In an international comparison, Switzerland is often considered as the main example of the consensus model of democracy (Lijphart 1984: 23-32). Among the 21 Western democracies analysed by Lijphart, Switzerland is the only whose Government is composed uninterruptedly since 1945 by a large coalition (Liberals, Christian Democrats, Agrarians and Socialists). When we speak of the parliamentary opposition, we have to remember that in the Swiss case there is not only one form of institutionalized opposition (led by the parliamentary groups), but different places where the opposition to the legislative acts can be expressed (Papadopoulos 1994: 114-115).

Our paper aims to explain how the parliamentary opposition in Switzerland is changed, especially given the change of electoral shares of the four main Swiss parties (rise of the Swiss People’s Party, weakening of the Radicals/Liberals and Christian Democrats) and the increasing polarization since 1990s.

In order to do this, our contribution will be divided into four different parties. First of all, we present shortly some specificities of the Swiss party system and we will discuss also the transformations that have happened since 1990s. Secondly, we want to discuss briefly about the organization and the role of the Swiss Parliament. Finally, we will present the main elements concerning the Swiss decision-making process, which is divided into three main sequences, and the opposition, that can be expressed in and outside the Parliament.
Some Introductory Elements about the Swiss Party System and its transformation

According to Ladner (2004, 2007), in a comparative perspective, the Swiss party system is characterized by two elements.

First of all, Switzerland shows an important “horizontal” fragmentation (i.e. high number of political parties in the Parliament). Since the introduction of proportional representation in 1918 for the elections of National Council, up to sixteen political parties were able to elect at least one MP at the Lower House. The “effective number of parties” index by Laakso/Taagepera shows clearly that the Swiss party system is one of the most fragmented. The average figure for Switzerland in the time between 1948 and 1995 is 5.9. Other countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium, France and Finland show figures above 5.0. Only Belgium, since the early 1980s, showed a higher figure than Switzerland. On the contrary, Germany, the UK, Austria and the USA show figures of below 3.0 for the same time period (Ladner 2007: 316).

An element that can help us to explain this high degree of fragmentation in the Swiss party system is connected to the federalism. In fact, the parties have historically positioned themselves first of all in the cantonal context. In other words, that means that the party systems vary in every canton. Usually, the national parties constitute more than federations of the cantonal parties trying to maintain a precarious unity at the federal level (Gruner 1977). According to Kriesi and Trechsel (2008: 89), “the first consequence of the fact that the parties were basically constituted at the cantonal level was the increase in the number of parties at the federal level, because some parties only exist in certain cantons and not in others. More important still is the fact that partisan federalism has traditionally contributed to the incoherence of each major party. As a consequence of federalism, the situation of one and the same party may differ considerably from one canton to another”.2

Secondly, Switzerland, despite this fragmentation, shows historically an important degree of stability of the electoral strength of the main political parties. For a long time, the electoral shares obtained by the major political parties didn’t know very important

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1 In addition to this “horizontal” fragmentation, there is also a significant “vertical” fragmentation of the Swiss party system. In fact, the Swiss political parties include not less than 180 cantonal sections and about 5’000 communal sections which enjoy a degree of autonomy, so much so that the voting instructions for the referenda may differ sometimes between the national parties and their cantonal sections (Hug 1994).

2 In 2013, the seats in the Lower House are still shared out to eleven parties: Swiss People’s Party (54 seats), Socialist Party (46), Radical/Liberal Party (30), Christian Democrats Party (28), Greens (15), Green Liberal Party (12), Conservative Democratic Party (9), Evangelical Party (2), Ligue of Ticinesi (2), Social-Christian Party (1) and Geneva Citizens Movement (1).
variations. In other words, the proportion of voters supporting the four largest parties (FDP - Radical Party, CVP - Christian Democrats Party, SVP - Swiss People’s Party and SP - Socialist Party) did not change significantly between 1945 and the early 1990s (see figure 1 below). This stability, among other things, is favoured by the gradual integration of the main parties in the government (i.e. Federal Council) who leads to a distribution of the seven seats between the four parties. This distribution remains unchanged for a long time and it represents the basis of the Swiss concordance system (Ladner 2007: 312-313).³

