CHAPTER 3

How Gender Quotas Work in Switzerland

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Since Swiss women received the right to vote in 1971, female political representation has risen continuously if unevenly between parties and regions. In 2019, 42% of women were elected to the National Council (lower chamber) with a proportional list system and 26% to the Council of States (upper chamber) via majority vote. The Federal Council (government) in 2021 consisted of three women and four men. Increasingly, not only do left parties successfully nominate women on electoral lists but center and right parties do too (Table 1). Throughout the past two decades, about one-third of all candidates to the National Council have been women. Except for the latest election in 2019, women's odds to win a seat have, however, been worse than those of men, particularly for right and liberal parties. This was true to a lesser extent for the Social Democrats: in 1999, the ratio between female candidacies and seats won was 0.3 for the *Schweizerische Volkspartei* (Swiss People's Party, SVP), 0.84 for *Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz* (Social Democratic Party, SPS), and 1.3 for the *Grüne Partei der Schweiz* (Green Party,

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GPS). In 2019 the ratio was below one only for the centrist parties: *Freisinnig-demokratische Partei*—die Liberalen (The Liberals, FDP): 0.93 and *Christlich-demokratische Volkspartei* (Christian Democrat People's Party, CVP): 0.7 (Table 1). This is a result of the list order, but also of voters' ability to alter lists as well as to combine votes from several lists and thus to support, or discriminate against, women. Only the Social Democrats and the Greens have voluntary party quotas for electoral lists and in some cantons for party office. These quotas were introduced since the late 1980s and are stipulated in cantonal party statutes, albeit with substantial variety in wording, thresholds, and rules for list composition. Quota regulations of these two parties apply to the municipal, cantonal, and national level.

Switzerland is a heterogeneous country which has many social, economic, cultural, and political institutional mechanisms to deal with divisive aspects of such diversity. Direct democracy, strong federalism, proportional representation, and the protection of (regional) minorities in an exemplary consensus democracy (Lijphart, 2012; Vatter, 2008) form the framework for gender quotas in politics. Sustained campaigns by women's organizations for mobilizing and electing female candidates in national elections have been instrumental in the rise of women's share in the National Council and indirectly in the nomination of women to the Federal Council.

Direct democracy is a crucial and identity-forming feature of Switzerland (Hertig Randall, 2017). Popular initiatives for the amendment of the Constitution are submitted to the vote at the request of 100,000 citizens and must gain the majority of the votes in the majority of the cantons. All revisions of the Constitution are subject to a mandatory referendum. Laws are submitted to the vote at the request of 50,000 citizens (Art. 138–142 Cst.). This option of a referendum has triggered compromise-oriented decision-making, which means mandatory consultation procedures and expert commissions to prepare draft compromises of legislative projects, which must be approved by all interest groups capable of launching and winning a referendum. This results as a rule in long and winding roads to stable compromises. Compromise-oriented decision-making means legal and unwritten quotas for regional minorities. Campaigns to extend these quotas to the criterion of gender have met with resistance, but informal gender quotas have slowly emerged as a political practice.

Table 1 Female candidates and elected MPs into the National Council (Lower Chamber) in Switzerland, 1999 to 2019

