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Switzerland's COVID-19 policy response: Consociational crisis management and neo-corporatist reopening

Fritz Sager[1] | **Céline Mavrot**[2]

[1]University of Bern, Bern, Switzerland
[2]UCLA, Los Angeles, CA, USA

Correspondence
Fritz Sager, University of Bern, Bern, Switzerland.
Email: fritz.sager@kpm.unibe.ch

Abstract

Switzerland responded to the first COVID-19 wave fairly successfully by employing both public health and economic measures. During the state of emergency, the federal government made a firm decision to flatten the infection curve and to protect especially at-risk populations. During the lockdown period, the focus of the political debate shifted from health to the economy as the Federal Council (i.e., the national executive) started to prepare for the country's reopening. While government still had full power due to the emergency situation defined under national epidemic law, the shift in the debate also meant a shift in the way that the government made decisions. Switzerland is a power-sharing consociational democracy with strong neo-corporatist features. While the executive untypically relied heavily on health experts within and outside the administration during the lockdown, the reopening strategy shows clear features of Swiss neo-corporatism, including the resurgence and influence of the traditional big economic vested interests over the government's approach to decision making.

KEYWORDS

consociationalism, COVID-19, neo-corporatism, pandemic policy response, Switzerland

1 | INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 hit Switzerland relatively early on. Its population's high mobility, thanks to a dense public transport and street system, its concentrated settlement structures, and its intensive border-crossing exchanges with its five neighboring countries made this small country in the middle of Western Europe one of the European states most affected by the pandemic between mid-March and mid-April 2020. The canton (member state of the Swiss Federation) of Ticino was affected the most because of its close relationship with Italy, including a 872 kilometers border and sustained economic relations. For a considerable period in the second half of March 2020, Switzerland had the highest infection rate per 1,000 people worldwide, ahead even of China and Italy (Gal & Woodward, 2020). Regardless of the variations in measurement methods across the world and their accuracy, these numbers indicated that Switzerland was hit hard when compared to other countries even though not as hard as other countries like Italy (Malandrino & Demichelis, 2020; Petridou et al., 2020; Zahariadis et al., 2020).

Despite this high infection rate, Switzerland fought the pandemic relatively successfully. After a somewhat bumpy start, the Federal Council (i.e., the national Executive) declared a state of emergency and made a firm decision to flatten the infection curve and to protect especially at-risk populations. In this article, we provide an account of Switzerland's response to the COVID-19 crisis from its beginning until the end of the extraordinary situation and emergency law on 19 June 2020. Figure 1 maps the development of confirmed cases during this period and of the resulting R-value in Switzerland. The R-value stands for the reproduction rate of the virus. An R-value of above 1 means that one infected person transmits the virus to more than one other person, and hence, the infection rate is exponential. As the graph shows, Switzerland brought the R-value to below 1 in the time period under scrutiny. We do not consider any developments after June 19 2020 (Figure 1).

Source: https://ibz-shiny.ethz.ch/covid-19-re/ (retrieved 2020/08/23).

We show how the political debate during the lockdown shifted from a focus on health to the economy as the Federal Council started to prepare for the country's reopening, and how the sectoral interests of the country's key economic players defined the government's strategy for exiting the lockdown. We then briefly assess the government's reaction to the crisis before discussing how the institutional characteristics of the Swiss political system determined its approach to crisis management.

While the government still had full power due to the state of emergency as provided by epidemic law, the political debate shifted from a public health focus at the beginning of the crisis to having a greater economic focus as the crisis progressed. This shift also changed the mode in which the government made decisions. Switzerland is a power-sharing consociational democracy with strong neo-corporatist features (Sager & Zollinger, 2011). In a consociational democracy, there is a "*deliberate joint effort by the elites to stabilize the system"* and to counter fragmentation through non-majoritarian institutional arrangements (Lijphart, 1969:213–14). Neo-corporatism is *"a system of interest representation in which a limited number of interest organisations (…) [are] granted a representational monopoly by the state"* (Kickert, 2002:1,477). While the executive untypically relied heavily on (mainly) health experts within and outside the administration during the lockdown, we show that the reopening strategy exhibited clear features of Swiss neo-corporatism. We use the example of the reopening of restaurants to make our case. We argue that the decision to reopen was due to the strength of institutional path dependence in executive decision making. We conclude that institutional paths may prevail even if interrupted by a fundamental crisis and a state of emergency. We consider it to be critical given that it questions the potential for institutional change due to COVID-19 while spotlighting the continuity of the functioning of democratic institutions even in times of crisis. With this focus, this article contributes to filling the gap in current policy research on COVID-19 regarding how *"the*

