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# **The Strength of Promissory Representation**

## **What Makes MPs Change their Positions?**

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### ***Abstract***

*The paper analyses the positional congruence between pre-election statements in the Swiss voting assistance application “smartvote” and post-election behaviour in the Swiss lower house between 2003 and 2009. For this purpose, we selected 34 smartvote questions which subsequently came up in parliament. Unlike previous studies which assessed the program-to-policy linkage of governments or party groups the paper examines the question at the level of individual MPs which seems appropriate for political systems which follow the idea of power dispersion.*

*While the average rate of political congruence is at some 85 percent, a multivariate analysis detects the underlying factors which push or curb a candidate's propensity to change his or her mind once elections are over. The results show that positional changes are more likely if (1) MPs are freshmen, (2) individual voting behaviour is invisible to the public, (3) the vote is not about a party's core issue, (4) the MP belongs to a party which is located in the political centre, and (5) if the pre-election statement is in disagreement with the majority position of the legislative party group. The last-mentioned factor is paramount: the farther away a candidate's pre-election profile from his or her party is located, the weaker turns out to be the electoral link of promissory representation.*

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## **Introduction: Supply-driven promissory representation**

In the 2006 “Role of Government IV” poll of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) roughly 30 percent of the respondents disagreed with the statement: “People we elect as MPs try to keep the promises they have made during the election” while another 33 percent took an indifferent stance. In more sizeable representative democracies like Britain, Germany, or the United States the share of discontent is even higher.<sup>4</sup> That MPs are not given too much credit by the general public can have many reasons, a positional gap between pre-election statements and post-election behaviour is one of them. We might call this the *Wysiwyg* problem in the electoral connection, as abbreviation for “What you see is what you get”: During election campaigns, candidates and parties wrap their positions and raise some expectations with the voters. Once elected, the unwrapped policies come to the disappointment of many, and voters get the strong feeling that what MPs implement is different from what they saw in the election campaign showcase before.

At the theoretical level, the problem is considered differently. A straightforward view is the mandate model (or responsible party model) in which parties compete with different political programs and the winner receives the mandate (and bears responsibility) to implement it (Schattschneider 1942; Downs 1957). Periodic elections then give the electorate the opportunity to evaluate the performance of the incumbent government and, if necessary, to modify their voting decision. This ideal conception of representative democracy has been criticised on various grounds. For instance, proponents of salience theory doubt if parties during election campaigns really provide directly comparable policy alternatives, instead of engaging in a kind of indirect competition (Budge and Hofferbert 1990; Klingemann et al. 1994). Moreover, mandate theory in its most naïve form ignores information asymmetries between principals and agents (agency loss problems; Strøm 2003), limited information processing capabilities of the electorate, and the fact that problems of preference aggregation prevent political actors from knowing what “their voters” want (Riker 1982). The most fundamental critique, however, affects the implication that the mandate model establishes a “simple demand-input” or “dyadic” relationship between the represented and the representatives (Pitkin 1967; Wahlke 1971; Eulau and Karps 1978). Most critics do not challenge the concept of political (or substantive/issue) representation in principle, but only the rigour in its delegational interpretation (for instance, see Pitkin 1967: 209-10). And it seems also widely accepted that alternative “paradigms” of representation can exist in parallel (Powell 2004; Mansbridge 2003).

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.issp.org/data.shtml>.

In line with Powell (2000) who emphasises “a voter's eye view” of elections we argue that in contemporary election campaigns the driving force behind the representational link between the electorate and the elected is the supply side, that is public statements, quasi-promises and real election pledges of candidates and parties. The recent emergence of web-based voting assistance applications, in which parties or individual candidates can enter their political profile by responding to a number of political questions, further strengthens this view (Ladner et al. 2008a; Walgrave et al. 2008). The programmatic orientation of candidates and parties leads to the inseparability of the choice of party/candidate from the content of their electoral appeals (Mansergh and Thomson 2007). Whenever candidates make explicit or implicit promises with regard to their post-electoral behaviour, the moral duty to (at least try to) keep these promises arises. The “promissory representation” model (Mansbridge 2003) draws on a fundamental principle which every modern society is based upon: confidence and reliance. So, in cases where candidates or parties present themselves to the electorate using explicit or implicit programmatic statements, why should voters not be allowed to take the offer seriously and rely on due implementation? To be sure, the promissory form of representation, too, should not be interpreted harshly: There are always good reasons why MPs deviate from what they stated during the campaign (see Pitkin 1967), and representatives should have both the right and the responsibility to adapt to changing conditions (lies and deception exempted). But as in any other relationship, be it political, social, or economic, the electorate should cast the ballot relying on the assumption that they can believe in the programmatic statements of the “policy suppliers”. Otherwise, already low public confidence in politicians, as seen in the 2006 ISSP poll shown above, will further diminish (see also Dalton 2007).

These “normative criteria” of the promissory model of representation (Mansbridge 2003) serve as the baseline of our contribution. Assuming that, and not testing if, a supply-driven voter's perspective on elections and behavioural strategies like prospective and retrospective voting exist (Powell 2000; for a critical review see Rehfeld 2009), the article deals with the question of issue congruence before and after elections: To what extent do forward-looking voters see their expectations fulfilled? How can deviating issue positions be explained? These questions are examined in a Swiss context between 2003 and 2009. Before giving further details on the used dataset, the specification of the dependent and independent variables, as well as the analysis and discussion of the results of our research, we first proceed with an overview about the literature on the topic, followed by a short institutional contextualisation of the Swiss case.

