

# Politicization of Immigration in Switzerland

Didier Ruedin ([didier.ruedin@unine.ch](mailto:didier.ruedin@unine.ch)), 4 September 2012

Draft version, presented at the *Annual IMISCOE Conference*, 29 August 2012, Amsterdam.

## *Introduction*

Cheese and mountains apart, Switzerland is often noted for its high proportion of foreigners and tough legislation on naturalization. It is the home of the Swiss People's Party (SVP), a successful populist right-wing party campaigning against many forms of immigration. In this chapter, I examine the politicization of immigration and integration in Switzerland in a systematic manner. A brief historical overview sets the context, and four kinds of explanations for differences in politicization across time (and compared to other countries) are covered in detail. Even though Switzerland is a single polity, I will discuss differences between the French-speaking and the German-speaking when these are relevant.

I find that the salience of the debate on immigration and integration slowly increased over time. As a reaction to an unprecedented number of asylum applications in the 1990s, salience peaked. Slower demographic changes do not seem to affect the salience of the debate in the news. Some referendums and popular initiatives are associated with higher salience, but interestingly not all referendums that concern immigration. The polarization of the debate is closely associated with unemployment figures – higher unemployment means greater polarization – with a consistent time lag.

## *Historical Description*

In recent years, the debate on immigration and integration in Switzerland can probably not be separated from the electoral success of the Swiss People's Party (SVP). Before and during the period covered, the SVP gained significant vote shares, and their position on immigration has radicalized. The concept of *Überfremdung*<sup>1</sup> is recurring in the Swiss debate since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Skenderovic and D'Amato 2008). Other features are the large foreign citizen population, a past of guest worker programmes, and recently the increased politicization of the Muslim population. At the same time as we observe strong conservatism and xenophobia in Switzerland, Switzerland has also a humanitarian tradition – the International Red Cross or the UN headquarters in Geneva are just two examples – and a globally competitive economy. The debate on immigration and integration is situated within this tension.

Switzerland is no stranger to immigration. After World War II, the Swiss economy experienced rapid growth stimulated by the recovery in the neighbouring countries. In order to fill labour shortages, guest-worker programmes were established, initially with Italy in 1948, later also with Spain in 1961. Guest workers were also recruited in other countries. These programmes were set up in a way to prevent permanent settlement, including restrictive conditions on family reunion. As the economy boomed in the 1960s, guest-worker programmes were controlled less tightly. Pressure also increased on the front of family reunion – not only from the workers, but particularly from the Italian state. With a restrictive family-reunion policy in Switzerland, it was increasingly difficult to recruit workers,

---

<sup>1</sup> *Überfremdung* stands for over-foreignization; it combines notions of too many foreigners (numerical aspects), and the foreigners being too different (cultural aspects).

since countries such as Germany or Austria offered more attractive terms. At the same time the *Organization for European Economic Cooperation* (OEEC, later OECD) introduced standards for family reunification, and the Swiss government was pressured by organizations such as the *International Labour Organization* (ILO) to adopt new policies (A. Achermann et al. 2009; Efionayi, Niederberger, and Wanner 2005). As a result, the existing model was replaced by a system focusing on integration, where family reunification was a central aspect.

Today, official policy in Switzerland makes a clear distinction between immigration from countries of the *European Union* and EEA, and immigration from other countries. Whilst not a member of the European Union, Switzerland has forged close ties with the European Union since 1991, when the guest-worker status was abolished for non-EU citizens (Farrér 2009). Particularly since the bilateral treaty on the free movement of persons in 2002 is immigration from European countries preferred to immigration from other countries. The treaty between Switzerland and the countries of the European Union means that in terms of the movement and settlement of citizens, Switzerland is de facto treated as a member of the Union.

While the movement of individuals from and into the European Union was facilitated, Swiss policy makes it difficult for non-Europeans to enter the country (so-called third-country nationals). Preference is given to Swiss and European workers from the EU and EFTA, and work permits are regulated by strict quotas. In practice, this means that citizens from non-European countries can only enter if they are highly skilled workers, executives, or specialists. A different route to migration is that of asylum, which was used by a significant number of individuals and families from the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s (Efionayi, Niederberger, and Wanner 2005).

### ***Changes in Demographic Composition***

Over the years, the immigrant population in Switzerland has increased, both in absolute and relative terms. The composition of the immigrant population in Switzerland changed considerably over the years, and continues to do so. Because of the guest-worker programmes after World War II, Italians were the largest group of foreign citizens for many years. In 1970, over half of all foreign citizens in Switzerland were Italians (54%). Their numbers have declined in real terms since, but the Italians remained the largest group of immigrants in 1990 (31%).

During the 1990s, the population originating from the former Yugoslavia increased significantly, and by 2000 they were the largest group of immigrants in Switzerland (24%), overtaking Italian citizens (22%). Italian citizens were not the only group with a decreasing population in Switzerland: a similar pattern can be observed for Spanish citizens. Part of these patterns can be attributed to naturalization. Turkish citizens are another group that increased significantly, from 1% in 1970 to 7% in 1990. The largest group from Asia are Sri Lankans seeking asylum in the 1990s (Efionayi, Niederberger, and Wanner 2005).

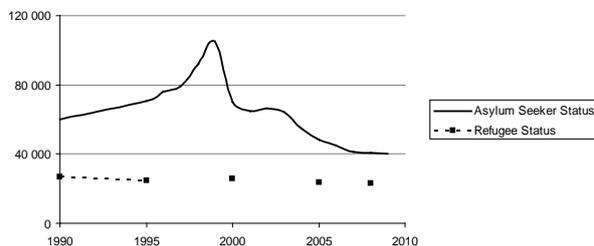
Partly due to an increasing orientation to countries of the European Union and EEA, the proportion of citizens from different countries in Switzerland kept changing. In 2008, of all foreign citizens in Switzerland, 87% were from Europe, 62% from countries of the enlarged EU-27. There are not many citizens from the new European countries: 60% of all foreign citizens in Switzerland come from the EU-15 countries. The focus on European immigration meant that the proportion of non-European citizens decreased, and Italian citizens once again constitute the largest group of foreign citizens (18%). Of all the foreign citizens in Switzerland in 2008, 14% were German, 12% Portuguese, 11% from Serbia and Montenegro, 5% from France, and 4% from Turkey. With the removal of quotas for

EU citizens in 2008, there was a recent surge in immigrants under the freedom of movement provision: the number of German and French immigrants increased drastically in the last two years under study.

