



## Women in Switzerland: From Backwardness to Uneven Progress

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### OVERVIEW

With 7.4 million inhabitants, Switzerland is a small but very diverse country characterized by natural, cultural, economic, political, and religious cleavages; these exist, for example, between rural and metropolitan, poorer and wealthier areas, modernists and traditionalists, and left and right, and finally between its French-speaking, Italian-speaking, and German-speaking areas. These cleavages are crosscutting, and Swiss society has developed numerous mechanisms to cope with the divisive aspects of such diversity. Switzerland is a bicameral parliamentary democracy, but it has strong elements of direct democracy. Reconciliation, compromise, and consensus are important values and have corresponding procedures that allow Switzerland to reconcile its inner differences. They include a strong federalism among 26 cantons with substantial competencies; strong written and unwritten rules for protecting minorities; a stable, virtual all-party government; and a political decision-making process that involves all organized interests. Last but not least, a high standard of living and a welfare state help secure these processes. Important milestones for women are listed in Table 1.

Popular initiatives for amending the Constitution are submitted to the vote at the request of 100,000 citizens. All revisions to the Constitution are subject to a mandatory referendum. Parliament-made laws are submitted to vote at the request of 50,000 people (Swiss Federal Constitution, art. 138–142). Such an optional referendum fails if it does not get the majority of the votes. The law in question comes into force then.

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*Facing page: Woman travels on snowshoes near a snow-covered cabin in the Alps of Switzerland.  
(Falk Kienas/Shutterstock)*

TABLE 1. Milestones in Swiss Equity Policy

Subject	Year
Right to vote (mandatory referendum)	1971
Equal Rights Amendment (popular initiative) – with state obligation to create active equality policies	1981
New family law, gender neutral (failed referendum)	1988
Law on Equality in the Workplace (parliament)	1996
Gender-neutral revision of old age social security (failed referendum)	1998
New gender-neutral divorce law (parliament)	2000
Pro-choice solution for abortions (failed referendum)	2002
Paid maternity leave (failed referendum)	2004
Registered same sex partnerships (failed referendum)	2005

Source: Compiled from Eidgenössische Kommission für Frauenfragen (2001) and gfs.bern (n.d.).

In this essay, it is argued that the peculiarities of the Swiss political decision-making process shape political opportunities and attempts to improve the status of women. In particular, the features of this process affect political culture and movement strategies. Direct democracy requires supporters of new policies to gain majorities in the general population and the cantons, which can take a long time. To achieve such support, networking and cooperating with the corporatist structure are important. Finally, although much can be achieved by stressing the liberal notion of equal rights, redistributive policies still rarely succeed. Throughout the essay this claim will be supported by reference to specific policy areas.

Switzerland has been an isolationist and conservative society. This is an outcome of the spirit of the ideology that allowed the Swiss to remain neutral during World War II, the so-called “mental defense of the Fatherland” (*geistige Landesverteidigung*). Only the students’ revolt in Western Europe, with its long-term outcomes, such as cultural or sexual liberalization and leftist mobilization, brought a fresher feel to Swiss attitudes toward women. On the one hand, in popular culture and public discourse one basic principle of the bourgeois society, its strong public–private divide, still prevails. A woman’s place is in the home. The ideal mother still follows the 19th-century notion of her role: Children belong to their mother and mothers should be with their children in the house, where she has to feed them a home-cooked meal at noon. Female pursuit of gainful employment is often seen as a necessary evil. Until very recently, the ideal of the male breadwinner was institutionalized—for example, by old-age pension schemes or an organization of school timetables that discouraged women to work outside the home. On the other hand, cultural and economic shifts in the last decade have challenged these older models of gender roles immensely. Thus, the situation of women is full of contradictions.



(ABC-CLIO)

In the past decades, younger women have gradually become better educated. Employment rates rose from 68.2 percent in 1991 to 74.3 percent in 2005 among women aged 15–64 (Bundesamt für Statistik 2005d, 17). Even two-thirds of all mothers with small children work outside the home, and 56.7 percent of all employed women have part-time jobs (Bundesamt für Statistik 2005d, 11). Yet child care is seen as a private problem. Facilities are rare, rarely subsidized by the state, and expensive. Grandmothers do a great deal of care work.

Swiss women have been involved in organized politics only since 1971. On February 7 of that year, the male electorate agreed to include federal political rights for women in the constitution via mandatory referendum. Since then, female representation among political representatives has risen slowly but significantly, from 5 percent in 1971 to 29.5 percent in 2007 in the National Council, the lower chamber of Parliament. In May 2008, Switzerland ranked 24th in the worldwide ranking of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (n.d.). The first woman minister was elected in 1984 (Stämpfli 1994, 701). In 2008, women held 26.3 percent of all seats in cantonal parliaments and 19.9 percent of all cantonal ministers were women (Bundesamt für Statistik, n.d.). Because of party quotas, Social Democrats, Greens, and leftist parties have a greater percentage of female parliamentarians and ministers (about 40 percent) than liberal, conservative, or rightist parties (about 10 percent to 30 percent). The main hindrances and obstacles for women in public office are traditional gender stereotypes

and problems reconciling the competing demands of politics, family, and employment, because men rarely participate substantially in work related to family care or housework.

The next section of this essay deals with politics, namely, the women's movement and political participation. The third section is dedicated to diverse policy areas where the peculiarities of Swiss politics are demonstrated with regard to the equality law, maternity leave, abortion, and violence.

## POLITICS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

### *The Women's Movement*

Women obtained the right to vote very late, in 1971, although a women's movement and organizations had been at work in Switzerland since the 1870s. To explain this delayed success, one must take into account the political system, political culture, and the movement itself, with its strategies, beliefs, and conflicts (for a comprehensive account, see Voegeli 1997; Hardmeier 1997; and Banaszak 1996). The older women's movement was predominantly oriented toward "difference feminism", i.e. the assumption prevailed that men and women are essentially different in biological and social terms. Generally, engagement for practical interests related to traditional gender roles (such as education) was not used to make strategic demands (like equal rights). As in many other countries, there has been a cleavage in Switzerland between bourgeois-liberal and working-class women as well as between reformist and conservative organizations.

