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12. Switzerland. Favorable Conditions for Growing Populism

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Introduction

The Swiss political system can be characterized as consociational and direct democratic (Albertazzi, 2006; Frölich-Steffen, 2006). It has been described as providing the ideal opportunity structure for the emergence of populist political communication. Direct-democratic instruments—in particular, so-called initiatives—allow political players to push issues that resonate well with “the people” to the top of the political agenda. Initiatives and the related campaigns provide fertile ground for populist rhetoric and populist ideology, since they allow parties to present themselves as collaborating with the people (and their concerns) against an allegedly paralyzed political system and inactive parliament. As this chapter will show, several other factors contribute to creating a supportive environment for populism.

The bulk of the existing literature on populism in Switzerland focuses on the communication strategies of two political parties—the Swiss People’s Party (SVP) and the Ticino League (LdT)—and their media-savvy leaders (Blocher and Bignasca), as well as their aggressive, media-centered campaigns (before elections and referenda) and their partisan media supporters (e.g., *Schweizerzeit*, *Weltwoche*, *Il Mattino della Domenica*). It will be further shown that both populist parties have similar although not identical issue preferences and communication styles and that their ideological cores are heavily influenced by a specific variant of populism—namely, *Alpine populism*. The Swiss media have devoted their attention again and again to these parties, and although their coverage is by no means always positive, these parties often manage to turn even negative coverage to their advantage. While almost nothing is known about the effects of populist messages on citizens, Swiss researchers have a fairly clear picture of the voter segments that gravitate to these two parties.

Research on Populism in Switzerland

Scholarship on populism in Switzerland (e.g., Albertazzi, 2006, 2007; Cranmer, 2011; Geden, 2006) has drawn, in general, on some of the most widely established definitions of populism as laid out in the opening chapters of this volume. Cranmer (2011), for instance, draws on Jagers and Walgrave (2007) and defines populism as a communication style “that refers to the people and can be employed by different political actors for different purposes” (p. 287). She distinguishes between mere references to the people (“thin” ideology), on the one hand, and exclusion strategies, anti-establishment attitudes, and the homogeneity of “the people” (“thick” ideology), on the other hand.

Other authors have tied their research closely to the political and geographical context of Switzerland. Albertazzi (2006, pp. 134–137) argues that in a consociational and direct-democratic system like Switzerland, key elements of populism receive special general resonance, such as the opposition

to representative democracy, the idea of virtuous people standing in opposition to a corrupt elite, the unifying role of a leadership personality, and a chameleon-like approach to ideology that takes up influences from different political traditions. Betz (2005, p. 147) refers to the Swiss variant of populism—Alpine populism—and ascribes its success to its representatives presenting themselves as advocates of “true” democracy and defenders against those who want to take it away.

Whereas Cranmer in her writings emphasizes the universal characteristics of Swiss populism (of which there are many), other scholars like Albertazzi and Betz have complemented the picture by pointing to those conditions in the Swiss context that proved especially conducive to the spread of populist discourse.

Of special interest are those works identifying Switzerland as a prototypical case of Alpine populism. What makes the political culture in Switzerland, Austria, southern Germany (Bavaria), northern Italy (Po Valley) and western France distinct from other European regions is explained by Caramani and Wagemann (2005) in terms of attitudes, identity, and institutions.

People’s attitudes in this region are influenced by the idealization of smallscale agriculture and the “pure” nature that stands in contrast to “impure” urban influences and industrial growth. The “hard and honest work culture” leads the people living there to champion values such as civic-mindedness, cleanliness, and order. These values have brought economic prosperity, and they need to be defended against “other groups” that are portrayed as being lazy and exploiting the system. This viewpoint explains skepticism toward the destructive tendencies of modernity, globalization, and the blending of cultures. In Switzerland, this attitude is exacerbated by two additional factors: strong identification with local communities and a voluntary system of unpaid self-administration (militia system). Both have been used to create a narrative according to which the “honest” locals know best how to run their communities—without unwanted interference from the capital Berne or even Brussels. This narrative can be tied not only to the myths of independence, neutrality, and Swiss exceptionalism but also to a vision of special identity and fear of loss of home.

