Swiss parliament.<sup>23</sup> Second, as five party dummies (FDP, SPS, SVP, GPS, and "small parties") where the CVP as the ideal-type centrist party is our reference category.

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<sup>21</sup> If no majority in the party group could be detected (e.g. if a tie occurred) or if the majority of the party group abstained, any smartvote answer was rated as being in line with the party group majority. MPs that are not members of a group are treated as missing values.

<sup>22</sup> Mainly the Evangelical People's Party (EVP) and the Green Liberal Party (GLP).

<sup>23</sup> This classification of centrally and non-centrally located parties is also based on results of various legislative studies (e.g. Hermann and Jeitziner 2008; Hug and Schulz 2007; Lee-mann 2008).

Table 4: Mean Positional Congruence of MPs (Grouped by Party)

	Mean (Standard Deviation)		Number of MPs Included
CVP	73.8%	(11.57)	38
FDP	80.4%	(10.86)	44
GPS	92.3%	(8.25)	27
SPS	93.5%	(6.25)	62
SVP	86.3%	(7.05)	61
All MPs <sup>a</sup>	85.1%	(12.50)	254

*Reading Example:* On average, a CVP MP sticks to his/her pre-election statement in 73.8% of the cases.

*Note:* <sup>a</sup> Including members of smaller parties not separately listed in the table.

*District magnitude:* In national elections, the electoral districts are the 26 Swiss cantons whose size varies between one and 34 seats, according to population figures. The voting system is first-past-the-post in 6 single-member districts, and proportional representation in the 20 multi-member districts. According to voting theory, the electoral connection is closer in small districts because it is easier to keep track of just a few MPs (Bowler and Farrel 1993; Carey and Shugart 1995; Cox 1997). We therefore expect the propensity to disregard pre-election positions to be higher in larger districts than in smaller ones. Because district magnitude is not expected to show a linear effect, we use two dummy variables which capture, on the one hand, the smallest districts with up to 4 seats and, on the other hand, the biggest districts with 15 or more seats (the reference category thus are middle-sized districts).

*Issues and issue dimensions:* According to the salience approach, party manifestos mainly highlight issues that are relevant and important to the party in question (Budge and Hofferbert 1990; Klingemann et al. 1994), whereas the smartvote questionnaire is composed of the full range of political areas. We assume that election pledges concerning issues which are particularly important to an MP are more often respected than presumably irrelevant issues. Since we have neither individual nor party-level data about the importance attached to specific issues, we try to detect the core issues of each party by looking at the homogeneity of the responses to the

smartvote questionnaire by all candidates of a specific party, assuming that the candidates of that party show higher agreement on the party's core issues.<sup>24</sup> To operationalise this variable we proceed as following: For each party and each of the two smartvote surveys we calculate the mean standard deviation of the responses to all issues belonging to one of the eight policy dimensions used by smartvote: foreign policy, economy, finances and taxes, law and order, immigration, environment, social welfare, and society and ethics. This leaves us with a mean standard deviation per party and dimension for each of the two elections. From these we select the three dimensions with the lowest standard deviation and consider them as the core dimensions of the respective party. The core issue variable relies on the assumption that homogeneity of pre-election statements within the same party indicates a uniform political or ideological orientation of party members. Since homogeneity does not necessarily imply importance, we refer to the variable as "core issues" instead of calling it "issue salience".

*Relevance of the vote:* Not every roll call is equally significant within the legislative process. Some votes may have a direct law-making effect (e.g. votes on drawn-up bills which have been introduced by a government or legislative committee) and other votes merely charge the administration to consider the later introduction of a law-making proposal (parliamentary motions). Recent research has shown that the importance of a vote affects legislative behaviour of Swiss MPs (Hug and Sciarini 2009; Schwarz 2009). Out of the 34 selected items in this article, 20 are government bills (high law-making relevance) and 3 are parliamentary motions (low relevance); 11 items concern parliamentary initiatives whose relevance status depends on whether the vote is related to the initial phase (low relevance in five cases) or to a bill drawn-up and introduced by a legislative committee (high relevance in six cases). The effect on the positional congruence of MPs is theoretically ambiguous: On the one hand, it can be argued that congruence is higher when the less relevant votes are concerned because they are safe for position-taking and of little consequence, no matter what the result of the roll call is. On the other hand, the publicity of more relevant votes is broader and MPs could feel more obliged to stick to their pre-election statements.