The majority of foreign citizens, both men and women, are of working age. Compared to the general population, foreign citizens are more likely to be either children or adults of working age, but less likely to be aged 50 or over (Efionayi, Niederberger, and Wanner 2005). As in most countries, immigrants in Switzerland are concentrated in urban centres, particularly the largest cities of the country that are the drivers of the economy.

Asylum applications were stable in Switzerland in the 1970s, but particularly the wars in former Yugoslavia led to many asylum seekers in the 1990s (figure 1). Many of these asylum seekers had personal or family ties to Switzerland because of labour migration in the 1960s and 1970s. Of the applicants, many received temporary protection, and they were financially supported to return after the wars in 1995 and 1999 respectively. At the same time, the nature of refugees in Switzerland also changed: after receiving anti-communist dissidents in the past, in the 1980s and 1990s refugees increasingly came from further away, including from Sri Lanka, the Middle East, and Africa. In contrast with most anti-communist dissidents, many of the more recent refugees were neither professionals nor university-educated.

**Figure 1: Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Switzerland, 1990 to 2010**



*Notes: Numbers for refugee status were collected every 5 years, numbers for asylum seeker status cover every year between 1995 and 2009, plus 1990. Sources: Swiss Federal Statistical Office, Federal Office for Migration.*

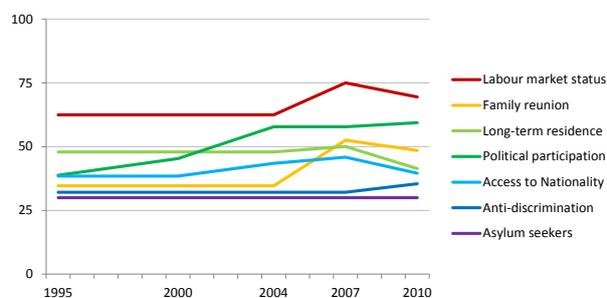
### **Legal Changes**

The increased number of immigrants in Switzerland meant that since the 1970s, immigration has become an increasingly salient issue (Afonso 2005; Bornschier 2010). Within these concerns over immigration, there was a clear shift of focus. In the 1980s, issues of asylum were predominant; since the late 1990s issues of integration and cultural differences have become predominant (Skenderovic and D’Amato 2008). This change of focus mostly took place before the period covered by this paper. By contrast, changes in the party landscape fall within the scope of the report, and are outlined below. To some extent, however, they reflect changes in Swiss immigration policy – from a guest-worker model that tried to prevent permanent settlement to one focusing on the integration of the immigrants already in the country.

Despite these changes, Swiss immigration law remained unchanged for a long time. Over the years, there have been many attempts to change immigration laws, but most attempts failed. Despite agreement that legislation was inadequate, key actors could not agree (Skenderovic and D’Amato 2008). Initially this lack of change probably meant that laws were not liberalized, later this might have prevented a toughening of immigration laws. It appears, however, that recently a cross-party consensus might be emerging towards stricter approaches to immigration.

The first changes were undertaken in the late 1980s when asylum matters were highly politicized. It was not until 2007, however, that immigration laws were revised substantially, with the new *Ausländergesetz* (AuG) replacing existing legislation dating back to 1931 (see also figure 4 below). This relative stability in immigration policy is summarized in figure 2 using the MIPEX criteria (Huddleston and Niessen 2011; Niessen et al. 2007), with an additional component on asylum seekers. It should be noted that for most policy areas, there is significant variation between cantons (Manatschal 2010), and this variation is not reflected in the figure. This variation stems from the way national policies are implemented, as well as from the fact that in many cases the cantons or even the municipalities are responsible for policymaking and decision-making.

**Figure 2: Immigration Policy in Switzerland, 1995 to 2010**



*Notes: Changes in immigration policy in Switzerland, using MIPEX indicators plus an indicator on asylum seekers. The policy situation was captured for 1995, 2000, 2004, 2007, and 2010. Sources: MIPEX, Ruedin 2012.*

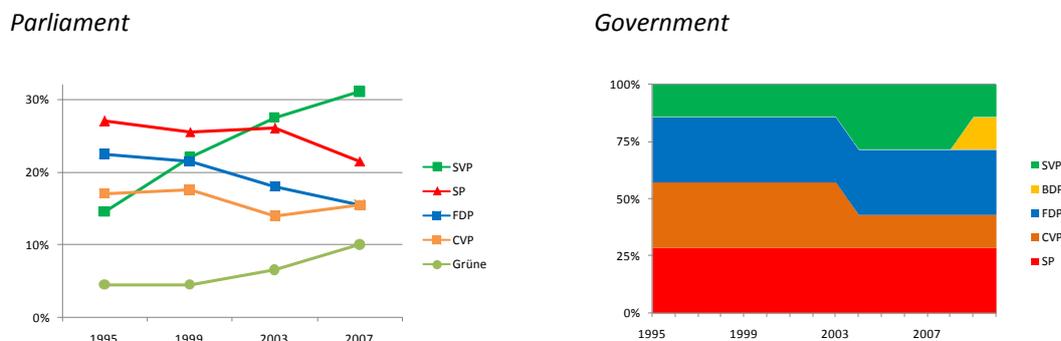
By international standards, many aspects of immigration law in Switzerland can be considered strict. As visible in figure 2, the introduction of a new law on foreigners (AuG) is the most significant development for the period covered. Although the new legislation brought a great number of changes, in many cases they were clarifications or standardizing common practice at the national level. In other cases, the changes were small and did not warrant a change in the MIPEX ratings. This is also the case for the asylum seeker indicator, where the general situation has not changed despite a number of changes in law.

