

**IREb2014**

# **CULTURE, SOCIETY AND POLITICS IN THE GERMAN-SPEAKING COUNTRIES**

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Fall 2021

**Session 12: The Swiss Political System**

# On the Agenda for Today

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- **Economy, Neutrality, Army**
- **Switzerland & the EU**
- **Swiss Federalism**
  - Federation vs. Confederation
  - Largest Political Parties
- **Direct Democracy**
  - Popular Initiatives
  - Referendums
- **The Multicultural State**
- **Proportional Representation**
- **Exploring Direct Democracy**
  - Supporting/Opposing Views
  - Why does it work in Switzerland?



# Economy

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- Exports of **goods** and **services** account for nearly **two-thirds** of the country's GDP
  - **Main exports** => Machinery & equipment, chemical-pharmaceutical products, watches, textiles
  - **Main imports** => Manufactured goods, motor vehicles, chemical products, raw materials, food, vegetable oils, fuel
- Over 99% of Swiss firms are small + **medium-sized** enterprises
- **Public debt is low, competitive tax system + service sector** make Switzerland attractive for corporations



# Economy



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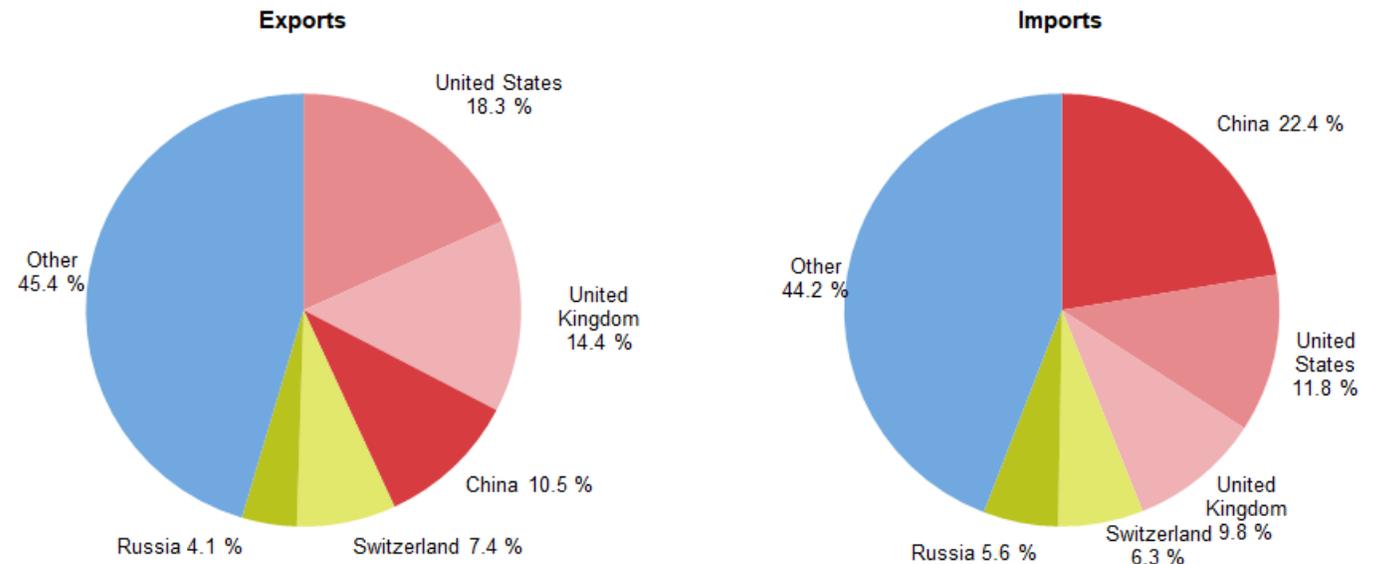
- **Export-oriented economy**

- The **EU** is Switzerland's **main trading partner**

- Switzerland is the EU's **fourth** trading partner + an important partner for trade in commercial services

- Both the EU and Switzerland are among each other's top destinations for foreign investment

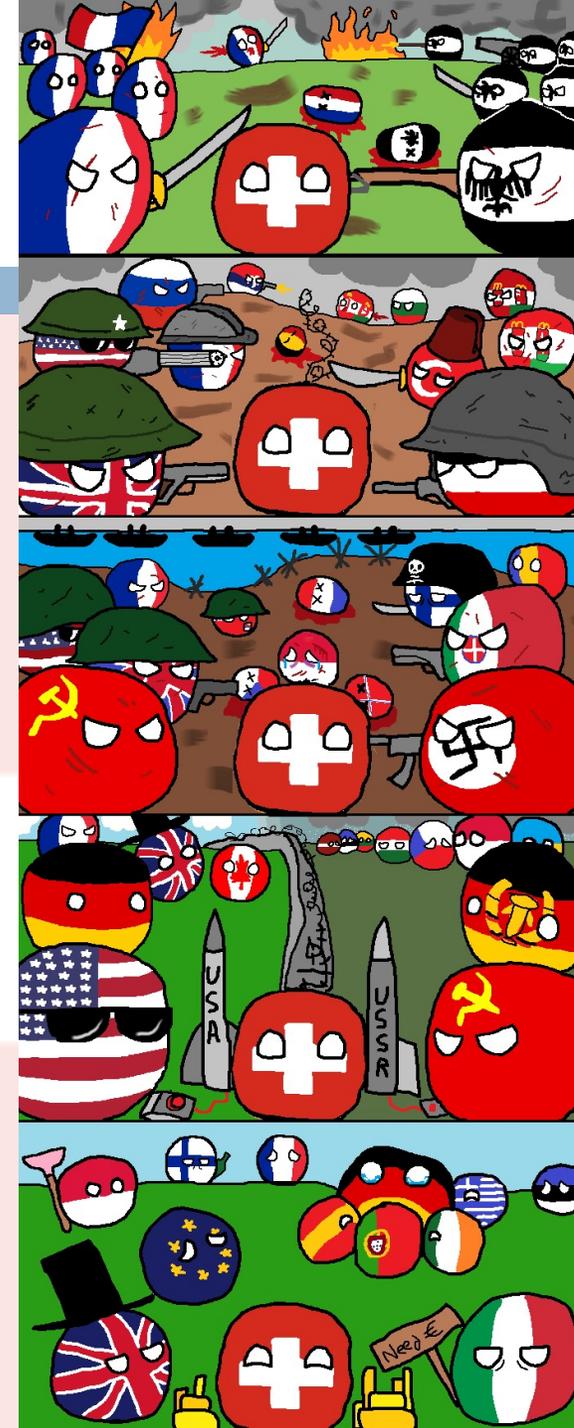
**Switzerland among the EU's main partners for trade in goods, 2020**  
(% share of extra EU exports/imports)



