

# CREAKY CONCORDANCE SYSTEM

## PARLIAMENTARY AND GOVERNMENTAL ELECTIONS IN SWITZERLAND: DIVIDED CONSERVATIVES DEFEATED BY CONSENSUS-ORIENTED CENTRE-RIGHT PARTIES

*Burkard Steppacher*

Elections in Switzerland have become quite exciting in recent years. The cooperation between the traditional ruling parties, which have been in power in a grand coalition since the end of the 1950s, has clearly been thrown into crisis,<sup>1</sup> new parties have entered parliament and the political concordance that has existed for decades has started to creak and shift. However, it appears that these changes have not yet found a permanent footing.<sup>2</sup>

Every four years there are federal elections to select a new parliament in Switzerland, a country with one of the most constitutionally stable political systems, both in Europe and the world.<sup>3</sup> The larger chamber (National Council) has 200 members and the smaller chamber (Council of States) has 46 members, with two members per canton, although six so-called "half cantons" only have one member each. Once the members of both parliamentary chambers have been chosen, the chambers, which together make up the Federal Assembly, then elect the country's seven-member federal government (Federal Council). The elections were watched with great interest in 2011, as there was the real possibility of a change to the federal government.



Prof. Dr. Burkard Steppacher is a staff member of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Scholarship Programme and Honorary Professor of Political Science at the University of Cologne.

- 1 | Cf. Burkard Steppacher, "Die Krise der Konkordanz", *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*, 2/2008, 19-22; Michael Hartmann, *Konkordanz in der Krise. Ideen für eine Revitalisierung*, Avenir Suisse, NZZ-Verlag, Zurich 2011.
- 2 | Cf. Wolf Linder, "Schweizerische Konkordanz im Wandel", *Zeitschrift für Staats- und Europawissenschaften*, 2009, No. 2, 209-230; cf. René Zeller, "Wo neue Blöcke sich erheben", *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 31 Dec 2011, 23.
- 3 | Cf. Burkard Steppacher, "Eigenwillige Eidgenossen", *KAS Länderbericht*, Oct 2007, 1-4, <http://kas.de/wf/de/33.12281> (accessed 13 Feb 2012).

Fig. 1

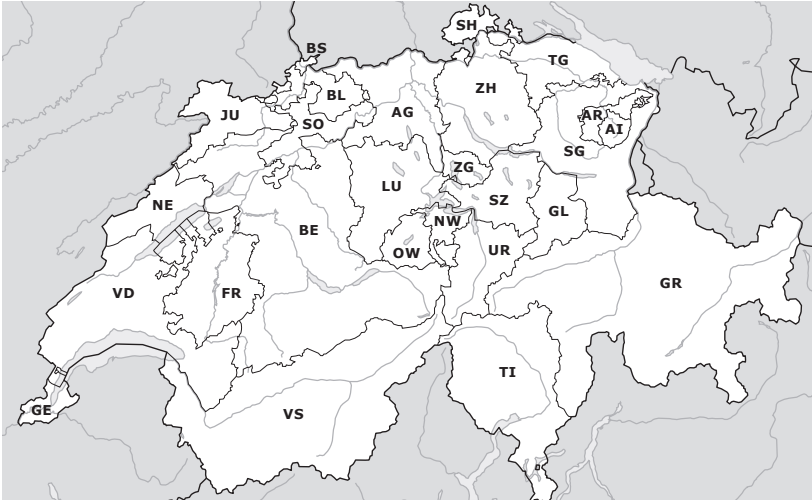
**The Swiss Confederation and its cantons**

