

IREb2014

CULTURE, SOCIETY AND POLITICS IN THE GERMAN-SPEAKING COUNTRIES

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Fall 2020-2021

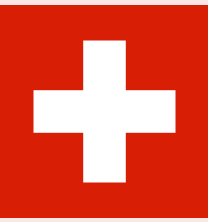
Session 12: The Swiss Political System

On the Agenda for Today

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- **Federalism**
- **Swiss Federalism**
 - Federation vs. Confederation
 - Largest Political Parties
- **Direct Democracy**
 - Popular Initiatives
 - Referendums
- **The Multicultural State**
- **Proportional Representation**
- **Analyzing Direct Democracy**
 - Supporting/Opposing
 - Why does it work in Switzerland?

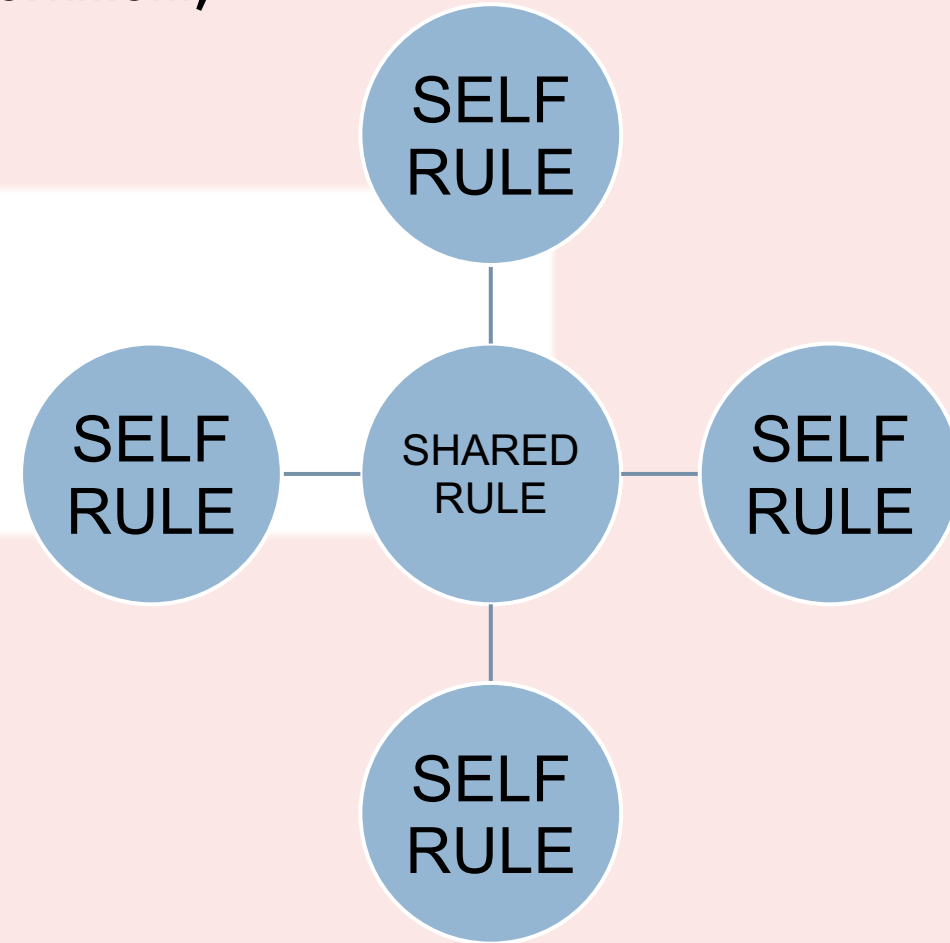


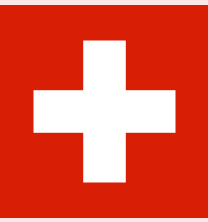


Federalism

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- **Federalism: Power sharing** between a **general** government, state/**regional** governments
 - **Dispersed** power centers
- **State power** in Switzerland is **shared** between the **federal government**, the **cantons** and the **communes**
 - The cantons + communes have **broad scope** in carrying out their responsibilities
 - **Federalism + direct Democracy** (initiatives, referenda) **supports** Switzerland as a **multicultural state**