# Neutrality

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- **Neutrality: Cornerstone of Swiss foreign policy**
- **Deeply engrained in Switzerland's collective psyche, enjoys wide popular support, meant to secure internal cohesion**
  - Formally recognised in **1815** (Congress of Vienna), **1907** (Hague Convention)
  - **No external armed conflicts/assistance, NOT a member of any military alliances**
- **Post Cold War-**
  - **Economic sanctions** against Iraq (first Gulf War in 1991)
  - 1996: Joined **NATO's Partnership for Peace** programme
  - 1999: Sent unarmed volunteers to support **peacekeeping** efforts in Kosovo; 2002: Joined the **UN**



# Army and Guns



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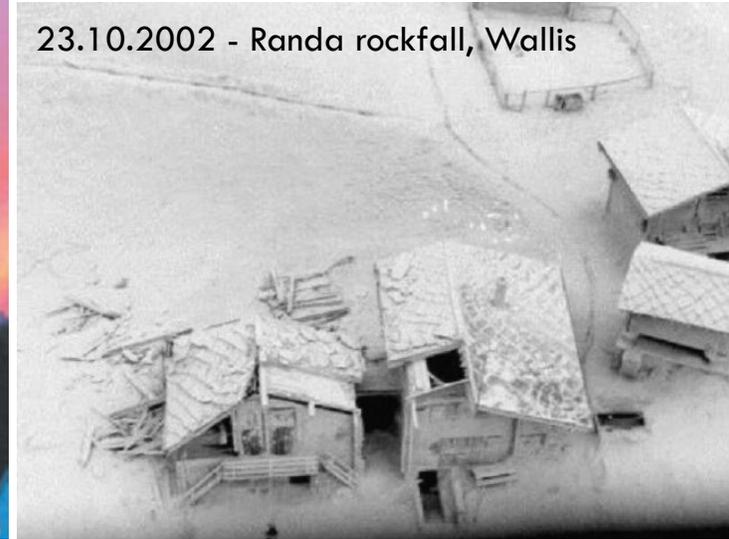
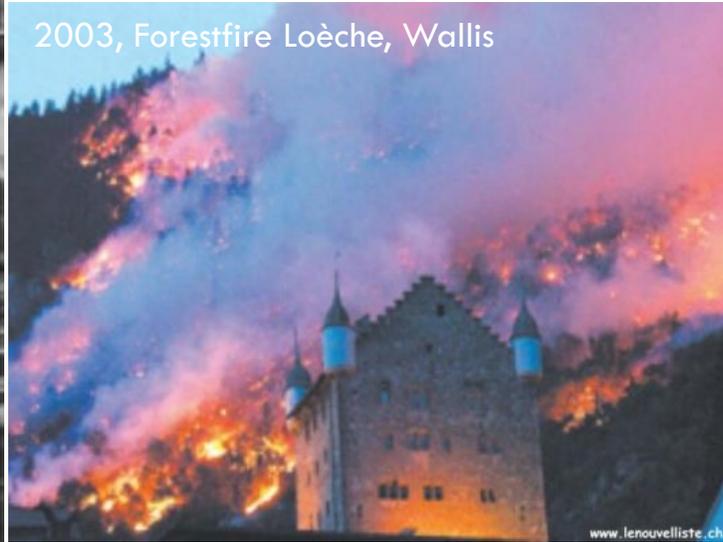
- **Armed neutrality**
  - **Conscription for men**
- **Soldiers + reserves keep their arms at home**
- **Guns are part of the Swiss heritage**
  - **2011: Rejected** an initiative to ban army-issued **guns at home**, central **gun registry** + strict **licensing system** for the use of firearms
- **Yearly shooting content for kids (Knabenschiessen), strict gun ownership laws**



