

## SWITZERLAND

**Date of Elections:** 21 October 1979

### **Purpose of Elections**

Elections were held for all the members of the National Council and for 37 of the 46 members of the Council of States on the normal expiry of their term of office.

### **Characteristics of Parliament**

The Swiss Federal Assembly is bicameral, consisting of the National Council (*Nationalrat*) and Council of States (*Standerat*).

The National Council is composed of 200 members elected for 4 years. The Council of States comprises 46 members, two from each of the Confederation's 20 cantons and one from each of the 6 half-cantons. All *Standerat* members are elected for 4 years except for those from the canton of Glarus, whose term of office is 3 years. *Standerat* elections generally coincide with those for the *Nationalrat*.

### **Electoral System**

While the electoral laws for the National Council are drawn up on the federal level, those for the Council of States are done so by the cantons.

In elections to the National Council, citizens at least 20 years of age and residing in Switzerland are entitled to vote unless they are insane, have been deprived of their civil rights or (in most cantons) are under guardianship.

Electoral registers are compiled on the constituency level and revised continuously. Voting is compulsory only in a small number of cantons, where those abstaining without a justifiable reason are subject to a small fine.

All qualified electors aged 20 years or more who are laymen may be candidates for the National Council. Membership thereof is incompatible with membership of the Federal Council (Cabinet) or the post of federal judge or official appointed by the Federal Council. Membership of the Council of States is incompatible with that of the Federal Council and the Federal Tribunal. Lists of candidates for the National Council must be supported by 15 electors; candidates are, in practice, nominated by political parties.

For purposes of elections, Switzerland is divided into 26 constituencies—one for each canton and half-canton. The number of seats allotted to each is based on the constituency's population. Candidates in multi-member constituencies appear on party lists and are elected so as to arrive at proportional representation calculated according to the Hagenbach-Bischoff method, the electoral quota within each constituency being established by dividing the number of seats to be filled, plus one, into the total number of

valid votes; every party is given one seat for every completed number of times which this quota is contained in the number of votes cast for it. Each elector can vote for a list as is or modify it by crossing out or repeating names appearing on it; he can moreover split his vote between different party lists (*panachage*) or select names from different lists in forming his own list on a blank ballot paper.

In the five single-member constituencies (two cantons, three half-cantons). National Council members are elected by simple majority vote.

Cantonal law governs election to be Council of States. Members are generally chosen by simple majority vote.

If a seat in the National Council becomes vacant between general elections it is filled by the individual who is "next-in-line" on the list of the party which formerly held the seat or by means of a by-election in constituencies which elect only one member. By-elections are also generally held to fill vacancies in the Council of States.

### **General Political Considerations and Conduct of the Elections**

The 1979 election results once again bore out the stability of Switzerland's electorate, as there were minor changes in party representation and the four partners—Social Democrats (SPS), Radical Democrats (FDP), Christian-Democratic People's Party (CVP) and Swiss People's Party (SVP)—in the ruling coalition which has governed the country since 1959 captured the same number of National Council seats they had won four years earlier—169. The FDP matched the SPS in having the highest total: 51.

A total of 1,843 candidates—including 340 women—were in contention for the 200 National Council seats, which were redistributed following the admission of the new canton of Jura into the Confederation in 1979. Campaign oratory centered largely on local issues. As in the past voter turnout on polling day was low, falling below 50% for the first time in 60 years.

After voting for the 37 Council of States seats at stake the same day, the four coalition partners held 43 of this Chamber's 46 seats. A second round of voting took place on 28 October and 11 November in four of the cantons.

In the seven-man Cabinet, the SPS, FDP and CVP each hold two seats and the SVP has one.

## Statistics

1. *Results of the Elections and Distribution of Seats  
in the National Council*

Number of registered electors. . . . .	3,863,160	
Voters. . . . .	1,856,689	(48.06%)
Blank or void ballot papers. . . . .	23,484	
Valid votes. . . . .	1,833,205	

Political Group	% of Votes obtained	Number of Seats
Social-Democratic Party. . . . .	<b>24.9</b>	51 (-4)
Radical-Democratic Party . . . . .	24.0	51 (+4)
Christian-Democratic People's Party	21.1	<b>44(-2)</b>
Swiss People's Party . . . . .	11.5	23 (+2)
Independent Party. . . . .	4.2	8 (-3)
Liberal Party . . . . .	2.8	8 (+2)
Evangelical Party. . . . .	2.3	3 (=)
Labour Party . . . . .	2.1	3 (-1)
National Action. . . . .	1.4	2(=)
Republican Movement . . . . .	0.6	1(-3)
Others . . . . .	5.1	6(+5)
		200

2. Distribution of Seats in the Council of States

Political Group	Number of Seats
Christian-Democratic People's Party . . . . .	18 (x 1)
Radical-Democratic Party. . . . .	11 (—4)
Social-Democratic Party. . . . .	9 (+4)
Swiss People's Party. . . . .	5 (=)
Liberal Party. . . . .	3 (+2)
Independent Party. . . . .	- (-1)
	46*

\* Two seats added since previous elections.

3. Distribution of Members of the Federal Assembly according to Sex

	National Council	Council of States
Men . . . . .	179	43
Women . . . . .	21	3
	200	46