

Rising Tides of Ideological Simplifications: A Comparative and Longitudinal Analysis of Local Parties

HANS GESER
University of Zurich

This article explores the strength and causal determinants of ideological thinking within Swiss local political parties. The concept of “ideologization” refers to (1): “horizontal couplings”, as they are manifested in intercorrelations between different opinions, and to (2) “vertical couplings” of specific opinions to abstract concepts of “left” and “right”. Results show high ideologization on the left-center section of the LR-scale, especially in the vertical dimension. On both sides of the spectrum, ideological constraints are significantly higher in larger communities than in smaller ones. Only in rather small communities, does ideologization correlate positively with the educational level, the modern occupational background of party members and the number of other local parties with which they have to compete. In communities of given size, ideological thinking is more pronounced when parties possess a small share of political power. Finally, it is found that ideological constraints have increased somewhat between 1989 and 2002.

KEYWORDS: Ideology • Local Parties • Left-right Scale • Municipal Politics • Political Attitudes • Political Change.

“Ideology” as an Ambiguous Concept

In everyday talk as well as in political and scientific discourses, the term “ideology” has ambiguous connotations.

On the one hand, “ideological thinking” denotes a tendency to cling to rigid mental stereotypes instead of recognizing the reality and adapting pragmatically to situational conditions, to evaluate all issues according to the same monistic guidelines instead of judging each on its own intrinsic merits, and to identify with ready-made collectivistic opinion patterns instead of relying on one’s own capacity of autonomous thought.

On the other hand, there is also a long tradition in social science to see ideology in a much more positive way: as a correlate of higher intellectual sophistication. In this view, ideological thinking is characterized by high stability, internal logical coherence and consistency, based on the capacity to relate specific issues to more abstract principles and to organize different attitudes to logically consistent wholes (Converse 1964; Gerring 1997).

This view gave rise to the notion that people with high political interest and expertise are most likely to structure attitudes toward political issues in ideologically consistent ways (Converse 1964; Zaller 1992; Federico and Schneider 2007), while most ordinary citizens (especially the less educated) lack ideological thinking because their political views are found to be incoherent, volatile and logically flawed (Bishop 2005; Converse 1964; Nie and Anderson 1974; McGuire 1985, 1999).

However, this “rationalistic” perspective has been heavily attacked by psychologists who again stress the importance of non-rational factors in the genesis of ideological thought. For instance, Federico and Schneider criticise such views as unduly “cognitivist” and stress the importance of motivational factors in processes of ideological structuring (Federico and Schneider 2007). Similarly, Jost et al. have argued that ideological thinking may well derive its internal coherence not from logics, but “acquires coherence and structure from psychological needs, motives, and constraints that vary both situationally and dispositionally” (Jost et al. 2008).

Especially “conservatism” has been widely interpreted as a highly synthetic world view that encompasses a wide range of world-views, values and attitudes related to basic personality characteristics like “authoritarianism” (Adorno et al. 1950), “need for cognitive closure” (Kruglanski and Webster 1996), anxiety arising from mortality salience (Greenberg et al. 1990), “intolerance of ambiguity” (Kirton 1978), “uncertainty avoidance” (Jost et al. 2008) or simple “fear of change” (Rossiter 1968).

While psychologists are professionally disposed to focus on intrapersonal motivations and dispositions, sociologists are more inclined to include factors related to social interaction, collective group formation, society and culture. Adopting this perspective, it is fascinating to learn that there are pronounced differences between various segments of societal elites. Thus, it has been found that highly consistent belief systems are highly pronounced among cultural elites, while they are less prevalent among elites highly involved in (political or economic) decisions (Lerner et al. 1991). This regularity may indicate that high involvement in powerful roles may be incompatible with the maintenance of ideological consistency because

there is too much need to do justice to each particular problem and to adapt to issue-specific and situational conditions.

Left-right Ideology: Conceptual and Theoretical Issues

While originating from mutually very distant disciplines (like sociology, psychology, sociology and political science), most studies on ideology converge in the point that ideological thinking in politics is mainly organized along a single dimension spanning between “conservative vs. “liberal” or “left” vs. “right”.

A wealth of empirical evidence shows that most citizens in most developed democratic countries are willing and able to place themselves on the left-right dimension: a scale usually ranging from 1–10 or from 0–10. (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976; Colomer and Escatel 2004: 3). Similarly, voters as well as political elites use the LR scale for characterizing social movements, political parties, candidates, news media, issue positions, political programs and governing regimes.

Like the top-bottom model of social stratification, the LR scheme is a simple spatial metaphor that has the characteristic of being translatable in all languages and being potentially adopted by all human cultures (Laponce 1981: 27).

The ubiquity of such one-dimensional schemes is best explained by the “functionalist” theory which assumes that the salience of the LR continuum is particularly high under conditions of high political complexity and low political information (Fuchs and Klingemann 1990). As a starting premise, the theory assumes that most people spend little efforts for acquiring and synthesizing political information, because they have little skills to do that or no time available. The salience of the left-right dimension can be minimal in two party systems, because party preferences can easily be built up without referring to ideological notions. In more complex and competitive multiparty systems, citizens tend to rely on rather simple heuristic shortcuts in order to reach non-ambiguous voting decisions with a minimum of personal efforts (Berelson et al. 1954; McKelvey and Ordeshook 1986; Neuman 1986; Popkin 1994; Hinich and Munger 1994), and parties will use ideology as an indispensable tool for “branding their products” in political campaigns (Downs 1957; Colomer and Escatel 2004).

In conformity with Converse’s observation that highly educated and politically interested individuals were more inclined to think in ideologi-

cal terms (Converse 1964), various more recent studies have shown that politically sophisticated individuals are better able to make use of political labels like “left” and “right” because they are better informed about their meaning (Sniderman et al. 1991; Kitschelt and Helleman 1990; Klingemann 1979; etc.), and that issue positions and left-right self placements are more tightly correlated when the level of political cognition is high (e. g. Inglehart and Klingemann 1976).

The astonishing permanency of the spatial left-right metaphor contrasts sharply with extreme variations of the meanings associated with these two terms during history and across different cultures. In the early 19th century, leftism was mainly associated with individualism, free enterprise, national independence and – following Rousseau – an endeavour to restore perfect form of human society as it had presumably existed in the past (Laponce 1981: 118ff.).

Between about 1850 and 1960, it was almost exclusively amalgamated to socialist and communist ideologies associated with the various labour movements – thus giving priority to questions of economic organization, class relations and social welfare. In the late sixties, the civil rights movements and the student revolts gave rise to a new, more encompassing understanding of leftism (or: “radicalism”): including the perspective of extending basic standards of human rights and welfare to all kinds of discriminated population segments (like non-whites, females, gays, starving poor in underdeveloped nations etc.). Within the same time period, *ecologist issues* gained increased prominence on political agendas and were incorporated in programs aiming to catalyze societal and economic change. Finally, processes of globalization and regional supranational integration (within Europe) have given rise to new controversies where basic strategies of foreign policy are at stake.

However, there is no agreement whether all these “postmaterialist” issues become increasingly assimilated to “leftism”, or whether they are the nucleus of a second (orthogonal) ideological dimension.

On the one hand, there is considerable evidence that no amalgamation is taking place. Thus, Terry N. Clark assumes that rising affluence and intergenerational change contribute to a growing salience of “social value issues” which constitute “a distinct political dimension from more traditional economic or fiscal issues.” (Clark et al. 1993: 305). In contrast to socialist collectivism, this new “social liberalism” is more associated with individualism: implying an affirmative position toward markets and private actions, and a growing skepticism toward governmental bureaucracy.

