

## Swiss Reliability?

### An empirical comparison of Swiss MPs' pre- and post-electoral positions

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#### **Abstract**

*This paper 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 86%, 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) the issue at stake is not salient and (3) not about a core issue of the respective MP's party, (4) when the MP belongs to a party which is located in the political centre, and (5) the pre-election statement dissents from the majority position of the legislative party group. Of these factors, the last one is paramount.*

#### **Résumé**

*Dans la présente contribution, le comportement de vote des membres du Conseil national suisse 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 sont 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 vote en question n'est pas salient et (3) 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.*

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Do members of Parliament (MPs) stick to their pre-election positions once they have been elected to parliament? The electorate does not generally believe this to be the case. According to the 2006 ISSP survey “Role of Government IV” only about 20% of the electorate in 34 countries are of the opinion that elected MPs try to keep their electoral promises. 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 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. Among Swiss voters the share of respondents believing that MPs usually try to keep their election promises is among the highest with roughly 37%, according to the 2006 “Role of Government IV” poll of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP).<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. Schattschneider 1942; Downs 1957). 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 (Pitkin 1967; Wahlke 1971; Eulau and Karps 1978). Nonetheless, promissory forms of representation are still widely used as analytical frameworks in contemporary political research (also in this paper). 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

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on Schwarz et al. (2010) and Schädel (2011)

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

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 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 (Walgrave et al. 2008; Ladner et al. 2008a), 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. This paper is concerned with the congruence of political positions of MPs before and after elections. It is guided by the following three research questions:

- (1) *To what extent do elected MPs stick to their pre-election positions?*
- (2) *In what direction on the left-right-scale do MPs’ positions shift?*
- (3) *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 paper 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

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<sup>3</sup> See footnote 13.

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 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 and several European countries.<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 (see Schädel 2011: 6 for an overview of the mentioned studies and their reported pledge fulfilment rates).<sup>7</sup> Hardly surprising is the fact that institutional characteristics have an important impact on the fulfilment rates. According to Naurin (2009: 64-68), the following three patterns can be found: First, parliamentary systems have on average higher fulfilment rates than presidential (USA) or semi-presidential systems (F). Second, within parliamentary systems we find higher rates among majority governments (GR, CDN) than minority governments (E). Third, election pledges have a higher propensity of being fulfilled in single-party governments (GB, GR,

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

<sup>5</sup> For the U.S., see Pomper (1968), Bradley (1969), David (1971), Elling (1979), Pomper and Lederman (1980), Krukones (1984), Fishel (1985), Rallings (1987), Royed (1996), Royed and Borelii (1997, 1999), Shaw (1998), Ringquist and Dasse (2004); Britain: Rose (1980), Royed (2007); Canada: Rallings (1987), Monière (1988), Pétry (2002), Pétry and Collette (2006); Greece: Kalogeropoulou (1989); the Netherlands: Thomson (1999, 2001); Ireland: Mansergh and Thomson (2007), Costello and Thomson (2008); New Zealand: McClusky (2008); Czech Republic: Roberts (2008); Spain: Artés and Bustos (2008); France: Holmqvist (2008); Norway: Sandvold (2008); Sweden: Naurin (2009).

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

<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.

CDN, S, NZ1<sup>8</sup>) than in coalition governments (NL, IRL, NZ2). In other words, the pledge fulfilment is higher, the easier it is for a party to have its own way.

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>9</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>10</sup> Moreover, the vagueness of some statements often leaves researchers puzzled whether to classify them as explicit election pledge or not. Third, existing studies ignore different mechanisms of law making in legislative-executive relations.<sup>11</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 however (Powell 2000; Samuels and Shugart 2003), party-level analyses seem inadequate for two reasons. First, as soon as different political actors at different state 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

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<sup>8</sup> In the 1990s an electoral reform was implemented in New Zealand in the course of which the former majoritarian system was replaced by a PR system. This meant that on the government level coalitions had to be built and the former one-party system disappeared. In doing so, the pledge fulfilment rate dropped from 78% to 62% (McCluskey 2008, cited in Naurin 2009: 68).