The first national organization for voting rights was founded in 1909. From the end of World War I through 1921, women's suffrage was clearly defeated in six cantons; disappointed women's organizations played down these defeats and adapted. In 1929, a petition for the women's vote with 250,000 signatures was handed over to the federal government (the men's signatures on this petition could have been used for a popular initiative for the amendment to the Constitution, but the initiators decided against it). The government discussed the petition as late as 1957. In the first nationwide vote on such a measure in 1959, Swiss men rejected women's suffrage. In 1963, Switzerland joined the Council of Europe without signing the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, although women's organizations protested this omission. In 1968, the federal government recommended signing the European Convention only with a reservation made to the clause on equal rights for men and women. At this time the protests were great and many women were outraged. On March 1, 1969, 5,000 people marched to the Swiss capital, Bern, and demonstrated on the Bundesplatz to demand immediate equal rights. The new women's liberation movement criticized older women's organizations for being reformist and defensive and even disrupted their meetings. In October 1969, the Council of States (second chamber of Parliament) blocked the ratification of the European Convention just as the Council of Europe signaled it would not accept a reservation on equal rights. In December, the Swiss government declared its wish to

## WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT AND GOVERNMENT

Although Swiss women gained political rights only recently, in 1971, and in some cantons even later, the political representation of women in parliaments is quite high. Since 2007, women make up 30 percent of the National Council members, in contrast to the average of 24 percent in the EU (Bundesamt für Statistik n.d.). The percentage of women in cantonal parliaments ranges from 11 percent to almost 37 percent (average 26 percent). This seems to be due to the political culture of Swiss consensus democracy, where representation of different groups in society—read quotas—is essential to produce social cohesion and reconcile conflicts. To date, only leftist parties have adopted formalized gender quotas. Informal quotas play a certain role in other parties, but there seems to be a glass ceiling of one third for female representation.

Female representation in executive power—that is, state leadership—has been harder to achieve. The average in the cantons in 2008 is only 20 percent and 25 percent in cities with more than 10,000 inhabitants. There are many examples of non-elected women or women who were not reelected to executive office (see text). In the 2007 election, Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf was not nominated but was elected into federal government as a third woman after Micheline Calmy-Rey and Doris Leuthard. Her party colleague, the incumbent Christoph Blocher from the Swiss People's Party, was defeated. Although the nonelection of official party candidates happens from time to time, the male leaders of the Swiss People's Party were outraged. They called Widmer-Schlumpf a traitor and excluded her and her party fellow Samuel Schmid from the parliamentary faction. Finally, the executive committee sent an ultimatum to Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf to resign both from the party and from her post in national government. This resulted in the mobilization of women's organizations like Alliance F. Their petition was signed by more than 100,000 persons within days. In April 2008, 12,000 people demonstrated in front of Parliament for a "decent and tolerant political culture" and criticized the "uncouth defamation" of a female politician who was elected democratically.

The Swiss women's movement has proved to have mobilizing powers to defend respect for basic democratic procedures and to defend women in office irrespective of their personal political affiliations as well. ([www.bfs.admin.ch](http://www.bfs.admin.ch))

introduce voting rights for women, and on February 7, 1971, two-thirds of the electorate voted yes.

The old suffrage movement had been predominantly bourgeois, and the range of means and instruments available to these women were very narrow because of the limitations of their role conceptions. Taking part in a demonstration, sometimes even signing a petition, simply "did not fit." No nationwide repertoires of movement tactics existed. The cleavages of language, religion (Catholics versus Protestants), and social background were very strong between different organizations and the exchange of information correspondingly rather weak. The movement did not frame its demands with the language of other reformist arguments, like those based on

natural law. It had almost no allies among the political parties and therefore exercised hardly any political pressure—the Social Democrats attached themselves to this initiative only belatedly, and other party elites opposed the women's vote. The movement did almost no lobbying. Cooperation with conservative women's organizations weakened the movement because their image of women was very reactionary. Furthermore, activists had been integrated into the lower levels of bourgeois politics by family ties and the generally small size of communes in which they were sometimes pacified by being appointed to communal or parish commissions. Finally, the movement did not use any confrontational tactics—partly because Swiss political culture is consensus oriented, partly because such behavior contradicts norms of female behavior. These factors together explain why so few opportunities have been taken to conduct typical political pressure techniques, such as initiatives, lobbying, or street protests.

*Bern*  
The march to Bern marked the starting point of the new women's movement. At the beginning, it was characterized by a big *no* to patriarchy and structural oppression as well as a rejection of the previous policies and politics of the established women's organizations. The Swiss movement developed around similar issues as in Germany: consciousness raising, violence against women, abortion, and peace. Looking back, the new women's movement has had a significant impact: all topics treated in this essay have been affected by the agenda set by feminist politics. Cultural norms, values, self-concepts and identities, role models, access to education, and several laws have changed significantly in favor of women. Nevertheless, significant gaps between the genders persist in terms of equal distribution of power, money, time, and recognition. Progress toward resolving these problems is slow; the inequalities persist and the developments are often contradictory. Whether a real shift in gender relations has occurred or ongoing inequality has merely been modernized is an ongoing discussion in Switzerland.