These orientations lead to a defensive attitude that Caramani and Wagemann (2005) label “identity retrenchment,” a search for a backward-oriented identity that offers security in an uncertain age. Important identity elements are (a) the idea of “the people” as a natural entity that needs to be protected from outside threats; (b) the idea that the ethnic and religious roots of the people—and the feelings of “community” that follow from them—are threatened by an over-generous, universalistic, and multicultural idea of citizenship; and (c) the idea that this longing for a feeling of “home” justifies the rejection of others who, for instance, do not speak the local dialect, have a different ethno-religious background, or are perceived as otherwise invading a culturally closed “homeland.”

The third aspect of the Alpine political culture according to Caramani and Wagemann (2005) relates to institutions. Since the state, established parties, and corporate business are all perceived as not doing enough against the various external threats, people grow skeptical about the system and its personnel (including the bureaucratic *nomenklatura*, appointed by the distant planets Berne or Brussels), and reinforce their tendency to focus on social traditions, group identity, local culture, and untouched nature. In the perceptions of many Swiss, joining the “eurozone superstate” would imply dissolving their country’s special identity.

Further aspects adding to the fertile opportunity structure for populist political communication in Switzerland (in addition to features of Alpine populism and direct-democratic instruments such as initiatives) includes the growing share of foreigners, standing at roughly 24% in 2014. One line of populist discourse draws a link between immigration and criminality/asylum abuse, similar to the arguments of far-right parties in other European countries. Another line of discourse plays on fears of job insecurity as a result of recruiting well-educated foreigners (Albertazzi, 2006).

In terms of researching Swiss populism, most scholarship is organized around case studies of political parties and individual politicians commonly perceived as populist (e.g., Albertazzi, 2006; Hennecke, 2003; Kriesi, Lachat, Selb, Bornschie, & Helbling, 2005; Mazzoleni, 1995, 1999; 2003a, 2003b). Oftentimes, comparisons are drawn to equivalent actors in neighboring countries, in particular, Austria, Italy, France, and Germany.

For instance, Albertazzi (2007) compared the political rhetoric and the style of party campaign materials of the Ticino League in Switzerland and the Lega Nord (LN) in Italy. He analyzed campaign posters and party campaign materials between 1990 and 2005 and conducted interviews with party officials. In a follow-up study, Albertazzi (2009) included more parties—the Swiss People's Party, the Ticino League, Lega Nord, and Forza Italia—and compared their populist communication strategies. Betz (2005) compared the ideologies of radical right-wing populist parties in Austria, Italy, and Switzerland in order to analyze how these parties mobilized the populations' resentments.

Two studies focus on how political actors resonate in society by investigating voter support and public debates. Mazzoleni (2008) compared supporters of the Swiss Ticino League and the Italian Lega Nord in terms of their perceptions of politicians' transgressions. Dolezal, Helbling, and Hutter (2010) analyzed public debates regarding Islam and Muslim immigration in Switzerland, Austria, and Germany. In addition to these two studies, Bornschie (2010) analyzed the development and current state of the relation between cultural cleavages and populist parties in France, and Germany, and Switzerland.

In general, most of these authors restricted their studies to political actors previously identified as populists, and they did not include mainstream parties. Even if they employed a comparative design, they only included countries in the extended Alpine region.

In Switzerland, two political parties—the Swiss People's Party and the Ticino League—are widely regarded as populist by mass media and scholarship alike. The same applies to the isolationist and anti-EU political movement, the Campaign for an Independent and Neutral Switzerland (AUNS), from which the Swiss People's Party has evolved. Finally, the founding fathers of the Swiss People's Party and the Ticino League, Blocher and Bignasca, are generally regarded as prototypes of the charismatic populist leader (Hennecke, 2003; Mazzoleni, 2005).