		FDP	*CVP*	*SPS*	*SVP*	*EVP*	*GLP*	*BDP*	*GPS*	*All parties*
1999	Candidates in percent	30.7	34.7	46.7	22.6	36.8			50.5	34.6
	Elected women	9	8	20	3				6	47
	Elected women in percent	20.9	22.9	39.2	6.8	0			66.7	23.5
2003	Candidates in percent	35.2	27.3	48	19.1	38.8			50.2	35
	Elected women	7	9	24	3				7	52
	Elected women in percent	19.4	32.1	46.2	5.5	0			53.8	26
2007	Candidates in percent	27.8	35.7	48.3	20.3	39.1	45.7		48.1	35.2
	Elected women	6	12	18	8		2		10	59
	Elected women in percent	19.4	38.7	41.9	12.9	0	66.7		50	29.5
2011	Candidates in percent	24.5	34.3	46.7	18.5	32	31.5	20.5	48.6	32.8
	Elected women	7	9	21	6	2	4	2	6	58
	Elected women in percent	23.3	32.1	45.7	11.1	100	33.3	22.2	40	29
2015	Candidates in percent	30.7	34.2	46.9	18.9	41.1	32.9	32.6	50.6	34.5
	Elected women	7	9	25	11	2	3	1	5	64
	Elected women in percent	21.2	33.3	58.1	16.9	100	42.9	14.3	45.5	32
2019	Candidates in percent	37.3	40	51	22.1	48	40.7	31.4	55.4	40.3
	Elected women	10	7	25	13	2	8	1	17	84

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

	FDP	*CVP*	*SPS*	*SVP*	*EVP*	*GLP*	*BDP*	*GPS*	*All parties*
Elected women in percent	34.5	28	64.1	24.5	66.7	50	33.3	60.7	42

Source Author's Calculation from Federal Office of Statistics, www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/politik/wahlen/frauen.html
Legend FDP (Freisinnig-demokratische Partei—die Liberalen): The Liberals; CVP (Christlich-demokratische Volkspartei) (Christian Democrat People's Party, since 2020: The Centre); SPS (Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz): Social Democratic Party; SVP (Schweizerische Volkspartei) Swiss People's Party; EVP (Evangelische Volkspartei) Swiss Evangelical People's Party; GLP (Grünliberale Partei) Green Liberal Party; BDP (Bürgerlich-demokratische Partei) Conservative Democratic Party; GPS (Grüne Partei der Schweiz) Green Party.

This chapter addresses the implementation of voluntary party quotas and informal quotas: how do parties administer their quota regulations in the context of a complex electoral system, and what are the major challenges to successful implementation? Do informal quotas have a substantial and reliable effect? Research on the emergence and adoption of gender quotas in Switzerland is scarce. The debate around the popular initiative for legal gender quotas in federal authorities (which were defeated in 2000) has received some attention (Arioli, 1998; Sgier, 2004). Historical analyses address the influence of women's sections of Swiss parties on gender policies (Amlinger, 2017). The following investigation into voluntary party and informal quotas is based on: (1) source materials (party statutes, manuals), (2) interviews with party officials (presidents, secretaries) on the national level, and in one canton (Basel-City) and (3) media coverage, public debates, and practices related to elections to the Federal Council.

1 Implementing Voluntary, Legislated, and Informal Gender Quotas in Swiss Politics

Three kinds of gender quotas are central to women's political representation in Switzerland: voluntary party-list quotas, attempts to establish legislated quotas in the mid-1990s, and unwritten quotas which gained significance after the defeat of legislated quotas. After providing some information on the Swiss electoral and party system, this chapter will discuss these different quotas and the debates and practices accompanying their implementation or—as was the case with legislative quotas—their defeat.

1.1 The Impact of Electoral Law and the Party System

As is typical for a federal and consensus democracy, proportional representation prevails in Switzerland for legislatures on all political levels except for the Council of States, which is the upper chamber of national Parliament where the two seats per canton are determined by absolute majority. In elections for the lower chamber, the National Council, each canton forms a separate constituency and cantonal parties nominate an electoral list. Voters can change these lists by listing a person twice, deleting persons, or listing candidates from other parties (cumulation and vote-splitting). Who will be elected thus depends not solely on

the nomination and party-list ranking but centrally on voters' choices. Cumulative and split voting are powerful, yet neutral tools: they may increase gender balance, but they do not ensure it. Majoritarian seats by contrast are harder to win for women than for men. This is true in Switzerland and includes direct elections of cantonal governments. In general, however, electoral provisions promoting female representation predominate (Krook & Schwindt-Bayer, 2013).

