European Journal of Political Research Political Data Yearbook **60**: 390–405, 2021
doi: 10.1111/2047-8852.12332

Switzerland: Political Developments and Data in 2020

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Introduction

The year 2020 was supposed to become a year of new parliamentary dynamics, given that the national elections in autumn 2019 had produced the largest shifts in the composition of Parliament for decades, most notably much higher shares of green and female MPs. However, in the first half of the year, party politics was put on hold when the Federal Council, in March 2020, and for the first time in its history, declared the 'extraordinary situation' under the Federal Law of Epidemics. While in June this situation was downgraded to the 'special situation' and Parliament and party politics regained relevance and visibility in the second half of the year, the pandemic clearly dominated many aspects of the political life in 2020.

Election report

No national elections were held in Switzerland. However, cantonal (subnational) elections took place in the cantons of Uri, Schwyz, Basel-Stadt, Schaffhausen, St Gallen, Thurgau, Aargau and Jura. In all these cantonal elections but Uri, the green parties, and especially the Green Liberal Party/*Grünliberale Partei/Parti vert'libéral* (GLP/PVL) was able to make considerable gains in its vote shares. Hence, the 'green wave' of the national elections 2019 was continued at the subnational level in 2020. Even though it was sometimes less pronounced than at the national level, it is noteworthy that substantial green gains could be observed even in some conservative cantons such as St Gallen or Thurgau.

Referendums

The quarterly dates of federal votes are fixed and announced in advance. In 2020, only three dates were used, with Swiss voters deciding on nine ballot proposals (Tables 1–3). In the context of the pandemic, the Federal Council cancelled the votes scheduled in May, which led to a 'super voting day' in the autumn with five proposals being decided on the same day.

The first ballot votes of the year took place on 9 February. The popular *Initiative on More Affordable Homes* asked the Confederation and the cantons to promote affordable housing more strongly. As one of the main measures, the initiative proposed that at least 10 per cent of newly built apartments should belong to non-profit developers. The initiative was clearly rejected with only 42.9 per cent of voters and four-and-a-half cantons supporting it.

[Correction added on 18 April 2022, after first online publication: Funding statement has been added.]
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https://doi.org/10.1111/2047-8852.12332 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1111/2047-8852.12332 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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Table 1. Results of all popular initiatives and referendums on 9 February 2020

Date of referendum	9 February 2020				
Electorate	5,467,714				
Referendum question		**Valid answers**	***N***	**%**	**Outcome**
Popular initiative on more affordable homes	*Volksinitative 'Mehr bezahlbare Wohnungen'/Initiative populaire 'Davantage de logements abordables'*	Yes	963,740	42.9%	Fail
		No	1,280,331	57.1%	
Total votes cast	2,278,908	Votes cast as share of electorate		41.7%	
Total valid votes	2,244,071	Valid votes as share of votes cast		98.5%	
Referendum question		**Valid answers**	***N***	**%**	**Outcome**
Referendum on the ban on discrimination based on sexual orientation	*Änderung des Strafgesetzbuches und des Militärstrafgesetzes (Diskriminierung und Aufruf zu Hass aufgrund der sexuellen Orientierung)/Modification du code Liber et du code Liber militaire (Discrimination et incitation à la haine en raison de l'orientation sexuelle)*	Yes	1,414,160	63.1%	Pass
		No	827,235	36.9%	
Total votes cast	2,279,761	Votes cast as share of electorate		41.7%	
Total valid votes	2,241,395	Valid votes as share of votes cast		98.3%	

Source: The Federal Chancellery 2021.

However, the post-ballot survey revealed that a clear majority supported the core aim of the proposal, namely more affordable housing, but feared that the new policy would not take into account regional disparities (Bernhard & Scaperrotta 2020).

