How Denationalization Influences Governance in Established Democracies

Democratic states in the 21st century are experiencing strong pressures driven by denationalization, a political process in which the decision-making authority is shifted upwards from the national to the international, or downwards to the regional and local levels. How do Western democracies deal with these pressures? How do they adapt in order to meet these challenges? Four NCCR research projects elucidate these questions.

The growing interdependence of economic, social and cultural processes restricts the manoeuvring space of national decision makers. The political options available to them are limited and their decisions more and more affected by decisions taken elsewhere. Citizens also have less possibility to influence political decisions. This raises the important question of the democratic legitimacy of decisions taken. Furthermore, the balance of power, on which democracy relies, is altered between political actors at the national level: it is assumed for instance that governments are strengthened over parliaments and domestic interest groups. On the other hand, political actors increasingly have to deal with highly complex problems so that approaches...

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The Media and Politics: Who Manipulates Whom?

Which role do the mass media play within the political process in Europe and the USA? Against the background of the 2008 US presidential election, twenty-five social scientists participated in the conference entitled “Democracies – Same Media Power?” which was hosted in September 2008 in San Francisco, California. The event took place in the framework of the 175th anniversary celebrations of the University of Zurich in Zurich’s sister city on the American west coast.

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The Impact of European Integration on Decision-Making Processes in Switzerland

Since the 1980s, internationalization and European integration have increasingly influenced the domestic politics of European states. Even in Switzerland, a country that is not a member of the European Union (EU), national political arrangements do not remain immune to the effects of European integration. The EU’s democratic legitimacy, however, is generally perceived as weak. It is therefore of utmost importance to investigate the consequences of European integration at the domestic level. Is the balance of power between political actors altered? And, if yes, who are the winners and losers of this process?

An NCCR project at the University of Lausanne examines the impact of Europeanization on policymaking in Switzerland and three other small European states (Austria, Belgium and Ireland). Small states are particularly interesting in that respect: these countries are traditionally characterized by external openness and a close cooperation between the state and private interests in public policymaking (concertation). The research team, consisting of Prof. Yannis Papadopoulos and doctoral students Marie-Christine Fontana and Alexandre Afonso, is interested in the consequences of internationalization and European integration for domestic institutions and decision-making processes in these countries.

In political science literature, it is often argued that Europeanization strengthens governments and the bureaucracy over parliaments and domestic interest groups because state executives can play a “two-level game”. Governments are present both in the domestic and in the international arena and can exploit the pressure of joint-decision making with other governments at the international level to facilitate policy moves that were otherwise infeasible internally. Hence, international cooperation is said to enhance the power of governments over other domestic actors. Another hypothesis suggests that internationalization, which mainly brings about economic liberalization, weakens left-wing parties and trade unions and strengthens the actors favourable to liberal policies (firms and business associations). Internationalization is also expected to increase domestic conflicts because of the distributional issues it entails, yet according to a rival hypothesis it is also deemed to strengthen domestic concertation in order to better face external pressure. However, recent empirical analyses regarding these questions and assumptions are scarce and it is still not clear how Europeanization impacts on domestic policy making.
The project team therefore carried out several case studies in policy fields that are subject to different degrees and forms of Europeanization such as labour and electricity-market liberalization, competition and welfare state reforms. Results indicate that Europeanization indeed affects domestic policy making and policy processes. Firstly, decision-making processes are modified in strongly “Europeanized” policy fields in the countries under scrutiny and it becomes difficult to apply standard (“textbook”) policy procedures and styles. However, how the processes are modified depends upon the concrete configuration of interests not only in the country, but also in the respective sector. For example, although political economy theories predict that trade unions and left-wing parties will be weakened by European integration, these actors can benefit if they are able to exploit new political cleavages between the “winners” and “losers” of internationalization and strategically use domestic institutions.

Secondly, Europeanization impacts on the inclusion and influence of organized interests in policy making. However, their inclusion depends on their “blackmailing” potential and their influence depends on their capacity to work out compromises.