Table 1

**Distribution of National Council and Council of States Seats 2011**

Canton	NC	CS	Canton	NC	CS		
Zurich	ZH	34	2	Schaffhausen	SH	2	2
Bern	BE	26	2	Appenzell Innerrhoden	AI	1	1
Lucerne	LU	10	2	Appenzell Ausserrhoden	AR	1	1
Uri	UR	1	2	St. Gallen	SG	12	2
Schwyz	SZ	4	2	Grisons	GR	5	2
Obwalden	OW	1	1	Aargau	AG	15	2
Nidwalden	NW	1	1	Thurgau	TG	6	2
Glarus	GL	1	2	Ticino	TI	8	2
Zug	ZG	3	2	Vaud	VD	18	2
Fribourg	FR	7	2	Valais	VS	7	2
Solothurn	SO	7	2	Neuchâtel	NE	5	2
Basel-Stadt	BS	5	1	Geneva	GE	11	2
Basel-Landschaft	BL	7	1	Jura	JU	2	2
<b>Total</b>					<b>200</b>	<b>46</b>	

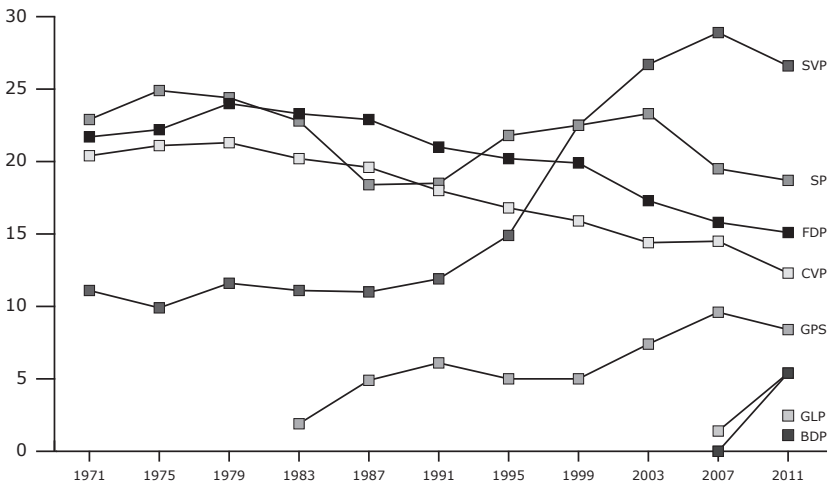
Source: Federal Statistical Office and own compilation. The cantons are listed in accordance with the official sequence.

## ELECTION ANALYSIS 2011

In the autumn of 2011, the SVP, the SP and the Greens failed to continue gaining in strength, as they had in previous parliamentary elections,<sup>4</sup> but instead voters leaned towards parties in the political centre.<sup>5</sup> However, the traditional centrist parties such as the FDP and the CVP did not profit from this, rather it was the centre-right newcomers, the BDP and the GLP that came from virtually nowhere to win 5.4 per cent of the vote in the 2011 National Council elections.

Fig. 2

### Percentage of votes by party in the National Council



Source: Federal Statistical Office, [http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/de/index/themen/17/02/blank/key/national\\_rat/parteienstaerke.html](http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/de/index/themen/17/02/blank/key/national_rat/parteienstaerke.html) (accessed 28 Feb 2012).

Over the last 20 years, the most popular Swiss party, the national conservative Swiss People's Party (SVP) and its Zurich billionaire figurehead Christoph Blocher, had always been able to increase its share of the vote, despite criticism from the EU and occasional displays of xenophobia. However, in the 2011 elections, the SVP managed to fail on all fronts: In the National Council elections it was not

4 | Cf. Burkard Steppacher, "Schweizer Christdemokraten in der Zwickmühle: Wahlanalyse 2003", *KAS Auslandsinformationen*, 11/2003, 64-80, <http://kas.de/wf/de/33.3574> (accessed 13 Feb 2012).

5 | For up-to-date figures see Table 2 and Fig. 4. For parties and their acronyms see Table 3.

able to repeat its previous best result from 2007 (28.9 per cent) and only received 26.6 per cent of the vote, despite all the effort and expense it had put into the election campaign. The final ballot for the Council of States, its somewhat polarised candidates were defeated in almost all of the cantons. The party chairman, Toni Brunner, the SVP faction leader Caspar Baader and even the former Federal Council member Christoph Blocher, who campaigned hard in Zurich, were not able to prevail against other centre-right candidates, in spite of all their political skills. As a result, the media started reporting stories of internal party criticism of the SVP leadership group of Brunner/Baader/Blocher ("Triple B") in the aftermath of the election.<sup>6</sup> The SVP also failed in its battle to regain the seat it lost on the Federal Council when the Council was re-elected in December 2011, mostly because its strategy was unclear and it lacked a convincing candidate who was capable of winning a majority.