## Pledge fulfilment in the literature

Existing studies on the subject usually compare election pledges in party manifestos or public speeches with governmental policy actions after the election. First studies focused on the United States and Britain, followed by Canada, Greece, the Netherlands, Ireland, and Sweden. Some of them take a comparative perspective, investigating the differences in the “effectiveness” (Royed 1996) of the various democratic systems in enacting policies as promised before elections.<sup>5</sup> Quite contrary to the common public perception of politicians as a notoriously untrustworthy guild, most studies find pledge fulfilment rates among government parties of 70 percent and more and consider them as astonishingly high.<sup>6</sup> This discrepancy between citizens’ perceptions and the measured non-fulfilment rates are probably due to fact that for citizens the non-fulfilment of one single but particularly important pledge is reason enough to distrust politicians. As a general pattern in literature, and hardly surprising, government parties in single-party governments like Britain show the highest rates of over 80 percent (Rose 1980; Rallings 1987; Royed 1996), while the effectiveness of the “program-to-policy linkage” (Thomson 2001; Klingemann et al. 1994) in coalition governments<sup>7</sup> and governments which operate in a dispersed-powers environment tends to be substantially lower at around 70 percent (Pomper and Lederman 1980; Pomper 1988; Royed 1996; Royed and Borrelli 1999).<sup>8</sup>

Current research suffers from a number of methodological problems, as has been put forward by Costello and Thomson (2008) and Gallagher et al. (2006): First, party manifestos only bring up those issues which are highly salient for the party concerned.<sup>9</sup> This results in a constrained choice of selected pledges because the salience of certain issues does not necessarily coincide between

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<sup>5</sup> For the United States, see Pomper and Lederman (1980), Fishel (1985), Pomper (1988), Budge and Hofferbert (1990), Shaw (1998), Royed and Borelli (2002); Britain: Rose (1980); Canada: Rallings (1987); Greece: Kalogeropoulou (1989); the Netherlands: Thomson (1999, 2001); Ireland: Mansergh (2004), Costello and Thomson (2008); Sweden: Naurin (2007). Comparative studies comprise Rallings (1987), Royed (1996), Mansergh and Thomson (2007), as well as Costello and Thomson (2008).

<sup>6</sup> That such findings come as a big surprise to the general public is documented by Naurin (2007) who experienced in Sweden hostile reactions towards her research project after the publication of her results.

<sup>7</sup> The specificities of government coalitions is demonstrated by the following example from German politics (taken out of “faz.net”, the online issue of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on 5 September 2006): “As coalition, we are pitted against what has been said in the election campaign. This is unfair.’ This said [vice chancellor] Franz Müntefering, without being asked to do so, at the ‘We are back’ press conference [....]. It was none of his wisecracks – and anything but a joke. He wanted to get it off his chest, and Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel, who was sitting next to him, agreed” (own translation).

<sup>8</sup> Opposition parties’ pledge fulfilment is even in parliamentary systems above zero, because pledges may coincide with the the parliamentary majority (Costello and Thomson 2008), or the upper-house majority in bicameral systems may have a veto position in the lower house which forces the government to absorb the preferences of the opposition (Tsebelis 2002; Tsebelis and Money 1997).

<sup>9</sup> “In choosing their issues, parties act rationally, emphasizing the policy areas of their strength and neglecting the strong points of their opponents. They tend to be specific on these issues of direct, distributive benefit to the voters and to resort to rhetoric or vagueness where voters are unclear, uninterested, or divided” (Pomper 1988: 163); see also Budge and Hofferbert (1990).

different parties. Second, party manifestos tend to be vague and they often stress “valence issues” (Stokes 1963), i.e. non-ideological statements which nobody is seriously opposed to because they merely assign a positive goal without saying how to achieve it.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the vagueness of some statements often leaves researchers puzzled whether to classify them as explicit election pledge or not. Third, existing studies ignore different mechanisms of law making in legislative-executive relations.<sup>11</sup> They usually apply a parliamentary logic that government is identical to legislative majority, for which reason it seems fair to evaluate government actions on the basis of the party manifesto. This is also the reason why these studies in their analyses of pledge fulfilment rates focused exclusively on explanatory factors at political system and party levels like the status as government or opposition party, the existence of a single-party or coalition government, the allocation of ministerial portfolios among coalition partners, pledge agreement between government/opposition parties as well as between coalition partners, the type of pledge (keeping status quo or implementing new policies), media coverage of the pledges, and so on.

Yet, for countries operating in a context of dispersed powers (Powell 2000; Samuels and Shugart 2003), an exclusive analytical focus on the party level often seems not adequate out of two reasons. First, as soon as different political actors at different state levels are forced to govern together, the chances that they can stick to their electoral programs decreases. A compromise which is likely to find a majority is unlikely to be in line with the electoral programs of all actors involved. Second, such systems tend to produce weak party systems at national level and emphasise the party-independent position of the individual MP. This point is further elaborated in the following section.