The second proposal of the day was a *Referendum on the Ban on Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation*. In 2018, Parliament had decided to extend the anti-racism penal code to include discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. The referendum was called for by members of the Swiss People's Party/*Schweizerische Volkspartei/Union démocratique du centre* (SVP/UDC) and the Eidgenössisch-Demokratische Union/Union Démocratique Fédérale (EDU/UDF). However, the new law, and relatedly the commitment to a tolerant society (Bernhard & Scaperrotta 2020), was supported by all major parties but the SVP/UDC, and also received a clear yes-majority of 63.1 per cent at the ballot.

Turnout on 9 February was relatively low at 41.7 per cent, which might also reflect a moderate campaign intensity.[1] Conversely, the 'super voting day' on 27 September generated an exceptionally high turnout rate of 59.9 per cent. The five proposals covered rather diverse topics, most moreover involving rather fundamental and emotional questions. This strongly mobilized green–leftist voters, those with high education and income and those in urban centres (Milic et al. 2020: 7).

One driver of high turnout was the so-called *Limitation Initiative* that demanded the end of free movement of persons with the European Union (EU). The initiative was a continuation of an ongoing debate on the potential trade-off between bilateral agreements with the EU and Switzerland's autonomy to limit immigration. Launched by members of the SVP/UDC and the Aktion für eine unabhängige und neutrale Schweiz/Action pour une Suisse Indépendante et Neutre (AUNS/ASIN), this new initiative targeted more directly the core of this trade-off, namely the free movement of persons. Initially scheduled for May 2020 and postponed to September 2020 due to the pandemic, the result was surprisingly clear: 61.7 per cent of voters casted a no-vote, and only in four cantons did the proposal obtain majority support. While previous votes on similar topics (namely the mass immigration initiative in 2014) were decided on small margins, this decision revealed that the bilateral agreements with the EU are given clear priority over autonomy in immigration control (Milic et al. 2020: 5).

The second proposal was a referendum on the *Amendment of the Hunting Act*, which centred on new rules for dealing with wolves (but also included regulations on other wild animals). The referendum was called for by nature conservation associations, and it triggered an intensive and emotional campaign. At the ballot, 51.8 per cent of voters rejected the amendment. Large differences in voting behaviour occurred between the Alpine cantons, where almost 70 per cent of voters casted a yes-vote, and the midland and urban cantons, where clear majorities opposed the new law (Milic et al. 2020: 24).

On the same day, the citizenry also rejected an *Amendment of the Federal Act on Direct Federal Taxation* with 63.2 per cent of no-votes. Initially, the Federal Council had conceptualized the amendment, namely an increased tax deduction for childcare costs, as a measure to improve the reconciliation between family duties and employment. However, in the parliamentary process, the centre-right majority added a general tax deduction for children to the proposal, which let the Social Democrats/*Sozialdemokratische Partei/Parti Socialiste* (SPS/PSS) to call for the referendum (Strasser 2020). The party's main argument

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https://doi.org/10.1111/2047-8852.12332 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Table 2. Results of all popular initiatives and referendums on 27 September 2020

Date of referendum	27 September 2020				
Electorate	5,493,036				
Referendum question		**Valid answers**	***N***	**%**	**Outcome**
Popular initiative 'For moderate immigration (Limitation Initiative)'	*Volksinitiative 'Für eine massvolle Zuwanderung (Begrenzungsinitiative)'/ Initiative populaire 'Pour une immigration modérée (initiative de limitation)'*	Yes	1,233,995	38.3%	Fail
		No	1,988,349	61.7%	
Total votes cast	3,267,849	Votes cast as share of electorate		59.5%	
Total valid votes	3,222,344	Valid votes as share of votes cast		98.6%	
Referendum question		**Valid answers**	***N***	**%**	**Outcome**
Referendum on the Amendment of the Hunting Act	*Änderung des Bundesgesetzes über die Jagd und den Schutz wildlebender Säugetiere und Vögel/Modification de la loi fédérale sur la chasse et la protection des mammifères et oiseaux sauvages*	Yes	1,531,027	48.1%	Fail
		No	1,654,105	51.9%	
Total votes cast	3,259,818	Votes cast as share of electorate		59.3%	
Total valid votes	3,185,132	Valid votes as share of votes cast		97.7%	

