

# Switzerland

# *Ethnicity in Switzerland*

## *Group selection*

Although Switzerland is a typical multi-ethnic democracy, it is important to consider that ethnicity or language has so far not been subject to substantial political mobilization. Linder & Steffen (5045, 10) note that: “[...] there has never been a political party that explicitly represented the linguistic groups, although this cleavage probably could have helped to win a not-so-negligible number of votes. But Swiss parties never tried to exploit the potential of this cleavage and therefore assisted in neutralizing ethno-linguistic tensions. This became possible because the parties were not considered as primarily linguistically-based, but more importantly as national parties.” This assertion reiterates Lijphart’s (5046) earlier finding that religious cleavages explain Swiss individual electoral choices better than linguistic differences which he reports to account for merely 4.5 % of the variation.

<sup>5045</sup> [Linder & Steffen, 2006]

However, there is no complete absence of regional parties that make claims on the national level. For example political parties like the Ligue vaudoise, the Mouvement Citoyens Genevois (since 2005; 1 seat in Parliament since 2011) or the Lega dei Ticinesi (since 1991, 2 seats in Parliament since 2011) have distinctly regional or even ethno-nationalist claims. Furthermore and more importantly, the Swiss consensus democracy and the respective influence regions and cantons have had in everyday politics and legislation of the past would make it rather far-fetched to treat ethnicity in Switzerland as being irrelevant. This can also be seen in the fact that a balanced representation of Swiss regions plays an important role when it comes to the assignment of offices.

<sup>5046</sup> [Lijphart, 1979]

We identify **Swiss Germans**, **Swiss French** and **Swiss Italians** as politically relevant ethnic groups. The Romansh-speaking people are another ethnic group, amounting to 35'095 inhabitants of Switzerland (first language; census 2000). However, no political party is primarily based on claims pertaining to this ethnic group; rather, their interests are incorporated into a variety of party programs. Therefore the Romansh people are coded as being politically irrelevant at the national level in all years from 1946 to 2020.

*Power relations*

1946-2021

Since 1999 Article 175 of the Swiss Constitution states that it must be ensured that the various geographical and language regions of the country are appropriately represented (5047). The Swiss French have always been represented in the Swiss Bundesrat (the 7 people government). While this is not the case for the Swiss Italians (they have been represented by at least 5 members since 1945 (5048)), one can argue with a view on the large variety of power-sharing and consensus-building mechanisms in Swiss politics that the few periods of non-representation of Swiss Italians do not amount to their political powerlessness. This judgment is backed by Linder & Steffen (5049, 22) who conclude that "the French- and Italian-speaking minorities hold a proportional share in political offices at all levels of the hierarchy".

Hence, the Swiss Germans are coded as being a "senior partners" and the Swiss French and Swiss Italians as being "junior partners" for all years between 1946 and 2021. Due to the extensive Swiss federalism, all ethnic groups are coded as having regional autonomy.

<sup>5047</sup> [Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation, 1999]

<sup>5048</sup> [Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, 2017]

<sup>5049</sup> [Linder & Steffen, 2006]

## *Bibliography*

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## *Political status of ethnic groups in Switzerland*

*From 1946 until 2021*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Swiss Germans	0.63	SENIOR PARTNER
Swiss French	0.227	JUNIOR PARTNER
Swiss Italians	0.081	JUNIOR PARTNER

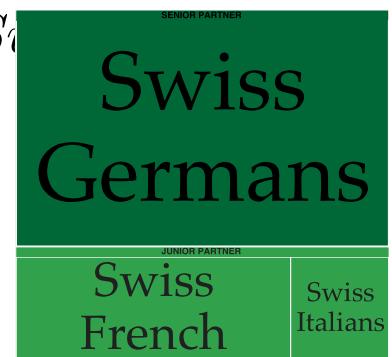


Figure 986: Political status of ethnic groups in Switzerland during 1946-2021.

# *Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Switzerland*

*From 1946 until 2021*

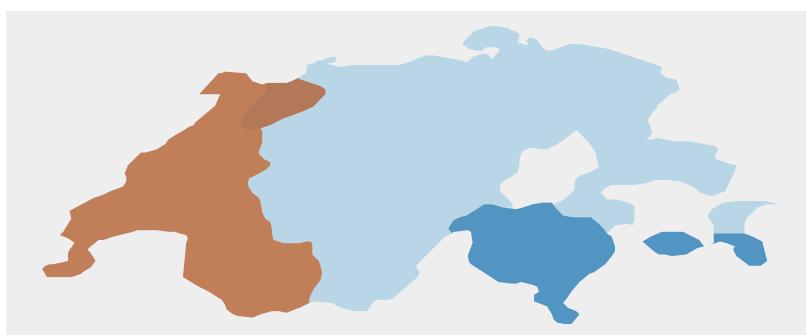


Figure 987: Map of ethnic groups in Switzerland during 1946-2021.

Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
Swiss Germans	23 786	Regional & urban
Swiss French	9945	Regional & urban
Swiss Italians	4293	Regional & urban

Table 361: List of ethnic groups in Switzerland during 1946-2021.