

The Swiss Radical Right in Perspective

A Reevaluation of Success Conditions in Switzerland

Damir Skenderovic

Center for European Studies
New York University
58 W 10th Street
New York, NY 10011
Tel: ++1 212 998 3997
Fax: ++1 212 995 4188
Email: damir.skenderovic@unifr.ch

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As we have witnessed since the 1990s, both the success of right-wing populist parties and the activities of New Right intellectuals and extreme-right groups demonstrate the continuing mobilization of the radical right in Western Europe.¹ While the emergence of the radical right in major Western European democracies such as France and Germany has alarmed public opinion and been the focus of scholarly works for some time, attention has recently shifted more to smaller European democracies.² Following the electoral success of the Progress Party in Norway in 1997 and the recent upsurge of the Swedish militant extreme right, the electoral victory of the Austrian Freedom Party in October 1999 may be seen as the latest example of the rise of the radical right in smaller European countries. In Switzerland too, with the political and ideological transformation of the Swiss People's Party we see another example of the success of right-wing populist politics in a small democracy. Nonetheless, for many, Switzerland still represents an exceptional case and its radical right is rarely compared with Western European counterparts.

In the *first part* of my paper I will place the commonly encountered assumption of Switzerland as a special case into perspective. I will discuss five prevalent arguments concerning Switzerland's exceptional position which emphasize aspects of Swiss political institutions and its party system as well as historical and cultural factors, which are generally seen as creating disadvantageous conditions for the success of radical-right politics in Switzerland. Thereafter, I will suggest a reconsideration and partial revision of certain of these arguments. In the second part I will investigate several variables which are important for an analytical framework of favorable conditions for radical-right politics, and will then examine whether these variables are detectable in Switzerland. Finally, based on the concept of radical right, I will explore in the third part of the paper the Swiss radical right as a political family whose factions share similar ideological features, but which have distinct strategic and political aims. In this regard I will stress ideologies of exclusion as the doctrinal core of the radical right and further elucidate some main characteristics of its organizational structures and political strategies.

Switzerland as an exception

Comparative studies of the radical right in Western Europe have barely taken into account the Swiss case.³ Although in recent years several articles on the Swiss radical right have been published in edited volumes compiling single-country case studies (Gentile/Kriesi 1998, Altermatt/Skenderovic 1998, Husbands 2000), there have been no profound comparative

findings including the case of Switzerland. In addition, domestic scholarship tends to regard the Swiss radical right as a somewhat uniquely Swiss phenomenon, and thus often fails to situate it in a broader analytical framework allowing for comparative conclusions (e.g. Pitterle 1981, Ebel/Fiala 1983). Unlike research on new social movements, where Swiss scholars have made major contributions, social science scholarship on the radical right seems to still be in its infancy. There are various reasons for this low representation in comparative work and the rather exceptional view of the Swiss radical right. In the following I will discuss five main arguments:

First, from a historical point of view, some scholars stress that during the 1930s and 1940s Switzerland did not have a fascist or national socialist regime (*historical argument*). They have, therefore, assumed a very low tolerance in Swiss political culture for an anti-democratic right-wing stance or a demagogic revitalization of radical-right patterns of thought (Helms 1997: 44). Indeed, during the 1930s fascist political groups were on the fringe of Swiss political life and could only establish themselves in a few cities and cantons. Likewise, during World War II, Switzerland's political system continued more or less to function as a democracy and multiparty system despite being encircled by totalitarian regimes.⁴ In the postwar era, the view that a strong army and solid democratic political culture were the dominant reasons for Switzerland's having been spared a totalitarian regime was widely embraced by authorities and the public. In addition, the general view persisted that, compared to other European countries during World War II, authoritarian, anti-democratic as well as antisemitic ideologies were ephemeral phenomena in Swiss society and politics.

Second, several studies on Switzerland emphasize the highly unifying effect of the 'consociational system' (Lijphart 1968, Hottinger 1997) and the strong integrative capacity of the Swiss party system (*consociational argument*). From this viewpoint, the Swiss political system does not accommodate radical parties unless they follow an opposition policy loyal to the system (Helms 1997: 43-44). A pillar of this stability is the governmental coalition, (based on the so-called magic formula established in 1959), which is composed of two members of the Radical Democratic Party, two of the Christian Democratic Party, two of the Social Democratic Party, and one member of the Swiss People's Party. Moreover, the large electoral support for the four parties forming the government coalition suggests that there are strong political alignments to the established parties, and that the 'consociational system' has strong support among Swiss voters.⁵

The *third* argument stresses the notion of direct democracy as an institutionalized “safety valve” (Armingeon 1995: 55-57, Helms 1997: 47) and attempts to explain why in the past the splinter right-wing populist parties were not as strong as electorate parties (*direct democracy argument*). In this view, Switzerland’s unique way of political decision-making allows groups excluded from or only partially included in the ‘consociational system’ to advance their interests by launching popular initiatives or referenda against a parliamentary decision (Luthardt 1991/92, Trechsel/Sciarini 1998). They do not have to put the majority of their efforts on election and parliamentary work, but can secure their political survival by focusing on direct democratic opportunities. This means of exerting political pressure gives small parties as well as voters the ability to express their oppositional stance to policies embraced by the government or the established parties, without to have a strong electoral and parliamentary position. Indeed, there are many examples of the successful use of the instruments of direct democracy by smaller parties (at times in collaboration with extra-parliamentary groups) to shape the country’s political agenda.

The *fourth* argument involves specific notions and features of Swiss national identity (*state-nation argument*). Switzerland is generally described as the prototype of a state-nation strongly relying on political will (Kohn 1956, Deutsch 1976). According to Habermas (1992), one may legitimately claim that there is a strong ‘constitutional patriotism’ in Switzerland. The federal state brings together four ethnoculturally distinct regions with their own languages and cultures. This and the institutional mixture of the three key elements: direct democracy, federalism and neutrality, is seen as a pillar of Swiss national identity (Sciarini et al. 1997). Some thus argue that Swiss civic nationalism is difficult for the radical right to exploit, which, in its ultra-nationalist discourse, depends upon the concept of an homogenous ethnic and culture nation.