<sup>9</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>10</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>11</sup> An exception is the attention recent studies draw to the effects of coalition governments (Mansergh and Thomson 2007, Costello and Thomson 2008) or minority governments (Naurin 2009), as compared to single-party governments.

produce weak party systems at the 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>12</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/SP and the Green Party/GP), right-wing parties (primarily the Swiss People's Party/SVP), and moderate centrist parties (such as the Christian Democratic People's Party/CVP and the Free Democratic Party/FDP) (see Ladner 2007; Hug and Schulz 2007; Kriesi 2001). 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 (Kriesi 2001; Lüthi 2007; Hug and Sciarini 2009; Schwarz et al. 2010).

### **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 and comparing them with actual government performance, we use personal statements of MPs as recorded in the Swiss VAA “smartvote”<sup>13</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

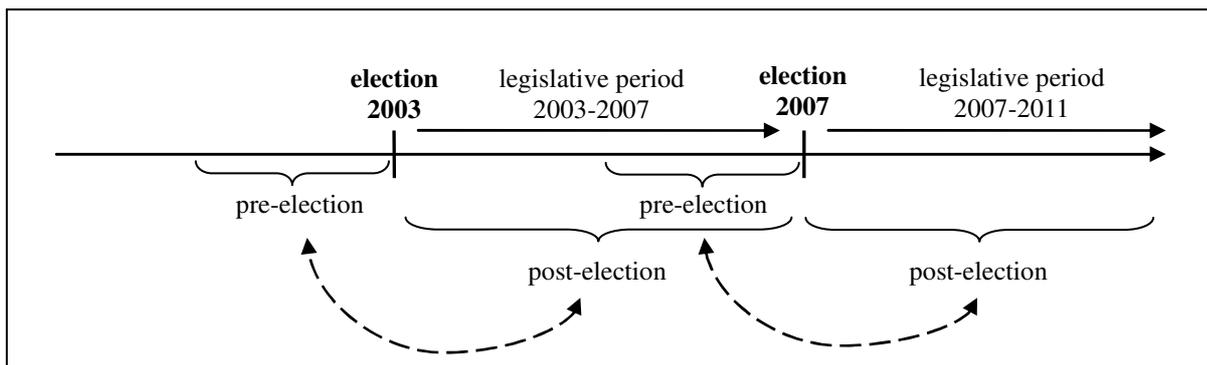
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<sup>12</sup> Parliamentary or governmental rights to dismiss each other during the constitutionally fixed legislative period of four years are entirely lacking.

<sup>13</sup> <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).

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 2003-2007 debates were inspected, and for the answers in the 2007 questionnaire only the debates from 2007 onwards.<sup>14</sup> The maximum time span between the promise and the related parliamentary vote is therefore four years (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1:** Pre- and post-election spheres 2003-2009 taken into account



The smartvote questionnaire provides for four answer options (fully agree, weakly agree, weakly disagree, fully disagree), while parliamentary 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>15</sup> Neither abstentions nor absenteeism in the parliament, nor non-reply to the smartvote questionnaire are taken into account in our analysis.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</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).

<sup>15</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>16</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 1800 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 4820 (see also the distribution of cases in the dependent variable in Table 2).

**Table 1:** Proximity matrix (congruence) between smartvote answer and legislative behaviour (dependent variable)

<i>smartvote answer</i>	<i>legislative behaviour</i>		
	<i>yea</i>	<i>nay</i>	<i>abstention</i>
fully agree	1	0	--
weakly agree	1	0	--
weakly disagree	0	1	--
fully disagree	0	1	--

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

Table 2 gives an overview on the number of cases in the proximity matrix (dependent variable) while table 3 depicts some basic information on the dataset.

**Table 2:** Distribution of cases in the proximity matrix (percentages in brackets)

<i>smartvote answer</i>	<i>legislative behaviour</i>		
	<i>yea</i>	<i>nay</i>	<i>total</i>
fully agree	1'630 (34.0%)	159 (3.3%)	1'789 (38.5%)
weakly agree	395 (8.2%)	228 (4.8%)	623 (13.4%)
weakly disagree	151 (3.2%)	340 (7.1%)	491 (10.6%)
fully disagree	115 (2.4%)	1'632 (34.0%)	1'747 (37.6%)
<b>total</b>	<b>2'291 (47.8%)</b>	<b>2'359 (49.2%)</b>	<b>4'650 (100.0%)</b>