### **Switzerland: A multi-party dispersed-powers framework**

Political systems which are based on ideas of separation of powers, checks and balances, or power sharing do not place the responsibility for policy enactment on the government party (or coalition) alone. Dispersion-of-power frameworks<sup>12</sup> often go along with a separation of purpose, i.e. the electorate may assign different kinds of “mandates” to different directly elected bodies, or hold separately elected institutions accountable on different grounds (Samuels and Shugart 2003).

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<sup>10</sup> According to Ostrogorski (1964: 138) a platform “represents a long list of statements relating to politics, in which everybody can find something to suit him, but in which nothing is considered as of any consequence by the authors of the document, as well as by the whole convention.”

<sup>11</sup> An exception is the attention recent studies draw to the effects of coalition government (Mansergh and Thomson 2007; Costello and Thomson 2008) or minority governments (Naurin 2007), as compared to single-party governments.

<sup>12</sup> This term, following Powell (2000), shall capture all regime types which do not follow a straight parliamentary logic and incorporate ideas of separation of powers, power sharing, presidentialism, etc.

Because of the – to a greater or lesser extent – mutual independence of the executive and the legislative branches and federalistic state structures, dispersed-powers regimes are often accompanied by candidate-centered voting systems and weak party structures which altogether promote the cultivation of personal, party-independent candidate profiles (Carey and Shugart 1995; Mitchell 2000). This creates ideological diversity within parties, whereby personal election pledges of candidates gain in importance for prospective-voting voters, compared to central party platforms in centralised parliamentary systems (see also Mansergh and Thomson 2007). The research level thus shifts from parties to individual candidates and MPs.

Switzerland's political system is a mixed regime type which incorporates elements both of parliamentarism and presidentialism (Kriesi 2001; Hertig 1978; Lijphart 1984, 1999; Linder 1994; Vatter 2008). The Swiss power-sharing system is characterised by highly dispersed powers not only in terms of federalism and direct democracy, but also in terms of a joint government of the most important parties and changing majorities within government and parliament (Schwarz 2009). Incentives to form a stable coalition – both in government and parliament – are low because the executive and legislative branches enjoy high mutual independence once the members of the Swiss consensus government are elected by the parliament.<sup>13</sup>

Ad hoc majority building in the bicameral Swiss legislature takes place within a multi-party context. Currently, 12 parties share the 200 seats in the lower chamber, 7 parties the 46 seats in the upper chamber. Case-by-case coalitions in parliament mean that participation in government and legislative success is uncoupled. Other than in strictly parliamentary systems, government parties are not always on the winning side, and opposition not always on the losing side. Rather, it is the policy area at stake and the stage within the entire law-making process at which legislative vote is exactly located which determine which parties will form a coalition, to what extent party unity can be expected, and who will be on the winning/losing side (Schwarz 2009). In the last 10 to 15 years, the Swiss party system has developed into a triple-pole system of roughly 30 percent vote share each: left-wing parties (like Social-democrats SP and the Greens GP), right-wing parties (like the Swiss People's Party SVP), and moderate centrist parties like the Christian-democrats (CVP) and the Liberals (FDP) (see Ladner 2007; Hug and Schulz 2007; Kriesi 2001). The centrist parties regularly play the role of legislative majority builders by deciding whether they ally with the parties at the right or the left side of the council and thus are the most “successful” actors in parliament

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<sup>13</sup> Parliamentary or governmental rights to dismiss each other during the constitutionally fixed legislative period of four years are entirely lacking.

(Kriesi 2001; Schwarz et al. 2009; Hug and Sciarini 2009).

### **What we look at: database and dependent variable**

This paper looks at a political system where the linkage between electoral promises of collective party platforms and legislative behaviour of individual MPs is supposed to be loose. Instable legislative case-by-case majorities and the powerful position of single MPs compared to the party leaders justify a change of the methodological perspective from party to the individual level. This is recently made possible by using data from web-based voting assistance applications (VAA). Instead of looking at party manifestos we use personal statements of MPs as recorded in the Swiss VAA “smartvote”<sup>14</sup> and compare them with legislative voting behaviour in the Swiss lower house, the National Council. Our focus therefore is not directed at the collective enactment of political programmes by fixed parliamentary majorities, but rather at the commitment of individual MPs to enact their own – sometimes party-independent – agenda.

The article compares the answers given to the smartvote questionnaire with identical (or nearly identical) parliamentary votes. The smartvote tool was launched in the run-up to the 2003 Swiss general elections and applied for a second time in 2007 (Thurman and Gasser 2009). The tool includes a broad-based questionnaire of 70 (2003) and 73 questions (2007) which allows for a reasonably precise analysis of the ideological positions of the candidates and parties (Ladner et al. 2008b). In 2003, smartvote covered 69.5 percent of all elected MPs in the 200-seat National Council, in the 2007 elections this share mounted to 93.5 percent.

The inspection of the parliamentary debates 2003-2009 detected 34 roll call votes that match with an item in the smartvote questionnaire and cover several important policy dimensions (see listing in appendix 1). We took into account that pre-election statements are submitted to a half-life and do not last forever; thus for the answers of the MPs to the 2003 questionnaire, we only inspected the 2003-2007 debates, for the answers to the 2007 questionnaire only the debates from 2007 onwards.<sup>15</sup> The maximum time span between the promise and the related parliamentary vote is therefore four years (see figure 1).