# Natural Disasters/Hazards



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# Switzerland and the EU



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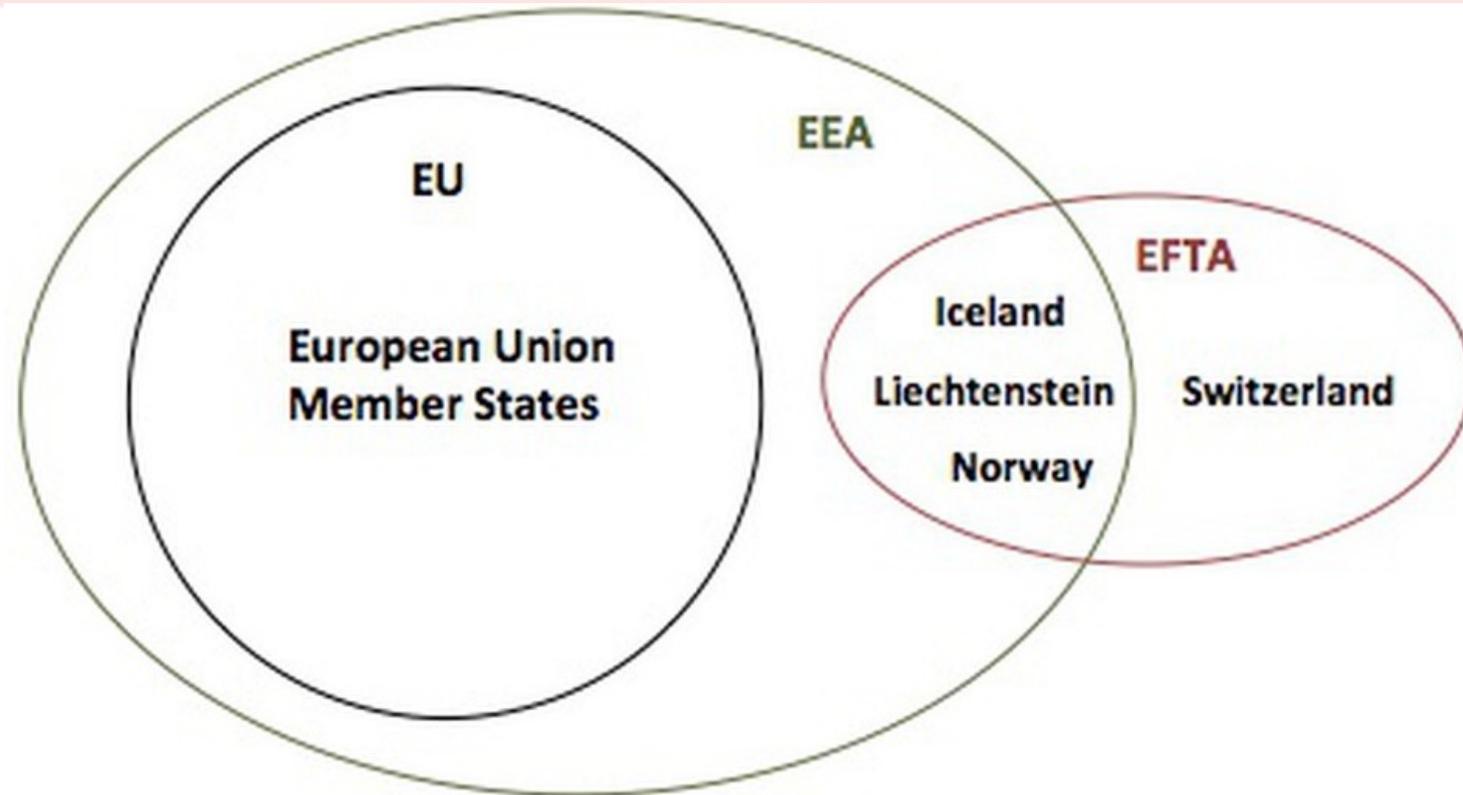
- The European Free Trade Association (EFTA), intergovernmental organisation (1960)

- Promotion of **free trade** + **economic integration** between its Member States within Europe and globally

- EFTA does **NOT**:

- Envision political integration
- Issue legislation
- Establishes a customs union

- EFTA members maintain the **full right** to enter **bilateral**, third-country **arrangements**



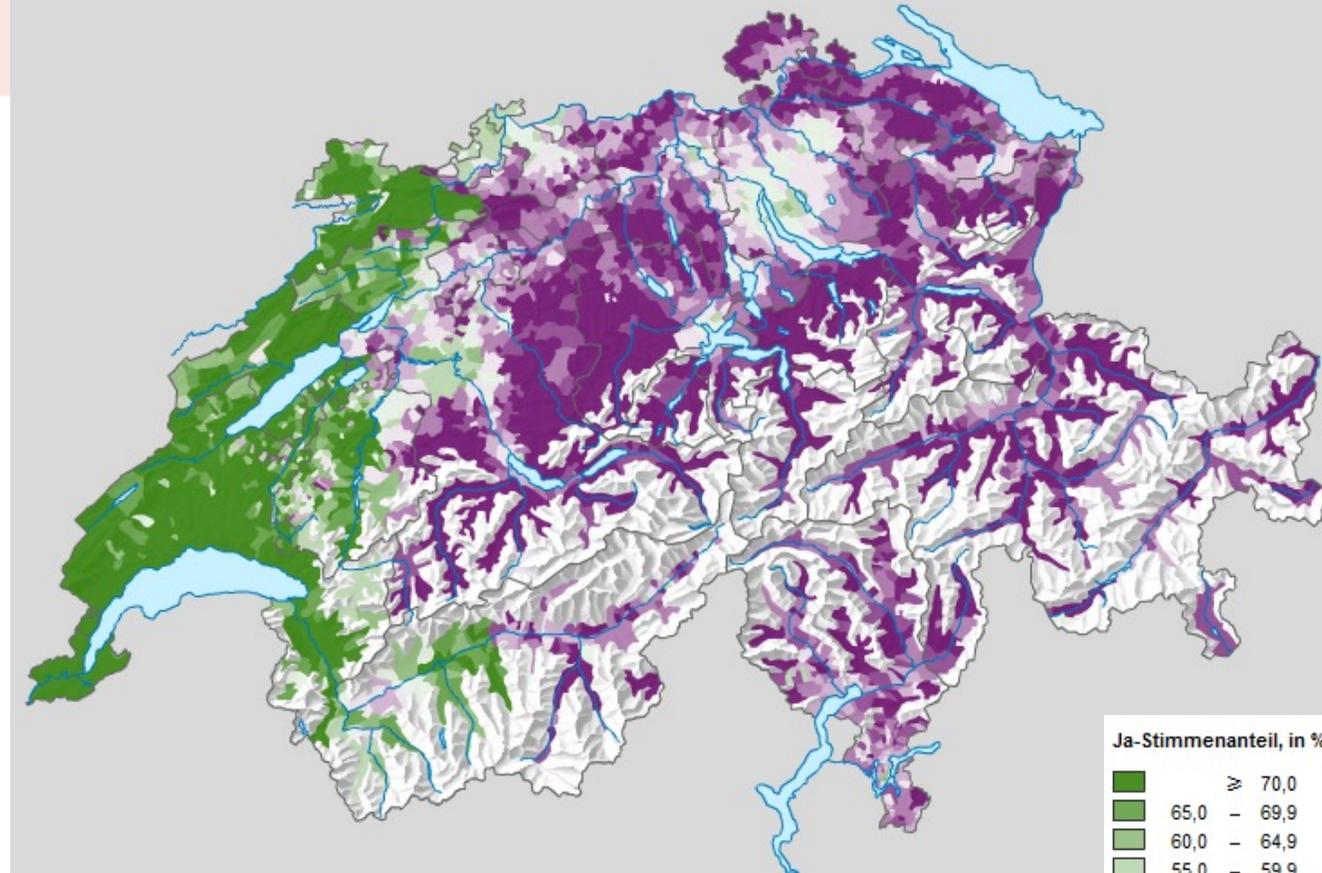
# Switzerland and the EU



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- The **European Economic Area (EEA, 1994)**:
  - Extend the Internal Market of the EU to EFTA States => Create a **homogeneous European Economic Area**
- Switzerland voted **'No'** to **joining the EEA** (referendum in 1992)
  - Uninterested in **ceding sovereignty**
  - **Protect direct democracy + local industries** from foreign competition