Finally, the administration plays a leadership role in strongly Europeanized policy fields. Nevertheless, the administration still has to co-operate with other actors in order to construct winning coalitions. As a whole, policy coalitions and power relationships – which vary across countries and policy fields – are crucial factors to understand the relationship between the executive and legislative branches, and between state and organized interests in the face of Europeanization.

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Publications


Photo above: Doctoral students Marie-Christine Fontana and Alexandre Afonso

Calendar of Events
1. Aarauer Demokratietage 2009
1–4 April 2009
Zentrum für Demokratie (ZDA), Aarau

From local to transnational: The challenge of campaigning in tomorrow's Europe
Annual conference of the European Association of Political Consultants in cooperation with NCCR Democracy
7–9 May 2009, University of Zurich and Marriott Hotel Zurich

Hot models and hard conflict: The agenda of comparative political science in the 21st century
A symposium in honor of Hanspeter Kriesi
26th June 2009, Center for Comparative and International Studies (CIS), University of Zurich/ETH Zurich

La politique fédérale en changement (Current changes in Swiss politics)
NCCR Democracy conference
6 November 2009, Bern

New forms of measuring political representation
NCCR Democracy conference
12–14 November 2009, University of Bern, Schanzeneckstrasse 1, rooms B-102 and B-105

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Do Democratic States Take Better Care of the Environment?

Environmental quality is a public good and public goods provision is a key function of government. While many serious environmental problems such as climate change remain unresolved, some countries appear to perform better in coming close to environmental policy goals than others. To what extent and how do political factors influence the quality of the natural environment? Are democracies better providers of public goods than non-democracies and, therefore, do a better job of safeguarding the environment?

The political determinants of environmental quality have generally received less attention than economic factors such as income levels and the scale and type of economic activity of a country. A NCCR research project at ETH Zurich sheds light on the question of whether and how particular democratic structures contribute or hamper the provision of one particular, and from the viewpoint of sustainable development, highly important type of public good – environmental quality.

The project team, consisting of Professors Vally Koubi and Thomas Bernauer and doctoral students Anna Kalbhenn and Gabriele Ruoff, initially developed a theoretical model to explain why democracies are likely to perform better in terms of providing public goods. The researchers argued that democracies adopt and implement stricter environmental policies relative to non-democracies because democratic leaders can only ensure their political survival by providing relatively high levels of public goods. Moreover, democratic political systems offer a higher degree of civil liberties, such as freedom of speech, press and association. Such liberties imply that citizens are better informed about environmental problems and government policies, and citizens have more opportunities to express freely their opinions and organize around alternative political views. They may exert pressure on their government so that the latter needs to respond to its citizens’ demand in order not to lose the support of its constituents. The theory was then tested for the reduction of air pollution in 40 countries over 30 years. The results indeed confirm that democracy tends to improve environmental quality at the national level.

However, political activity increasingly takes place at the global level and globalization has an effect on national policy efficacy. The increasing interdependence of political, economic, social and cultural processes limits the manoeuvring space of national policy-makers. Thus, globalization casts doubt on whether democratic systems are really more responsive to their citizens’ demands. Therefore, in a next step, the research team turned to the question of whether globalization enhances or undermines the positive effect democracy has on the environment:

Focusing first on less developed countries the project found that globalization effects through international political integration – in particular membership of international organizations – enhance the environmental quality of those countries. The main reason is that this mobilizes resources and technology and promotes the transfer of information and knowledge about environmental problems. Another finding is that democratic institutions in less developed countries amplify the positive effect international integration has on the country’s environmental quality. Consequently, this part of the research project suggests that less developed countries do not need to become rich before they can take better care of their environment as was previously advocated in both academic and policy debates.

The project has also examined the implications of globalization for transboundary environmental problems that extend beyond national boundaries and therefore require international cooperation to be solved. Focusing on international river management, climate change
and global environmental commitments more generally, the research team has shown that democratic countries are more likely to cooperate in solving these kinds of problems relative to non-democratic or mixed groups of countries, even in cases of severe problems and high mitigation costs, such as water pollution problems in international river systems.