*Fem Bern*  
At the beginning, the new women's movement organized itself autonomously, not only in informal initiatives but also in new umbrella organizations (Organisation für die Sache der Frau and Mouvement pour la Libération des Femmes). These organizations have since dissolved and have been replaced by a rather loose Feminist Coalition (FemCo, n.d.) consisting of 64 organizations. The "old," more traditional women's associations are organized in the Bund Schweizerischer Frauenvereine (BSF), founded in 1900, which comprises 170 organizations and is known as "Alliance F" (Bund Schweizerischer Frauenorganisationen, n.d.). The feminist movement has institutionalized and diversified itself since the mid-1980s; antiover violence groups, for example, formed nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and opened hotlines and houses for battered women that now receive state subsidies for their services. Another characteristic of this development is the parallel use of legal opportunities by newer groups in coalition with traditional women's organizations: In 1975, the traditionalist Swiss Women's Congress decided by a narrow majority to launch a popular initiative for equal rights for men and women to be included in the Constitution. Autonomous women's groups helped collect the 50,000 signatures needed to place the initiative on the ballot. (Some women in traditionalist groups, reluctant to demand more after having won the vote, opposed the initiative). The

slightly altered equal rights amendment was adopted in 1981. Other examples of such cooperation are initiatives for paid maternity leave and free, legal abortions. The first state feminist institutions were founded and run predominantly by movement members. During the 1990s, feminist demands found their way into the platforms of left parties and trade unions via members, quotas, and agendas. For example, Christine Goll, a notable feminist, is president of the Public Worker's Union (VPOD), and Christiane Brunner was elected president of the Swiss Metal and Watches Worker's Union in 1992. Women in the trade unions worked hard to abolish discriminatory general pay agreements. In 1991, to mark the 10th anniversary of the equal rights amendment and to press for equal pay, the trade unions called a nationwide women's strike. In response, a half million women stopped work or participated in a wide range of public action.

### *Successful Women's Movement Strategies*

Certain strategies have typically proved successful for achieving legal goals in the Swiss political context (see Senti 1998). Coalition building between traditional women's organizations and bourgeois parties for any project to change Swiss law is very important. Given the factors discussed in the introduction, in order to be successful it is necessary to seek an all-party (or nearly all-party) compromise and mobilize different political groups for this compromise (especially if it is one to be decided by ballot). To get all parties on board, sometimes strategic compromises must be made. For example, the goal of a gender-neutral arrangement of the old age pension scheme (the so-called 10. AHV-Revision) was traded for an increase in the retirement age for women. When a measure fails, it is important to try it again and again. The legal guarantee of paid maternity leave was achieved only in the fifth referendum attempt over 25 years. Finally, a good argument for innovation in Switzerland is the fact that it has already been "tried and tested on the cantonal level"—as with voting rights or protective measures against domestic violence. The use of direct democracy may not only have direct outcomes, but it can also be an instrument for agenda setting, as with the quota initiative for better political representation.

*Little Prognosis*  
Since the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, the situation in Switzerland has generally been seen increasingly through the lens of women's rights as universal human rights. Shadow reports by feminist and women's organizations are important instruments. Women's rights initiatives, women's rights groups, and even state feminist agencies frame their reports and demands in the language of international law and conventions. Normally, the Swiss have had a strong feeling of exceptionalism (in the form of convictions about having the best political system, the wealthiest, most stable country, or the most humanitarian policies). This conviction has been shattered, however, since the end of the Cold War and research on Swiss activities during World War II. Another sign of the globalizing consciousness of the Swiss women's movement is the formation of the initiative PeaceWomen across the Globe (formerly 1000 Women for the Nobel Peace Prize 2005) in 2001 by the Social Democrat parliamentarian Ruth-Gaby Vermot-Mangold. The group's goal was to

nominate a thousand “peacewomen” for the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize—most of whom were invisible and often endangered as they engaged in grassroots peace work all over the world.

### Civil Society

Strong corporatist structures and a high degree of organized interests are characteristic of Switzerland. These groups and veto players are crucial in the political decision-making process, but their influences are uneven. The most powerful agents remain a male-dominated closed shop. (There is no gender-specific analysis of interest groups. See Linder 2004, 111–125, 309–313, or Linder 1998 for an earlier version in English.) Switzerland has a long-standing, gender-segregated tradition of volunteer work and unpaid engagement in public office. Women did and still do most of the charity and church work. After the beginning of the 20th century, they were admitted to the occupation of school supervision. Men, in contrast, filled political positions. The social texture in Switzerland is rather dense. In a 1996 survey, 60 percent of Swiss citizens reported that they were active in one or more voluntary associations; only 21 percent had no membership at all. Between 1976 and 1996, the active membership of men in such groups declined from 72 percent to 65 percent, while female active membership rose from 48 percent to 56 percent (Freitag 2001, 96–97). Middle-aged people with better education and higher income are more likely to be active members. According to a survey (Bundesamt für Statistik 2005c), one-quarter of the population had been involved in organized volunteer work during the week preceding the survey. Men are more active than women (30 percent versus 21 percent) in associational life, predominantly in sports and cultural clubs and interest groups. Women engage mainly in sports clubs as well as in social and charity work. In addition, 3 percent of men and 1 percent of women worked in a political office or party. On the other hand, women predominate in informal voluntary work, like helping relatives and neighbors (29 percent versus 17 percent of men). They look after children or do housework for the elderly and disabled.

The need for care work, especially for the elderly, and social services continually increases. One strategy for coping with this increase is to revalue volunteer work symbolically, to formalize it and to stress its impact on one’s future employment opportunities. The implicit target of such attempts is women, but the underrepresentation of men in this field is not perceived as a problem (Nadai 2006). Whether this revaluation will be attractive for women remains to be seen.

