

Switzerland

Rice

Switzerland has a unique rotating head-of-state system. The executive branch of government (called the Federal Council) has seven members, each of whom is elected for a four-year term (without reelection limits). The individual who is the president of the Council serves for one year, and then turns over power to another member of the Council. Though Switzerland can readily be characterized as a mixed regime (Fleiner et al. 2005; Stepan & Skach 1998; Lijphart 1999), we follow Cheibub et al. (2010) who code Switzerland as a presidential democracy. According to the coding rules for this system, a SOLS change will only be coded if an individual who is not part of the regular party rotation within the Council gains leadership. This does not happen during the observed period. We code a minor solschance when a new party joins the rotation or a party leaves the rotation. Two new parties joined the rotation during this period—the SVP (Swiss People’s Party) in 1929 and the SPS (Social Democratic Party) in 1943 (Schelbert 2007, 108; Holzheu 2010, 2).

In 1919, the president of the Council was Gustave Ador of the Liberal Party (LP) that later merged with the FDP. The council further consists of the FDP and CVP. On January 1, 1920, the presidency transferred to Giuseppe Motta, a member of the Swiss Conservative People’s Party (CVP, from 1957 on known as the Christian Democratic People’s Party). In 1921, Edmund Schulthess, a member of the Freethinking-Democratic Party (FDP) took over. He was followed by Robert Haab, also of the FDP, in 1922. In 1923, FDP member Karl Alfred Scheurer took over leadership. In 1924, Ernest-Louis Chuard, also of the FDP became the president, followed by fellow FDP member Jean-Marie Musy in 1925. 1926 brought Heinrich Häberlin, of the CVP, to the presidency, followed by Motta again in 1927. Schulthess took over again in 1928, followed by Haab in 1929. From 12 December 1929 onwards, the SVP joined the council and occasionally provides the presidency (minor SOLS change) (Swiss Federal Council 2011).

Musy was President again in 1930, and Häberlin in 1931. Motta served again in 1932, followed by Schulthess in 1933. In 1934, a newer member of the Council, Marcel Pilet-Golaz of the FDP assumed leadership. He was followed by two more newer members, Rudolf Minger (SVP) in 1935 and Albert Meyer (FDP) in 1936. In 1937, Motta (serving his fifth term) became the president again, followed by Joannes Baumann of the FDP in 1938. In 1939, Philipp Etter of the CVP took over leadership, followed by Pilet-Golaz again in 1940. 1941 brought FDP member Ernst Wetter into the leadership role, followed by Etter in 1942. Enrico Celio, of the CVP, took over leadership in 1943. On December 15, 1943, the Social Democratic Party (SPS) joined the rotation, so we code a minor solschance (Swiss Federal Council 2011; worldstatesmen.org). In 1944, the leader was Walter Stampfli, of the FDP.

In Switzerland, during the post-1945 period, the group of parties from which all heads of state come from are the Christlich-Demokratische Volkspartei der Schweiz (CVP), Freisinnig-Demokratische Partei der Schweiz (FDP), the Schweizerische Volkspartei (SVP), and the Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz (SPS or SP) (Woldendorp et al. 2000, 513-14). However, one important issue is that not all parties participated in the rotation during the entire 1945-2008 period. In particular, the SP was in the rotation between 1945-1953, then dropped out 1953-1959, and then came back in 1959. The Social Democrats won their first seat in the council in 1943, but lost it in 1953 when council member Max Weber of the PS stepped down after his department lost a referendum on finance reform (Lehmbruch 1993). In 1959 they obtained two seats and from 1959 until 2003, the seat division was stable with two seats for the FDP, CVP, and SP and one seat for the

SVP (Dardanelli 2005, Lehmbruch 1993). We code minor SOLS changes both in 1953 and in 1959, since the SOLS did change with the SP leaving the rotation systems.¹

After 1959, Switzerland had what was called “magical formula” where each of the four parties had two federal councilors. Kriesi and Trechsel (2008) provide us with additional information on the magic formula. The magic formula of “progressive cooptation” arose in part because of the referendum threat. As each party could initiate a referendum, there was an incentive to co-opt all four parties. Council members are elected by the parties in the joint houses of parliament and each requires an absolute majority to be elected. Parties therefore need support of other parties to get their councilmember elected (Kriesi and Trechsel 2008; Dardanelli 2005).