The *fifth* argument stresses the presumed notion of respect and tolerance toward minorities or other cultures among large sections of the Swiss population (*tolerance argument*). These values purportedly contrast with the ideas and goals of radical-right actors whose ideology is generally based on antipathy and intolerance towards minorities (Armingeon 1995: 55). Surveys from previous years reveal that fundamental rights, such as freedom of conscience and the right to one’s own language and culture, are highly respected among the Swiss population (Melich 1991, Armingeon 1995). The tolerance argument is sustained by the fact that federalism

and elaborate minority rights provide a favorable institutional framework for minorities. It presents as well the firm ground of the widely acclaimed Swiss multiculturalism which has helped to create a climate of fairly reciprocal comprehension between autochthonous minorities. Thus, in spite of four different linguistic groups there is an astonishing cultural and ethnic cohesion in the country. The longstanding cooperative relationship between previously antagonistic Catholics and Protestants factions is taken as further evidence of the integrating capacity of Swiss society and politics.

The special case revisited

In order to allow a comparative analysis of the Swiss radical right based on cross-nationally detectable conditions for radical-right successes, we must first revisit the five mentioned arguments and partially revise them. Specifically, it is necessary to confront some of these common arguments with recent developments and changes in Swiss politics and society and, subsequently to adapt them accordingly.

First, during the last years, new research findings and publications have increasingly challenged the *historical argument*. Historical studies of the 1930s and 1940s convincingly point out that Switzerland's past must be seen in the wider European context. Recent research has revealed, for instance, that ideologies of discrimination such as antisemitism emerged and were often more widespread than many had long been made to believe (Mattioli 1998, Altermatt 1999). It would, therefore, be pertinent to expand historical research into ideologies and practices of discrimination, and to improve research concepts on Swiss national identity and nationalism by focusing on the exclusionary consequences of an entrenched national community. For instance, an important area of research should focus on the enduring features of the discourses and politics of exclusion towards other cultures or ethnic groups.⁶ Furthermore, it would be important to both revisit and deepen research work on individuals and political networks in Switzerland, which during the 1930s were involved in the so-called 'Movement of the Fronts' (Wolf 1969). For example, it would be instructive to examine whether we detect continuous paths in the political work of these individuals and political networks during the postwar period.⁷ Finally, we should consider as well that the Swiss radical right today has a major stake in historical questions, especially as they relate to the World War II period. The recent debates on

dormant Swiss bank accounts as well as on Swiss refugee policy during World War II demonstrated the influential role that the radical right is playing on these issues.

Second, the *consociational argument* has begun to lose its persuasiveness in recent years as the Swiss political system has become increasingly more polarized, and long-standing notions of concordance and consensus are seeming to fade. During the 1990s, the Swiss People's Party, a member of the government, has regularly played the role of opposition within the governmental coalition, and continues to challenge the consociational system. In 1992, for instance, the party launched for the first time in its history a federal initiative, named "Against illegal immigration", which demonstrated its strong disapproval of the authorities' asylum policy. In addition, the rather high degree of mistrust and skepticism towards the political elite and its institutions among large sections of the voters represents another challenge to the Swiss consociational system, and may also be seen as providing considerable electoral potential for right-wing populist parties.⁸

Third, the *direct democracy argument*, which stresses the importance of direct democracy as a political safety valve, has also to be reconsidered since, in essence, it ignores the considerable impact of campaigning and public pressure on political institutions which evolves out of the use of direct democracy. The safety valve notion of course explains the lack of electoral success and parliamentary representation of the radical right by pointing to the compensatory function of direct democratic tools such as initiatives and referenda. However, this approach neglects the fact that direct democracy allows the radical right to lead large public campaigns to promote their popular initiatives, with the result that far-reaching sections of the voting public are becoming even more familiar with radical-right goals and ideology. Considering this, I would even argue that direct democracy provides opportunity structures which are of great importance and favorable to the emergence and mobilization of the radical right. Moreover, direct democracy provides efficient instruments to exert continuous pressure on policy making of the established political parties.

Fourth, the *state-nation argument* needs as well to be revised and confronted with new research questions. Recently, research has emphasized that Swiss national identity is built not only on the notion of the state-nation based on political will and civic rights, but on cultural and ethnic categories as well (Kriesi 1999a, Skenderovic 2001). The continuous construction of national ideas and myths contributes to, as Froidevaux (1997: 58) calls it, "an ethnic construction relying on Switzerland as an exceptional and insular case" (translation D.S.). In this regard,

citizenship rights, above all, became an important research area in which the impact of the notion of Switzerland as a culture and even ethnic nation is shown (Centlivres 1990, Ireland 1994). We have to consider that the ethnocultural framing of Swiss national identity and ideology represents an historically and culturally determined opportunity structure which the radical right uses as a counter concept to the idea of the nation as a political or civic community (Koopmans/Statham 1999).

Finally, the *tolerance argument* - drawing on the assumption that the functioning of Swiss multiculturalism is evidence of the high level of respect and tolerance among the Swiss society - must be reconsidered. One should not forget that what I have elsewhere called (Skenderovic 1998), '*multiculturalisme indigène*' (indigenous multiculturalism) in Switzerland is often seen as being of fairly limited utility for the challenge of a broader multicultural society which would include foreigners (Linder 1998). Multicultural coexistence, reinforced by institutional opportunity structures and political will in favor of minority policy has failed, to a certain extent, to develop open attitudes toward new minorities and has not resulted in the establishment of inclusive opportunity structures for recent migrants. Among others, the debates and politics of radical-right actors has contributed, by repeatedly problematizing migration issues and asylum policy, to the construction of a national identity relying on exclusive nationhood and mistrustful views of Non-Swiss individuals. Moreover, we must not forget that there has been a noticeable degree of radical-right and xenophobic patterns of thought in sections of the population, expressed at federal and poll votes and regularly detected by opinion surveys.⁹

Socioeconomic, political and discursive conditions

In order to put the Swiss radical right in comparative perspective, we must first examine external variables such as social changes, political institutions and cultural discourses, generally considered in theories and explanations of the emergence of radical-right politics in contemporary Western Europe. For some scholars, modernization and socioeconomic crisis are significant reasons for the attraction of radical-right patterns of thought and the electoral success of right-wing populist parties (Heitmeyer 1992, Falter 1994). In their view, modernization has liberated social alignments from traditional ties leading to fragmentation of social life and social disintegration, and that, consequently, the radical right responds to an increased longing for greater clarity and certainty. To this end, the radical right provides guidance through rigid and

closed systems of thought which serve as an aid to self-orientation. As an example we may take the homogenizing discourse of exclusion and inclusion within the nation state (Elwert 1989, Wimmer 1996).