In theory, Swiss politics still operates as a militia system: parliamentarians are not professionals, but keep their regular jobs and engage in politics in their free time. They do not depend on their mandate, as compensation for political office is modest. De facto, however, many parliamentarians on the national level engage full-time or devote a substantial proportion of their (self) employment hours to politics. Political careers in Switzerland are extremely demanding, unpredictable, and always have to be reconciled with one's own professional career. This makes mobilization of female politicians difficult.

The party system is highly decentralized with cantonal parties at the center and national parties as umbrellas with common programmatic features. Swiss parties are regular civil associations. Special regulations regarding the internal organization, financing, and transparency do not exist (Schiess Rütimann, 2011).

1.2 Voluntary Party Quotas

The Greens and the Social Democrats (SPS) have adopted gender equality commitments on the national but mostly on the cantonal level, which often, but not always, take the form of quotas.

In 1986, the SPS women's section successfully pushed for a gender quota in party offices and on ballots (Amlinger, 2017: 358; Table 2). Both Greens and Social Democrats commit themselves to fair gender representation in mandates, bodies, delegations, and electoral lists with almost identical party statute clauses.[1] As the cantonal parties recruit and nominate political personnel for canton-wide lists for federal elections, their regulations and procedures are decisive for actual quota implementation. But even tough SPS quota rules apply to all political levels. Nomination procedures and gender clauses in cantonal party statutes vary widely and not all cantonal parties even have formal gender quotas.

Out of 26 cantons, Social Democrats have voluntary party quotas for candidate lists only in 15, and the Greens only in six cantons. According

Table 2 Gender quotas in Swiss Party statutes

Gender feature	*Social democrats (N = 25)*	*Greens (N = 23)*
No mention of gender equality	3 cantons	2 cantons
General clause on gender equality	10 cantons, federal statute	8 cantons, federal statute
Gender quota for party office	15 cantons (33.3%: 2, 40%: 1) rest: "strive for parity", "balanced", "reasonable"	13 statutes in 12 cantons (Alternating presidency: 1; 33.3%: 1, 40%: 3) rest: "strive for parity", "balanced"
Gender quota for candidates	15 cantons (33.3%: 2, 40%: 1) rest: "strive for parity", "balanced", "reasonable"	6 cantons "balanced", "parity", "respecting gender equality"

Source Author's compilation from websites and emails to the author. No data for five cantonal parties

to a Green secretary,[2] this may be due to larger Green skepticism towards centralized solutions. Cantonal Social Democratic parties tend to have clearer gender quotas and nomination procedures, while Greens more often use generalizable wording. Levels vary in both parties: clear shares are rare, instead "balanced" or "parity" representation prevail. Parties in French-speaking Switzerland tend to have more elaborate rules, anchored in a more etatist political culture. The spectrum of regulation can be illustrated by assessing quota regulation and nominations in three cantons: in the French-speaking canton of Neuchâtel, neither party has a quota regulation in its party statutes. The Social Democrats only have a general gender-related mission statement, while the Green statutes are altogether silent on gender. The Social Democrats have formed a campaign committee for upcoming elections that will seek candidates "with a view to fair representation of the entire population" and it may propose a strategy "to achieve equal representation of men and women" (Art. 40 Parti socialiste neuchâtelois, 2018).

Despite the Green Party silence on gender in the electoral process, in 2019 they nominated a "zebra list" with a woman at the top. The first two candidates also ran for the Council of States. The first-placed woman candidate won one seat in the Council of States and the second-placed man was elected to the National Council. Social Democrat women fared a lot worse. For the National Council list, men pushed forward and only

one woman (25%) stood, placed at the end of the list. Two well-known women ran for the Council of States instead, although they could quite safely have won National Council seats based on their track record.[3] The Social Democratic seat in the Council of States, however, was lost to the Greens. In effect, a lack of clear quota rules allowed for male power play, but only because informal commitment was weak.