The magic formula of 2:2:2:1 broke down in 2003, when the SVP won one of the seats from the Christian democrats (Kriesi and Trechsel 2008). Hereafter there was increase struggle between parties over cabinet posts. However, the party composition of the council remained the same until 2008. In December 2007, Blocher, the controversial leader of the rightwing People’s Party was voted out of cabinet in favor of outside People’s Party candidate Widmer-Schlumpf. Widmer-Schlumpf accepted the position on December 13, 2007 (Swissinfo 2007b). In response the People’s Party announced it would leave the government coalition and would ban Widmer-Schlumpf from the parliamentary grouping if she would not step down (Bradley 2007, Swissinfo 2008a). Widmer-Schlumpf did not step down, however, and the People’s Party withdrew recognition of both its cabinet ministers Widmer-Schlumpf and Schmid. Widmer-Schlumpf was officially removed from the party in Juli when the SVP banned her canton chapter. The divisions within the People’s Party became formal with the establishment of the Conservative Democratic Party in November 2008 (Swissinfo 2008b). However, following the resignation of Schmid in November, the People’s Party re-entered cabinet with the election of Mauer on 10 December 2008 (“SWISS FAR RIGHT” 2008, Swissinfo 2008c). The exit and re-entry of the People’s Party are minor SOLS changes.

Sources

Bradley. Simon. 2008 ‘Cabinet "can get by" without Blocher’ *Swissinfo*, December 14.

Dardanelli, P. 2005. ‘The parliamentary and executive elections in Switzerland’. *Electoral Studies* 24(1): 123-9.

“Executive branch: the Federal Council.” Federal Department of Foreign Affairs Presence Switzerland. [Swissworld.org](http://www.swissworld.org).
http://www.swissworld.org/en/politics/government_and_parliament/ (June 20, 2010).

Fleiner, Thomas, Thomas Fleiner-Gerster, Alexander Misic, and Nicole Töpperwien. 2005. *Swiss Constitutional Law*, Kluwer Law International.

Holzheu, Elena. 2010. *Would the Popular Election of the Swiss Federal Council be Detrimental to Federalism?* GRIN Verlag.

¹ Note that we diverge from the Archigos leader coding with respect to Friedrich Wahlen, who is listed by his first name Friedrich in Archigos and is listed as Wahlen in CHISOLS.

- Kriesi, Hanspeter and Alexandre H. Trechsel .2008. *[The politics of Switzerland : continuity and change in a consensus democracy](#)*. Cambridge, UK; New York : Cambridge University Press.
- Lehmbruch, G. 1993. 'Consociational democracy and corporatism in Switzerland', *Journal of Federalism* 23(2): 46-60.
- Lijphart, Arend. 1999. *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*, Yale University Press.
- Milic, Thomas. 2008. "Switzerland." *European Journal of Political Research* 47: 1148–1155.
- Schelbert, Leo. 2007. *Historical Dictionary of Switzerland*. Scarecrow Press.
- Stepan, Alfred and Cindy Skach. 1993. Constitutional Frameworks and Democratic Consolidation: Parliamentarism versus Presidentialism. *World Politics*. 46(1): 1-22.
- "Swiss far-right back in government." 2008. *BBC Monitoring Europe*.
- The Swiss Federal Council 2011. *Index of Federal Councillors since 1848*, accessed 5/9/2011. <<http://www.admin.ch/br/index.html>>
- Swissinfo 2007a. 'Widmer-Schlumpf accepts cabinet post' *Swissinfo* Dec 13
http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/Home/Archive/Widmer-Schlumpf_accepts_cabinet_post.html?cid=6312540
- Swissinfo. 2008a. 'Supporters rally as minister says she will stay' *Swissinfo* Apr 11
http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/Home/Archive/Supporters_rally_as_minister_says_she_will_stay.html?cid=6579096
- Swissinfo. 2008b. 'New political party takes its first steps', *Swissinfo* Nov 1
http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/politics/internal_affairs/New_political_party_takes_its_first_steps.html?cid=7012404
- Swissinfo. 2008c. 'Maurer takes People's Party back into the fold' *Swissinfo* Dec 10
<http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/politics/internal_affairs/Maurer_takes_Peoples_Party_back_in_to_the_fold.html?cid=680756>
- U.S. Department of State. 2010. "Country Background Note: Switzerland". Last edited 31 March 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3431.htm>
- U.S. Department of State. 2010. "Background Note: Germany,"
<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3431.htm> (June 20, 2010).
- Woldendorp, Jaap, Hans Keman, and Ian Budge. "Party Government in 48 Democracies (1945-1998): Composition, Duration, Personnel," Kluwer Academic Publishers, (Dordrecht, Netherlands), 513-14.

Pre-1945 coded by Meera Krishnan (Rice) on 10/22/2010
Post-1945 coded by Alexander Anderson (Rice) on 06/20/2010

Pre-1945 revised by Ashley Leeds (Rice) on 06/12/2012
Pre-1945 revised by Eelco van der Maat (Vanderbilt) on 09/08/2012

Post-1945 revised by Eelco van der Maat (Vanderbilt) on 09/26/2011
Post-1945 revised by Michaela Mattes (Vanderbilt) on 12/16/2011
Post-1945 revised by Eelco van der Maat (Vanderbilt) on 05/08/2013

Combined by Matt DiLorenzo (Vanderbilt) on 07/16/2013
Revised by Andrew Wood on March 5, 2014
Edited by Andrew Wood (Rice) 05/24/2014