

View of party-political relations in the seven major regions : a cantonal perspective of the party landscape

Autor(en): **Boder, Willy / Imsand, Christiane / Maurer, Christian U.**

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View of party-political relations in the seven major regions

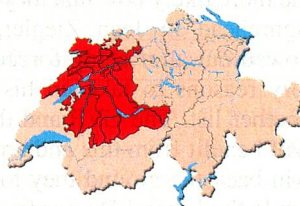
A cantonal perspective of the party landscape

Politically active Swiss are mainly interested in the canton where they exercise their voting rights. Local journalists familiar with local conditions provide an overview of the political situation in the seven main Swiss regions of Zurich, Eastern Switzerland, Central Switzerland, Ticino, Northwestern Switzerland, Espace Mittelland and the Lake Geneva region.



Fire extinguishers are on hand in case the arguments get too heated.

Heterogeneity in the Espace Mittelland



With half of the six Fribourg seats in the National Council, the CVP is the most powerful political group in the canton. How well they will withstand the con-

*Willy Boder**

tinual nation-wide erosion of the centre in favour of far-right parties is the burning question of the forthcoming elections.

The uncertainty is even greater in the canton of Fribourg now that party

strongman Joseph Deiss has changed from the National Council to the executive. The SVP, with a 6 percent share of the vote in Fribourg, has less chance of winning back the seat it lost in 1995. The fragmented Left, which can still count on 30 percent of the vote, is hoping for a second seat, while the FDP allied with the CVP hopes to kill two birds with one stone by holding onto its seat in the National Council and challenging the Social Democrats for the State Council seat. The sixth seat is likely to remain in the hands of the Christian Socialists thanks to the high-profile personality of hitherto National

Councillor and union leader Hugo Fasel.

SP's list of women

With the five Neuchâtel seats occupied by two Liberal Democrats, one Liberal and two Social Democrats, the battle will be pitched mainly within the right-wing faction. In 1995 the FDP snatched a seat away from the Liberals. But the latter are committed to winning it back at the expense of Claude Frey, who has been stamping his presence on Berne for the past 20 years.

The SP will keep their two seats for the time being, but the present male incumbents could be hard pressed by their female counterparts. Social Democrat women have compiled their own list of candidates and are aiming to elect former National Councillor Heidi Deneys to the State Council. Fernand Cuche, the Swiss Farmers Union candidate, could provide a surprise.

Pre-ordained results

In Jura the elections will run their pre-determined course. "Voters are going for the present members," says an astute observer of Jura politics. Both National Council candidates Jean-Claude Rennwald (SP) and François Lachat (CVP) need not worry unduly about their re-election. Nevertheless the CVP candidate will lose some votes due to his lack of support for Government Councillor Jean-François Roth in the latter's unsuccessful bid for Federal Councillor. The same seat distribution – one SP and one CVP member – is expected for the State Council. With no strong personality in its ranks the FDP's candidature seems doomed to failure.

*Willy Boder is Mittelland correspondent for "Le Temps".

End of the centre-right monopoly in parliament?

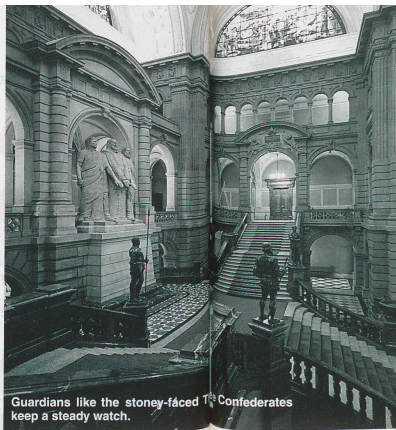
The nation-wide discussion on the ascendancy of Christoph Blocher's SVP at the expense of the CVP and FDP plays a minor role in the canton of Berne, where the toned-down SVP is allied with the Liberal Democrats. The CVP, which boasts only one of the 27 National Councilors, has no impact on the political debate.

The battle is more likely to take place between the Left (8 seats to the SP and 2 seats to the Greens) and the Right (SVP with 8 seats, FDP with 4). How voters will allocate the five seats remains to be seen. Generally these seats alternate between far-right parties and the alternative Left. Due to the SVP's failure to position itself on the right of the political spectrum, dissenters may switch their vote to the Freedom Party and the Swiss Democrats. The battle for seats on the State Council is wide open. For the first time since 1959 the Left, which is putting up consumer rights ac-

tivist Simonetta Sommaruga, has the opportunity to break the SVP-FDP stronghold.