Nevertheless, some empirical studies suggest that it is insufficient to interpret the emergence of the radical right as a reaction to modernization and socioeconomic crisis, attracting mostly so-called ‘modernization-losers’ (e.g. Willems 1993, Karapin 1998a). Since socially disoriented and disadvantaged people are not more attracted than others to radical-right value systems, we may consider that real loss of status or unemployment is less relevant than the subjective perception of alleged disadvantage (Minkenberg 2000). Thus, among the supporters of radical-right parties, we find many who simply believe themselves threatened by ongoing socioeconomic and cultural changes, and are hence described in research studies as being in a state of relative deprivation (Hennig 1994).¹⁰ To this purpose some argue that the radical right in Western democracies has to be characterized as a manifestation of ‘*Wohlstandschauvinismus*’ (Ignazi 1997, Minkenberg 1998).

In Switzerland, we find indications suggesting that socioeconomic reasons alone are not satisfactory in explaining the attraction of the radical right’s demands and attitudes. At the beginning of the 1970s, xenophobic attitudes and demands for restrictive migration policy were widely espoused by the public during a time of economic stability and relative prosperity, before the oil crisis and the economic slump had happened. In 1999, the exit polls for the Swiss national elections showed that a majority of the people in high-income brackets had voted for the Swiss People’s Party (Longchamp 2000). Finally, a study on the Swiss extreme-right subculture concludes that unemployment and social marginality are not significant characteristics of extreme-right militants (Gentile et al. 1995).

Other studies on the radical right in Western Europe, concerned mainly with the party system, suggest focusing on political opportunity structures in order to grasp its success (e.g. Betz 1994, Kriesi 1999b). To this end, we may consider the changes in the political systems of most Western democracies since the 1970s. One such example is the development of larger political parties from mass parties and the transition of catch-all-parties to cartel parties (Katz/Mair 1995). In addition, the established parties have adopted to a high degree co-operative power sharing mechanisms and institutional arrangements. Public mistrust towards the political parties in power and attitudes of disillusionment with politics (*Politikverdrossenheit*) are often

consequences of this consensual system of negotiation and the lack of real opposition forces. Moreover, since political alignment with parties has dropped considerably and the degree of volatility among the electorate has increased, a breeding-ground for protest voting has developed, and, consequently, for the growth of radical parties, which mostly present themselves as anti-system parties (Satori 1976, Fennema 1997).¹¹

According to this way of thinking, it is not surprising that in democracies such as Switzerland or Austria - in which during the post-war period major parties of the moderate right and left have moved closer together and have come to share power - we find a political and electoral space which the right-wing populist parties were able to fill (Kriesi 1995, Bischof/Pelinka 1996). They use the common strategy of inciting popular resentment against the established political elite and the government, and then present themselves as the defenders of those alienated from these negotiational arrangements.

For example, the Swiss right-wing populist parties regularly oppose governmental proposals involving the country's international integration (such as the European Economic Space treaty, or the Provision of UN Peacekeeping Troops), and their rejection referenda must be seen as "meaningful votes against the government" (Kobach 1997: 207). In 1992, 72 percent of the people voting against Switzerland's membership in the European Economic Area (EEA), a treaty vigorously combated by the Swiss People's Party, expressed their mistrust towards the government. As mentioned previously, survey data from the 1990s indicate that Swiss voters generally have a rather high degree of mistrust towards political institutions. Finally, we may add that 25 percent of Swiss People's Party's electorate in the 1999 national elections were volatile voters, which suggest the party's significant attraction for protest voters (Longchamp 2000).¹²

A further external variable relevant in explaining radical-right success is the discursive or cultural opportunity structure. As Koopmans/Statham (1999) have argued, the classical opportunity structure model fails to take into account how social movements mobilize symbolic resources in order to set forth their proposals. In their opinion, the radical right has become successful by mobilizing within an ethnic-cultural framing of national identity and national ideology, using it as a counter concept to the idea of the nation as a political or civic community. By examining the debates on Swiss national identity, we notice that the radical right, in its conception of national identity, employs exclusionist cultural and ethnic notions of the Swiss nation. It refers in its discourse on migration, multiculturalism and citizenship to specific notions

of 'Swissness' (Sciarini et al. 1997, Skenderovic 1999). As Giugni and Passy (1998: 6) point out, Swiss citizenship is based on an ethnic-assimilationist model, where "migrants face a closed national community and must downplay their ethnic difference in order to adapt to the norms and cultural codes of the host society".

Following this line of argument, we may suggest that the radical right can rely on particular cultural opportunity structures present in Switzerland, given that many Swiss see themselves as members of a national group held together by common historical experiences, mind-set, and life-style. They exploit national characteristics and myths constructed and deployed to build a self-referential feeling of group identity, of 'us', which they employ together with an ideology of integration whose appeal crosses social classes. Using national categories and symbols, they refer not only to the constitutional bases of the federal state, but also to language, culture and historical origins.¹³

The radical right as a political family

Generally speaking, the radical right in Switzerland has to be seen as a political family composed of various types of organizations with common ideological features (Duverger 1951, Minkenberg 1998, Mair/Mudde 1998). We may also refer to the notion of a collective actor to better grasp the whole repertoire of collective actions from election campaigns to random violent acts (Tarrow 1994). Although characterized by a high degree of organizational variety, the radical right consists of a conglomerate of political entrepreneurs and suppliers of ideology on one hand, and organizations such as political parties, intellectual circles or militant groups on the other. With regard to the organizational differences of the various radical-right actors we may consider their position in the political system as well as their public impact in terms of mobilization and public appearances.

In this regard, of course, the right-wing populist parties play a more predominant role, as they are mainly public actors managing public campaigns and running for office. But the importance of intellectuals and publications of the New Right must not be underestimated, as they play a substantial role as the suppliers of ideology in political and public debates. Further, the extreme-right subculture can be described as the micro-mobilization of the radical right (Bergmann 1994). We regularly detect points of contact between extreme-right activists, intellectual circles, and political parties, in terms of personal links and mobilizing events

(Minkenberg 1998). Nevertheless, it is admittedly rather difficult to grasp the extreme-right subculture as a segment of the radical right, since extreme-right groups predominantly act with autonomy within the radical-right political family. They have relegated themselves, with their violent activities and often openly racist attitudes, to the margins of the political scene.