**Table 3:** Number of MPs and MP votes in the dataset (per party)

<i>Party</i>	<i>Number of MPs included</i>			<i>Number of MP votes included</i>			<i>Average number of votes per MP</i>
	2003	2007	total	2003	2007	total	entire time period
<i>SVP</i>	46	55	61	561	739	1'267	20.8
<i>SP</i>	55	42	62	759	576	1'301	21.0
<i>FDP</i>	35	29	44	349	379	702	16.0
<i>CVP</i>	31	30	38	359	388	734	19.3
<i>Grüne</i>	16	21	27	198	285	474	17.6
<i>Other parties</i>	17	14	22	178	173	342	15.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>2'404</b>	<b>2'540</b>	<b>4'820</b>	<b>19.0</b>

### To what extent do elected MPs stick to their pre-election positions (descriptive results)?

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 86% of the cases (see Table 4).<sup>17</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 (SP) and the Greens (GP) – with values exceeding 90%, and the right-wing national-conservative SVP with 86%. The two centrist parties, the Christian Democrats (CVP) and the liberal Free Democrats (FDP), show substantially lower congruence rates: their average rates vary between 74 and 81%.

**Table 4:** Mean positional congruence of MPs (grouped by party, percentages)

<i>Party</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Number of MPs included</i>
<i>SVP</i>	86.3	7.0	69.0	100.0	61
<i>SP</i>	93.5	6.3	66.7	100.0	62
<i>FDP</i>	80.5	10.9	50.0	100.0	44
<i>CVP</i>	74.0	11.6	33.3	96.2	38
<i>GP</i>	92.3	8.3	73.3	100.0	27
<i>other parties</i>	81.9	12.6	60.0	100.0	22
<i>All MPs</i>	86.1	12.5	33.3	100.0	254

*Reading example:* On average, a CVP MP sticks to his/her pre-election statement in 74% of the cases.

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>18</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 & order issues are ranking at the bottom. Some topics seem to be party-specific: for instance, SP and SVP MPs stay quite firmly in social welfare questions, GP and FDP MPs in environmental issues (FDP members also stay quite firm in the area of economic policy).

<sup>17</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).

<sup>18</sup> According to Appendix 1, the policy areas covered in this study are: foreign policy, economy, finances & taxes, law & order, immigration, environment, social welfare, society & ethics.

**Table 5:** Policy areas with the highest/lowest positional congruence of MPs (grouped by party)<sup>19</sup>

<i>Party</i>	<i>Highest congruence</i>	<i>Lowest congruence</i>
<i>SVP</i>	society & ethics, foreign policy (=), immigration (=)	economy, law & order, environment
<i>SP</i>	immigration (=), social welfare (-), foreign policy	finances & taxes (-), economy, law & order
<i>FDP</i>	environment (-), economy (-), foreign policy (-)	society & ethics, finances & taxes (=), law & order
<i>CVP</i>	immigration, society & ethics, foreign policy (-)	finances & taxes (=), social welfare (-), law & order (-)
<i>GP</i>	environment (=), immigration (=), foreign policy	finances & taxes (-), law & order, economy
<i>All MPs</i> <sup>20</sup>	immigration, foreign policy, environment	finances & taxes, society & ethics, law & order

*Legend:* (=): core issue of the party in both elections; (-): core issue of the party in one election (2003 or 2007).

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.

### **In what direction on the left-right-scale do MPs' positions shift?**

In addition to the question whether MPs change their pre-election positions, we are interested in the direction of these changes on a left-right-scale. Of the 34 votes taken into account in this study, we were able to place 23 on the left-right-scale.<sup>21</sup> As can be seen from the following table we have quite an even distribution, with almost 50% of changes to the left and 50% to the right.