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<sup>24</sup> Alternative procedures would be (1) to directly ask the parties or the candidates about their core issues in the 2003/07 elections, (2) to conduct an expert survey among political scientists, or (3) to extract core issues from party manifestos or other documents. Since each alternative has its problems regarding methodology or data availability we decided to keep our variable definition.

Table 5: Policy Areas with Highest/lowest Positional Congruence of MPs (Grouped by Party)<sup>1</sup>

	Highest Congruence	Lowest Congruence
CVP	Immigration, Society and Ethics, Foreign Policy ( $\geq 73.0\%$ )	Finances and Taxes, Social Welfare, Law and Order ( $\leq 68.8\%$ )
FDP	Environment, Economy, Foreign Policy ( $\geq 85.1\%$ )	Society and Ethics, Finances and Taxes, Law and Order ( $\leq 76.5\%$ )
GPS	Environment, Immigration, Foreign Policy ( $\geq 98.7\%$ )	Finances and Taxes, Law and Order, Economy ( $\leq 93.3\%$ )
SPS	Immigration, Social Welfare, Foreign Policy ( $\geq 98.5\%$ )	Finances and Taxes, Economy, Law and Order ( $\leq 95.2\%$ )
SVP	Foreign Policy, Immigration, Social Welfare ( $\geq 94.0\%$ )	Economy, Society and Ethics, Law and Order ( $\leq 89.8\%$ )
All MPs <sup>2</sup>	Immigration, Foreign Policy, Environment ( $\geq 90.7\%$ )	Finances and Taxes, Society and Ethics, Law and Order ( $\leq 84.8\%$ )

Notes: <sup>1</sup> For the classification of policy areas see Appendix 1 <sup>2</sup> Including members of smaller parties not separately listed in the table. Values in brackets refer to the mean congruence rate in these areas.

*Visibility of the vote:* All votes in the Swiss lower chamber are electronically recorded, but only some of them – roughly one third – are made visible to the public (Schwarz 2005; Hug 2005). MPs know in advance which votes will be published so they can theoretically adapt their behaviour (Carey 2009). We thus hypothesise that we will see higher congruence in published votes. Swiss legislative voting rules provide for two different kinds of published votes: First, ensemble votes<sup>25</sup> and final passage votes<sup>26</sup> are published automatically; in a vote type hierarchy, they constitute the most important set of votes. Second, all other votes are subject to publication on demand by at least 30 MPs. In order to disentangle the two effects, we created two dummy variables, one for automatic publication (which is, as we have seen, an indicator for the most important category of votes), and one for publication by specific request. The reference category is unpublished parliamentary votes.

<sup>25</sup> *Gesamtabstimmung*; occurs after the first round of debate in each chamber.

<sup>26</sup> *Schlussabstimmung*; occurs after both chambers have reached an agreement about the final wording.

*Time-span:* Political contexts can and do change over time. Thus pre-election positions are sometimes overtaken by events which *should* lead responsible MPs to change their mind, be it for the benefit of their own voters or for the common good. While our models are unavoidably “static”, i.e. they do not take into account contextual changes to the 34 selected items, the time-span variable (measured in months) tries to capture some variation by assuming that the longer the period between smartvote statement and legislative vote, the higher the probability that conditions change, and with them the positions taken up by MPs.