### Political Participation and Representation

After the successful federal vote in 1971, it took another 19 years until the last canton, Appenzell Inner Rhoden, was forced by a ruling of the Federal Tribunal to grant full political rights to its female citizens. There has been a stable rise in the participation of women in political bodies at the communal, cantonal, and federal levels. Cantons that granted political rights before 1971 have an even better representation than relative latecomers. In Europe, Switzerland ranges in the middle field, ahead of

TABLE 2. Women in Switzerland’s National Parliament, 1971–2007

	1971	1975	1979	1983	1987	1991	1995	1999	2003	2007
Lower House (Nationalrat), 200 seats	10 (5%)	15 (7.5%)	21 (10.5%)	22 (11.0%)	29 (14.5%)	35 (17.5%)	43 (21.5%)	47 (23.5%)	52 (26.0%)	59 (29.5%)
Upper House (Ständerat), 46 seats	1 (2.2%)	0	3 (6.5%)	3 (6.5%)	5 (10.9%)	4 (8.7%)	8 (17.5%)	9 (19.6%)	11 (23.9%)	10 (21.7%)

Sources: Eidgenössische Kommission für Frauenfragen (2001), Seitz (2004) and [http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/de/index/themen/17/02/blank/key/frauen\\_und\\_politik/bund.html](http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/de/index/themen/17/02/blank/key/frauen_und_politik/bund.html) (accessed May 19, 2008).

France, Poland, and Italy, but behind Sweden, Spain, and even Germany in women’s representation in political entities. Federal expert commissions in 2002 comprised between 27 percent and 42 percent women, due to an internal minimum quota of 30 percent that has been in force since 1989 (see Michel et al. 2002, 46). Table 2 shows women’s share of seats in Parliament since 1971.

Female representation in federal government positions has been harder to achieve. Both chambers of parliament elect ministers for four years. If a minister resigns during the legislature period, his or her party nominates one or two candidates as replacements. Candidates undergo a hearing in the different party fractions. A candidate has to fulfill several quotas (canton, language, profession, age, and possibly sex) and should actively accept the “principle of concordance,” that is, agree to present and defend all government decisions in public, even if strongly opposed to them personally. In 1993, the Social Democrats nominated the trade unionist Brunner for a ministerial position. The bourgeois parties opposed her candidacy. It was argued, even by an anonymous “committee,” that Brunner did not reflect the principle of concordance, that as a divorcee living outside of wedlock with her new partner she simply did not represent Switzerland. She was accused of having participated in an illegal abortion. Instead, on March 3, 1993, Parliament elected the Social Democrat Francis Matthey as its new minister. Matthey did not immediately accept, but asked instead for a period to decide. At the same time 5,000 people demonstrated in front of the Parliament. They were outraged that Swiss politicians refused to accept a woman and disregarded her legitimate claim to inclusion in government. The following days saw several actions and demonstrations in favor of Brunner. Behind the curtains a compromise was worked out that saved face for everyone: Matthey did not accept his election, and the Social Democrats presented two candidates, Brunner and Ruth Dreifuss. Parliament finally elected Dreifuss. She had a more “womanly attitude,” did not seem to be so “radical,” and was therefore more “eligible.” As it turned out, Dreifuss was one of the highest-profile ministers of recent decades (for a comprehensive account on this election, see Duttweiler 1993). This example shows that in a small country, once they are on the national agenda and treated by the national media, political demands can be realized quickly.

**TABLE 3.** Women in National Government Positions in Switzerland

Term of Office	Name and Party	Office
1984–1989	Elisabeth Kopp (Radical-Liberal)	Minister of Justice
1993–2003	Ruth Dreifuss (Social Democrat)	Minister of the Interior
1999–2003	Ruth Metzler (Christian Democrat)	Minister of Justice
2003–present	Micheline Calmy-Rey (Social Democrat)	Minister of Foreign Affairs
2006–present	Doris Leuthard (Christian Democrat)	Minister of Economy
2007–present	Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf (Swiss People's Party)	Minister of Justice

In 1993, all cantons witnessed a sudden rise in women's representation in the parliaments, a trend that has been described as the "Brunner effect." Voters in Switzerland can alter ballots, giving two votes to one candidate, putting a candidate of one party on another party's list, and crossing others off the list. Such preference voting can be good for women, but the opposite is true as well. (About 10 percent of the electorate makes gender a criteria for voting (Fuchs 2004, 81). For more information about electoral systems, see Norris 2000 and Rule 1994.) Especially in conservative, liberal, and rightist parties, women generally have worse chances of election, even if they are high on the party's list, because voters discriminate against them. This tendency is the reason campaigns by equal opportunity offices and the national woman's commission to elect women are so important. They usually argue that electing women is a matter of justice and better represents society's different interests (see Table 3 for a list of women who have become governmental ministers in Switzerland). Unfortunately, the gender gap in voting participation has failed to bring Switzerland close to the representation found in other European countries. In 1999, only 37 percent of Swiss women but 51 percent of Swiss men, voted in national elections. The surveys taken up to now to determine the reasons for this state of affairs have not included large enough sample sizes to provide convincing answers (Fuchs 2004, 79).

In communal parliaments the representation of women among parliamentarians is as high as 31 percent; in 1983 it had been only 16.2 percent. In communal executives the share is 25 percent compared with 5.8 percent in 1983. Since the 1980s the share has been strongly differentiated by party: about 40–45 percent of leftist and Green party members of Parliament are women, compared with about 25 percent of bourgeois party members. The problem of female underrepresentation among parliamentarians is especially strong in the populist Swiss People's Party (Schweizerische Volkspartei) (Seitz 2006).

So far, only leftist parties have adopted quotas as a solution to the imbalance, although they have proven very effective in improving women's representation. Quotas are measures to compensate inequalities, which have structural as well as individual causes. Hence, equal access to political office is not sufficient as a response to female

underrepresentation. Quotas should balance actual inequalities. Formal and informal quotas are political instruments to protect minorities and to handle and come to terms with differences. Quotas consequently lie at the heart of the Swiss political system of consensus democracy, which uses them to reconcile conflict between groups and produce social cohesion. For example, in the Council of States, every canton has two seats, irrespective of size; popular initiatives have to be approved by the majority of voters in the majority of cantons. Because the small cantons are also the most conservative, this arrangement creates a very high barrier to attempts to change laws.