If immigration policy in Switzerland is relatively strict, there are important exceptions. Labour market access of immigrants, to start with, is relatively liberal. What is more, aspects related to the fair application of the rule of law often reflect MIPEX best practice: rights to fair treatment and appeal exist for everyone. The low ratings for most of the indicators demonstrate that there is potential to improve the legal and policy situation of immigrants in Switzerland, but a tougher discourse might have developed recently, which makes such changes less likely. Indeed, some of the changes between 2007 and 2010 point to stricter policies, notably in the areas of long-term residence and access to nationality.

## Elections and Government

There are general elections in Switzerland every four years, during the period covered in 1995, 1999, 2003, and 2007. The political landscape of Switzerland is characterized by its grand coalition that includes all major parties in government. In fact, the government composition has not changed between 1959 and 2003, leading many scholars and commentators to regard it as fixed. The electoral success of the SVP challenged the fixed distribution of ministerial seats, yet the changes in government composition were not dramatic (figure 3).

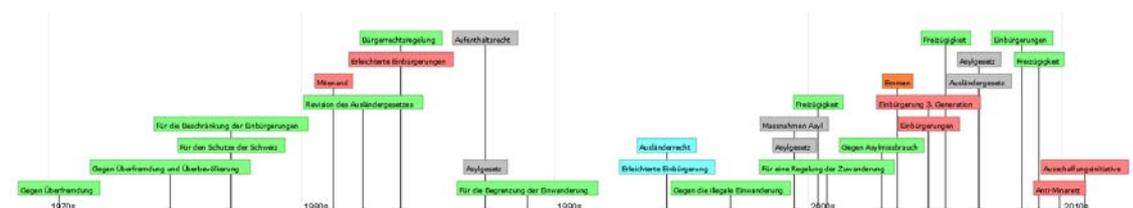
**Figure 3: Changing Composition of Swiss Parliament and Government, 1995 to 2010**



Notes: Seats in the National Council (parliament, lower chamber) and Bundesrat (government) respectively. Beyond the period covered, elections were held in October 2011. The SVP did not manage to increase their seat share, whilst the GLP (Green Liberal Party) and BDP (Conservative Democratic Party) established themselves as new, albeit still small, forces on the Swiss political landscape. The SP remained stable, whilst the FDP, CVP, and Greens experienced declines in seat shares. Source: Ruedin 2011.

The legislative and other political institutions in Switzerland are also widely considered as characterized by stability. The increased vote share of the SVP has gradually changed the composition of the national and most cantonal legislatures.

**Figure 4: Referendums and Popular Initiatives about Immigration and Integration, 1970 to 2011**



Notes: Legislative decisions (grey), court decisions (orange), executive decisions (blue), and referendums and popular initiatives related to immigration and integration. Referendums and popular initiatives are given in green if the outcome was pro-immigration – including a defeat of anti-immigrants policy –, red if the outcome was anti-immigrant – including a defeat of pro-immigrant policy –, and grey if they concern multiple law changes. Source: extended from Skenderovic and D'Amato 2008.

Direct democratic instruments are central to Swiss politics, and both referendums and popular initiatives have been used to politicize immigration. Figure 4 shows the referendums and initiatives relevant to immigration policies. The 1970 *Schwarzenbach* initiative to limit the foreign population in Switzerland was only narrowly defeated, leading to many more appeals in the same direction. Indeed,

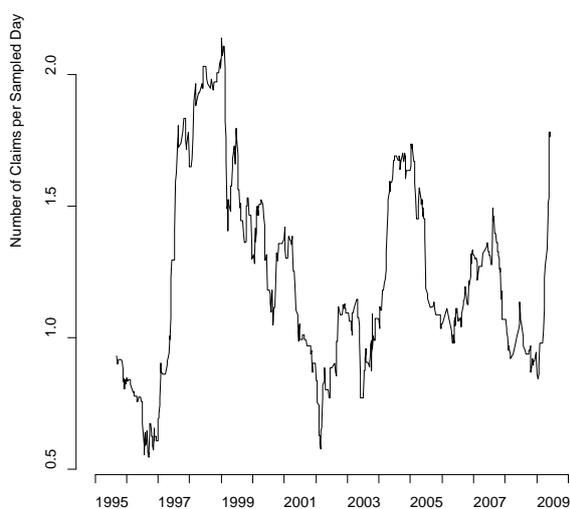
the Schwarzenbach initiative is widely credited to have given rise to the radical right in Switzerland (Gerber 2003; Skenderovic and D'Amato 2008). Although none of these advances from the populist right was successful at the poll, they led to pro-immigration initiatives in the early 1980s – which were also defeated. This illustrates the deadlock in Swiss politics to change immigration legislation significantly for many years (Skenderovic and D'Amato 2008). Many changes in law and executive decisions were challenged by referendums or the threat thereof.

The Swiss have largely supported the policy direction of the government at the polls: both radicalization – such as limiting the number of foreigners – and liberalization – such as facilitated naturalization – were resisted. The bilateral agreements with the countries of the European Union have been defended at the polls several times, including the provision of the free movement of persons. It was only toward the very end of the period considered that the SVP and anti-immigration organizations managed to invoke more radical law at the national level: the 2009 ban on the construction of minarets, and the 2010 initiative for automatic expulsion of criminal foreigners. This is not to say that the many initiatives and referendums had no effect on immigration policy, because the nature of the political system and the grand coalition means that direct democratic instruments are used as a tool for negotiating law changes as much as imposing these directly. The threat of a referendum or the announcement of a popular initiative often lead to the government devising counter projects or bills that incorporate parts of the demands.