The Swiss People's Party conforms to the ideal picture of a populist party (Albertazzi, 2008; Bornschie, 2010; Frölich-Steffen, 2006). Founded as a merger of small farmer parties in 1971, the party has grown into Switzerland's largest and has acquired "an impressive ability to take control of the national political agenda" (Albertazzi, 2008, p. 100). Under the leadership of businessman Blocher in the 1990s, the party radicalized its rhetoric by focusing on the preservation of cultural independence and national sovereignty against immigration

and EU integration (Albertazzi, 2009; Skenderovic, 2007). It almost doubled its voter share between 1995 and 2007, going from 15% to 29%. It has maintained that level of support through 2015 to become the strongest party in government.

Due to Swiss federalism, the hierarchy of the Swiss People's Party does not allow for a single leader commanding the entire party in a crude top-down manner. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that the intellectual and spiritual leadership of former party leader Blocher remains a fact. Coming from the Zurich branch, he has been the architect of the party's turn to populism and serves to this day as its charismatic leader (Albertazzi, 2009; Bornschier, 2010; Hennecke, 2003). Studies showed that Blocher's personal appeal has been a decisive factor in luring voters to the Swiss People's Party (Kriesi et al., 2005). In addition, his considerable personal wealth has allowed him to fund state-of-the-art campaigns (Albertazzi, 2008). Blocher's success derives from his ability to present himself as the defender of much-evoked Swiss traditions and values, which are allegedly "betrayed" by the political class. He therefore promoted himself initially as a political outsider who dared to say what people really think (Betz, 2005).

The Swiss People's Party's greatest victory was in 2003 when it became the largest party in Switzerland (Frölich-Steffen, 2006). Besides the Austrian Freedom Party, the Swiss People's Party is the only rightwing populist party in an advanced post-industrial country that has ever reached or exceeded the electoral support level of its established, non-socialist competitors (McGann & Kitschelt, 2005). Blocher himself was in government from 2003–2007. His announcement in the spring of 2016 that he intended to step down from all party posts due to his age (75) opened a new chapter for the Swiss People's Party, although his influence is unlikely to wane.

The Ticino League is the other important populist party in Switzerland. In comparison to the Swiss People's Party, the Ticino League does not play a major role at the national level. It is a regional party within the Italian-speaking canton Ticino. The party was founded in 1990 and within the first year became the third largest party in Ticino. In the regional elections of 2011, it achieved a vote share of 30%. The Ticino League mainly claims to defend the specific interests of its region against the capital in Berne. In this regard, it bears similarities to its southern sibling, the Lega Nord in Italy, even though the Ticino League does not aim at secession. Some authors argue that the Ticino League should be seen as a paradigmatic embodiment of populism (Albertazzi, 2006, Mazzoleni, 1999)—in particular, due to its unease with representative democracy, the crucial role that the concept of "the people" plays in its propaganda, the power of the leader, and also the party's readiness to adopt both right-wing and left-wing principles (Albertazzi, 2006, p. 138). The founder and oft-called "president for life," Giuliano Bignasca, was the party's charismatic leader; after his death in 2013, he was replaced by his brother, Attilio Bignasca.

AUNS is not a political party but rather a populist movement that opposes Swiss participation in any international framework, such as the European Union, United Nations, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or the International Monetary Fund. Furthermore, the movement pitches itself as the defender of Switzerland (a "special case"), which is seen as threatened by economic and cultural globalization (Albertazzi, 2008; Frölich-Steffen, 2006). AUNS was founded in 1986 and originally directed by Blocher. The close relation between the Swiss People's Party and AUNS is not only reflected in a considerable overlap of membership but also in a similarity of issues, a fact from which the Swiss People's Party can benefit in elections.

Populist Actors as Communicators

Special attention in the research literature has been paid to the communication styles and strategies of Swiss populist actors, with the majority of those studies exploring the Swiss People's Party.

