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Magic formula strengthened – cent

Voter participation at an all-time low of 42.2%, Social Democrat advance, success for Christoph Blocher's SVP, continued decline of the Christian Democrats, loss of momentum for the smaller parties (especially the Greens), increased conflict potential within the ruling coalition: these are the most important points to emerge from the 1995 federal election results.

The October 22 elections made the SP into Switzerland's biggest party, with 21.8% of votes (up 3.3% on 1991); the FDP came next with 20.2% (down 0.8% to an all-time low); then the CDP with 17% (down 1.3% to another

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all-time low); then the SVP with 14.9% (up 3%). These were followed at a distance by the Greens with 5% (down 1.1%), the Freedom Party/ex-Auto Party with 4% (down 1.1%), the Swiss Democrats/ex-National Action with 3.1% (down 0.3%), the Liberals with 2.7% (down 0.1%), the Independents with 1.8% (down 1%) and the Evangelicals with 1.8% (down 0.1%). Three of the smaller parties represented in parlia-

ment, the Labour Party, the Federal Democratic Union and the feminist FRAP increased their share of the vote.

The Social Democrats were the big winners in the National Council with 54 seats (up 12). The Swiss People's Party were also up with 29 seats (up 4), as were the Labour Party with 3 instead of 2 seats and the Liberal Democrats with 45 instead of 44. The Greens did very badly, falling from 14 to 9. The Liberals also suffered, dropping from 10 to 7. The Independents fell to 3 – they had previously been 6 counting the non-party Appenzell Outer Rhodes seat. The Swiss Democrats also lost momentum and were down 2. The Christian Democrats continued their slide, falling to 34 seats (2 less). And there was one seat less each for the Freedom Party, the

Evangelicals and the Ticino League. The Federal Democratic Union kept its one seat, as did the FRAP (until now part of the Social Democrat group) and the Fribourg Christian Democrats (until now part of the Christian Democrat group).

The Council of States results are not yet definitive. 12 of the 46 seats will be decided in the second round of voting, to be held in November. At present, however, we know that in Geneva Liberal Gilbert Couteau lost his seat, and in Canton Jura the Liberal Democrats lost their seat.

48 of the 200 members of the National Council were not standing again, and a further 19 were not re-elected. This means that one-third of the members are new. Amongst those not re-elected were 5 Greens (including 4 women), 4 Christian Democrats (1 woman), 2 Liberal Democrats, 2 Social Democrats (1 woman), 2 Freedom Party members, 1 Liberal, 1 Independent, 1 Swiss Democrat and 1 Ticino League member. Those not re-elected included Green Rosmarie Bär from Berne, Christian Democrat Hugo Wick from

Commentary

What do the October 22 results actually mean? Here are a few brief comments.

Firstly, never in the whole of history have so few Swiss citizens taken the trouble to vote in general elections. The proportion was down to 42.2%, which is 4.1% less than in 1991. One might have thought that today's political problems – social distress, pension scheme issues, European integration, etc. – would have had the opposite effect. But the low turnout may well signify distrust in the federal government. We have only to think of the juggling of figures with respect to the trans-Alpine railway tunnels, Rail 2000, health insurance premiums, even the state of the federal pension fund. Many people seem to be simply resigned, convinced that "in any case Berne does what it wants".

Secondly, the Social Democrats advanced throughout the country, bringing them almost back to their 1975 level.

Why was this? Worrying social problems are certainly one reason. Another may be the fact that the party is in favour of joining the EU. But we must not ignore the help provided by Otto Stich, who resigned just at the right moment, giving the party top publicity in the election campaign from the end of August on. And then his participation in the anti-Blocher rally in Zurich helped to keep the Social Democrats on the front page.

Thirdly, at the other end of the coalition voters rewarded the dominant faction of the SVP, which follows National Councillor Christoph Blocher. But the more flexible wing of the party, led by Adolf Ogi, did less well. The SVP's voter share went up in the same proportion as the SP's, which takes it back to the fat years of the 1920s and 1930s. The party confirmed its position as the leading group in Zurich and Berne, the most populous cantons. Blocher's victory is that of a man who has come out clearly against political integration in the EU

and who also takes very firm positions on other subjects, such as drugs.

