

## When the Winner Takes Less

Does Compensational Voting Make Sense in Swiss Consociationalism?

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*“It is only when we have a better understanding of the way the behavior we observe is shaped by the institutions we observe, only when we refrain from analyzing behavior as if it were stripped down from an institutional context, that we will be able to successfully understand behavior (...)” (Kedar 2009: 138).*

### Introduction

It is an empirical fact that voters do not always go for the politically closest alternative (e.g., Blais, Aldrich, Indridason and Levine 2006; Lau and Redlawsk 2006; Bargsted and Kedar 2009). Thus scholars in the issue-voting tradition (i.e., running under the assumption that voters are predominately policy-oriented) have been looking for theoretical extensions to the standard proximity voting models (Downs 1957; Enelow and Hinich 1984). Some scholars propose that voters use their votes *strategically*. According to Cox (1997), for instance, voters take into account the perceived electoral chances of the parties; in order to avoid wasting their vote, they support only parties that are likely to win. The electoral effects of different voting systems thus play a predominant role within this theory. Sophisticated voting is also at the core of the *compensational-vote model* (Kedar 2005a, 2005b, 2009). Voters anticipate political compromise within government coalitions; they are tempted to pick a less proximate party in order to pull enacted policies as close as possible to their ideal point: “If (...) voters are concerned with policy outcomes, they will not necessarily vote for the party whose positions are most similar to their own positions, but rather, they will compensate for postelectoral bargaining resulting in watering-down of their vote and will often prefer parties whose positions differ from their

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own” (Kedar 2005a: 190). Thus the compensational-vote model – like other theories of strategic voting behaviour – explicitly assumes what Downs (1957) in his classical work dismissed as unrealistic, albeit rationally desirable: that voters in multi-party systems have the capacity for sophisticated voting (see also Blais et al. 2006).<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, recent studies have tried to combine the two strategic incentives of perceived electoral chance and expected government policy (Bargsted and Kedar 2009; Lachat and Selb 2009).

Unlike sophisticated voting models, and perhaps closer to Downs' expectations, the *incorrect voting literature* (Lau and Redlawsk 2006) takes a more pessimistic view on voters' strategic skills. They claim that voters suffer deficits in information processing capabilities and may at times err about parties' policy positions in the political space. Similarly, Strøm, Müller and Bergman (2003) see a mounting overload of predominantly irrelevant or even misleading information as major challenge to the proper functioning of the delegation principle in contemporary parliamentary democracies.

Neither information processing nor sophisticated voting, but rather “emotional” forces are the basis for voting decisions which disregard political proximity according to the *directional model of voting* (Matthews 1979; Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989; Macdonald et al. 1991, 1995). The theory assumes that “[p]arties and candidates can be located (...) according to the direction of policy they advocate and the intensity of the stand they take” (Macdonald et al. 1995: 456), and that voters reward parties which have clear-cut positions in the preferred political direction, as long as these positions do not lie outside a so-called “region of acceptability” (Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989: 108).

Compared to the – sometimes fierce – scholarly debate between proponents of proximity and directional voting models until beginning of the 2000s (e.g., Westholm 1997; Lewis and King 1999; Macdonald et al. 2001; Blais, Nadeau, Gidengil and Nevitte 2001), the compensational-vote approach stepped in only recently and began to dominate discussions henceforth. One reason for its wide diffusion might be that from the very beginning the model provided a theoretical link to the institutional environment, which enabled insightful cross-country comparisons (Kedar 2005a, 2005b). Among the 14 parliamentary democracies investigated by Kedar (2005b) we find the case of Switzerland which fits smoothly in her general line of argument (see next section for theoretical and empirical details). This is remarkable since the Swiss polity looks like a parliamentary regime only from afar, while in everyday politics it rather works like a separation-of-powers (or presidential) system (Bächtiger, Schwarz and Lutz 2006). This paper thus explores the question whether the compensational-vote model really makes sense for Swiss democracy.

In the following, we first have a closer look at the “innards” of the compensational-vote model – at the pre-

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<sup>3</sup> However, Downs (1957) was not too strict in his formulation, writing only that “most” citizens would not vote in a sophisticated manner (p. 300). Blais et al. (2006) found in their study of the 2003 Israeli election that “for nearly one voter out of ten, coalition preferences were a decisive consideration” (p. 702). So, the remaining 90 percent could be labelled as “most citizens”, indeed.

requisites and theoretical assumptions, as well as the formal model. We then proceed to further develop our argument that the Swiss context does not provide fertile ground for compensatory motivations of voters, despite its pronounced power-sharing character, and furthermore that with the empirical application of the model to the Swiss case some doubts regarding the validity of the measurement arise. To this end we briefly portray the most relevant institutional features of the Swiss political system and corroborate our theoretical reasoning with empirical findings from two recently concluded research projects on political behaviour in the Swiss legislature.<sup>4</sup> The last section addresses the “what next?” question: We propose and briefly discuss two possible ways out which might adapt compensational-vote model to fit the Swiss case – and both broaden the debate and integrate existing models on electoral behaviour.

### **The compensational-vote model**

The following paragraphs give a brief account of those theoretical and empirical aspects of the compensational-vote model which are most relevant for the later discussion of the Swiss case. If not otherwise stated, information is based on the two “founding articles” of the theory (Kedar 2005a, 2005b).