SVP breakthrough?

The burning question in the canton of Solothurn is: can the SVP repeat the landslide (10 seats at one go) they won in the Cantonal Council elections two years ago? The vote against a coalition between the FDP (2 of 7 seats) and CVP (2 of 7 seats) reinforces the SVP's chances of gaining admittance to the National Council. The SP (2 of 7 National Council seats) is focusing its election campaign primarily on the State Council, where it hopes to benefit from the retirement of popular CVP politician Rosemarie Simmen and replace her with its union representative Ernst Leuenberger. Given these facts, the Left has every chance of breaking the right-wing tandem that has held sway for almost a decade.



Guardians like the stoney-faced Confederates keep a steady watch.

1995 with a total of seven seats. Within the centre-right parties there were a few fluctuations. The CVP won a seat from the Liberals thanks to the candidature of highly popular radio moderator Jean-Charles Simon. Since Simon is not standing for re-election, the field is once more completely open. With 5 seats the FDP remains the strongest party in the centre-right camp, ahead of the Liberals with 3 seats, while the CVP, previously a strong contender, will have to make do with one seat.

All in all no fundamental shift in the political balance is foreseen in the National Council seats this autumn. The battle between Left and Right centres on the composition of the State Council. The Liberal-Democrat coalition has the edge with its male-female candidature, supported by all centre-right parties, whose positions were also strengthened at the cantonal level following the last elections.

CVP on the wane

The political climate in the Valais is characterised by the fragmentation of the all-powerful CVP, which began in 1997 with the election of National Councillor Peter Bodenmann to the Valais government. In a canton where the Liberal Democrats formed the only serious counterweight to the CVP, this move was akin to an earthquake. Two years later voters in the Valais confirmed this new trend by electing another Social Democrat as successor to Peter Bodenmann.

This added a new dimension to the campaign for the parliamentary elections. In the National Council (7 seats) any erosion of the CVP would primarily benefit the Social Democrats, who could thereby hope to gain a second seat. The Liberal Democrats currently hold two seats and the CVP four. But as in the canton of Vaud, the real battle will be for State Council seats. Alongside Uri, the Valais is the only Swiss canton whose two State Councilors belong to the same party, in this case the CVP. It remains to be seen whether the disappearance of this monopoly will benefit a member of the FDP or the SP.

Zurich under the SVP



In Zurich all the parties, with the exception of the dominant SVP, await the National Council elections with apprehension. For all other parties from left to right of the political spectrum, holding onto their present seats will not be easy.

* Christian U. Maurer is local editor of the Swiss Press Agency in Zurich.

Of the 34 Zurich National Council seats the SP holds ten, the SVP nine, the FDP six, the Greens, LdU and CVP two each, and the EVP, FPS and SD one each. Six of the mandates are so-called

Christian U. Maurer*

unsafe seats that were only assigned in 1995 in the second allocation round. The SP has to defend three of these remaining mandates, and the SVP, CVP and LdU one each.

Although the SP continually gained ground in the 90s and is able to place its National President Ursula Koch at the top of the list for the canton of Zurich, its present above-average representation is not easy to maintain. It won two so-called unsafe seats in 1995 due to proportional vote, and inherited the third when there was a change of party.

The SVP is entering the electoral fray in buoyant mood and expects to gain a seat. In every election over the past decade its share of the vote has massively increased, and under its chief pro-

tagonist Christoph Blocher has set the tone nation-wide. During the cantonal elections of last spring it finally overtook the FDP as the strongest centre-right power.

FDP on shaky ground

The once-proud Zurich Liberal Democratic Party has continually declined in popularity since the late 80s. The party bedrock is unsettled and angry at its opponents: when assigning list placements it unsuccessfully attempted to place new candidates above present incumbents. In the wake of the three main parties, the minority parties are battling against further decline. Their share of Zurich's vote dropped from about one third to a quarter during the 90s.

No surprises are expected in the election for Zurich's State Council seats. Both incumbents, Vreni Spoerry (FDP) and Hans Hofmann (SVP), have been nominated by their parties and should have no difficulty being re-elected.

Left-wing currents in the Lake Geneva region



The failure of the maternity insurance proposal has highlighted the cultural differences between Western Switzerland and German-speaking Switzerland. These differences are also reflected in the campaigns for re-election to parliament, with the Left serving as an outlet for dissatisfied voters.