Finally, the project has explored the implications of globalization and democracy for climate change, a policy problem that has become virtually a symbol of globalization. The results of this research show that democracy contributes to a stronger political commitment to climate change mitigation. However, this does not necessarily lead to lower emission levels. In climate change policy, democracies are clearly stronger at the commitment level than at the problem-solving level.

These results demonstrate that the democracy effect has until now not been able to override countervailing forces that emanate from the free-rider problem and economic factors that cut against efforts to reduce emissions. Even though democracies have obviously had a slow start in moving from paper to practice in environmental policy, the project team observes some encouraging signs.

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Publications


Photo above: Vally Koubi, Anna Kalbhenn, Thomas Bernauer and Gabriele Ruoff at ETH Zurich examine whether and how democracy has an effect on environmental quality.
Global competition for the location of businesses, investments and consumers has fostered the emergence of metropolitan areas. As human activities increasingly concentrate there, these places also become increasingly politically relevant. In the future, the metropolitan level will be more and more decisive for the political debate, thereby shaping politics in distinct ways. A project led by Prof. Daniel Kübler in cooperation with doctoral students Philippe Koch and Urs Scheuss analyzes how urbanization in Switzerland has influenced politics since the second half of the 20th century. The researchers are mainly interested in two questions: Does urbanization influence political behaviour? And what are the implications for institutions and governance structures in metropolitan areas?

Metropolitan areas are highly heterogeneous, consisting of core cities, poor, affluent and middle-class suburbs. In fact, the larger a metropolitan area, the more heterogeneous it usually is. This also means that places within metropolitan areas are concerned with policy problems and solutions in a different way. It can be expected that the political orientations of citizens living in these places also differ. An analysis of the large metropolitan areas of Zurich, Basel, Geneva, Berne, Lausanne, Lucerne and Lugano carried out by the project team reveals a consistent pattern: People in urban centres are more on the left whereas people in disadvantaged suburbs prefer national conservatives. Both in affluent communes and in communes at the fringes of metropolitan areas people tend to support liberal conservatives.

The analysis confirms that metropolitanization of politics is at work in Switzerland: Political behaviour in metropolitan areas is heterogeneous and this heterogeneity has increased over time. Who people vote for in local elections is almost completely determined by where, in a metropolitan area, they live. It can be expected that this also has a significant effect on political behaviour in national elections and that politics is effectively influenced by urban-regional territorial restructuring that takes place in the context of globalization.

The greater the political division at the local level, the more likely the conflicts between actors in metropolitan areas. Does this affect the way public services are provided? The answer seems to be no. The researchers carried out four in-depth case studies on public transportation in the metropolitan areas of Zurich, Berne, Lausanne and Lucerne. They show that while metropolitan areas face similar challenges in public transportation (such as sufficient transport capacities and coordination of the offer), area-wide answers to these challenges vary considerably. How can this be explained? One reason is certainly that cantonal and federal legislation sets a formal frame in public transportation governance which is often too narrow for the political game at the level of the metropolitan area.

However, metropolitanization has led to the multiplication of coordination dilemmas and as most of the problems cross political boundaries, regional problem-solving is difficult to attain. Indeed, the results show that the pathway to area-wide governance schemes is complex and full of pitfalls. It is only successful when a shared understanding can be established as regards the development of the metropolitan area and the conditions for cooperation therein.
The greater the political heterogeneity within a metropolitan area, the more important local democratic procedures and institutions are to decision making in metropolitan policies. They could foster establishing a political community as a sustainable base for still-lacking common understanding. It will be interesting to see how recently suggested new models of cooperation in metropolitan areas perform. These models such as the Regionalkonferenzen in the canton of Berne or the agglomération in the canton of Fribourg include directly elected public bodies, direct democratic instruments and offer new venues for participation of a wider public.

