

SWITZERLAND

Jurassians

Activity: 1947-2020

General notes

NA

Movement start and end dates

- The first evidence of organized separatist activity we found is in 1947, when the the Comité Moutier was founded. Thus, we peg the start date to 1947.
- In 1951, the main separatist party, the Rassemblement Jurassien (Jura Gathering, RJ), was founded. The aim of the RJ was the formation of a new canton out of the French-speaking territories of the canton of Berne.
- In 1974 the majority French-speaking districts of northwestern Bern voted to form a new canton called Jura. This canton was finally established in 1979 after a series of further referendums, including a 1978 federal vote.
- However, the demands of Jurassien separatists were not fully met, mainly because some of the Jurassien districts voted to remain with Berne. Separatist organizations began to work towards the reunification of the northern and southern regions.
- In 1994, the Mouvement Autonomiste Jurassien (MAJ) was created as a coalition of organizations aiming for the liberation of Jura. Another relevant organization is the Mouvement Indépendantiste Jurassien (MIJ), which was formed in 1990. Outright secessionists are a minority in Jura, however.
- Both the MAJ and the MIJ continues to remain active as of 2020. More generally, Jurassien separatists have agitated for the merger of all Jurassien territories to the canton of Jura (Buechi 2012; Hewitt & Cheetham 2000: 144; Keesing's; Lexis Nexis; Marshall & Gurr 2003; Mazidi & Minder 2019; Minahan 1996: 459ff, 2002: 851ff; MAR; Mouvement Autonomiste Jurassien; Mouvement Indépendantiste Jurassien; Roth 2015: 116f). [start date: 1947; end date: ongoing]

Dominant claim

- In 1947, the Comité Moutier was formed, an organization that promoted an autonomous status for the Jura within Berne but not a separate canton. It remained the dominant organization until 1951, when the Rassemblement Jurassien (RJ) was formed, henceforth the dominant player in the movement. The Comité de Moutier dissolved in 1952 (Buechi 2012: 188-189). The more radical RJ demanded the creation of a separate Jura canton, and when this was achieved in 1978 the claim changed to the incorporation of further territories into a bigger Jura. In 1994, the Mouvement Autonomiste Jurassien (MAJ) was created as a coalition of organizations aiming for the liberation of Jura. Another relevant organization is the Mouvement Indépendantiste Jurassien (MIJ), which was formed in 1990. Outright secessionists are a small minority in Jura, however. (Buechi 2012: 188-192; Mazini & Minder 2019; Mouvement Autonomiste Jurassien; Mouvement Indépendantiste Jurassien; Roth 2015: 116f; Wüthrich 2012). [1947-1951: autonomy claim; 1952-2020: sub-state secession claim]

Independence claims

- As previously mentioned, there are outright secessionists, since 1990 organized under the banner of the Mouvement Indépendantiste Jurassien (MIJ). According to Minahan (2002: 854), outright secessionists are a minority; still, “many” Jurassian separatists would like to see an independent Jura according to Minahan. According to the Dictionnaire du Jura (2006), the MIJ participates in elections, demonstrations, international conferences, and a prominent regional festival; however, according to the movement’s own website, the MIJ does not participate in elections. Roth (2015: 116f) confirms that there are organized secessionists in Jura, but he describes the movement as “semi-active”. The MIJ’s website appears to have been last updated in 2013 as of 2023 and the online forum has a mere 70 members. Most sources focus on the movement for autonomy/separation from Bern and mention the movement for outright secession in passing. Overall, there is a movement for secession with a start date of 1990, but the movement is not very politically significant. We do not code a claim for secession while noting that this is a borderline case. [no independence claim]

Irredentist claims

NA

Claimed territory

- The territory claimed by the Jurassians consists of the seven French-speaking districts that were previously all located within the canton Bern. This area is larger than the current canton of Jura, which is composed of only three out of the seven French-speaking districts (Roth 2015: 116). Following the creation of the Jura canton in 1979, claims revolved around the remaining Jurassian territories within the canton of Berne. A map can be found in Roth (2015: 114). We code the claim using GIS data on administrative units from the Global Administrative Areas database (2019) for polygon definition.

