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# Political professionalization and transformations of political career patterns in multi-level states: The case of Switzerland

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## ABSTRACT



This article aims to question how the process of political professionalization in multi-level states could change political careers patterns. We show that the changing opportunity structure produced by the growing political professionalization, the revalorization of executive cantonal and urban positions and the formal and/or de facto interdiction of multiple office holdings profoundly affect political career patterns. Our analysis is based on the Swiss case and calls into question the unidirectional pattern traditionally attributed to Switzerland. At a more general and theoretical level, our contribution also shows how the growing professionalization of political mandates affects political career patterns in federal states as in unitary states with decentralized political institutions. Our analysis is based on two comprehensive and original dataset on political careers of Federal MPs, and on members of the executive offices for the 26 cantons and the four largest cities from four benchmark dates (1957, 1980, 2000, and 2015).

**KEYWORDS** Political professionalization; political careers; political elites; federalism; Swiss politics

## Introduction

Recent studies have shown important transformations in the career patterns of political elites within multi-level political systems with the emergence of new patterns (Borchert and Stolz 2011a). Three main processes of institutional change have affected the career patterns of political elites: the professionalization of the state level in federal systems (especially for the legislative positions), the regionalization of formally unitary states, and the development of supranational institutions, such as the European Parliament.

None of these recent institutional changes has really taken place in Switzerland, which is still not a member of the European Union, did not undergo a regionalization process, and where cantonal parliaments remains ‘militia institutions’ – that is, non-professional. However, other recent changes affecting the opportunity structures of political careers might have impacted the

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career patterns of Swiss political elites. Among these, three are worth mentioning: 1) the growing professionalization of the Swiss 'militia' parliament, which has undergone some important changes since the 1990s; 2) the revalorization and professionalization of executive mandates at the cantonal level and in the large cities; and 3) the formal and/or de facto interdiction of some multiple office holdings, which were very common in Switzerland.

In the literature, Switzerland has traditionally been classified as having 'unidirectional model' career patterns, according to which politicians climb the ladder of politics step by step, from the local to the national level: 'Switzerland conforms to the stepping stone hypothesis of nationally integrated career paths directed towards the centre, ...' (Stolz 2003, 227). Yet, this classification is questionable and needs to be qualified. The weak professionalization of the Swiss Parliament and the cantonal parliaments as well as the widespread practice of national MPs holding multiple offices creates the necessity to more precisely discuss the unidirectional pattern of political careers in Switzerland by focusing the analysis on professional political mandates.

This article thus pursues two heuristic objectives: first, we carry out a reclassification of the Swiss case; second, we provide a general theoretical contribution on multilevel political careers by showing how the general trend of political professionalization and other related, but up to now, neglected changes, such as the interdiction of multiple office holdings and the revalorization of executive regional and urban positions, have affected political career patterns in western democracies. Based on the case of Switzerland, we point out new political career trajectories resulting from these less visible changes of opportunity structure especially in contexts where the professionalization of political mandates is still under way.

The paper is structured as follows. We first present our analytical framework and the recent changes of the opportunity structure in Switzerland. We then present our data, stemming from a unique database documenting political careers of Swiss political elites from the mid-twentieth century until today, and how we have proceeded. In the results section, we first question the relevance of the 'unidirectional model' for Swiss political careers and, second, highlight the transformations of political careers in reaction to the changes in the opportunity structure. Finally, we discuss how these results represent a more general theoretical contribution on the impact of growing political professionalization on multilevel careers.

## **Changing opportunity structures and political career patterns in Switzerland**

The literature on political careers identified two types of factors affecting career patterns (Vercesi 2018): at an individual level politician's ambition and strategic choices affect their career pathways (Nicholls 1991; Sieberer

and Müller 2017); at a contextual level, individual choices are shaped by opportunity structures (Stolz 2003; Borchert 2011; Borchert and Stolz 2011a).

Using a context-oriented approach, we assume that political careers are shaped by the interplay between the ambitions of individual politicians and the opportunity structure of a given political system. Thus, the conditions for increased political professionalism in Switzerland have modified this structure and made it necessary to reassess political careers by taking into account the changes in the availability, accessibility, and attractiveness of political offices, which represent the main explanatory factors of career patterns in which politicians pursue incomes, career advancement and career maintenance (Borchert 2011).