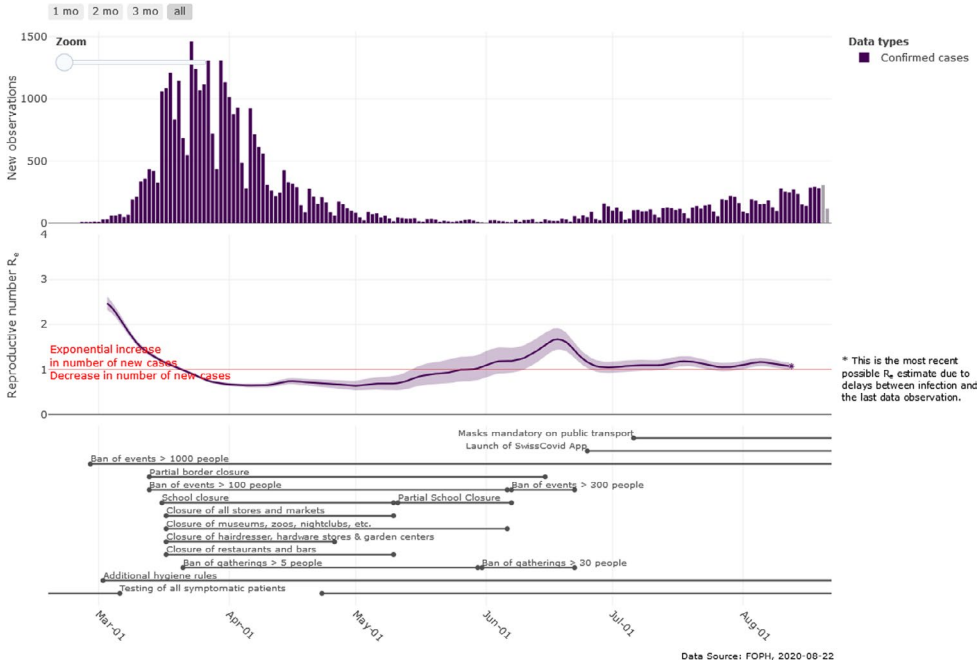

FIGURE 1 Confirmed cases and R-Value in Switzerland

political response to the pandemic has altered (…) the focus and intensities of policy conflicts," as *"the characteristics and permanency of these changes remain unknown"* (Weible et al., 2020:238).

2 | COVID-19 POLICY RESPONSE IN SWITZERLAND: A CHRONOLOGY

Despite receiving detailed information about the onset of the virus relatively early on (Besson et al., 2020), the Swiss government only started introducing responsive measures at the end of January 2020. On 31 December 2019, the first reports of a mysterious lung disease arrived at the headquarters of the World Health Organization (WHO) in Geneva. On 26 January, the federal government first tightened reporting obligations relating to the illness, instructing doctors and laboratories to report cases of suspected COVID-19 infection to the cantons and the to the confederation within two hours. The Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) also contacted tourism operators that organize group trips to Switzerland with guests from Asia (the chronology draws from: Schenkel, 2020; NZZ, 2020; EDI/BAG 2020a; 2020b, the COVID-19 Ordonnance and the 24 updates of the COVID-19 Ordonnance 2). On 30 January, the FOPH set up a toll-free hotline to answer questions from the general public about COVID-19. On 07 February, initial restrictive measures began at airports, as incoming air passengers became the first focus of prevention against COVID-19. Leaflets at airports were circulated to raise awareness of the disease, as passengers flying with Air China from Beijing to Geneva had to leave their contact details with authorities, and the COVID-19 outbreak resulted in the suspension of many flights to China.