Comparing the two major populist parties reveals many similarities: Both prefer those campaign issues that let them express their aversion to the ruling elite, other parties, and immigrants (Geden, 2006). Prime targets are the political elite, meaning the federal government and federal administration. Since the two populist parties differ in size and national reach, their rhetoric and communication styles are similar but not identical.

Taking a closer look at the Swiss People's Party, it is noteworthy that its rhetoric has changed over the past 25 years. In the early 1990s, the rhetoric focused on three main issues: immigration (with a special focus on asylum policies), the importance and protection of the country's cultural identity, and the hostile position toward political elites (Albertazzi, 2008; Betz, 2005). In the course of the 1999 national election campaign, the party's anti-EU stance proved a very successful additional asset in its rhetorical arsenal (Kriesi et al., 2005; Skenderovic, 2007).

The Ticino League's rhetoric is quite similar. It is vehemently anti-European, anti-foreigner, anti-centralization, and anti-globalism. Similar to the Swiss People's Party, it promises to give the power back to the people by turning "every piazza into a parliament" (Albertazzi, 2006, p. 135). However, since the Ticino League is a cantonal rather than national party, its rhetoric builds on the contrast between the canton Ticino at the Swiss periphery and the power center in the Swiss capital of Berne. The Ticino League aims for economic protectionism and greater autonomy within the Swiss federal state and cultivates an image of Ticino as a discriminated-against and outcast canton (Mazzoleni, 2005).

Besides their general rhetoric, the two populist parties differ also in their communication strategies (Albertazzi, 2009). The Swiss People's Party has adopted a communication strategy that can be described as "opposition within the government" (p. 2). Although the Swiss People's Party is the largest party and part of the executive branch, it manages to claim that it stands in opposition to the established political forces (Frölich-Steffen, 2006). This tendency was reinforced after the party lost its second seat in the Swiss government body, the Federal Council, in 2007 (and regained it only in 2015). In comparison, the Ticino League adopted the strategy of "role-playing," which is described as balancing between verbal extremism and pragmatism. On the one hand, Bignasca used sometimes shocking, politically incorrect language, while on the other hand, Ticino League minister Borradori was famous for his family friendly, soft style. Albertazzi (2009) summarized the Ticino League communication tactic as "shouting loudly without rocking the boat" (p. 8).

In addition to the largely theoretical literature on Swiss populists as communicators, two empirical studies form an exception by analyzing populist communication strategies (Cranmer, 2011) and populist discourse (Bernhard, Kriesi, & Weber, 2015) in more detail.

Bernhard et al. (2015) conducted a content analysis of the Swiss People's Party's public communication over 10 years (2003–2013). The authors examined five different document types, including press releases, party pamphlets, programmatic speeches, and political

advertising. The populist discourse was measured on three dimensions: people-centrism, anti-elitism, and popular sovereignty. The study established four major findings: the populist discourse of the Swiss People's Party depends heavily on the chosen issue; it is particularly high for immigration and European integration; it did not significantly increase in the years after the global economic and financial crisis; the party's rhetoric exhibits the highest degree of populism during election campaigns, when addressing cultural issues, and during periods when the party is only weakly represented in the federal government.

Cranmer (2011) examined the context-dependency of populist communication by comparing immigration statements made in three different arenas: internal committees, parliamentary speeches, and a weekly political talk show. She studied not just the Swiss People's Party but the five largest Swiss parties. She measured populist communication by six indicators: advocacy, accountability, legitimacy, homogeneity, anti-establishmentarianism, and exclusion. The first three indicators measure the "thin" variant of populism, focusing on the connection to the people, whereas the latter three focus on the "thick" part of populism. Cranmer (2011) concluded that "different public settings exert different influence patterns on populist communication" (p. 299). When comparing populist communication output of the five major parties, the Swiss People's Party was found to use it most frequently. Between the different communication settings, talk shows proved to offer the most favorable conditions for transmitting populist messages.