Borchert (2011, 131) distinguished three patterns illustrating the hierarchy/prestige of political offices and the direction of career paths. First, the 'unidirectional model' refers to a political system in which a clear hierarchy of political offices exists, and where all politicians want to 'move up'. Second, in the 'alternative model', there is no clear hierarchy of offices with a high degree of autonomy between the levels of government and few 'multi-level hopping' in the career of politicians. Finally, in the third 'integrated model', there is '[no-]clear-cut hierarchy as in the unidirectional model. Political offices constitute opportunities among which actors choose according to the situational costs and benefits they perceive as being attached to them' (Borchert 2011, 131).

In order to concretely operationalize this analytical framework and document the dominant career patterns among politicians in a country, Stolz (2003, 226) elaborated different ratios (the centripetal ratio, indicating a movement to the centre, and the centrifugal ratio, showing movement towards the region, away from the centre) measuring the direction and intensity of political careers. Even though these ratios were elaborated by Stolz in context of regionalization or political devolution (not relevant for the Swiss case) in order to analyse center-periphery relations, these ratios provide useful indicators to document the direction of political careers (see below Data and methods section for more details and discussion on these ratios).

According to various recent studies (Edinger and Jahr 2015; Dodeigne 2018; Grimaldi and Vercesi 2018), the regionalization of unitary states, the growing role of the European parliament and the revalorization or direct election of local/regional governmental positions have led to a diversification of political careers patterns. Contrary to other European countries, Switzerland did not undergo similar important institutional reforms and has remained very stable. However, other less visible and profound changes have also affected the opportunity structure of political careers since the 1990s. We can identify three partially interrelated changes: 1) growing professionalization of the Swiss 'militia parliament' since the 1990s; 2) the partial revalorization and professionalization of cantonal/urban executives; 3) the formal or de facto interdiction of some multiple office holdings.

First, the Swiss parliament stands out internationally by its weak professionalization. The ‘militia tradition’, meaning that political offices were only weakly remunerated and exercised alongside a main profession, remained very strong nationally.<sup>1</sup> Until the beginning of the 1990s, the Swiss Parliament could not be considered professionalized in terms of remuneration, since one could not earn a living from this political mandate (Wiesli 2003; Z’graggen 2009; Pilotti 2017). It was only during the 1990s, with the parliament’s increasing workload, that some reforms were adopted in terms of remuneration of national MPs and the introduction of permanent, specialized parliamentary committees (for more details, see Pilotti 2017, 156ff.; Lüthi 1997; Jegher 1999). An indicator of the parliament’s increasing workload is the growing proportion of Swiss MPs who define themselves as professional MP (those who claim to devote at least two-thirds of their working time to their mandate): their rate has risen from 35% in the late 1980s to 61% in 2016 (Pilotti et al. 2019, 83). During the 1990s, MPs’ remunerations have significantly increased (Pilotti 2017, 157ff.).<sup>2</sup> Nowadays, a national MP receives an annual allowance of 26,000 francs for the preparation of parliamentary activities and an annual contribution for staff and material expenses of 33,000 francs. In addition to this basic annual salary of 59,000 francs, there are various other allowances (attendance, overnight stay, meals, travel, etc.). In general, each MP receives at least 115–120,000 gross francs. The amount can even increase up to 175,000 francs, especially for some members of the Upper House sitting in several specialized parliamentary committees (Pilotti et al. 2019, 65ff.). This growing professionalization and better remuneration should have increased the attractiveness of the Swiss Parliament.

Second, the partial revalorization and professionalization of cantonal and urban executives has also contributed to modify the opportunity structure of political offices in Switzerland. While such executive positions had already been professionalized very early on during the twentieth century in terms of remuneration and in terms of full-time activities (Lasseb and Pilotti 2019a), some important recent changes have taken place, with the increasing professionalization among cantonal executives of the smallest cantons (Uri, Obwald, Nidwald, Glaris, and Appenzell Ausserrhoden). The members of these cantonal governments have been fulfilling their mandate on a full-time basis since recently (Vatter 2018a, 226). Members of urban executives have also gained in political importance and legitimacy since the 1980s (see Geser et al. 2012: chapter 4 and 5). In comparison to national MPs, cantonal executive members, as well as executive members in large cities, are better remunerated. In addition, they also have more power to implement regional public policies, with numerous civil servants under their direction. Concerning the general evolution of Swiss federalism, even if recent studies underline the progressive legislative centralization, they also point out a fiscal and administrative decentralization of Swiss federalism (for an overview, see Vatter

2018b). Even though we cannot rely on quantitative indicators, cantonal and urban executive positions have become much more demanding than in the past because of increasing legislative complexity, the growing size of their public administration and growing media pressure on professional politicians. This revalorization of cantonal and urban executive positions has certainly made executive positions in cantons or large cities more attractive.