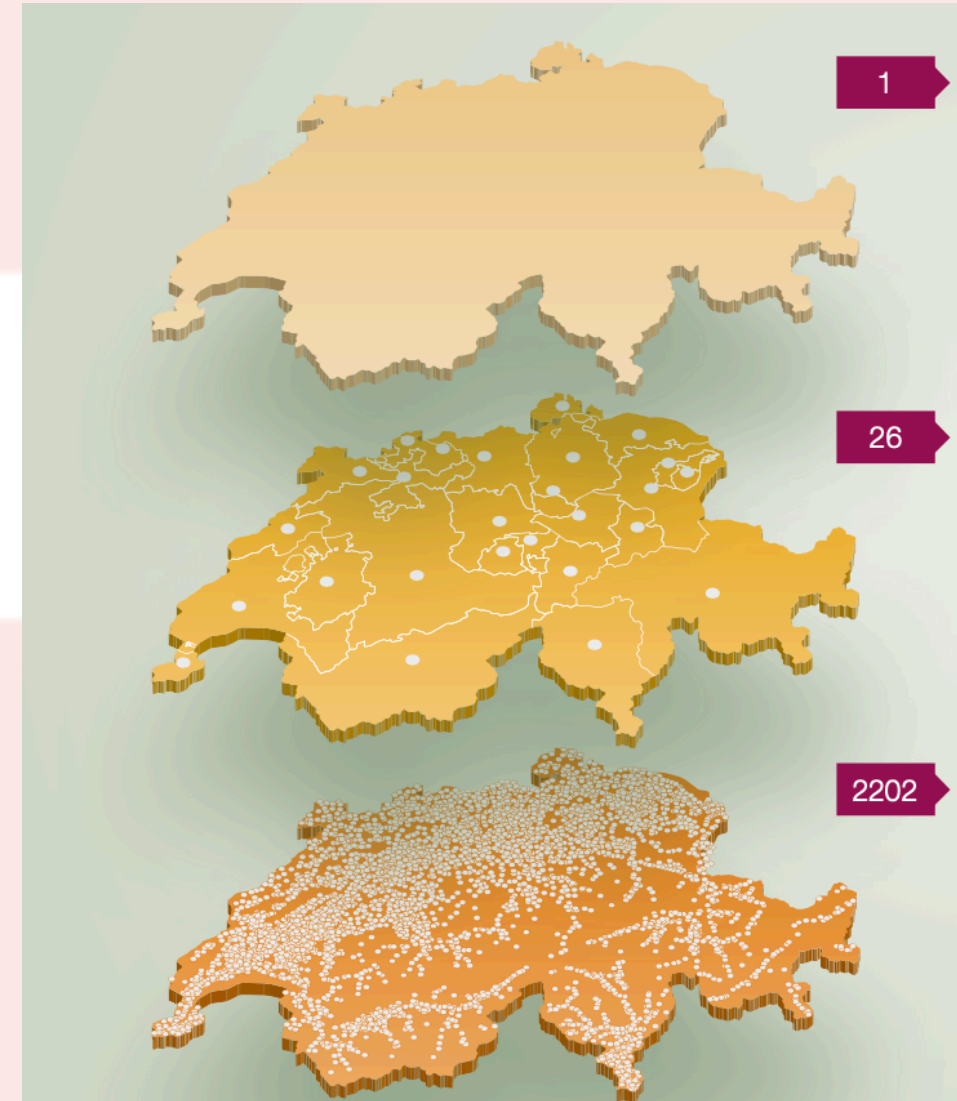
Swiss Federalism

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- Three **political levels** share power in Switzerland:
 - The **Confederation**
 - 26 **cantons**
 - Over 2,000 **communes**

The Confederation =>

- **Federal Constitution:** Defines the Confederation's tasks & responsibilities
- **Federal Legislative:** Bicameral **parliament**
- **Federal Executive:** Federal Council: **government**