Although quotas are a very Swiss approach to an issue, formal sex quotas for nominating candidates exist only in some parties. In the 1990s, popular initiatives for quotas in government and public administration at the federal or cantonal level were defeated or declared unconstitutional. In political discourse, however, women's claims of, for example, a second seat of seven in the federal government are contested less and less. Thus, such claims are supported rhetorically, but binding decisions are rejected. Why have supporters of quotas not succeeded to date? Obviously, claims for gender quotas have not been successfully integrated into the commonly resonating framework of political quotas. Quotas are intended to bridge cleavages, so gender must be established as a new, important cleavage, in addition to region, language, and others. Because arguments about cleavage rely on notions of difference, whereas most quota advocates come from a left-wing tradition of equality and justice, arguments for gender quotas may sound self-contradictory (see also Tinker 2004; Wytttenbach 2000).

Structural reasons for the underrepresentation of women in politics are hardly discussed (Michel et al. 2002, 44). Open sexism, as in the case of Brunner, is discredited now. Nonetheless, particular policy areas are still ascribed to men or women: basic state functions (e.g., internal affairs, finance, justice) and infrastructure are largely assumed by men, and women dominate in social affairs, culture, and education. The process of obtaining a ministry-level position or a post in a parliamentary commission seems to be determined by an interplay of personal interest, professional experience, external (gender) expectations, and, finally, power (Fuchs 1994, 592–593).

Payments from an expense account are the only remunerations for most political positions and offices in Switzerland, whether for the federal parliament or the village executive. A career path as a professional politician simply does not exist. Politics is not regarded as a full-time job. The hegemonic notion of civil society is one of a republican community where citizens actively discuss public issues and fulfill public duties at the same time. This notion stresses that politicians should be rooted in "real life" (Nadai 2006, 344). Of course, this "militia style" of politics is more clearly interest-driven (no incompatibility rules exist); it is socially selective, and officeholders often do not fulfill the professional requirements of the tasks (Linder 2004, 73–76). Many communities are experiencing a growing lack of sufficiently qualified personnel for office, because people face increasing pressures at work. Whether this situation will open opportunities for women or whether men and women will refrain from political office for similar reasons is an open question; political scientists should do qualitative research to answer it.

## POLICIES

### *Education*

Like many other countries, Switzerland has experienced an educational expansion in recent decades. Educational attainment tends to be high. In 2004, of all individuals between 25 and 64 years old, 27 percent pursued a tertiary education (university degree), 54 percent were recipients of an upper secondary education (university-entrance diploma from high school or professional or vocational training), and only 19 percent had no post-compulsory training, i.e. only nine years of schooling (Bundesamt für Statistik 2005e, 28). Women have caught up with men in education: of women older than 75 years, 60 percent had no training after school, but only 20 percent of women aged 35–44 years had no training. The respective figures for men are 29 percent and 13 percent (Bundesamt für Statistik 2003a, 24). But gender differences remain relatively high; even today, fewer young women continue their training after secondary school (Bühler and Heye 2005, 17). Differences between native Swiss and foreigners are much greater than differences between the genders, which makes migrant women a vulnerable and discriminated-against group.

Universities opened up for Swiss women at the turn of the 20th century. Discriminatory rules and different timetables for girls and boys in schools persisted until the 1990s. Career choices are highly stereotyped by gender and have not changed in recent years. Young women tend to choose business training and personal services (from sales to nursing), and young men opt for technical and industrial vocational training. The gender division of labor, the difficult employment situation, social expectations, and self-concepts make girls and boys anticipate their chances and how they will “fit” in different professions in cultural terms (Grossenbacher 2006). Yet in secondary school, girls fare generally better than boys. For example, in 2000, 13.3 percent of the 15-year-old girls versus 21.5 percent of the 15-year-old boys in the Programme of International Student Assessment (a program of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) were in the lowest levels for reading skills (Bundesamt für Statistik 2003a, 28f.). In 2004, 58 percent of all academic baccalaureates (called *Matura*), university-entrance diplomas received after 12 or 13 years of schooling, went to young women but only 48 percent of all university degrees (Bachelor, Master, and Diploma) and 38 percent of all doctorates. Looking at the teaching personnel, one can observe the typical funnel effect: 95 percent of all kindergarten teachers are women and 78 percent of teachers in primary schools are women, but only 41 percent in upper secondary education are women. In universities, 29 percent of the teaching staff is female, but women account for only 11 percent of university professors (Bundesamt für Statistik 2005b). The last figure rose only recently from 7 percent in 1998 thanks to (monetary) incentives offered through a federal equality program (CUS, n.d.).

### *Economy: Employment and Unpaid Labor*

Two tendencies in employment are characteristic for Switzerland. Women’s employment, especially that of mothers, has risen. Between 1970 and 2000, employment rates

for women in the prime working age group jumped from 40 percent to 78 percent (Bühler and Heye 2005, 24). The overall employment rate in this age range (15–64 years) is 70.4 percent for women and 83.9 percent for men. At the same time, part-time work proliferated. Today, 56.7 percent of all employed women, but only 11 percent of men, work part-time. About half of the women employed part-time work fewer than 20 hours weekly (Bundesamt für Statistik 2005d, 16f, 40f.). These data mean that only about one-third of all paid working hours are completed by women (Bühler and Heye 2005, 30), whereas they account for two-thirds of all unpaid working hours (work in the house, care work, and voluntary work). In 2005, 5.1 percent of women and 3.9 percent of men were unemployed. Since mass unemployment first surfaced in Switzerland in the 1970s, unemployment rates have risen faster for women than for men. Unemployment rates for mothers with small children are twice as high as the average for women (Bühler and Heye 2005, 41).