Therefore, until the beginning of the Nineties, the federal elections were generally characterized by a low degree of volatility. Obviously, this does not prevent that, according to Kriesi and Trechsel (2008: 93), we can identify at least three waves of opposition that lead to a decrease of the electoral success of the four major parties. The first phase is characterized by the Alliance of Independents (LdU), able to mobilize especially the voters without partisan attachments from among the new middle class. In the second phase (1960s), we observe the emergence of small parties on the radical right mobilized against the influx of foreigners that involves a relative increase of the polarization. In the late 1970s, there is the emergence of a third wave of opposition led by the small parties of the new left (including the Greens) (for more details, see Ladner 2007: 313). These three different waves of opposition are, however, only the prelude to a more important transformation of the Swiss party system connected to the rise of the Swiss People’s Party. Indeed, the Nineties are characterized by an important change with the rise of the Swiss People’s Party and the weakening of the Radicals/Liberals and Christian Democrats. The balance of power between the main parties knows a true “upheaval” (Figure 1). We observe an increasing polarization between, on the one hand, the Socialist Party and the Greens and, on the other hand, the SVP. At the same time, we witness the rise of electoral campaigns more mediatized and which need more financial resources (Gunzinger 2008; Weinmann 2009). The SVP increases uninterruptedly its share of the votes for the Lower House elections from 11.9 per cent in 1991 to 28.6 per cent in 2007. In 2011, after twenty years, the Swiss People’s Party loses supports in favour of the new centre parties (Green Liberal Party and Conservative Democratic Party). Anyway, the SVP is still the main political party in Switzerland.

³ Between 1959-2003, the seven seats were allocated this way: 2 Liberals (FDP), 2 Christian Democrats (CVP), 2 Social Democrats (SP) and 1 Swiss People’s Party (SVP). The composition has changed twice in the 2000s. During the period 2003-2007 (2 FDP, 2 SVP, 2 SP, 1 CVP) and since 2007 (2 FDP, 2 SP, 1 CVP, 1 SVP, 1 Conservative Democratic Party, BDP).
The Swiss People’s Party, during the recent period, knows the most important changes at different levels (organizational, ideological and electoral). In other words, we observe, in connection with the transformations of the international and Swiss context, the emergence of a “new” SVP.

With regard to the organizational dimension, we witness a real “nationalization” of the party, with the creation of twelve new cantonal sections between 1991 and 2001, the adoption of a common political agenda and the standardization of electoral campaigns which, moreover, rely on a professional political marketing (Skenderovic 2007: 55-57, 2009; Mazzoleni 2008: 78ff).

Concerning the ideological dimension, since the early 1990s, the Swiss People’s Party leaves its consensual attitude, adopted since the mid-1930s, in favour of an opposition sometimes uncompromising (Zürcher 2007). In the 1990s and 2000s, the SVP moves to the party defending especially agrarian interests to a party that advocates neoliberal positions for the economic and fiscal policy. As for the migration policy and the relationships with the European Union, the SVP promotes the adoption of a more restrictive legislation about the immigration and asylum and the defence of national identity against the “European bureaucratization”. At these claims also adds a strong
criticism of the establishment and the political class and the defence of a conservative view (“law and order”) (Mazzoleni 2008: 69ff). In sum, the Swiss People’s Party organizes now its discourse and its claims on two new cleavages related to the politicization of the immigration and European integration issues: on the one hand, the cleavage between openness and exclusion and, on the other hand, the cleavage between “losers” and “winners” of the globalization or “European integration” and “national sovereignty” (Kriesi et al. 2005; Rayner & Pilotti 2011).

Lastly, with regard to the electoral dimension, for a long time the SVP has been the smallest party among the parties represented at the Federal Council. In 2003, it becomes the first political party in Switzerland and in 2007 it obtains the highest electoral share ever achieved by a Swiss party since 1919 (29%). Under the leadership of its leader, the National Councillor and businessman of Zurich Christoph Blocher, the Swiss People’s Party left the former more centrist positions to move now on the right of the political spectrum.