Finally, following the growing workload and political professionalization of political mandates, multiple office holdings<sup>3</sup> have been formally forbidden in some cantons and in the statutes of some political parties. Ticino (in 1963), Graubünden (in 1979) and Schaffhausen (in 1983) were the first cantons to prohibit the accumulation of mandates of national MP and member of the cantonal government. Other cantons introduced the same interdiction, but much later since the 1990s (Jura, Bern, Glarus, Fribourg, Vaud, Geneva, Zug, Basel Land). This interdiction was also introduced by some cantonal sections of the Social-Democratic Party (Basel-Stadt, Geneva, Neuchâtel and Vaud), the Green Party of the canton of Geneva, the Christian-Democratic Party in Fribourg and Ticino, and the Liberal Party in the canton of Ticino (Pilotti 2017, 239). In addition to formal interdictions, the strong increase in the workload of the national parliament and of the executive positions in the cantons and the large cities has made the combination of some political mandates clearly incompatible, even if it is not formally forbidden. Such formal changes or growing incompatibility in terms of workload have considerably reduced the possibility of accumulating political mandates at different levels and might have an important impact on politicians' career paths.

These three interrelated changes have impacted the opportunity structure of political careers in Switzerland. In terms of 'availability', the Swiss federal system offers a great number of political mandates (for a general overview of the political mandates available in Switzerland and their remuneration, see Lasseb and Pilotti 2019b). However, many of them are clear 'amateur' or 'militia' positions, exercised alongside a main profession. For example, cantonal, as urban, parliaments are not professionalized: the maximum workload is about 35–40% in Zurich and Geneva (Bundi, Eberli, and Bütikofer 2017). Since the beginning of the 1990s, the main professionalized political mandates have been as follows. At the federal level, these include the members of the federal council (government) and the bicameral parliament (200 members of the National Council and 46 members of the Council of States, two per canton). At the cantonal and communal levels, the executive positions in the cantons (except the small canton of Appenzell Innerrhoden, with 50% working time) and in the large cities clearly have been professionalized for a long time in terms of remuneration and workload.

Concerning the attractiveness of political mandates, being a member of the Swiss Parliament has become more attractive in terms of remuneration since the beginning of the 1990s, but also in terms of prestige and power

because of the parliament's revalorization in the Swiss decision-making processes (Pilotti 2017; Sciarini 2014; Sciarini, Fischer, and Traber 2015). Cantonal and urban executives have also become more interesting, in financial terms and in scope of action.

Concerning their 'accessibility', some changes have also impacted the major professionalized political mandates. With the formal or de facto interdiction of holding some combination of multiple offices, the simultaneous accessibility of some political mandates has clearly declined (see Pilotti 2017). In addition, the electoral competition has clearly increased for the Swiss Parliament since the 1990s, with the growing electoral success of the Swiss People's Party (Bochsler and Bousbah 2015).

These changes lead us to formulate three general expectations about the changing career patterns of Swiss politicians. First, in order to nuance and qualify more precisely if and to what extent the 'unidirectional model' applies to Switzerland, as underlined by Stolz (2003) and Borchert (2011, 132), we more explicitly take into account the difference between professional and non-professional mandates as well as the accumulation of political mandates, two points that remained neglected in these studies. We thus expect that Swiss political careers should be classified in the 'integrated model' instead of the 'unidirectional model'.

Second, because of the growing political professionalization and the interdiction of some multiple office holding, we expect that political careers now follow a more 'successive' pattern, instead of individuals accumulating multiple offices at the same time.

Third, the general trend of growing professionalization in Swiss politics has impacted the three levels of the state (especially the national parliament but also the executive positions in the cantons and major cities). Because of the new attractiveness of cantonal and urban executive positions, we expect a growing number of national MPs to pursue political careers in executive positions at the cantonal level or in large cities and to abandon their national mandates.