(Clark and Inglehart 1998). In a similar vein, Kitschelt has argued that in addition to the traditional LR dimension, a second axis extending between an “authoritarian” and a “libertarian” pole is gaining weight (Kitschelt 1994). Besides social liberalism, *ecologism* is also said to constitute a new ideological dimension less and less associated with conventional radicalism (Kessel and Tischler 1984). Finally, Simon Hix and Fritz Scharpf claim that *processes of European integration* have given rise to a new dimension that divides those who favor this process from those who want to preserve national autonomy (Hix 1999; Scharpf 1996).

On a more fundamental level, it has been argued that modern political parties are generally moving away from ideological programs in order to include broader voter segments no longer committed to traditional “milieus” and “Weltanschauungen” as they have structured the political landscape until the 1960s. Kirchheimer’s (1965) “catch all party”, Katz and Mair’s (1995) “cartel party” as well as von Beyme’s (2000) “professional electoral party” (*professionelle Wählerpartei*) and Lösche’s conceptions of “Volksparteien” as “loosely coupled anarchies” share the notion that successful current parties tend to adapt pragmatically to a heterogeneous and volatile electorate, so that all traditional ideological patterns tend to decay (Hofmann 2003). All these notions also converge with the argument that the “mediatization” of modern elections promotes a shift from issue-centered to candidate-centered campaigning (Niedermayer 2000) as well as a tendency “that parties propagate positive product attributes and a universalized competence instead of sharply defined programmatic profiles.” (Schulz 1998: 378).

On the other hand, there is also evidence that attitudes toward “old” and “new” political issues are significantly interrelated, and that this linkage has not been eroded by either socio-economic development or intergenerational change. Thus many Western countries (particularly in Europe) have seen the emergence of “red-green parties” which combine ecological and social liberalist standings with pronounced leftist positions in all traditional domains (e.g. in economic and social policy) (Poguntke 1987). In Germany, the trend toward washed-out “peoples parties” (*Volksparteien*) seems to be broken by the shifts from the CDU and SPD to smaller parties which maintain more pronounced and consistent ideological profiles: “Die Grünen” which combine strict ecological standings with a broad spectrum of more classical leftist positions; and “Die Linke” which is committed to a very general subordination of the economy under political power (Jun and Kreikenbom and Neu 2006: 13ff.).

In a sophisticated empirical study, Weakliem (1991) has shown that the “materialist” and the “postmaterialist” dimension of political ideology show considerable values of interfactor correlations (between 0.40 and 0.60). According to Inglehart, the functional needs for organizing politics along a single “left-right”-dimension are so imperative that – in the long run at least – postmaterialistic issues will become assimilated to this dimension rather than evolving to an independent second ideological axis (Inglehart 1984: 37). All this conforms to Sani and Sartori’s and Bobbio’s view that Left and Right are just “empty containers” that can be filled with various meanings by anybody (Sani and Sartori 1983; Bobbio 1996).

In several other empirical studies, it was found that rather tight correlations between issue positions and left-right self ratings exist for the left half of the continuum, while on the right side, the explanatory power of political attitudes is much reduced. As Laponce concludes from his meta-analysis, this is true for most issues conventionally related to the LR-continuum: e.g. attitudes toward economic regulation, nationalism or gender equality (Laponce 1981: 158ff.). As the author himself has verified in a study on local parties in Switzerland, the same is also true for items related to financial policy, immigration policy or environmental protection (Geser 1992).

In the era of conventional class politics, ideological cores were sufficiently defined by stable interests deriving from the position of collectivities within the socio-economic system. In postmaterialist ages where particular interests are substituted by generalized “values”, this specificity and stability has evidently been lost. Instead, ideologies have become more dependent on

- subjective personal factors and character traits (e. g. “conservative” mentalities characterized by high security needs and low tolerance of ambiguity);
- divergences conditioned by cultural traditions (as they are currently manifested in the different attitudes of European countries toward nuclear power);
- fads and fashions, which may dominate the political agenda for transitory periods.

Consequently, we may well see a higher variability of “leftisms” and “rightisms” in the future, while the degree of ideological cohesiveness may

well remain the same, because the same needs for simplification are persisting on the individual as well as on the political level.

However, it cannot be denied that all these different issues are too heterogeneous (and too variable) to be part of a logically consistent ideological belief system.¹ For instance: if it's true that conservatives have an increased need for security: why are they more prone to carry the risks connected with nuclear power plants? And why are leftist parties fighting so vigorously for the abandonment of atomic energy, when this results in such cost increases for electricity that they risk to lose their traditional electorate (lower social strata).

Similarly, it is not evident that attitudes toward EU membership and European integration have become a left-right issue in many countries. Why are the leftist (e. g. in Switzerland) in favor of such a project which is associated with so many developments they don't appreciate: the liberalization of trade and labour markets, the intensified fight against immigration from Southern countries; the demise of national worker protection?²

If highly educated strata are more prone to maintain tight constraints among opinions to all these issues: why does this indicate that their thinking is in any way more sophisticated than the less interrelated attitudes of less educated citizens? Doesn't this manifest just the contrary: that educated people are more disposed to take over ready-made collective stereotypes that to rely on autonomous individual reflection, more eager to create in-group conformity than to generate guidelines for pragmatic judgments and decisions?

Swiss Local Parties as a Field for Studying “Ideological Cultures”

The following empirical study intends to shed a light on the actual ideological culture in Swiss politics as it is reflected in the issue positions of local political parties.

In contrast to the general “political culture” which encompasses more basic “rules of the game”, ideological cultures may be seen as more vari-

¹ Thus, the “new social movements” themselves never produced a coherent encompassing ideology comparable to Marxism and Socialism in the case of the labour movement (see Brand et al. 1984).

² A special case here is Sweden where leftists are more EU-critical because they fear lowering welfare standards.

able pattern co-varying with long-term changes of societal value systems as well as more short-term developments on the level of social movements, salient issues or attitudinal “fashions”. Nevertheless, the concept of “ideological culture” implies the existence of collective political perspectives, values and goals governing the behavior of individuals and organizations that are transmitted by regular processes of socialization.

In general, average individual citizens are rather poor informants of “culture” because their thinking is heavily shaped by psychological idiosyncrasies and because they often lack the cognitive and intellectual capacities needed to perceive and interpret these collective patterns adequately.

Studying *politically active elites* may be a better approach, but it is still assumed that cultural patterns are adequately mirrored in the subjective consciousness of individual minds.

By studying *groups and organizations*, more justice can be done to the basic fact that culture is primarily expressed in the outcomes of collective communications and activities: e.g. in the explicit results of discussions, negotiations and deliberative procedures, in formally stated decisions and action programs or at least in mutually recognized “majority opinions”.

Political parties have particularly strong links to ideological culture. It can be expected that party groupings will tend to maintain more consistent and integrative ideological standings than individuals, because

- a. it is their job to aggregate the attitudes of their divergent members and factions into explicit action programs and specific political decisions;
- b. their visible public status sets them under high pressure to be consistent in order to appeal to potential voters or adherents (Colomer and Escatel 2004).

This implies that high intercorrelations between different issue opinions (like “socialism” and “ecologism”) among parties may not at all reflect a similar covariance on the level of their individual members: but rather their particular success in aggregating “socialist factions” and “ecological factions” into an overarching party platform (e.g. for simple tactical reasons of winning elections).

In an even wider and longer perspective, political parties can be seen as active agents that define for everybody else in society what is the (current) meaning of “left” and “right” (Potter 2001: 6).

Local party sections have the additional virtues of being so numerous that rigorous multivariate methods of comparative analysis can be applied, and of being so low in organizational complexity that a single central member is well able to deliver all the relevant information.