In sum, nowadays the Swiss party system is structured into three camps, which can be placed in a two-dimensional space. The first dimension includes the classic opposition between the parties of the left, defending the welfare state and advocating the adoption of an environmental protection, and the parties of the right that claim economic liberalism and budgetary rigour. The second dimension includes the opposition between, on the one hand, the defenders of an open and culturally liberal Switzerland and, on the other hand, the defenders of Swiss traditions. The third dimension concerns the division of the right into two camps: the moderate right (FDP and CVP) and the nationalist-conservative right (SVP). More generally, the SVP’s success has contributed to increase at the same time the partisan competition and the degree of polarization of the Swiss party system and to create a less consensual style (Kriesi & Trechsel 2008: 96-97).

The Swiss Parliament and its recent changes

The Swiss Parliament, i.e. the Federal Assembly, is composed of two houses with equal power: the National Council (200 seats) and the Council of States (46 seats), all members of which are elected within the cantons. The 200 deputies of the Lower House are elected with a proportional system, based on the cantons’ demographic weight; the 46 senators of the Upper House are elected, with a few exceptions, with a majority system, two per canton (Lüthi 2007).
According to a widespread academic opinion, the Swiss regime is neither parliamentary nor presidential (Lijphart 1999). It displays some elements of both models (Table 1). For example, it is similar to the parliamentary system because the government is elected by the Parliament, while the independence enjoyed by the Federal Council tends to approach it to the presidential system.

Table 1 *The Swiss model between parliamentary system and presidential system*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present in the Swiss model</th>
<th>Components of parliamentary system</th>
<th>Components of presidential system</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Election of the Federal Council (i.e. the Government) by the Parliament</td>
<td>(Relative) independence of the Federal Council vis-à-vis the Parliament and the Federal Councillors vis-à-vis their political parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absent in the Swiss model</td>
<td>No political responsibility of the Federal Council vis-à-vis the Parliament (no matter of trust, confidence motion or motion of no confidence). No possibility for the Government to dissolve Parliament</td>
<td>No popular election of the Federal Council (the Government has nevertheless the legislative initiative)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


According to Varone (2004: 258-259), with regard to the relationship between the Government and the Parliament, we can highlight three characteristics of the Swiss model. First of all, the Federal Council is not obliged to present a political program to be elected. The Government presents at the Parliament its guidelines and its annual budget management, but it is not from them that the Federal Councillors are elected. Secondly, because of the concordance system, in the Swiss political system there is not alternation between the majority and the opposition. Indeed, as we have already seen, the Government is composed by a large coalition including now five different parties (FDP, CVP, SVP, SP and – since 2007 – BDP). Thirdly, the Swiss model is faced to constraints of the direct democracy on the government and parliamentary actions.

We can summarize the following idiosyncratic elements on the relations between the legislative and the executive:

- The Government (i.e. the Federal Council) cannot dissolve the Federal Assembly.
- The seven members of the collegial federal executive are elected every four years on an individual basis by Parliament.
- The Parliament cannot dismiss the Government, which remains in office even if the Federal Assembly refuses to support its policies (or if the people veto policies in referendums).
• The Government cannot veto Parliament’s decisions.
• Finally, the Constitution explicitly declares the Federal Assembly as the supreme authority within the Federation.

Despite this apparent centrality, the Swiss Parliament has historically been characterized by significant weakness in the decision-making process (for more information, see Papadopoulos 1997; Kriesi 1998; Linder 1999), especially for three reasons:

• The ex post “Sword of Damocles” of the referendum on parliamentary decisions.
• A sophisticated pre-parliamentary phase, in which especially corporatist actors used to strike compromises that were formally ratified subsequently.
• The “militia” principle and a weak degree of professionalization.

The 1990s are characterized by the onset of an important process of adaptation of Swiss legislation to the European legislation and the adoption of many social and economic policy reforms (Mach 1999, 2006). Generally, the political authorities, including of course the MPs, are faced an increasing complexity of the problems to solve and the extents of the areas to be treated. The constant rise, among other things, of the parliamentary proceedings seems to show clearly the increased parliamentary duties (Table 2).