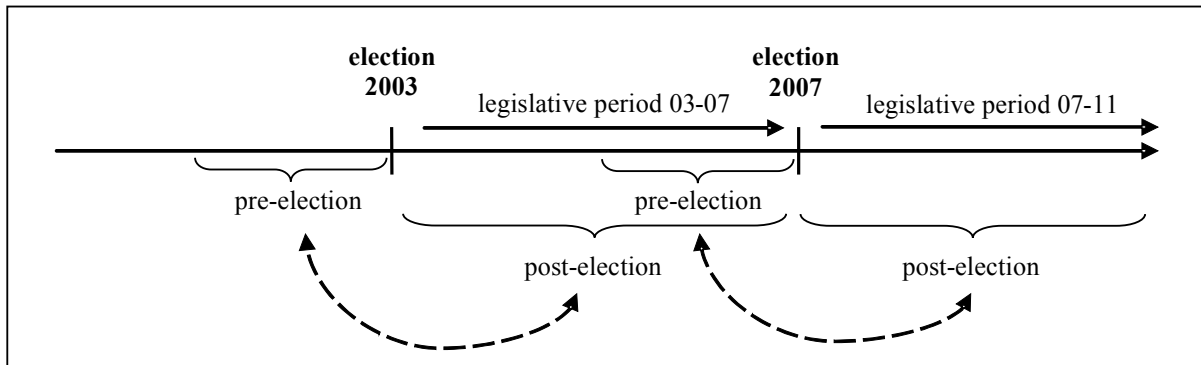
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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.smartvote.ch>; the tool which is operated by the non-partisan research network “Politools” in Bern/Switzerland, exists since 2003 (for details, see Thurman and Gasser 2009).

<sup>15</sup> There are five exceptions to this rule when we took into account parliamentary votes of the preceding term that are very close to the election day (items no. 1, 15, and 17-19 in appendix 1).



**Figure 1:** Pre- and post-election spheres 2003-2009 taken into account



The smartvote questionnaire provides for four answer options (fully agree, weakly agree, weakly disagree, fully disagree), while parliamentary votes allow for three options only (yea, nay, abstention). Moreover, smartvote participants have to answer all questions whereas elected MPs have the possibility to walk out the chamber or abstain from the vote if they feel unable to make a decision. In order to make the two datasets comparable we created a simple proximity matrix (the dependent variable) which matches the opinions given in the smartvote questionnaire and the legislative vote (see table 1; the value 1 means positional congruence, i.e. no difference between pre- and post-election behaviour).<sup>16</sup> If an MP did not answer the smartvote questionnaire and/or did not take part in a related roll call, no value has been calculated for the concerned item; our data sheet is thus unbalanced which needs appropriate statistical correction of the standard errors in individual-level analyses.

**Table 1:** Proximity matrix (congruence) between smartvote answer and legislative behaviour (dependent variable)

	<i>legislative behaviour</i>		
	yea	nay	abstention
<i>smartvote answer</i>			
fully agree	1	0	0
weakly agree	1	0	0
weakly disagree	0	1	0
fully disagree	0	1	0

*Note:* Non-participation in smartvote and/or in a related legislative vote is treated as missing value.

<sup>16</sup> Since we operate with a latent dependent variable, alternative definitions with a higher number of ordinal categories are conceivable. The underlying rationale for the binary option as specified in table 1 is that more categories might contain too many “artificial” subdivisions which are indistinguishable in reality, and which would only increase statistical noise. Statistical tests with such alternative specifications with up to five ordinal categories (ordered logit models) have largely confirmed the statistical effects of our logit model.

In the following table some basic information is given on the number of MPs included in the dataset and the number of roll call votes analysed.<sup>17</sup>

**Table 2:** Number of MPs / roll call votes per party in the dataset

	Number of MPs			Number of roll calls		
	<i>2003-2007</i>	<i>2007-2009</i>	<i>total</i>	<i>2003-2007</i>	<i>2007-2009</i>	<i>total</i>
SVP	46	55	61	561	739	1300
SP	55	42	62	759	576	1335
FDP	35	29	44	349	379	728
CVP	31	30	38	359	388	747
GP	16	21	27	198	285	483
others	17	14	22	178	173	351
<b>total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>2404</b>	<b>2540</b>	<b>4944</b>

A preliminary glance at the dependent variable reveals that – contrary to common perception but in line with findings from (party-related) research cited above – Swiss MPs usually stick to their pre-election statements (see table 3 which depicts the average positional congruence per MP and party over all 34 selected items). There are however quite large differences between parties. The highest congruence between pre- and post-election positions can be found among the leftist parties – the Social Democrats (SP) and the Greens (GP) – with values of around 90 percent, and the right-wing national-conservative SVP close to 85 percent. The lowest positional congruence show the two centrist parties, the Christian Democrats (CVP) and the liberal Free Democrats (FDP): their average positional congruence is around 75 percent. The figures also show the range within each party: While among Green MPs the lowest mean positional congruence score is as high as 75 percent, the lowest congruence mean is found within the two centrist parties with 50 percent, which means that on average these MPs changed their minds in 50 percent of the selected items.