Fourthly, there have never been so few Christian Democrats in the National Council, and this party has never had so low a share of the vote. Even though the drop is not dramatic compared with 1991, the CDP's slow decline worries its leaders greatly since it has now been going on for 20 years. The Christian Democrats, who have fallen even farther behind the SP and the FDP, can now feel the SVP breathing down their necks. The Liberal Democrats have nothing to rejoice about either. They may have gained 1 seat, but their share of the vote too has fallen to a record low.

Fifthly, the four points already made raise an even more important one. To what extent can the coalition still rule? Although its four member parties have gained overall, the two extremes have moved farther apart. This means that the country will indeed be more difficult to govern.

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weakened

Basle City, Christian Democrat Mimi Lepori Bonetti from Ticino, dissident Liberal Democrat Christian Miesch from Basle Rural, Social Democrat Arthur Züger from Schwyz and Ticino League Chairman Giuliano Bignasca. The new National Council has 43 women members, 8 more than at the beginning of the 1991-95 parliament and 5 more than at its dissolution.

Our brief analysis of the party results at the cantonal level starts with the Social Democrats. These lost 1 seat in Schwyz but gained others in no less than 10 cantons: 2 in Zurich, Berne and Basle City and 1 in Zug, Soleure, St. Gall, Aargau, Ticino, Geneva and Jura. This made 12 gains in all. The increase in voter share was particularly strong in Appenzell Outer Rhodes (up 15.1%), Basle City (up 10.2%), Soleure (up 4.4%), Zurich and Berne (up 4.3%), Geneva, Jura and Schaffhausen (up 3.6%). There was a slight percentage fall in Neuchâtel, Fribourg, Vaud and Ticino.

The Liberal Democrats gained 1 seat in Lucerne, Lower Unterwalden, Neuchâtel and Geneva and lost 1 in Zurich, Jura and Basle Rural. This meant a net gain of 1. Apart from their historic victory in Lower Unterwalden – where they regained a seat held by the Christian Democrats for 123 years – the FDP improved its voter share consistently in Appenzell Outer Rhodes (up 5.7%), Schaffhausen (up 3.3%) and Neuchâtel (up 3.2%). But their vote fell substantially in Zug (down 10.4%), Soleure (down 7.4%), Uri (down 7.2%), Jura (down 5.7%), Basle Rural (down 5.2%), Basle City (down 3.6%), St. Gall and Lucerne (down 3%).

The Christian Democrats lost on balance. Gains made in Fribourg, Vaud and Basle Rural were far outweighed by losses in Lucerne, St. Gall, Lower Unterwalden, Basle City and Geneva. Its worst voter losses were in Lucerne (down 12.1%), Appenzell Outer Rhodes (down 7.2%), Zug (down 7.1%), Schwyz

No Swiss Abroad in the National Council
 Out of a total of 9 Swiss Abroad candidates for the National Council none was elected.

(down 5.4%), St. Gall (down 4.8%) and Thurgau (down 3.5%). There were slight increases in Jura, Vaud, Grisons, Valais and Basle City.

The Swiss People's Party lost their Fribourg seat but gained one in Zurich, St. Gall, Appenzell Outer Rhodes, Lucerne and Schwyz. This meant an overall increase of 4. They increased their voter share in Appenzell Outer Rhodes (up 22%), Zug (up 15.1%), Lucerne (up 13.8%), Schwyz (up 12.3%), St. Gall (up 8.4%), Grisons (up 7.4%), Soleure (up 6.7%), Zurich (up 5.3%) and Thurgau (up 3.3%). There was a slight drop in Geneva, Basle Rural, Fribourg and Berne.

The Greens were heavily defeated. They lost 2 seats in Berne and 1 in Geneva, Soleure and Thurgau. The most important voter drops were in Berne (down 4%), Vaud and Neuchâtel. The Liberals are also in mourning, losing 1 seat in Neuchâtel, Geneva and Vaud. The Freedom Party lost 1 seat in Zurich and Berne but gained 1 in Thurgau. The Independents lost their St. Gall and Basle City seats. The Swiss Democrats advanced in both Basle half cantons but lost a seat in Zurich and Berne. The Ticino League lost 1 of its seats to the Social Democrats, the Evangelicals lost 1 seat in Zurich, and the Labour Party gained 1 seat in Geneva.

Seat distribution in the National Council