Sovereignty declarations

NA

Separatist armed conflict

- We found no reports of separatist violence crossing the LVIOLSD threshold, hence a NVIOLSD classification. [NVIOLSD]

Historical context

- The Jura came under the rule of the prince-bishop of Basel in the fourteenth century. At the time of the French Revolution, French soldiers seized the region and the Jura was annexed to the French Republic and became a département – at the time France’s smallest département in terms of population. After the Vienna Congress, the French-speaking Jura was merged with the (Swiss) German-speaking canton of Berne (Minahan 2002: 853). According to Buechi (2012: 187), “[t]wo parts were joined that did not match. The conservative, French-speaking Catholic Jura, once an autonomous political entity, became a minority within the liberal, German-speaking Protestant canton of Berne.” Overall, the Jurassians lost autonomy; however, note that the Jurassians’ cultural rights appear to have had fair protection; in particular, the canton of Berne had since 1815 recognized French as one of its two official languages.

Concessions and restrictions

- In 1949, the Bernese parliament agreed to a total of 19 proposals designed to ameliorate the Berne-Jura relations (Wüthrich 2012). Some of the proposals required constitutional changes. In 1950, the canton of Berne approved constitutional amendments by way of a referendum that recognized the separate identity of the Jura (Buechi 2012: 188; Mazidi & Minder 2019). [1949: cultural rights concession]
- Minahan (2002: 853) notes that in 1951, Berne's cantonal council officially sanctioned the Jurassian flag as a regional emblem. This is likely related to the above process initiated in 1949 and therefore not separately coded.
- In 1957, Jurassian separatists launched a signature collection for a cantonal citizens' initiative on the separation of the Jura from Berne (to be more exact, the initiative proposed a cantonal law that would allow for another plebiscite to be held only in the Jura region on its separation from Berne) (Buechi 2012: 189; Mazidi & Minder 2019). The undertaking succeeded and Berne's cantonal government now had to decide whether the proposal is valid (implying that there would be a cantonal vote) or not (implying that there would not be a cantonal vote). Even if the Bernese authorities at the time were opposed to the separation of the Jura, Berne's executive (that was dominated by German-speakers) recommended to the cantonal parliament to allow the vote and the cantonal parliament decided without a dissenting vote that the initiative is valid (unclear when exactly, but most likely in 1958). According to Wüthrich (2012), this was a clear conciliatory sign. The proposal, voted on in the whole canton of Berne in July 1959, was defeated decisively (only 22.4% yes). Even the Protestant French-speaking Jurassians rejected. Only the three French-speaking, Catholic districts of the North Jura voted in favor. We do not code a concession here because the vote was canton-wide and not only in the Jura, in line with the codebook.
- Faced with continued separatist contention, Berne's government reconsidered its position in the late 1960s (previously it had been opposed to the creation of a separate Jura canton). In June 1967, Berne's government set-up a commission composed of twelve 'Bernois' and twelve Jurassians. The main separatist outfit, the Rassemblement Jurassien (RJ) was invited, too, but refused to participate (Wüthrich 2012). The result was a "one-off direct-democratic separation process" to be enshrined in the canton's constitution (Buechi 2012: 190). The constitutional amendment, adopted by the canton's parliament in December 1969, foresaw a complex cascade of referendums designed to separate all those parts of the Jura with a majority in favor of separation. Thus the procedure that was set out aimed to minimize territorial losses on the side of Berne. The procedure could be initiated either by 5,000 Jurassian voters or by Berne's government. The main separatist organization, the RJ, opposed the agreement as it was unwilling to accept a potential break-up of the Jura and was unwilling to grant non-native Jurassians the right to vote (Buechi 2012: 189). Since constitutional amendments were subject to popular approval, a mandatory referendum was held on March 1, 1970. The constitutional amendment, voted on in the whole canton of Berne, was passed by about 86.5% of voters upon a low turnout of 38%. This paved the way for a series of further votes on the separation of the Jura from Berne.
- The complex cascade of referendums on the separation of the Jura from Berne foreseen in the 1970 constitutional amendments could be initiated either by 5,000 Jurassian voters or by Berne's government. The separatist movement was opposed to the referendum; it declared that it would not accept a break-up of the Jura (the procedure was designed in a way to minimize potential losses on the side of Berne) and it also disputed the non-native Jurassians' right to vote. Thus it was Berne's government that in 1973 initiated the procedure and set a vote for June 1974. This set-off a cascade of referendums in 1974 (whole region), 1975 (determination of borders between Berne and Jura) and 1978 (mandatory constitutional referendum at national level) (Buechi 2012: 190-191; Wüthrich 2012). January 1, 1979, the Jura was separated from Berne. We code a concession in 1973, when the process was initiated. [1973: autonomy concession]
- In the 1980s, the Rassemblement Jurassien initiated an initiative called UNIR in the canton of Jura, which demanded the reunification with the Bernese Jura. The initiative was declared invalid in 1992 by the Federal Supreme Court on the grounds that unilateral actions which alter the territorial integrity of other cantons were not permitted (Mazini & Minder 2019). As the status quo remained unchanged, this is not a restriction as defined here.