**Table 6:** Directional change of MPs' positions

<i>Directional change</i>	<i>Frequency (%)</i>	<i>N</i>
<i>Left</i>	48.2	217
<i>Right</i>	51.8	233
<i>Total</i>	100	450

The following figure 2 tries to give an overview on MPs' positional congruence with respect to their change on the left-right-dimension and their change in line with the majority party position. As can be seen from the diagram, of all the positional changes to the left (217) almost 80% are in line with the party position. Among changes to the right this percentage rises to almost 95%. This means that

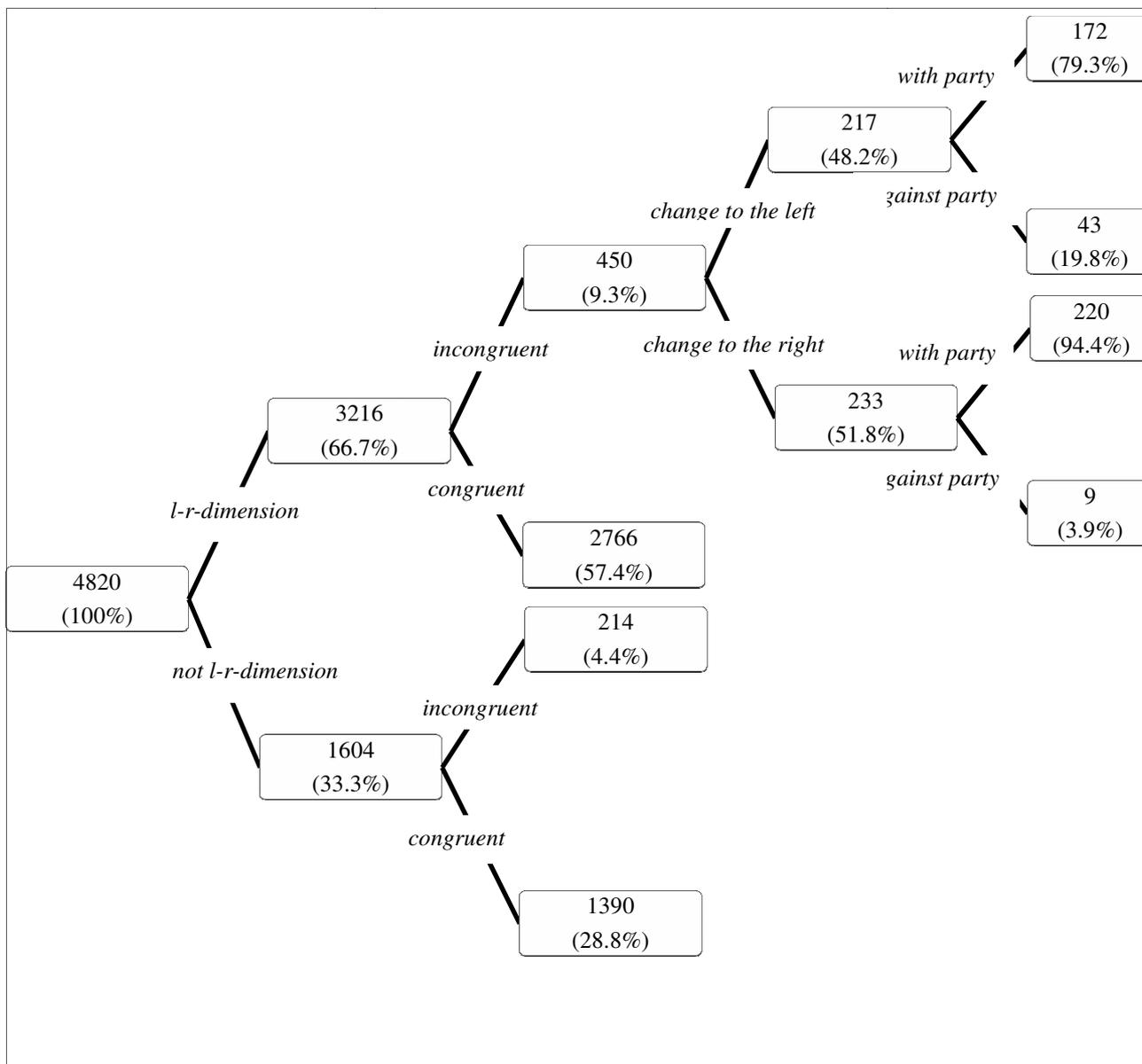
<sup>19</sup> For the classification of policy areas see Appendix 1.

<sup>20</sup> Includes members of smaller parties not separately listed in the table.