With regard to the Swiss *right-wing populist parties*, scholars familiar with the contemporary history of Switzerland were not surprised by the rise of the Swiss People's Party in the last elections in 1999, and point out the continuity of these parties in the Swiss political system. In fact, Swiss anti-immigrant parties took on the role of trailblazer in Western Europe, having been successfully active since the 1960s (Altermatt 1982, Skenderovic 1998). The so-called '*Überfremdungsbewegung*' ('Movement against overforeignization') primarily challenged the federal state's migration policies, and this enabled them to establish themselves in the party system. Although their electoral support in elections to the National Council was rather low (1967-1987: 2 to 9 percent), they were much more successful in federal votes on popular initiatives and referenda (see table 1). Up until the 1990s there have been various small, often competing, fringe parties (such as National Action/Swiss Democrats, Republican Movement, Vigilance, Automobilst Party/Freedom Party), and thus the radical right in Switzerland has been described as a "history of a divided family" (Gentile/Kriesi 1998).

However, during the 1990s we note major changes within the radical-right spectrum, as the Swiss People's Party (SVP) has taken over the legacy of the 'Movement against overforeignization'.¹⁴ The political and ideological changes within the SVP suggest that it be viewed as an example of the transformation of an established political party into a right-wing populist party (Helms 1997).¹⁵ The SVP has, since 1929, been a member of the national government and was a cooperative part of the consensual agreements during the postwar period. Since the 1990s, however, this position of support towards the governing coalition has come under increasing pressure within the SVP. The Zurich cantonal section and its populist leader Christoph Blocher have become a national political force often opposing the federal party's consensus politics. Thus, the federal SVP remains, to a certain degree, fractionated, with some cantonal sections within the federal party still tending to advocate a moderate policy.

After a process of consolidation during the 1990s, the SVP succeeded in integrating the electorate of the splinter parties and in driving these parties out of the Swiss party system (see table 2). In October 1999, elections to the national council resulted in a spectacular success for

the Swiss People's Party, in which they won 22.5 percent of the vote, making them the strongest Swiss party (Lutz/Vatter 2000). As the results of the 1999 national elections indicate, the SVP is heavily supported in the German-speaking part of Switzerland and among voters living in suburbs and the countryside. The SVP has gained support mostly among men and young voters. In fact, the party has become the most favored party for male voters and people under the age of 40 (Longchamp 2000). Here, the party emulates the tradition of the Swiss Democrats and the Freedom Party which, compared to other parties, had greater support among younger male voters (Linder 1998: 107, Gentile/Kriesi 1998: 134-136). However, in comparison to the previous electorate of the radical-right splinter parties, the SVP attracts more people with a college degree and a higher income. One can thus emphasize that a large segment of today's SVP electorate comes out of the middle class.

Significant differences within the *Swiss New Right* are demonstrated between the French and German-speaking regions, predominantly in terms of public appearance and political influence.¹⁶ Historical development and intellectual significance vary as well in the two Swiss regions. Since the 1970s, a diversifying development of the New Right has occurred in the German speaking region characterized by a transformation from the Old Right, mostly conservative and anticommunist, to the more heterogeneous New Right featuring identity politics and nationalist purposes. A majority of the New Right's followers are directly involved in politics and sometimes affiliated with political parties. They have taken advantage of the possibilities of direct democracy and conduct wide-ranging propaganda campaigns through it.¹⁷ On the other hand, leading figures and profound doctrinal work are widely missing among the German-speaking New Right, which remains a strong deficit in attracting a broader range of intellectuals. Moreover, the influence of theoreticians and publications of the German New Right is rather modest.

In the French-speaking part of Switzerland, the New Right has been more active in the cultural and intellectual realms. In this respect, it appears to have more organizational and ideological coherence than its German-speaking counterpart, and has succeeded in reasserting its place in the intellectual life of major cities like Lausanne and Geneva. More so than in the German region, the French-speaking New Right sees itself as an intellectual movement and contains various circles, publishing houses, newspapers and other publications. It also maintains a close connection with the French *Nouvelle Droite*. For a long time, the Swiss New Right

avoided attracting a wide audience and did not participate in broad political debates on everyday matters, in keeping with the strategic thinking of the French New Right. At the end of the 1990s, however, we note a shift of the New Right towards party politics, as a notorious figure became involved with the Geneva section of the Swiss People's Party.

The Swiss *extreme right*, until the mid-1980s, rarely appeared in public and consisted mainly of individual activists and a few small neo-Nazi groups (Frischknecht 1991, Cantini 1992). In 1985, its activities increased rapidly and the extreme right established itself in Switzerland as a viable subculture with various groupings, networks and methods of action. A new generation of extreme-right activists, mostly racist skinheads, carried out various acts of violence against foreigners, asylum seekers, and left-libertarian groups; and several other less organized militant groups began to emerge (for an overview, see Altermatt/Skenderovic 1995). Between 1988 and 1989 violent racist acts tripled, from approximately 30 to 80. In 1991, extreme-right violence was at its worst to date, consisting mainly of individual attacks against asylum seekers and on asylum seekers' housing (Gentile 1999). According to an annually published report, there has been yet another increase in violent racist acts since 1997. 80 cases of racist acts were recorded in 1997 and 115 in 1998.¹⁸

At the end of the 1990s, the organizational structures and networks of the extreme-right subculture remain relatively loose. The best way to analyze the current situation in the Swiss extreme right is to use a typology of organizations which divides the extreme right into five separate categories (see table 3). The differentiation is based primarily on historical, ideological and organizational criteria as well as on the various forms of activities different groups engage in (Altermatt/Skenderovic 1999). The extreme-right scene in Switzerland is substantially smaller than in countries like Germany or France and recent estimated figures of its numbers vary from 500 to 1,000 activists. We observe, however, a growing cross-border collaboration with associates in other European countries, and the astonishing increase in the use of the Internet as a new medium for the purposes of communication and propaganda.¹⁹ The Swiss extreme-right subculture is also a matter of many enterprising individuals who have become one of the best resources for spreading the movement throughout the country (for the transnational context, see Kaplan/Weinberg 1998). There are several long-standing proponents of extreme-right ideas, mostly among the negationists and old fascists, who are very active in publishing and in holding the various groups and scenes together.