The original model<sup>5</sup> explicitly assumes a *parliamentary logic of policy making*, i.e., a dichotomy between government (coalition) and opposition. Part of this logic is that opposition parties do not exert more influence on policies than those in government: “Although all members of the legislature have some impact on policy formation, members of the opposition (...) are not as influential as their colleagues in the coalition (...)” (Kedar 2005a: 192). And within the coalition, the more portfolios a party holds the more powerful it is which increases the chance to pull government policies in direction of its ideal point. Having this parliamentary setting in mind, the utility of voter  $i$  ( $i = 1, \dots, n$ ) for party  $j$  ( $j = 1, \dots, m$ ) consists of two components which are linked by the mixing parameter  $\beta \in (0,1)$  capturing their relative weight (see formula below). The first (proximity) component sets utility inversely related to the ideological distance between the positions of the voter  $v_i$  and party  $p_j$ . The second (compensational) component sets utility inversely related to the distance between  $v_i$  and policy outcome  $P$ , while  $P_{-pj}$  is a counter-factual policy outcome (i.e., the expected policy outcome if party  $j$  had not taken part in the policy-formation process). The formal model thus looks as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}
 U_{ij} &= \theta[-\beta \cdot \text{representational}_{ij} - (1 - \beta) \cdot \text{compensatory}_{ij}] + w_i \delta_j \\
 &= \theta\{-\beta(v_i - p_j)^2 - (1 - \beta)[(v_i - P)^2 - (v_i - P_{-pj})^2]\} + w_i \delta_j,
 \end{aligned}$$

<sup>4</sup> *Majority building, coalitions and party unity in the Swiss National Council 1996-2005*, project conducted at the University of Bern and funded by the Parliamentary Services of the Swiss Federal Assembly (research mandates 2004-08), and the *Smartmonitor legislative database* project within NCCR Democracy, IP16 “smart-voting”, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation and conducted at the Centre for Democracy of the University of Zurich.

<sup>5</sup> Most recent model extensions to presidential regimes in Kedar (2009: 102-141) are discussed in the last section of the paper, together with the question whether Switzerland is affected by it.

where the mixing parameter  $\beta$  is unknown.<sup>6</sup> In order to calculate  $\beta$  the expected policy outcome  $P$  needs primary attention. Kedar (2005a: 188) explicitly employs a “naïve understanding of democracy” and proposes that “policy outcome is a weighted average of policy positions of parties in the legislature, where the weights are the relative impacts of the different parties.” Thus  $P = \sum s_j p_j$  where  $s_j$  is the relative impact of party  $j$ .<sup>7</sup> In Kedar (2005b) four alternative measures for policy impact  $s$  are evaluated: 1. seat share in parliament; 2. vote share in election; 3. averaging seat share with government portfolio share as 3:1 ratio; 4. averaging seat share with portfolio share as 1:1 ratio. Since all four measures are highly correlated ( $r \geq 0.93$ ; see Kedar 2005b: 421) the simplest measure, *seat share*, is used to determine the relative impact of parties. In other words, taking the example of a five-party parliament with seat shares of 10, 15, 20, 25, and 30%, the model assumes that enacted policies are composed of 10% of  $p_1$ , 15% of  $p_2$ , 20% of  $p_3$ , and so on.<sup>8</sup>

An additional relevant aspect of the compensational-vote model is the *theoretical link to the degree of legislative power sharing*. The nexus is simple: the more diffused parliamentary power is, the more voters are inclined to compensational voting.<sup>9</sup> Kedar (2005b) tests this hypothesis in a comparison of 14 countries: 13 parliamentary democracies including clearly majoritarian cases (Britain) to consensus-oriented ones (Belgium), and one country – Switzerland – representing a mixed regime type in combination with a pronounced consensus-style government (Linder 1994; Lijphart 1999; Vatter 2008).<sup>10</sup> The results convincingly support the initial thesis: power sharing in legislatures is indeed correlated to lower estimates of the  $\beta$  parameter, that is more compensational voting. In the analysis, Switzerland (data taken from the 1999 general elections) is an unspectacular observation of a power-sharing system with a relatively high share of compensational voting which fits into the general picture, a fact which is further confirmed for the Swiss 2007 elections by Lachat and Selb (2009).<sup>11</sup>

The paper concentrates in the following on the question what Switzerland's deviation from the conventional parliamentary regime type means for the definition of policy outcome  $P$  in the model's utility function (and consequently for the validity of the estimates of the mixing parameter  $\beta$ ). For this purpose the next section shall give a concise overview of the most relevant features of the Swiss government system.

<sup>6</sup> As well as  $\theta$  (a salience parameter) and  $\delta_j$  (vectors of voter-characteristic party-specific effects) which can be neglected since they do not affect the relative weight of the two components.

<sup>7</sup> Accordingly,  $P_{-pj} = (1/\sum_{k \neq j} s_k) \sum_{k \neq j} s_k p_k$ .

<sup>8</sup> Lachat and Selb (2009) restrict their analysis to the four Swiss government parties and thus use the share of government seats for the definition of  $P$ . As will be shown below, however, government seat shares do not give a better account of actual policy impact than seat shares.

<sup>9</sup> Kedar (2005b: 419) measures diffusion of power by an index of four indicators (partly based on Lijphart 1999 and Döring 1995): single-party cabinet, effective number of parliamentary parties, district magnitude, and control over plenary agenda.

<sup>10</sup> The remaining 11 cases include Australia, Canada, Denmark, Iceland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden.

<sup>11</sup> Kedar's (2005b) analysis detects two outliers: Belgium is even within the group of power-sharing democracies an extremely compensatory case (the proximity component tends to zero in the investigated 1999 elections), and Australian voters in 1996 behaved much more compensatory than expected, given its majoritarian legislative system.

## Executive-legislative relations in Switzerland

Switzerland receives regular scholarly attention due to federalism, direct democracy, and consociationalism. Its legislative institutions and the organisation of executive-legislative relations are less often part of cross-national comparative studies, at least as far as a deeper understanding of the precise mode of operation is concerned. This might be a reason why the Swiss case at times is lumped together with conventional parliamentary democracies which, depending on the research topic, does not always seem adequate.