<sup>21</sup> In classifying issues as right and left we tried to follow the instructions given by the Manifesto Project (Volkens et al. 2010; <http://manifestoproject.wzb.eu/>)

the reasons for shifting leftwards or rightwards can be found in an alignment with the official party line. We will come back to this result in the next section when discussing the results of our multilevel analyses.

**Figure 2:** Tree diagram of MPs' positional congruence; number of parliamentary votes



### How can deviant issue positions be explained?

Why do some MPs stick to their pre-election positions while others tend to change their minds more frequently? We expect several different factors to have a direct influence on an MP's positional congruence. In this section we introduce these factors, present our corresponding hypotheses and define the operationalisation of the related variables (for details, see Appendix 2). Since the

influencing factors are located on several different levels we will discuss them according to these levels:

### **1) Individual factors:**

*Legitimacy:* In a democratic system MPs gain legitimacy through their electorate, i.e. if a certain amount of the electorate votes in favour of a candidate, he or she is legitimized as an MP. The impact of MPs in the parliamentary arena differs widely from one MP to another, despite the formal rule that each MP gets accorded one vote. Among other factors explaining these different impact levels, the number of votes an MP has received from his or her electorate certainly plays some role. The effect of the number of votes on an MP's positional congruence is not clear however. On the one hand, MPs backed by a large portion of the electorate should find it easier to insist on their positions and not succumb to external pressures (from the party group or other actors). On the other hand, such MPs could understand their legitimacy more in the sense of a trustee, who is given the authority by their voters to act independently.

*Incumbent status:* The effect of incumbency on pledge fulfilment is ambiguous as well: 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).

*Indecisiveness:* As mentioned before, candidates have four different answer options when filling in the smartvote questionnaire. They can either express strong (dis)agreement or weak (dis)agreement with a statement. Since candidates are not given the opportunity to abstain from position taking on any of the issues, we assume that those respondents not feeling very sure of the answer will be more likely to choose the "weaker" form of position taking. We therefore expect candidates with a high percentage of "weak" smartvote positions to later show a higher propensity to deviate from these positions.

*Disagreement with the party group majority:* Positional congruence by an MP should be 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 takes 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 (Hertig 1978; Damgaard 1995; Lanfranchi and Lüthi 1999). This variable is binary, analogically defined to the dependent variable.<sup>22</sup>

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

## 2) Issue factors:

*Saliency of the vote:* Not every roll call is equally significant within the legislative process and the willingness of MPs to stick to their pre-electoral positions should also depend on the saliency of the issue at stake. Several studies have shown that MPs try much harder to act in line with the opinions of their electorate when salient issues are concerned (Miller and Stokes 1963, 1966; Cnudde and McCrone 1966; Kuklinski and McCrone 1980). We therefore expect MPs to be more congruent when salient issues are concerned. The measurement of saliency is a very difficult endeavour. Given the absence of reliable survey data – a method often used to elicit saliency – we have decided to use media coverage and the intensity of parliamentary debates as proxies. We assume that high media coverage and long parliamentary debates can be interpreted as signs for high issue saliency.

*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>23</sup> and final passage votes<sup>24</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. We created two dummy variables, one for automatic publication, and one for publication by specific request. The reference category is unpublished parliamentary votes.

*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”,

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<sup>22</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>23</sup> *Gesamtabstimmung*; occurs after the first round of debate in each chamber.

<sup>24</sup> *Schlussabstimmung*; occurs after both chambers have reached an agreement about the final wording.

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 propensity that conditions change, and with them the positions taken up by MPs.

### **3) Party factors:**

*Parties' core issues:* 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>25</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 & taxes, law & order, immigration, environment, social welfare, and society & 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.

*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 (Jegher 1999; Kriesi 2001; Linder and Schwarz 2008; Schwarz 2009; Hug and Sciarini 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, i.e. CVP,

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<sup>25</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.

FDP, LPS, EVP, GLP), tend to have a lower positional congruence.