On 24 February, the first national COVID-19 case was detected in the canton of Ticino, where a 70-year-old pensioner tested positive. He had become infected while attending a gathering in Northern Italy. On 28 February, the Swiss government issued its first ordinance on COVID-19 which banned events of more than 1,000 people (Bundesrat/Le Conseil fédéral, 2020a). From then on, the Federal

Council classified the sanitary crisis as a "special situation" under the 2012 Epidemics Act (Bundesrat/Le Conseil fédéral, 2020b). Under a “special situation” regime, the Federal Council can assume exceptional competences to issue measures directly aimed at the population, in consultation with the cantons (i.e., the cantons have the right to be heard) (Art. 6, al. 2, let. b). Following this declaration of this "special situation," the Federal Council issued a second ordinance on COVID-19, which was updated 24 times between March and June 2020 (Bundesrat/Le Conseil fédéral, 2020c) and substantially ruled on the issues of medical supplies, entry onto the Swiss territory, school measures, the closure of shops and institutions, and on the amount of people allowed to attend public events and private gatherings in public spaces.

Switzerland reported its first COVID-19 death on 05 March, as a 74-year-old woman with a pre-existing condition died in the University Hospital of Lausanne. The Federal Council called on the population to practice social distancing and to regularly wash their hands. On 11 March, the WHO classified COVID-19 as a worldwide pandemic. In Ticino, the most severely affected canton, Switzerland closed nine border points with Italy.

The COVID-19 response measures taken early on had a deep impact on the Swiss sports calendar. On 12 March, the ice hockey season was canceled and football games were also suspended until further notice. Concerts, festivals, and cultural events were canceled en masse. On 13 March, the government issued the first revision of the COVID-19 ordinance in which it banned events with more than 100 people. It also limited restaurant, bar, and disco capacity to 50 people.

From March onwards, COVID-19 deeply altered the political life of the country. On 15 March, the Administration Delegation of the Federal Assembly (the national legislative chambers) ended the ongoing spring session prematurely. The President of the upper Chamber, the Council of States, declared that through this decision the parliament wanted to show citizens the importance of staying at home. The Federal Council could, however, reconvene the parliament at any time if needed (Schweizer Parlament/Le Parlement suisse, 2020a). Three days later, the confederation postponed the popular votes planned to take place on 17 May 2020 (one initiative and two referenda were planned on immigration, wildlife, and family policy).

On 16 March, under the Epidemics Act, the Federal Council changed the categorization of the situation from “special” to "extraordinary," a status which would run until 19 April. It then decreed the following core measures:

- From March 16 on, the Federal Council imposed a ban on in-person teaching in schools and all education institutions. However, the school year would be regarded as a full academic year in all cantons, and from 11 May on, the cantons would resume compulsory schooling.
- From 17 March on, all public and private manifestations and events were banned. Shops, restaurants, bars, and entertainment and leisure facilities had to close, while grocery stores, drugstores, and take-out catering remained open. The instructions of the FOPH prescribed having only one customer per ten square meters of shop space.
- From 21 March on, gatherings of more than five people in public places were forbidden. Members of smaller groups had to maintain a distance of at least two meters. Anyone infringing on this rule could face an administrative fine of up to CHF 100 (USD 108) per person.

On 20 March 2020, the Federal Council approved a comprehensive package of measures totaling CHF 32 billion (USD 35 billion) to soften the economic consequences of the pandemic. Together with measures already approved on 13 March, a total of CHF 42 billion (USD 45 billion) was made available to various categories of the population in financial support. The financial package especially allowed for easier access to partial unemployment benefits and salary loss compensations (Staatssekretariat

für Wirtschaft SECO, 2020). At the beginning of April, Finance Minister Ueli Maurer increased the amount of emergency loans and guarantees by a further CHF 20 billion (USD 22 billion).

On 08 April, the Federal Council extended the existing measures until 26 April and at the same time announced a gradual relaxation of measures thereafter. The Federal Council presented a three-stage roadmap for gradually relaxing the far-reaching measures under the emergency law.