Switzerland usually is classified as some kind of mixed regime type because it combines constitutive elements of both parliamentary and presidential systems (Steiner 1974; Linder 1994; Lijphart 1999; Klöti 2001; Kriesi 2001; Church 2004; Gallagher, Laver and Mair 2006; Lüthi 2007; Kriesi and Trechsel 2008). The constitutive parliamentary element consists in the way the Swiss executive, the Federal Council, is elected: After every general election, re-election of the seven-member executive body takes place, in a joint session of both legislative chambers (i.e., the 200-member National Council and the 46-member Council of States, which altogether form the Federal Assembly).<sup>12</sup> The legitimation basis of the executive branch emanates from parliament. Yet, like in purely presidential systems, the Swiss constitution does neither provide for instruments by which the parliament can displace the whole government, or individual members thereof, during the term, nor has the government the right to dismiss the legislature. Thus, both parliament and government always serve a constitutionally fixed four-year term, with far-reaching implications for legislative-executive relations (Schwarz, Bächtiger and Lutz 2010): Government parties are not constrained by the need to ensure a permanent legislative majority since there is no risk that they bring about their government's downfall. Any party, and – as far as peer pressure permits – even any member of parliament can express political preferences largely unconstrained by coalition considerations (Hertig 1978; Lanfranchi and Lüthi 1999; Sciarini 2007). This means that coalitions form *ad hoc* in a case-by-case manner; there are no binding coalition agreements between the parties represented in government, simply because incentives for adherence would be too weak in the present institutional context. Table 1 summarises the frequency of the most common coalition patterns among the four government parties in the National Council between 1996 and 2005.<sup>13</sup> The most frequent pattern which formed in almost 40% of the cases is the classical bourgeois alliance voting against the Social-democrats (SP). Two coalitions with almost the same frequency share the second place: The “Christian-social” alliance between CVP and SP against right-leaning FDP and SVP (nearly 15%), and a pattern which unites SP, CVP and FDP against national-conservative SVP (around 14%). All other patterns – with the notable exception of unanimous votes – are negligible, including the “government coalition” against the largest “opposition” party (the Greens) which forms in 1.9% of the votes only.

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<sup>12</sup> Each Federal Councillor is elected in an individual vote in which the absolute majority of the present members of the Federal Assembly is required. Holding a seat in parliament is not required in order to be eligible for government elections. Moreover, government and parliamentary posts are separated, i.e., government members have to resign from parliament once elected (Lüthi 2007).

<sup>13</sup> Empirical results can only provided for the lower house because the Council of States does not record voting behaviour, neither on the basis of individual MPs nor party groups.

[Table 1 here]

This system of “variable geometry” in coalition formation is further reinforced by three additional factors: First, widely diffused legislative powers (as recognised by Kedar 2005b, too). In the 2007 elections the five strongest parties all received between 10 and 29 percent of the votes, while as many as 13 parties are represented in parliament. Thus legislative majority is normally only attainable if at least three of the “big five” ally. Second, the two houses of the Swiss legislature represent a bicameral system which is absolutely symmetric (identical lawmaking authority), but incongruent in political composition (Lijphart 1999; Tsebelis and Money 1997). Due to the majority vote system, the second chamber is a stronghold of politically moderate parties (see Lachat 2006) which means that for any successful legislative endeavour at least one of the two big centrist parties (Christian-democrats or Free-liberals) is needed. And third, the effects of direct democracy which, on the one hand, stimulate risk-minimising strategies (extensive consultation procedures before a proposal reaches the parliamentary stage, representation of all major parties in government; see Linder 1994; Papadopoulos 2001; Sciarini 2007) in order to make legislation “referendum-proof”. On the other hand, direct democracy establishes opportunities to all parties (even those represented in government) to occasionally oppose an unloved piece of legislation not only in parliament but also in a post-parliamentary referendum. Thus, in the Swiss context the role of opposition is neither permanently nor solely assigned to those parties not represented in government.

Accordingly there is little room for interpreting Switzerland's system as an institutionally mixed regime type whose relevant lawmaking mechanisms, however, actually work like parliamentarism, as Colomer and Negretto (2005) propose for a number of Latin American presidential democracies. While it is true that the operational mode of a system is more important than institutional formalities, in light of the depiction given above it can be ruled out that Switzerland constitutes such a parliamentary system “in disguise” (Bächtiger, Schwarz and Lutz 2006).

After having laid down the basic institutional setting and the general lawmaking mechanisms in Switzerland's executive-legislative relations, we now turn to the question in what way these mechanisms work against the arguments of the compensational-vote model.

### **Disincentives to compensational voting**

In her first article, Kedar (2005a: 192) puts much weight on the difference between government and opposition parties: “Although all members of the legislature have some impact on policy formation, members of the opposition (...) are not as influential as their colleagues in the coalition (...). Similarly, parties that hold the lion's share of portfolios may be more powerful than junior partners in the governing coalition.” Consequently,

she applies the average of seat and portfolio shares in order to calculate policy outcome  $P$  (see above). However, in later publications (2005b, 2009) she moves her focus to the legislative arena, dropping the portfolio share component and relying solely on seat shares to define  $P$ .<sup>14</sup> In the following we present arguments taking into account both versions of the compensational-vote model.

### *Consociationalism and the secondary role of government selection*

Under the header “Can voters really compensate?” Kedar (2009: 38-39) gives some examples from the Netherlands, Israel, and Canada when the result of the poll was more or less clear during the election campaign already. In these situations campaigners of the (presumably) losing parties despairingly called on the electorate to use their vote in order to mitigate the landslide, or to balance relative strengths in the most likely coalition. Applying this line of argument to Swiss consociationalism seems inappropriate since the disconnection between voters' preferences and elite responses is an often cited sore point of extensive power-sharing regimes (e.g., McDonald and Budge 2005: 29; see also the collection of arguments in O'Leary 2005). Compared to traditional parliamentary democracies, general elections in Switzerland are a devaluated process, which is mirrored rather low turnouts of 40-45% (Lutz and Selb 2007). A main reason for this low relevance of Swiss elections can be found in analyses of direct and indirect effects of direct democracy: First, the extensive pre-parliamentary consultation procedure shall ensure that the interests of as many groups which credibly can launch a referendum are regarded in order to avoid most popular votes (Sciarini 2007; Kriesi and Trechsel 2008). Second, also the “oversized” composition of the Swiss government is a consequence of direct democracy. The seven members of the Swiss government are not primarily elected by parliament in order to shape and implement policies which are previously agreed upon in a coalition treaty and which correspond to a stable legislative majority. The election of the government members rather follows a distinctly consociational logic which values the governmental functions of representation, integration and administration more than strong policy leadership. It is first and foremost a representative body of all relevant political forces in the country, its main goal is mitigating the fear of a blocked system due to an overuse of direct democracy. Thus, Swiss consociationalism is in itself a highly balanced system – additional compensatory behaviour by voters is neither needed nor very effective, as we will see in the next paragraph.