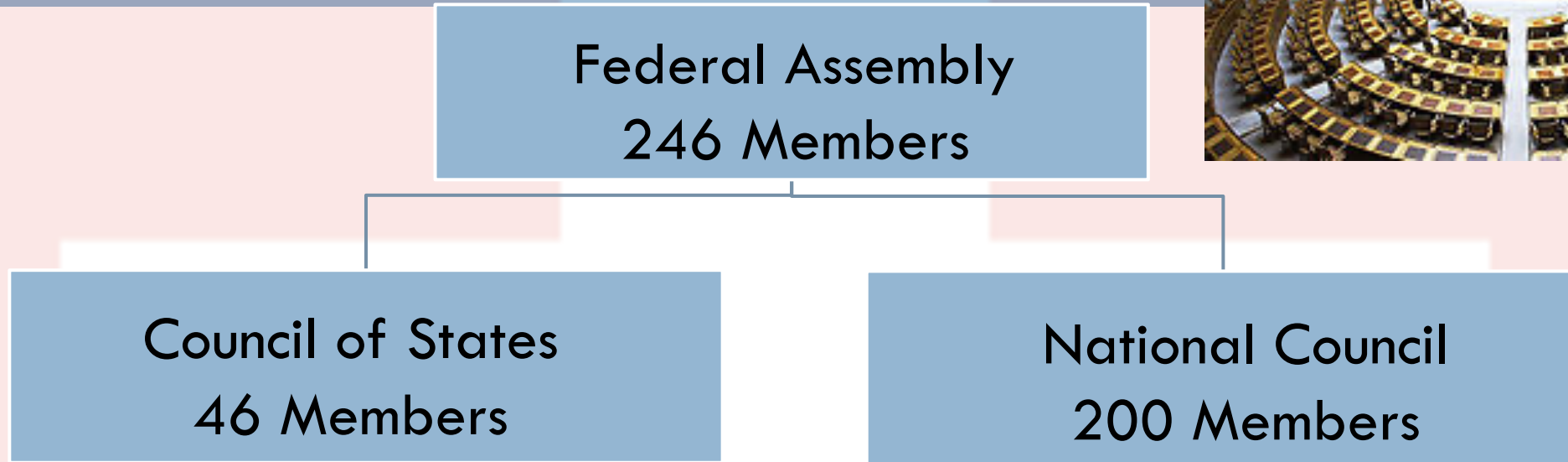


Federation vs. Confederation

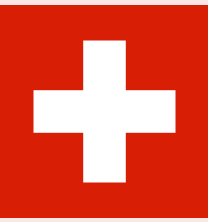
Federation	Confederation
A union of states or provinces	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- States or provinces that join a federation, agree to give up part of their powers and to answer to the central government, which has the power to enforce laws and regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- States come together creating a loose union for matters of political, economic or administrative convenience
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Members of a federation are bound to respect the authority of the central government and maintain limited powers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Within a confederation, member states maintain a large degree of autonomy and independence, often appoint a weak central authority

Swiss Federalism

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- **Council of States** => **Upper chamber**, 2 seats per canton, members elected by the people in each canton in a direct majority list ballot system (mostly)
- **National Council** => **Lower chamber**, seats allocated according to **population size** (minimum one seat)
- **Power sharing system**

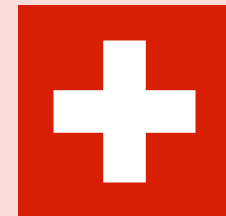


Swiss Federalism

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- **Federal Council (Government):** Seven members elected by parliament
 - Composition determined by a **Magic formula** (since 1955): seats are divided between the four ruling parties
 - Federal **chancellor**
- **Federal Supreme Court**
 - Switzerland's **highest court**
 - Ensures the uniform application of the **law** + upholds the **rights** of ordinary people
 - Highest court of **appeal**

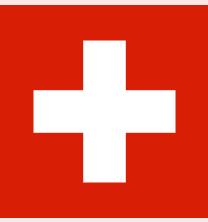




Largest Political Parties

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Logo	Party	Abb.	Political Ideology	Seats in government
	Swiss People's Party/ 'Democratic Union of the Centre'	(SVP/UDC)	National conservative	2
	Social Democratic Party of Switzerland	PS/SP	Democratic socialist, center left	2
	The Liberals/Free Democratic Party of Switzerland	FDP/PRD/PLR	Centre right, liberalism	2
	The Christian Democrats	CVP/PDC/PPD	Conservative Christian Democracy	1