- From 27 April, providers of "personal services," such as hairdressing salons and massage and cosmetic studios were allowed to resume operations, and DIY stores, garden centers, and flower shops were allowed to open again, provided they adhered to the relevant rules around hygiene and social distancing.
- From 11 May, as initially planned, all shops and schools were allowed to reopen. Secondary schools, vocational schools, and universities would be allowed to hold face-to-face events from the start of a third phase starting in June. In addition, collective sports activities would gradually resume. However, because of the positive evolution of the epidemic curve, the government loosened some measures of the lockdown earlier than previously announced. This included the reopening of restaurants and cultural institutions (including museums, libraries, and archives) with limited occupation rates (Bundesrat/Le Conseil fédéral, 2020d). Botanical gardens and zoos, on the other hand, were to remain closed until 08 June 2020.
- Although initially planned for 08 June, the Federal Council announced on 29 April that the reopening of restaurants will be allowed from 11 May. Restaurant and tourism associations had put consistent pressure on the authorities and regularly claimed in the media that they were forgotten by the government's crisis management measures, as the Federal Council defined strict conditions for the reopening restaurants. In a first step, a maximum of four people or parents with their children were allowed at one table. The measures also stipulated that all guests had to be seated (i.e., there would be no service at the bar), that there had to be a two-meter gap or separating elements between groups of guests, and that restaurants had to close by midnight. The Federal Council initially announced that all guests had to leave their personal details at the facility to allow for contact tracing. GastroSuisse and HotellerieSuisse—the restaurant and tourism industry associations— drew up "a protection concept", composed of protocols for the protection of staff and customers for all catering establishments. Notably, there was no obligation to wear a mask, and the Federal Council instructed cantons to strictly monitor compliance with the protection concept.

On 27 May, the Federal Council decided on further opening steps. From 30 May on, the ban on public assembly was partially relaxed, allowing up to 30 people to gather. From 06 June, private and public events could once again host up to 300 people (e.g., family events, trade fairs, and cultural events) and political demonstrations were also possible again. Events with more than 1,000 people would remain prohibited until the end of August. Also, from 06 June on, leisure and tourism businesses (e.g., mountain railways, camp sites, casinos, amusement parks, zoos, botanical gardens, swimming pools, wellness facilities, and erotic businesses), applying hygiene and social distance rules, could reopen, and restaurants could welcome groups of more than four people. Establishments finally had to include the contact information of only one guest per table. In addition, initially announced as mandatory, this requirement was finally implemented on a voluntary basis. Nightclubs and discotheques were also required to provide attendance lists and could grant admission to maximum of 300 people per evening, and all such establishments had to close by midnight.

From 08 June, the processing of applications of workers from the EU/EFTA area began again. By 06 July, the free movement of persons and the freedom to travel throughout the Schengen area was expected to be possible again. The Federal Council decided to lift border controls earlier with Italy, Germany, Austria, and France (as of 15 June 2020). On 19 June, the Federal Council returned to a "special situation" instead of an "extraordinary situation" under the Epidemics Law.

The public debate was highly supportive of government measures throughout much of the early stages of the special measures. Only one conservative liberal quality paper, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, insisted that the emergency law was a threat to democracy and civic liberty, and quite notoriously kept publishing opinion pieces over two months promoting this message. Some criticism also came from the Swiss branch of Amnesty International because of the limitations of citizens' rights during the lockdown—especially following police interventions in local protests—and from Amnesty and consumers' organizations because of threats to data protection, given that the Federal Council initiated the development of an official contact tracing phone app for the country (Amnesty International, 2020a, 2020b). Survey results, however, generally showed continuing support for government policy, similar to Germany (Naumann et al., 2020). An opinion survey jointly commissioned by newspapers of the three Swiss linguistic regions was performed between April 22 and April 28, after the Federal Council announced the first relaxation of measures in April and May. While 43% of respondents thought the economy was (rather) too strongly affected by the measures taken to fight the pandemic, 42% believed the measures were well-balanced, and another 15% felt that health was (rather) insufficiently protected in comparison with the economic aspects. More specifically, regarding the reopening, only 39% of the respondents (rather) believed that restaurants should reopen sooner than announced. The fact that the Federal Council nevertheless announced the earlier reopening of restaurants on April 29 indicates that it rather followed the pressures of the economic players than public opinion as reflected in this national survey. Finally, the survey showed a high level of trust in the government, with 78% of the respondents (rather) trusting the Federal Council's management of the crisis (Golder et al., 2020).