<sup>17</sup> It should be kept in mind that table 2 lists all MPs included in the analysis, also those that replaced a previous MP. This means that the total number of 200 (2003-2007) is merely a coincidence with the number of seats in the National Council.

**Table 3:** Value range and mean positional congruence per MP and party

	<b>Mean</b> (Std. dev.)	<b>Min.</b>	<b>Max.</b>	<b>N</b> (no. of MPs)
<b>SVP</b>	0.841 (0.060)	0.68	0.94	61
<b>SP</b>	0.907 (0.061)	0.71	1.00	62
<b>CVP</b>	0.725 (0.090)	0.50	0.86	38
<b>FDP</b>	0.772 (0.081)	0.50	0.94	44
<b>GP</b>	0.894 (0.067)	0.75	0.97	27

*Legend: 0 = no congruence over all 34 items, 1 = full congruence.*

These preliminary findings confirm that the commitment to stick to pre-election positions is not evenly spread among MPs but contingent on additional factors like party membership. This shall be further examined in the following sections in which some explaining factors are presented and their effects on positional congruence tested in a multivariate model.

### **What factors might explain a change of mind?**

Why do some MPs stick to their pre-election positions and others do not? Unlike existing research which is limited on party- and system-level factors the present article combines individual and possible party- or system-level explanations.

*Positional incongruence with party group majority.* Positional congruence by an MP is more likely if the majority of the party group takes up the same stance on the issue. If an MP finds out after the election that the majority of his or her fellow party colleagues takes another position the propensity should increase that he/she will conform to the majority position, most likely due to peer-group pressure as Swiss party group leaders do not have strong formal instruments at hand to discipline their group members (Hertig 1978; Lanfranchi and Lüthi 1999). The variable is binary, analogically defined to the dependent variable.<sup>18</sup>

*Positional centrality of the party.* As seen before, Swiss legislative parties do not form a permanent coalition, but operate on a case-by-case basis. Beneficiaries of this situation are mainly the moderate parties in the political centre which regularly play the role of legislative majority builders

<sup>18</sup> If no majority in the party group could be detected (e.g. if a tie occurred) or if the majority of the party group abstained, any smartvote answer was rated as congruent with party group majority.

by deciding whether they ally with the parties at the right or the left side of the council (Kriesi 2001; Schwarz et al. 2009; Hug and Sciarini 2009). The preliminary results in the previous section further suggest that this “constructive” role of the central players comes at least partly at the expense of positional congruence (which is also our hypothesis). In the multivariate analysis, the CVP, FDP/Liberals, and some smaller moderate parties<sup>19</sup> are considered as centrist parties in Swiss parliament.<sup>20</sup>

*Size of the electoral district and candidate-centredness.* In national elections, the electoral districts are the 26 Swiss cantons. Their size varies between 1 and 34 seats, according to population figures. The voting system is first-past-the-post (FPTP) in the 6 single-member districts (SMD), and proportional representation (PR) in the 20 multi-member districts (MMD). According to voting theory, the electoral connection is closer in small districts (Carey and Shugart 1995; Cox 1997; Bowler and Farrel 1993), mainly because it is easier to keep track of just a few MPs. We would therefore hypothesise that the propensity to disregard election pledges is higher in larger districts than in smaller ones. Moreover, in Switzerland's MMDs, an open-list preference-voting system is applied with the possibility to modify any party list by vote-splitting (panachage) and cumulation (putting a preferred candidate twice on the list). Carey and Shugart (1995) thus classify the Swiss voting system as relatively candidate-centred within the variety of PR systems. For the operationalisation of candidate-centredness we use as proxy variable the actual rate of modified party lists in each electoral district in the 2003 and 2007 elections, which ranges between 29.4 (canton of Geneva in 2007) and 78.0 percent (canton of Valais in 2003). For SMDs the value is set to 100 percent by default. As with the size of the electoral district we can hypothesise that the less candidate-centred (or the more party-centred) the election is the less committed to pledge fulfilment the MPs are.

*Issues and issue dimensions.* According to salience theory, party manifestos mainly highlight issues which are relevant and important to the party in question, whereas the smartvote questionnaire is composed of the full range of political areas. It seems safe to assume that election pledges concerning issues which are more important to an MP (or his or her party) are more often respected than issues which are quite irrelevant. Since we have neither individual nor party-level data about the importance attached to specific issues, we try to detect the core issues of each party by looking

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<sup>19</sup> Mainly the Evangelic People's Party (EVP) and the Green-Liberal Party (GLP).

<sup>20</sup> This classification between centrist and non-centrist parties can also be based on repeated analysis of voting behaviour with multidimensional scaling technique (e.g. Hermann/Jeitziner 2008; see also <http://www.parlamentsspiegel.ch>).

at the homogeneity of the responses to the smartvote questionnaire by all candidates of a specific party, assuming that the candidates of that party show higher agreement on the party's core issues.<sup>21</sup> To operationalise the variable we proceed the following way: For each party and each of the two smartvote surveys we calculate the mean standard deviation of the responses to all issues belonging to one of the following eight policy dimensions (according to the classification made by smartvote): Foreign policy, migration, law and order, society and ethics, economy, finances, social welfare, and environment. This leaves us with a mean standard deviation per party and dimension. From these we select those three dimensions with the lowest standard deviation and consider them as the core dimensions of the respective party.

