

# Ethnic Structure, Inequality and Governance in the Public Sector in Switzerland

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## **Summary/Résumé/Resumen**

### ***Summary***

Switzerland is one of the few multilingual countries in Europe that does not have political difficulties with its linguistic minorities. Yet it would be fundamentally wrong to think of Switzerland as a country without historical conflicts. Modern Switzerland was not created by one homogeneous ethnic people but by different ethnic groups speaking different languages and following different religions. As in other countries, the processes of nation building, industrialization, urbanization and modernization were accompanied by societal conflicts.

But over the past 150 years, Switzerland has been fortunate to find political ways of achieving multicultural understanding; this has been based mainly on two concepts. First, Switzerland renounced the idea of creating a culturally homogeneous nation-state. Instead, from the very beginning of its modern existence, it has been an “artificial” multicultural nation, depending on the political will of its inhabitants with different cultures. Second, Switzerland was able to create a type of democracy that favours and enforces political power sharing between the different cultural groups. This led to social and political integration, peaceful conflict resolution by negotiation, and national consensus among a once-fragmented and heterogeneous population.

The paper is based on both qualitative and quantitative work. While the institutional analysis is mainly qualitative and based on previous research carried out by Wolf Linder, supplemented by the cleavage analysis of Seymour Lipset and Stein Rokkan, the effects of the institutional arrangements on both minority representation and equality are empirically demonstrated with quantitative data. The paper begins with a description of the ethnic structures and cleavages in Switzerland and their development. It then provides an overview of the Swiss political system and its institutional elements of political integration. Finally, the scope and limits of these arrangements are discussed through an analysis of their effects on minority representation and equality.

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### ***Résumé***

La Suisse est l'un des rares pays multilingues d'Europe qui n'ait pas de difficultés politiques avec ses minorités linguistiques. Pourtant, il serait fondamentalement faux de penser à la Suisse comme un pays sans conflit historique. La Suisse moderne n'est pas faite d'une seule ethnie homogène mais de divers groupes ethniques qui parlent des langues différentes et ont des religions différentes. Comme dans d'autres pays, l'édification de la nation, l'industrialisation, l'urbanisation et la modernisation se sont accompagnées de conflits de société.

Cependant, depuis 150 ans, la Suisse a eu la chance de trouver les moyens politiques de faire régner la bonne entente entre ses diverses cultures. Cette concorde a reposé essentiellement sur deux concepts. Premièrement, la Suisse a renoncé à l'idée de former un Etat-nation culturellement homogène. Depuis ses débuts, la Suisse moderne est, au contraire, une nation multiculturelle “artificielle”, dont l'existence ne tient qu'à la volonté politique de ses habitants, aux cultures différentes. Deuxièmement, elle a su se doter d'un type de démocratie qui favorise et pratique le partage du pouvoir politique entre les divers groupes culturels. Les résultats ont été l'intégration sociale et politique, le règlement pacifique des conflits par la négociation, et un consensus national chez une population autrefois morcelée et hétérogène.

Cette étude repose sur des travaux à la fois qualitatifs et quantitatifs. Si l'analyse des institutions, complétée par l'analyse des clivages de Seymour Lipset et Stein Rokkan, est principalement qualitative et s'appuie sur des recherches antérieures effectuées par Wolf

Linder, les effets des mécanismes institutionnels sur la représentation de la minorité et sur l'égalité sont démontrés empiriquement à l'aide de données quantitatives. L'étude commence par une description des structures ethniques et des clivages en Suisse et de leur évolution. Elle donne ensuite une vue d'ensemble du système politique suisse et des éléments d'intégration politique qui tiennent aux institutions. Enfin, les auteurs traitent de la portée et des limites de ces mécanismes en analysant leurs effets sur la représentation de la minorité et sur l'égalité.

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### **Resumen**

Suiza es uno de los pocos países multilingües de Europa que no tiene dificultades políticas con sus minorías lingüísticas. No obstante, sería un error fundamental pensar que Suiza es un país sin conflictos históricos. La Suiza moderna no fue creada por un pueblo étnico homogéneo sino por distintos grupos que hablaban distintos idiomas y tenían distintas religiones. Como ocurrió en otros países, el proceso de formación de la nación, la industrialización, urbanización y modernización fue acompañado por conflictos societales.

Sin embargo, durante los últimos 150 años, Suiza ha tenido la suerte de encontrar soluciones políticas para lograr el respeto entre las culturas. Esto se basó en dos conceptos. Primero, Suiza renunció a la idea de formar un estado-nación culturalmente homogéneo. En vez de eso, desde el principio de su historia moderna, fue una nación multicultural "artificial", que dependía de la voluntad política de sus ciudadanos de distintas culturas. En segundo lugar, Suiza fue capaz de crear un tipo de democracia que favorece y protege la distribución del poder político entre los distintos grupos culturales. Esto mostró el camino hacia la integración social y política, la resolución de conflictos de forma pacífica y negociada, y el consenso nacional entre una población anteriormente dividida y heterogénea.

El estudio se basa tanto en un trabajo tanto cualitativo como cuantitativo. Mientras que el análisis institucional es principalmente cualitativo y se sustenta en investigaciones previas llevadas a cabo por Wolf Linder, apoyado por el análisis cuantitativo de Seymour Lipset y Stein Rokkan, los efectos de las disposiciones institucionales tanto en la representación como en la igualdad de las minorías se demuestran empíricamente usando datos numéricos. El estudio empieza con una descripción de las estructuras étnicas y las divisiones en Suiza y su desarrollo. Luego da una perspectiva general del sistema político suizo y sus elementos institucionales de integración política. Finalmente, el alcance y los límites de estas disposiciones se presentan mediante un análisis de sus efectos sobre la representación y la igualdad de las minorías.