**The SVP failed in 2011 due to its decision to adopt a strategy based on conflict, which was not a particularly smart move nor something that is done very often.**

As in 2007, the national conservative SVP was once again shown its limitations. The party, which carries the country's name with pride and is always happy to accuse its opponents of being "un-Swiss", failed again in 2011 due to its decision to adopt a strategy based on conflict, which was not a particularly smart move nor, in Swiss Confederation terms, something that is done very often. It is much easier to enjoy political success in Switzerland through coalitions and consensus than with a win-at-all-costs approach.

### **STABILITY OF THE SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT**

Structurally, the Swiss system of government has proved to be extraordinarily stable, in that four parties have ruled as part of a long-term coalition since the end of the 1950s (FDP/CVP/SVP/SP). The Liberals (FDP) are practically the "state party" of the Confederation, as they have been continuously represented in government since the Federal State was founded in 1848. The Christian Democratic People's Party (CVP) has been in power for 120 years in total, making it the longest-serving C-party in the world,

6 | Cf. "SVP-Basis wütend auf Triple B", *Blick*, 12 Dec 2011; cf. "Schelte für das 'Triple-B'-Regime der SVP", *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 14 Dec 2011.

even if it did go by different names in the past. Since 1959, the Federal Council has always been limited to a total of seven seats by the Federal Constitution and has remained unchanged for decades, with the seats divided according to the ratio 2:2:2:1 amongst the four largest parties, with language, sex and regional proportionality also being taken into account. Prior to the end of 2003, the FDP, CVP and SP each had two Federal Council members and the smaller SVP just one, based on this "magic formula".

One of the main reasons for the remarkable stability of the Confederation's system of government is the direct democratic right of participation, which allows voters to have a concrete influence on political decisions, independently of the elections. In democracies, a majority is usually needed to make things happen politically. In parliamentary democracies, a majority of 51 per cent of the yes votes is normally sufficient. In Switzerland, with its elements of direct democracy, such small majorities are normally not enough to win the day. In the Confederation nearly all decisions made by parliament and the government can be over-turned by the people, so politicians need to make sure they have a broad majority in advance of a vote, in order to avoid having their ideas rejected by the voters.

Under this type of system, it is important that political projects are based on a broad consensus if the parties want to succeed in having these projects turned into legislation. However, as any project passed by the Federal Council (federal government) or the Federal Assembly (National Council and Council of States) that only has a small majority is likely to be disputed in a referendum and can easily fail, politicians generally try to ensure that their decisions are as "referendum-proof" as possible. This practice has been in evidence from the very beginning, with the result that the federal system of government, which was originally dominated by liberals after 1848, slowly developed into a concordance democracy in the space of a few decades – almost as a counterbalance to the strengthening of the rights of the people. Consequently, groups that are considered "capable of launching referendums" (*referendumsfähig*) are often