Ideology, strategies and resources

As most studies note, the radical right for the most part does not present a coherent ideology. More typically, it combines varying ideological and political elements such as nationalism, racism and anti-egalitarianism as well as anti-establishment messages and neoliberal objectives (Prowe 1994, Mudde 1995, 1999, Karapin 1998b). But above all, exclusionary ideologies are key definitional criteria to understanding the radical right's belief system. In this respect, we may nowadays consider the transformed discourses and purposes of nationalism as well as racism.

First, the new nationalism in today's Europe is directed against non-members of the nation inside the country, and thus, constructs divisions within the population by stressing interior exclusion and discrimination (Ignatieff 1994, Delanty 1996). Moreover, the radical right's nationalism is frequently expressed in its opposition to the European integration process, and here the radical right regularly succeeds in strengthening the national identity. For the Swiss right-wing populist parties, issues of international integration traditionally represent the main field of action in which they mobilize support through their nationalist and isolationist discourse. In 1992 for instance, the Swiss People's Party led a vigorous and populist anti-Europe campaign against Swiss membership in the European Economic Area (EEA). In their arguments, the populists emphasized that if membership was granted, Switzerland would lose its sovereignty and democratic institutions, and that low-salary foreign workers would subsequently invade the country (Huth-Spiess 1996). On December 16, 1992, the Swiss membership in the EEA was rejected by 50.3 percent of the voters. Furthermore, on June 8, 1997, 74 percent of voters rejected an initiative named "Popular vote on the EU-membership negotiations", which was launched by the Swiss Democrats and the Lega dei Ticinesi and aimed at preventing Switzerland from joining the European Union (Delgrande/Linder 1997).

Second, since racism, as an ideology based upon the idea that a natural inequality exists between human groups, has been largely disqualified in politics and society, we find an important shift concerning the rhetoric of exclusion encompassed within with the concept 'neoracism' (Barker 1981, Taguieff 1987, Balibar 1991).²⁰ The doctrinal work of the New Right contributed to a wide extent to reformulations within racist discourse (Taguieff 1994, Ansell 1997). In contrast to inegalitarian racism, neoracism exalts the 'right to be different' and thus stresses egalitarian assumptions, based on a presumed incommensurability of different cultural

identities. From this viewpoint, culture, whether attributed to nation, ethnic identity or *Volk*, is viewed as a static and natural category, and becomes the determining feature of differentiation. Cultural and social phenomena are naturalized and thus acquire an essentialist connotation. Moreover, the neoracist position presupposes the superiority of the home culture by pointing out the differences between cultures in a radical ethnocentric stance.

In Switzerland, from the mid-1980s on, the general debates on asylum policy show that culturalistic and ethnopluralist arguments, originally initiated by New Right publicists and right-wing populists, were common in the political discourse (Fröhlich/Müller 1995). Nowadays, the Swiss People's Party has also become strongly involved in debates on migration, citizenship and integration policy towards foreigners²¹ and regularly sets forth the idea that a multiculturalism which includes new migrants is a threat to the occidental value system, leading ultimately to the decline of Swiss culture.²² In Switzerland today, classical biologicistic racism based on inegalitarian and hierarchical assumptions is found only among the propaganda of marginal extreme-right groups. Also, since 1995, a legal instrument exists with which to combat racism in the form of a new law providing for the punishment of any racist speech or act (Niggli 1996). Thus, to grasp the Swiss discourse and practice of exclusion towards asylum seekers since the 1980s, - first the non-Europeans and later Europeans from the Balkans - we may consider the discursive and conceptual changes that have occurred through the influence of neoracism (Skenderovic 2001).

Often, the radical right in Western Europe is also seen as the main agent of what is called the "silent counterrevolution" (Ignazi 1992). It confronts basic changes of sociocultural values in Western industrial societies since the end of the 1960s, and opposes the ideas of the New Left and other new social movements which emerged after 1968, and which have initiated a political modernization, characterized by basis-democratization, emancipation and equality (Minkenberg 1998). The radical right has developed an ideological counter model to the egalitarian and multicultural principles of the 68-generation on issues like migration, social welfare, cultural policy, and education, hence forming an antipode to left-libertarian and ecological movements (Kitschelt 1995). In Switzerland, with its history of strong new social movements, the radical right, particularly its intellectuals from the New Right faction, vigorously proclaims its opposition to left-wing cultural politics (Kriesi 1999b). The Swiss New Right has also succeeded

in increasing its influence on other domestic issues such as abortion, education, and family policy.²³

As many scholars have pointed out, in the 1990s right-wing populist parties reacted towards socioeconomic crises and international competition through globalization, and the augmented feelings of insecurity this produced among some sections of the population, with a programmatic transformation shifting visibly towards neoliberal positions (Betz 1993, Kitschelt 1995). The neoliberal answers of right-wing populist parties promote the idea that free market ideology and the limitation of state intervention will guarantee the economic and social well being of large sections of the population. At first glance the neoliberal shift seems paradoxical. But by linking liberalism and nationalism, right-wing populists offer a concept that suggests reducing the negative effects of a liberal market by emphasizing the national components. Thus, in face of the threat of liberalization and the loss of socioeconomic security they present a solution that excludes one portion of the competition.²⁴ Using this logic, the right-wing populist parties tend to attract social bases across classes by combining neoliberalism with nationalism and xenophobia.²⁵ Similar to other Western European right-wing populist parties, the Swiss People's Party put forth, during the national elections campaign in 1999, its neoliberal economic program and argued for a 'light state', demanding less state intervention, lower taxes and a reduction in the state bureaucracy.

Furthermore, as regards the political parties, we may mention populism as a key characteristic in terms of political techniques and forms of agitation (Dubiel 1986, Canovan 1999, Mény/Surel 2000). All share national populist appeals to the 'common man', running against established parties in order to return power to the 'people'; an appeal to the *Volk* in the everyday sense. In recent years the Swiss People's Party has regularly launched emotional campaigns and initiatives in a popular style, presenting itself as the defender of the 'common man' and as the messenger of 'common sense'. Moreover, flamboyant and charismatic politicians like Christoph Blocher, the populist leader of the Swiss People's Party, play a crucial role in mobilizing popular support.²⁶ Right-wing populist leaders have skillfully demonstrated what it takes to build a mass following in an era where television has become the most important vehicle for winning voter support. They have often transferred their political stage from traditional locales of political debates at parliament and party meetings to TV shows where

controversial debate, demagogical rhetoric, and charismatic appearance are more important than content and factuality.