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



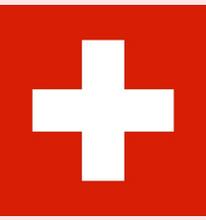
# Switzerland and the EU



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- Policy of signing **bilateral agreements** with the EU **rather than joining it**
  - Bilaterals I (1999)
  - Continuous updates to EFTA (2001-)
  - Bilaterals II (2004) ...
- **Partial Integration** into the single market
- Policy of signing **bilateral agreements** with the EU **rather than joining it**

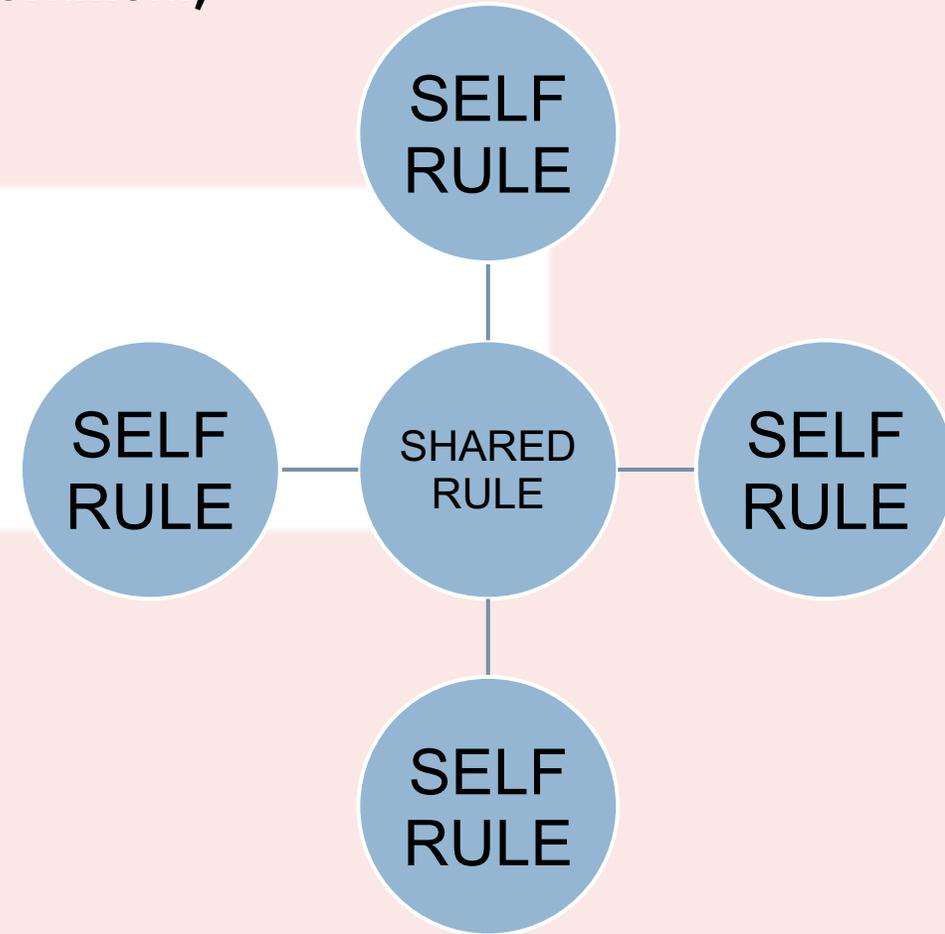


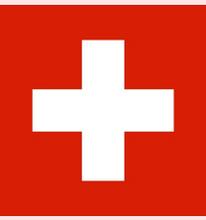


# Federalism

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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**