## Data and methods

In order to provide a general overview of how the career patterns have evolved during the last 70 years and to test our general expectations, we rely on two distinct data samples. The first sample (*federal dataset*) includes all federal MPs (National Council and Council of States) from four benchmark dates (1957, 1980, 2000, and 2015) – around 246 individuals per year. The second sample (*regional dataset*) includes all members of the executive offices in the 26 cantons and the four largest cities (Zurich, Geneva, Lausanne, and Berne) for the same benchmark years. This represents between five and nine members for each executive authority in the cantons or the large cities,

totalling around 200 individuals per year. The size of the executive composition has slightly decreased in some cantons, which explains the sample's diminution (see Table 1 below). By using these two datasets, we are able to take into account almost all of today's professional elected mandates in Switzerland, in terms of remuneration. Some individuals are in both samples because they held multiple offices, especially for the years 1957 and 1980.

For both samples, we documented the political career of each individual by registering all political mandates they had occupied before, during or after their federal or regional mandate.<sup>4</sup> This is a significant advantage over other publications in the field which consider generally only prior office experience. Both samples should highlight the same trends in the careers of Swiss politicians, although they are based on different political professionalized positions. Moreover, these double datasets should reinforce the reliability and validity of our results.<sup>5</sup>

In order to document the transformations in career patterns among Swiss political elites over the past 70 years, different analyses were performed on these two samples, mostly using the measure of *multilevelness* proposed by Stolz (2003). The measure uses two indicators to characterize the direction of career movements and to reflect the intensity of the movements: the *centripetal ratio* measures the *movement from the region towards the centre*, while the *centrifugal ratio* measures the *movement from the centre towards the region*. Both indicators can be applied to the two samples. These two indicators are used to identify different career paths. A *unidirectional* career path should be characterized by a high centripetal ratio and a low centrifugal ratio; an *alternative* path should be characterized by a low centripetal ratio and low centrifugal ratio; and finally an *integrated* path should be characterized by a high centripetal ratio and high centrifugal ratio (Tronconi 2018, 616–617) Table 2.

However, the historically unprofessionalized nature of Swiss political functions led us to refine the *multilevelness* ratios developed by Stolz (2003). For this purpose, we considered two essential factors affecting these ratios: the *accumulation of offices* and the variable *professionalization* of offices. In calculating ratios, we have therefore been careful to propose a detailed composition of them considering proportions of politicians carrying out these paths through professional or non-professional offices and also considering

**Table 1.** Datasets on Swiss national and regional political elites.

Dataset	1957	1980	2000	2015
Federal	243	248	249	246
Regional	199	204	199	180
Cantonal executives	171	176	171	154
Urban executives	28	28	28	26



**Table 2.** Definition of centripetal and centrifugal ratios for the two dataset.

Dataset	Tested ratios	How the ratio is measured
Federal	<i>Centripetal ratio</i>	% of MPs with <i>previous</i> cantonal/communal experience (legislative and executive offices)
	<i>Centrifugal ratio</i>	% of MPs <i>moving</i> from the national parliament to professionalized regional offices
Regional	<i>Centripetal ratio</i>	% of regional professional politicians (cantonal and urban executives) <i>continuing</i> their careers at the federal level
	<i>Centrifugal ratio</i>	% of regional professional politicians (cantonal and urban executives) with a <i>previous</i> federal experience

those pursuing these paths by accumulating several mandates at the same time<sup>6</sup> or by being elected successively in each of them.

## Reconsidering the unidirectional model in Switzerland

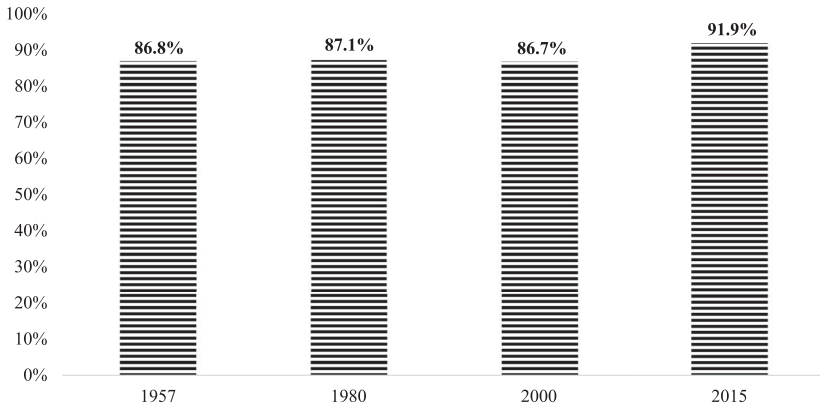
The prerequisite to be considered a country with a unidirectional pattern is to have a *high centripetal ratio but a low centrifugal ratio*. In other words, a unidirectional career pattern is characterized by a high proportion of MPs going from the regional level (communal or cantonal offices) towards the national level (national parliament) and by a low proportion of national MPs moving to sub-levels. Our data allow us to provide a general picture of how political career patterns have evolved, and to determine whether Switzerland can be considered to have a predominantly unidirectional model, as underlined in the literature.