- Minahan (2002: 855) reports that a few more towns joined the Jura in 1995. Contrary to Minahan, a single town (or rather: smallish village), Vellerat, separated from Berne and joined the Jura in July 1996 after a national referendum on this question in March 1996 (CH 1995; Minorities at Risk Project). The territorial change was the result of decades-long negotiations between the Jura and Berne. June 30, 1993, Berne's government agreed to let Vellerat go. Vellerat has only about 70 residents, but since its merger with the Jura was one of the core demands of the RJ, we nonetheless code a concession. [1993: autonomy concession]
- In 2003, Jurassian separatists launched a citizens' initiative in the canton of Jura ("un seul Jura") in which they demanded the creation of a bigger Jura. An earlier, similar initiative ("UNIR") had been declared invalid by the federal court. In 2004, Jura's Parliament declared the initiative valid, which caused furor in Berne. Eventually the two parties agreed to negotiate on the issue. In February 2012, the cantons of Bern and Jura signed an agreement for a democratic solution to the Jura question (Canton of Berne 2012). In November 2013, two referendums took place, one in the canton of Jura and one in the Jura areas that had remained in Bern. While 76.6% of the voters in the canton of Jura supported the idea of receiving the Bernese Jura, 71.8% of the voters in the latter region rejected to secede from Bern. Similar to the 1970s, though, municipalities in the Bernese Jura could request another vote at municipal level. The municipality of Moutier requested such a vote in 2014. In 2017, a narrow majority of voters in Moutier opted to join the canton of Jura (51.7%) while two smaller municipalities, Sorvilier and Belprahon, voted to remain with Bern (Mazini & Minder 2019; Vatter 2018: 255ff). The referendum in Moutier was subsequently declared invalid by Bernese courts due to possible irregularities with Moutier's electoral roll. The referendum was repeated in 2021, when a majority of 55% voted to join the canton of Jura. This time, the referendum was declared valid, and Moutier is expected to be transferred to the canton of Bern (Mueller 2021). We code a single concession in 2012 as this is when the canton of Jura and the canton of Bern signed the agreement for a democratic solution which initiated the various referendums. [2012: autonomy concession]

Regional autonomy

- January 1, 1979, the Jura was separated from Berne. We do not code regional autonomy before that; the Jurassians had been represented in Berne's government, but the canton had been dominated by German-speakers. [1979-2020: regional autonomy]

De facto independence

NA

Major territorial changes

- January 1, 1979, the Jura was separated from Berne. [1979: sub-state secession]
- The merger of Vellerat (70 inhabitants) with the Jura in 1996 is not coded as a major change, nor would the (future) transfer of Moutier (population of 7,500).

EPR2SDM

<i>Movement</i>	Jurassians
<i>Scenario</i>	n:1
<i>EPR group(s)</i>	Swiss French
<i>Gwgroupid(s)</i>	22502000

Power access

- The French-speaking Jurassians form part of EPR's Swiss French, which are coded as junior partner throughout. The Jurassians, however, have not been represented in the Federal Council in 1947-2020 (and also not before 1947; see Giudici & Stojanovic 2016). In 2022, the Jura gained representation in the national executive for the first time with the election of Élisabeth Baume-Schneider to the Federal Council, but we stop coding in 2020. [1947-2020: powerless]

Group size

- According to Minahan (2002: 851) the Jurassians numbered around 190,000 in 2002. MAR reports around 160,000 in 1998. In line with general practice, we draw on the figure provided by Minahan. According to the World Bank, Switzerland had a population of approximately 7.3 million in 2002. [0.026]

Regional concentration

- The Jurassians are concentrated in today's canton of Jura and adjacent areas in the canton of Bern. According to Minahan (2002: 881), approx. a third of the Jurassians resides in the canton of Jura (approx. 63,000), where they make up 91% of the local population. Thus, the threshold for territorial concentration is not met if we only consider the canton of Jura. Minahan does not give figures for adjacent areas in the canton of Bern; according to data from the Swiss Statistical Office 45,000 out of 51,000 people in the Jura region in the canton of Bern spoke French as their mother tongue. The assumption appears safe that most self-identify as Jurassian. As a result, if the Bernois Jura is added, the threshold is met: approx. 60% of the Jurassians lives there, and approx. 90% in the area are Jurassians. [concentrated]

Kin

- No kin according to MAR. However, the French in France can be considered close kindred (they also speak French and tend to be Catholic). [kin in adjacent country]

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