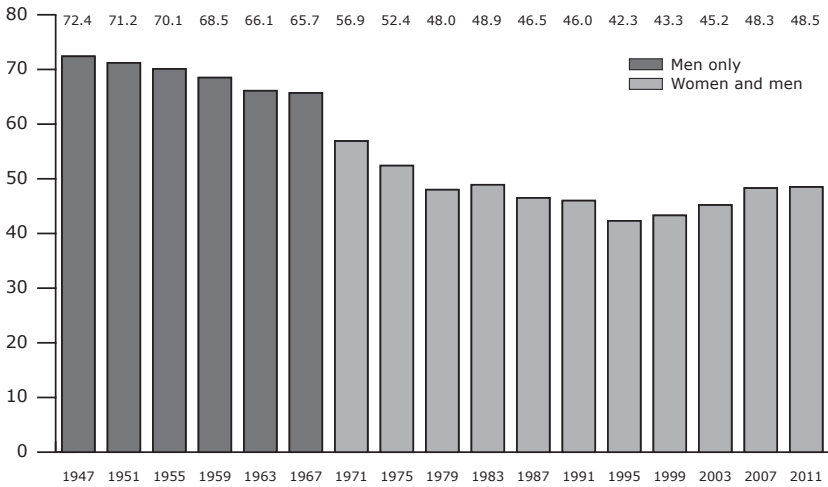
**The federal system of government slowly developed into a concordance democracy in the space of a few decades – almost as a counterbalance to the strengthening of the people's rights.**

invited to join the legislative process to improve the chances of the legislation succeeding (by involving them in consultation procedures, for example).

### STRUCTURALLY LOW PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIONS AND VOTING

A classic competitive democracy was therefore gradually changed into a consensus democracy by the introduction of constitutional instruments such as the referendum and the people’s initiative. The most powerful opposition in Switzerland is not to be found in parliament, but amongst the voters.

Fig. 3  
**Voter turnout for National Council elections since 1947**



Source: Federal Statistical Office, [http://www.politik-stat.ch/nrw2007CHwb\\_de.html](http://www.politik-stat.ch/nrw2007CHwb_de.html) (accessed 13 Feb 2012).

This also explains the structurally low voter turnout for elections, which has been less than 50 per cent for decades now. Elections are not the only form of participation for voters, because they also have the possibility of using referendums and initiatives. After the voter turnout reached a historic low in the 1990s, numbers have risen slightly over the last ten years and turnout was 48.5 per cent for the National Council elections in 2011.

The idea of departing from the “magic formula”, – something that is constantly being discussed by both the left and the right – or of changing to a leftist majority government, which many people seem to want, or, conversely, of switching to a purely centre-right government without the participation of the social democrats, all appear to be illusions doomed to instant failure because of the direct democratic constitutional mechanisms in place. Similar models at canton level have not been successful in the long-term. Because the actual opposition does not sit in parliament and the voters maintain permanent control via the ballot box, the parties are “condemned to concordance”, despite their political differences.

**As the actual opposition is not in the parliament and the voters maintain permanent control via the ballot box, the parties are “condemned to concordance”, despite their political differences.**

### THE RISE OF THE SVP AND THE CURRENT CRISIS

The Swiss People’s Party (SVP), which grew out of the centrist Party of Farmers, Traders and Independents (BGB) at the beginning of the 1970s, changed during the 1980s into a distinctly national conservative party under the influence of the Zurich entrepreneur Christoph Blocher. With Blocher as figurehead, the party repositioned itself and modernised its organisation. Its policies became more personalised and pointed, almost to the point of radicalism.<sup>7</sup> In addition to its traditional interest in domestic economic matters, the SVP also focused on a number of other key issues. Following a successful battle against UN membership in 1986, it concentrated on opposing closer ties between Switzerland and the European Union and on preserving the country’s status as a “special case”.<sup>8</sup>

By publicly criticising the pro-Europe policies of the other governing parties, the SVP gradually managed to significantly increase its electoral base, and in the space of just twenty years it went from being a 10 per cent party to being the most popular party in Switzerland. It was able to attract new groups of voters, even from the other governing parties, but more especially from the smaller single-issue

7 | Cf. the controversial “sheep poster” from the 2007 election campaign which showed three white sheep driving a black sheep away from the Swiss flag, cf. [http://rhetorik.ch/Aktuell/07/07\\_16/index.html](http://rhetorik.ch/Aktuell/07/07_16/index.html) (accessed 13 Feb 2012).