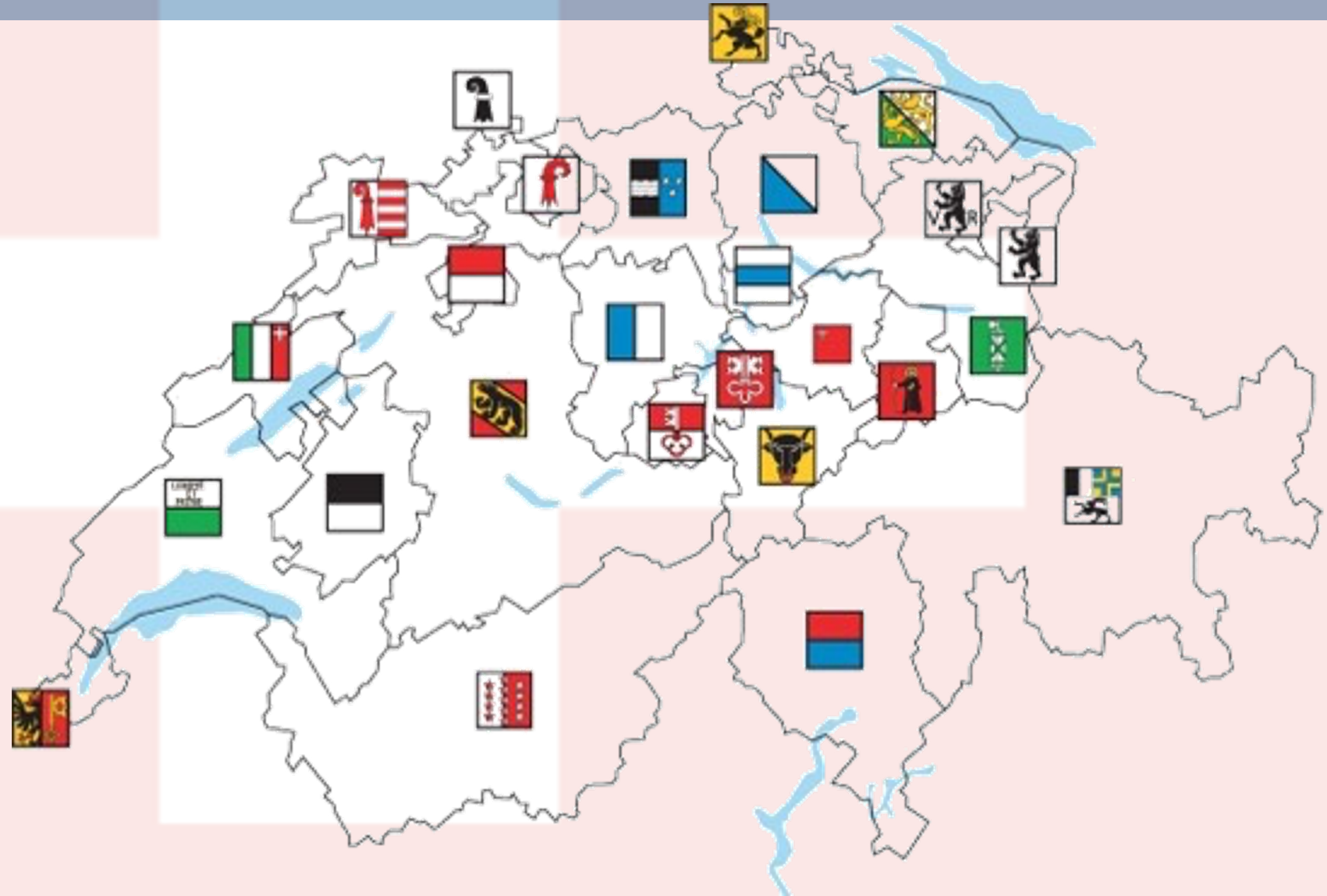


Swiss Federalism

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The Cantons =>

- 26 cantons/states
- **Political Autonomy:** Each has own parliament, government, courts, constitution
- Diverse





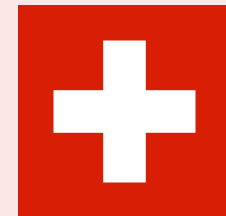
Swiss Federalism

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Communes =>

- **Cantons** are divided into **communes**
 - Division of responsibilities between cantons and communes (e.g., local planning, running the schools, social welfare and the fire service)
 - **Larger communes/cities:** Own parliaments, referendums
 - **Smaller communes:** Communal assemblies
 - **Diverse**
- Communes + cantons allow rural areas, different religious denominations, language groups to **self govern & influence federal** decision-making





Direct Democracy

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- Swiss citizens may voice their opinions by means of: **popular initiative, optional referendum and mandatory referendum**

pensions



pollution

taxes

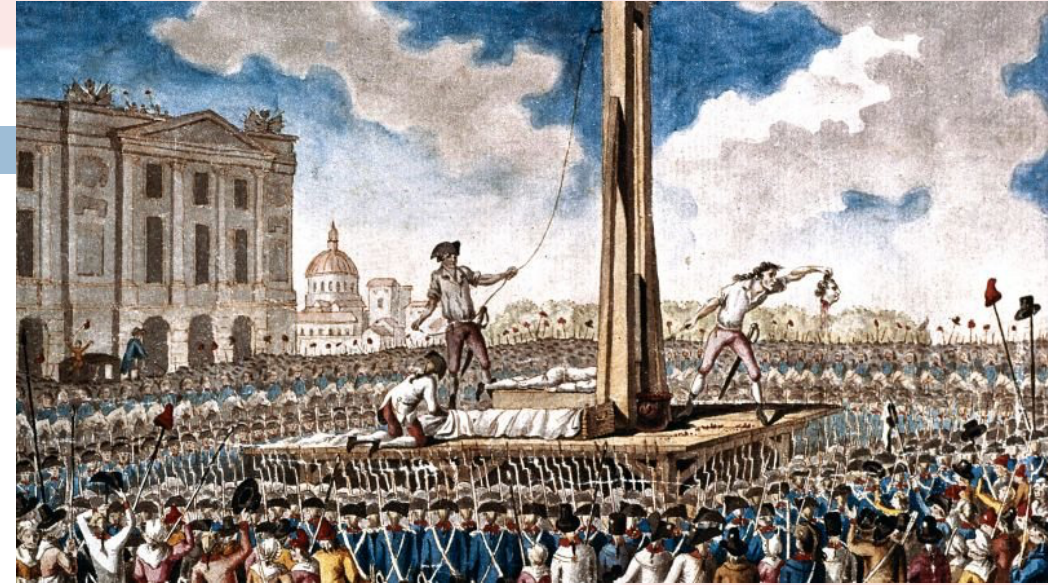


Religion

Direct Democracy

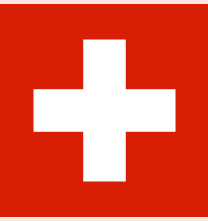
Historical Background =>

- **Pre-modern forms of democracy** dating back to the Middle Ages
- American + French revolutions
- Introduction of:
 - **Mandatory constitutional referendum** (1848)
 - **Optional referendum** (1874)
 - **Popular initiative** (1891)
 - The referendum on international treaties (1921, 1977, 2003)
 - Resolutive referendum (1949)