Publications


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Photo above: Philippe Koch, Urs Scheuss and Daniel Kübler analyze how metropolitanization in Switzerland influences politics.

New NCCR Publications


Information about Public Performance in Mass Media Reporting and Policy Making

Modern democracies are not only judged by the quality of their decision-making processes but also by their capacity to solve problems. Recent reforms aiming to improve the state’s steering capabilities, such as evidence-based policy-making or new public management, emphasize the role of systematic evidence for the effectiveness of public policies. It is argued that policy formulation should be more based on research-generated evidence of ‘what works’ and would thereby lead to better policies. However, this claim of greater rationality in policy making is not new, but continues to be debatable, controversial and its realization a challenge. Policy formulation always takes place in the sphere of ideologies, power struggles and the quest for rational deliberation.

This research project aims to assess the role of systematic evidence in six recent legislative reforms at the Swiss federal level in the fields of traffic safety, asylum and health policy. We explore how such evidence is created, diffused by the mass media and used in policy revisions by bringing together researchers from political and communication science.

The first part of the research project deals with the existing systematic evidence relating to the effectiveness of the policies under revision. How broad was the evidence base for the policy under revision and the alternative policy solutions implemented in other countries? The existing amounts of evidence for the policy measure differ greatly: we could identify far more studies about the traffic-safety measures, than about those concerning the asylum policy. Furthermore, in the field of traffic safety Swiss-specific evidence was mainly produced with public resources whereas in the field of asylum policy non-governmental organizations funded some studies.

The second part of the research project deals with the questions of how mass the media report public policies and their effects by diffusing systematic evidence, and whether such reporting promotes the use of systematic evidence in the investigated policy revision. To deal with these questions, we analyze articles relating to the six revisions published by the three biggest Swiss German newspapers. The analysis shows that only a few articles contain systematic evidence about the effectiveness of the policy measures under revision. In most of the cases the references to the sources are incomplete. Not surprisingly, most attention was achieved by results that were actively communicated by the authors and commissioners through a press conference, or that were first published by indiscretion.

The third part of the research project aims to assess how and under what conditions systematic evidence was used in the six revisions under study. One of the central preliminary findings is the confirmation of the hypothesis that systematic evidence plays a greater role in traffic-safety policy revisions that are more shaped by technical considerations than in asylum-policy revisions that are more shaped by ideological considerations. In the policy documents of the traffic-safety policy revisions we can find some references to systematic evidence, while in those of the asylum-policy revisions such references are non-existent. The analysis of parliamentary debates shows that in both policy fields some politicians did refer to systematic evidence, but in the case of the asylum-policy revisions the proponents denied the need for more sound evidence, criticized the quality of the existing evidence or put forward the experiences of selected practitioners.

In linking together the three parts of the research project, the following conclusions can be drawn: the creation, diffusion and utilization of systematic evidence are highly dependent on the policy concerned - the more technical the policy is, the more evidence is needed; and although systematic evidence is reported rarely, fragmentarily and often uncritically, reporting can force political and administrative actors to use such evidence. At least it is much harder to ignore systematic evidence that has been published in the mass media.

Project team

Thomas Widmer, Kathrin Frey, Christine Zollinger and Martin Baumann, Department of Political Science, University of Zurich; Heinz Bonfadelli and Mirella Schütz, Institute of Mass Communication and Media Research, University of Zurich

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The Media and Politics: Who Manipulates Whom?

Barely 24 hours after the nomination of Sarah Palin as the Republican vice-presidential nominee, the US media began reporting on alleged scandals involving the Alaskan governor. Does this serve as an indication of the incorrupt nature of research journalism in the US, or is it instead a sign of the instrumentalization of the mass media by political opponents? Moreover, does this example demonstrate that the media do indeed influence the pace of politics to a significant degree, or was Sarah Palin chosen as the vice-presidential contender simply because she would be well-received by the media?