8 | Cf. Paul Widmer, *Die Schweiz als Sonderfall: Grundlagen, Geschichte, Gestaltung*, NZZ libro, Zurich 2007, 8 et sqq.

parties, particularly those on the right, whose supporters couldn't really find a home amongst the other popular parties. From a small party with its roots firmly anchored in the Protestant German-speaking part of Switzerland, the SVP developed from election to election into a party capable of transcending language barriers and being active throughout the country.<sup>9</sup> In doing so, it was able to enjoy success in the traditional homeland of the CVP, the Catholic Central Switzerland, amongst disenfranchised industrial workers in urban areas and in French-speaking West Switzerland. And its success was not limited to the various elections, but was also reflected in plebiscites.

Table 2

**National Council Elections 2003-2011:  
Percentage of vote and number of seats by party**

Party	2003		2007		2011	
FDP	17.3	36	15.8	31	15.1	30 (-1)
CVP	14.4	28	24.5	31	12.3	28 (-3)
SP	23.3	52	19.5	43	18.7	46 (+3)
SVP	26.7	55	28.9	62	26.6	54 (-8)
LPS	2.2	4	1.9	4	(FDP)	(FDP)
EVP	2.3	3	2.4	2	2.0	2 (-)
CSP	0.4	1	0.4	1	0.3	0 (-1)
GLP	n. c.	n. c.	1.4	3	5.4	12 (+9)
BDP	n. c.	n. c.	n. c.	n. c.	5.4	9 (+9)
PdA	0.7	2	0.7	1	0.5	- (-1)
GPS	7.4	13	9.6	20	8.4	15 (-5)
Sol.	0.5	1	0.4	-	0.3	-
FGA	0.5	1	0.2	-	n. c.	-
SD	1.0	1	0.5	-	0.2	-
EDU	1.3	2	1.3	-	1.3	-
FPS	0.2	-	0.1	-	n. c.	-
Lega	0.4	1	0.6	1	0.8	2 (+1)
MCG	n. c.	n. c.	0.1	-	-	1 (+1)
Other	1.6	-	1.7	-	2.2	1 (+1)
Total	100	200	100	200	100	200

n. c. – No candidates; abbreviations: cf. table 3.

Note: Because of factional changes within individual National Councils, there may be some differences to earlier tables.

9 | Cf. on cantonal differences: Hanspeter Kriesi et al. (eds.), *Der Aufstieg der SVP: Acht Kantone im Vergleich*, NZZ libro, Zurich, 2005.



## FEDERAL COUNCIL DESELECTIONS IN 2003 AND 2007

By the end of the 1990s, the SVP was the most popular party in the country and was pushing hard for a greater role in the federal government, albeit unsuccessfully at that time. However, when the SVP once again increased its share of the vote and its number of seats in the National Council elections of 2003, the Federal Assembly decided to deselect Federal Council member Ruth Metzler of the CVP, the then fourth strongest party, and elect the SVP politician Blocher to the Federal Council instead. The deselecting of a Federal Council member is unusual in Swiss politics, but was seen as unavoidable in 2003, in order to ensure a properly functioning concordance system.

Over the next four years, the fact that Blocher, as a new Federal Council member, tended to act more like a “ruling opposition member” than as the member of a collegial body, irritated the other members of the federal government as much as it did those in parliament. During the 2007 parliamentary elections, the SVP focused its campaign on its front man, Blocher, under the banner of “Strengthen Blocher! Vote SVP!” This kind of personalisation is unusual in what is a very egalitarian confederation and was criticised not only by leftist politicians, but also by many on the centre-right, as being an almost “un-Swiss” cult of personality.<sup>10</sup>

The National Council elections in 2007 represented the pinnacle of the SVP’s achievements and SVP politicians were happy to laud this success over its political opponents. The SVP added to its vote again and won 62 of the 200 seats in the National Council.<sup>11</sup> But, in politics, it is the end result that counts, especially in Switzerland, and in its moment of triumph the SVP representatives had forgotten that to be successful you also need alliance partners, and that it is a mistake to alienate them. The SVP leadership were all-too-confident that the majority of those in parliament would not endanger the new balance of power within the concordance and that Blocher would ultimately retain his seat on the Federal Council.