Christiane Imsand*

In the last parliamentary elections held in 1995, the Left showed strong gains in Geneva and, with six representatives as opposed to five in the centre-right camp, is in the majority in the National Council. Thanks to the candidature of Christiane Brunner, the then Co-President of the Swiss Trades Union Congress, the SP also won a seat in the Council of States.

Centre-right's defensive stand

It may be difficult for the Geneva Left to hold onto its present number of seats, and the Social Democrats may have to concede a seat to the Greens. This is all the more likely now that they have lost a figurehead in Jean Ziegler, who has bowed out after being forced for statutory reasons to take up his option on another list. The CVP and the Liberals will benefit from this and are aiming to win back the ground they lost in 1995, while the Liberal Democrats have good prospects of holding onto their two seats. Centre-right parties are on a defensive tack, since the State Council elections held last Spring demonstrated that Geneva's shift to the left was not just a flash in the pan.

A surprise outcome is less probable in the State Council. Since the female Liberal-Social-Democrat duo elected in 1995 has proved that they complement each other ideally, no great upsets are foreseen here.

In the canton of Vaud, which is dispatching no fewer than 17 delegates to the National Council, the Left and the Greens stabilised their representation in

*The author is parliamentary correspondent for the "Tribune de Genève".

Neck-and-neck race in North-western Switzerland



Thanks to a Left-Green coalition listing, the SP Basle City won a total of four seats in the National Council four years ago, leaving only two seats to the

while the CVP wants to win back its lost seat.

Tough fight ahead in Basle Country

The autumn election promises to be a close-run thing in Basle Country. The SP must replace its two long-standing representatives Angéline Fankhauser and Theo Meyer. The recently fragmented Greens will again present a united front in order to hold onto Ruth Gmseth's seat. The FDP can count on the re-election of Hans Rudolf Gysin, but whether or not they will gain a second National Council seat is open to question. The CVP is exclusively concerned with holding onto Ruedi Imhof's seat. The SVP is also defending the current seat occupied by Caspar Baader. It is also realistically counting on the

Michael Müller and Hansruedi Schär*

centre-right camp (1 FDP, 1 Liberal Democratic Party), while the CVP narrowly lost the third centre-right seat to the Social Democrats.

Following the decision of the two centre parties, the Democratic Social Party and the Union of Evangelical Voters, to share a platform in this year's electoral campaign, three major camps are in the running for the Canton of Basle City. After National Councillor Margrith von Felten's surprise switch last summer from the SP to the Green faction, the Social Democrats are hoping to defend at least three of their current seats this autumn. The SP is counting on the renewed candidature of Ex-Poch National Councillor Anita Fetz. On the centre-right the FDP and LDP are aiming to defend their seats,

*Michael Müller (BS/BL) and Hansruedi Schär (AG) are editors of the Regional Journals of Swiss Radio DR5.

centre-right alliance's failure to win a fourth seat, because despite the controversy surrounding his immunity, the re-election of Rudolf Keller, President of the Swiss Democrats (SD), is as good as assured.

Another interesting factor is the bid for the State Council seat. The seat vacated by FDP politician René Rhinow is being contested by recently re-elected Financial Director Hans Fünfschilling, also FDP, and the two candidates for the National Council: Claude Janiak, SP, and Ruth Gonseth, Greens. This presages at least a second ballot. In Basle City incumbent Gian-Reto Plattner has been nominated as SP State Councillor.

SVP strong in Aargau

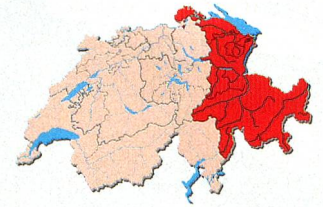
As winner of the Aargau Cantonal Council elections in 1997, the SVP should also gain in the National Council elections. However, since it needs around five percent of the vote to hold onto the fourth mandate inherited from the Freedom Party following Ulrich Giezendanner's party switch, it is not expected to gain a seat. Nor is any change anticipated in the seats held by the SP, FDP (3 each) and CVP (2).

By contrast, fluctuations may occur in the small parties by dint of their coalition listings. Currently in the throes of dissolution, the National Association of Independents (LDU) should lose its seat to the Evangelical People's Party (EVP); and following its defeat at the Cantonal Council elections, an exit from the national stage now threatens the Freedom Party, with the Swiss Democrats waiting in the wings as possible heirs. Added to this the seat held by the Greens, who have entered into a coalition listing with the SP, is looking shaky.