Switzerland is outstanding for the fact that formalized part groupings are astonishingly widespread even among very tiny municipalities, and that they control to a high degree all major political processes on the communal level (Geser et al. 1994).

Given the mix between direct and representative democracy typical for Swiss politics, most of these local parties have the dual function of influencing elections on the one hand and decisions about specific political issues on the other. With a total number of about 200'000 participative adherents (equal to about 5% of Swiss voters), these groupings encompass the major part of all politically active citizen in the country.

It might be objected that the community level is not adequate for studying political ideology, because smaller settings are generally prone to avoid overt political conflict (Vidich and Bensman 1968; Black 1974), and because municipal issues are often seen as mere technical and administrative problems not subject to struggles between political parties (Banfield and Wilson 1965; Geser 2003). In the United States, even larger cities have been affected by the "progressive reform movement" which reinforced nonpartisan managerial conceptions of city government dedicated general "community welfare", not to the interest of particular groupings and electoral clienteles (Kemp 1999); and in many European countries, it is found that instead of competing polarized party systems, inclusive "consociational governments" are widespread at least in villages and smaller cities (Holler 1981: 127; Elander and Stig 1991; Mouritzen 1991).

However, exactly these conditions offer good conditions for subjecting our de-ideologization hypotheses to especially harsh procedures of falsification. In other words: if high (and increasing) degrees of ideology are found on the level of local parties, we may safely conclude that they may even be more (rather than less) pronounced on supralocal levels.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

In the following, we want to explore some factors that determine to what extent the issue positions, goals and action courses of political parties are structured by ideological constraints.

Following Federico and Schneider (2007), two dimensions of ideological attitude-structuring may be distinguished:

“Horizontal Constraints”: Or “Political Belief Consistency” (Converse 1964).

This concept relates to the degree to which issue opinions among are inter-related among each other. In operational terms, such constraints reach their maximum when knowing the opinion on issue A allows me to predict with certainty the opinions on issues B, C, D, ... to Z, and they are minimal when no predictions are possible because intercorrelations are zero. Evidently, horizontal constraints can effectively be assessed by factor-analytic methods that explore to what degree intercorrelation matrices between issue opinions can be reduced to very few common dimensions.

“Vertical Constraints”: Or “Level of Conceptualization” (Converse 1964)

This concept refers to the degree to which attitudes to specific issues are related to higher-order ideological concepts like “liberalism” vs. “conservatism” or “left vs. right”. In operational terms, it can be measured by the certainty and precision with which the placement on such ideological scales can be predicted when opinions on all particular issues (A, B, C, ... to Z) are known. Evidently, such assessments call for multivariate regression methods that allow measuring the cumulative explanatory power of all the issues in questions.

Minimal ideologization would be defined as a totally unconstrained political standing where the opinion about each issue is generated independently and without guidance by superordinate “Weltanschauungen” or programmatic structures: on the basis of its own intrinsic merits and by adapting to particular needs and problems, current trends in the media or demoscopic surveys, and specific situational conditions. Evidently, such openness would have to be paid with heavy loads of permanent information gathering, communication and consensus-building procedures, and it will make it difficult for a party to formulate programs and to establish and maintain a consistent a clear-cut public identity.

Theoretically, these two aspects could vary independently of each other. Thus, dense horizontal clusterings could be found without any relation to more abstract ideological notions, or issue positions may be tightly coupled

to ideological concepts despite the fact that they are mutually unrelated. However, notions like “leftism” or “rightism” always imply a combination (and positive covariation) of horizontal clusterings and vertical couplings.

On a general level, it has to be expected that in contrast to supralocal (especially national) party organizations, local parties may well maintain a much lower level of ideology, because in the realm of community politics, issues are often defined as non-political problems to be solved by mere common sense or technical expertise (Vidich and Bensman 1968; Geser 2003).

Nevertheless, it can be assumed that local parties are basically also subject to the same patterns of one-dimensional left-right polarity as it is reigning in the encompassing political system.

Thus, the following hypotheses will be tested:

1. A certain degree of horizontal as well as vertical ideologization is present among all political parties, and these **clustering’s and constraints** can be unambiguously identified in conventional terms of “left” vs. right”.
2. This main ideological dimension encompasses a broad range of “materialist” as well as “postmaterialist” issue positions. Other ideological dimensions (e. g. related to social liberalism, ecologism, international openness etc.) may also be found, but they are likely to be of secondary importance.
3. We acknowledge the possibility that there are asymmetries between “leftism” and “rightism” **in the degree of ideologization. On the one hand**, we are open for the notion that “conservatives are the real dogmatists” because they have a heightened need for cognitive structures and a decreased capacity to tolerate ambiguity and change (e. g. Tomkins 1963; Wilson 1973; Altemeyer 1998; Jost et al. 2003, 2008). On the other hand, we take into account the thorough empirical evidence that falsifies such claims: e. g. the impressionistic historical regularity that leftist (e. g. socialist and communist) movements and parties have been forerunners in political ideologization since the middle of the 19th century, while ideologies on the rightist side (including national socialism) were mainly reactive and have remained on lower levels of coherence and consistency. This latter regularity has been corroborated by several studies that have found vertical couplings between issue positions and ideologi-

cal self-placement to be much stronger on the left-to-center than on the center-to-right section of the left-right scale (see Laponce 1981: 58ff; Geser 1992; Potter 2001).

4. Ideologization patterns are conditioned by various characteristics of the social and cultural setting within which parties operate. Given the notoriously low salience of ideological thinking in (especially rural) communal politics (Vidich and Bensman 1968; Holler 1981), we will expect ideology to become more prominent with increasing city size and increasing degree of “communal politicization”.
5. Similarly, we take into consideration the possibility that political ideology is predominantly articulated in the very centers of society and by the more educated strata (Converse 1964; Laponce 1981: 158ff.; Gerring 1997; Bishop 2005). Thus, we expect higher ideology when larger percentages of party activists have higher educational degrees and stem from modern sectors of the economy.
6. In municipalities of given size, ideological constraints will rise with the number of competing political parties for two reasons. First, every single party has more leeway to appeal to special electorate groups and give priority to internal purity and coherence, because it has not to take the overall perspective of the total community. Secondly – following the functional theory of Fuchs and Klingemann (1990) – parties in complex political systems have to streamline and simplify their positions and programs, so that citizens are better able to make electoral decisions without having to gather and synthesize much information.
7. We remember Lerner’s finding that ideological thinking is most pronounced within marginal (e. g. cultural) elites not involved in far-reaching (political or economic) decisions (see above). This could result from the fact that high policy involvement creates pressures to adapt pragmatically to particular problems and situational conditions, while powerlessness offers better opportunities to preserve “ideological purity” because no full “reality tests” have to be faced. By following this argumentation, it can be assumed that conditions for maintaining coherent ideological beliefs may be better when a party doesn’t actively participate in executive political power, or when its share of formal power is rather small.

8. Impressed by the widely articulated mantra of “ideological revivals” (Hinich and Munger 1994; McCarthy et al. 2006; Baldassarri and Bearman 2007; etc.), we would not be surprised to find that degrees of horizontal and vertical ideological constraints have increased rather than diminished over time.

Data and Variables

The following empirical study is based on two mailed-out surveys (conducted in 1989 and 2002) that have included all (about 5'000) local party sections in all (about 2'800) Swiss communities of all three linguistic regions. The questionnaires were sent by mail to the current heads of these sections. They were asked to provide information about the political goals and values of their grouping as well as on its membership composition, internal organizational structure, political activities and relationship to the supralocal party levels.

As the return was about 50% in both waves, a rather large sample of more than 2'600 units was achieved: providing the basis for testing rigorously a manifold of hypotheses with multivariate statistical procedures (Table 1).