### Saliency

As in the other chapters, politicization describes both saliency and polarization. An issue is salient when it is on the political agenda: people talk about it and newspaper write about it. The more salient an issue is, the more it is reported in the news. Figure 5 looks at the number of claims about immigration and integration in Switzerland over time.

**Figure 5: Saliency of Immigration and Integration in Switzerland, 1995 to 2009**



*Notes: Saliency of immigration and integration in Swiss news, 1995 to 2009. N=850 randomly sampled days, given is the average number of claims in the 60 most recently sampled days previous to a data point.*

The number of claims made in newspaper varies significantly over time. There are days when no major Swiss newspaper runs an article on immigration and integration, and there are times when

many claims about immigration and integration appear in the news. Figure 5 makes it clear that the coverage of immigration and integration is not constant: times of high salience are often followed by times of relative low salience.

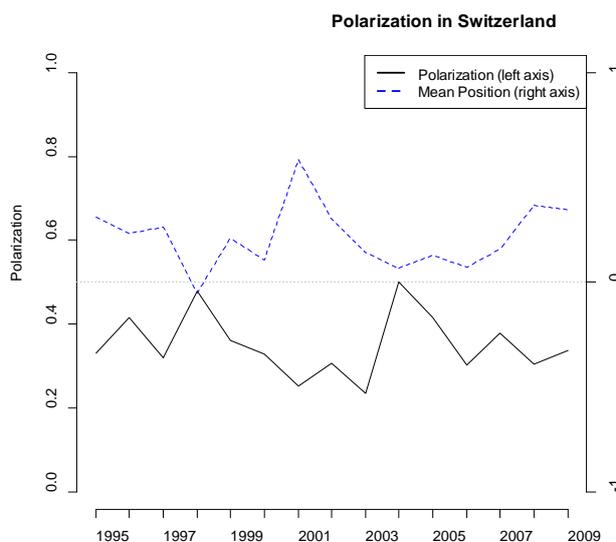
Considering the entire period – 1995 to 2009 – we can determine an increase of salience. Before 2005, there were several periods where no claims about immigration and integration were sampled. Put differently, there were no claims about the issue under consideration for 15 subsequent days that were considered. This is indicative of a period of very low salience. After 2005, in any subsequent sample of 15 days there were some claims about immigration and integration. A different way to highlight the increase of salience is a focus on yearly averages (▬▬▬). The average number of claims in a newspaper was 0.24 in 1996 and 0.82 in 2008.

It would be wrong, however, to ignore the peaks and dips. There are peaks of relative high salience in early 1998, at the end of 2000 and 2002, and particularly in early 2005. There are relative dips at the end of 1996, in early 2000, and in mid-2003. It is also notable that elections are not marked by peaks in salience – instead there seem to be relatively fewer claims about immigration and integration as we come closer to elections (October 1995, 1999, 2003, and 2007). Both the general increase over time and the peaks call for explanation.

### Polarization

There is no clear trend in the polarization of the debate in Switzerland across time. Figure 6 makes it clear that the polarization of the debate varied over time, but values in 2009 are similar to those in 1995. With the exception of 2004, the values were smaller than 0.5, indicating a tendency to agree: the different actors tend to take the same position. This agreement was somewhat stronger between 1999 and 2003.

**Figure 6: Polarization of the Debate on Immigration and Integration in Switzerland, 1995 to 2009**



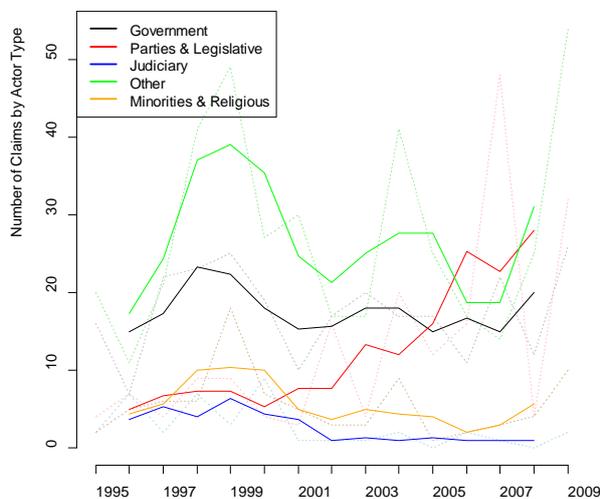
Notes: Polarization (black line, left axis) and mean position (blue dashed line, right axis) of the debate on immigration and integration in Switzerland, 1995 to 2009. Polarization values greater than 0.5 indicate a trend toward polarization, values below 0.5 indicate a trend toward agreement. Positive positions indicate open to immigrants, negative positions indicate restrictive positions.

The mean position of claims is also included in figure 6 (dashed blue line, right axis), suggesting that on average positive claims about immigration are made. This was particularly the case in 2001; in the other years, the difference from zero is not that marked. The relatively many positive claims in 2001 call for explanation, as does the sharp increase of polarization in 2004. It is also notable that there is no balance in the position on immigration in the claims in the news, and it would be interesting to learn why this is the case.

### Who makes claims

Figure 7 shows the number of claims by different types of actors. Government actors are an important claimant throughout the period covered, with no significant changes over time. The legislative and political parties appear increasingly as claimants in the news, noticeably so after 2002. Claims by the judiciary, by contrast, declined further at that time. Minority and religious organizations also make relatively few claims, with a peak in the late 1990s. It was also in the late 1990s that the broad category “other” was responsible for most claims. The most significant actors here are civil society actors. Not shown separately are racist organizations, which had virtually no claims in the news (N=11). The changes over time call for explanation.