Yet, the composition of the Swiss government is not carved in stone for evermore. Seat shares in Swiss parliament are in flux, particularly so in the last 15 years, which is reflective of the fundamental changes Switzerland's party system (Ladner 2007). In 2003, the national-conservative Swiss People's Party (SVP) became the strongest force in National Council with a seat share of 27.5%, and consequentially received an additional seat in government at the expense of the diving Christian-democrats (CVP).<sup>15</sup> The alteration was

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<sup>14</sup> Kedar (2005a: 192) justifies her choice for the combined average in footnote 15 that “results are weaker” when she takes simple averages. Explicit reason why she applies the simple seat share measure instead of the weighted average in later publications are not given, which is why we can only speculate that in the comparison with 14 countries the results became “stronger” this way than in her initial publications with only four countries.

<sup>15</sup> But the government was still formed by the same four parties: SVP (2 seats), Social-democrats (SP; 2), liberal Free Democrats (FDP; 2), CVP (1).

heavily disputed by CVP members and leftist parties mainly for two reasons. The first one was symmetrical bicameralism; the CVP was (and still is) the strongest party in the Council of States, holding there almost 33% of the seats, the SVP in 2003 only some 17% (and further plumped in 2007 to 15%). The second reason was the controversial personality of the proposed candidate, *Christoph Blocher*, the mastermind and ideological leader of the entire national-conservative camp and thus a red rag to many moderate and left-leaning politicians. But the initial euphoria among his supporters soon wore off; the power of individual government members is very limited in a collegial body. Even a dominant member has to convince at least three of his or her colleagues in order to shape policies in the desired direction – and then still faces uncertain legislative approval. So, bulls in china shops often produce unwanted results, a wisdom which finds empirical support in the fact that *Blocher* was voted out of office and replaced by a moderate SVP representative after general elections 2007, despite SVP's increased seat share in National Council (from 27.5 to 31%).<sup>16</sup> This (in parliamentary terms) “illogical” consequence of a landslide victory – the SP as second largest party dropped from 26 to 21.5% – gives a first account of what might be seen as *punitive effects* of compensational voting. In a consociational system where election results are mostly unspectacular, their effects on the “oversized” composition of the government very limited, and where the executive itself is organised as an internally heterogeneous representative body (hence its name *Federal Council*), it is hard to see how voters could expect that the anticipated benefits of a compensational vote – enacted policies closer to their ideal points – materialise in reality.<sup>17</sup> In a nutshell, elections in consociational regimes are very bad instruments for both selecting a government and influencing policy outcomes in a desired direction.

#### *Legislative politics: Unstable majorities and unhappy winners*

One might object that in consociational systems in general, and particularly in the “non-parliamentary” Swiss context, the focal point of voters' motivation to cast a compensational vote is legislative politics, not government composition. If the government constitutes a weak body (in the sense that it is neither representing a stable parliamentary majority nor has it the instruments at hand to impose its will on parliament) whose composition is not contingent on electoral preferences alone, one might conclude that the value of a compensational vote is reflected in parliamentary decisions. This consideration is supported by the fact that in Switzerland 35-45% of all government proposals are amended during parliamentary debates (Jegher 1999; Schwarz, Bächtiger and Lutz 2010), i.e. the Swiss legislature plays a quite active part in lawmaking. Nevertheless, there are strong disincentives to compensational voting also with regard to the parliamentary level. The paper addresses four of them.

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<sup>16</sup> It is true, as Lachat and Selb (2009) propose, that the electoral campaign of the SVP had a strongly personalised focus on *Blocher* (“Strengthen Blocher! Vote for SVP!” was the text of an election poster). Yet, it seems not very consequential that FDP and CVP voters – who were engaged in a fierce competition among themselves about who becomes the third largest party which would (presumably) ensure the second seat in government – weakened their most proximate party in order to support the SVP. In the case of FDP voters a compensational vote for the SVP could have resulted in a FDP seat loss in favour of the CVP; compensating CVP voters would have weakened the realistic chances of their preferred party to regain a second seat in government.

<sup>17</sup> Remind that we do not argue that voting for a politically more distant alternative does not exist; we just question the compensational motivation of such behaviour in the Swiss case.

The first disincentive concerns the fact that changing majorities do not occur *between* policy areas only, as shown above, but also *within* areas (and even within a single lawmaking project). This means that a compensational-minded voter can never be sure what coalition will form in policy fields or issues which are of particular importance to her, even if there seems a solid majority in the one or other political direction. Table 2 illustrates this point by depicting the frequency of coalition patterns within a number of important policy areas between 1996 and 2005.<sup>18</sup> The conclusion to be drawn from the table is that there is no policy field in which more than 50% of the legislative votes have identical coalition patterns. Even in the areas of security and migration policy, which are mostly structured along the classical left-right scheme, more than 50% of the cases show deviant alliances. So, in the Swiss system the value of any compensational vote for, say, the SVP instead of the FDP in order to pull policy outcomes a bit more to the right, is more diluted than in truly parliamentary systems. Yet, the compensational-vote model postulates that voters in power-sharing regimes (like Switzerland) should be provided more incentives to a compensational vote than in majoritarian systems.