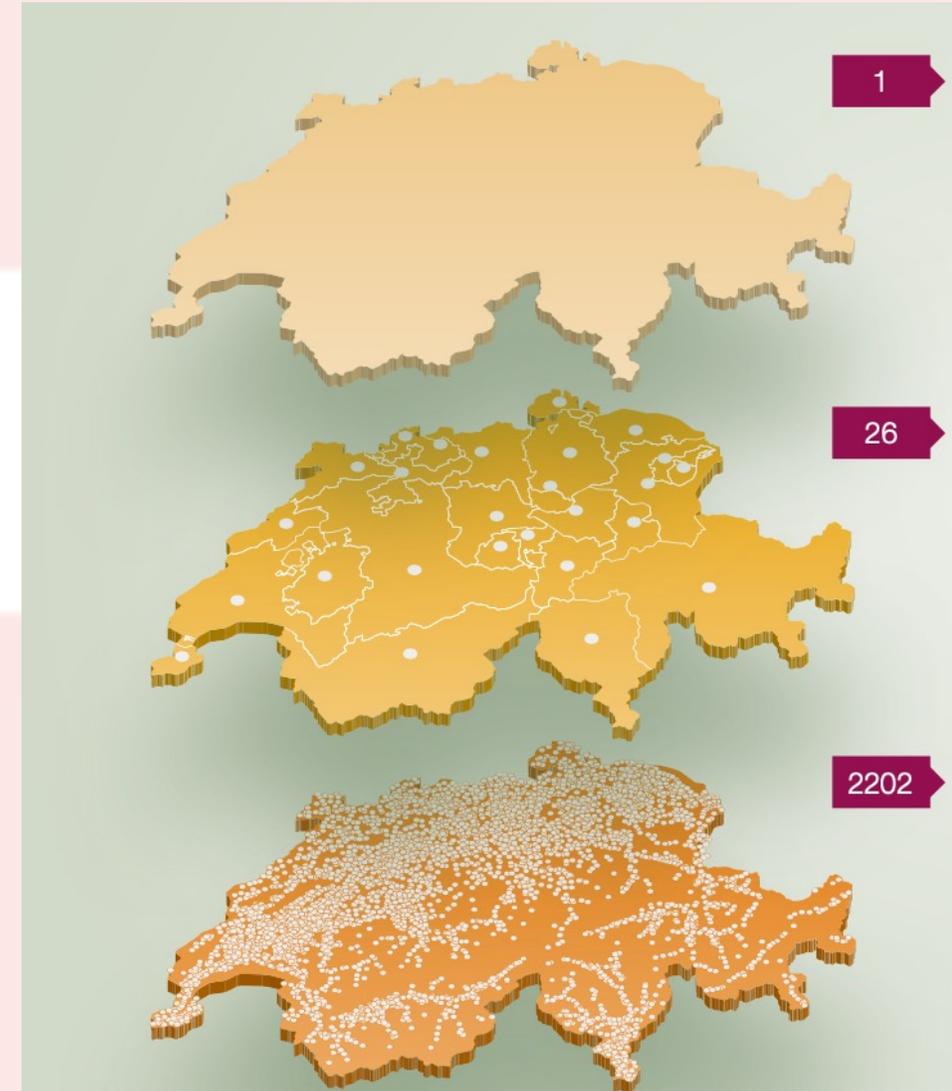
# Swiss Federalism

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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**

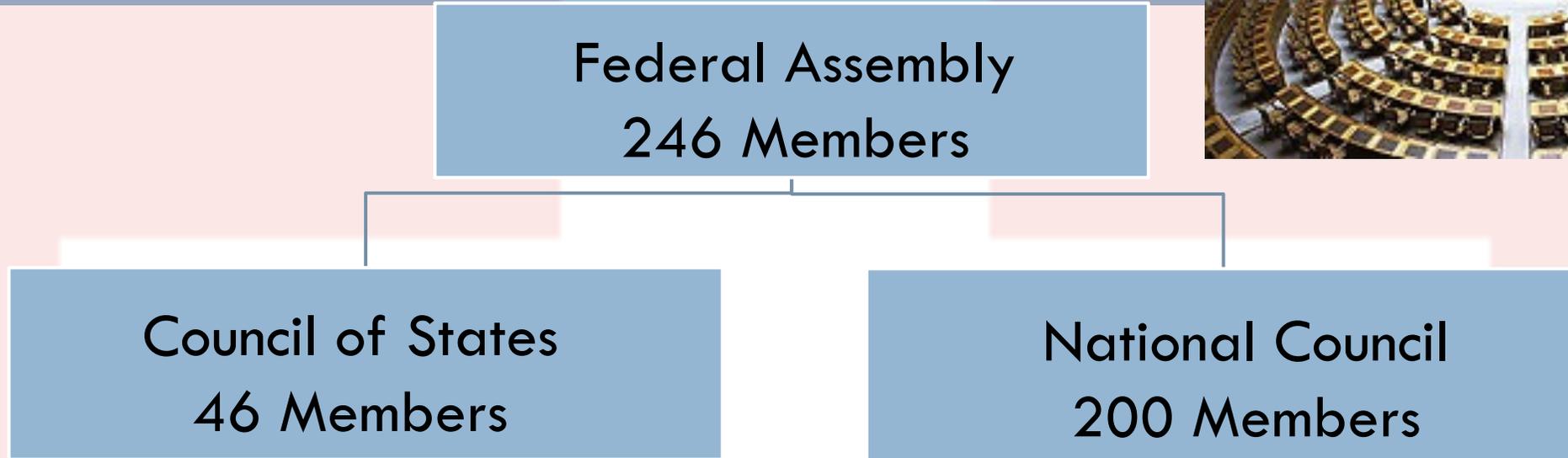


# Federation vs. Confederation

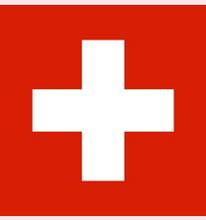
Federation	Confederation
A <b>union of states or provinces</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- States or provinces that join a federation, agree to <b>give up</b> part of their powers and to <b>answer to the central government</b>, which has the power to enforce laws and regulations</li></ul>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

# 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

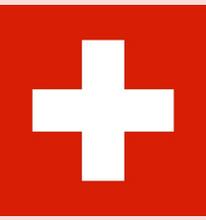
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- **Federal Council (Government):** Seven members elected by parliament
  - Composition determined by a **Magic formula** (since 1955): seats are divided between the four ruling parties
  - Federal **chancellor**



- **Federal Supreme Court**

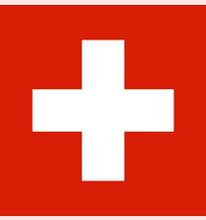
- Switzerland's **highest court**
- Ensures the uniform application of the **law** + upholds the **rights** of ordinary people
- Highest court of **appeal**



# Largest Political Parties

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



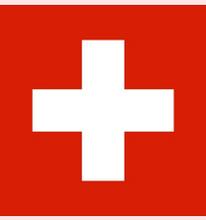
# Swiss Federalism

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## The Cantons =>

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





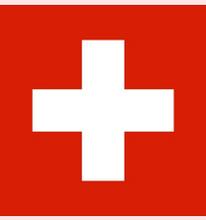
# Swiss Federalism

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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