In Basel-City, two green parties formed one list for federal elections. There are no gender quotas for nomination, yet "50:50 always works out somehow" according to the co-president of Basta![4] Green men generally fare worse in the elections, as green voters appear to prefer women candidates. Additionally, the Green parties in the canton have a long tradition of female party leadership that helps to enforce informal rules.

The Social Democrats in Basel, by contrast, have elaborated systems of nomination for public office. Generally, nominations shall aim for 50:50 representation, yet every gender must account for at least 40% on every list. The nominating Delegate Assembly may suspend the quota by a two-thirds majority vote (Wahl- und Abstimmungsreglement, SP Basel-Stadt 2021, Art. 16). Nominations for federal elections (and cantonal government) take place in three phases: first, local party sections nominate candidates and report them to the Executive Committee, which may also nominate candidates. Both proposals are submitted to the Delegate Assembly. All female candidates are placed on top of the list in alphabetical order, followed by the men. In 2019, one man and one woman were elected. Anecdotal evidence suggests that non-compliant aspirations for candidatures are eliminated in advance via informal negotiations.[5]

Green practice in Basel-City demonstrates that, if the party exhibits gender-sensitive cultural capital, informal quotas may be as effective as more specific rules. In both parties, political culture plays a decisive role in quota compliance.

The most elaborate rules of both parties are found in Geneva: the Green section boards report candidacies to the General Assembly. The assembly nominates male and female candidates separately. If one gender is overrepresented, the lowest placed persons of that gender are removed from the list. In the event of a tie, a tie-breaking vote is held (Verts genevevois-es, 2019, Art. 33). The executive board proposes four persons at the top of the list who are best able "to carry the list". The Assembly may come up with alternative top candidates and may decide to alternate the candidates according to gender (ibid., art. 34). The Greens won three

seats (two women, one man) in 2019 and became the strongest party in the canton.

Geneva Social Democrats seek to achieve equality as regards candidacies and may solicit candidates of the underrepresented gender (Parti socialiste genevois, 2020, Art. 2bis, par. 2). A 40% gender quota applies to all electoral lists with more than ten candidates, including the National Council list. Sections report candidacies to the secretariat one month ahead of the General Assembly. The Assembly decides on the number of candidates, nominates them via secret ballot and absolute majority in the first, and relative majority in the second round. Candidates are placed on the list in descending order of nomination votes *and* alternating between two genders (ibid., Art. 12, 12a, 12b). One woman and one man won an SPS seat in 2019.

The example shows differentiated rules can be effective—and necessary, according to Green Party officials,[6] to preempt male hegemony when the party becomes stronger and therefore more posts need to be filled. Quota procedures are perceived as containment also by SPS officials who point to less leverage in majoritarian elections.

Considering that transparent nominations help women to gain office (Kittilson, 2013; Norris, 1993), one would expect the Social Democrats to fare better than the Greens. However, the average share of women in the National Council (Table 1) as well as in cantonal parliaments has become slightly higher for the SPS only recently, while the Greens were in the lead before.[7] No obvious link can be established between weak or no gender quota regulations in cantonal party statutes and low women's representation. This might suggest that unwritten quota rules or a gender equity culture is well established in both parties and that voters correct unbalanced party lists.

Both parties have long adhered to largely informal quota commitments. They have more than 40% of women on their national ballots, the Greens since 1987 and the Social Democrats since 1991, nearing 50% in 2019. The situation in cantonal parliaments is similar: on average, both parties have over 40% of women representatives since 1992.[8]

Strong links to the feminist movement have helped gender equality commitments in both parties (for the SP, Amlinger, 2017: 187). Cowell-Meyers (2020) showed strong influences of cantonal feminist movement parties on Green and Social Democrat party programs and cooperation in elections. After dissolution, several members continued their political careers with the Greens or the SPS.