*Relevance of the vote.* Not every roll call is equally significant within the legislative process. Some votes may have a direct law-making effect (e.g. votes concerning drawn-up bills which were introduced by the government or the parliament itself), others merely charge the administration to consider the introduction of a law-making proposal (e.g. parliamentary motions). Recent research has shown that the importance of a vote affects legislative behaviour of Swiss MPs (Hug and Sciarini 2009; Schwarz 2009). Out of the 34 selected items 20 are government bills which are assigned a high relevance and 3 are parliamentary motions with low relevance assigned. 11 items concern parliamentary initiatives which may have a different status, depending on whether the vote is related to the initial phase (low relevance in 5 cases) or to a bill drawn-up and introduced by a legislative committee (high relevance in 6 cases). The effect on pledge fulfilment is theoretically ambiguous: On the one hand, it can be argued that the fulfilment rate is higher when less relevant votes are concerned because they are safe for position-taking and of little consequence, no matter what the result of the roll call is. On the other hand, the publicity of more relevant votes is broader, and MPs could feel more obliged to stick to their pre-election promises.

*Visibility of the vote.* All votes in the Swiss lower chamber are electronically recorded, but only some of them – roughly one third – are made visible to the public (Schwarz 2005; Hug 2005). Until recently, unpublished votes were only available for research purposes. MPs know in advance which votes will be published so they could at least theoretically adapt their behaviour (Carey 2009). We thus hypothesise that we will see higher pledge fulfilment rates in published votes.

*Incumbent status.* The effect of incumbent status on pledge fulfilment is ambiguous: On the one

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<sup>21</sup> Alternative procedures would be (1) to ask directly the parties or the candidates about their core issues in the 2003/07 elections, (2) to conduct an expert survey among political scientists, or (3) to extract the core issues by ourselves from the party manifestos.

hand, incumbents know how the wind blows; unlike freshmen, they are more consolidated in their political positions and thus less prone to changing their pre-election positions. On the other hand, incumbents might be more detached, both from their party and their voters. They have gained self-confidence from the fact that they have been re-elected at least once which could weaken the chain of delegation and broaden political leeways (Shugart et al. 2005; Tavits 2009).

Our analysis further controls for the effects of *language* (German-speaking majority vs. French- and Italian-speaking minority), *age*, and *sex*.

### **Multivariate analysis and discussion of the results**

In order to test the hypotheses we estimate different logit models on the basis of individual-level data. Some are multilevel models with up to three levels, others traditional logistic regression models with cluster-corrected standard errors (see results in table 4).<sup>22</sup> The dependent variable is the behavioural congruence according to table 1 above (dummy variable). In general, the estimated models perform fairly well. Our main criteria for the evaluation of the model are the plausibility of the estimated parameters with regard to theoretical expectations and the robustness of the effects when modifying model specifications.<sup>23</sup>

Table 4 only presents “full-scale” models, i.e. with all independent factors included.<sup>24</sup> Beginning with socio-demographic and socio-cultural factors, the model does not show any significant effects on MPs' issue congruence. The same is true for candidate-centredness of the voting system and district size.<sup>25</sup> A major exception is the incumbency status which significantly furthers positional congruence: The positional reliability of old stagers appears to be higher than that of newcomers.

Among the factors relating to the nature of the parliamentary vote at stake, visibility and issue dimension play a significant role: Positional congruence is significantly higher if individual voting behaviour is published, and if the topic of the vote belongs to a party's core issues. Both effects are in agreement with theoretical expectations.

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<sup>22</sup> Multilevel models are mixed-effects logistic regression models using the *xtnlogit* command in Stata 10.1, the traditional *logit* models used the Stata *cluster* option for the MP index variable.

<sup>23</sup> An additional robustness criterion was the effect of alternative specification of the *dependent* variable. As noted earlier, these tests did not cause substantial changes which suggests quite a robust setting.

<sup>24</sup> All tests on possible multicollinearity problems showed a negative result and model estimators remained stable when factors were removed or added.

<sup>25</sup> This also holds if we use the log of the district size.

Again as theoretically expected, an MP's change of mind is significantly more likely if his or her pre-election statement is in disagreement with the majority position of fellow party members. The model indicates for this factor by far the biggest effect of all variables taken into account, with a 40 times higher probability for a positional change.

Moreover, positional centrality of a party affects the congruence between pre-election statements and post-election behaviour negatively. This result is again in line with our theoretical considerations and means that party members from the political centre (CVP, FDP, EVP, GLP) change their minds more often than MPs of other parties.

As already noted, the effects of the different models remain remarkably stable, even if we control for different levels.

How should the results be interpreted? First of all, positional congruence has nothing to do with socio-demographic or socio-cultural characteristics of individual MPs. Furthermore, there is no reason to believe that district properties like its size or the effort voters take in modifying party lists (as a proxy variable for the candidate-centredness of the voting system) make any difference.