### **Multivariate analysis: What makes MPs change their position?**

Given the binary dependent variable according to Table 1 and the multilevel structure of the data, the following analyses are based on multilevel logit models. The hierarchical data structure features three levels: individual MPs, the votes/issues, and the parties<sup>26</sup>. In Table 7, four different models are estimated: the first one contains all individual level variables, model B contains all issue-level variables and model C all party-level variables. In Model D all the contextual variables that have proven significant in the previous models are included.<sup>27</sup>

With respect to the individual variables, the models show fairly consistent results. *Incumbent MPs* seem to be significantly more consistent in their positions than newcomers. This could either be due to incumbents' longer experience and consequently their more consolidated political attitudes. Or it could be explained by the fact that newcomers are more likely to succumb to pressures from within their party group. Another explanation could be that incumbents know very well about the (informal) pressure within the party group they will face once elected and they might therefore adapt their pre-election positions to the expected or known party position rather than give their personal opinion on smartvote.

*Indecisive MPs* have a much lower propensity to stick to their pre-election positions than decisive MPs in the first two models, i.e. candidates giving "weak" answers tend to change their positions once in parliament. With the inclusion of party-level variables this effect loses its significance however. This comes as no surprise since the centrally located parties have higher proportions of indecisive MPs among their ranks than left- or right-wing parties<sup>28</sup>. With the inclusion of the positional centrality of an MP's party as a variable, the individual indecisiveness therefore loses its significance.

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<sup>26</sup> We defer to a more thorough discussion on the method and refer to the relevant literature on multilevel analysis (Hox 2010; Jones 1997; Snijders and Bosker 1999; Teachman and Crowder, 2002; for multilevel logit analysis see Goldstein 1991; Guo and Zhao 2000).

<sup>27</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. We also estimated several other models (empty models, two-level-models, etc.) which all support the general results presented here (see Schädel 2011).

<sup>28</sup> CVP and FDP MPs gave in roughly one third of the cases a "weakly (dis-)agree" answer, while among SP, GP and SVP members this share drops to 15-20%.

**Table 7:** Logit predictions for positional congruence between pre- and post-election sphere. Three-level cross-classification models (MPs, parties, issues)

	<b>Model A</b> context level 1: Issues context level 2: Parties	<b>Model B</b> CL 1: Issues CL 2: Parties	<b>Model C</b> CL 1: Issues CL 2: Parties	<b>Model D</b> CL 1: Issues CL 2: Parties
<b>FIXED EFFECTS</b>				
Constant	-209 (.317)	<b>-967</b> <b>(.461)*</b>	<b>-716</b> <b>(.371)*</b>	<b>-1.024</b> <b>(.387)***</b>
<b>INDIVIDUAL LEVEL</b>				
Legitimacy	-.371 (.390)	-.386 (.393)	-.236 (.470)	-.256 (.472)
Incumbent	<b>.290</b> <b>(.148)*</b>	<b>.278</b> <b>(.148)*</b>	<b>.479</b> <b>(.174)***</b>	<b>.457</b> <b>(.175)***</b>
Indecisiveness	<b>-1.042</b> <b>(.451)**</b>	<b>-1.060</b> <b>(.454)**</b>	-.325 (.545)	-.369 (.547)
Disagreement with party group majority	<b>4.189</b> <b>(.143)***</b>	<b>4.176</b> <b>(.143)***</b>	<b>4.644</b> <b>(.167)***</b>	<b>4.607</b> <b>(.166)***</b>
Minority language (f/i)	-.067 (.149)	-.061 (.150)	.004 (.175)	-.002 (.176)
Age	-.515 (.395)	-.441 (.398)	-.597 (.485)	-.531 (.460)
Sex (female)	.097 (.148)	.097 (.149)	.162 (.173)	.157 (.174)
<b>CONTEXT LEVEL 1</b>				
Saliency of the issue	-	<b>1.060</b> <b>(.428)**</b>	-	<b>1.392</b> <b>(.405)***</b>
Automatically published vote	-	.413 (.299)	-	-
Published upon request	-	.301 (.266)	-	-
Time-span	-	.404 (.313)	-	-
<b>CONTEXT LEVEL 2</b>				
Core issues	-	-	<b>.462</b> <b>(.190)**</b>	<b>.505</b> <b>(.185)***</b>
Positional centrality of party	-	-	<b>-.480</b> <b>(.238)**</b>	<b>-.474</b> <b>(.260)*</b>
<b>RANDOM EFFECTS</b>				
Contextual level 2 (parties)	.083 (.076)	.113 (.087)	.041 (.059)	.081 (.074)
Contextual level 1 (issues)	<b>.615</b> <b>(.155)***</b>	<b>.565</b> <b>(.149)***</b>	<b>.339</b> <b>(.142)**</b>	<b>.253</b> <b>(.128)**</b>
Individual level	<b>1</b> <b>(0)***</b>	<b>1</b> <b>(0)***</b>	<b>1</b> <b>(0)***</b>	<b>1</b> <b>(0)***</b>
<b>MODEL PROPERTIES</b>				
Number of cases (issues, parties)	4825 (34, 24)	4825 (34, 24)	4825 (34, 24)	4825 (34, 24)
Wald (Joint chi <sup>2</sup> ) (df)	987.211 (8)	964.793 (12)	916.904 (10)	892.344 (11)