3 | DID THE GOVERNMENT DO A GOOD JOB?

Despite having general public support, there was public and political scrutiny of the government's work. The Federal Council was both praised and criticized for its crisis management. Its work seems praiseworthy, as the spread of COVID-19 in Switzerland has been kept under control, thanks in part to the measures taken by the Federal Council. On the other hand, the Federal Council has been criticized for its failure to ensure sufficient stocks of medical material, as well as for the relaxation measures that could not meet all the demands ranging from health security to labor market and economic concerns to an ongoing social life. In fact, there were gaps in the reserves of ethanol and medical consumables, especially when it came to hygiene masks and face coverings. The comments depended on the position and interests of those making the criticism. In the midst of lockdown, Sager and Ritz (2020) gave a short assessment of Switzerland's response to the COVID-19 pandemic based on five criteria that aimed to provide a more objective evaluation. Their criteria stem from an interdisciplinary study of government (Ritz et al., 2019; also Raadschelders, 2012). The authors gave an overall positive assessment of the Federal Council's crisis management during the state of emergency, as the lockdown was seen as a successful phase in the fight against the pandemic, during which public order was not endangered. There was no indication that the Federal Council sought to abuse the emergency law and use it against democratic institutions. The Federal Council and its chief officials also successfully communicated during the acute phase of the crisis, giving the federal administration a trustworthy image. The Federal Council also demonstrated its ability to strike for a balance between restrictions (lockdown) and freedom (no full confinement), which was appropriate for the Swiss population who largely complied with the measures. All in all, the assessment spoke for the Federal Council's positive performance. The government delivered what was expected of it, especially during the lockdown: the early but not hasty, decisive but prudent, overall confidence-building fight against the pandemic.

However, the reopening strategy and the proposed exit measures from the lockdown were more contested than the epidemiological measures during lockdown. In the following, we argue that the shift in priorities from health to the economy led to a fallback into long-established and well-proven modes of neo-corporatist decision making that heavily prioritize economic interests. As also observed in the Italian case for instance, the already "rooted policy style"—including the main political and policy features of the country's system—may prevail in the decision making process, even in instances of a severe external contingency such as a pandemic; this incrementalism might especially take place if a country is unprepared for a sanitary crisis (Capano, 2020:327, 341). We use the case of restaurant reopening to discuss this claim in the next section.

4 | THE RETURN TO NEO-CORPORATIST DECISION MAKING FOR THE REOPENING STRATEGY IN SWITZERLAND: THE CASE OF RESTAURANTS

While the Federal Council heavily relied on the advice of medical experts, from hospitals and from the Federal Office of Public Health, at the beginning of the pandemic, it shifted to relying on central economic players during the following steps. In particular, the restaurant and tourism umbrella organizations, GastroSuisse and HotellerieSuisse, managed to gain the attention of the Federal Council and to make their claims heard during the exit phase of the lockdown. Economic associations are key traditional players in the politico-institutional system in Switzerland, and they are substantially personally intertwined with the political elite in the Swiss system of non-professional politics (Pilotti et al., 2010:216) (the so-called *Milizsystem* in German, cf. Sager et al., 2017:17, 44). Moreover, after almost two months of shutdown, this sector of the economy was hard hit by the COVID-19 crisis in contrast to other key sectors of the Swiss economy such as banks or the pharmaceutical industry. While the Federal Council rapidly adopted most of the policy measures that medical experts deemed necessary, including a stay-at-home policy, the closure of non-essential businesses and activities, and taking measures of physical distancing. However, the Federal Council surprised public life observers by its behavior during the later phase of the lockdown when it announced the early reopening of restaurants, and, in addition, made a u-turn on the question of contact tracing for customers.