The SVP can safely count on re-election of its State Councillor Maximilian Reimann. However, the second State Council seat – occupied until now by Willi Loretan of the FDP – is strongly contested, although with Government and State Councillor Thomas Pfisterer the FDP's chances of holding onto it are intact. The closest contender is likely to be Cantonal Councillor and lawyer Doris Leuthard.

Since a second ballot is anticipated, there is little chance of the SP posing a serious threat in this centre-right duel. Moreover, the candidatures of the SD, EVP and Greens are primarily regarded as a bolster for the National Council elections. ■

SVP set to gain votes in the East

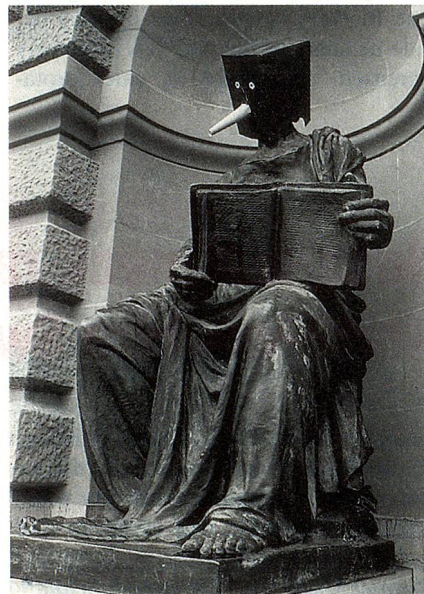


The SVP has a chance of becoming the second-strongest party in St. Gallen within the space of only one legislative term. In recent years the SVP has en-

Markus Rohner*

joyed an unprecedented rise in popularity, spearheaded by Toni Brunner, Switzerland's youngest National Councillor.

In view of this development the established parties have no alternative but to indulge in damage limitation. In their cornered position, the CVP and FDP have for the first time managed to agree on a coalition listing – a historic pre-



Despite strict access controls, jokers sometimes manage to pull off a prank.

cedent in this erstwhile cantonal battleground of cultures. Both parties have decided on this move in a bid to win back a seat that was lost four years ago. The CVP wants a fifth National Council mandate, the FDP a third. But the CVP lacks a strong figurehead now that long-serving National Councillor and farmer Josef Kühne is standing down. Almost all their hopes are now pinned on Eugen David. Because the party was afraid of

losing even more votes without him, he was not allowed to stand as State Council candidate. Instead the CVP is trying its luck with an unknown cantonal councillor from the Linth region.

Jostling for position in Grisons

The fifth National Council seat has been a bone of contention in the canton of Grisons for years. All Federal Council parties are sure of one seat. The question is: who will win the second seat? Four years ago the Social Democrats were the happy victors; now the centre-right parties have set their sights on the seat. By agreeing on a major joint listing, they hope to keep the second National Council seat away from the SP. The SVP stands to profit most from this situation, and has placed its former General Secretary Myrtha Welti-Hunger, a politician living in Zurich, on its list – a far from conventional move in Switzerland.

In the canton of Thurgau, too, a rotating National Council seat is the cause of much speculation every four years. At times the seat is occupied by the Left, at other times by the Right. In view of its declining popularity in Eastern Switzerland as well, the probability of the Freedom Party holding onto its Thurgau National Council seat is minimal. The SP allied with the Greens has the best chance of capturing this seat. The SVP will hold two mandates, while the CVP and FDP should successfully defend their only seat, although the latter will need to manage without its driving force Ernst Mühlemann.

The outcome of the State Council elections is more uncertain. With both State Council seats up for election following the retirement of Hans Uhlmann (SVP) and Thomas Onken (SP), seven candidates have so far declared their interest.

Quiet elections in the small cantons

Were it not for the retirement of Innerrhoden National Councillor Rolf Engler (CVP), elections in the three small cantons in the east of Switzerland – Appenzell Innerrhoden, Appenzell Auserrhoden and Glarus – would run a pre-

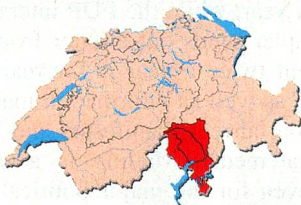
* Markus Rohner lives in Altstätten (SG) and for ten years has been Eastern Switzerland correspondent for various Swiss newspapers.

determined course. Whether or not the CVP puts up a National Councillor again, and whether or not an independent or a representative of the opposition is successful in Innerrhoden, is still uncertain in Switzerland's smallest canton. In March the CVP brought its key driving force to Berne in the person of Federal Councillor Ruth Metzler.