Table 2 Parliamentary proceedings at the Swiss Parliament, 1995-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motions</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>482</td>
<td>169%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postulates</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>109%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Initiatives</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>318%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Parliamentary Proceedings</td>
<td>954</td>
<td>1224</td>
<td>1478</td>
<td>2065</td>
<td>116%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own elaboration from Parliamentary Services, Bern.

Thus, the transformation of the context leads to a change in the perception that the members of Parliament have about their function. The majority of them are aware of the necessity to revise the organization of its work and its remuneration. Consequently, the Federal Assembly adopt parliamentary reforms that have aimed at reasserting the political status of the Parliament and at professionalizing its members: a reform of the
committee system in 1991 that created 12 permanent committees for each chamber (Lüthi 1997; Jegher 1999), a significant rise of allowances for MPs and parliamentary groups and the adoption in 2002 of a new Federal Act on the Parliament, which recognizes to Federal Assembly more powers and influence in the decision-making process. At the same time, the proportion of full-time parliamentarians increased (Pilotti 2012). Another reason that seems to lead to a “reparliamentarization” process (at least in domestic matters) is the higher level of polarization that made pre-parliamentary compromises more difficult and shifted decision-making into the parliamentary arena.

The Swiss Decision-Making Process and the Parliamentary Opposition

In the Swiss decision-making process we can distinguish three main sequences in which oppositions to a governmental bill can be expressed (Sciarini 2007).

Firstly, the pre-parliamentary phase, which is historically considered crucial, includes the Federal Council, the administration, business associations, parties and the cantons. The government and civil servants regard this step as a tool for making decisions that are at the same time technically appropriate and politically acceptable. The development of the pre-parliamentary phase originates from the multiple forms of uncertainty that the Federal Council faces when preparing a legislative act.

Secondly, in the parliamentary phase, the respective committees of the two Chambers, i.e. National Council (Lower House) and Council of States (Upper House), proceed to a first examination of the proposals prepared by the executive. Then, the bill is discussed in plenary sessions of both Houses of Parliament. The deliberations include three different votes: the vote for the general discussion on the bill, the detail vote (for different articles of the bill) and the final vote (about the entire bill). If there is a disagreement between the two Chambers, the bill circulates between them and if no agreement is found a “conciliation committee” tries to overcome differences. If it fails, the bill is abandoned.

With the adoption of a bill by the Parliament, the legislative process is not yet necessarily complete, because there may be a third step: the referendum phase. More precisely, the referendum gives the people an opportunity to challenge the bill adopted by

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4 However, we point out that the Swiss Parliament, in an international comparison with 19 others parliaments of the OECD countries is characterized by one of the weakest degree of professionalization. Moreover, the Swiss MPs earn less than the majority of national parliamentarians in Western countries (Z’graggen 2009: 100-103).

5 Most bills have a governmental origin, but this proportion is lower than in parliamentary systems.
Federal Assembly. The popular vote can be optional (by petition) or compulsory, depending on the normative level of the legislative act. If a referendum is not requested, or if the bill is supported by a majority of voters (and of the cantons in case of constitutional reforms), the law is definitively adopted. Less than 10 per cent of bills are challenged in a referendum, which often means that objections have been “internalised” by the decision-making bodies (see Carl Friedrich’s “law of anticipated reactions”). Experience shows that in order to have reasonable chances to avoid a referendum on bills, they must *de facto* be supported by a qualified parliamentary majority.

**Figure 2** Electoral shares for the National Council elections of the government parties, 1919-2011 (percentage)

![Graph showing electoral shares for the National Council elections of the government parties, 1919-2011.](source_image)

Source: Own elaboration from Federal Statistical Office, Neuchâtel.