Part-time work can be involuntary. In 2003, 3.8 percent of all employed men, but 16 percent of all employed women declared themselves underemployed, a figure that doubled in one decade (Bundesamt für Statistik 2003b). Children younger than 15 years influence the number of working hours for women in Switzerland, whereas the hours of male employment stay the same irrespective of parenthood status. The inequality results from cultural stereotypes, which suggest that women are responsible for raising children and doing housework. This notion of gender roles puts women at a disadvantage: mothers lose financial independence, their social security payments are lower, their professional and career development is hampered, and—keeping in mind the high divorce rate—their risk of poverty is rather high (Bühler and Heye 2005, 28–30). On average, women work 30.5 unpaid hours per week, compared with 16.5 hours for men. Nine of ten women with children younger than 15 years of age bear the main responsibility for housework and care work (Bundesamt für Statistik 2003a, 78f.). Many criticize the fact that this work experience is not considered relevant to paid employment and that it does not provide contributions to social security or old age pensions. Yet there are no political initiatives for waged housework.

Women more often have precarious jobs. In 2003, 27.5 percent of all women, but only 13.5 percent of all men, were in at least one of the following categories: being a family or home worker, working on call or in private households, or employed for fewer than six hours weekly. The figures have increased in recent years (Bundesamt für Statistik 2003a, 42f).

In 1970, about 70 percent of all family households followed the classic mode where the father worked full-time as the breadwinner and mother was the housewife and cared for the children. In 2000, only 36.3 percent of the family households follow this arrangement. A new model has emerged where the father works full-time and the mother works part-time and does the caring and housework (47 percent of the households). Two full-time working parents (9 percent) are an exception as are two part-time working parents (1.6 percent) (Bundesamt für Statistik 2003a, 39).

In general, poverty is not feminized, but single parents, 90 percent of them mothers, experience the highest poverty risk, as the first nationwide statistics on public assistance showed: whereas 3 percent of the population depends on public assistance, the figure

TABLE 4. Differences in Professional Status of Men and Women in Switzerland, 2003

	Women	Men
Employee without supervisory function	58.9%	38.4%
Employee in managerial position or with supervisory function	21.4%	36.8%
Self-employed	11.6%	18%
Undergoing training / apprenticeship	5.0%	5.1%
Family worker	3.1%	1.7%
Total	100%	100%

Source: Calculated from Federal Office for Statistics, Swiss Labor Force Survey, 2003.

is 14 percent for single-parent families. Two-thirds of these households require support for more than one year (Bundesamt für Statistik 2006).

As shown in Table 4, there is a difference in professional status between women and men in Switzerland. In 2000, only 15 percent of higher management positions (*Unternehmensleitung*) were filled by women; in 1970 it was 10 percent (Bühler and Heye 2005, 32). Research on leading positions in politics and the economy revealed that production and maintenance of gender differences and segregation are stricter and stronger in business than even in politics. This conclusion applies to cultural and structural shaping of gender-specific working fields, recruiting and career patterns, and discrimination that occurs via social interaction or demands that can only be met by the “standard male biography” (Liebig 1997, 261–274).

Women with equal qualifications earn about one-fifth less than men (2000: 21.3 percent, 2004: 19.7 percent; based on average hourly wages) with a slight trend downwards (Bundesamt für Statistik 2004). This pay gap is smaller in the public sector, for less-qualified work, and in western Switzerland (Romandie). It is most severe for those employed in the most-qualified jobs and in the eastern parts of Switzerland.

In 2000, 1.5 million foreigners lived in Switzerland (20 percent). As a group they occupy less-qualified jobs and fewer management positions (Wanner 2004, 31f.). Nowadays it is nearly impossible for people from outside the European Union (EU) to get a work permit unless they are highly qualified. An estimated 70,000–300,000 illegal foreigners (called *Sans Papiers*) live in Switzerland (Anlaufstelle 2004, 3). Female immigration, mainly from Latin America and Eastern Europe, covers the demand for employment in households, child care, and the sex work sector (Michel et al. 2002, 27).

### Equality Law

Since 1996, Switzerland has had an equality law in place that covers employment and selectively implements EU directives on gender equality (Englaro 2004). The law

forbids any discrimination, direct or indirect, on the basis of sex. This prohibition holds true especially for hiring, tasks, working conditions, continuing education and vocational training, promotion, dismissal, and sexual harassment. According to the law, reasonable and appropriate measures to achieve factual equality do not constitute discrimination. The burden of proof for proving violations of the law is that discrimination does not have to be proven to have occurred, but the plaintiff must show it may credibly have occurred. The defendant (i.e., the employer) must prove that it did not discriminate (as an exception, in cases of hiring and harassment the plaintiff has the full burden of proof). Organizations may go to court on behalf of individuals. In most cantons an obligatory arbitration procedure must precede a legal suit.

The equality law places the main burden of acting against discrimination on the individual employee. Strong public institutions to investigate and discipline employers on their own initiative (like the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in the United States) do not exist. The law implemented the EU directives on equal pay and equal treatment (75/117, 76/207), reversed the burden of proof, and created a fund comparable to EU Framework Strategies. It anticipated the definition of sexual harassment as discrimination and the right of associations to sue (both have been included in EU directives since 2002). On the other hand, nothing about parental leave or equality in social security has been implemented. These measures may be unattractive in Switzerland because they contest the public-private divide and may be perceived as redistributive. The implementation of EU law, as far as it follows liberal notions of nondiscrimination, seems to be unproblematic and is economically useful and politically necessary.