There is hardly any study that explicitly investigates whether populist leaders differ in their charisma and communication skills from other party leaders. As previously mentioned, Blocher is considered a textbook example of a charismatic leader (Bornschiefer 2010; Hennecke, 2003), aided by an ability to address concerns of the ordinary people in media-friendly language and connecting to voters during mesmerizing public appearances (Kriesi et al., 2005).

Cranmer (2011) found that the Swiss People's Party, in comparison with other Swiss parties, differs in the range of populist elements used in its communication. This difference is further emphasized when taking electoral strategies into account. Although robust empirical evidence is lacking, the electoral strategies of the Swiss People's Party tend to be more aggressive than those of other Swiss parties (Albertazzi, 2009). One of the most heavily debated examples is a campaign poster for the national election of 2007 on which, against the backdrop of a Swiss flag, three white sheep are shown kicking a lone black sheep out of their flock. The poster called for foreigners who have repeatedly been convicted of violent crimes (i.e., "black sheep") to be deported after serving their sentences. It is just one of many examples illustrating the Swiss People's Party's provocative and aggressive campaign tactics.

In sum, the literature on populist communicators in Switzerland tends to qualitatively analyze the special rhetoric and communication strategies of those political actors a priori defined as populists, resulting in a string of case studies on the Swiss People's Party, the Ticino League, and their respective political leaders. A systematic comparison with other Swiss or international parties is rarely conducted, with the welcome exception of Cranmer (2011).

The Media and Populism

This section turns to the much smaller body of literature dealing with the relationship between populist communication strategies and the mass media in Switzerland. While many authors make only brief references in passing to this relationship, Albertazzi (2008) has explained in

greater detail than they do that changes within the Swiss media system (e.g., the disappearance of the traditional party press, increased media ownership concentration, and dependence on advertising) and a stronger orientation toward news values like simplification, personalization, and dramatization have worked in favor of growing populist discourse. Populist parties have often attracted high media attention because their rhetoric has served journalists' rising demand for the extreme and unusual.

Most of empirical studies have explored the relation between populism and mass media outlets by simply looking at how populist actors and their issues were portrayed in the media. Udris (2012) analyzed media attention, issue ownership, and party strategies of the Swiss People's Party. His content analysis of six Swiss newspapers (quality, tabloid, and Sunday papers) over a seven-year period (2002–2009) yielded three major conclusions. First, the Swiss People's Party pushed their own issues—mainly immigration and Europe—but made use of other issues, too. Second, the Swiss People's Party received the largest share of news play. It was able to claim ownership of a range of highly salient issues from the broader categories of identity politics and law and order. Third, it occupied new and free-floating issues, and also trespassed on issues typically owned by other parties. In sum, the media image of the Swiss People's Party was one of a proactive, powerful party that brings some stimulating turmoil to the party landscape. One can conclude that the Swiss People's Party was not only the most active actor in the media; rather, the media and other social actors also referred to it most often, often describing it as a powerful threat. It is noteworthy that commercially oriented media outlets devoted more attention to it than upmarket newspapers.

Next to the general attention that populist actors receive in the media another interesting question is how populist actors and their issues are framed. Albertazzi (2008) has presented evidence that the media coverage of the Swiss People's Party in national newspapers and particularly public broadcast television is not favorable. However, the party seems to actually benefit from this negative coverage because it allows the Swiss People's Party to accuse the other parties of receiving preferential treatment by the media. By using this “us against the mainstream” rhetoric, the Swiss People's Party and particularly Blocher often try to turn the negative media coverage to their advantage by accusing the media of being part of the established elite and hostile to their conservative, country-loving cause (Albertazzi, 2008).

The use of the “us against them” rhetoric is in line with the findings of a content analysis of quality newspapers on the issues of Islam and Muslims in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland by Dolezal et al. (2010) between 1998 and 2007. It found that the Swiss People's Party claimed ownership of these issues and framed them in negative, identity-based scenarios. More than half of the Swiss People's Party frames referred to the European tradition of Christianity and fears of Islamization.