In sum, the stunning diversity of rules and procedures yield quite homogenous and positive results. One may conclude that even indistinct rules can develop normative power.

1.3 The Defeat of Legislated Gender Quotas: Paving the Way for Informal Quotas

In 1993, activists from feminist and women's organizations and party members launched a popular initiative for legislated gender quotas ("For a fair representation of women in federal authorities—initiative 3rd March") because demands of women's representation in government had been blatantly ignored and obstructed. The initiative and the debates that accompanied it served as an agenda-setting instrument—not unusual for direct democracy—and paved the way for informal gender quotas.

After general elections or replacement elections during the legislative period, the Federal Assembly (both chambers of Parliament) elects the candidates put forward by their parties as members of the all-party-government. The Swiss Constitution only requires appropriate representation of the various geographical and language regions (Art. 175 para 4 Cst.).[9] The elections proved to be a site of struggle for inclusion of women in political power.[10] In 1993, Parliament refused to elect the nominated socialist woman after it had already done so in 1983. Christiane Brunner, an outspoken feminist and trade unionist, was attacked in a sexist campaign that tried to scandalize alleged behavior unrelated to political office (Amlinger, 2012; Duttweiler, 1993). This caused massive protests in the streets that mobilized left-wing parties, feminists, trade unions, and moderate women's organizations. Eventually, the elected non-runner Francis Matthey did not accept office, and another Social Democrat, Ruth Dreifuss, was elected. Public perception had flipped and the sexist campaign itself became the scandal (Amlinger, 2012). In the aftermath, the share of female parliamentarians in the cantons skyrocketed (the so-called "Brunner effect"; Fuchs, 2018: 86) due to votes which moved women higher on the lists.

An initiative formed to mobilize for a constitutional amendment requiring an "adequate representation" of women and men in all three state powers, and more specifically at least three women in the Federal Council, 50% in Parliament and at least 40% in the Federal Supreme Court. Popular initiatives face a mandatory debate in Parliament before being submitted to the vote. A discourse analysis (Sgier, 2004) revealed

two distinct and stable coalitions along the left–right cleavage in the parliamentary debate and these are found in regional and municipal quota debates as well (Arioli, 1998). Proponents of the initiative claimed a "refinement of the Swiss quota system", and were thus a frame extension of the Swiss raison d'être to include gender. They pleaded for the explicit gendering of the existing pluralist model of representation (Sgier, 2004: 15). Positive measures, they argued, were necessary to fulfill the active constitutional task of factual equality. Arguments of justice and modernity were invoked ("sign of the times", Arioli, 1998: 135–136.) Opponents rigorously rejected the argument of Switzerland as a country of quotas. In their view, constitutional quotas were designed to maintain cohesion and equilibrium in a federalist state: gender quotas to them appeared "arbitrary, perverse, rigid and absurd, heresy, a way of creating a gap between men and women and even a step back to 'pre-democratic times'" (Sgier, 2004: 16). Informal quotas, although existing, were deemed to be without any juridical validity by the Federal Council. Opposition to quotas was also fueled by opposition to illegitimate state interventions as opposed to the good traditions of decentralization and subsidiarity. Gender equality in politics, it was felt, would be accomplished naturally over time. Unsurprisingly, in March 2000, seven years after the Brunner scandal, voters rejected the initiative with 82% "no" votes.

Meanwhile, two cantonal gender quota initiatives in Solothurn and Uri had been declared unconstitutional by the Federal Supreme Court (Buser, 1998; Wyttenbach, 2000). When parliamentarians in 2017 launched a new gender quota proposal to be added to the Federal Council election clause (Art. 175 Cst., no. 17.484), Parliament rejected it again in 2019. This proposal by a liberal state councillor would have extended the frame of legitimate representation of regions and language to gender. The inclusion of gender would modernize and complete consociationalism with a strong programmatic statement, but not a quota. Opponents argued that programmatic clauses are unnecessary as an informal gender quota already exists which the parties do observe: "The gender issue is already integrated into the mentality of the parliamentarians who proceed to the election; the last election to the Federal Council was proof of this" (Michael Buffat, SVP, 4th March 2019, Amtliches Bulletin 2019, N21).