Table 1: Sample size of local party sections 1989 and 2002, according to linguistic region

Language region:	1989	2002
German	2'039	1'994
French	3'36	399
Italian	263	262
Total	2'638	2'655

Among many other questions, respondents were asked to place their party section on a left-right scale ranging from 1 (extreme left) to 10 (extreme right).

As seen from Table 2, more than 95% of all participants were ready and able to provide such a judgment, and the whole range of values was actually used.

Table 2: Distribution of local parties on the left-right scale (according to the judgment of the party president) 1989 and 2002: percentage values

	Value on the Left-Right Scale										No Answer
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
1989	1.3	5.1	11.6	10.0	13.3	18.6	16.7	14.0	3.4	1.7	4.3
2002	1.8	6.1	13.2	9.2	13.2	17.2	18.7	14.1	2.7	0.9	2.9
N (1989)	33	133	301	260	346	485	434	363	88	45	113
N (2002)	47	154	335	233	335	438	475	360	69	24	75

Comparing the two waves, there can be concluded that

- the notion of “left vs. right” seems to have increased somewhat in salience, because the share of non-respondents has considerably declined (from 4.3 to 2.9 percent);
- only minor changes have occurred in the overall distribution; in particular, extremely leftist and moderately rightist groupings have slightly increased, while sections on the extreme right have lost ground.

Secondly, informants had to indicate the opinions reigning within their groupings on a manifold of crucial political issues known to be associated with positions of “left” and “right”. Nine of the issues were related to national policies, while the remaining six were focusing on issues on the communal level.

“In favor” and “against” means that a stable and considerable majority is active members are (dis)agreeing on the issue, so that the party section as a whole can follow consistently these political lines. “Mixed” means that either no secure and stable majority exists for either position, so that there is no reliable basis for consistent political action.

Given the shifts of the political agenda, some new issues had to be included in 2002, so that only ten out of 15 issue positions can be compared over time.

Looking at Table 3, it is remarkable that the frequency distributions on most items are highly skewed. Social desirability factors may well have effected that informants were inclined to “agree” to any items proposed: so

that results may have been somewhat different when alternative (negative) formulations would have been used.

As in Table 2, a closer inspection shows that no clear overall shifts to the left or the right have occurred in the critical period. While support for some leftist demands (budget expansion, closing of nuclear power plants) has increased, welfare commitments to immigrants have declined and critics of the Swiss financial sector (under heavy international attack because of its banking secrecy practices) have lost ground.

Considering the semi-nominal character of these opinion scales, non-parametric methods of analysis have to be applied.

For assessing the *horizontal constraints* (i.e. interrelations between variables), *Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA)* seems an adequate procedure because it parallels factor analysis in reducing intercorrelation matrices to a minimum number of dimensions: with *factor scores* that indicate the relationship of each variable vis-à-vis these extracted factors, and *inertia values* that measure the percentage of total variance explained by each factor.

The *vertical constraints* are assessed by correlating issue opinions with the values of the left-right scale by using Spearman's rank correlation coefficients ρ , and by calculating a multiple linear regression equation with the LR scale as the dependent variable. Using regression methods seems unproblematic because the (approximately normally distributed) left-right scale may well be treated as an interval variable, and because the method is known to be quite robust when nonparametric predictors are included (Labowitz 1970; Anderson 1984).

Additional data used in this study are taken from Federal census data of 1990 and 2000, and from several Swiss community surveys conducted in 1988, 1994 and 2005. In these mailed-out surveys, the central civil service officials ("Gemeindeschreiber") were asked to provide information about the formal political and administrative structure as well as about informal political processes in their community and its relation to the supralocal political levels.

Table 3: Distribution of party opinions on 15 political issues 1989 and 2002 (%)

Political issue	1989			2002		
	Opinion of local party positive	Opinion of local party mixed	Opinion of local party negative	Opinion of local party positive	Opinion of local party mixed	Opinion of local party negative
<i>Leftist political issues:</i>						
Empowerment of workers/employees	44	41	16	41	41	18
Higher tax rates for the wealthy	--	--	--	42	26	31
Expanding communal budget for social welfare	40	31	29	52	33	15
Expanding communal budget for cultural matters	43	38	19	49	38	12
More ecolog. restrictions on communal projects	73	24	3	58	34	8
Nuclear energy should be abandoned	24	41	35	30	36	34
More efforts for achieving gender equality	77	20	3	77	19	4
More communal daycare facilities for kids	--	--	--	52	29	19
Better care for asylum seekers in community	20	50	30	18	31	51
Switzerland should become member of the EU	--	--	--	33	34	33
The Swiss Army should be abolished	--	--	--	14	20	66
<i>Rightist political issues:</i>						
Promoting Switzerland as a financial center	41	38	20	59	28	13
Reducing the communal tax load	63	27	10	63	23	14
Less governmental reglementation	64	26	10	63	24	14
More efforts for increasing public security	--	--	--	72	20	8

Empirical Results

Basic Ideological Constraints in the Total Sample

By exploring our *first* hypothesis, Table 4 shows that very pronounced constraints exist on the left side of the ideological spectrum. The dense interrelationships between the 15 issue opinions (horizontal constraints) are manifested by a very strong first factor that absorbs 46.7% of the total variance and shows positive factor loadings by all variables included. Such clusterings go along with strong vertical constraints as they are visible in the high correlation of each issue variable with the self placement value on the LR scale and in the high cumulative statistical explanation achieved by the multivariate regression in which all issue variables are included as predictors (64.5%). Thus, hypotheses 1 and 2 are fully confirmed at least for the left-center section of the ideological axis.

On the other hand, no equivalent patterns of rightist ideology can be found. While the MCA procedure produces also a predominant first factor, its explanatory power (25.6%) as well as its scope is on a much lower level. Similarly, vertical couplings to the left-right dimension are so loose that by including all predictors in a linear regression, just 18% of the total variance in LR placement can be explained. Thus, hypothesis 3, postulating lower degrees of ideology on the center-right section of the scale, is strongly corroborated.

Evidently, our data are quite efficient to tap the ideological polarization between leftism and centrist political positions, while they are inadequate to account for differences between centrist parties and the extreme right. As these results conform with several other studies (mentioned above), they invite the question whether are caused just by a biased selection of political issues, or whether they reflect the fact that “rightism” is more defined by elements of verbal and behavioral ” styles” rather than by substantive stances toward political issues and goals.

However, all speculations that the traditional LR dimensions may be challenged by other dimensions are refuted. While a second sector has been extracted in both scale sections, its profile is very weak and it is neither related to ecologism nor to social liberalism or to nationalist-internationalist aspects as they have been postulated by different scholars (see above section 2).