**Figure 7: Actors Making Claims on Immigration and Integration in the News in Switzerland, 1995 to 2009**



Notes: Number of claims made by five actor types, 1995 to 2009. Given are claims by government (black), by parties and the legislative (red), the judiciary (blue), minority and religious organizations (orange), and other actors (green). In each case, the solid line represents the moving average over three years, and the dotted lines give the yearly number of claims.

**Table 1: Actors Making Claims on Immigration and Integration in the News in Switzerland, 1995 to 2009**

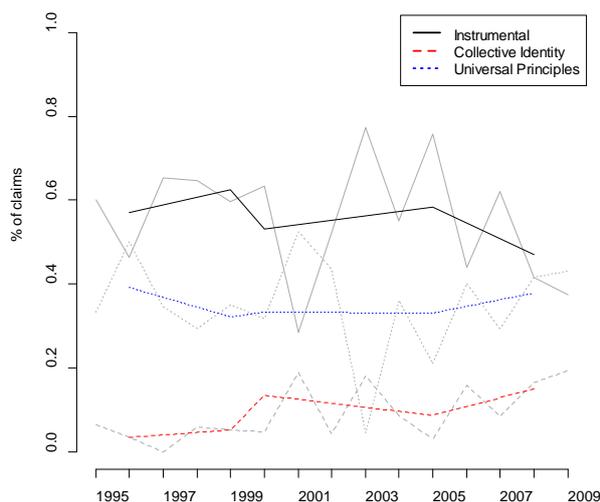
|                        | 95 | 96 | 97 | 98 | 99 | 00 | 01 | 02 | 03 | 04 | 05 | 06 | 07 | 08 | 09 |
|------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Government             | 16 | 7  | 22 | 23 | 25 | 19 | 10 | 17 | 20 | 17 | 17 | 11 | 22 | 12 | 26 |
| Parties & Legislative  | 4  | 7  | 4  | 9  | 9  | 4  | 3  | 16 | 4  | 20 | 12 | 16 | 48 | 4  | 32 |
| Judiciary              | 2  | 7  | 2  | 7  | 3  | 9  | 1  | 1  | 1  | 2  | 0  | 2  | 1  | 0  | 2  |
| Other                  | 20 | 11 | 21 | 41 | 49 | 27 | 30 | 17 | 17 | 41 | 25 | 17 | 14 | 25 | 54 |
| Minorities & Religious | 2  | 5  | 6  | 6  | 18 | 7  | 5  | 3  | 3  | 9  | 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 10 |

Notes: Number of claims made by five actor types, 1995 to 2009. See figure 7 for a graphical representation.

### Frames

Of the three categories of frames considered, instrumental frames are always the most common ones, followed by universal principles such as human rights, and collective identity. Because of the relatively small number of cases, figure 8 shows the situation averaged over 3 years. The proportion of claims using instrumental values has recently declined. Instead, frames of universal principles and collective identity have been invoked more frequently. In terms of frames, we note a clear difference between the French-speaking and German-speaking area of Switzerland: In the German-speaking area instrumental frames are more common, in the French-speaking area, frames of universal principles are generally more common – they are in many years more common than instrumental frames. Detailed analysis on the cantonal level would be necessary to explain these differences, since the pattern of difference is relatively stable over time.

**Figure 8: Frames Used in the Debate on Immigration and Integration in Switzerland, 1995 to 2009**



Notes: Distribution of the percentage of claims using a particular frame (justification) over time. Given are instrumental frames (black, solid), collective identity (red, dashed), and universal principles (blue, dotted) for periods of 3 years each. The grey shadows indicate the yearly values.

Looking at the yearly data – the grey shadows in figure 8 – 2001 stands out for its dip in instrumental frames. In fact, in 2001, universal principles were used more frequently, and frames of collective identity were more common than hitherto. In 2003, no claims invoking universal principles were

found in the random sample of newspapers covered. The changes overall – and perhaps particularly after 2005 – call for explanation.

## *Explanations*

There are different kinds of explanations for differences in salience and polarization. In this section, four kinds of explanations will be examined: (1) societal developments, namely demographic changes, (2) actions of and claims by specific groups and political actors, (3) immigration policies and legislative actions, (4) political opportunity structures and other structural factors.

### **Societal developments (structural, bottom up)**

It is plausible that issues become more politicized when they affect society and people's everyday lives. This intuition also applies to the politicization of immigration. In particular, we can expect growing numbers of immigrants – notably so-called visible immigrants – to have an impact. What is more, people might be more sensitive to growing numbers of immigrants during times of high unemployment.

The number of immigrants is an obvious candidate to test the impact of societal developments. In Switzerland, during the period covered, the number of immigrants increased steadily (—).<sup>2</sup> As such, the number of immigrants could be used to explain the overall increase in salience, but it fails to explain the peaks outlined in figure 5. The number of immigrants is not suitable to explain changes in polarization – where no linear changes can be observed –, but as a (any) linear pattern, it could be used to explain changes in frames.

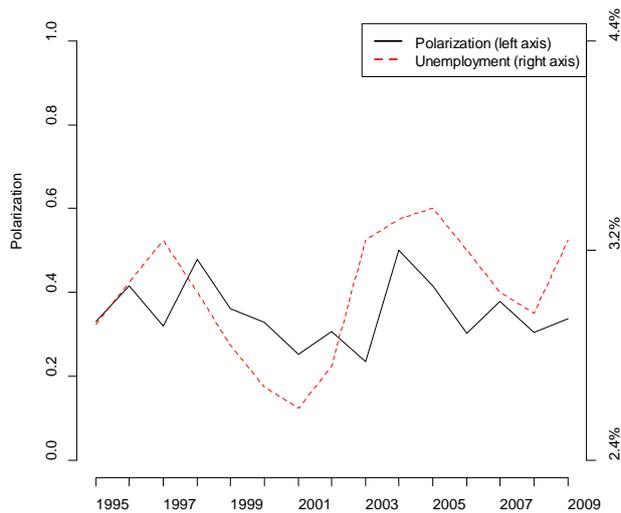
When focusing on cultural rather than economic arguments, the role of visible immigrants comes to the fore. Switzerland is an interesting case here, since the number of Muslim immigrants did not grow in parallel to the overall number of immigrants in Switzerland. The number of Muslims in Switzerland, however, is not associated with patterns of salience and polarization. Indeed, it seems that immigration is politicized more generally, not as a reaction to Muslim immigrants. At the same time, Muslim immigrants were highly politicized at the end of the period – culminating in the popular initiative on the ban of the construction of minarets –, despite no significant increase in numbers.