Resistance to legislated gender quotas has been explicit in various political arenas: in parliament, in voting campaigns, and in court. The pro-coalition failed in trying to extend the consociationalism

framing to gender; the contra-coalition-framed proportional representation according to language and region as raison d'état and gender as irrelevant. These stable coalitions were congruent with the left–right cleavage as in other gender equality policies (touching upon deep core beliefs on the nature of gender and state intervention, Fuchs, 2018: 117–141). The 2017 debate shows that, in the long term, the continued discourse has led to a situation in which the goal of gender balance can no longer be dismissed, even if legislated quotas continue to be rejected.

1.4 The Practice and Rationale of Unwritten Gender Quotas

Are unwritten quotas, well anchored in Swiss political culture, a viable and effective alternative to legislated gender quotas? I take the elections to the Federal Council as an example because they are a central site of negotiation about the fair share of women in politics, and this share has long been precarious and contested in Swiss government, as the Table 3 shows.

To track the emergence of informal gender quotas, I use official party statements in the Federal Assembly and coverage in leading print media.[11] Gender representation in government is a regular de facto issue in elections since the 2000s and coincides with debates about the defeat of consensus democracy.

Table 3 Female Federal Councillors in Switzerland since 1984

Term	*Female Federal Councillors*	*Percentage in government (%)*
1984–1989	1	14.3
1989–1993	0	0
1993–1999	1	14.3
1999–2003	2	28.6
2004–2006	1	14.3
2006–2008	2	28.6
2008	3	42.9
2009–2010	3	42.9
2010–2011	4	57.1
2012–2015	3	42.9
2016–2018	2	28.6
2018–	3	42.9

Source Bundesamt für Statistik (2018). Author's compilation

In 2003, the historically "magic formula" of the multi-party federal government (2 SP, 2 FDP, 2 CVP and 1 SVP seat) shifted because the SVP had doubled its electorate since the 1990s. At the center of these shifts, the place of women in politics was renegotiated. In 2003, a second SVP Federal Councillor, party leader Christoph Blocher, was elected and Federal Councillor Ruth Metzler, a young Christian Democrat, was voted out of office—this being the first time an incumbent had been voted out of office since 1872. Critics of sexism in politics mobilized publicly (Duttweiler, 2003). The NZZ remarked on the ousting of Metzler: "A gender concordance has obviously not been maintained in the new Federal Council" (11th December 2003).

In 2007, in a clever political move, Parliament elected a non-runner, the moderate SVP politician Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf, at the time cantonal finance minister of Grison, as new Federal Councillor, and ousted Blocher. Party officials were outraged and claimed the destruction of consociationalism. They reproached Widmer-Schlumpf for acting in a non-democratic manner and eventually excluded the Grison branch of the party after an ultimatum to expel Widmer-Schlumpf. Demonstrations and a protest note in April 2008 supported Widmer-Schlumpf and condemned threats against democratically elected politicians (Bühlmann & Hohl, 2020). Since these events, the magic formula and consociationalism are open to dispute and the place of women in government is a strong undercurrent in the debate, as the following commentary from *Le Temps* showcases.

> The election of Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf has clouded the issue. What if Moritz Leuenberger is replaced by a man? This scenario, which seemed unthinkable before 12 December, suddenly becomes plausible. After the election of Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf, there are now three women on Federal Council … As a result, it is no longer certain that the election of a second socialist woman to the government is really indispensable for the PS. This allows left-wing men to dream again and the parliament to let itself have total freedom. As for the socialist leaders, they are getting a few grey hairs. For if a man is elected to the successor to Moritz Leuenberger, it will be necessary, for internal balance, to find a woman to succeed Micheline Calmy-Rey. But potential candidates are not running in the streets of French-speaking Switzerland. (*Le Temps*, 26 January 2008)

In the following years, the women's question was extensively debated with replacements in the Federal Council. In 2017, gender and region

were explicitly and extensively weighed against each other, with Italian-speaking Ticino gaining a male federal councillor.