In addition, a research group at the University of Zurich regularly examines populist undertones in the media coverage on various issues related to foreigners and ethnic minorities (Ettinger, 2010, 2013; Udris, 2012; Udris, Imhof, & Ettinger, 2011). This research group found that high-profile initiatives of the Swiss People's Party against the construction of minarets (2009), for the expulsion of criminal foreigners (2010), and against mass immigration (2014) received exceptional media attention. News coverage has been conflictive and dramatized, and the Swiss People's Party-friendly weekly *Weltwoche* stood out with the most negative framing of the underlying threats to the Swiss people.

The studies above focused on the question of how media outlets report about populism and populist party issues, while consigning the media outlets themselves a passive role as simple transmitters of populist messages and issues. Cranmer (2011) has been a rare exception, in that she analyzed the co-production role of the communication strategies used by politicians and by media channels. She concluded that TV talk shows offer an effective platform for employing populist communication strategies, such as taking an anti-establishment position or demonstrating closeness to the people.

Another strand of research examined if populist parties have organizational relations to specific media outlets but empirical findings are scarce. One example for well-documented press/party parallelism is *Il Mattino della Domenica*. It is considered the Ticino League's official mouthpiece, and its news coverage of the party is often personalized, dramatized, and sympathetic (Albertazzi, 2007). Not yet systematically investigated are the role of *Klartext* and *Zürcher Bote*, two party papers of the Swiss People's Party, and the campaigning paper *Extrablatt*, which the Swiss People's Party distributes free of charge to all Swiss households before important referendums and elections. In addition, the Swiss People's Party benefits from supportive coverage in the nationalist-conservative biweekly *Schweizerzeit* and the weekly *Weltwoche*, the chief editors of which are both Swiss People's Party parliamentarians.

Citizens and Populism

This section focuses on the relation between populism and Swiss society.

While there is no systematic knowledge on the effects of populist messages on Swiss citizens, there is a significant amount of research on citizens' predispositions to taking on such messages. If we take Swiss People's Party

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voters as a starting point, it is interesting to see that in parallel to the party's programmatic shift in the 1990s (turning the Swiss People's Party into *the* anti-EU party), the electorate also changed. Before Blocher took charge of this new course, Swiss People's Party voters were mostly protestant farmers and small business owners, and its national vote share was 11% to 13% (McGann & Kitschelt, 2005). In the early and mid-1990s, Blocher succeeded in increasing this share by winning over voters from the "new radical-right" Swiss Freedom Party, while at the same time retaining the traditional Swiss People's Party electorate and attracting a broader anti-EU constituency (McGann & Kitschelt, 2005). By 1999, the Swiss People's Party had almost doubled its electoral support and—similar to other new radical right-parties around Europe—increased, in particular, their share of self-employed voters (small business owners, farmers), blue-collar workers, and retirees (McGann & Kitschelt, 2005; Oesch, 2008). In the 2011 national election, the typical Swiss People's Party voter was male, older, had middle-educational qualifications, held a petty bourgeois or non-skilled job, and took a critical view toward immigrants, the European Union, and the government (Fitzgerald & Lawrence, 2011). In the political campaigns, the Swiss People's Party specifically targeted voters with relatively low economic, cultural, and educational capital.

It has been repeatedly shown that the class basis of the typical Swiss People's Party voter differs considerably from the electorate of left-wing parties (Oesch & Rennwald, 2010). Whereas voters of the union-friendly Social Democratic Party and the ecological

Green Party hold primarily better paid middle-class jobs, Swiss People's Party voters often come from economically threatened categories of small independents and blue collar workers. The Swiss People's Party also receives greater support from housewives and retirees.

It is striking that this difference in class positions goes along with opposing values. Swiss People's Party voters are less favorably inclined to government redistribution, EU integration, and multiculturalism than Social Democratic and Green voters. To express this in more precise terms, protectionist *cultural* attitudes—such as demand for cultural homogeneity, national identity, and traditional authority—are of much greater relevance in explaining support for the Swiss People's Party than *economic* attitudes (Oesch & Rennwald, 2010).