*Incumbent status:* The effect of incumbency on pledge fulfilment is ambiguous: On the one hand, incumbents know how the wind blows; unlike freshmen, they are more consolidated in their political positions and thus less prone to changing their pre-election positions. On the other hand, incumbents might be more detached, both from their party and their voters. They have gained self-confidence from the fact that they have been re-elected at least once which could weaken the chain of delegation and broaden political leeway (Shugart et al. 2005; Tavits 2009).

Our analysis further controls for the effects of *language* (German-speaking majority vs. French- and Italian-speaking minority), *age*, and *sex*.

### **Multivariate Analysis: What Makes MPs Change Their Position?**

Given the binary dependent variable according to Table 1 and the clustered structure of the data, the following analyses are based on multilevel logit models using individual-level data.<sup>27</sup> The hierarchical data structure features four levels: individual MP, electoral district (canton), national party, and the vote/issue itself. Since these levels are not perfectly nested, the model specification has to deal with cross-classification issues (e.g. national parties appear in different cantons and every MP gives his or her opinion on a number of different votes). The cross-classification structure is simplified by the fact that “empty model” estimations containing only random effects indicated that there is no significant variance between cantons (results not reported). We therefore decided to drop cross-classifications involving parties and cantons, but leaving those between issues and MPs/parties.

<sup>27</sup> Mixed-effects logistic regression models using the *xtmelogit* procedure in Stata 10.1 following the instructions by Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal (2008).

The estimated models generally perform fairly well. Our main criteria for evaluation are the plausibility of the estimated parameters with regard to theoretical expectations (hypotheses) and the robustness of the effects when modifying the composition of the explaining factors.<sup>28</sup> In Table 6, four different models are estimated: the first one contains mainly control variables; the second one contains only factors which are directly related to hypothesis testing; the third model is full-fledged, and the fourth model uses five party dummies in place of the party centrality variable (hence the party level is abandoned). All models show largely identical results.

Beginning with socio-demographic and socio-cultural factors, none of the models indicates any significant effects on MPs' positional congruence. The same is true for the time-span between responding to the smartvote questionnaire and voting in parliament. Significantly positive effects on positional congruence at least at the 95% level can be detected (1) if the MP is an incumbent, (2) if the vote is automatically published (which at the same time concerns the category of most important votes), (3) if the vote is a matter of an MP's party's core issues, and (4) if the MP has been elected in a small electoral district. The analysis further discovers that unlike the visibility/importance of the vote the formal law-making relevance of the bill has no influence on positional congruence.

Significantly negative effects on positional congruence between pre- and post-election behaviour can be found among (1) MPs that belong to centrally located parties in Swiss parliament and – first and foremost – (2) MPs whose smartvote response contradicts the majority opinion in their own legislative party group. Here, the estimated effect is remarkably high (at low standard errors) and indicates that, on average, MPs whose smartvote response is in disagreement with the party group majority show approximately a 50 times higher probability to change their mind. The comparison of models 3 and 4 additionally reveals the theoretically expected differences between parties: Compared to the reference category (the centrally located CVP), members of GPS, SPS and – to a slightly lesser extent – the SVP stick to their pre-election statements significantly more often, whereas FDP members are not different from CVP MPs in their behaviour.

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<sup>28</sup> Additionally, we tested the effect of alternative specification of the *dependent* variable. These tests did not cause substantial changes and thus support the general results. Additionally, any tests on possible multicollinearity problems (pair-wise correlations and variance inflation factors) showed no worrying results.