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https://doi.org/10.1111/2047-8852.12332 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Table 2. Continued

Referendum question		Valid answers	*N*	%	Outcome
Referendum on the Amendment of the Federal Act on Direct Federal Taxation	*Änderung des Bundesgesetzes über die direkte Bundessteuer (Steuerliche Berücksichtigung der Kinderdrittbetreuungskosten)/Modification de la loi fédérale sur l'impôt direct (Déduction Libera des frais de garde des enfants par des tiers)*	Yes No	1,164,451 2,003,235	36.8% 63.2%	Fail
Total votes cast Total valid votes	3,252,306 3,167,686	Votes cast as share of electorate Valid votes as share of votes cast		59.2% 97.4%	
Referendum question		**Valid answers**	***N***	**%**	**Outcome**
Referendum on the Amendment of the Loss of Earnings Compensation Act	*Änderung des Bundesgesetzes über den Erwerbsersatz für Dienstleistende und bei Mutterschaft ('Vaterschaftsurlaub')/ Modification de la loi fédérale sur les allocations pour perte de gain en cas de service et de maternité ('Congé de paternité')*	Yes No	1,933,310 1,270,705	60.3% 39.7%	Pass
Total votes cast Total valid votes	3,260,613 3,204,015	Votes cast as share of electorate Valid votes as share of votes cast		59.4% 98.3%	
Referendum question		**Valid answers**	***N***	**%**	**Outcome**
Referendum on Federal Decree on the Procurement of New Fighter Aircraft	*Bundesbeschluss über die Beschaffung neuer Kampfflugzeuge/Arrêté Liberal relatif à l'acquisition de nouveaux avions de combat*	Yes No	1,605,839 1,597,324	50.1% 49.9%	Pass
Total votes cast Total valid votes	3,264,252 3,203,163	Votes cast as share of electorate Valid votes as share of votes cast		59.4% 98.1%	

Source: The Federal Chancellery 2021.

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against the amendment, namely that only high-income households would profit form the tax deductions, was also the main reason for voters to reject it on the ballot (Milic et al. 2020: 34).

The fourth referendum on the *Referendum on the Amendment of the Loss of Earnings Compensation Act* was in fact a vote on the *Introduction of a Two-Week Paternity Leave*. The proposal was a direct counterproposal to the withdrawn popular initiative 'Paternity leave now' and triggered opposition mainly among the right-wing parties (Milic et al. 2020: 38). However, 60.3 per cent of voters and a majority of cantons approved the amendment on the ballot, whereas 10 cantons from the eastern and centre parts of the country still rejected the paternity leave.

The fifth ballot proposal was embedded in a longer debate on the purchase of new fighter aircraft, regarding which the electorate had rejected a proposal in 2014. The new decree allocated a maximum of 6 billion Swiss francs to this project without, however, specifying the particular type of fighter aircraft that should be purchased. The main conflict occurred – as in previous ballot decision on military questions – along the left–right divide, and produced a very close result with 50.1 per cent yes-votes and a margin of fewer than 9000 votes (Milic et al. 2020: 46). Remarkably, the new and first female Defence Minister, Viola Amherd, became heavily involved in the campaign and managed to gain sympathy for herself and therewith for the bill (Milic et al. 2020).

On 29 November, voters decided on two ballot proposals that covered ethical, social and sustainability issues in a global context.

The popular *Initiative for Responsible Businesses*, launched by more than 60 non-governmental organizations (NGOs), demanded that Swiss companies should examine their as well as their subsidiaries' suppliers' and business partners' compliance with internationally recognized human rights and environmental standards. The government and Parliament opposed the initiative arguing that the proposed liability rules went too far. While the proposal received a small majority in the popular vote (50.7 per cent), it failed to win a majority of the cantons. It was only the second time since the introduction of female suffrage that this combination of popular majority and cantonal minority led to the rejection of an initiative (Golder et al. 2021).