10 | Cf. “Couchepin kritisiert die SVP hart”, *NZZ Online*, 7 Sep 2007, [http://nzz.ch/nachrichten/politik/schweiz/aktuell/couchepin\\_komplott\\_blocher\\_gpk\\_1.551990](http://nzz.ch/nachrichten/politik/schweiz/aktuell/couchepin_komplott_blocher_gpk_1.551990) (accessed 13 Feb 2012).

11 | Cf. Steppacher, “Eigenwillige Eidgenossen”, n. 3.

Table 3

**Acronyms for the Swiss parties****Federal Council Parties**

FDP	RPD	FDP, The Liberals
CVP	PDC	Christian Democratic People's party of Switzerland
SP	PS	Social Democratic Party of Switzerland
SVP	UDC	Swiss People's party
BDP	PBD	Conservative Democratic Party of Switzerland (founded in 2008 after a split with the SVP)

**Non-Federal Council Parties**

PdA	PST-POP	Swiss Workers' Party
Sol.	–	SolidaritéS (Geneva)
PSA	–	Partita Socialista Autonomo (Ticino)
POCH	–	Progressive Organisations of Switzerland (until 1993)
FGA	–	Feminist and Green Alternative Groupings
GPS	PES	Green Party of Switzerland
GLP	PVL	Green Liberal Party of Switzerland (founded in 2007 after a split with the GPS)
LPS	PLS	Liberal Party of Switzerland (merged with the FDP in 2009)
LdU	AdI	Ring of Independents (disbanded in 1999)
EVP	PEV	Evangelical People's Party of Switzerland
CSP	–	Christian Social Party of Switzerland
Rep.	–	Swiss Republican Movement (1971-1989), incl. Vigilance (Geneva) (1971-1987)
SD	DS	Swiss Democrats (until 1990: National Action, NA)
EDU	UDF	Federal Democratic Union
FPS	PSL	Freedom Party of Switzerland (until 1994: Swiss Automobile Party, AP)
Lega	LdT	Ticino League (Ticino)

At the end of 2007, an informal cross-party agreement between Blocher opponents to vote for the more conciliatory Grisons SVP politician Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf proved to be a tactical masterstroke. Widmer-Schlumpf accepted the nomination, despite strong opposition from within her own party.<sup>12</sup> The election of a Federal Council member other than the one recommended by the party leadership is nothing new in Switzerland. The SP in particular has had to accept,

albeit with much grumbling, that the Federal Assembly has

12 | Cf. the instructive documentary from the Swiss TV channel *SF DOK*, <http://videportal.sf.tv/video?id=22511a99-296b-44d5-a726-3a1ef3bbb7fe> (accessed 13 Feb 2012).

often preferred a different social democratic candidate to the one they recommended. The SVP, however, decided to expel the insubordinate Widmer-Schlumpf from the party, together with the Grisons section of the party, and drove the other SVP Federal Council Member, Samuel Schmid, into the camp of the then newly-formed Conservative Democratic Party (BDP). The SVP had effectively cast out its own Federal Council members and so was temporarily no longer represented in the federal government.

### PROGRESSING BACK TO CONCORDANCE

The stability of Switzerland's institutions referred to above and the only limited possibilities for political influence through initiatives and referendums made the SVP party leadership realise that sulking was not a practical long-term solution. At the next by-election for the Federal Council in 2009, the long-time SVP party president, Ueli Maurer, stood for election and was elected to the federal government with a narrow majority. The claim by the SVP that, as the most popular party in the country, it should have a second seat on the Federal Council, remained on the political agenda and became a major topic of debate during the 2011 elections.

Table 4

#### Composition of the Federal Council ("magic formula")

(\*) In 2007/2008 the SVP expelled its Federal Council members

Party	1959	2003	2007	2008	2009	2011
FDP	2	2	2	2	2	2
CVP	2	1	1	1	1	1
SP	2	2	2	2	2	2
SVP	1	2	1	–	1	1
BDP			1*	2*	1	1

Widmer-Schlumpf and Schmid from the SVP parliamentary faction, with the result that both of them joined the newly-formed BDP.