A recent evaluation of the equality law (AG Gleichstellungsgesetz 2005) revealed that awareness of its provisions is high within enterprises and trade unions, but not among employees. Judicial personnel have certain knowledge gaps with respect to its content, thus hampering its effective implementation and resulting in legal uncertainty. The meaning of the concept of indirect discrimination remains unclear for many people potentially involved in related legal actions. Some suits have had substantial and widely debated results. In the public sector, for instance, trade unions went to court to realize “equal pay for work of equal value” for typical female occupations like nursing, physiotherapy, and kindergarten and primary school teaching. Four big suits concerning equal pay in public health care in the canton of Zurich resulted in the retroactive payment of 280 million Swiss francs and an ongoing annual payment of 70 million Swiss francs due to the reclassification of such occupations. Such collective suits are typical, and they mitigate the need and risk to expose oneself (which can prove difficult in a small country and small enterprises).

### Equity Policy

State equity policy may be categorized according to three approaches (Wahl 1999). First, the discrimination model is based on liberal tradition. It assumes that reasons for discrimination are individual and therefore seeks to abolish individual discrimination via equality before and via the law. Second, the expanding opportunities

approach sees the reasons for discrimination outside the labor market, for example, in gender-specific socialization and division of unpaid labor and care work. Finally, the affirmative action approach attributes discrimination to structural factors that cannot be confronted individually and therefore seeks to promote disadvantaged groups. Affirmative-action policies are virtually absent in Switzerland. Several attempts have been made to expand opportunities for women, that is, to enhance female labor market participation via taxation, social security measures, or paid maternity leave. But virtually all political successes in achieving gender equality in recent years (see Table 1) are based on a liberal antidiscrimination model. Equality before the law and the abolition of direct discrimination are very important—yet recent—steps and must not be underestimated. The Constitution (article 8, sentence 3) obliges the state to engage in active policies for factual equality, specifically in employment, family, and education. Only the law on surnames is not gender neutral. A judgment of the European Court for Human Rights in 1994 criticized this, but the parliament has failed thus far to make an amendment.

Mainly between 1989 and 1996, many cantonal offices and one federal office for equal opportunity for women and men were established, mostly reporting directly to one minister. They work on behalf of the public administration and the general public. They are supposed to raise public awareness of gender-equality issues in the general public; advise public administrators in these matters, especially in the formulation of new legal regulations; initiate and carry out projects and programs; and conduct studies and reports on the current situation and further needs.

These state feminist institutions have concentrated on education and vocational training, reconciliation of employment and care/housework, women in politics, and domestic violence. Other fields of action (following the Beijing Platform of Action) have hardly been dealt with, such as poverty, health, migration, the environment, or the media. Efforts to implement gender mainstreaming in cantonal and federal administration are scattered, except in the Department of Cooperation and Development.

All in all, the equality offices have little authority, have no veto rights, and are heavily understaffed. Populists, especially those from the Swiss People's Party, attack them on a regular basis, for example, by initiatives to abolish these offices in Parliament or via a popular initiative. As a cantonal minister defined the offices' mission: "You have to bark, but you mustn't bite." Swiss equity policy is a mixture of liberal, antidiscrimination, and expanding opportunity approaches. Its impact and outcomes have yet to be thoroughly analyzed.

### *Maternity Leave*

High-quality reproductive health care is available in Switzerland. All contraceptive methods are available and in use, teen birthrates are low, and infant mortality is low (under 5 per 1,000 live births) (Stahelin and Coda 2004, 6). Breastfeeding has been on the rise again since the 1970s, but legal protection of pregnant women and young mothers in the workplace is weak. For example, arrangements for part-time

work after birth do not derive from legal entitlements; rather, they mainly depend on personal power to negotiate with the employer. This may have poor results if older cultural values about motherhood still prevail in the enterprise (Stahelin and Coda 2004, 66–67). Until 2005, Switzerland had no paid maternity leave, but there was a ban on work until at least eight weeks after delivery. In 1945, the state was obliged via constitutional amendment to introduce a maternity insurance scheme. In four elections (1974, 1984, 1987, and 1999) the Swiss rejected different proposals to fulfill this requirement. In 2004, there was another referendum and a maternity leave policy was introduced. Since July 1, 2005, every woman who has paid social insurance for at least 12 months is entitled to a maternity leave of 14 weeks (paid at 80 percent of the last salary, but with a maximum amount of 172 Swiss francs per day). The leave is financed by proportional contributions of all wages to a fund that was previously used mostly to finance salaries during military service. There existed and still exists a variety of regulations for civil servants as well as collective labor agreements that are more generous than those of the statutory regulations.

In discussions about this policy, the arguments of the opponents differed, depending on the provisions of the proposal, sometimes attacking (1974, 1984, and 1987) and at other times demanding (1999 and 2004) the inclusion of women not in the workforce. The underlying questions here are whether maternity and children are a private or a public issue and whether society must make provisions for raising children or not; in short, such questions reflect the public-private divide. Although social measures to protect maternity were already a common issue for bourgeois and leftist women in the old women's movement, liberal and conservative organizations have not always supported the different proposals; class differences proved to be stronger than allegiances to women's issues (see also Senti 1998, 691). The 2004 referendum was successful because the solution was supported not only by left parties, feminist groups, and trade unions but also by liberals, Christian Democrats, and employers' organizations. Voters made their decisions based mostly on fundamental, abstract reasons, like social justice, promotion of the family, or constitutional provisions (gfs.bern 2004, 28). This example shows that some issues have to be brought before the voters repeatedly in order to succeed. As maternity leave is a redistributive measure with high symbolic impact, a broad coalition was necessary to establish it. Unfortunately, further laws for better reconciliation of the problems that necessitate maternity leave have not been discussed, such as parental leave, right to part-time work for young parents, or a general reduction of the length of the work week.

### *Abortion*

Legal abortions have been an issue for the Swiss women's movement since the beginning of the 20th century (Eidgenössische Kommission für Frauenfragen, 2001, sec. 3.8). Abortion was illegal in Switzerland and was regulated on a nationwide basis since the introduction of the 1942 penal code. Exceptions were made for cases relating

to birth defects, crimes, and the mother's health. A complicated procedure of examinations and expert opinions was in force. This system led to diverse practices in different areas of the country. In urban, industrialized, and Protestant areas, policy enforcement was rather liberal. In rural, Catholic, and small cantons with a high level of social control, the practice was rather restrictive. This state of affairs resulted in considerable "abortion tourism" within the country.