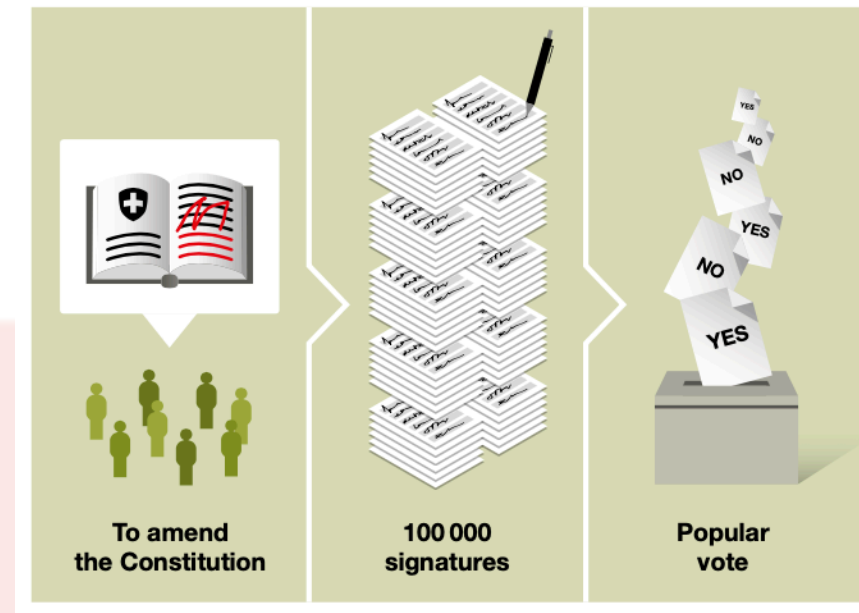


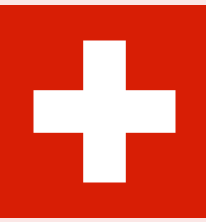
Popular Initiative

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- Est. 1891
- Allows citizens to propose **changes/additions** to the Swiss Federal **Constitution**
 - **100,000 signatures** in favour of the proposal must be collected within **18 months** before a vote is held
 - **Double majority** needed
- **Most** are rejected, but they **drive/launch** political **debate** on a specific issue, which, at times, lead to **new legislation**
 - Minimum monthly income, cutting military spending, limiting foreign population to 18%, banning the production + sale of absinthe ...



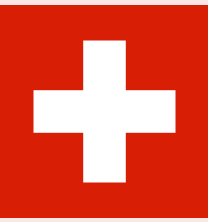


Referendums

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- Latin for referral/referring to the public: Nationwide **popular vote**
 - **Optional/mandatory referendum**
- **Mandatory referendum**
 - Concerning all **constitutional amendments** approved by parliament
 - Swiss **membership** in specific **international organizations**
 - **Require a double majority: National popular vote at the polls + win most of the cantons**