Another group of visible immigrants are asylum seekers. The number of asylum seekers grew significantly in the 1990s (compare figure 1), and it can probably explain the peak in salience in 1998. Indeed, salience peaked before the number of asylum seekers peaked, suggesting that new arrivals are more important than the number of asylum seekers present: sudden changes in the number of visible immigrants. The sudden growth in asylum seekers can also explain why civil society actors made so many claims at the time (compare figure 7). For the slower changes in Muslim immigrants and immigrants overall, we do not observe an equivalent association than for the sudden change in asylum seekers in the late 1990s.

---

<sup>2</sup> Numbers of foreign citizens and foreign-born individuals (where available) follow a similar pattern over time.

**Figure 9: Unemployment and Polarization in Switzerland, 1995 to 2009**



Notes: Source: ILO

Unemployment numbers offer an interesting contrast to immigrant numbers, since they are not linear over time ( $\sim$ ). The changes over time do not fit the changes in salience, or the changes in frames. It is possible that relevant influences are exclusively located at the local level (Dancygier 2010). By contrast, changes in unemployment figures fit surprisingly well with the polarization values. Figure 9 shows this association in graphical form. The shapes of the two curves are remarkably similar, and there is a consistent lag of about one year: polarization increases about one year after unemployment figures increase, and they decline about one year after unemployment figures decline.

### Actions of specific groups (agency, bottom up)

A different set of explanations focuses less on the number of immigrants or the kinds of immigrants, but on political actors who make claims and mobilize. Both claims made by immigrants and the role of anti-immigrant parties and organizations deserve attention. Within these organizations, it may be new leaders who play an important role, perhaps using immigration – or other new issues – to differentiate themselves from the older generations. In Switzerland, the use of direct democratic means – referendums and popular initiatives – falls within the realms of actions of specific groups, usually political parties and civil society organizations.

Not all these direct democratic measures have the same impact on the politicization of immigration. Two popular initiatives seem to have increased salience significantly: one in the wake of a court decision that regulated naturalizations (Emmen), and the other on the ban on the construction of minarets at the end of the period covered. In 2003, the federal court decided that secret ballots on naturalization applications are unconstitutional because they could not be justified (BGE 2003). In 2009, the Swiss voters agreed to ban the construction of new minarets (BFS 2010). At the same time, several referendums on the freedom of movement – regulating immigration from the European Union and EEA – did not significantly increase salience. Similarly, other referendums and initiatives outlined in figure 4 had no discernible impact on salience.

While the frames seems unaffected by direct democratic interventions, the two initiatives highlighted for the salience (Emmen, minarets) also fit peaks in polarization, although these peaks seem explicable in terms of unemployment figures alone.

New leaders do not seem to have a discernible impact on politicization. This is the case for new leaders in the SVP as well as the many leadership changes in Swiss political parties in 2001/2. The change in leadership in the SVP in the 1990s is likely to be associated with a radicalization of the party, but it does not appear to have affected directly the overall debate on immigration and integration. Unfortunately we lack precise data to make comparisons to periods before 1995.

Civil society actors were most active in the late 1990s when there was unprecedented number of asylum seekers in Switzerland. After 2003, political parties emerge as significant claimants in the debate in the news (compare figure 4 on the uses of direct democratic instruments). The increased number of claims by parties is to some extent reflected by changes in relevant law (compare figure 2). It appears that parties do not merely talk about immigration and integration, but that they are indeed also involved in legislative action. This growing role of political parties in the politicization of immigration is not attributable to the electoral success of the SVP alone, since parties only emerged as more significant claimants as the SVP slowed its growth.

#### **Policies (agency, initially top down)**

It seems plausible that changes in immigration and integration legislation prompt politicization, particularly if such policies are unpopular among specific groups. Policy changes are relatively rare in Switzerland, and only recently, these changes were significant enough to change MIPEX scores. As such, changes in policy measured this way are not suitable for explaining changes in salience and polarization. At the same time, the federal court decision on naturalizations (Emmen) clearly prompted politicization in the sense of salience. In this sense, the proposition is true in some cases, but not universally so. The introduction and expansion of the freedom of movement was unpopular with a significant proportion of the population and organizations close to the SVP. Yet, it did not lead to significant changes in politicization, as was the case with naturalizations (Emmen).

#### **The Political Opportunity Structure (structural, top down)**

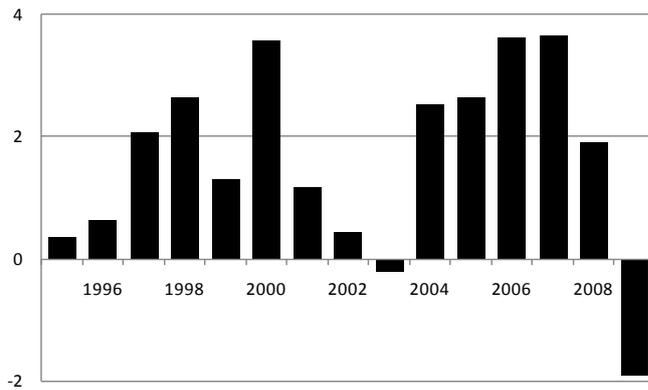
The possibility for any kind of collective actor to put new issues on the agenda will depend upon structural circumstances that in the literature are widely called political opportunities. The intuition is that depending on the institutional setting and the way political actors are placed in the polity, certain organizations will find it easier to put issues on the agenda or mobilize support for their ideas. By extension, these (structurally determined) conditions also shape whether there are opportunities for political actors to de-politicize an issue.