Source: Swiss Federal Administration, <http://www.admin.ch/br/dokumentation/mitglieder/departementsvorsteher/index.html> (accessed 13 Feb 2012).

During the elections in 2011, the big questions were

whether the SVP would be able to profit from the difficulties of the previous legislature, whether the other parties would be punished by voters for deselection of Blocher and whether the newly-formed BDP would be successful. Could the concordance survive all these upheavals?

Table 5

**Members of the Federal Council**

Source: Swiss Federal Administration, <http://www.admin.ch/br/dokumentation/mitglieder/departementsvorsteher/index.html>

	<b>Canton</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Period</b>	<b>Department</b>
Doris Leuthard	AG	CVP	2006 –	UVEK (Environment)
Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf	GR	BDP	2007 –	EFD (Finance)
Ueli Maurer	ZH	SVP	2008 –	VBS (Defence)
Didier Burkhalter	NE	FDP	2009 –	EDA (Foreign Affairs)
Simonetta Sommaruga	BE	SP	2010 –	EJPD (Justice)
Johann Schneider-Ammann	BE	FDP	2010 –	EVD (Economic Affairs)
Alain Berset	FR	SP	2011 –	EDI (Home Affairs)

[html](http://www.admin.ch/br/dokumentation/mitglieder/departementsvorsteher/index.html) (accessed 13 Feb 2012).

At the beginning of 2011 there was plenty of evidence to suggest that the SVP would once again increase its share of the vote. It won a by-election for the Council of States in the Bern canton and many observers believed that this was the beginning of a resurgence for the SVP. But for voters, politics is not only about people, parties and “revenge” and during 2011 political issues once again came to the fore, including the nuclear power station disaster at Fukushima in Japan.

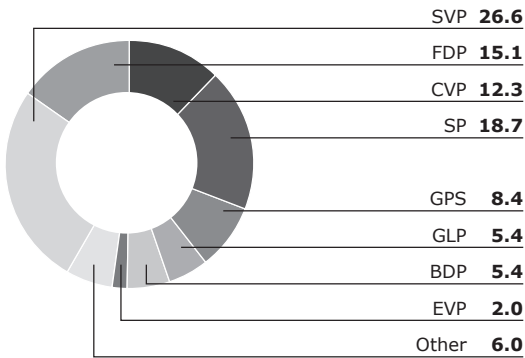
The federal government (Federal Council) reacted surprisingly quickly to the disaster by deciding to phase out nuclear power and, in doing so, hijacked the main election campaign theme of the Green Party (GPS), which was barely able to mobilise its supporters as a result. The main beneficiary of this situation was another relatively new party, the Green Liberal Party of Switzerland (GLP), which was formed in 2004 after a split with the Zurich Greens. Its goal is to effectively combine liberal and economic social policies with sustainable environmental policies. There are some differences between the “Melon Greens”, who tend to be closer to the ideology of the SP, and the “Cucumber Greens”, who are more centre-right, particularly on issues

relating to economic and financial policy.<sup>13</sup>

Fig. 4

**Parties in the National Council 2011 –  
Percentage of votes by party**

Source: Swiss Federal Administration, loc. cit.



The election campaign of 2011 proved that the Swiss voter is open to change and new ideas. New issues and news faces were welcomed. The two new parties, the GLP and the BDP, were the ones to profit from this, while the classic Federal Council parties, FDP, CVP, SP and SVP were the losers, along with the “established” greens from the GPS.

The SP was able to limit its losses in the 2011 National Council elections through the strategic withdrawal of its prominent, but also controversial member of the Federal Council, the Foreign Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey. It is a common ploy in Swiss politics to change a member of the Federal Council just before an election, so that voters’ attention is drawn to the party during the internal debate about who should be the successor. This proved to be a successful strategy for the SP, and it also managed to retain its second seat in the Federal Council without any problems. Alain Berset from Fribourg was elected as Calmy-Rey’s successor as Federal Council member. As part of a reshuffling of responsibilities, Berset took over the Department of Internal Affairs, whose previous head, Didier Burkhalter, switched to the Department of Foreign Affairs and will now represent Switzerland on the international stage.