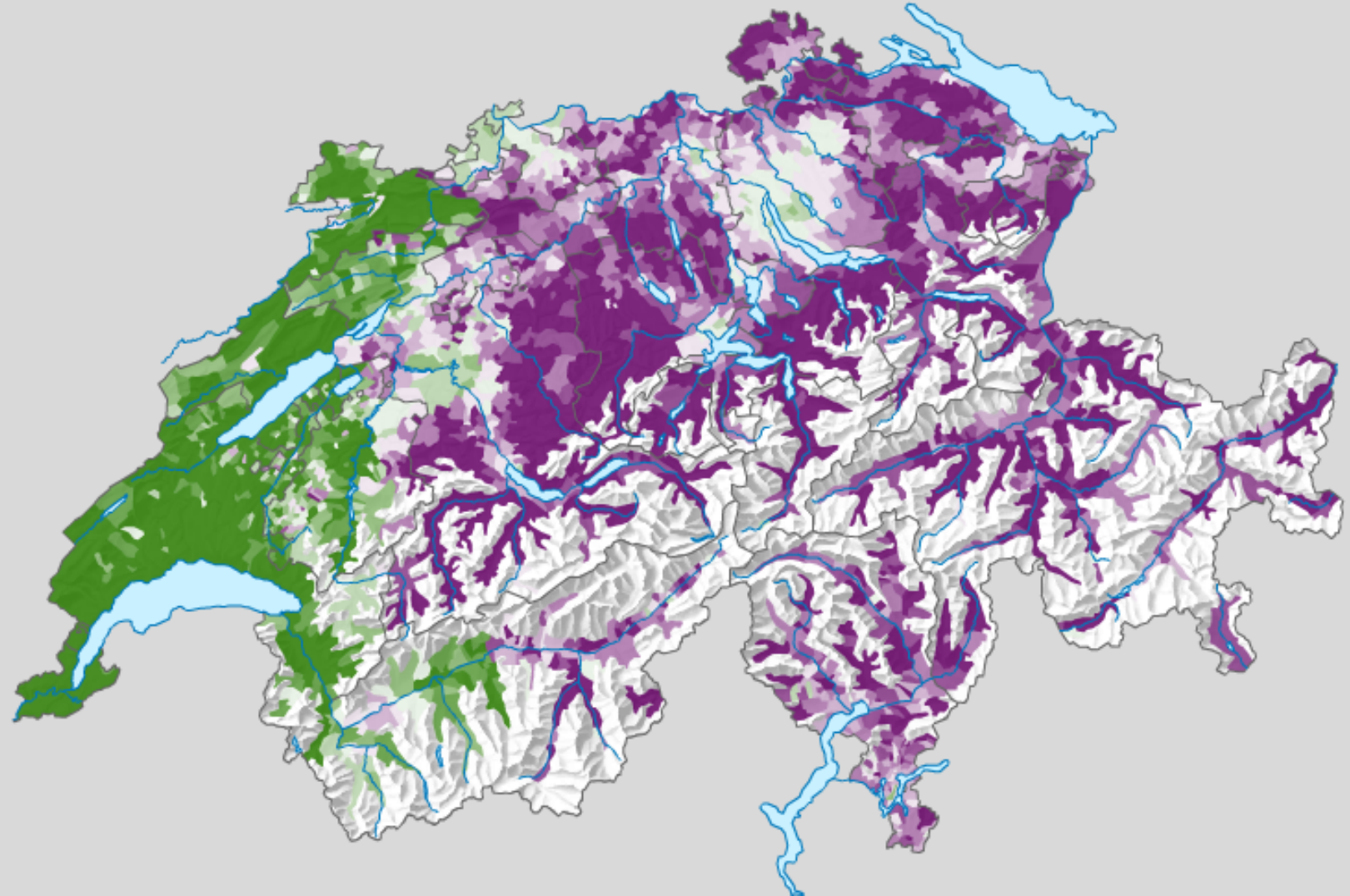
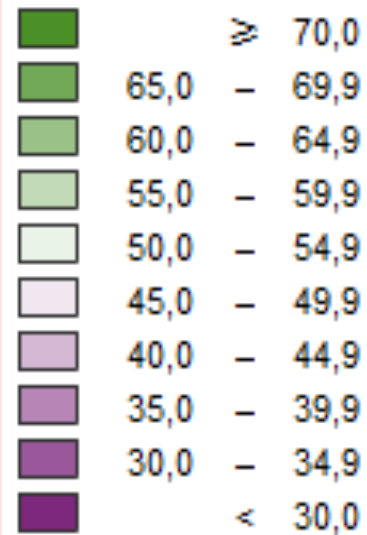


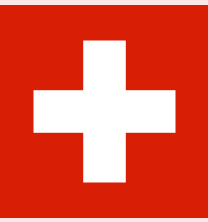
1992: Joining the EEA

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Bundesbeschluss über den Europäischen Wirtschaftsraum (EWR), Abstimmung vom 06.12.1992