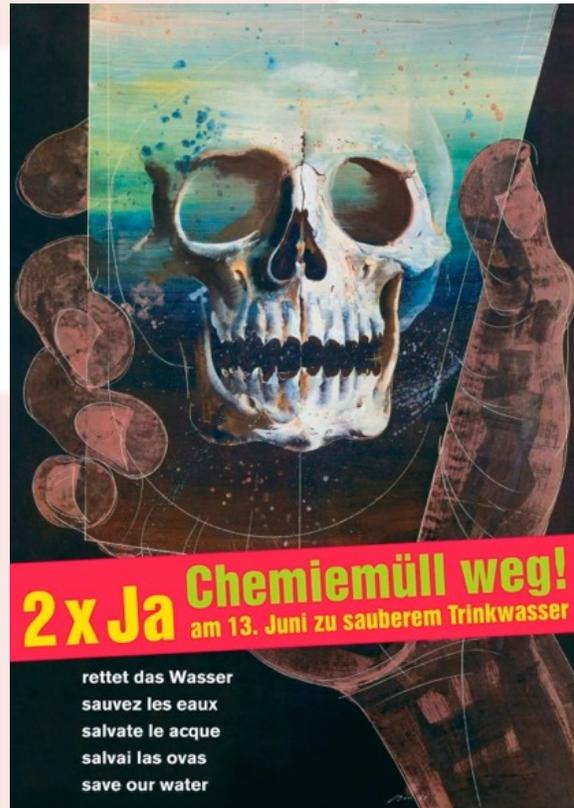


# Direct Democracy

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

pensions



pollution

taxes

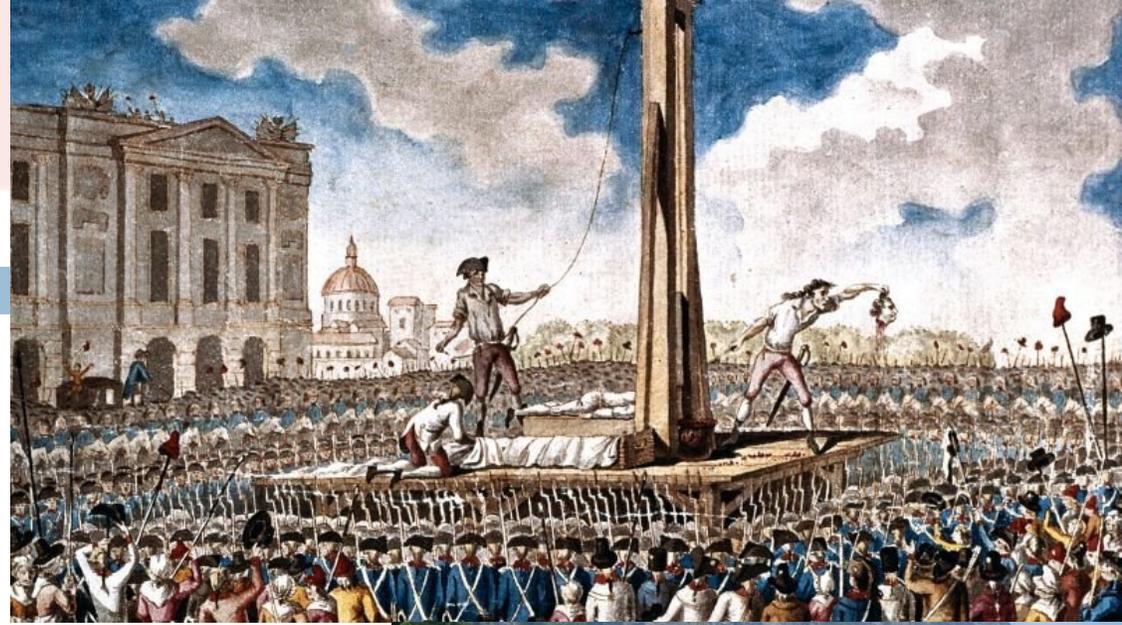


Religion

# Direct Democracy

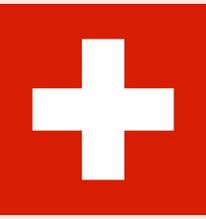
## Historical Background =>

- 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)

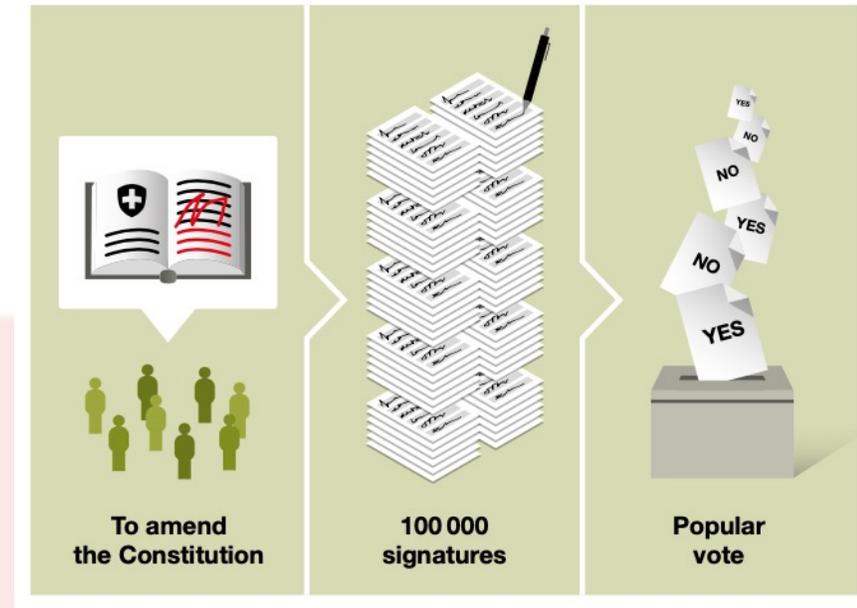


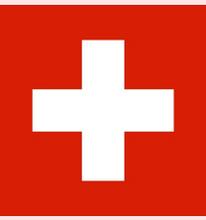
# Popular Initiative

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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 ...



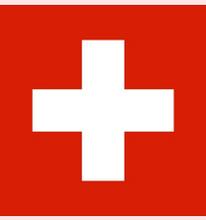


# Referendums

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- Latin for referral/referring to the public: Nationwide **popular vote**
  - **Optional referendum**
  - **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**