Table 4: Horizontal and vertical ideological constraints in left-center and center-right section of LR scale (wave 2002)*

Issues:	left scale section (1-6)		right scale section (5-10)		left scale section (1-6)	right scale section (5-10)
	MCA factor scores		MCA factor scores		Corr. with LR scale value	Corr. with LR scale value
	I	II	I	II		
Promoting Switzerland as a financial center (inv)	0.561	0.066	0.149	0.087	0.65	0.17
Empowerment of workers/employees	0.462	0.088	0.273	0.107	0.50	0.23
Higher tax rates for the wealthy	0.440	0.117	0.246	0.134	0.53	0.25
Reducing the communal tax load (inv)	0.422	0.051	0.127	0.097	0.51	0.22
Expanding communal budget for social welfare	0.606	0.386	0.534	0.324	0.56	0.34
Expanding communal budget for cultural matters	0.455	0.269	0.370	0.290	0.47	0.24
Less governmental reglementation (inv)	0.481	0.111	0.174	0.045	0.57	0.13
More ecology. Restrictions on communal projects	0.284	0.083	0.201	0.064	0.36	0.22
Nuclear energy should be abandoned	0.572	0.141	0.323	0.142	0.61	0.20
More efforts for achieving gender equality	0.196	0.045	0.125	0.100	0.29	0.15
More communal daycare facilities for kids	0.453	0.216	0.275	0.208	0.46	0.19
More efforts for increasing public security (inv)	0.397	0.066	0.062	0.058	0.48	0.08
Better care for asylum seekers in community	0.653	0.405	0.489	0.257	0.61	0.27
Switzerland should become member of the EU	0.412	0.136	0.241	0.166	0.48	0.21
The Swiss Army should be abolished	0.613	0.120	0.248	0.064	0.64	0.15
Eigenvalues	7.006	2.300	3.838	2.144		
Explained inertias	0.467	0.153	0.256	0.143		
Corrected R-square (multivariate regression)					0.645	0.180
(N =)	(1'030)		(1'190)		(1'030)	(1'190)

* Pos. values and correlations indicate pos. relationships with leftist positions. Values of four items that tap rightist issues have been inverted.

The Impact of Community Size and Communal "Politicization"

Looking at the impact of community size in the left-center part of the LR scale (Table 5a), it is evident that horizontal as well as vertical couplings are less pronounced in smaller than in middle-sized municipalities, and reach maximal values in cities with more than 15'000 inhabitants. In addition, some shifts in the content of leftist ideology can be observed insofar as "urban leftism" is more tightly associated with the demand for expanding the budget for culture and with negative attitudes toward tax cuts and the expansion of public security measures (while the classical socialist issue of "worker empowerment" loses ground).

However, a rather generalized tendency of leftist ideologization seems to go along with increasing city size: encompassing 12 out of 15 items in the case of horizontal coupling and 13 out of 15 issues in the realm of vertical constraints.

Inspecting the center-right part of the LR scale (Table 5b), it is evident that rightist ideologies are rather weak in smaller as well as middle-sized communities, while winning considerable ground above the level of 15'000 inhabitants. In these larger settings, being "rightist" means particularly: favoring nuclear energy and tax cuts, and opposing public budget expansion, help for asylum seekers as well as subsidized kid daycare facilities and Swiss membership in the EU.

As a summary, we may conclude that larger city size promotes ideological structuring on both sides of the LR scale, but somewhat more so in the vertical than in the horizontal dimension. Evidently, hypothesis 4 is fully confirmed.

Especially in smaller settings, community affairs are widely considered as nonpolitical issues to be settled by common sense, technical rationality or by applying supralocal legal rules and administrative procedures: so that there is no place for power play and controversies on the level of values and goals (Geser 2003). Under such conditions, we expect that the need for ideological structuring is much less than in settings where "real politics" like on cantonal or the national level takes place (hypothesis 4).

For tapping this variable, party heads were asked whether according to their own judgment, community issues were (overall) "nonpolitical questions". Not unexpectedly, respondents who disagreed were more likely to stem from leftist and urban than from rightist and nonurban parties, so that it is indispensable to control these two variables in order to find out whether "community politicization" is an independent causal factor.

Table 5a: Horizontal and vertical ideological constraints: according to size of community (wave 2002)

Left-center section of the LR scale	MCA factor scores			Correlation with Left-Right scale placement		
	Community size			Community size		
	< 2'000	5'000–10'000	> 15'000	< 2'000	5'000–10'000	> 15'000
Political Issues:						
Promoting Switzerland as a financial center (inv)	0.496	0.554	0.650	0.58	0.66	0.76
Empowerment of workers/employees	0.378	0.521	0.448	0.44	0.58	0.41
Higher tax rates for the wealthy	0.362	0.514	0.501	0.45	0.59	0.54
Reducing the communal tax load (inv)	0.260	0.434	0.599	0.38	0.53	0.64
Expanding communal budget for social welfare	0.520	0.632	0.623	0.49	0.61	0.55
Expanding communal budget for cultural matters	0.387	0.480	0.618	0.36	0.49	0.64
Less governmental reglementation (inv)	0.394	0.510	0.512	0.51	0.57	0.67
More ecological restrictions on communal projects	0.289	0.258	0.250	0.31	0.37	0.36
Nuclear energy should be abandoned	0.495	0.590	0.560	0.53	0.65	0.61
More efforts for achieving gender equality	0.209	0.192	0.214	0.25	0.31	0.37
More communal daycare facilities for kids	0.417	0.460	0.473	0.40	0.49	0.48
More efforts for increasing public security (inv)	0.292	0.393	0.585	0.41	0.48	0.62
Better care for asylum seekers in community	0.578	0.658	0.658	0.50	0.64	0.68
Switzerland should become member of the EU	0.431	0.421	0.365	0.44	0.50	0.43
The Swiss Army should be abolished	0.562	0.609	0.738	0.61	0.62	0.76
Eigenvalues	6.070	7.228	7.795			
Explained inertias	0.405	0.482	0.520			
Corrected R-square (multivariate regression)				0.576	0.669	0.769
(N =)	(316)	(507)	(110)	(316)	(507)	(110)

Table 5b: Horizontal and vertical ideological constraints: according to size of community (wave 2002)
Center-right section of the LR scale

Political Issues:	MCA factor scores			Correlation with Left-Right scale placement		
	Community size			Community size		
	Lower than 2'000	5'000–10'000	More than 15'000	Lower than 2'000	5'000–10'000	More than 15'000
Promoting Switzerland as a financial center (inv)	0.113	0.114	0.337	0.03	0.18	0.26
Empowerment of workers/employees	0.204	0.287	0.301	0.16	0.28	0.27
Higher tax rates for the wealthy	0.215	0.208	0.340	0.21	0.26	0.27
Reducing the communal tax load (inv)	0.038	0.140	0.489	0.16	0.23	0.37
Expanding communal budget for social welfare	0.526	0.514	0.619	0.30	0.31	0.53
Expanding communal budget for cultural matters	0.391	0.363	0.420	0.21	0.22	0.41
Less governmental regimentation (inv)	0.194	0.145	0.072	0.13	0.14	0.07*
More ecological restrictions on communal projects	0.174	0.204	0.331	0.16	0.22	0.36
Nuclear energy should be abandoned	0.280	0.295	0.428	0.14	0.20	0.38
More efforts for achieving gender equality	0.156	0.116	0.098	0.12	0.15	0.24
More communal daycare facilities for kids	0.348	0.282	0.277	0.17	0.18	0.36
More efforts for increasing public security (inv)	0.025	0.054	0.307	0.07*	0.06*	0.20
Better care for asylum seekers in community	0.451	0.486	0.547	0.23	0.24	0.40
Switzerland should become member of the EU	0.244	0.228	0.348	0.18	0.22	0.36
The Swiss Army should be abolished	0.234	0.223	0.287	0.13	0.16	0.12
Eigenvalues	3.595	3.659	5.200			
Explained inertias	0.240	0.244	0.347			

Inspecting Table 6, it is evident that in municipalities of various sizes, the degree of horizontal ideological structuring tends to be higher when community affairs are defined in political (rather than technical, legal or administrative) terms. These trends are similarly strong in the left and the right section of the LR scale. In the vertical dimension, however, the results are much less consistent, except in the largest size category (5–10'000 inhabitants) where the salience of “left” and “right” reaches maximum levels when a highly politicized interpretation of community matters prevails. In addition, Table 6 makes clear that the higher levels of ideology found in leftist parties and sections in larger communities are partially caused by the higher politicization levels of these same groupings, because divergences shrink considerably when this variable is controlled. Especially vertical couplings remain weak in all size categories when an apolitical interpretation of community matters is maintained.