Ja-Stimmenanteil, in %



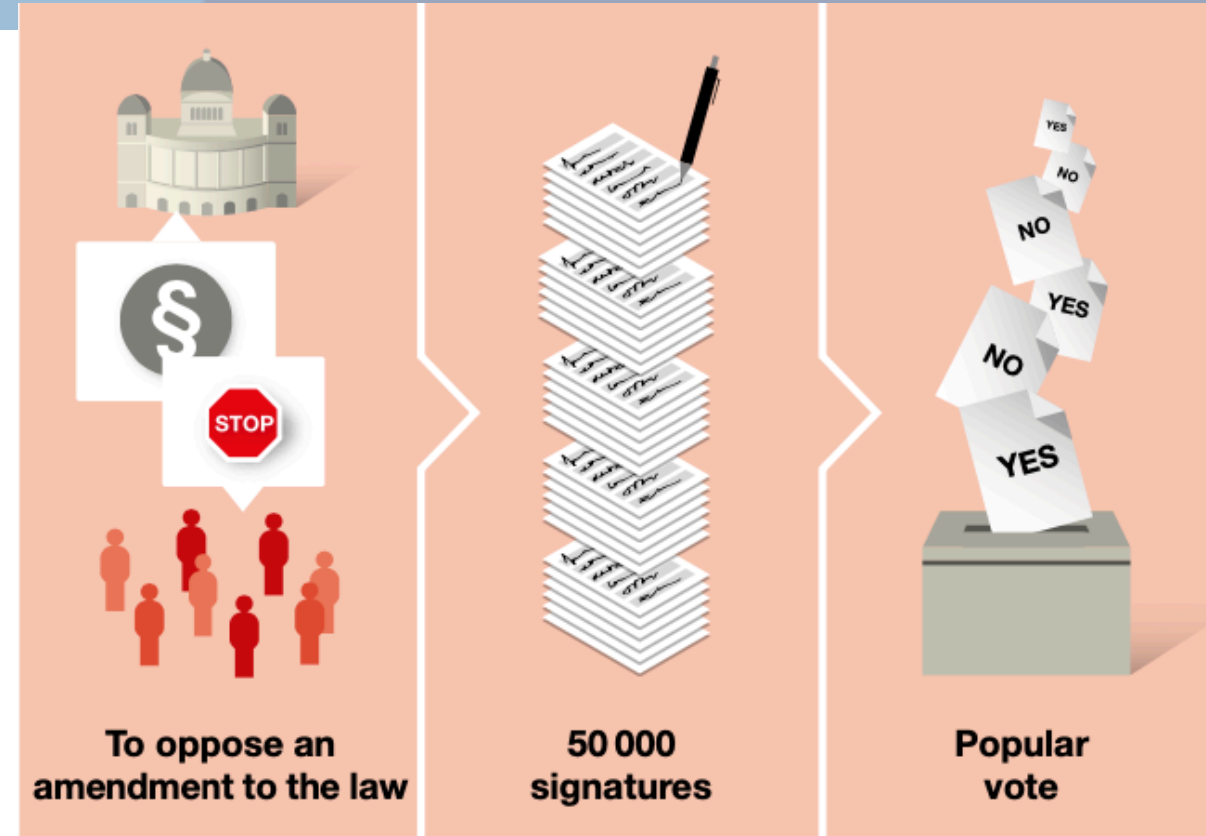


Referendums

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- **Optional referendum**

- Challenging a new law/amendment to a law
- Any **law** can be put to a nationwide vote if **50,000** signatures are collected within **100 days** of publication of the new legislation, OR
- Referendum requested by the **cantons** must be demanded by **8 cantons**



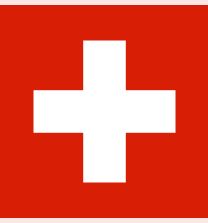
- Referendums as **safeguards** of the **political process**
- Referendum as means of **pressure** on the **legislator** meant to induce **compromise**

Referendums

Voter Turnout =>

- Until the end of World War II: 50%
- 1960 to mid-1980s: 40%
- Since the late 1980s: Around 45%
- Most important factor for **mobilizing voters- topic**
- Voting culture, but also voting fatigue
- How do the Swiss form an opinion?
 - The **referendum booklet** educates the voters
 - The **government recommends** whether the initiative/referendum should be accepted/rejected

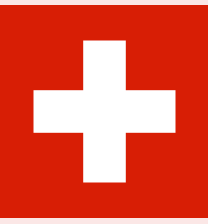
Election For	Date ▼	Votes	Registered Voters	Turn Out
Swiss National Council	2019-10-20	2,462,581	5,460,268	45.1%
Swiss Council of States	2019-10-20	2,462,581	5,460,268	45.1%
Referendum	2019-05-19	2,356,013	5,391,090	43.7%
Referendum	2019-02-10	2,028,734	5,428,531	37.37%
Referendum	2018-11-25	2,585,802	5,391,090	47.96%
Referendum	2018-09-23	2,004,433	5,391,090	37.18%
Referendum	2018-06-10	1,325,982	5,391,090	24.6%
Referendum	2018-03-04	2,904,047	5,391,090	53.87%
Referendum	2017-09-24	2,546,386	5,372,748	47.39%
Referendum	2017-05-21	2,297,296	5,356,538	42.89%
Referendum	2017-02-12	2,482,448	5,325,848	46.61%
Referendum	2016-11-27	2,399,984	5,325,848	45.06%
Referendum	2016-09-25	2,269,020	5,325,848	42.6%
Referendum	2016-06-05	2,465,868	5,325,848	46.3%
Referendum	2016-02-28	3,342,034	5,295,506	63.11%
Swiss National Council	2015-10-18	2,563,052	5,295,506	48.4%
Swiss Council of States	2015-10-18	2,563,052	5,295,506	48.4%
Referendum	2015-06-14	2,301,320	5,254,965	43.79%



The Multicultural State

- 1848 => The Swiss Constitution states that Switzerland consists of “**the people of the cantons**”
 - The **Swiss people** are **NOT** defined by a common language/ethnicity/history/religion, but by **formal citizenship**
 - A **political**, rather than a **cultural** nation => The state is **neutral** with regard to religion ...
- **Federalism and Multiculturalism:** The cantons **self rule** + influence **federal** decision making (inclusion)
 - **Not perfect**, **only** protects **minorities** representing a **political majority** in a sub-national unit