National Councillor Werner Marti (SP) is again standing for election in Glarus. In Ausserrhoden the SP is aiming to win back the seat it lost four years ago to the SVP. Whether they succeed is another question. By contrast the FDP seat in the National and State Council is in no way endangered.

The Schaffhausen State Council elections promise to be a close-run thing. The retirement of both State Councillors Kurt Schüle (FDP) and Bernhard Seiler (SVP) presages a major battle between the FDP, SVP and SP. The SP is putting forward its top female politician, faction leader and National Councillor Ursula Hafner, but her party will have to do without her for the National Council elections. ■

Turning point for Ticino?



A minor political earthquake is on the cards in Italian-speaking Switzerland. At present it appears certain that four of the ten Ticino parliamentarians in Berne (4 FDP, 3 CVP, 2 SP, 1 Ticino League) will not be standing for re-election: CVP State Councillor Renzo Respini, his party colleagues National Councillors Remigio Ratti and Massimo Pini, and Social Democrat Werner Carobbio have announced their retirement.

The parliamentary elections will not only determine the popularity of individual personalities, but also provide the parties with a further vehicle for confirming their position in the wake of the Spring cantonal elections. The Ticino League has reached the rank of third-strongest party in the Ticino after the FDP and CVP but ahead of the SP,

which consequently harbours the fear that it will lose its National Council mandate. The battle for the vacant State Council seat promises to be a cliff-hanger, as the Social Democrats eagerly

set their sights on the Upper House. They will probably send their former Government Councillor Pietro Martignelli into the fray.

DB ■

Restructured political landscape in Central Switzerland



Since the early 90's the SVP has continually made inroads in the party-political landscape of Central Switzerland. Strongly influenced from Zurich, the cantonal chapters have put down roots at an unprecedented rate. SVP strategists are

*Hanns Fuchs**

aiming to harvest the fruits of their targeted, grass-roots campaign to boost party popularity.

The SVP boasts a short but incredibly successful history in Lucerne. In 1995 the party succeeded in winning the new tenth Lucerne mandate in one fell swoop, and literally swept the board at the cantonal elections in the spring of 1999. With more than an 18 percent share of the vote it established itself as the third-strongest political force behind the CVP and Liberals (as the FDP is called in the canton of Lucerne). The centre-right SVP now has a larger following than the Social Democrats and Greens put together. A second National Council mandate is therefore as good as in the bag for the SVP in Lucerne canton, and there is even the chance of a third seat. The Liberals and Greens are rightly anxious about holding onto their seats. In 1995 the Liberals retained their third seat only as a residual mandate with a narrow majority. And the Greens have a coalition listing with the SP to thank for their seat.

Meteoric rise in Zug also

In the canton of Zug the SVP experienced a meteoric rise on a scale with Lucerne, enlarging its representation in the cantonal parliament from three to eight following the cantonal elections in Au-

tumn 1998. Thanks to a peculiarity of Zug electoral law (proportional election to the government), it even gained access to the executive. Although the CVP was the loser across the board, its National Council mandate does not appear to be at risk. The Social Democrats, too, should be able to hold onto their seat thanks to the Red-Green coalition listing. On the other hand, the Liberal Democrats are in a precarious situation: with the retirement of Georg Stucky, high-profile businessman and National Councillor, the SVP scents a major opportunity.

Difficult starting point for Liberals

The SVP can look back on a longer tradition in the canton of Schwyz, where it was created from a group that for decades had practised centre-right niche politics. In 1995 the SVP succeeded in electing a member to the National Council in the person of popular Muotatal representative Peter Föhn; at the same time the Social Democrats lost their Schwyz mandate. Since then the SVP has made strong gains in cantonal elections and other areas, more than doubling its representation in the cantonal parliament from five to twelve primarily at the expense of the Schwyz Liberals. Now, with the aim of winning back their National Council seat, the Social Democrats are putting up government councillor Richard Wyrsh as a candidate. But the focus is less likely to be a duel between him and SVP candidate Föhn than a battle for the Liberals' seat. Due to the fact that uncontested leader Toni Dettling, profiled as a staunch neo-liberal, wants to switch from the National to the State Council, the Liberals are faced with the difficult task of defending their old mandate with a new candidate. ■

*Hanns Fuchs is parliamentary editor for Radio DRS and lives in Lucerne.