#### **4A. Non-institutional characteristics**

While political conflicts divide groups, they also unite others (e.g. Schattschneider 1960). In order to organize the support of a majority in favour of a certain proposal, actors have to build coalitions, and doing so takes an investment in terms of time and energy. This means that majority coalitions are valuable assets, and actors have an interest not to jeopardize these coalitions. Conflicts that divide existing coalitions are therefore less likely to become politicized than conflicts that coincide with the existing political cleavages. This implies that the issue of immigration and integration is most likely to become politicized when positions on immigration coincide with positions on other issues. Moreover, issues compete with each other for attention from the media, politicians and the public. In times when the economy is doing poorly, economic issues will be high on the agenda and there will be less room for other issues like immigration.

The level of cross-cuttingness has not changed significantly during the period covered (Ruedin 2011). The positions on immigration and integration largely coincide with left-right positions and positions on the European Union. This means that in Switzerland, this factor cannot account for changes over time, nor explain peaks in politicization. Perhaps cross-cuttingness is useful for other periods or comparison with other countries. Similarly, GDP growth rates do not fit changes in salience. Even though the hypothesis is primarily formulated about salience, it can be stretched to polarization. In contrast to the unemployment figures, GDP growth (figure 10) does not provide more than a cursory match. For example, the dip in 2003 and the sharp increase thereafter would fit. By contrast, polarization declined in 2000 when GDP growth was high, or the negative growth in 2009 does not seem to affect polarization.

**Figure 10: GDP Growth in Switzerland, 1995 to 2009**



Notes: Yearly GDP growth (in %), Source: World Bank.

#### 4B. Institutional characteristics

There were few significant changes concerning institutional characteristics in Switzerland. As such, they are unable to explain trends, but may still play an important role in the politicization of immigration. Relevant factors include corporatism, federalism, and the type of party system.

The political institutions of Switzerland are renowned for their stability over time, but the open nature of the electoral system means that the growing electoral success of the SVP affected the composition of the legislature directly, and in 2003 the composition of government – for the first time since 1959.<sup>3</sup> This governmental stability can be attributed to an informal agreement between the party leaders and a political tradition that incorporates all major groups in society: in ideology as well as in terms of language and religion. Indeed, the outlined changes in government composition reflect a commitment to consensus politics.

More generally, the political system of Switzerland is characterized by its general openness and federal nature. These principal arrangements remained stable during the period covered, enabling the strong consensus tradition that exists in the country. More specifically on immigration, immigrant organizations are routinely consulted on policies that affect immigrants to ensure that all stakeholders are included in policymaking. Since 2005, and particularly since the VIntA of 2007, a clear trend

<sup>3</sup> The Swiss People's Party (SVP) increased its seat share particularly in the *National Council* (lower chamber). In the more consensus-oriented *Council of States* (upper chamber), the SVP was unable to make similar inroads. The increase of the SVP was at the cost of particularly the FDP and CVP, and smaller parties to the right of the SVP that have largely disappeared. There was no further increase in the vote or seat share for the SVP in 2011.

toward more formal and mandatory consultations can be observed. At the same time, a great variance remains between the cantons. Put differently, although on all levels of Swiss politics both pro- and anti-immigrant organizations are consulted, the way this is implemented varies greatly from canton to canton.

Such a variance also exists in the right to vote for foreign citizens. In some cantons and municipalities non-Swiss citizens have the right to vote, mostly in the French-speaking area. Most of the time, participation is restricted to the local level, but in the cantons of Jura and Neuchâtel, foreign citizens can vote for the Council of State, and thus influence national politics to a limited extent (Ruedin 2010). There is no special treatment for EU citizens or any other specific group of foreigners when it comes to the right to vote.

Generally, there are very low structural barriers for new parties to enter the scene, and indeed new parties are formed regularly – usually at the local level. Most of the time, however, new parties fail to make significant inroads and remain marginal players. As such, the Swiss immigrant party Second@sPlus has the same structural opportunities, just like the BDP and GLP which recently established themselves on the national level – or earlier the Greens – to become new political players in Switzerland. However, for reasons unrelated to the political opportunity structure, this is not happening.

Within political parties, the position on immigration is stable, and it is a reinforcing cleavage. At the poles (SP and SVP) members of the parties agree strongly on their view on immigration; in the centre (FDP and CVP) there is more variation within the parties (Ladner, Schwarz, and Fivaz 2009).

There is no expectation that the openness of the political system in Switzerland would favour anti-immigrant movements over solidarity movements. The growth of the SVP has certainly increased the number of allies for anti-immigrant movements, although the SVP is probably the key actor rather than an ally for other movements. The growth of the SVP has led to increasing dynamism in terms of the very stable political arrangements, but the Swiss consensus tradition and federalism mean that system remains very stable.

## *Conclusion*

There are many actors making claims about immigration and integration in Swiss news. Civil society organizations reacted to the unprecedented increase in numbers of asylum seekers at the end of the 1990s, but increasingly – since around 2002 – political parties seem to drive the agenda. It is worth noting that the SVP increased its vote share already before that point, so the growth of the SVP is unlikely to be the cause of the increased role of political parties in the debate on immigration. Indeed, the importance of political parties as claimants increased toward the end of the period under consideration, despite the SVP no longer increasing their vote share.