Membership Composition

The well-documented empirical regularity that educated people lean toward more pronounced ideological thinking (hypothesis 5) is only partially reproduced. In small communities with less than 2'000 inhabitants, horizontal as well as vertical constraints increase dramatically with rising percentages of highly educated active members, when the total sample is included (Table 7a). While this regularity may at least partially be caused by the higher educational level in leftist groupings, it persists on the left scale section when the ideological direction of the party is controlled. All this contrasts with the conditions in middle-sized communities where overall impacts of education are weaker and more articulated on the center-right section of the scale (Table 7b).

Apart from formal education, we may speculate that insofar as high political ideologization is a correlate of modern urban society, we will find that it is less pronounced in parties where a large percentage of members stem from “traditional” occupations. For testing this hypothesis, we calculate the percentage of active members who are farmers or self-employed (excluding free professionals who are of course more numerous in modernized settings).

Similar to Table 7, Table 8 shows that such occupational impacts are strongest in the smallest communities. Here, trends toward tight ideology are highest in (leftist as well as rightist) party sections in which the share of traditional occupational strata is insignificant or zero. In middle-sized set-

Table 6: Horizontal and vertical ideological constraints: according to (non)political interpretation of community issues and LR scale section (only communities between 2'000 and 10'000 inhabitants)

	Multiple Corresp. Analysis: explained inertias			Multivariate Regression: corrected R-square			N: Left / right
	Total sample	left scale section	right scale section	Total sample	left scale section	right scale section	
“Community affairs are not political”							
a) Communities with less than 2'000 inhabitants							
Agree strongly	0.288	0.280	0.253	0.12	0.39	0.12	71 / 99
Rather agree	0.365	0.385	0.235	0.07	0.53	0.07	261 / 309
Rather disagree	0.503	0.472	0.253	0.11	0.63	0.11	111 / 112
Disagree strongly	0.511	0.418	0.412	0.29	0.41	0.23	57 / 58
b) Communities with 2'000–5'000 inhabitants							
Agree strongly	0.351	0.363	0.247	0.40	0.60	0.12	53 / 71
Rather agree	0.448	0.436	0.240	0.66	0.59	0.19	164 / 210
Rather disagree	0.600	0.517	0.250	0.78	0.71	0.22	64 / 66
Disagree strongly	0.603	0.500	0.393	0.70	0.60	0.08	31 / 30
c) Communities with 5'000–10'000 inhabitants							
Agree strongly	0.344	0.366	0.309	0.38	0.21	0.08	27 / 16
Rather agree	0.507	0.479	0.287	0.66	0.70	0.18	98 / 96
Rather disagree	0.629	0.626	0.326	0.79	0.88	0.17	45 / 46
Disagree strongly	0.636	0.598	0.347	0.77	0.95	0.28	27 / 25

Table 7: Horizontal and vertical ideological constraints in party sections with different percentages of highly educated active members

Percentage of active members with higher education	Multiple Corresp. Analysis: explained inertias				Multivariate Regression: corrected R-square				N: left / right	
	Total sample	left scale section	right scale section	Total sample	left scale section	right scale section	left scale section	right scale section		
a) Communities below 2'000 inhabitants										
-15%	0.384	0.396	0.247	0.56	0.57	0.20	0.20	0.20	234 / 311	
16-30%	0.459	0.468	0.277	0.69	0.67	0.09	0.09	0.09	80 / 101	
30-40%	0.462	0.440	0.244	0.70	0.77	0.15	0.15	0.15	21 / 27	
41+ %	0.547	--	0.382	0.87	0.94	--	--	--	17 / 14	
b) Communities between 2'000 and 10'000 inhabitants										
-15%	0.508	0.469	0.267	0.67	0.63	0.20	0.20	0.20	192 / 215	
16-30%	0.544	0.496	0.242	0.77	0.70	0.24	0.24	0.24	112 / 111	
30-40%	0.536	0.480	0.240	0.86	0.78	0.44	0.44	0.44	31 / 33	
41+ %	0.551	0.515	0.349	0.76	0.67	0.35	0.35	0.35	45 / 38	

Table 8: Horizontal and vertical ideological constraints in party sections with different percentages of active members who stem from traditional occupational strata (farmers and self-employed)

Percentage of active members who are farmers or self-employed*	Multiple Corresp. Analysis: explained inertias			Multivariate Regression: corrected R-square			N: left / right
	Total sample	left scale section	right scale section	Total sample	left scale section	right scale section	
a) Communities with less than 2'000 inhabitants							
36+	0.242	0.280	0.221	0.17	0.04	0.15	30 / 85
21-35	0.310	0.331	0.237	0.44	0.65	0.08	30 / 62
1-20	0.388	0.374	0.231	0.68	0.58	0.30	71 / 65
0	0.467	0.414	0.339	0.64	0.49	0.33	53 / 31
b) Communities with 2'000-10'000 inhabitants							
36+	0.387	0.438	0.213	0.68	0.62	0.12	37 / 88
21-35	0.336	0.374	0.231	0.73	0.72	0.19	45 / 90
1-20	0.493	0.445	0.214	0.39	0.68	0.20	124 / 122
0	0.432	0.357	0.307	0.47	0.49	0.38	123 / 41

* free professionals excluded.

tings, however (Table 8b), such impacts can only be found in groupings on the center-right section of the LR scale – similar to Table 7b which shows the same asymmetry in the case of education.

These findings conform well with the argument that leftist ideologies have always been conceived as a ready-made, highly explicit constructions easy to grasp by lowly-educated people (e. g. unionized workers), while rightist, conservative ideologies tend to be less formal, so that their grasping and precise definition depends more on factors of individual motivation and skills.

Complexity of the Communal Party System

Functionalist theories predict that the salience of the left-right dimension increases with the complexity of the political system, because it provides an easy categorical scheme for comparing and evaluating large numbers of political positions, politicians, regimes or political parties (hypothesis 6). By synthesizing their issue positions to highly structured bundles labeled as “leftist”, “centrist” or “rightist”, even less interested voters can easily make up their mind about their preferences without engaging in cumbersome information gathering and multidimensional evaluations.

While the high correlations of ideological constraints with city size may well be partially explained by the fact that larger communities tend to have more local parties, the number of parties may well be a determinative factor independent of size.

As seen from Table 9a and b, this hypothesis is only borne out for leftist ideology in smaller communities between 2'000 and 5'000 inhabitants³, while no effects are visible in larger communities and in the right section of the scale.

We may speculate that in more sizable communities, ideological tendencies are sufficiently supported by other factors (e. g. the high politicization of community affairs (see 6.3)), so that intracommunal factors like the number of local party sections is no longer decisive.

³ Communities with less than 2'000 inhabitants have not been analyzed because of their rather rudimentary party system.