Who in actuality exercises power over whom? How do the media influence politics, and how do political actors instrumentalize and control the dominant media companies? Which roles do the new media play in this conflictual relationship? These were among the many questions which experts from the USA, Switzerland, Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands addressed during the two-day conference. The arrangement was organized by the Swiss Center for Studies on the Global Information Society (SwissGIS) at the University of Zurich in collaboration with Swissnex, a public-private venture company promoting economic, cultural and scientific exchange between Switzerland and North America, as well as NCCR Democracy. The event was opened by the former rector of the University of Zurich, Hans Weder, and the President of the City of Zurich, Elmar Ledergerber.

Immediately at the beginning of the conference, Lance Bennett (Washington State University) assertively challenged the power of large mass media, directing attention to the increasingly significant influence of interactive media over the internet. According to Bennett, viral videos – amateur recordings which are rapidly disseminated over the internet – have become highly influential instruments during electoral campaigns. Along with the participating researchers from Europe, Shanto Iyengar (Stanford University) expressed reservations over Bennett’s perspective, however, arguing that over the long-run while the impact of participatory media can in no way be underestimated, the big media still set the agenda.

Various topics were also discussed in four panels: the role of the media in elections, media power structures, media-politics relations in the US and Europe, and the monitoring of the media’s democratic performance. In one panel deserving specific mention, Eric Bucy (Indiana University) addressed a topic which has yet to gather considerable focus in European research. Bucy examined the visual display format of political communication and advanced the argument that written or spoken communication is not pivotal to the political preferences of citizens, rather visual imagery. To be certain, well-rehearsed and staged performances on the part of both US presidential candidates seems to support the plausibility of this claim. Through the careful selection of imagery, sequence, perspective and background, photographers and camera crews exercise substantial influence over the presentation of themes and people as well as over the public’s political opinion-making.

Within the framework of the anniversary celebrations for the University of Zurich, the conference offered an ideal opportunity to both further strengthen cooperation between the researchers from the participating partner institutions and the NCCR Democracy and to intensify research on the topics which came under discussion.

Pictured at the San Francisco conference: Elmar Ledergerber, President of the City of Zurich, and Josef Trappel of SwissGIS who organized the event.
© Swissnex San Francisco
The National Centres of Competence in Research (NCCR) are a research instrument of the Swiss National Science Foundation.

The panel, moderated by Prof. Frank Schimmelfennig, represented a broad range of perspectives. Anthony Haynes, a freelance literary agent and former publishing director at Continuum International Publishing Group who has authored several books on successful publishing, gave some insights into the Anglo-Saxon book market. He stressed that writing a convincing book proposal is a key factor and provided the audience with a list of attributes that make a book proposal perfect. He ended by comparing a book proposal to a business plan.

Dr. Reinald Klockenbusch mainly talked about the process of publishing a dissertation at VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, where he is the publishing director. VS Verlag is a leading publisher of academic books in the social sciences and dissertations in general in the German-speaking market. Since manuscripts are not peer-reviewed, getting one's dissertation published by VS Verlag is possible within two to three months. He described the submission procedure and invited PhD students to send enquiries. The publication costs are shared by the author and the publisher.

Prof. Frank Esser, who was invited to share his experience as author as well as doctoral supervisor, addressed the question of how to select a publisher. He said that the published dissertation serves as one’s ‘business card’ in academia. He reflected on the prestige of different publishing houses. At the top of the hierarchy are the Anglo-Saxon university presses, followed by commercial but still international publishers such as Sage or Routledge, because manuscripts submitted are peer-reviewed. For the German-speaking market, Esser noted that large publishing houses have the advantage of providing good visibility.

Prof. Gerald Schneider, professor of International Politics at the University of Konstanz, argued that, contrary to the topic of the panel, cumulative paper dissertations or articles deduced from the dissertation are very important because it is hard to be visible with a book. Next, he suggested writing the dissertation in English and, if it is a book, to submit it to Anglo-Saxon publishers. Moreover, and regardless of the language, peer-reviewed book series are a good publishing platform.

