

# **Social Blocs, Political Cleavages and Institutional Change in Switzerland**

**A Neorealist Approach**

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# Abstract

What are the relationships between political cleavages, the formation of social blocs and socio-economic characteristics such as income and education? The present master theses conducts a first analysis of the links between socio-economic factors, the formation of socio-political groups and social blocs, and of political cleavages. After assessing country's political stability in the last decades, a long-run analysis of the socio-economic determinants of voting outcomes for the main Swiss social blocs are conducted. Finally, two latent class analysis are conducted to identify socio-political groups and to what extent the latter conflate with socio-economic groups. This master thesis is the first work to conduct such an analysis for Switzerland, and the aim of this work is to provide a first step into a overall analysis of the political economy of institutional change in Switzerland, using the neorealist approach.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 The growing importance of political cleavages, social conflict and institutional change

Part of the recent political economy literature developed a tremendous analysis of the long-run transformations of political cleavages in almost all democratic countries around the globe. Following the now well-known success of inequality studies in economics and social sciences since the work of, naturally, Piketty and Goldhammer (2014) but also of Milanović (2016) and others, economists are recently shifting their attention towards social conflict and political cleavages within capitalist economies.

One possible explanation of this sudden interest could be the following paradox: increasing inequality and neoliberal reforms which took place in the last decades did not pave the way mechanically for growing support for redistribution or left-wing parties. The same paradox could also be stressed for climate change since green parties were not relatively so successful despite the growing emergencies associated with environmental issues.

This sudden interest thus gave birth to an ambitious project mostly conducted by economists under the supervision of Piketty. Gethin, Martinez-Toledano, and Piketty (2021) give a wide and broad analysis of political preferences as functions of socio-economic factors such as income, education, wealth, gender, religion and so on. This kind of project shows that economists are tackling with a subject that political scientists have been studying for decades, at least from *Lipset and Rokkan*. The main findings of Gethin, Martinez-Toledano, and Piketty (2021) can be summarized as follows: after the post-war period, political cleavages were structured around a single left-right axis structured around class conflict over economic issues. The support for the left was based on average on low income and education voters whereas the support for the right was correlated positively with income and education.

## References

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