Among the factors that have a significant effect there is one major explanation which outshines everything else: If an MP's smartvote position contravenes the majority position of his or her party group, it is quite unlikely that this MP adheres to his or her pre-election statement. Put in simple bivariate figures (table not shown here), if the smartvote position contradicts the party group position, in roughly two thirds of the cases MPs adopt during the legislative vote the majority opinion of their fellows. However, if pre-election pledge and majority position of the legislative party group correspond, a switch of position is seen in a marginal number of the cases only. Possible explanations are three-pronged: First, focusing on the parliamentary group, which has either a "natural" socialising effect on its MPs or asserts strong social pressure to bring deviant MPs back on the party line. Second, as for the centre parties FDP and CVP whose MPs enjoy traditionally more leeway than in the case of the Social-democrats and the SVP, the coercion argument is less convincing. Here it might also be the case that MPs of the more centrist formations have on a bigger number of issues weaker preferences which make opinion changes easier. Lastly, a third explanation would focus on VAAs and possible strategic answer patterns in the pre-election sphere.

**Table 4:** Logit predictions for positional congruence between pre- and post-election sphere; binary dependent variable.

	<b>Logit</b>	<b>Multilevel</b> <i>L1: party, L2: MP</i>	<b>Multilevel</b> <i>L1: party, L2: district, L3: MP</i>
<i>Fixed-effects parameters:</i>			
Minority language	.0320876 (.1408493)	.0268617 (.1422689)	.0268853 (.1422671)
Age	-.0008883 (.006515)	.0000346 (.0063257)	.0000337 (.0063257)
Male	-.0693244 (.1282271)	-.0410135 (.1263573)	-.0410464 (.1263543)
Incumbent	.2890817* (.120824)	.2877333* (.1194782)	.2877381* (.1194774)
Published vote	.456973*** (.1383252)	.4772773*** (.1436887)	.4772542*** (.4772542)
Relevance of bill	-.0303454 (.1120414)	-.0363278 (.1236664)	-.0363182 (.1236665)
Core issue	.2646278* (.117759)	.2722447* (.1148124)	.2722356* (.1148123)
Candidate-centred voting system	.0044403 (.0047868)	.0050543 (.0044923)	.0050536 (.0044922)
District size	-.0012307 (.0056489)	-.0014717 (.0056817)	-.0014712 (.0056816)
Disagreement with party group majority	-3.686012*** (.1244307)	-3.687515*** (.1122947)	-3.687548*** (.1122971)
Positional centrality of party	-.4092632*** (.1084882)	-.4173653** (.1470686)	-.4173694** (.1470428)
_cons	2.401327*** (.5032611)	2.282713*** (.5382518)	2.282815*** (.5382464)
<i>Random-effects parameters:</i>			
Level 1	var(_cons)	.0219101 (.0505826)	.0128044 (.020101)
Level 2	var(_cons)	.012815 (.0201109)	2.35e-08 (.000053)
Level 3	var(_cons)		.0218947 (.0505901)
<i>N</i>	4906	4906	4906
<i>No. of groups (Level 1; Level 2; Level 3)</i>	251	(L1: 13; L2: 251)	(L1: 13; L2: 100; L3: 251)
<i>p &gt; chi2 (Wald)</i>	.0000	.0000	.0000
<i>p &gt; chi2 (LR test vs. logistic regression)</i>		.5393	.8962
<i>Log (pseudo-)likelihood</i>	-1306.7468	-1306.1294	-1306.4462
<i>Method</i>	logit	mixed-effects logistic regression	mixed-effects logistic regression

Notes: \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ , +  $p < .10$  (two-tailed tests). Entries are logit coefficients (standard errors in brackets, MP cluster-corrected in case of logit model).



Three more factors have a constantly significant effect in our models. First, incumbent MPs are either more consolidated in their political positions than newcomers or they are in a position which allows stronger resistance against party pressure, or both. Second, MPs stick to their pre-election statements more frequently if the individual voting behaviour is published and thus visible to the media, pressure groups, and interested voters. The causality, however, remains not so clear, because there are two types of visible votes: those automatically published by statute, and those published on demand of at least 30 MPs. In the latter case, MPs may demand a visible vote because they know that they will keep their promise, for instance if saliency is high. Or they force themselves in line in an automatically published vote because they know that the media and pressure groups will keep an eye on them. Only in this case roll call voting makes the MPs stick to their promises.

This leads to the third factor, the question of core issues, i.e. the political content of a vote. We defined this variable pragmatically as those policy areas with the lowest variance among all party members in the smartvote questionnaire. The empirical results confirm that a such defined pre-electoral unity in specific policy areas coincides with higher pledge fulfilment rates. This makes theoretically sense and shows that positional congruence depends on policies, too (although there might be an objection to our definition of core issues which does not take into account the saliency a party actually attaches to an issue). We will leave this for a later version of this paper.

## **Conclusion**

The paper analyses the positional congruence between pre-election statements in the Swiss voting assistance application “smartvote” and post-election behaviour in the Swiss lower house in the period 2003-2009. For this purpose, we selected 34 smartvote questions which subsequently came up in parliament in identical or nearly identical form and compared the positions of individual MPs. Unlike previous studies which assessed the program-to-policy linkage of governments or party groups the present paper examined the question at the level of individual MPs. This seems appropriate for political systems that follow the idea of power dispersion between executive and legislative branches and multi-party government with case-by-case coalitions in parliament, thus creating a political environment in which individual MPs before and after elections enjoy substantial leeway to express their own views.