Finally, right-wing populist parties can generally lean on a centralized party apparatus, where professionalization of political management and devotion of party members considerably increases efficiency and productivity in terms of public output (Veugelers 1999). In Switzerland, the Swiss People's Party presents a notorious example of the successful strategy of the professional marketing of political campaigns in order to reinforce the effects of their political actions. In particular, the Zurich section significantly increased its membership during the 1990s and diversified its multi-level party organization structure by using such tactics (Hartmann/Horvath 1995, Niggli/Frischknecht 1998). Moreover, the Action for an Independent and Neutral Switzerland (AUNS), which resulted in 1986 from a widespread campaign against Swiss membership in the United Nations, is an example of an organization with a high degree of mobilizing potential and close links to the Swiss People's Party.²⁷

Conclusions: A process of normalization

For a long time, it has been assumed that favorable conditions for Swiss radical-right politics have been widely missing, preventing, to a wide extent, the consideration of Switzerland in international scholarship on the radical right. But as I have demonstrated, in terms of history, political system, state-nation and attitudes of tolerance, Switzerland does not represent a special case, as many might believe. From this starting point, a reevaluation of the Swiss radical right from a comparative perspective is urged. Thus, by focusing on the recent emergence of the radical right in Switzerland in terms of electoral success, structural resources, and ideological transformation, one may properly note a process of 'normalization' of the radical right. It appears that the Swiss radical right has developed distinct political and ideological features, expressed in its exclusionary nationalism, anti-foreigner resentments, 'mistrust' messages, and neoliberal policies, which are comparable to its counterparts in other Western European countries. Moreover, the Swiss radical right as a political family contains a wide range of various organization types that vary in terms of political goals and participation as well as activities and strategy.

With regard to the *right-wing populist parties*, the Swiss People's Party has become the dominant party on the right margin of the political spectrum by effectively driving the fringe

parties out of the party system and co-opting much of their electorate. Moreover, it has assumed the legacy of the long-standing 'Movement against overforeignization'. Although the party still remains somewhat fractionated - a situation sustained by the federalist structure of Swiss party organizations -, the intransigent Zurich party-section, together with its allied sections in several cantons, has increased its internal supremacy within the national party during the last years. By promoting a mix of neoliberal, xenophobic and socially conservative messages, the Swiss People's Party has succeeded in propounding a 'winning formula' (Kitschelt 1995) to attract voters with a distinct ideological profile. Substantial structural resources and a strong leadership, as well as modernized and professionalized organizational structures and public relations methods have assisted this process.

The Swiss *New Right* has focused on building up a network of organizations and publications during the last twenty years, increasing its involvement in political debates and policy-making throughout the 1990s. One may deliberately describe this development of the New Right as a remarkable shift in which bystanders have become direct actors. Moreover, in debates on Swiss migration policy, the New Right's discourse on culture and ethnicity as deterministic categories has become rather common. With regard to the *extreme right*, we observe the consolidation of a relatively small subculture, which, nonetheless, appears to be very active in the areas of publishing and in reinforcing international collaboration. The potential of militancy among young, increasingly politicized, extreme-right activists, has raised public concern over widespread occurrences of violent racism during the 1990s, and has also lead to more repressive measures from authorities.

By considering the changing components within the Swiss political system as well as the controversial issues currently active in Swiss political debates, we recognize that there are likely conflict potentials favorable to the success of the radical right. Although for many, the Swiss consociational system seems to be the most appropriate, and the governmental coalition an efficient setting for policy-making, various indications point to growing disagreements and fissures among the four coalition partners. The Zurich section of the Swiss People's Party and its populist leader Christoph Blocher regularly present themselves as being unfairly excluded from full participation in the government and propagate messages of delegitimatization and mistrust regarding the ruling political class. Furthermore, the Swiss People's Party increasingly employs

popular initiatives to manifest its oppositional stance within the political system, which with its direct democratic settings provides a certain system openness towards radical-right politics.

Finally, there is today in Switzerland a growing issue-based polarization within two distinct policy areas, and here the Swiss People's Party has managed to optimize its electoral advantage. First, with regard to foreign policy and in particular Switzerland's international integration, we witness a considerable antagonism between the government and large sections of the political elite on one side, and the right-wing populist parties on the other. The latter use this antagonism to propagate the belief in a divergence between the political elite and a majority of the voters. Second, the right-wing populist parties also play a major role in the contentious debates regarding migration, asylum, and citizenship policies. By launching popular initiatives and xenophobic campaigns, the right-wing populist parties regularly promote opposition to the authorities' policies and urge a restrictive handling of immigration rates, integration opportunities, and citizenship policy.

Appendix

Table 1: Popular initiatives and referenda of the radical right (1970-1999)

<i>Year of the vote</i>	<i>name or subject of the initiative or referendum</i>	<i>party launching the demand</i>	<i>percentage of voters accepting the demand</i>
1970	'Against overforeignization'	NA	46%
1974	'Against overforeignization and overpopulation'	NA	34.2%
1977	'Against overforeignization'	Republican Movement	29.5%
1977	'For the limitation of naturalizations'	NA	33.8%
1977	'On the reorganization of the Treaty Referendum'	NA	21.9%
1982	Referendum against the legislation on foreigners	NA	50.4%
1984	'Against the selling out of the homeland'	NA	48.9%
1988	'For the limitation of immigration'	NA	32.7%
1993	Referendum against new taxes on gas	AP	45.5%
1993	'Holiday on the national day'	SD	83.8%
1994	Referendum against the Provision of UN Peacekeeping Troops	SD/Lega	57.2%
1994	Referendum against the Antiracism-law	radical-right committee	45.4%
1995	Referendum against the law facilitating foreigners to buy real estate	SD	53.6%
1996	'Against illegal immigration'	SVP	46.3%
1997	'Popular vote on the EU-membership negotiations'	SD/Lega	25.9%
1997	'Youth without drugs'	New Right committee	29.3%

Abbreviations: NA (National Action), SD (Swiss Democrats), AP (Automobilist Party), Lega (Lega di Ticinesi)
 Source: <http://www.admin.ch/>

Table 2: Votes for right-wing populist parties (National Council 1987–1999)

	1987	1991	1995	1999
Swiss People's Party	10.9	11.8	14.9	22.5
National Action/Swiss Democrats	2.5	3.4	3.1	1.8
Automobilist Party/Freedom Party	2.6	5.1	4.0	0.9
Lega dei Ticinesi	--	1.4	0.9	0.9

Source: *Année politique Suisse*, 1987, 1991, 1995, 1999.