Figure 2 shows clearly that the government parties pick up the big majority of the votes. The first increase, between 1928 and 1931, is related to the election of the first minister of the Party of farmers, traders and independents (the forerunner of the Swiss People’s Party). The decrease during the 1930 depends on the rise of the Socialist Party, which enter into Government only in 1943. Both declines observed during the Sixties and the Eighties are respectively dependent of the success of small nationalist parties of the right and the parties of the New Left (especially the Greens). In 1991, for the first time, the electoral share of the four government parties (FDP, CVP, SP and SVP) dropped to...
below 70% (Ladner 2007: 313ff). That said, in 2011, almost 80% of the electorate voted for a political party represented in the Federal Council. Hence, it is more difficult to distinguish really a parliamentary opposition, as it is defined in parliamentary or presidential systems.

Oppositional behaviour in Switzerland can be expressed normally by the refusal of the general discussion on a bill, the (not frequent, even for opponents) refusal of the bill at the final vote, or by amendments during the debate on the different articles of the law. We can also maybe consider the most binding among the propositional instruments, such as parliamentary initiatives (or parliamentary motions, the latter leaving more discretion to the government), as oppositional tools as well. They aim at generating legislation in the absence of governmental initiation (but this may denote neglect or other priorities, not lack of will).

The degree of parliamentary opposition, which interests us more closely, is historically low in the Swiss Parliament. This situation is related to the consensual form of democracy (Konkordanzdemokratie) characterizing the Swiss political system, itself largely an indirect effect of the risk of a veto through the referendum in the end of the policy process.

More generally, Henry Kerr (1978: 52) has remarked that in the fragmented Swiss party system it

is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to identify political opposition […] it is also nearly impossible to distinguish “opposition” from “government” in this governmental system of rule by an “all-party” coalition. The magic formula of 2:2:2:1 representation in the Federal Council translates into a norm for coalition formation whereby everyone is “in” and no one is “out”. The numerical strength of the four major parties represented in the governmental coalition far exceeds the numbers required for a “minimum winning” coalition.

In other words, it is difficult to identify a “true opposition” in a system in which the four major parties were represented in the government on a proportional basis (the magic formula that lasted more than four decades). Similarly, Kerr (1978: 53) has observed that
“[t]he pressures leading to consensus within the Swiss Federal Assembly have removed in very large measure the law-making function as well as the expression of partisan conflict from the parliamentary arena.

Nevertheless, this last remark must be revised for the recent period. In fact, since the 1980s, and especially the 1990s, the law-making function of the Swiss Parliament has increased (see, for instance, the increase of parliamentary initiatives and motions, table 2 above) (Graf 1991; Riklin & Möckli 1991: 147ff; Sciarini 2002: 593ff). Moreover, during the 1991-1995 legislature, Jegher (1999) has also shown an increase, although slight, of the rate of amendments introduced by the Parliament to proposals of the Government in comparison with the 1971-1975 legislature (respectively 44% vs 40%). Nevertheless, in view of these data, it is also true that “the Federal Council is still capable of passing more than half of the legislative acts without modification” (Sciarini 2007: 479). Unfortunately, we do not have more recent data on the intensity of these modifications.6

The degree of parliamentary opposition varies between the two Chambers. Nicolet et al. (2003) has shown that the average level of conflict, for the intermediary and final votes, is systematically higher in the National Council (Lower House) than in the Council of States (Upper House). This difference may be explained by a different balance of power in the two Chambers. Indeed, in the Upper House, the two main parties of the moderate right (FDP and CVP) are dominant contrary to the Lower House, where the main parliamentary groups are SVP (nationalist-conservative right) and SP with the Greens (left).

According to Papadopoulos (1997: 103), we may hypothesize that the amplitude of amendments introduced by the Federal Assembly, and consequently the degree of parliamentary opposition, are a function of the degree of political conflict. In other words, “the Parliament modifies few of the executive’s proposals in the consensual periods, acting in these circumstances as the “notary of the government”. But in a period of crisis and/or when the prevailing degree of conflict is higher, the Parliament presumably exerts its legislative and controlling functions more assertively” (Sciarini 2007: 480). It is less easy to consider the use of propositional instruments as expression of opposition because they also serve the self-mediatisation of MPs.