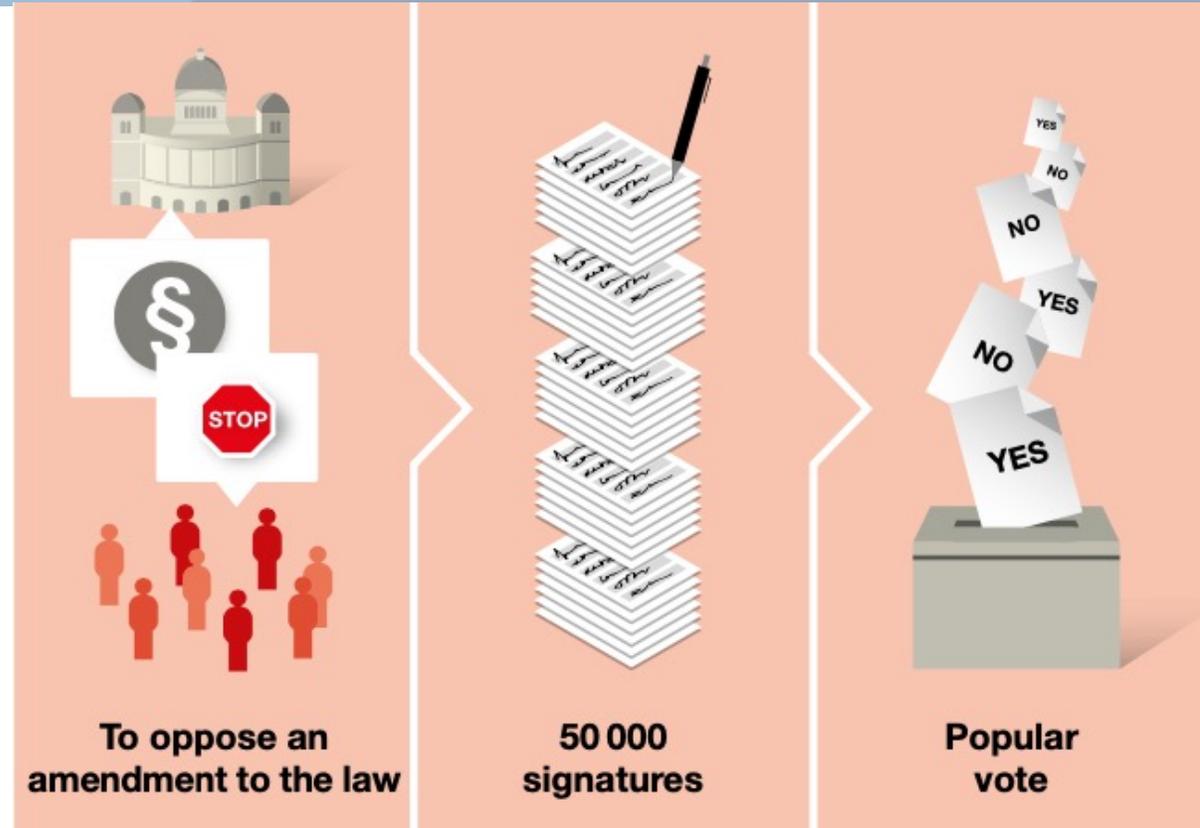


# Referendums

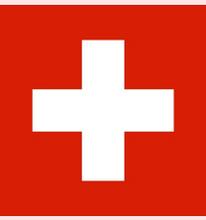
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## ■ Optional referendum

- 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**

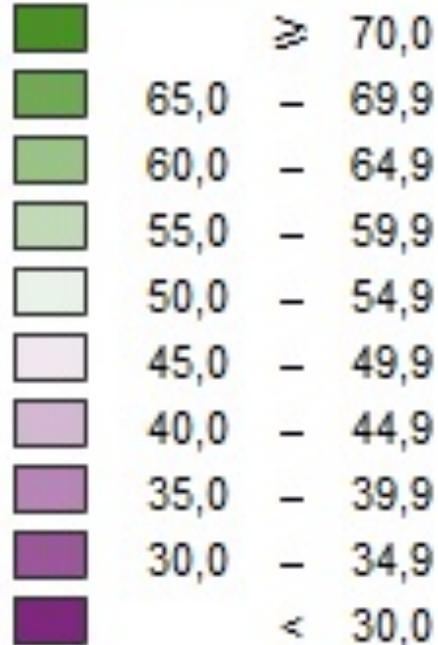


# 1992: Joining the EEA

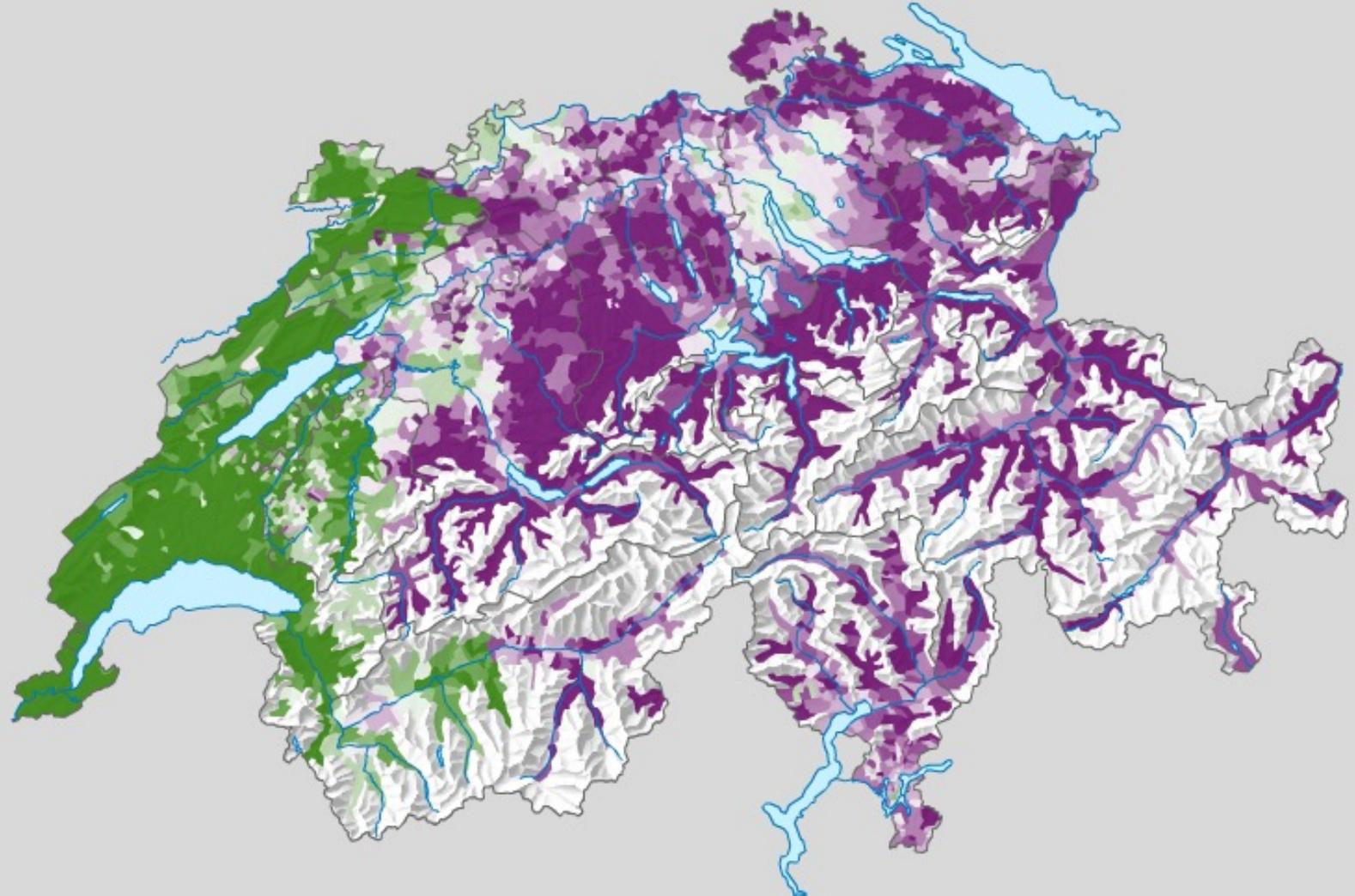
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- An example for a referendum =>