Table 3: Typology of the extreme-right subculture in the 1990s

	<i>degree of mobilization</i>	<i>level of membership</i>	<i>militant activities</i>	<i>public appearances</i>	<i>international connections</i>
Old Fascist	-	-	-	++	+
National-revolutionaries	+	+	+	+	-
Skinheads	+	+	+	+	+
Negationists	++	-	-	+	+
Antisemites	++	-	-	+	++

+ high
 ++ medium
 - low

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Notes

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²In contemporary history and political science studies we find a wide range of terminology to describe political parties and groups on the right-wing margin of the political spectrum, ranging from 'extreme right', 'radical right', and 'far right' to 'right-wing populism'. There are, of course, some analytical reasons for this diversity (see Mudde 1996, Eatwell 2000). For instance the term of 'right-wing populism' stresses in particular the political strategies and techniques of political parties. But the lack of coherence is also a result of differing scientific discourses in which the concept of extremism is used. German-speaking scholars tend to work with the normative conception of extremism in which it is equated with an antidemocratic stance. Here, we note the ongoing influence of German totalitarianism-concepts, which emphasize a strictly normative approach to the notion of the democratic and

constitutional state, and which take for granted even more the assumption that right- and left-wing extremism are adequately anti-democratic and anti-constitutional (see Backes 1989, Pfahl-Traughber 1992). Although these positions have been largely criticized (see, among others Jaschke 1994, Stöss 1994) and wider notions of extremism have been suggested (Holzer 1993), it appears that the use of ‘extremism’ remains problematic and controversial. With regard to right-wing politics, we recognize in recent literature, especially among comparative studies, the increased use of the concept of ‘radical right’, which does not put forth the anti-democratic stance and tends to marginalize it as a political movement. Furthermore, it allows for the identifying of various ideological and organizational appearances on the outer edges of the political spectrum (Betz 1999). In this paper I use ‘radical right’ as a general concept which includes the three organizational and political determined subcategories of right-wing populist party, New Right, and extreme-right subculture.

³For an exception regarding the two political parties: the Swiss Democrats and the Freedom Party, see Kitschelt 1995. Kaplan/Weinberg’s broad study (1998) lacks any consideration of the Swiss extreme-right subculture.

⁴However, we must not forget that during World War II, the so-called “*Vollmachtenregime*” gave exceptional executive power to the Swiss government and considerably restricted the impact of direct democracy.

⁵In the 1991 national elections support for the four government parties dropped to under 70 percent. But in the last national elections in 1999 we note again a strong support for the governmental coalition, with over 80 percent of the votes. However, we may bear in mind that the reason for this reformation in favor the government parties is due mainly to the electoral success of the Swiss People’s Party, a member of the government.

Support for the four parties forming the government coalition (1961-1999)

1963	1967	1971	1975	1979	1983	1987	1991	1995	1999
87.2%	81.2%	76.1%	78.1%	81.8%	77.6%	71.6%	68.7%	73.7%	80.8%

Sources: Kriesi 1995, Linder 1998, Lutz/Vatter 2000

⁶For example, if we were to engage in a study of Swiss migration policy and the discourse of exclusion towards foreigners we must, first of all, take a closer look at the term ‘overforeignization’ (*Überfremdung*), which in the sense of a sociocultural code aims at the perception and exclusion of culturally demarcated and socially segregated entities (see Skenderovic 2001).

⁷We know for instance, that the leader of the Swiss Republicans active during the 1970s was involved in the Front movements of the 1930s. Furthermore, the founder of the New Right circle ‘Foundation for the Consciousness of the Occident’ was a member of the National Front, the main group within the Front movements.

⁸As the figures show, in 1996, 30 percent of population expressed their trust in the National Council and 40 percent in the government. In 1999, 36 percent said that they trusted the National Council, and 55 percent trusted the government (Longchamp et al. 1999).

⁹In fact, surveys carried out during the 1990s note that nationalism and xenophobia may be detected in large segments of the Swiss population. In polls from 1994, 24% of those interviewed insisted that “the purity of the Swiss people” must be considered and that “the mixing of peoples” was something to be avoided (Schloeth 1994). A survey, established during the national elections 1995, asked the question whether foreigners should have the same opportunities as Swiss citizens. 39 percent of the people interviewed said that foreigners ought to have fewer opportunities than Swiss citizens (Armingeon 2000). A survey organized in 1997 showed that 46 percent of people interviewed were in favor of the state taking measures to reduce the number of foreigners in Switzerland, with 22 percent suggesting it should be cut by a quarter and 24 percent indicating the number of foreign residents in Switzerland should be halved (Nef 1997). In the most recent opinion poll from March 2000, 26 percent of the people interviewed said that they would not like to have Turks as neighbors, and 38 percent showed dislike for neighbors from Kosovo (GfS-Forschungsinstitut 2000).

¹⁰As Lipset and Raab (1971) demonstrated earlier, the middle classes too have been disadvantaged by the process of modernization either because of actual loss of social status (farmers, craftsmen) or because of subjective fears of such a loss. According to this view, these social classes are especially susceptible to racist and extreme right models of thought and behavior.

¹¹For a criticism of the protest-vote thesis, see Eatwell 1998.

¹²In this context, we must consider that there are rather insufficient survey data on the electorate of the splinter radical-right parties since the 1960s. Since on the national level support for parties such as the National Action or the Automobilst party was very low, survey sample data did not contain a representative number of people voting for these parties. For a criticism on the survey data on the Swiss radical right, see Husbands 2000.

¹³For instance, Swiss history, emphasizing the period of the ‘Old Confederation’ or its long-standing neutrality, is a powerful force for integration and possesses, above all, great symbolic value (Marchal/Mattioli 1992, Bendix 1992). Further, geographical references to the Alpine mountains as a national shield and shelter, as well as a national image of peaceful and romantic life, are commonly used to express national history and feelings (Racine/Raffestin 1990, Kaufmann/Zimmer 1998). Through literature and other works of art, for example, the main elements of the Swiss people’s collective mentality are repeatedly portrayed as consisting of traits such as love of liberty, the desire for independence, rootedness in the native soil, and a strong national defense as important.