13 | Cf. distribution for each party: [http://smartvote.ch/11\\_ch\\_nr/smartmap/candidates](http://smartvote.ch/11_ch_nr/smartmap/candidates) (accessed 13 Feb 2012).

Table 6  
**Council of States elections 2003-2011:  
 Distribution of seats by party**

<b>Party</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2011</b>
FDP	14	12	11
CVP	15	15	13
SP	9	9	11
SVP	8	7	5
GPS	–	2	2
GLP	–	1	2
BDP	–	–	1
Other	–	–	1

Source: Federal Statistical Office, [http://www.politik-stat.ch/srw/2011CH\\_de.html](http://www.politik-stat.ch/srw/2011CH_de.html) (accessed 13 Feb 2012).

The biggest casualties of these discussions on succession were the FDP, which had been ailing as a party for many years. Despite merging with Liberals, there was no great turnaround for the FDP in 2011. It suffered losses throughout the country because it lacked a particularly convincing campaign manifesto. Also, when it came to discussions on the concordance system, it became obvious that the FDP was over-represented by having two seats in the Federal Council. Although the FDP had been able to replace two of its Federal Council members in 2009 and 2010 on age grounds and replace them with new faces, the feeling was that, in the 2011 Federal Council elections, one of the FDP seats could be in danger, especially if that seat were contested. It was generally recognised that the SVP was mathematically entitled to a second seat, although there was no ideal SVP candidate available at the time. In the end, the FDP could be counted among the winners in 2011, in spite of its losses, as it was once again able to secure a second seat in the Federal Council.

The CVP, which had lost one of its two seats in 2003, was able to maintain its position to a greater or lesser degree. Even though it is still only the fourth strongest party in the National Council, with 12.3 per cent, it still has the most Council of States seats in the smaller chamber (cf. Table 6), and because of its moderate, balanced political approach, it still has significantly more political weight

than its factional strength alone would suggest. During the re-election of the Federal Council in 2011, the Federal Assembly confirmed the seat of Doris Leuthard of the CVP by a large majority. Since 2010 she has been in charge of the Federal Department of Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications.<sup>14</sup>

## SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK

In the new legislative period from 2011 to 2015, parliament and the Federal Government face the task of steering the Confederation through the choppy waters of internal and external affairs. As with its European neighbours, demographic and social change in Switzerland is creating internal political changes. In view of the changes that have taken place in energy policy and foreign trade, it is now important to re-establish a successful economy in a way that is different to that of the past. Things have changed for Switzerland on the international stage too. Changes to the global financial markets, in the Arab world, and also amongst the country's immediate neighbours, the European Union, have served to make it clear that Switzerland is not an island, let alone an "island of the blessed". The question of how best to develop relations with the EU will be of particular importance for the country's politicians over the coming years.<sup>15</sup>

**Demographic and social change is creating internal political changes. In view of the changes that have taken place in energy policy and foreign trade, it is important to re-establish a successful economy.**

Swiss voters showed in the 2011 elections that, in spite of many changes to the small details, they are still basically in favour of continuity and stability. Politics is by its nature about conflict resolution, but in the end, the majority of voters seem to clearly prefer a more measured approach based on consensus and concordance. During every election, the Swiss have shown that they are open to new ideas, as long as they are not too radical. The 2011 election year can be summed up as a "strengthening of the middle". Just how successful that will prove to be in the new legislative period that just has started depends on politicians' ability to conduct domestic and foreign affairs with a sense of proportion.

14 | Cf. Table 5.

15 | Cf. Burkard Steppacher, "Die EFTA-Staaten, der EWR und die Schweiz", *Jahrbuch der Europäischen Union 2011*, Baden-Baden, 2011, 253-256, here: 255.