*Notes:* Not standardised coefficients with standard errors in brackets; all independent variables rescaled on a scale of 0-1, where 0 indicates the lowest value and 1 the highest value of the variable. Coefficients therefore indicate the change associated with moving from the lowest to the highest value. The Wald test is an approximate Chi<sup>2</sup> based test of the fit of the model; \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1; all models calculated with MLwiN, restricted maximum likelihood first order MQL binominal logit analysis.

The by far largest (negative) effect on positional congruence is exerted by the *disagreement between an MP's smartvote position and the party group majority's parliamentary position*. That is, an MP whose pre-election position stands in opposition to the future party group's position shows a very high propensity to adapt his or her position to the party line. This strong influence of the party groups might come as a surprise given the generally assumed low party pressure in the Swiss parliament. We will discuss this result in more detail further down. Concerning the other individual-level variables *legitimacy, language, age* and *gender* no significant effects on MPs' positional congruence could be found.

Turning to the issue-level variables, a large impact of the *salience of an issue* could be detected. The more salient an issue is, the higher is the congruence of MPs on that specific issue. This could on the one hand be explained by the higher visibility of such issues to the electorate, i.e. MPs can expect that their voters will know about their voting behaviour in parliament and might fear negative consequences for their re-election if they don't stick to their original position. On the other hand, we would expect candidates to have more consolidated positions on issues that are well known and that have been discussed in the public arena. The *publication of a parliamentary vote* does not seem to have a significant impact however, and neither does the *time-span* between a parliamentary vote and the preceding election.

The two included party-level variables both show a significant effect. If the issue at stake is among a party's *core issues*, MPs of that particular party are on average much more likely to stick to their pre-electoral positions. This effect can again be explained with the more consolidated positions of candidates on these issues. Furthermore, there is a high probability that a candidate's personal opinion on these issues already conforms to the party line. As already mentioned with respect to the influence of an MP's indecisiveness there is a significant negative effect of the *positional centrality of a party* on positional congruence. MPs belonging to one of the parties in the political centre (primarily CVP and FDP) are more likely to change their pre-election positions once in parliament.

In light of the theoretical and empirical literature cited above, we would like to highlight the following points: (1) 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 will adhere 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 (see table 8). The

influence of the party group becomes even more evident when we look only at those MPs who have changed their positions: In 81.6% of the cases these changes go in the direction of the party position.

**Table 8:** Positional in(congruence) of MPs with pre-election positions differing from the party-group's position

<i>Status</i>	<i>Positional congruence</i>		<i>Positional incongruence</i>	
<i>Incumbent</i>	35.1%	(178)	64.9%	(329)
<i>Newcomer</i>	29.3%	(86)	70.7%	(208)
<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b>33.0%</b>	<b>(264)</b>	<b>67.0%</b>	<b>(537)</b>

*Note:* number of cases in brackets

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 SP 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. This could also be confirmed by the fact that candidates of centrist parties tend to give “weak” answers in the smartvote questionnaire. Lastly, a third explanation would focus on VAAs and possible strategic answer patterns in the pre-election sphere. (2) 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. (3) MPs stick to their pre-election statements more frequently if an issue is very salient, as measured by large media coverage and extensive parliamentary debates. From the view of promissory representation this can be interpreted as a good sign: politicians, it seems, cannot afford to act against the will of their electorate when it comes to salient issues.