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## Introduction

Switzerland is one of the few multilingual countries in Europe that does not have political difficulties with its linguistic minorities. However, it would be fundamentally wrong to think of Switzerland as a country without historical conflict on this issue. Modern Switzerland was not created by one homogeneous ethnic people, but by different ethnic groups speaking different languages and following different religions. Societal conflicts similar to those of other countries accompanied the process of nation building, industrialization, urbanization and modernization.

However, over the past 150 years Switzerland has successfully achieved multicultural understanding through political means that are mainly based on two concepts. First, Switzerland renounced the idea of creating a culturally homogeneous nation-state. Instead, from the beginning of its modern existence, it formed an “artificial” multicultural nation, dependent upon the political will of its inhabitants from different cultures. Second, Switzerland was able to create a type of democracy that favours and enforces political power sharing between the different cultural groups. This led to social and political integration, peaceful conflict resolution by negotiation and national consensus among a once fragmented and heterogeneous population.

To a large extent, Swiss society is a product of its political institutions, which led Karl Deutsch to speak of Switzerland as a “paradigmatic case of political integration” (Linder 2002b:16). This paper addresses the Swiss institutions of political integration and their effects on minority representation and equality. Our research relies on qualitative as well as quantitative research. While the institutional analysis is primarily qualitative—based on previous research (Linder 2002a, 2002b, 1999, 1998) and supplemented by the concept of cleavage of Lipset and Rokkan (1967)—the effects of the institutions on both minority representation and equality are empirically demonstrated with quantitative data.

The paper begins by describing the ethnic structures and cleavages and their development in Switzerland. This is followed by an overview of the Swiss political system and its institutional elements of political integration. Subsequently, the scope and limits of these arrangements are discussed by analysing their effects on minority representation and equality, followed by concluding remarks.

## I. Ethnic Structures and Cleavages in Switzerland

### ***Description of ethno-linguistic groups: German, French, Italian and Romansh speakers***

In the nineteenth century, nation building was typically a process of “national unification”, uniting a people with a common culture, ethnicity or language. But this is not the case for Switzerland. The Constitution of 1848 federated the peoples of 25 cantons,<sup>1</sup> with different historical backgrounds and cultures, into four ethno-linguistic groups. Today, approximately 70 per cent of the population speak German, 22 per cent French, 7 per cent Italian and less than 1 per cent Romansh, a minor language largely descended from Latin and spoken in a few alpine regions in southeast Switzerland.<sup>2</sup> The linguistic groups are spread throughout the subnational units, but most of the Swiss cantons have an overwhelming majority of one linguistic group. Hence, there are 15 German-, six French- and one Italian-speaking cantons as well as four multilingual cantons.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1978, a part of the Bern canton separated and created the Jura canton (see also section III, Scope and limits of political integration). Thus, the Swiss Federation now consists of 26 cantons.

<sup>2</sup> If the total resident population—including foreigners—is considered, the percentages change slightly with 65 per cent German, 20 per cent French, 6 per cent Italian, 0.5 per cent Romansh and 8.5 per cent other languages (BFS 2003).

While the ethno-linguistic cleavage never became a crucial issue, historically the concerns of religious minorities triggered belligerent conflicts. In the nineteenth century, they resulted in the “cultural struggle” (*Kulturkampf*) and led beyond religion to different views of society (Linder 1998; see also the last part of this section I). By comparison, today’s public opinion polls show that the Swiss population is much less concerned with linguistic differences.

Even so, linguistic-cultural differences still persist in the society and frequently lead to discussions. Public opinion about the ethno-linguistic groups differs in three basic areas: (i) in relations between the cantons and the federation; (ii) in social policy; and (iii) in relations with foreign countries, which is probably the most important “source of division”. Furthermore, some researchers have identified a process of drifting apart, such as the economic predominance of the German-speaking part of Switzerland.<sup>3</sup> Such differences periodically fade away or develop again. For instance, in the 1990s, the results of some important popular votes showed an increasing dissent between the French- and German-speaking parts of Switzerland.

It is interesting to note that the perception of these differences also varies between the ethno-linguistic regions. While a majority of the German speakers considers the division of French- and German-speaking Switzerland – the so-called *Röstigraben* – to be of no real importance, the French-speakers judge it to be salient (Kriesi et al. 1996). This is another reason why the ethno-linguistic cleavage remains significant.

Finally, mingling between the ethno-linguistic groups is rather limited. In fact, languages form a distinct barrier to migration between the regions (Filippini 1998). This is primarily true for low-skilled and elderly people, who often are not able to speak a second official language. From the 1970s to the 1990s, movement between the French- and Italian-speaking regions decreased by 11 per cent, and migration between the German- and French-speaking parts decreased by 47 per cent (BFS 1996).

Although the linguistic differences do not induce critical problems, the ethno-linguistic cleavage remains one of the most important and most visible cleavages in Switzerland.

### ***Analysis of the ethno-linguistic cleavage based on Lipset and Rokkan’s concept of the four European cleavages***

Lipset and Rokkan (1967) identified four critical cleavages that help to explain much of the social history of Europe since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Two of these cleavages are a direct product of the National Revolution. The first was the conflict between the central nation-building culture and the increasing resistance of the ethnically, linguistically or religiously distinct populations in the provinces and the peripheries of society (centre versus periphery). In Switzerland, this cleavage was initially manifested in the tensions between the ethno-linguistic groups, with the French-, Italian- and Romansh-speaking parts forming the minority in opposition to the German-speaking centre. The second cleavage resulted from the

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