Party statements before election are usually extensive programmatic announcements on consociationalism and legitimate representation. Unlike in the media, gender and consociationalism are never discursively connected. Statements mostly occur in cases of female candidates. Sometimes spokespersons put forward gender-political arguments to justify the non-election of a candidate. For example, when Guy Parmelin (SVP) was elected, the Green club leader ended his statement with "… and in 2015, you cannot be serious about having no adequate women's representation in government any more" (*Amtliches Bulletin* 2015: 2331).

In Parliament, unwritten gender quotas are not an important explicit issue on election day: it is more salient to present one's own party as a supporter of traditional consociationalism and Swiss stability. The media analysis, however, shows that the meaning of consociationalism is gradually extended to gender and that women's representation becomes part of the complex consideration of whom to nominate and when, for the Federal Council. Resistance to implementation is mostly implicit. There will always be reasons not to nominate a woman, to find justifications as to why other criteria are more important, or why a party has no eligible women. Legally, Parliament must only respect balanced regional and linguistic representations in government. Whether politicians adhere to unwritten quotas out of conviction is an open question. Explicit resistance still occurs in form of unfair criticism or threats against women, as in the case of Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf. Another example occurred as late as 2017 when candidate Isabelle Moret was belittled as a ditzy blonde (Marti, 2017).

Public discussion of the gender quota is essential to force parties to take a stand on it. Informal gender quotas in Switzerland depend on publicity and sustained agenda setting: they are easily ignored where public attention is lacking. In 2019, for example, a tabloid revealed that the Federal Assembly would send eleven men and only one woman to the Council of Europe parliament. The Council stipulates that there must be at least as many women in the delegation as in the lower national chamber. Swiss party representatives, however, declined responsibility citing male incumbents; that they had elected a woman in the past, and so it wasn't their turn (Triaca, 2019).

To conclude: left parties in Switzerland are committed to voluntary party quotas, although sometimes cantonal regulations remain vague.

Strict rules and general commitments coexist, and the parties' political culture is key to compliance. Unwritten quotas have gained acceptance but cannot be taken for granted: their implementation depends on continuous agenda setting by political actors.

2 Gender Quotas as Part of the "Political DNA"?

Several political, institutional, and cultural factors shape the implementation of quotas as well as broad reliance on unwritten quotas. Politically, the Green and Social Democratic party voluntary quotas have gained normative power because they are in line with ideological commitments and part of official party programs. The share of female members in these two parties is comparatively high, the Social Democrats have a strong women's section so feminists and feminist thinking are well anchored in both parties: "It's part of our DNA!", as a party president stated.[12] In other, center and center-right parties' quotas do not have ideological foothold, and women's sections have less lobbying success. Instead, some parties have used the rhetoric of "voluntary targets". This has a better programmatic fit but is, with party traditionalists still in power, less effective.

Gender quotas in left parties are based on internal bottom-up mobilization. For example, a handbook for local branches of the Social Democrats explains how to mobilize and promote women members, providing role models and recommending refusal to participate in all-male panels. As voluntary party quotas in both parties have been extended to party office and even to speakers' lists, Young Greens and Young Socialists evolved into feminist pressure groups and young women feel taken seriously. At the same time, women's professional engagement, care responsibilities and the unpredictability of political careers hinder women to advance in these two parties and beyond. The emergence and implementation of formal gender quotas and more informal procedures for gender equality in the parties are, according to party officials, a long-term endeavor that needs constant engagement.