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6 The analysis of Zehnder (1988: 73ff) for the period 1971-1975 has shown that the Federal Assembly modified only a minority of the executive proposals. Moreover in a majority of cases the modifications were minor.
According to Kerr, in classical theories conflict is seen to turn on partisan issues dividing the “opposition” and the “government” in a fight for control of the executive. However, in the Swiss case, based on a permanent large coalition (or even an all-party system of government), these kinds of fights occur less frequently (but more frequently nowadays: parties are no longer certain that their governmental seats will remain unchallenged). The parliamentary opposition in Switzerland “is a continual shifting of alliances across parties as one issue after another competes for the attention of the opponents. At times, issues may define alliances in partisan terms; in other instances, issues may unite parties in common opposition to governmental policies; and, more often than not, issues mobilize alliances across party divisions” (Kerr 1978: 56-57). Kerr has distinguished two fundamental ways in which the issues debated in Parliament may vary: issue-saliency and issue-partisanship. The joint variation of these two characteristics of issues defines four basic types of parliamentary opposition in Federal Assembly (Figure 3).

Figure 3 Kerr's typology of parliamentary opposition in Switzerland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>PARTISAN OPPOSITION</td>
<td>RITUALISTIC OPPOSITION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>FACTIONAL OPPOSITION</td>
<td>CORPORATIST OPPOSITION</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kerr (1978: 57).

Always according to Kerr (1978: 57-58), this typology allows us to identify “the conditions under which Parliament will most likely perform its legislative and representative functions and those conditions under which it will relinquish these functions to the executive branch”. Kerr defines the four different types of parliamentary opposition as follows:

- The partisan opposition is associated with highly salient issues, which divide MPs into opposing partisan camps (e.g. codetermination issue or abortion issue).
• The factional opposition is associated with highly salient issues that cut across parties and divide them internally into opposing factions (e.g. land use law).

• The ritualistic opposition occurs on issues where, aware of its minority status, the opposition views the legislative outcome as inevitable and defends its program exclusively as a matter of principle (e.g. defence budget in the past).

• The corporatist opposition is associated on issues with low degree of saliency and partisanship (this seems a rather unspecified and residual category).

This typology seems still useful to identify and classify the parliamentary opposition in Switzerland following the main issues in Swiss politics. However, more recently partisan opposition is on the rise and factional opposition not very important: polarization generates partisan cohesion and divides between ideological camps (see Appendix 1). Indeed, usually the major parties are winners in parliamentary votes; this “win-win” situation is characteristic of the consensual character of Swiss politics. However, recently the success rates of the nationalist-conservative right-wing SVP and left-wing SP have decreased as a symptom of the higher level of polarization, although these are the two largest parties in terms of electoral strength (Appendix 2).7 The high success rates of the moderate right-wing Radical/Liberal FDP and Christian Democratic CVP, in spite of their electoral erosion, can be explained by the tripolar structure of the party system (see Appendix 1). They have a pivotal role and can alternatively coalesce with the Left and the nationalist Right (figure 4 below).

Figure 4 below shows the evolution of the structure of party cleavages in the National Council (similar data is not available in the Council of States due to a different voting procedure; both SP and SVP are underrepresented in this Chamber due to the election mode). Although this figure does not show who voted in favour and who against a bill, this can be more or less inferred with a reasonable degree of confidence from the legislative coalitions (for more details, see also Schwarz 2009: 47ff).

As a non-parliamentary system, the Swiss system presents the following peculiarities:

• Governmental parties oppose governmental bills.

• Non-governmental parties support governmental bills.

7 A more specific analysis on the 2003-2007 legislature at the National Council confirms that each of the main parliamentary groups has won more than half of the votes. This analysis also displays variations of success rates depending on policy issues (data available on request).
As a matter of fact, the condition for participation to government is much more electoral size (a small party that supports governmental bills will not be co-opted) than loyalty to governmental policies.

**Figure 4** *Frequency and evolution of legislative coalitions in the National Council (percentage)*

The most notable findings are:

- The prevalence and durability of a Left-Right cleavage in spite of consensual politics (left column).
- The increasing opposition between the national-populist SVP and the other governmental parties (third column from the left).
- The erosion of the consensus among the major governmental parties (last column).