The panel was completed by two young researchers who talked about their recent experiences. Dr. Martina Leonarz, a postdoctoral fellow in communication sciences at the University of Zurich, stressed the need to check publication options and funding opportunities well in advance. Looking back, she said that one should take enough time to search for the right publisher and to consider different alternatives. In her case, the supervisor played an important role in the process of publication. In addition, she pointed to the necessity of starting to look for money early enough in order to cover the publication costs. The Swiss National Science Foundation provides publication funding, but the application and review procedure takes quite a long time.

Dr. Stefanie Bailer, a senior researcher in political science at the University of Zurich, also advised PhD students to look for publishers early, i.e. before the defence of their thesis. Contrary to Mr. Haynes’ remarks, she did not submit a book proposal but rather the whole book along with the reviews from her PhD committee. Since the publication can cost ten to twelve euros per page she also pointed to the need for additional funding.

After their input speeches, the six panel members answered questions from the audience.
the audience. Some of the crucial themes were picked up again. With regard to the selection of the right publisher, it was stated that university presses are very prestigious but they also tend to be slow. The focus of a publishing house should also be taken into account when looking for publishers. Asking around and approaching editors at conferences is a good way to learn about their preferences.

A further important point of the discussion was the language issue. The two professors in particular agreed that writing the dissertation in English is advisable because there are many more publication options. Even German companies such as the VS Verlag publish books in English. Haynes added that the main buyers of books are libraries, most of which are located in the United States. However, Bailer argued that a German book dissertation has the advantage of allowing the author to later transform it into several English articles. The question of copyright problems should not be neglected, though; and Leonarz added that this question also depends on the topic of the dissertation.

To summarize, the public event provided the audience with many interesting insights and recommendations from different angles of the publication process. But it became clear that there is no single way in which to proceed. The only thing that seems to be certain is that the planning of the publication should start early.

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Picture above: The panel members gave interesting recommendations concerning the criteria for an excellent book proposal, the procedure and timing of a book submission, the criteria for selecting a publishing house, and funding the publication.
The National Centres of Competence in Research (NCCR) are a research instrument of the Swiss National Science Foundation. Over a period of eight days the NCCR members presented their research projects and the tools they have developed to a broad public:

Lisa Müller and Isabel Vollenweider of the Democracy Barometer project offered an interactive, computer-animated map showing the world-wide democratization process between 1810 and 2000. Visitors could operate a controller and observe how the colouring of each country changes over time according to the degree of democracy. They could choose different indices and components of democratization and thus were encouraged to critically reflect on the measurement and the world-wide meaning of democracy.

Dominik Allenspach of the NCCR civic education project presented a first version of the Politikzyklus learning tool (www.politikzyklus.ch). The tool illustrates and explains the policy cycle, and has been developed with secondary school students particularly in mind, in order to enable them to better understand and analyze the political process.

Giorgio Nadig, Jan Fivaz and Stefani Gerber of Smartvote (www.smartvote.ch) provided visitors with a personal ‘smartspider’ that showed their political profile and gave answers to questions such as in which canton or municipality they should live in order to be with politically like-minded people. Visitors were also sensitized to the opportunities and risks of electronic voting.

Laurent Bernhard, Matthias Gerth, Regula Hänggli, Patrick Rademacher and Christian Schmer of NCCR research module 4 presented their initial results based on the data obtained during the campaign on the new asylum law in Switzerland, on which a referendum was held in September 2006. The researchers explained to the visitors the strategies of political actors in campaigns, and the role of the media and of public opinion.

The prize winners contributed to a direct knowledge transfer of NCCR research to the 40,000 visitors of the Parcours des Wissens including children with their parents, pupils, professionals and pensioners. They entered into a dialogue with citizens, stimulated discussion, raised interest and created acceptance for research. Furthermore, to prepare and realize the exhibition required a high level of initiative, effort and time.

The award is endowed with 4,000 Swiss Francs and was presented to the winners by NCCR Deputy Director Frank Esser at the 3rd NCCR General Assembly Meeting in September 2008. Congratulations!