Table 6: Logit Predictions for Positional Congruence between Pre- and Post-election Sphere. Three-level Cross-classification Models (MPs, Parties, Issues)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Fixed Effects				
Minority Language (French/Italian)	-0.049 (0.105)		-0.015 (0.141)	-0.048 (0.139)
Age	0.001 (0.005)		-0.006 (0.008)	-0.004 (0.007)
Male	0.052 (0.111)		0.067 (0.148)	0.123 (0.148)
Time-span	-0.013 (0.010)		0.002 (0.009)	0.002 (0.0087)
Incumbent		0.321* (0.132)	0.353** (0.138)	0.350* (0.138)
Published Vote (Automatically)		0.634* (0.279)	0.614* (0.281)	0.638* (0.278)
Published Vote (By Request)		0.414+ (0.245)	0.373 (0.258)	0.415 (0.255)
Relevance of Bill		-0.123 (0.224)	-0.133 (0.229)	-0.139 (0.227)
Core Issue		0.423** (0.157)	0.428** (0.159)	0.457** (0.159)
District Magnitude $\leq 4$ Seats		0.603* (0.246)	0.587* (0.250)	0.584* (0.248)
District Magnitude $\geq 15$ Seats		-0.066 (0.131)	-0.072 (0.132)	-0.071 (0.133)
Disagreement with Party Group Majority		-4.059*** (0.136)	-4.063*** (0.136)	-4.026*** (0.135)
Positional Centrality of Party		-0.476* (0.202)	-0.471* (0.198)	
FDP				0.206 (0.195)
GPS				0.956*** (0.291)
SPS				0.918*** (0.215)

Table 6 (continous): Logit Predictions for Positional Congruence between Pre- and Post-election Sphere. Three-level Cross-classification Models (MPs, Parties, Issues)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
SVP				0.365* (0.186)
Small Parties				0.072 (0.266)
Constant	1.879*** (0.399)	3.027*** (0.339)	3.218*** (0.550)	2.393*** (0.547)
Random Effects				
Issue Level ( $\Theta$ )	0.323* (0.098)	0.136* (0.062)	0.137* (0.063)	0.132* (0.062)
Party Level ( $\Psi$ )	0.376* (0.186)	0.034* (0.042)	0.031* (0.041)	
MP Level ( $\Psi$ )	0.014* (0.040)	0.054* (0.072)	0.053* (0.072)	0.042* (0.069)
Observations	4'820	4'765	4'765	4'765
Number of Groups:				
Issue Level	34 (Cross-cl.)	34 (Cross-cl.)	34 (Cross-cl.)	34 (Cross-cl.)
Party Level	14	13	v13	-
MP Level	254	251	251	251
P > Chi2 (Wald)	0.684	0.000	0.000	0.000
P > Chi2 (LR Test vs. Logistic Regression)	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.001
Log Likelihood	-1'794.431	-1'038.629	-1'038.238	-1'032.593

Notes: \*\*\* =  $p < 0.001$ , \*\* =  $p < 0.01$ , \* =  $p < 0.05$ , + =  $p < 0.10$  (two-tailed tests). Entries are non-standardised logit coefficients (standard errors in brackets). All models estimated using xtlogit procedure in Stata 10.1.

In light of the theoretical and empirical literature cited above, we would like to highlight the following points: First, positional congruence has nothing to do with socio-demographic or socio-cultural characteristics of individual MPs. Among the factors that have a significant effect there is one major explanation which outshines almost everything else: If an MP's smartvote position contravenes the majority position of the party group, it is quite unlikely that he or she adheres to his or her pre-election statement. Put in simple figures, if the smartvote position contradicts the party group position, in roughly two thirds of the cases MPs change their minds during the legislative vote. However, if the pre-election statement and the majority position of the legislative party group correspond, a switch of position is only seen in a marginal number of the cases (3%). Possible explanations are three-pronged: First, focusing on the parliamentary group, which has either a "natural" socialising effect on its MPs or asserts strong social pressure to bring deviant MPs back on the party line. Second, as for the centre parties FDP and CVP whose MPs traditionally enjoy more leeway than in the case of the SPS and the SVP, the coercion argument is less convincing. Here it might be the case that MPs of the more centrist formations have weaker preferences on a bigger number of issues which make opinion changes easier. Lastly, a third explanation would focus on VAAs and possible strategic answer patterns in the pre-election sphere.