First, restaurants were reopened a month earlier than initially planned. Despite restaurants' nature as closed places that attract relatively high concentrations of people, they were reopened three weeks before the Federal Council lifted the ban on groups of five individuals gathering in public spaces, which could constitute a policy incoherence. Other organizations that had also been waiting to resume their activities, such as associations or churches, were only able to reopen weeks later (May 28 for church services and June 6 for associations). Second, important concerns regarding the safety of employees in the case of this early reopening were disregarded, in favor of GastroSuisse's lobbying for a rapid reopening (Syndicat interprofessionnel de travailleuses et travailleurs (SIT), 2020). Employees' trade unions raised safety concerns, although they did so in a non-unified way, because they were torn between defending employees and protecting workplaces in the context of the economic crisis. All sectors comprised, national trade unions were more strongly in favor of reopening the economy than several of their regional sections, which rather wanted to prioritize employee safety. This was especially the case in the French-speaking part of Switzerland (i.e., the western part of the country) (Revello, 2020), which was hit hardest by COVID-19, together with the Italian-speaking part (Ticino), (Swissinfo, 2020). When the reopening was decided upon, trade unions insisted on the necessity to observe the protection measures in restaurants, to implement strict controls, and to exempt employees in at-risk categories from having to work (UNIA, 2020). The issue also divided the public, with 40%

opposing the reopening of restaurants on 11 May (Le Nouvelliste, 2020). Finally, the initial health protection measure that the Federal Council proposed would have obliged guests to leave their personal details with the restaurant manager to facilitate contact tracing if necessary. Medical experts explained in the media that it was a necessary measure for restaurant reopening, which would allow targeted action against potential future breakouts. Consumer associations actively informed citizens about their rights to data protection regarding contact tracing in restaurants, though without advocating against this measure (Konsumentenschutz, 2020). However, in the face of GastroSuisse's heavy opposition (e.g., Wuthrich, 2020), the Federal Council withdrew this requirement before the reopening of restaurants (Hoffstetter, 2020).

The case of the relaxation of restrictions for the restaurant industry illustrates the stark contrast between the political management of the lockdown driven by public health concerns and the decision making for the reopening driven primarily by economic concerns. The executive governance of the lockdown period displays two core features: the willingness to rely on expert advice in a situation of acute uncertainty (Versluis et al., 2019), and the consociational element of consensus government. The medical perspective did not totally dominate the Federal Council's policies, and in retrospect, several epidemiologists criticized the Federal Council and the FOPH for not responding to their warnings enough (Schmid & von Burg, 2020). However, in sum, the management of this crisis consistently struck a balance between expert-driven advice and political feasibility and acceptability of the measures by the traditional key economic players. Two core factors held the two sides of politics and science together. First, following the example of many countries around the world, Switzerland agreed on the common goal of controlling the pandemic and consequently prioritizing health over economic concerns. Second, the FOPH acted as moderator and broker between the two sides and succeeded in communicating a coherent message to the public in spite of internal disagreements and quarrels (Brönnimann, 2020). The common goal justified adding an exceptional technocratic element to the consociational structure of Swiss decision making, which received wide acceptance by the population and even among politicians. As highlighted regarding the Swedish case—another consensus-oriented democracy (Petridou, 2020)—the recourse to public experts conveniently allows political authorities to limit the contradictory debate through the use of authoritative voices, thus smoothening the crisis management and fostering increased national unity (Premat, 2020).