Table 9: Horizontal and vertical ideological constraints of local parties according to total number of competing local parties in the community

Number of local party sections in community	Multiple Corresp. Analysis: explained inertias			Multivariate Regression: corrected R-square			N: left / right
	Total sample	left scale section	right scale section	Total sample	left scale section	right scale section	
a) Communities with 2'000–5'000 inhabitants							
1–2	0.349	0.378	0.249	0.57	0.59	0.15	30 / 46
3	0.475	0.425	0.228	0.63	0.61	0.29	192 / 215
4	0.483	0.446	0.251	0.63	0.66	0.05	112 / 111
5+	0.539	0.467	0.265	0.80	0.72	0.40	45 / 38
b) Communities with 5'000–10'000 inhabitants							
1–3	0.514	0.489	0.341	0.70	0.41	0.45	25 / 24
4	0.552	0.581	0.295	0.65	0.51	0.28	26 / 29
5	0.565	0.545	0.290	0.75	0.68	0.30	41 / 45
6–9	0.529	0.477	0.291	0.80	0.69	0.22	43 / 38

Table 10: Horizontal and vertical ideological constraints: according percentage of seats in the communal executive and LR scale section (only communities between 2'000 and 10'000 inhabitants)

Percent seats in the communal executive	Multiple Corresp. Analysis: explained inertias			Multivariate Regression: corrected R-square			N: left / right
	Total sample	left scale section	right scale section	Total sample	left scale section	right scale section	
0%	0.563	0.453	0.330	0.75	0.58	0.29	77 / 51
1-15%	0.551	0.467	0.309	0.75	0.58	0.21	77 / 53
16-30%	0.525	0.496	0.261	0.72	0.71	0.15	115 / 117
31-50%	0.447	0.457	0.250	0.59	0.65	0.20	94 / 161
51%+	0.374	0.417	0.228	0.46	0.68	0.09	45 / 75

Note: * As parties are more likely to have a smaller power share in larger communities (because more local parties are competing), it is necessary to control population size in order to eliminate potentially confounding effects.

Table 11: Changes in horizontal and vertical ideological constraints in the left and right section of the LR scale: comparing waves 1989 and 2002 (total sample)

Political Issues:	MCA factor scores						Correlation with LR scale value			
	left scale section		right scale section		left scale section		right scale section		right scale section	
	1989	2002	1989	2002	1989	2002	1989	2002	1989	2002
Promoting Switzerland as a financial center(inv)	0.534	0.567	0.191	0.149	0.61	0.65	0.23	0.17		
Empowerment of workers/employees	0.468	0.469	0.383	0.307	0.52	0.50	0.23	0.23		
Reducing the communal tax load (inv)	0.280	0.453	0.042	0.151	0.36	0.51	0.15	0.22		
Expanding communal budget for social welfare	0.489	0.643	0.519	0.570	0.46	0.59	0.25	0.34		
Expanding communal budget for cultural matters	0.337	0.474	0.295	0.404	0.35	0.47	0.13	0.24		
Less governmental reglementation (inv)	0.416	0.500	0.249	0.188	0.45	0.57	0.13	0.13		
More ecolog. restrictions on communal projects	0.173	0.327	0.149	0.234	0.22	0.36	0.16	0.22		
Nuclear energy should be abandoned	0.535	0.576	0.265	0.341	0.58	0.61	0.21	0.20		
More efforts for achieving gender equality	0.148	0.216	0.146	0.130	0.23	0.29	0.18	0.15		
Better care for asylum seekers in community	0.505	0.661	0.377	0.494	0.47	0.61	0.22	0.27		
Eigenvalues	3.89	40.89	20.62	20.97						
Explained inertias	0.389	0.489	0.262	0.297						
Corrected R-square (linear multivariate regression)					0.550	0.620	0.172	0.171		
(N =)	1'177	1'131	1'326	1'283	1'177	1'131	1'326	1'283		

Table 12: Changes in horizontal and vertical ideological constraints in the left and right section of the LR scale, according to size of community: comparing waves 1989 and 2002

Community size	Multiple Corresp. Analysis: explained inertias				Multivariate Regression: corrected R-square			
	left-center scale section		center-right scale section		left-center scale section		center-right scale section	
	1989	2002	1989	2002	1989	2002	1989	2002
-2'000 inhabitants	0.332	0.420	0.246	0.273	0.45	0.53	0.06	0.11
2'001–10'000 inh.	0.392	0.505	0.276	0.288	0.57	0.66	0.23	0.17
10'001+ inh.	0.409	0.530	0.299	0.394	0.55	0.63	0.27	0.32

Power Position of the Party Within the Community

In well established democracies like Switzerland, cynical sayings like “Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely” (Baron Acton 1887) may only have limited relevance, but they may not be completely mistaken. As in all political systems, parties that without any share in political power have least difficulty in maintaining “ideological purity”, because they are not involved in “compromising” decisions and because their responsibility extends just to their members and voter clienteles, not to the community as a whole. By contrast, parties reigning with absolute majority tend to shift ideological points of views into the background, because they have to adapt to all sorts of pragmatic considerations (e. g. caused by financial scarcities or organizational deficits) and because they are obliged to focus on the general welfare of the whole population (hypothesis 7).

Therefore, we expect a negative correlation between a party’s share of formal power (operationalized by the percentage of seats it holds in the communal executive board) and its degree of ideologization.⁴

As seen in Table 10, hypothesis 7 is borne out very strongly in the total sample, but much less in the subsamples representing the left and the right section of the scale. Evidently, the total sample effect is mainly caused by the regularity that powerless parties are more likely to be leftist parties – which maintain higher degrees of ideology irrespective of any other conditions. Among rightist parties however, the expected trend seems to hold: sections have lowest levels of horizontal clustering and vertical couplings

⁴ In order to eliminate concomitant size effects (due to the larger number of minority parties in larger municipalities), only communities between 2'000 and 10'000 inhabitants are included.

when they control over 50% (equal to the absolute majority) of the executive seats.

Recent and Current Changes in Ideologization

Given that opinions on ten (out of 15) issues have been measured in both waves of the Swiss party surveys, changes in the degree and kind of party ideology occurring in the period 1989–2002 can be assessed at least in the realm of “stable” issues that have been salient at both points of time.

As seen from Table 11, horizontal as well as vertical ideological structuring has significantly increased on the left side of the spectrum, while on the right scale section; changes are weak in the case of MCA factor clusterings and completely inexistent in the covariations between issue positions and LR placements.

Most interestingly, leftism has become more and more defined in terms of “materialist” aspects (especially related to governmental tax and budget policy), while the relevance of “postmaterialist” issues (like nuclear or gender policy) has not much shifted. This trend contradicts evidently any “New Politics” conceptions which predict that leftism has been increasingly redefined in terms of postsocialist dimensions like “ecologism”, “social liberalism” and the like. A conspicuous exception is the classical socialist item of “worker empowerment” that has lost ground – maybe because traditional working class structures have eroded.

Table 12 shows that the rise in leftist ideology has taken place in communities of all size categories, while on the right side, increases in ideologization have only occurred in urban settings. In addition, the impression is corroborated that changes since the late 80ies have mainly resulted in increasing the tightness of clusterings among issue opinions, while vertical couplings to the left-right dimension have been less affected. Thus, hypothesis 8 is only partially confirmed.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to explore the strength and causal determinants of ideological thinking within political parties. By focusing on local party sections, we address a hitherto much neglected intermediate layer of the political system: located between the total voting population (or party members) on the one hand and the “real” political elites on the other.

Given the highly pluralized party systems in Switzerland (generated by a decentralized Federalism as well as by proportional election laws); it is not to be expected that this country is a forerunner in the emergence of de-ideologized “catch-all parties” (Kirchheimer 1965). However, the results presented above show shockingly high trends of ideologization at least on the left-center section of the spectrum, especially in the vertical dimension. Thus, more than 64 percent of the variance in LR-scale placements between 1 and 6 can be explained with 15 issue predictors. By contrast, rightist ideologies are much less articulated, as the explanatory power of these same predictors (for scale values spreading between 5 and 10) doesn’t surpass 18%. Urbanization stands out as a major causal factor: on both sides of the spectrum, as ideological constraints are significantly higher in larger than in smaller communities. However, this seems to be largely due to the fact that more “political” interpretations of communal issues prevails in urban communities – so that size effects are dramatically reduced when the “degree of politicization” is controlled.