Finally, we should not overlook the relevance of the referendum phase for the opposition. Opponents to a bill are well aware that the outcome can be reversed in a referendum and tend to use this “veto point” as well, especially as even supporters of a bill in Parliament may oppose it in the referendum if they feel that the public opinion is against (“bandwagon” effect). In the early 1990s, the majority of MPs interviewed for a research (63%) said they would not hesitate to use the referendum venue (Kobach 1993: 160-161; see also Papadopoulos 2001).
With regard to the referendum phase and the attitude of governing party, the comparison of two periods (1971-1979 and 1995-2003) provides us some interesting results (Table 3). First of all, the Socialist Party was the first party that opposed in several occasions governmental bills. Between the Seventies and late 1990s and the early years of this century, SP’s opposition on legislative acts subject to referendum (compulsory or optional) and supported by the Federal Council and the majority of the Parliament decreased slightly. On the contrary, the opposition increased on legislative acts resulting from popular initiatives. The evolution of SVP concerning its voting recommendations running counter the Federal Council knows a radical change. In fact, in the 1970s, the party was characterized by a “governmental profile”; only in very few cases its positions diverged from those of the Government. Since the mid-1990s, Swiss People’s Party shows clearly a more critical attitude towards legislative acts supported by the Federal Council (Sciarini 2007: 485-486).


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Socialist Party (SP)</th>
<th>Swiss People's Party (SVP)</th>
<th>SP and/or SVP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compulsory referendum</td>
<td>25 15</td>
<td>3 30</td>
<td>28 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optional referendum</td>
<td>47 43</td>
<td>6 29</td>
<td>53 71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular initiative</td>
<td>52 65</td>
<td>0 18</td>
<td>52 83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In sum, “between 1995 and 2003, the Swiss Government faced the opposition of (at least) one party of the governing coalition in almost three cases out of four in popular votes arising from an optional referendum, and in four cases out of five in popular votes arising from a popular initiative” (Sciarini 2007: 486). More recently, in the legislature 2007-2011, 25 referendum votes took place. In only two of them the Government could count with a support to its bills by all governmental parties; the SP recommended rejection in 13 cases and the SVP in 12 (Sciarini 2011).
Conclusion

Katzenstein (1985) remarked that the search for consensus is particularly widespread in small European countries because of their economic vulnerability and their dependence on the outside world. These situation “has favoured the development of a sense of common national destiny, itself propitious to the emergence of “corporatist-like” arrangements between the State, interest groups, and political parties” (Sciarini 2007: 492).

In regard to Switzerland, we observed that since 1990s the Swiss concordance system faced to some important challenges and sometimes it has been sorely tried. These evolutions taken place in a political and institutional context characterized by several changes. These changes are related also with the process of “Europeanization” of Swiss legislation and with the emergence of a new cleavage between the partisans of the openness of the country and the defenders of Swiss traditions.

On the one hand, we witness an improvement of the Parliament’s influence over the decision-making process (creation of 12 permanent committees for each chamber, new Federal Act on the Parliament), an increased professionalization of parliamentary mandates (rise of allowances for MPs and parliamentary groups) and an important increase of parliamentary activity (parliamentary initiatives, motions, etc.). On the other hand, we observed a change in power relations between the main political parties (rise of the SVP, weakening of FDP and CVP) and an increase of legislative acts contested by referenda since 1990s. This last factor and the rate of amendments introduced by the Parliament to proposals of the Government show an increase of the opposition in the Swiss Politics.

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8 For information, from 1875 to 2013, the number of successful referenda is 176. Almost half of them (84) have been launched between 1991 and 2013. Similarly, the successful popular initiatives from 1893 until now are 184; 80 of them (43%) have been launched since 1991.
REFERENCES


**Appendix 1** *Distance between, and cohesion within, parliamentary groups 2007-2011*


**Appendix 2** *Success rates in Swiss Parliament, 1995-2011 (percentage)*

Source: Michael Hermann, Sotomo, University of Zurich.