[Table 2 here]

The second point which should rather dis- than encourage compensational voting concerns the comparison between pre- and post-election positions of politicians. The compensational-vote model assumes that post-election behaviour is affected by compromise among the members of a (fixed) coalition in parliament. Whenever pre-election positions of subsequent coalition partners in certain issues do not match, the model assumes that the enacted policy will be some sort of compromise between the involved parties. While this assumption might make sense when coalition partners are at the mercy of each other, it does not in a more flexible context. If no binding coalition agreement exists, legislative parties probably first try to find a parliamentary majority which avoids (or at least minimises) the need for compromise.<sup>19</sup> If our supposition holds, we should see no (or only marginal) compromising behaviour in post-election legislative votes compared to pre-election positions to identical topics. Thus, we selected 34 pre-election positions of subsequently elected members of the National Council according to the Swiss web-based vote advice application “smartvote” which were followed by legislative votes on the same issue (see listing in appendix 1).<sup>20</sup> For the behaviour of each legislator in the 34 selected items it is evaluated whether a positional shifting can be detected, and if yes, in what political direction. If a legislator sticks to her pre-election position, it is assigned a zero value; if she changes her position, +1 or -1 is assigned, depending on the political direction of the change. The analysis is calculated separately for eight issue dimensions and in aggregated manner (averages) for the five largest

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<sup>18</sup> We selected six out of 20 policy areas officially registered by the Parliamentary Services. The six selected areas should give a good account of the variety in coalition formation within policy fields (for the full picture, see Schwarz 2009: 51-52).

<sup>19</sup> The same is true in position-taking situations, e.g. if a party's position is light-years away from the positions of the others, so that there is no point in trying to find compromise solutions.

<sup>20</sup> It is the same selection as in Schwarz, Schädel and Ladner (2010, forthcoming). For further information about “smartvote”, see Thurman and Gasser (2009).

parties in Switzerland.<sup>21</sup>

The results displayed in table 3 convincingly support our expectations about majority building in Swiss parliament. According to the compensational-vote model, mean positional changes of right-wing SVP should indicate an alignment towards the political centre which is not the case here. Instead, SVP positions in many areas are even more clear-cut after elections than they were before, mainly due to peer pressure effects (dissenting statements are brought in line with the party group's majority opinion; see Schwarz, Schädel and Ladner 2010, forthcoming). Legislative positions of SVP legislators compared to their statements during the election campaign move, for instance, towards a less open stance on foreign policy issues, a more restrictive financial policy, a tougher stance on law and order issues, less environmental protection, and towards retrenched welfare state.

The same mechanisms can be detected on the political left (SP and GP). Their legislators, too, often take more pronounced positions in parliament compared to their pre-election statements. As can be expected, they move in the opposite direction than the SVP, that is, in favour of a more open foreign policy, a softer law and order policy, a less restrictive immigration policy, and a more expanded welfare state. The moderate parties in the political centre, also as expected, sometimes lean more to the SVP, sometimes more to SP/GP, and sometimes do not show any significant tendency at all.

[Table 3 here]

A third factor injecting doubt that the Swiss system provides great incentives to compensational voting behaviour concerns the the actual policy effects of the electorally most successful parties on the right and left side of the political landscape. Switzerland's bicameral multiparty parliament rewards politically moderate positions. Pivotal parties (i.e., parties which incorporate the median position and thus form the “central party” in parliament; see McDonald and Budge 2005; Laver and Shepsle 1996; van Roozendaal 1990, 1993) are usually the CVP and/or FDP; at least one of the two is regularly needed in order to gain majority status in *both* chambers of the Federal Assembly which is, due to symmetrical bicameralism, a constant requirement for successful lawmaking. The political advantage of centrally located actors is illustrated in figure 1 for each of the four government parties plus the Greens. The figure presents two indicators for policy impact in the National Council between 1996 and 2005: First, relative party success rates in the National Council (i.e., how many times the majority of a party group was on the winning side). Second, the relative frequency of isolated positions (i.e., how many times the majority position of a party group did not find an alliance partner among the other government parties). Interesting is the obviously uncorrelated relation between party success at the ballots (seat share in the National Council) and the two mentioned indicators. Although part of the govern-

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<sup>21</sup> The 8 dimension labels are taken from “smartvote”, the attribution of the 34 issues to the dimensions are shown in appendix 1.

ment – even with two seats since 2003 – the SVP could not plant its compelling electoral success into the legislative realm. Quite the contrary, success rate in parliamentary votes has dropped and the share of votes in which the SVP takes an isolated position has almost doubled since 1996. On the other hand, CVP and FDP, which are constantly losing at the polls, still are the most successful players in parliament. Isolated positions are almost unknown to them, due to their central role in the bicameral system. The winner takes less in Swiss parliament, a compensational vote for a more extreme party thus does not seem leading to the desired results, at least not in the straight manner the model proposes.

[Figure 1 here]

### **Still, why do Swiss voters (sometimes) cold-shoulder the most proximate party?**

So far, we have presented some simple empirical evidence which casts doubt that the postulated nexus between the degree of power sharing and the share of compensational voting really holds for Switzerland's mixed polity. Unlike parliamentary consensus democracies like Belgium or the Netherlands, where voters define fixed coalitions (and the relative strength of the parties within a given coalition) and thus might employ their vote to compensate for watered-down coalition policies, Swiss voters have substantially lower incentives to use their vote in a compensatory manner since *their* vote is watered down institutionally. Moreover, measuring party impact on enacted policies with seat shares seems inappropriate, which means that the validity of the entire utility function is problematic. That the Swiss case almost perfectly fits into Kedar's (2005b) analysis is not really an argument for the compensational-vote model because the results could also be based on a mere coincidence. However, since we do not doubt that a substantial part of the electorate does not vote for the most proximate party, the next question is: how could the model be adapted in order to adequately capture eccentric cases like Switzerland?

We prescind from maybe the two most obvious options, first, the adaptation of the criticised definition of policy impact in order to find a *passpartout* for all kind of political systems, and second, the adaptation of the definition in order to fit just the Swiss system. The first option would possibly open Pandora's box because questions regarding the validity of the measure even for parliamentary democracies could arise, a matter which is beyond the scope of this paper. The second option would be of no avail for those interested in comparative studies. In the following we briefly discuss two other possible ways out.