The salience of the debate – the number of claims made on a given day – increased during the period studied. The overall increase matches to some degree the overall increase in foreign citizens in Switzerland, but with the concurrent growth of the SVP, these two factors are difficult to disentangle. The salience of immigration did not increase steadily, but instead it is characterized by many peaks. The biggest peaks seem to be best explained by the increase in asylum seekers in the late 1990s – when particularly civil society actors were active – and certain direct democratic actions, namely in the wake of a court decision on naturalizations (Emmen) and more recently in the context of the ban of the construction of minarets. This highlights that political parties are critical actors in the politicization of immigration. With the evidence available, it is difficult to tell, though, whether an

increased politicization allowed the parties to stage successful referendums, or whether parties were driving politicization. Given the many referendums and initiatives (compare figure 4), it is tempting to conclude that the actions of the parties come first.

Politicization entails polarization as much as salience. In Switzerland, the polarization of the debate on immigration and integration fits very well with unemployment figures, with a consistent lag of about one year. As an alternative explanation, the 2003 change in government composition coincides with changes in polarization, but only the unemployment figures offer a consistent explanation for both the increases in polarization and its decline over time (compare figure 6).

The frames used in the debate on immigration and integration only changed gradually – if one focuses on the trend and ignores the big changes year on year. Any linear change could account for the changes in frames, including the overall increase in the foreign population.

This chapter found no support for the role of GDP on the politicization of immigration. Having said this, via unemployment the economic situation does seem important. Similarly, changes in law are not associated with politicization, but they are important via referendums and popular initiatives. The composition of the population seems of lesser importance. For instance, the politicization of immigration around Muslims at the end of the period studied was independent from the size of the Muslim population – which remained largely stable. By contrast, the sudden increase in asylum seekers at the end of the 1990s led to a politicization of immigration. Put differently, the gradual increase of immigrants alone does not seem to prompt direct changes in the politicization of immigration, but sudden changes appear to do so.

## References

- Achermann, A. et al. 2009. *Country Report: Switzerland*. Florence: European University Institute. EUDO Citizenship Observatory. <http://eudo-citizenship.eu/docs/CountryReports/Switzerland.pdf> (Accessed March 3, 2010).
- Afonso, A. 2005. “When the export of social problems is no longer possible: Immigration policies and unemployment in Switzerland.” *Social Policy & Administration* 39(6): 653–68.
- AuG. 2005. “SR 142.20 Bundesgesetz vom 16. Dezember 2005 über die Ausländerinnen und Ausländer.” [http://www.admin.ch/ch/d/sr/c142\\_20.html](http://www.admin.ch/ch/d/sr/c142_20.html) (Accessed May 14, 2010).
- BFS. 2010. “Eidgenössische Volksabstimmung vom 29. November 2009.” *Abstimmungen – Indikatoren*. <http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/de/index/themen/17/03/blank/key/2009/05.html> (Accessed August 8, 2012).
- BGE. 2003. (Bundesgericht) *BGE 129 I 217 - Urnenabstimmung Emmen*.
- Bornschiefer, Simon. 2010. *Cleavage Politics and the Populist Right: The New Cultural Conflict in Western Europe*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Dancygier, R. 2010. *Immigration and Conflict in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Efionayi, D., J. Niederberger, and P. Wanner. 2005. “Switzerland Faces Common European Challenges.” *Migration Information Source*. <http://www.migrationinformation.org/USfocus/display.cfm?ID=284> (Accessed March 12, 2010).

- Farrér, G. 2009. "Leistung willkommen Integration unerwünscht." *Der Arbeitsmarkt*. [http://www.derarbeitsmarkt.ch/arbeitsmarkt/de/themen/archiv/704452/Leistung\\_willkommen\\_Integration\\_unerw%C3%BCnscht](http://www.derarbeitsmarkt.ch/arbeitsmarkt/de/themen/archiv/704452/Leistung_willkommen_Integration_unerw%C3%BCnscht) (Accessed September 4, 2012).
- Gerber, B. 2003. *Die antirassistische Bewegung in der Schweiz: Organisationen, Netzwerke und Aktionen*. Zürich: Seismo Verlag.
- Huddleston, T., and J. Niessen. 2011. *Migrant Integration Policy Index*. Brussels: British Council and Migration Policy Group. <http://www.integrationindex.eu>.
- Ladner, A., D. Schwarz, and J. Fivaz. 2009. "Die Schweizer Parteien im politischen Raum - eine Analyse der politischen Positionen ihrer Kandidierenden bei den Nationalratswahlen 2007." *Working paper de l'IDHEAP* 2009(1).
- Manatschal, A. 2010. "Integration policies in federal settings: Assessing the impact of exclusionary citizenship conceptions on cantonal integration policies." *CIS Working Paper* 2010(55): 1–26.
- Niessen, J. et al. 2007. *Migrant Integration Policy Index*. Brussels: British Council and Migration Policy Group. <http://www.integrationindex.eu>.
- Ruedin, D. 2011. "Indicators of the political opportunity structure (POS)." *SOM Working Paper* 1: 1–19.
- . 2012. "Legal and Policy Situation of Immigrants: Switzerland." *SOM Working Paper* 5: 1–15.
- . 2010. "Wie würden Personen ohne den roten Pass wählen: Wahlverhalten von Ausländerinnen und Ausländern." *SFM Discussion Paper* 24.
- Schattschneider, E. 1960. *The Semisovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America*. The Dryden Press.
- Skenderovic, D., and G. D'Amato. 2008. *Mit dem Fremden politisieren: Rechtspopulismus und Migrationspolitik in der Schweiz seit den 1960er Jahren*. Zürich: Chronos.
- VIntA. 2007. "SR 142.205 Verordnung vom 24. Oktober 2007 über die Integration von Ausländerinnen und Ausländern." [http://www.admin.ch/ch/d/sr/c142\\_205.html](http://www.admin.ch/ch/d/sr/c142_205.html) (Accessed May 14, 2010).