¹⁴In January 2000 the Council of Europe published a report which expressed worries about the progress of parties that directly or indirectly encourage xenophobia, intolerance and racism, and mentions in this context the Swiss People’s Party in the same vein as the Vlaams Blok in Belgium and the Freedom Party in Austria; see Council of Europe, *Threat posed to democracy by extremist parties and movements in Europe*. Report of the Political Affairs Committee, Doc. 8607, January 2000.

¹⁵Here, we may stress the similarity to the Austrian Freedom Party which, after 1986, under the leadership of Jörg Haider, transformed itself from a liberal party into a right-wing populist party (Bailer-Galanda/Neugebauer 1997).

¹⁶There are almost no studies on the Swiss New Right (for exceptions, see Altermatt/Skenderovic 1995, 1996). There is a journalistic study, profoundly investigated and very informative, on various right-wing groups in the German-speaking region (Niggli/Frischknecht 1998).

¹⁷The most important common mobilization was noted in the first half of the 1990s, when various groups and individuals of the New Right, the extreme-right subculture, as well as members of the Swiss Democrats and Freedom Party launched and supported the referendum against the Antiracism-law. Nevertheless, in September 1994 the law, aiming to combat any racist speech or act, was accepted in a popular vote.

¹⁸Compared to Germany, where the *Verfassungsschutz* releases detailed statistics on extreme-right violence every year, the Swiss figures from the state authorities are less coherent. Thus, we must mainly rely on data from an anti-racist foundation which systematically observe racist activities in Switzerland; see *Chronologie rassistischer Vorfälle in der Schweiz*, ed. by the Stiftung gegen Rassismus und Antisemitismus (GRA), <<http://www.gra.ch/>>.

¹⁹One cannot stress enough the increasing importance of the internet as a new way of communication allowing groups to bypass not only country borders, but also to avoid domestic legal restrictions (see Kaplan/Bjorgo 1998). The Swiss negationists are a valuable example of this.

²⁰Generally speaking, classical racism justifies a biological, natural, and immutable order of ranking among human groups by socially constructed, fictitious, or genuine phenotypic (such as skin color) and cultural features of difference. With regard to neoracism, some authors warn against a conflation of the concepts of racism and neoracism and prefer to differentiate them analytically (Miles 1989, Bader 1995, Priester 1997). They maintain that the culturalist rhetoric of neoracism is distinct from racism as it “rectifies culture conceived as a compact, bounded, localized, and historically rooted set of traditions and values transmitted through generations by drawing on an ideological repertoire that dates back to the contradictory 19th-century conception of the nation-state” (Stolcke 1995: 4).

²¹The Swiss People’s Party’s local section in the city of Zurich, which has an influential position in questions of migration, released a concept manual for the policy towards foreigners in 1999 which featured a chapter entitled ‘Mass immigration thanks to left wing policy’: “We must deal with a wave of immigration which consists of mostly non-educated, professionally unqualified persons who are, in rare cases, ready to work and who come from other, non-Western European culture circles.” (see *Konzept für eine Zürcher Ausländerpolitik*, ed. by the Swiss People’s Party of the city of Zurich, 1st edition, 1999, translation D.S.). With regard to integration policy towards foreigners, especially from the Balkans and non-European countries, the SVP opposes all measures of accommodation. Following this policy, the Zurich section defeated an integration project for people from Kosovo in 1998, utilizing a xenophobic public campaign that provoked general criticism among the Swiss public.

²²The secretary of the local Zurich section recently put it as such in the *Schweizerzeit*, a widely read newspaper of the New Right: “Multiculturalism means the decline of culture. As history shows, the cohabitation of people of different nationality, race, skin color and religion has created problems at all times and in all countries and has been conflict-ridden.” (*Schweizerzeit*, March 2, 2000; translation D.S.). A notorious example of recent SVP policy is the demand that the decision as to whether foreigners should become Swiss should lie in the hands of the Swiss people. To this end, several SVP sections urged the introduction of a popular vote on the conferring of citizenship. In March 2000, in the small city of Emmen this procedure has already been applied with the result that 8 foreigners out of 56 were accepted as suitable to obtain Swiss citizenship.

²³On this matter, various currents of the New Right in the German-speaking part of Switzerland play a influential role: *Intellectual circles* which are rather less organized and mainly active through publications and meetings, assert

that their main aims are to strengthen European and Swiss traditions and values and to counter ideas of the left-wing students movement. Various *moralist groups*, which, similar to the intellectual circles, direct their activities against left-wing social and cultural concepts, try to mobilize public support by launching public campaigns and debates. In policies on education, family and drug abuse, they succeeded in interjecting their proposals into broader debates. Finally, *religious fundamentalist groups* which have a long-standing tradition dating from the 1960s, mainly among conservative catholic milieus, promote traditionalist and moralist ideas and goals on matters of religion as well as abortion policy. In the latter they play a major role, since they act as pressure groups, using informal lobbying as well as instruments of direct democracy, to achieve their goals.

²⁴The neoliberal position has impact as well on the integrative concept of a welfare state, since the welfare state is in crisis and is losing its influence as a model of social solidarity in the postwar period. In countries like Britain, France and Germany, the welfare state is increasingly seen as a national achievement and an expression of solidarity reserved for the *Volksgemeinschaft*. The feeling of belonging to a national community gains a concrete component of vested interest as the exclusive national community replaces the inclusive social community (see Demirovic 1995, Wimmer 1996).

²⁵Here the findings of Kitschelt's (1995: 257-279) detailed analysis are interesting, as he identifies small businesspeople and blue collar workers as the two professional groups most attracted to right-wing populist parties. Thus, its electorate represents a social coalition containing small business - attracted by the pro-capitalism and pro-market messages - and workers who are paying more attention to xenophobic themes and exclusionary discourses (see also, Karapin 1998b).

²⁶For instance, see Christoph Blocher's own website: www.blocher.ch

²⁷Although the associations' committee consists of politicians from different right-wing parties, the members of right-wing populist parties predominate. During the 1990s, the AUNS became a mass organization with over 25,000 members and, with its high mobilization potential, plays a crucial role as an actor in democratic decision-making on Swiss foreign policy. Here the movement opposes international integration and tends to reinforce isolationist tendencies of the Swiss electorate.