City size is also a potent *intervening* variable. Thus, only in rather small communities, it is found that ideologization correlates positively with the educational level and the modern occupational background of party members and with the number of other local parties with which they have to compete. Evidently, the politicization effects going along with larger community size are sufficient causes of ideologization: overriding many other effects that are visible when such impacts are very weak. While ideological thinking is boosted by politicization, it is paradoxically attenuated by high degrees of political power. Thus, it is lowest in the case of parties that enjoy an absolute majority in the municipal executive board.

There is strong evidence that ideological constraints in party policy have increased since the late eighties of the last century in communities of all size.

The historian Michael Hunt (1990) defines ideology as “an interrelated set of convictions or assumptions that reduces . . . complexities . . . to easily comprehensible terms and suggests appropriate ways of dealing with (them)”. As these needs for reducing complexities are certainly persisting – and most likely to increase in these times of multiplying issues and turbulent political processes – ideologies are likely to survive even when there is no basis for consistent ordering or deductive subsumption. Especially on the left side of the spectrum, we see not only the persistence, but even the ongoing tightening of “heteromorphic” ideologies encompassing a multitude of issue stances not intrinsically related to each other. In contrast to

classical socialism or liberalism, many items seem to be chosen on an ad hoc basis, and they may easily be eliminated and substituted as a consequence of changing political fads and fashions.

The focus on “complexity reduction” helps also to cast doubt on all assertions that ideological thinking is a correlate of higher political knowledge and sophistication. To the contrary: it indicates

- a deplorable lack of pragmatism as it is often cultivated in cohesive sect-like groupings that have no access to political decisions;
- a deficit of autonomous thinking that may be associated with weak personality systems as well as with social conformity pressures (e.g. “group think” tendencies as they often exist within tightly integrated elites).

In contradiction to most conventional wisdom, we may tentatively conclude that political thinking may be more “rational” at the peripheries than in the more central spheres of modern societies. It is in the smaller communities and among party members with traditional occupational backgrounds where there is most readiness to evaluate every issue on its own merits and to adapt opinions pragmatically to specific circumstances: irrespective of wider social pressures and ideological constraints.

The more we move from the countryside to the larger cities and from farmers and the petty bourgeoisie to modern professionals and employees, the higher is the disposition to simplify such evaluation processes by assimilating whole bundles of opinions: like choosing among a very small number of prefabricated fashionable costumes. Thus, when an urban party section declares that it is against the promotion of Switzerland as a worldwide center of finance, we can predict with high certainty that it is also fighting against nuclear power plants and sharper laws against immigration and supporting new daycare facilities for kids as well as the entry of Switzerland to the EU – despite the fact that these issues are not intrinsically connected and not implicated by common encompassing principles, value or norms.

We may speculate about the many dysfunctional consequences resulting from this “pathology”: such as

- trends toward free-wheeling overpolarized ideological discussions that may contribute much more to public media entertainment than to the solution of current political problems;

- an hesitance of urban and supralocal parties to cooperate among each other and enter into coalitions (Holler 1981), and to adapt their policies pragmatically to changing circumstances, instead of clinging rigidly to preformulated positions.

Of course, it seems unrealistic to transfer this “local pragmatism” to the urban sphere and the national level, because too many cumbersome processes of reflection, discussion, communication and negotiation would be needed when a wide range of issues and many political actors are involved. Wherever “real politics” is at stake, the demand for ideological simplification will certainly remain high – and is likely to increase further in the future, because the rising number and volatility of political issues collides ever more sharply with the invariantly low individual and collective capacities to process information and generate consensual judgments. Increasing these capacities (e. g. by ingenious applications of digital communication technologies) may be a key for improving the rationality of political processes at the levels where politics really takes place.

Overall, the findings lend very little support for all party development models that predict a decreasing salience of programs and ideology in favor of “pragmatic” adaptation to broader electoral strata and mediatised “personality marketing.” To the contrary, they suggest that parties are again sharpening their ideological profiles – at least in the Swiss environment of proportional voting where even minority parties are able to gain significant shares of formal political power. As such trends appear so strongly on the local level (where usually quite pragmatic notions of politics prevail), they are likely to be even more pronounced on supralocal levels that are known to be more prone to ideological polarization.

Given the limited space of a scientific paper, many additional hypotheses related to the determinants of ideologization trends have not been explored. In the future, we will rely on the same data set for clarifying the impact of various forms of political-administrative organization (e. g. direct vs. representative democracy) and the divergences of different cultural regions.

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**Ideologische Schematisierungen im Aufwind?
Eine vergleichende und diachronische Analyse lokaler Parteien**

Im Zentrum dieser empirischen Arbeit steht die Frage nach dem Ausmass und den kausalen Faktoren der Ideologisierung in Schweizer Lokalparteien. Das Konzept der "Ideologisierung" bezieht sich einerseits auf den Grad "horizontaler Koppelung" zwischen verschiedenen sachpolitischen Einstellungen, und andererseits auf den Grad "verti-

kaler Koppelung” zwischen spezifischen Sachpositionen und den abstrakteren Kategorien “links” und “rechts”. Die Ergebnisse zeigen sehr hohe Werte der Ideologisierung in der linken Hälfte des Links-Rechts-Spektrums, vor allem in der vertikalen Dimension und in grösseren Gemeinden. Nur in kleineren Gemeinden korreliert der Ideologisierungsgrad positiv mit dem Bildungsgrad und dem modernen Berufshintergrund der Mitglieder, sowie mit der Zahl konkurrierender Parteien. Geringste Ideologisierung besteht erwartungsgemäss in Parteien, die in der Exekutive über einen sehr grossen Sitzanteil verfügen. Longitudinale Vergleichsergebnisse deuten darauf hin, dass sich im Zeitraum 1989–2002 eine Zunahme an Ideologisierung stattgefunden hat.

Tendances croissantes vers la simplification idéologique ?

Une analyse comparative et diachronique des partis politiques locaux en Suisse

Cet article analyse les facteurs qui influencent l’emprise des idéologies au niveau des partis politiques locaux en Suisse. Le concept de “degré d’idéologisation” se rapporte (1) aux interrelations “horizontales” qui existent entre les opinions spécifiques (concernant 15 questions politiques diverses), et (2) aux interrelations “verticales” entre chaque opinion spécifique et le placement sur le spectre “gauche-droite”. Les résultats confirment l’hypothèse selon laquelle le degré d’idéologisation est plus élevé au centre-gauche du spectre politique, notamment concernant la dimension verticale. En outre, il est possible de démontrer que l’idéologie joue un rôle plus prononcé dans les grandes municipalités urbanisées. Dans les petites communes, l’étude menée met en lumière une corrélation positive entre le degré d’idéologisation et, d’une part, le niveau d’éducation et le domaine d’activité professionnelle des membres des partis et, d’autre part, le nombre de partis locaux engagés dans la compétition électorale. Lorsque l’on contrôle la taille de la population, il apparaît que les partis qui disposent d’une majorité absolue sont moins idéologisés que les groupes qui ne détiennent que peu de mandats (ou aucun siège) dans l’exécutif local. Finalement, l’étude montre que les tendances à l’idéologisation se sont accentuées au cours de la période 1989–2002.

Hans Geser ist Professor für Soziologie an der Universität Zürich. Seine Forschungsgebiete sind: Allgemeine Theorie, Organisations-, Parteien und Gemeindeforschung, Berufssoziologie, Kleinstaatsoziologie, Soziologie des Internet und anderes.

Address for correspondence: Institute of Sociology, University of Zurich, Andreasstrasse 15, CH-8050 Zurich, Switzerland. Phone: +41 (0)44 635 23 10; Email: hg@socio.ch.