## **Conclusion**

This paper examined the positional congruence between pre-election statements and actual post-election behaviour in Swiss parliament between 2003 and 2009. Unlike previous studies, the paper 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 86% 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 indicates that positional congruence in Switzerland is higher compared to other dispersed-powers systems, such as the United States. Swiss MPs do seem to confirm the Swiss reliability thesis. 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 paper 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 SP, GP 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 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) exist which would need closer examination in further research. Nevertheless, the conclusion that voters can draw from this paper is: The farther a candidate's profile from his or her party, the less likely it is that he or she will stick to the pre-election positions in parliament.

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1: The 34 included smartvote statements / legislative votes

No.	Issue	Left-right dimension	Policy area(s)	smartvote version	Date of legislative vote
1	Simplified naturalization of 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> generation of immigrants	X	Immigration	2003	03.10.2003
2	Adoption of children by homosexual couples	X	society & ethics	2003	03.12.2003
3	Higher spending for the armed forces	X	law & order finances & taxes	2003	09.12.2003
4	EU membership	X	foreign policy	2003	16.12.2003
5	Splitting TV/radio licence fees between public and private TV/radio stations	X	–	2003	03.03.2004
6	Keeping a nationwide network of post office branches	X	economy, finances & taxes	2003	19.03.2004
7	Higher remuneration for MPs	–	–	2003	08.10.2004
8	Higher spending for agriculture	–	economy, finances & taxes	2003	01.12.2004
9	Disclosure of the salaries of board members and CEOs in companies listed on the stock exchange	X	Economy	2003	02.03.2005
10	Standstill agreement on genetically modified organisms in agriculture and food	X	economy, environment	2003	17.06.2005
11	Keeping reduced VAT rate for tourism services	–	economy, finances & taxes	2003	14.12.2005
12	Freedom of choice between military service and alternative civilian service	X	law & order, society & ethics	2003	14.12.2005
13	Privatisation of the national telecommunication supplier "Swisscom"	X	Economy	2003	10.05.2006

14	Higher spending for day care and crèches	X	social welfare, society & 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)	X	social welfare	2007	19.09.2007
17	Storing soldiers' service weapons in the armoury	X	law & order	2007	22.03.2007/ 27.09.2007
18	Deployment of the army to support civilian units	X	law & order	2007	27.09.2007
19	Ban on smoking in public buildings, restaurants and bars	X	society & ethics	2007	04.10.2007
20	Legalising the possession and consumption of cannabis	–	law & order, society & 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	X	law & order	2007	19.12.2007
23	Limitations on the environmental associations' right of appeal	X	economy, environment	2007	20.03.2008
24	Introduction of a finance referendum at federal level	X	finances & 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	X	Environment	2007	03.06.2008
27	Higher spending in the field of development aid	X	foreign policy, finances & 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	X	law & order, society & ethics	2007	17.12.2008

31	Ban on the construction of minarets	–	society & ethics	2007	04.03.2009
32	Introduction of a minimum wage	X	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	X	economy	2007	27.05.2009

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## Appendix 2: Definition of independent variables<sup>29</sup>

Variable	Operationalisation
1. Legitimacy	Number of votes received during the parliamentary election preceding the respective parliamentary vote.
2. Incumbent status	0/1-Dummy: 1 = MP was incumbent when responding to smartvote questionnaire.
3. Indecisiveness	Percentage of smartvote-questions answered with “weakly agree” or “weakly disagree” by a candidate.
4. Disagreement 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.
5. Saliency of the issue	Factor consisting of the extent of media coverage (number and length of articles in four important newspapers) and extent of parliamentary debate (number of speakers and length of debate in parliament) on the issue concerned.
6. Visibility of the vote	2 dummy variables: automatically published votes; votes published upon request. Reference category: unpublished votes
7. Time span	Period between smartvote response and legislative vote (in months).
8. 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.
9. Positional centrality of the party	0/1-Dummy; 1 = CVP, FDP, LPS, EVP, GLP.
10. Minority language	0/1-Dummy: 1 = member of French-/Italian-speaking minority
11. Age	Age of MP in years (year of reference: 2007)
12. Sex	0/1-Dummy

<sup>29</sup> For a more detailed overview on the operationalisation of the variables see Schädel (2011).