The results further show that incumbents are either more consolidated in their political attitudes than newcomers or they are in a position which allows stronger resistance against party pressure. In the latter case, we would expect a positive effect of the interaction with disagreement between the smartvote response and the party group majority which would mean that dissenting incumbents are less likely to change their mind after elections than dissenting freshmen. However, additional model estimations (not reported here) do not support this hypothesis.

Furthermore, MPs stick to their pre-election statements more frequently if the individual voting behaviour is (automatically) published and thus visible to the media, pressure groups, and interested voters. Since this category of votes at the same time encompasses many votes of higher importance the question arises which one of the two driving forces – visibility or importance – has a stronger effect. A more in-depth analysis by Schädel (2010) has shown that the decisive factor is rather issue importance than visibility. This also goes along with our finding that positional congruence is higher in core issue areas.

Lastly, and supportive of the relevant voting theory, our results suggest that small district magnitude is supportive to positional congruence. The closeness of the electoral link as well as the fact that such MPs often have a more independent position vis-à-vis the national party facilitate the adherence to pre-election positions.<sup>29</sup>

## Conclusion

This article examined the positional congruence between pre-election statements and actual post-election behaviour in Swiss parliament between 2003 and 2009. Unlike previous studies, the article used individual-level data and asked about the factors that impact the likelihood that MPs change their mind.

From a general perspective, there is no reason for widespread distrust in Swiss politicians: in 85% of the cases MPs stick to their pre-election positions, which indicates that the answers given to the smartvote questionnaire are fairly good predictors of subsequent legislative behaviour. Moreover, the figure hints that positional congruence in Switzerland is higher compared to other dispersed-powers systems, such as the U.S. This is not only good news for Swiss voters; the results may also please the operators of web-based vote advice applications (and their online users).

However, analytically more interesting than these general findings are the determinants of positional changes. The article has shown that the level of positional congruence varies; most notably along the question whether or not the pre-election statement is in agreement with the subsequent party group majority. Moreover, there is a clear pattern along party lines. This sheds light on peer pressure mechanisms in Swiss parliamentary groups and on the question as to how strong the issue preferences of MPs are. It stands to reason that peer pressure plays a larger role in principally cohesive parties such as the SPS, GPS and the SVP, of late, while for MPs belonging to parties with central legislative majority building positions (like the CVP and FDP) the weak preference argument seems more convincing to explain frequent changes of mind. MPs of the CVP and FDP perceive themselves as those who – by their willingness to compromise – ensure

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<sup>29</sup> In general, Schädel (2010) has come to very similar results. However, due to the fact that she used a different research design and in part different explanatory variables, the effects of visibility and district magnitude are not significant in her study.

effective majority building in Switzerland's multi-party bicameral legislature without fixed government coalition; a more flexible preference structure clearly supports this legislative role.

The research question of this article is theoretically embedded in the assumption that voters expect that, once elected, candidates are committed to their pre-election positions (prospective voting). The results confirm that not all statements during the campaign can be put on a level with actual legislative behaviour. Besides the explanations delivered above, additional factors (like strategic behaviour and issue saliency) exist which would need closer examination in further research. Nevertheless, the advice that voters can conclude from this article is: The farther a candidate's personal profile from his or her party, the less likely it is that he or she will stick to it in parliament.