This exceptional governance arrangement came to an end with the start of the debate about the reopening strategy. The shift of the political priority from health to the economy allowed for the return of the established mode of economic policymaking in Switzerland. The strong ties between economic actors and high-level politics were immediately actioned at the executive and legislative levels. Media coverage reported on the intensive direct lobbying that occurred between GastroSuisse and selected Federal Councilors. GastroSuisse deployed a large range of actions, including special meetings with the political authorities (Lugon, 2020), and exerting pressure by going public in the press with its demands. The head of GastroSuisse also tried to activate the political cleavage for its own ends. To advocate an earlier reopening of restaurants, it conducted a targeted lobbying campaign among the five right-wing members of the Federal Council (out of seven members) in April, criticizing the policy of the left-wing Minister for Domestic Affairs (who is responsible for health) (Häfliger, 2020). Even though the Federal Council did not directly give into GastroSuisse's intense lobbying activities, the latter increased its pressure on parliamentarians. In terms of party politics, this pressure affected executive decision making. As part of an extraordinary session between 04 and 07 May (the first parliamentary session since the interruption of the spring session in March), the Swiss Parliament (which currently has a middle/right-wing majority) adopted two motions to loosen policies that interfered with economic activities, and they specifically called for the reopening of restaurants on 11 May (Schweizer Parlament/Le Parlement suisse., 2020b). Finally, despite the claims of the Minister

for Domestic Affairs to follow through on the closure of restaurants until June 08 as had initially been planned (for instance, in mid-April: Pelda & Gafner, 2020), the lobbying efforts of the key economic players won out, and the reopening schedule and modalities were changed.

The detour via the parliament in responding to vested interests instead of participating in direct negotiations is in line with recent mutations of neo-corporatism in Switzerland. Häusermann et al. (2004) describe how neo-corporatism in Switzerland has been destabilized since the 1990s by relative party polarization, thus undermining the compromise capacity of trilateral negotiations and increasing media coverage that impedes hidden arrangements and confidential negotiations. As a consequence, there was a shift from neo-corporatist arrangements to party politics and the parliamentarian arena. It is apparent that the neo-corporatist-partisan politics decision making mode resurged once the health priority was replaced by the economic imperative. So to speak, as soon as the common goal fell away and the emergency state was relaxed, the old decision making mode immediately kicked back in. From a global perspective, the resurgence of these national tendencies might be reinforced by the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic lacked a powerful, coordinated international governance capacity to help national authorities to navigate a way through the crisis (Comfort et al., 2020).

5 | CONCLUSION

The measures that the government issued to handle the COVID-19 pandemic in Switzerland were a mix of compulsory directives (e.g., restrictions of border crossings, the closure of non-essential businesses) and of more persuasive instruments. The latter fall into the category of soft power, defined as, *"getting others to want the outcomes that you want"* by influence rather than coercion (Nye, 2008:95). The most striking example of this soft power was the management of the lockdown, which strongly recommended people to stay at home, without any formal interdictions. However, heavy pressure came from public authorities and the media who insisted on the importance of respecting instructions. The population's compliance with measures to avoid any non-essential movements was very high. This heavy reliance on a shared national common sense approach typically exemplifies the country's consociational features and is highly representative of Swiss political narratives and culture. The government repeatedly highlighted Switzerland's ability to reach excellent outcomes through voluntary compliance, based on *"a balance that is acceptable to all*." (Berset, 2020). The president of the Swiss Confederation considered the authorities' role during the management of the pandemic as an example of *Mittelweg* (i.e., a middle ground) (Radio fréquence Jura RFJ, 2020).

However, the consensus narrative tends to overshadow the interest representation structure within the Swiss system. This is in line with the political mechanisms of a consociational system which, by definition, relies on a tendency to neutralize adversarial processes and social segmentation (Andeweg, 2000; Vatter, 2008), while favoring some vested interests that have better access to the political elite. The response to the pandemic being largely determined by political and social structures, this mediation through sociopolitical institutions also has important consequences in terms of health (in)equalities (Oberlander, 2020). In addition, under the emergency law, the equilibrium of powers was modified toward a predominance of the executive power. In this sense, the COVID-19 crisis provides an interesting occasion to study the arbitration of interests in a consociational system in which the checks and balances system was profoundly altered, including the exceptional attributions granted to the government, the deflation of the role of the parliament during emergency procedures, an exceptionally high public consensus, media support of government action, and the suspension of all traditional pre-parliamentary consultative procedures, which are usually key characteristics of the Swiss system.

ORCID

Fritz Sager https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5099-6676
Céline Mavrot https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9603-5790

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