The results prove that in a notably high number of 85 percent of the cases MPs stick to their pre-election positions. Although methodological differences (individual-level vs. party-level perspective) make direct comparisons to similar research projects in other countries difficult, the average rate in Switzerland appears to be considerably higher than in the U.S. system and almost reaches the heights of single-party governments like Britain.

Much more interesting than these figures is the identification of the factors which have an effect on positional changes. Our multivariate model estimations show that individual pledge fulfilment is neither driven by personal attributes of the MP nor is it contingent on the organisation of the electoral district. The results indicate that MPs that belong to parties with a central legislative majority building position more frequently depart from what they considered true in the pre-election sphere: Majority building in a multi-party bicameral legislature without fixed government coalition has to rely on MPs willing to compromise and adapt their opinion; within the framework of promissory representation, we would call these MPs trustees. Moreover, the advantage of incumbency, the importance of political issues for a party and the visibility of the individual voting behaviour to the public (media, pressure groups, voters) play a prominent role in preventing MPs from switching their positions.

However, paramount for the propensity to stick to a pre-election position is (dis-)agreement with the majority position of the own party group: If a pre-election statement contradicts the majority opinion of the own legislative party, a change of mind becomes some 40 times more likely. On the one hand, this sheds light on peer pressure mechanisms in Swiss parliamentary groups. On the other hand, with a view to online voting assistance applications like “smartvote”, the results confirm that not all statements in online surveys can be put on a level with actual legislative behaviour: some issues are “hot potatoes”, which may incite the candidates to strategic answers, and some are of no importance the candidates (and their voters), which means that weak preferences or indifference prevail. Whatever reason there might be, voters can learn from this result that the farther away a candidate's personal profile from his or her party is located, the weaker is the electoral link of promissory representation.

Some issues are left open for future research. First, one might be interested in the political direction of the positional changes (e.g., position-taking at the political poles or movement to the centre?). Second, the precise relation between positional changes within the centrist parties and actual majority building is still underexplored. And third, we are still puzzling about the behavioural

grounds for the positional changes between pre- and post-election sphere: strategic use of VAAs, weak preference structures of the respondents, or peer pressure in the party group?

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## Appendix 1: Description of the 34 smartvote statements / legislative votes

No.	Issue	Policy area(s)	smartvote version	Date of legislative vote
1	Simplified naturalization of 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> generation of immigrants	migration	2003	03.10.2003
2	Adoption of children by homosexual couples	society & ethics	2003	03.12.2003
3	Higher spending for the armed forces	law & order finances & taxes	2003	09.12.2003
4	EU membership	foreign policy	2003	16.12.2003
5	Splitting TV/radio licence fees between public and private TV/radio stations	--	2003	03.03.2004
6	Keeping a nationwide network of post office branches	economy, finances & taxes	2003	19.03.2004
7	Higher remuneration for MPs	--	2003	08.10.2004
8	Higher spending for agriculture	economy, finances & taxes	2003	01.12.2004
9	Disclosure of the salaries of board members and CEOs in companies listed on the stock exchange	economy	2003	02.03.2005
10	Standstill agreement on genetically modified organisms in agriculture and food	economy, environment	2003	17.06.2005
11	Freedom of choice between military service and alternative civilian service	law & order, society & ethics	2003	14.12.2005
12	Keeping reduced VAT rate for tourism services	economy, finances & taxes	2003	14.12.2005
13	Privatisation of the national telecommunication supplier "Swisscom"	economy	2003	10.05.2006
14	Higher spending for day care and crèches	social welfare, society & ethics	2003	07.06.2006
15	Storing soldiers' service weapons in the armoury	law & order	2007	22 Mar / 27 Sept 07
16	Introduction of English as the first foreign language in schools	--	2003	21.06.2007
17	Basic health insurance coverage of complementary medicine (alternative medicine)	social welfare	2007	19.09.2007

18	Deployment of the army to support civilian units	law & order	2007	27.09.2007
19	Ban on smoking in public buildings, restaurants and bars	society & ethics	2007	04.10.2007
20	Legalising the possession and consumption of cannabis	law & order, society & ethics	2007	10.12.2007
21	Granting nationality at communal level by using the ballot box or a communal assembly	migration	2007	17.12.2007
22	Toughening the criminal law for juveniles	law & order	2007	19.12.2007
23	Limitations on the environmental associations' right of appeal	economy, environment	2007	20.03.2008
24	Introduction of a finance referendum at federal level	finances & taxes	2007	20.03.2008
25	Extending the free movement of peoples between Switzerland and the EU to Bulgaria and Romania	foreign policy, economy, migration	2007	28.05.2008
26	Introduction of road pricing	environment	2007	03.06.2008
27	Higher spending in the field of development aid	foreign policy, finances & taxes	2007	10.06.2008
28	Giving young people the right to vote from the age of 16	--	2007	24.09.2008
29	Permission of parallel imports of items protected by patent	economy	2007	15.12.2008
30	Extending the powers of the security authorities to include the preventative monitoring of postal, telephone and email traffic	law & order, society & ethics	2007	17.12.2008
31	Ban on the construction of minarets	society & ethics	2007	04.03.2009
32	Introduction of a minimum wage	economy, social welfare	2007	11.03.2009
33	Direct election of the Federal Council (executive)	--	2007	30.03.2009
34	Retail price maintenance on books	economy	2007	27.05.2009