Institutionally, the Swiss electoral system with its open list elections that allows voters a maximum of flexibility on how to allocate their votes works against legislative quotas. But if parties were forced to put 50% of women on National Assembly lists, it would most certainly create a publicly visible push to vote for women across parties. As voluntary party quotas in Switzerland do not tackle majoritarian elections, e.g. for the

Council of State or cantonal governments (also directly elected by voters, not parliaments), unwritten quotas have become an effective means of achieving gender balance even in majoritarian elections.

Culturally, however, the conviction prevails that the Swiss will manage issues perfectly well on a voluntary basis, including offering somehow a fair share of political power to women. Another aspect of Swiss identity is that the people are always right. Consequently, no alleged interference in the voters' choice is accepted, neither in public opinion nor in Court. Ongoing public debate on gender quotas and gender equality may, however, increase the acceptance of unwritten quota. Unwritten quotas can have an impact in high visibility elections like those to the Federal Council. They are not sustainable where visibility is lacking, or political watchdogs do not push gender as a salient issue onto the agenda. Informal quotas per se initiate no "natural" bottom-up mobilization for formal quotas.

3 How Quotas Contribute to Gender Equality

The implementation of party quotas proved successful for left parties: their electorate approve of the quota and through changes on the ballot it has pushed more women candidates into public office. They have the highest women's shares in parliament and governments, and their women politicians are visible and prominent. There is however no automatic spill-over to other parties, mainly for ideological reasons.

Moreover, the Swiss polity has no institutional need for a mandatory gender quota, as neither men nor women are a social group capable of winning a referendum nor they are a regional minority. Contrary to other quotas, gender quotas are not necessary for system stability as mentioned in the introduction: men and women as a group do not vote differently on most issues and never have a veto position (Senti, 1998). Therefore the frame extension to include gender as a component of consociationalism is so hard to accomplish.

Whether the current development is sustainable (that is, gender-balanced representation becomes firmly anchored in the political consciousness of the voters) remains to be seen. Thanks to continued agenda setting, gender has become a relevant and legitimate feature for elections to the Federal Council as unwritten quotas, even if it is hardly regarded as part of the reason of state. It is, though, one among several features weighed against each other. If and how quotas have a long-lasting

outcome for gender equality (beyond political fairness and equal rights to an interesting job) will have to be established by looking at substantive representation (Fuchs, 2015; Lloren, 2015).

Notes

1. For a recent campaign "Helvetia calls" see https://de.alliancef.ch/helvetia-ruft/, Fuchs 2018: 82–84. https://gruene.ch/statuten and https://www.sp-ps.ch/sites/default/files/documents/sp-statuten_2016.pdf.
2. Interview with Rahel Estermann, deputy general secretary Green Party, 25th June 2021.
3. Interview with Gina La Mantia, SP Women's Section, 21st April 2021.
4. Interview with Heidi Mück, co-president of Basta!—Basels starke Alternative (Basel's strong alternative), 1st June 2021.
5. Conversation with Alex Klee, local councillor Basel, Social Democratic Party, 25th April 2021.
6. Interview with Florence Brenzikofer, deputy national president Green Party, 10th June 2021, and Interview with Rahel Estermann, deputy general secretary Green Party, 25th June 2021.
7. https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-17.02.05.01.01 (Kantonale Parlamentswahlen: Mandatsverteilung nach Partei und Geschlecht). Accessed 5th November 2020.
8. https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-17.02.05.01.01. Accessed 5th November 2020.
9. Actual procedures and considerations around elections allow for many political games, but cannot be analyzed in more detail here.
10. At the same time, these were the conflicts that shook up the established consociational model. An analysis from a gender perspective is still lacking.
11. The following analysis is based on articles in leading print media (Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Tagesanzeiger, Le Temps) around election days 2003 to 2019.
12. The following facts are taken from interviews with party officials, see Contact Summary Sheets in the references.

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