The paper's main argument rests on the fact that Switzerland neither constitutionally nor in its mode of operation resembles a parliamentary democracy. Institutionally it constitutes a mixed regime type, as laid down above, and everyday procedures within the two legislative chambers and between legislative and executive branches are redolent of a separation-of-powers system (Lanfranchi and Lüthi 1999; Bächtiger, Schwarz and Lutz 2006). Thus, should we think of Switzerland as a presidential democracy and analyse it

according to the proposed model extensions by Kedar (2009: 102-141)? Given the criteria usually applied (e.g., Shugart and Carey 1992; Samuels and Shugart 2003; Tsebelis and Aléman 2005) to place countries on a continuum from weak to strong presidential powers, Switzerland's position would be at the very weak end of the scale (no veto powers, no decree powers, no reserved policy areas to introduce legislation, no right to call referenda, no cabinet formation powers, no right to dissolve parliament). The only advantages vis-à-vis parliament rest, on the one hand, on the Swiss government's superior resource endowment (since the Federal Assembly merely is a semi-professional body; see Lüthi 2007; Vatter 2008; Z'graggen 2009), and on the other hand, the positional centrality of the Federal Council as collective actor, since typically presidential phenomena like divided government are logically excluded (Schwarz, Bächtiger and Lutz 2010).<sup>22</sup> These factors plus the fact that the Swiss government is not directly elected precludes the use of Kedar's (2009) model extensions for presidential systems which are mainly based on inter-temporal compensations, i.e. voters compensate in mid-term elections. Therefore, "going the presidential way" is not helpful for our problem.

A last solution remains: changing the data base. The main problem with the investigation of the different types of non-proximity voting (be it compensational, directional, or other forms) is that they refer to different *individual motivations* behind voting decisions. Yet, the models usually do not use direct information about voters' motivation why they prefer party A to party B although the latter is politically closer. Instead, they create a model which approximately infer compensatory behaviour from basically three variables: voter position, party position, and seat share (as a proxy for policy impact). This way, motives are inferred from purely observational data, and it seems quite unlikely that the mixing parameter  $\beta$  – at least in the Swiss case – constitutes a valid indicator for proximity and compensational voting. If we accept that compensatory motivation constitutes only one among a number of reasons why a voter may refrain from voting for the most proximate party, we should pursue more integrative research designs. This seems also the road Kedar (2009: 137) proposes, albeit not in connection with a self-critical review of her own model: "Current accounts for issue voting (...) have devoted great attention to understanding the way voters evaluate parties and party positions, and have indeed given us important insights. (...) But focusing on the way individuals assess parties, political scientists have neglected the ask what voters wish to maximize, what decision rule they might use to assess parties." Linking existing models with survey data which give a direct account of voters' reasoning behind their vote choice might be helpful at this point.

### **Concluding remarks**

Hard-hearted critics of consociational regimes characterise it as an undemocratic "loser-takes-all" system

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<sup>22</sup> The absolute-majority requirement in Federal Council elections ensures that all seven members of the Swiss government are elected with the votes of at least one (and mostly both) of the two "central" parties in Swiss parliament. Thus, the composition of the government by and large follows the preferences of the Federal Assembly's median actors. Moreover, there are no legislative mid-term elections which could bring parliamentary and government majorities out of step.

(O'Leary 2005: 6; Brass 1991). There is a grain of truth in this judgement, at least when you expect that electoral victories directly translate into increasing influence in the legislature and government. This expectation is the *sine qua non* for compensational voting motivations, which is not met in the case of Swiss consociationalism. Extreme power-sharing regimes do not only disperse legislative and executive powers on many political actors (including sub-national levels and frequently used direct democratic rights in the Swiss case), power sharing also lowers the responsiveness of a political system as well as the effectiveness of the electoral process (impact on policy enactment and government composition). There is no change of government in the Swiss system and the effects of election results on enacted policies are often marginal. Relatively low voter turnouts are a strong hint that Swiss voters are fully aware of this fact.

What motivations, then, drive (some) Swiss voters not to select the most proximate party, even in large electoral districts?<sup>23</sup> Empirically, the paper raised a reasonable suspicion that compensational voting is not a satisfactory answer; but further examination of the question is left for future research. Maybe voters vote for a more distant party *because* they know that the effect is largely symbolic?

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<sup>23</sup> In small districts the mechanical and psychological effects of the electoral system may play an important role (Duverger 1951; Cox 1997).

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

No.	Issue	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	immigration	2003	03.10.2003
2	Adoption of children by homosexual couples	society & ethics	2003	03.12.2003
3	Higher spending for the armed forces	law & order finances & 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 & 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	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 & taxes	2003	14.12.2005
12	Freedom of choice between military service and alternative civilian service	law & order, society & 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 & 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 & order	2007	22.03.2007/ 27.09.2007
18	Deployment of the army to support civilian units	law & order	2007	27.09.2007
19	Ban on smoking in public buildings, restaurants and bars	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	immigration	2007	17.12.2007

ballot box or a communal assembly

22	Toughening the criminal law for juveniles	law & 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 & 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 & 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 & 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	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

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**Table 1: Coalition patterns in Swiss National Council, 1996-2005**

	%	N
CVP, FDP, SVP vs. SP	39.6	3169
FDP, SVP vs. CVP, SP	14.9	1189
SP, CVP, FDP vs. SVP	13.7	1097
all gov. parties vs. GP	1.9	151
other (incl. unanimous votes)	29.9	2391
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>7997</i>

**Table 2: Coalition patterns in six policy areas in Swiss National Council, 1996-2005 (in %)**

	SP vs. CVP/FDP/SVP	SP/CVP vs. FDP/SVP	SP/CVP/FDP vs. SVP	all gov. parties vs. GP	other (incl. unanimous votes)	N (100%)
Security	49.7	6.8	9.3	4.3	24.2	632
Migration	47.4	16	18	1.8	14.3	567
Social welfare	42.6	18.1	10.9	1.5	22	1466
Economy	40.8	15.2	9.9	2.5	26.6	1917
Environment	33.2	20.6	15.5	3.6	23.3	563
International affairs	20.1	9.6	16.1	1.9	49.9	573