In line with these findings, Swiss People's Party voters tend to express higher rejection of Muslims and foreigners in general (e.g., Dolezal et al., 2010). The party's preferred campaign issues are their aversion to the ruling elite and other Swiss parties, and to the varied effects of immigration (Geden, 2006). Fitzgerald and Lawrence (2011) also found that local cohesion is a robust predictor: Voters in rural areas and smaller communities are particularly in favor of the Swiss People's Party.

With a focus on young voters, Coffé and Voorpostel (2010) found that young, less-educated males are more supportive of the Swiss People's Party than women (see also Fontana, Silder, & Hardmeier, 2006). Furthermore, parental preference (particularly the mother's) for the Swiss People's Party has a powerful effect on the children's voting behavior. Moreover, parents' negative attitude toward the EU has a positive effect on the likelihood of young people voting for the Swiss People's Party. A similar effect, however, may not be found for negative attitudes toward immigrants (Coffé & Voorpostel, 2010).

Stockemer (2012) emphasized that a perceived lack of political alternatives in the Swiss party spectrum is also a motivation to vote for the Swiss People's Party. For traditionalist voters, the Swiss People's Party continues to be seen as the main protector of their values and interests.

At the same time, populist parties and their supporters sometimes show a hypocritical attitude toward self-proclaimed values. Mazzoleni (2008) found that in contrast to the anti-establishment and anticorruption discourse of populist parties, their supporters are more tolerant of their politicians' misconduct than the supporters of more moderate, left-wing parties are of theirs. This attitude is clearly documented for Ticino League followers, whose leader has often been implicated in criminal proceedings and sometimes even convicted—though his leadership has never been called into question.

In sum, research on citizens and populism in Switzerland has mainly emphasized voters' sociodemographic attributes and behaviors. The research has been carried out in a largely descriptive manner. The theoretical potential of traditional research on political cleavages in Switzerland (e.g., Bornschieer, 2010; Kriesi et al., 2005) has not yet been fully exploited in this respect.

Summary and Recent Developments

Switzerland is a potentially fruitful case for the study of populism. It hosts one of the strongest right-wing populist parties in Europe—the Swiss People's Party—and its prototypical populist leader, Christoph Blocher. Most of the scientific literature on populist

political communication in Switzerland is therefore dedicated to either these actors or to their populist companion from the Italian-language region, the Ticino League.

A first group of studies describes the historical background and political success of the Swiss People's Party, Blocher, and the Ticino League. Another group investigates how these populist actors present themselves and communicate in public. A final group analyzes how the messages of these actors resonate in society, be it in the mass media or among citizens. This set of perspectives can be considered both a strength and weakness. On the one hand, it generates in-depth analyses of prototypical populist actors and their specific political, economic, and cultural contexts in Switzerland, and it illustrates the populists' impact on the democratic system and society as a whole. On the other hand, this focus largely ignores political actors who have not been previously identified as populists, such as members of centrist and left-wing parties. It also widely considers the mass media and citizens as passive transmitters or targets of populism. Most of the international comparisons are made with other prototypical populist actors in the neighboring countries of Austria, Italy, France, and Germany (in the regions of Alpine populism). Only broader-designed empirical studies can show if electoral victories by the Swiss People's Party and Blocher are a specific outcome of a unique social constellation or a manifestation of a general European phenomenon. All things considered, the largest research gap is in understanding what role the media play as an independent institution and as an instrument for populist political strategies.

It also remains to be seen how far the Swiss People's Party can push its anti-EU campaign given that after its 2015 election victory the party has a stronger representation in government than before. One of the challenges for the party is that its last successful federal initiative "Against Mass Immigration" may infringe the bilateral treaties between Berne and Brussels—and these are agreements with the European Union that many others in the Swiss government wish to rescue. Finally, it remains to be seen in which direction the Swiss People's Party will develop after Blocher's and Brunner's announcement that they are stepping down chairs of the party in the spring of 2016.

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