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1: The Included 34 Smartvote Statements / Legislative Votes

No.	Issue	Policy Area(s)	Version <sup>1</sup>	Date of Legislative Vote
1	Simplified Naturalization of 2nd and 3rd Generation of Immigrants	Immigration	2003	03.10.2003
2	Adoption of Children by Homosexual Couples	Society and Ethics	2003	03.12.2003
3	Higher Spending for the Armed Forces	Law and Order Finances and Taxes	2003	09.12.2003
4	EU Membership	Foreign Policy	2003	16.12.2003
5	Splitting TV/Radio Licence Fees between Public and Private TV/Radio Stations	-	2003	03.03.2004
6	Keeping a Nationwide Network of Post Office Branches	Economy, Finances and Taxes	2003	19.03.2004
7	Higher Remuneration for MPs	-	2003	08.10.2004
8	Higher Spending for Agriculture	Economy, Finances and Taxes	2003	01.12.2004
9	Disclosure of the Salaries of Board Members and CEOs in Companies Listed on the Stock Exchange	Economy	2003	02.03.2005
10	Standstill Agreement on Genetically Modified Organisms in Agriculture and Food	Economy, Environment	2003	17.06.2005
11	Keeping Reduced VAT Rate for Tourism Services	Economy, Finances and Taxes	2003	14.12.2005
12	Freedom of Choice between Military Service and Alternative Civilian Service	Law and Order, Society and Ethics	2003	14.12.2005
13	Privatisation of the National Telecommunication Supplier "Swisscom"	Economy	2003	10.05.2006
14	Higher Spending for Day Care and Crèches	Social Welfare, Society and Ethics	2003	07.06.2006
15	Introduction of English as the First Foreign Language in Schools	-	2003	21.06.2007
16	Basic Health Insurance Coverage of Complementary Medicine (Alternative Medicine)	Social Welfare	2007	19.09.2007
17	Storing Soldiers' Service Weapons in the Armoury	Law and Order	2007	22.03.2007/ 27.09.2007
18	Deployment of the Army to Support Civilian Units	Law and Order	2007	27.09.2007

19	Ban on Smoking in Public Buildings, Restaurants and Bars	Society and Ethics	2007	04.10.2007
20	Legalising the Possession and Consumption of Cannabis	Law and Order, Society And Ethics	2007	10.12.2007
21	Granting Nationality at the Communal Level by Using the Ballot Box or a Communal Assembly	Immigration	2007	17.12.2007
22	Toughening the Criminal Law for Juveniles	Law and Order	2007	19.12.2007
23	Limitations on the Environmental Associations' Right of Appeal	Economy, Environment	2007	20.03.2008
24	Introduction of a Finance Referendum at Federal Level	Finances and Taxes	2007	20.03.2008
25	Extending the Free Movement of Peoples between Switzerland and the EU to Bulgaria and Romania	Foreign Policy, Economy, Immigration	2007	28.05.2008
26	Introduction of Road Pricing	Environment	2007	03.06.2008
27	Higher Spending in the Field of Development Aid	Foreign Policy, Finances and Taxes	2007	10.06.2008
28	Giving Young People the Right to Vote from the Age of 16	-	2007	24.09.2008
29	Permission of Parallel Imports of Items Protected by Patent	Economy	2007	15.12.2008
30	Extending the Powers of the Security Authorities to Include the Preventative Monitoring of Postal, Telephone and Email Traffic	Law and Order, Society and Ethics	2007	17.12.2008
31	Ban on the Construction of Minarets	Society and Ethics	2007	04.03.2009
32	Introduction of a Minimum Wage	Economy, Social Welfare	2007	11.03.2009
33	Direct Election of the Federal Council (Executive)	-	2007	30.03.2009
34	Retail Price Maintenance on Books	Economy	2007	27.05.2009

Note: <sup>1</sup> Smartvote Version.