**Table 3: Positional changes of elected legislators (comparison of pre- and post-election positions in 2003 and 2007)**

	mean	s.d.	Frequencies (in %)			
			neg.	0	pos.	N
<b>Open foreign policy (no. of issues=3)</b>						
GPS	0.122*	0.331	0.0	87.8	12.2	49
SVP	-0.153***	0.443	18.5	78.2	3.2	124
SP	0.075**	0.265	0.0	92.5	7.5	120
FDP	-0.277**	0.718	43.1	41.5	15.4	65
CVP	0.116	0.738	21.7	44.9	33.3	69
<b>Economic liberalisation (11)</b>						
GPS	0.043	0.492	9.9	75.8	14.3	161
SVP	0.066*	0.570	13.1	67.2	19.7	411
SP	0.007	0.428	8.8	81.7	9.5	432
FDP	0.099**	0.569	11.7	66.8	21.5	223
CVP	0.123**	0.672	17.1	53.5	29.4	228
<b>Restrictive financial policy (6)</b>						
GPS	-0.160**	0.494	21.3	73.3	5.3	75
SVP	0.163***	0.543	7.9	68.0	24.1	203
SP	-0.026	0.515	14.5	73.5	12.0	234
FDP	0.000	0.771	29.5	41.0	29.5	122
CVP	-0.071	0.659	25.4	56.3	18.3	126
<b>Law &amp; order (6)</b>						
GPS	-0.165***	0.373	16.5	83.5	0.0	103

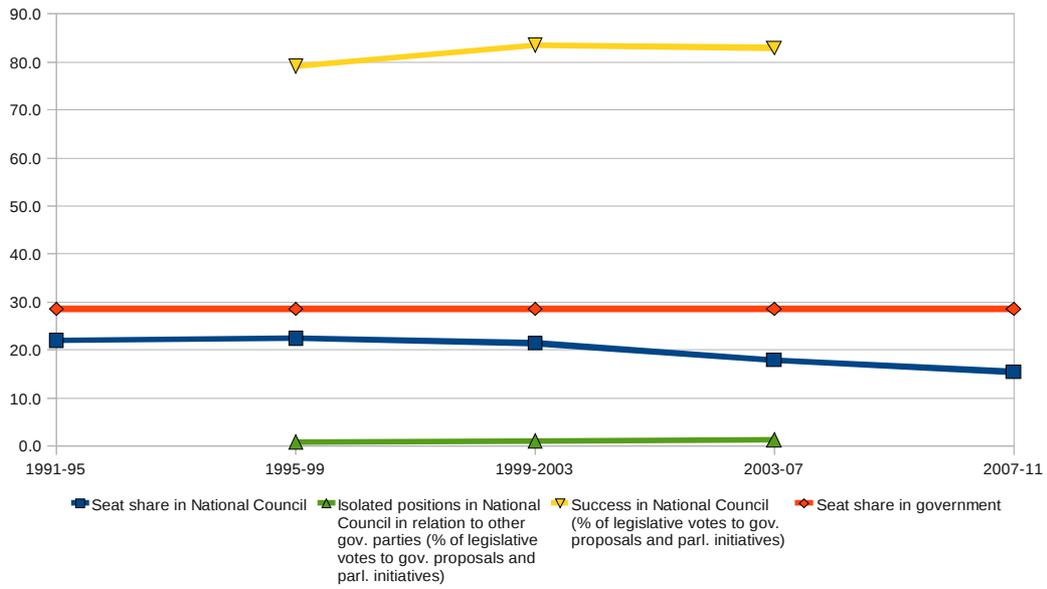
SVP	0.063*	0.508	9.9	73.9	16.2	272
SP	-0.143***	0.371	15.0	84.2	0.8	266
FDP	0.209***	0.685	15.0	49.0	35.9	153
CVP	0.093	0.669	18.0	54.7	27.3	150
<b>Restrictive immigration policy (3)</b>	mean	s.d.	neg.	0	pos.	N
GPS	-0.106*	0.312	10.6	89.4	0.0	47
SVP	0.063	0.364	3.6	86.5	9.9	111
SP	-0.037*	0.189	3.7	96.3	0.0	109
FDP	-0.300***	0.619	38.3	53.3	8.3	60
CVP	-0.239**	0.605	32.8	58.2	9.0	67
<b>Environmental protection (3)</b>	mean	s.d.	neg.	0	pos.	N
GPS	0.061	0.242	0.0	93.9	6.1	49
SVP	-0.106**	0.380	13.0	84.6	2.4	123
SP	0.141***	0.349	0.0	86.0	14.0	121
FDP	-0.300***	0.462	30.0	70.0	0.0	70
CVP	-0.016	0.724	26.6	48.4	25.0	64
<b>Expanded welfare state (3)</b>	mean	s.d.	neg.	0	pos.	N
GPS	0.103*	0.307	0.0	89.7	10.3	39
SVP	-0.139***	0.442	17.6	78.7	3.7	108
SP	0.035*	0.186	0.0	96.5	3.5	113
FDP	0.034	0.454	8.5	79.7	11.9	59
CVP	-0.328***	0.637	41.8	49.3	9.0	67
<b>Liberal/ethical society (7)</b>	mean	s.d.	neg.	0	pos.	N
GPS	0.079*	0.392	4.0	84.2	11.9	101
SVP	0.034	0.527	12.2	72.2	15.6	263
SP	0.031	0.349	4.6	87.8	7.6	262
FDP	-0.153**	0.703	33.3	48.6	18.1	144
CVP	-0.154**	0.644	29.5	56.4	14.1	156

Legend: Positive values indicate positional changes in direction of the dimension label.