The last ballot proposal of the year concerned a *Ban on the Financing of All War Material* including credits for material producers and the ownership of their shares. While support for this initiative was again strong at the left, it was clearly rejected among centre and rightist voters. Nevertheless, the yes-share of 42.6 per cent can be considered high compared with previous initiatives in the field of war and peace (Golder et al. 2021).

While turnout on that voting day was almost 10 percentage points lower than in September 2020, it was the first time in history that women exhibited a higher turnout rate than their male counterparts (Golder et al. 2021). This exceptional gender composition of the electorate was accompanied by a substantial gender gap in voting behaviour. A total of 57 per cent of women supported the initiative for responsible businesses, while only 43 of male voters did so. Similarly, almost every second female voter accepted the ban on financing war material manufacturers at the ballot, whereas only every third male voter cast a yes-vote (Golder et al. 2021).

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https://doi.org/10.1111/2047-8852.12332 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Table 3. Results of all popular initiatives and referendums on 29 November 2020

Date of referendum	29 November 2020				
Electorate	5,495,345				
Referendum question		**Valid answers**	***N***	**%**	**Outcome**
Popular Initiative 'For responsible businesses – protecting human rights and the environment'	*Volksinitiative 'Für verantwortungsvolle Unternehmen – zum Schutz von Mensch und Umwelt'/Initiative populaire 'Entreprises responsables – pour protéger l'être humain et l'environnement'*	Yes	1,299,129	50.7%	Fail
		No	1,261,680	49.3%	
Total votes cast	2,584,840	Votes cast as share of electorate		47.0%	
Total valid votes	2,560,809	Valid votes as share of votes cast		99.1%	
Referendum question		**Valid answers**	***N***	**%**	**Outcome**
Popular Initiative 'For a ban on financing war material manufacturers'	*Volksinitiative 'Für ein Verbot der Finanzierung von Kriegsmaterialproduzenten'/Initiative populaire 'Pour une interdiction du financement des producteurs de matériel de guerre'*	Yes	1,081,684	42.5%	Fail
		No	1,460,650	57.5%	
Total votes cast	2,579,954	Votes cast as share of electorate		47.0%	
Total valid votes	2,542,334	Valid votes as share of votes cast		98.5%	

Source: The Federal Chancellery 2021.

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https://doi.org/10.1111/2047-8852.12332 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Cabinet report

On 11 December 2019, after the national elections, all members of the coalition government in Switzerland had been re-elected by Parliament and remained in office during 2020. On the same day, Parliament also elected the Federal President and Vice-President for 2020 as these positions rotate annually among the members of the Cabinet. For the second time in her career, Simonetta Sommaruga (SPS/PSS) was elected as Federal President with 186 out of 200 valid votes. Guy Parmelin (SVP/UDC) was nominated as Vice-President and received 168 of 183 votes.

Parliament report

As 2020 was the first year of the legislative term, no major changes in Parliament occurred and only three members of the lower house of the Parliament (*National Council*) had to be replaced. Two persons left the national Parliament because they were elected to the governments of their home cantons, and one person died.

Political party report

On 17 October 2020, the delegates of the SPS/PSS had to elect a new party leader to replace Christian Levrat, who had led the party for 12 years. As a novelty in the party history, Mattea Meyer and Cédric Wermuth were elected as co-presidents.

Moreover, in 2020, the Christian Democratic People's Party/*Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei/Parti Démocrate-Chrétien* (CVP/PDC) and the Bürgerlich-Demokratische Partei/Parti bourgeois démocratique (BDP/PBD) decided to merge to a new joint party called 'The Centre'. Even though the party would not exist as such until January 2021, the main decisions of this merger were taken in 2020. On 28 November 2020, over 80 per cent of the delegates of the CVP/PDC (and, thus, clearly more than the required two-thirds) decided to rename their party and merge with the BDP/PBD. The delegates of the latter had agreed on the merger two weeks before.