Proportional Representation

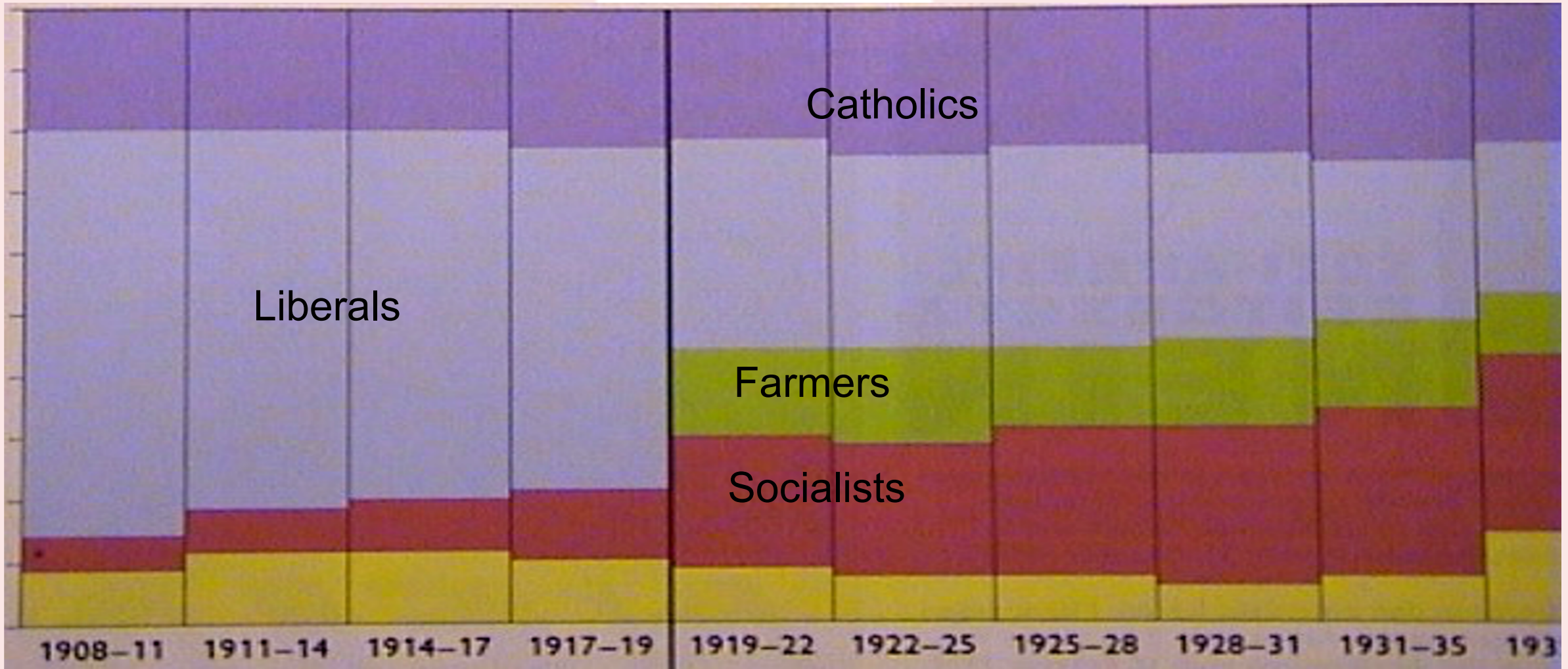


- 70-year long dominance of the radical democratic party secured by electoral system based on **majority rule**
- **19th century**: Industrialization + population growth, social problems increased, **social democrat** parties grew **stronger**
- 1918: General **strike** organized by the Socialist Party provokes intervention of the **army**
- 1919 => Introduction of **proportional representation**

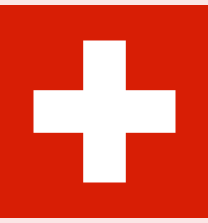


Effects of the Proportional Rule

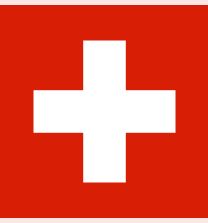
Seats in the **National Council** 1908 - 1939



Supporting Direct Democracy



- **Promoting participation:** Frequent and direct participation enables citizens to become more engaged in public life => Good citizenship
- **Popular sovereignty:** Direct democracy is an expression of popular sovereignty
- **Giving voice & control to ordinary citizens** (rather than the elites)
- **Unpacking the range of choices offered by parties:** additional channel of public control over decision-making, aimed to ensure that legislation and public policy conform more closely to citizens' preferences
- **Forcing incumbents to confront difficult issues**



Opposing Direct Democracy

- **Citizen information & competence:** voters may not always have the capacity/info to make well- informed decisions about the issue at stake
- **Voter fatigue:** If direct democracy mechanisms are used too often, voters may disengage from the political process
- **Shifting or avoiding responsibility away from political leaders**
- **Short-term vs. long-term policies:** direct democracy may encourage policies that are popular in the short term to the detriment of long-term goals
- **Cost & logistics**
- **Polarization**

Why does it work in Switzerland?

- Longstanding **democratic tradition**
- Comparatively **small size** of the population and country
- **High literacy** rate





Next Session...

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- Contemporary Developments in the DACH countries
- Comparative Analysis

Thank You For Your Attention!

Questions???