ESCE
Electoral System Change in Europe since 1945

Electoral System Change in Europe since 1945: Switzerland
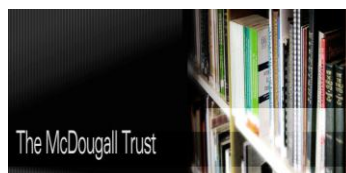
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Section 1: Overview of Swiss Electoral System Changes since 1945

The electoral system used to elect members of the Swiss National Council has for most part been the same since the adoption of the federal constitution. The National council is composed of 200 members (since 1963) elected in 26 districts, each corresponding to a canton. The magnitude of these districts may vary a lot, from 1 seat in several Alpine districts to 34 in Zurich.

In each district, seats are allocated through lists proportional representation (except obviously in single-member districts where FPTP is used). Parties are allowed to present several lists within the same district, and then to link them through an *apparentement* for a common counting of their votes during the process of allocation of seats.

Voters are allowed to cast as many preference votes as there are seats to be allocated in the district. These votes can be distributed within one list, or on several lists.

The electoral system has undergone no significant reforms during the period covered here (since 1945). The only exceptions are the gradual increase in assembly size from 194 in 1947 to 196 in 1951 and finally to 200 in 1963. Another size has been the addition to one district in 1983 with the creation of a new canton: Jura (created in 1974).

Section 2: Relevant Electoral System changes in Switzerland since 1945

Table 1. Summary of Swiss Electoral Laws and Amendments since 1945

Law	Amendment	Date of enactment	Location	Relevant for the research
Federal constitution of the Swiss Confederation		18 April 1999	*http://www. admin.ch/ch/ f/rs/101/*	Yes
Federal Law on the Political Rights		17 December 1976	*http://www.ad min.ch/ch/f/rs/ 161_1/index.ht ml*	Yes

Section 3: Details of previous electoral systems and electoral system changes.

3.1 The 1945 Electoral System

Assembly size. 194 members. This would gradually grow to 200 in 1963, and stay constant until 2012.

Districts and district magnitude. The number of seats allocated to each district is defined by the size population in the district. There is a minimum of one seat per district. (see appendix for the actual distribution of seats over time)

Nature of votes that can be cast. In multi-member districts, voters have as many votes as there are seats to be filled. They can express their support by (a) casting a vote for the entire list, (b) giving candidates within a list one or two votes, (c) deleting the names of candidates they do not want to support, and (d) right up the names of candidates from other lists (panachage – it is only possible if they have already deleted the name of some candidates).
If a voter does cast preference votes for candidates but not up to the number of votes he was allowed to express, the remaining votes are attributed to the list he supports (but not to specific candidates on this list).Interestingly, the Swiss electoral law stipulates that if no list of candidates has been put to vote, voters can vote for any eligible citizen. Citizens gaining most votes are elected.

In single-member districts, voters have only one vote to cast for the candidate of their choice. They are actually allowed to cast a vote for any eligible citizens, even those that have not declared their candidacy.

Party threshold. There is no threshold.

Allocation of seats to parties at the lower tier. The score of the list equals the number of preference votes for candidates on the list, the votes attributed to the entire list by voters who have not expressed a preference for candidates and the number of remaining votes not attributed by voters of the list to specific candidates.
In each district, lists are also authorized to make an apparentement, ie declare themselves allied, to be considered as a unique list during the process of seats allocation within the district.
Between lists (or grouping of lists being apparented), seats are allocated with proportional representation. First, a Hagenbach-Bischoff quota (= number of valid votes in the district divided by the total number of seats + 1) is calculated. Each list receives has many seats as the number of times its total number of valid votes contains this quota. Remainder seats are allocated to lists with the highest average of votes (again, a Hagenbach-Bischoff quota is used, meaning that the score of each list is divided by the number of seats already received + 1)..
Lists that are groups through apparentement then have to allocate seats among them. It is done using the same method between them than for the allocation of seats between all lists.

Allocation of seats to parties at the upper tier. Not applicable.

Allocation of seats to candidates. Candidates with the highest number of preference votes on the list are elected up to the number of seats gained by the list.

Appendix

CANTONS	1947	1951	1955	1959	1963	1967	1971	1975	1979	1983	1987	1991	1995	1999	2003	2007	2011
Total	194	196	196	196	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200
Zürich	31	32	32	32	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	34	34	34	34	34
Bern	33	33	33	33	33	33	31	31	29	29	29	29	27	27	26	26	26
Luzern	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	10	10	10	10	10
Uri	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Schwyz	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	4
Obwalden	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Nidwalden	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Glarus	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Zug	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3
Fribourg	7	7	7	7	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	7	7	7
Solothurn	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
Basel-Stadt	8	8	8	8	8	8	7	7	7	6	6	6	6	6	5	5	5
Basel-Landschaft	4	4	4	4	5	5	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
Schaffhausen	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Appenzell Auss.	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1
Appenzell Inn.	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
St. Gallen	13	13	13	13	13	13	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
Grisons	6	6	6	6	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Aurgau	12	13	13	13	13	13	14	14	14	14	14	14	15	15	15	15	15
Thurgau	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Ticino	7	7	7	7	7	7	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
Vaud	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	17	17	17	17	17	18	18	18
Valais	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
Neuchâtel	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Genève	8	8	8	8	10	10	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11
Jura										2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2

Source: Office fédéral de la statistique, Statistique des élections au Conseil national

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Book : Author (Surname, Name) (Year) *Title*. City.Publisher.
Edited volume: Editor(s) (ed. or eds) (year) *Title*. City. Publisher.
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