The BDP/PBD was only formed in 2008 as a split from the SVP/UDC. After some short-term successes, the party has steadily lost vote share in recent years. After the 2019 elections, the party no longer had the right to form its own parliamentary group and therefore joined the former Christian Democratic group (CVP/PDC, CSP/PCS and EVP/PEV) to form the new 'Centre Group. CVP-EVP-BDP'. From this perspective, the formal merger seems not to be a big deal.

However, the situation is different from the perspective of the CVP/PDC. Since the 19th century, this party has been the dominant party in the conservative cantons and for a long time formed the main counterweight to the liberal forces in Switzerland (Bochsler 2013). Moreover, having emerged from the 'Kulturkampf', the 'Christian' in the party's name has for long formed one of its identifying elements. Hence, the decision to merge, and most important, to change name is indeed historic for this party.[2]

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https://doi.org/10.1111/2047-8852.12332 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Table 4. Cabinet composition of the Federal Council in Switzerland in 2020

Duration of Cabinet	Inception	11 December 2019	Dissolution	13 December 2023		
Period covered by table	From	1 January 2020	Until	31 December 2020		
Type of Cabinet	Oversized Coalition					

A. Party/gender composition on 1 January 2020			Seats in Cabinet		Seats held by women		Seats in Parliament	
			N	%	*N*	% of party	*N*	%
FDP.The Liberals	*FDP.Die Liberalen/PLR.Les Libéraux-Radicaux*	(FDP/PLR)	2	28.6%	1	50.0%	41	16.6%
Swiss People's Party	*Schweizerische Volkspartei/Union démocratique du centre*	(SVP/UDC)	2	28.6%	0	0.0%	62	25.2%
Social Democrats	*Sozialdemokratische Partei/Parti Socialiste*	(SPS/PSS)	2	28.6%	1	50.0%	48	19.5%
Christian Democrats	*Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei/Parti Démocrate-Chrétien*	(CVP/PDC, CSP/PCS)	1	14.2%	1	100.0%	44	18.0%
Others	*Andere*		0	0.0%	0	0.0%	51	20.7%
Totals			7	100.0%	3	42.9%	246	100.0%

B. Composition of the Federal Council Cabinet on 1 January 2020
See previous editions of the *Political Data Yearbook* for Switzerland or http://politicaldatayearbook.com

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Table 4. (Continued)

C.	Changes in composition of the Federal Council during 2020 Ministerial title		Outgoing minister					Outgoing date	Incoming minister					Comments
	President of the Swiss confederation	*Bundespräsident/ Président de la Confédération*	Ueli	Maurer	1950	Male	(SVP/ UDC)	31 December 2019	Simo-netta	Somma-ruga	1960	Female	(SPS/ PSS)	The President of the Confederation changes every year. Maurer was no longer president but kept his seat in the Council
	Vice-president of the Swiss confederation	*Vizepräsident des Bundesrates/ Vice-présidents de la Confédération*	Simo-netta	Somma-ruga	1960	Female	(SPS/ PSS)	31 December 2019	Guy	Parme-lin	1959	Male	(SVP/ UDC)	The Vice-President of the Confederation changes every year. Sommaruga was no longer Vice-President but kept her seat in the Council and became President

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Table 4. (Continued)