'Yes' share of the votes in %  
Ja-Stimmenanteil, in %



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

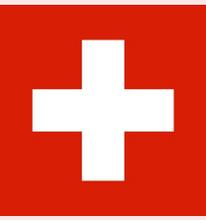


# Referendums

## 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

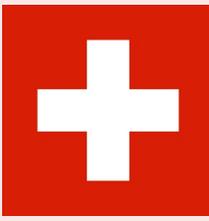
Election For	Date ▼	Votes	Registered Voters	Turn Out
Swiss National Council	2019-10-20	2,462,581	5,460,268	45.1%
Swiss Council of States	2019-10-20	2,462,581	5,460,268	45.1%
Referendum	2019-05-19	2,356,013	5,391,090	43.7%
Referendum	2019-02-10	2,028,734	5,428,531	37.37%
Referendum	2018-11-25	2,585,802	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

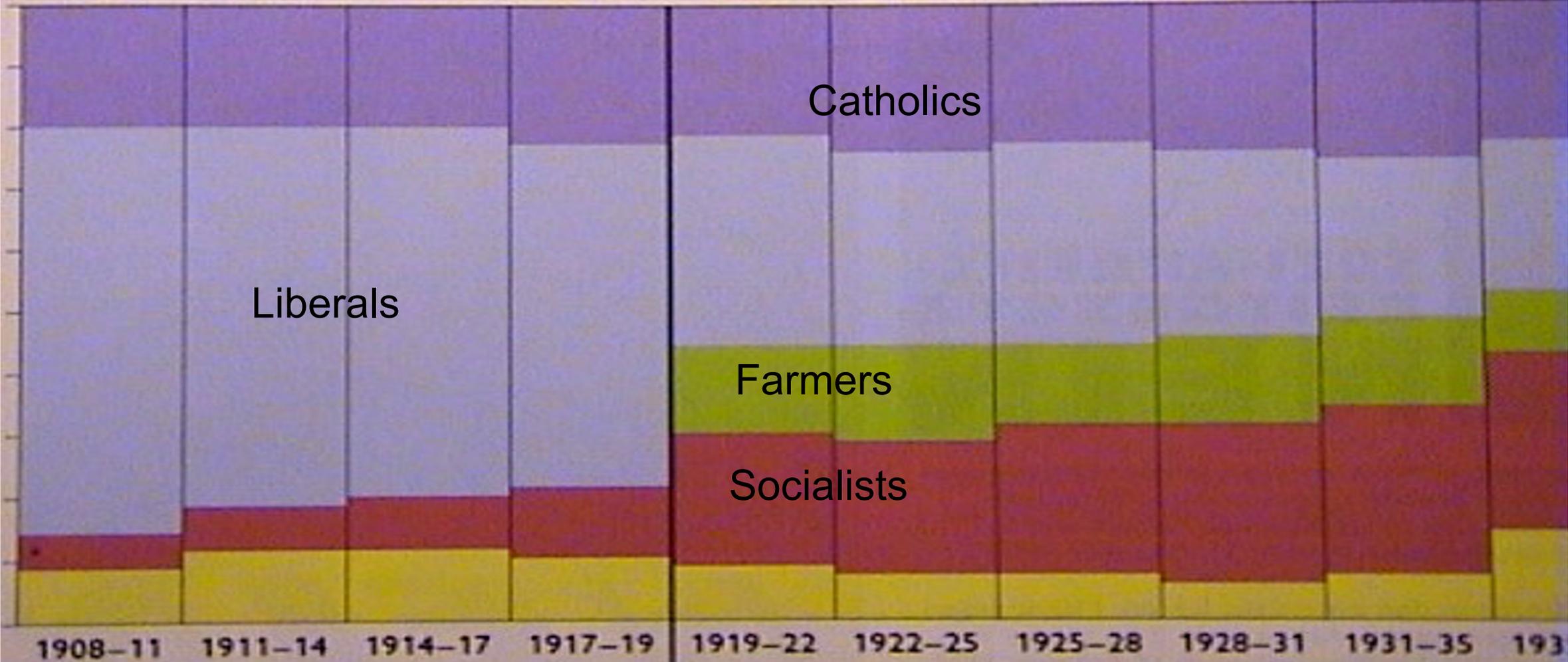


- 70-year long dominance of the radical democratic party secured by electoral system based on **majority rule**
- **19<sup>th</sup> century**: Industrialization + population growth, social problems increased, **social democrat** parties grew **stronger**
- 1918: General **strike** organized by the Socialist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

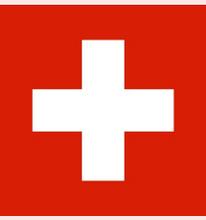


# Effects of the Proportional Rule

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**



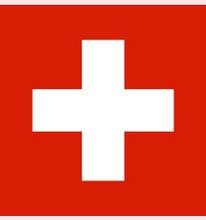
# Opposing Direct Democracy

- **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 Issues in the DACH countries

**Thank You For Your Attention!**

**Questions???**