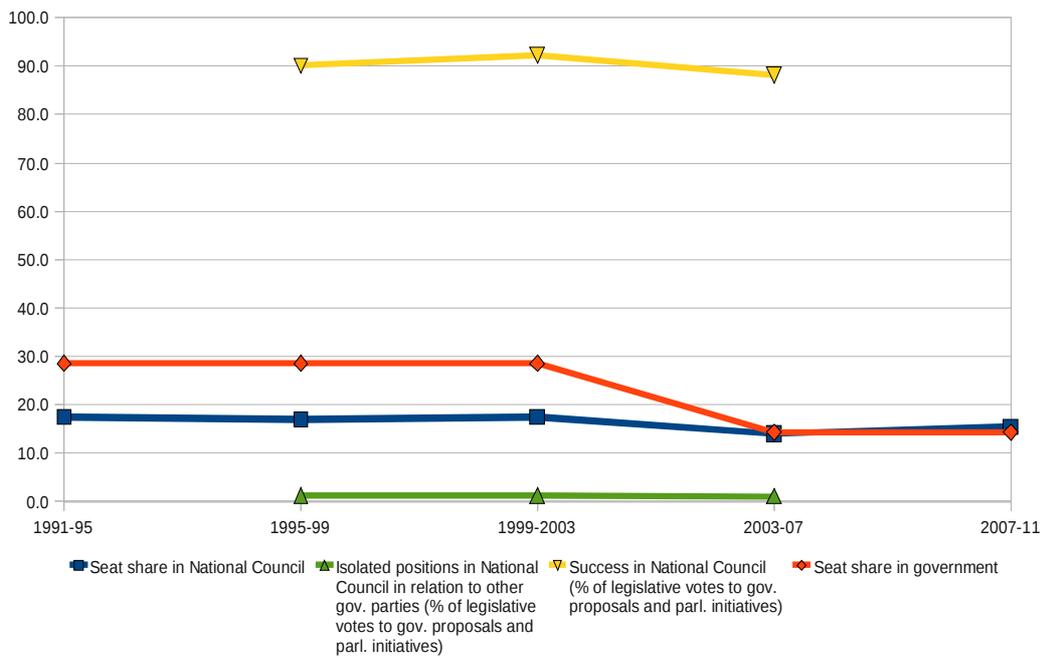
Sig. t-test (2-tailed): \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

**Figure 1: Seat share, isolated positions, and success rate of the five major parties in Switzerland**

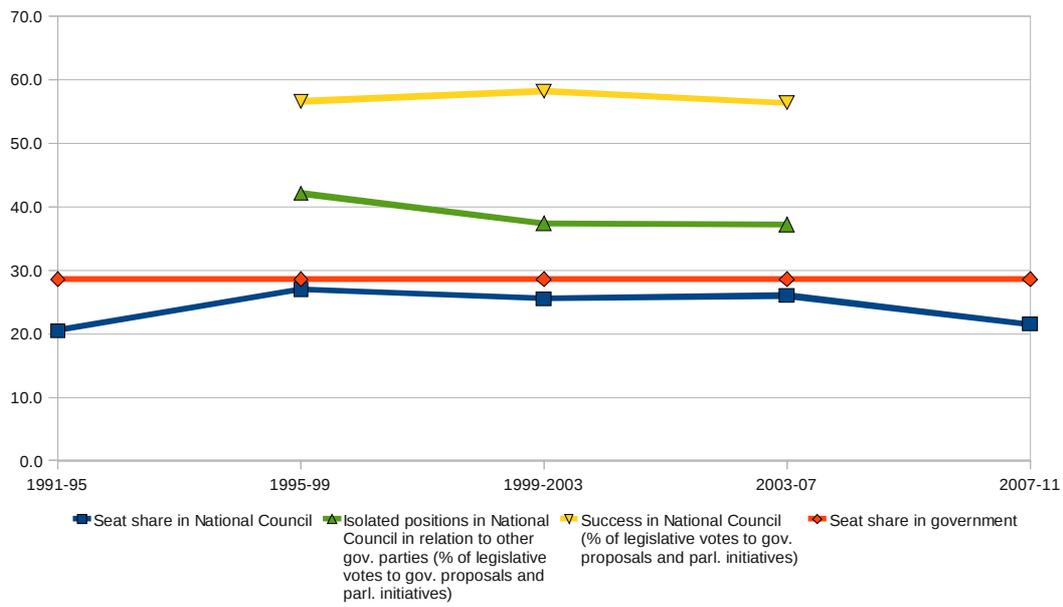
**Liberal Free-democrats (FDP)**



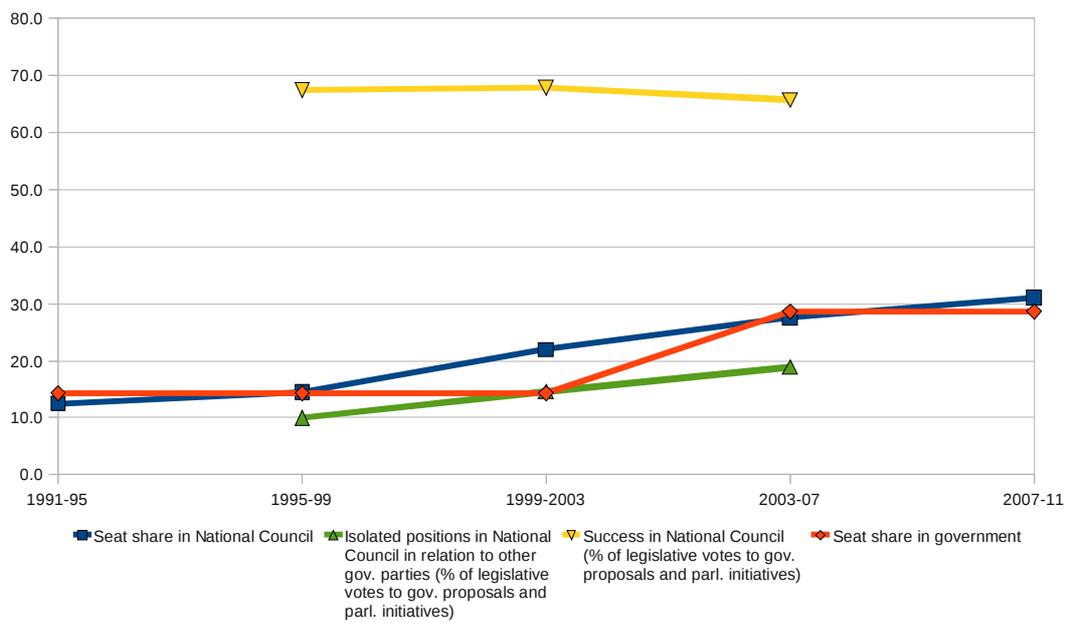
### Christian-democrats (CVP)



### Social-democrats (SP)



### Swiss People's Party (SVP)



**Greens (GP)**