D.	Party/gender composition on 31 December 2020			Seats in Cabinet		Seats held by women		Seats in Parliament	
				N	%	*N*	% of party	*N*	%
	FDP.The Liberals	*FDP.Die Liberalen/PLR.Les Libéraux-Radicaux*	(FDP/PLR)	2	28.6%	1	50.0%	41	16.6%
	Swiss People's Party	*Schweizerische Volkspartei/Union démocratique du centre*	(SVP/UDC)	2	28.6%	0	0.0%	62	25.2%
	Social Democrats	*Sozialdemokratische Partei/Parti Socialiste*	(SPS/PSS)	2	28.6%	1	50.0%	48	19.5%
	Christian Democrats	*Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei/Parti Démocrate-Chrétien*	(CVP/PDC, CSP/PCS)	1	14.2%	1	100.0%	44	18.0%
	Others	*Andere*		0	0.0%	0	0.0%	51	20.7%
	Totals			7	100.0%	3	42.9%	246	100.0%

Notes: Parliament here is named *Vereinigte Bundesversammlung* and consists of the seats in both chambers (the upper and the lower house).
The Cabinet is an Oversized Coalition, but not every faction that has seats in Parliament has a federal councillor.
Whereas members of the Federal Council are elected individually and have been in office for different periods of time, every four years after the national elections all members of the Federal Council are re-elected the same day. Hence, the inception of the 2020 Federal Council was on 11 December 2019, and unless a member resigns, it is elected for a period of four years.

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https://doi.org/10.1111/2047-8852.12332 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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Table 5. Party and gender composition of the lower house of Parliament (*Nationalrat*/*Conseil national*) in Switzerland in 2020

Party			1 January 2020				31 December 2020			
			All		Women		All		Women	
			N	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
Swiss People's Party	*Fraktion der Schweizerischen Volkspartei/Groupe de l'Union démocratique du centre*	(SVP/UDC)	55	27.5%	14	7.0%	55	27.5%	14	7.0%
Social Democrats	*Sozialdemokratische Fraktion/Groupe socialiste*	(SPS/PSS)	39	19.5%	23	11.5%	39	19.5%	24	12.0%
Centre Group. CVP-EVP-BDP	*Mitte Fraktion. CVP-EVP-BDP/Le Groupe du Centre.PDC-PEV-PBD*	(CVP/PDC, CSP/PCS, BDP/PBD, EVP/PEV)	31	15.5%	9	2.9%	31	15.5%	9	2.9%
FDP.The Liberal Group	*FDP-Liberale Fraktion/Groupe Liberal-radical*	(FDP/PLR)	29	14.5%	11	5.5%	29	14.5%	11	5.5%
Green Group	*Grüne Fraktion/Groupe des Verts*	(GPS/PES, PdA/PdT)	30	15.0%	18	9.0%	30	15.0%	18	9.0%
Green Liberal Group	*Grünliberale Fraktion/Groupe vert'libéral*	(GLP/PVL)	16	8.0%	8	4.0%	16	8.0%	8	4.0%
Totals			200	100.0%	83	41.6%	200	100.0%	84	42.0%

Notes: Parliamentary groups are not identical to political parties. For more information, see https://www.parlament.ch/en/organe/groups.
After the elections 2019, the Conservative Democratic Party (BDP/PBD) formed together with the former Christian Democratic Fraction (CVP/PDC, CSP/PCS and EVP/PEV) the new "The Center Group. CVP-EVP-BDP."
Source: The Federal Assembly – The Swiss Parliament (2021).

Table 6. Party and gender composition of the upper house of Parliament (*Ständerat/Conseil des États*) in Switzerland in 2020

Party			1 January 2020				31 December 2020			
			All		Women		All		Women	
			N	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
Swiss People's Party	*Fraktion der Schweizerischen Volkspartei/Groupe de l'Union démocratique du centre*	(SVP/UDC)	7	15.2%	0	0.0%	7	15.2%	0	0.0%
Social Democrats	*Sozialdemokratische Fraktion/Groupe socialiste*	(SPS/PSS)	9	19.6%	3	6.5%	9	19.6%	3	6.5%
Centre Group. CVP-EVP-BDP	*Mitte Fraktion. CVP-EVP-BDP/Le Groupe du Centre.PDC-PEV-PBD*	(CVP/PDC, CSP/PCS, BDP/PBD, EVP/PEV)	13	28.3%	4	8.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
FDP.The Liberal Group	*FDP-Liberale Fraktion/Groupe Liberal-radical*	(FDP/PLR)	12	26.0%	1	2.2%	12	26.0%	1	2.2%
Green Group	*Grüne Fraktion/Groupe des Verts*	(GPS/PES, PdA/PdT)	5	10.9%	4	8.7%	5	10.9%	4	8.7%
Totals			46	100.0%	12	26.1%	33	71.7%	8	24.2%