The new women's movement, inspired by French and German women who declared publicly "I had an abortion," launched as early as 1971 a rather radical popular initiative that was modified in 1975. This action led to the beginning of broad public discussion and a long political process. Several experts' commissions, both chambers of parliament, civil associations and pro-life and pro-choice activists were involved. In 1977, a popular initiative to allow abortion in first trimester of pregnancy was rejected (after receiving only 48 percent of the votes). A compromise—to add a provision permitting abortion based on certain social factors into the existing law—was contested by both sides and rejected in a referendum in 1978. A pro-life initiative that sought to ban any future liberalization of the abortion law failed decisively in 1985. In 1993, Social Democrat Barbara Haering Binder initiated a new attempt at liberalization that finally resulted in a new popular election in 2002. The National Council and its legal commission supported the project, and even during the administrative procedure that allows consultation about the formulation of a law (*Vernehmlassungsverfahren*) most parties, cantons, associations, and organizations were in favor of this solution. In a pivotal decision, the women's section of the Christian Democrats voted for the liberalization at their 2001 congress. The corresponding sections of the Radical Liberals and the Protestant Church Association followed, as well as an ad hoc coalition of eight women's organizations. Despite the hesitation of the federal government, in March 2001 Parliament passed the law. It guarantees any woman who claims an emergency the right to an abortion before a 12-week limit. Later abortions are only possible in response to severe health problems. In 2002, 72 percent of the Swiss people in most cantons voted in favor of the law.

Analyses show that in the matter of support for abortion rights, sociocultural background (education or religious denomination) has been a more important determining factor than age, gender, or political orientation. Surprisingly, 64 percent of Catholic women voted yes to the referendum (in 1977, it had been only 28 percent). The result reflects a considerable modernization shift and a rapprochement of rural and urban areas, of Catholics and Protestants, and of linguistic regions. The most important argumentative fault line has fallen between considerations about the right to make autonomous decisions about one's body and sentiments about the protection of the unborn (gfs.bern 2002). This example shows once again that an all-party women's coalition can be successful in changing Swiss law; the support of Christian Democrat women was crucial in this particular example. The liberal notion of an autonomous woman had gained broader social acceptance. Analyses of equality-related popular referenda have shown that other laws and initiatives with redistributive character could not count on women's solidarity in the same way. Rather, the differentiated

personal situation of women was decisive for their individual decision also in this case (see Senti 1998, 705–707).

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

The problem of violence against women was a key starting point of second-wave feminism. Violence was analyzed as a systematic and common means to control women in patriarchal society. Remedy could only come by improving women's status. Women's shelters were founded and demands for better protection against rape in marriage were raised. In 1992, new regulations in the penal code went into force that made marital rape a crime. This was the result of endless parliamentary discussion and a referendum of right-wing politicians that was defeated by an all-party women's coalition. Since 2004, marital rape has been a legal offense. Authorities must prosecute this crime even against the victim's will (Eidgenössisches Büro für Gleichstellung 2005). The first representative study on violence against women in 1997 found that at least 20 percent of all women experience physical or sexual violence from their partners (Gillioz 1997). The Swiss Conference of Equality Delegates launched the first nationwide awareness-raising campaign the same year.

Following the campaign, so-called intervention projects were set up in at least nine cantons. These projects have been inspired by the model of the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, Minnesota. Their objectives are to stop violence, protect victims, call perpetrators to account, increase sensitivity to the problem among the general public and involved institutions, and above all improve institutional interventions and procedures like techniques of interrogations, prioritization of domestic violence cases, and information policy. These measures are discussed and controlled at round tables (Haeberli 2005, 2–3) with involved institutions and NGOs. Since 2003, some cantons have amended police laws so that the police can remove a perpetrator from a shared residence (Eidgenössisches Büro für Gleichstellung 2004), and standardization will hopefully be achieved in the near future.

The example of cooperation between NGOs and state institutions in dealing with domestic violence reflects, on the one hand, a general shift in the perception of the state by feminists—from the agent of patriarchy to guarantor of personal inviolability. It also reveals a shift in the Swiss perception of the commonly observed public-private divide: violence is no longer regarded as a private matter, but it is framed as a civil rights violation. On the other hand, structural reasons for domestic violence are hardly discussed nowadays.

## CONCLUSION

Over the past 35 years, changes in the status of women in Switzerland have been enormous, from the attainment of basic political rights in 1971 to the achievement of paid maternity leave in 2005. Values, norms, and role conceptions have become more diverse and egalitarian, although stereotypes do remain.

Swiss politics, with its strong organized interests and its focus on consensus and moderation, makes a step-by-step approach necessary in order to improve women's status. Examples here are the achievement of legal equality or the regulation of abortion. Liberal nondiscrimination arguments have been very successful as a tool for supporting the goals of the women's movement. This is also reflected by the individual focus of the equality law to combat discrimination in the workplace. In contrast, it is very difficult for any redistributive policies to gain majority support, as repeated attempts for paid maternity leave have shown. This problem demonstrates how very important the public-private divide still is. Nonetheless, these boundaries may be shifted, as the successful framing of domestic violence as a human rights violation illustrates. Values and discourses are crucial in legitimizing changes in the status of women in Switzerland, both in legislation and social practice. The women's movement has made a very important contribution here. Meanwhile, the movement has diffused and institutionalized. This transformation is due to a normal cycle within popular citizen's movements, but new mobilization will be inevitable: remaining issues have to be popularized, their supporters will have to lobby to create coalitions that will allow political majorities, and they will have to try and try again.

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