## Appendix 2: Definition of Independent Variables

Variable	Operationalisation
1. Positional Incongruence with Party Group Majority	0/1-Dummy; 1 = Smartvote Response Different from Party Group Majority Opinion. In Case of a Tie in the Party Group Any Smartvote Response is Set to 0 by Default. MPs not Member of a Group are Treated as Missing Values.
2.1 Positional Centrality of the Party	0/1-Dummy; 1 = CVP, FDP, LPS, EVP, GLP.
2.2 Party	Party Dummies for FDP, GPS, SPS, SVP, and “Small Parties” (= All Other Parties, Except CVP). Reference Category = CVP.
3. District Magnitude	2 Dummy Variables: Districts $\leq 4$ Seats; Districts $\geq 15$ Seats. Reference Category: Cantons with 5–14 Seats.
4. Core Issues	0/1-Dummy: 3 Issue Dimensions with Lowest Standard Deviation in the Smartvote Responses of all Candidates of a Specific Party in the 2003/07 Elections.
5. Relevance of the Vote	0/1-Dummy: 1 = Votes with Potentially High Law-making Effects (Government Bills, Committee Proposals or Parliamentary Initiatives in Advanced Stage).
6. Visibility of the Vote	2 Dummy Variables: Automatically Published Votes (= Most Important Votes), Votes Published by Specific Request. Reference Category: Unpublished Votes.
7. Time Span	Period between Smartvote Response and Legislative Vote (In Months).
8. Incumbent Status	0/1-Dummy: 1 = MP was Incumbent when Responding to Smartvote Questionnaire.
9. Minority Language	0/1-Dummy: 1 = Member of French-/Italian-speaking Minority
10. Age	Age of MP in Years (Year of Reference: 2007)
11. Sex	0/1-Dummy: 1 = Male

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**Positions pré-électorales et comportement électoral dans le parlement:  
Congruence des positions politiques parmi les parlementaires suisses**

Dans la présente contribution, le comportement de vote des membres du Conseil national est comparé à leurs positions politiques exprimées avant leur élection. Pour la période de 2003 à 2009, l'analyse des données au niveau individuel montre que dans 85% des cas, le comportement de vote au sein du Parlement est conforme à la position prise avant les élections. A l'aide d'une analyse statistique multi-niveaux, les facteurs ayant une influence sur la congruence des prises de positions politiques ont pu être identifiés. Sur la base de ces résultats, on peut affirmer qu'un changement de position après l'élection au Conseil national est plus probable (1) parmi les nouveaux élus, (2) quand le comportement de vote individuel est publié, (3) si la circonscription électorale n'est pas petite, (4) quand le vote en question ne concerne pas un thème prioritaire du parti en question, (5) si le/la Conseiller/-ère national/-e en question appartient à un parti du centre et (6) si la position pré-électorale du/de la Conseiller/-ère national/-e est différente de la position de la majorité des membres de son groupe parlementaire. Ce dernier facteur s'avère être le plus important.

**Vorwahl-Positionierung und Stimmverhalten im Parlament:  
Kongruenz der politischen Positionen schweizerischer Parlamentsmitglieder**

Der Beitrag beschäftigt sich mit der Frage, inwieweit die politischen Positionen von Schweizer Nationalratsmitgliedern mit dem parlamentarischen Stimmverhalten nach der Wahl übereinstimmen und welche Faktoren einen Einfluss auf den Grad der Positionsänderung haben. Diese Frage wird für die Zeitspanne 2003–09 auf der individuellen Ebene der Nationalrätinnen und Nationalräte untersucht. Die Untersuchung zeigt, dass die durchschnittliche Übereinstimmungsrate bei rund 85% liegt. Aufgrund einer Mehrebenenanalyse wurden zudem Faktoren eruiert, welche die individuelle Positionskongruenz beeinflussen. Positionswechsel sind demnach wahrscheinlicher, wenn (1) es sich um Neugewählte handelt, (2) das individuelle Stimmverhalten öffentlich sichtbar ist, (3) der Wahlkreis nicht klein ist, (4) die Abstimmung kein Kernthema der jeweiligen Partei betrifft, (5) der Nationalrat einer Partei angehört, welche in der politischen Mitte positioniert ist, und (6) die Vorwahlposition eines Parlamentsmitglieds von der Mehrheitsmeinung seiner Fraktion abweicht. Von diesen genannten Faktoren übt der letztgenannte den grössten Einfluss aus.

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