Notes: Parliamentary groups are not identical to political parties. For more information, see https://www.parlament.ch/en/organe/groups.
After the elections 2019, the Conservative Democratic Party (BDP/PBD) formed together with the former Christian Democratic Fraction (CVP/PDC, CSP/PCS and EVP/PEV) the new "The Center Group. CVP-EVP-BDP."
Source: The Federal Assembly – The Swiss Parliament (2021).

https://doi.org/10.1111/2047-8852.12332 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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Table 7. Changes in political parties in Switzerland in 2020

A.	Party institutional changes in 2020													
	None													
B.	**Party leadership changes in 2020**													
	Social Democrats	SPS/PSS	President of the Social Democrats	Christian	Levrat	1970	Male	Two new party leaders (Co-presidency)	17 October 2020	Mattea	Meyer	1987	Female	SPS/PSS
	Social Democrats	SPS/PSS	President of the Social Democrats	Christian	Levrat	1970	Male	Two new party leaders (Co-presidency)	17 October 2020	Cédric	Wermuth	1986	Male	SPS/PSS

Notes: Mattea Meyer and Cédric Wermuth lead the party as a co-presidency.
Source: The Federal Assembly – The Swiss Parliament (2021).

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https://doi.org/10.1111/2047-8852.12332 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Institutional change report

There were no major institutional changes in 2020.

Issues in national politics

Not surprisingly, the pandemic, and how to deal with it, were the dominant issues in national politics. In a first phase, when the Federal Council declared the 'extraordinary situation' in March 2020 and put the most restrictive measures into force, the fight against the pandemic was extraordinarily depoliticized. All parties represented in Parliament even signed a joint media release supporting the Federal Council and its measures. However, only a few months later, 'pandemic politics' became a new issue in Swiss politics. The lines of conflict run along the left–right axis with left parties more strongly supporting stricter measures and rightist parties asking for a more rapid relaxation of measures such as the closure of shops and restaurants. Conversely, the extensive public expenditures to cushion the pandemic, namely short-time work compensation and emergency aid for companies, were hardly the subject of party-political disputes.

Related to the pandemic, the distribution of competencies between the Confederation and the cantons was a recurring topic of discussion. While in normal times cantons in Switzerland enjoy a high degree of autonomy (Linder & Vatter 2001), especially in health, education and social policy, the Federal Law of Epidemics allows for a considerable shift of powers to the federal government in 'extraordinary' or 'special' times. The test case of the Covid-19 pandemic, with the special and extraordinary times being in place for months, revealed that decision-making under this unusual distribution of competencies is conflictual.

Finally, while the year had started with the premise that climate change policy would be the dominant political matter, the pandemic shifted priorities. However, it did not completely displace the climate issue, which remained prominent in the political and public debate.

Acknowledgement

Open Access Funding provided by Universitat Bern.

Notes

1. See https://www.foeg.uzh.ch/dam/jcr:4e0c9d8b-d2dd-4755-8d30-f275a0697590/Abstimmungsmonitor_Febru-ar_2020.pdf (accessed on 6 April 2021).
2. While this decision only settles the merger at the national level, all cantonal parties can decide until 2025 whether they want to accept the new name and the merger.

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https://doi.org/10.1111/2047-8852.12332 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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https://doi.org/10.1111/2047-8852.12332 Published online by Cambridge University Press