As already identified by Gruner (1970 and Pilotti 2017 for the more recent period), a high degree of stability exists in the number of MPs who held elected office at a local or cantonal level before running for a seat in the Federal Assembly. In fact, the *centripetal ratio* has always been over 85% over the past 70 years and even rose to 91.9% in 2015 (see Figure 1 below). Therefore, having cantonal and communal political experience remains very important before accessing the national parliament. Then the first prerequisite for a prevailing unidirectional career pattern in Switzerland – a high centripetal ratio – is clearly present.

The second necessary prerequisite for a unidirectional model is a low centrifugal ratio. This prerequisite is also present: the proportion of elected members of professional offices at regional and urban level who have had previous national experience is low (see Figure 2).

The centrifugal ratio, is quite low and slightly increasing (from 4.5% in 1957–8.0% in 2010 for the federal dataset and remaining around 10% from 1957 to 2015 for the regional dataset). That would be the second necessary criterion to have a prevailing unidirectional pattern in Switzerland.

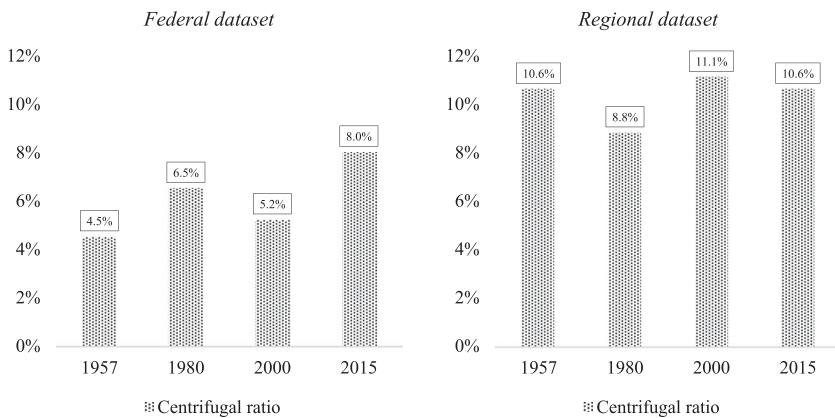
However, we must take into account that the centripetal (Figure 1) ratio was calculated using a broad conception of a political career (as usually



**Figure 1.** Centripetal ratio for federal dataset. N: 1957 = 211; 1980 = 216; 2000 = 216; 2015 = 226.

done so far in the literature), including all political offices (professional and non-professional) and accepting the possibility of holding multiple offices. Hence, as explained above, we should pay attention to two typical Swiss features that could have artificially increased the centripetal ratio: (1) the professional or non-professional nature of local and regional offices and (2) multiple office holding among politicians.

The first feature relates to the professional or unprofessional nature of the local and regional political offices occupied by MPs before accessing the national parliament. Indeed, if MPs occupied their previous mandates in non-professional arenas, we could not consider it as a real 'career', in



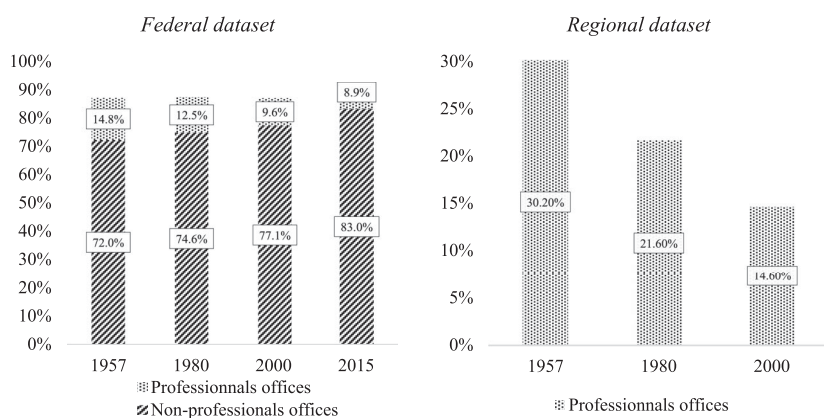
**Figure 2.** Centrifugal ratio for federal and regional datasets. N for Federal dataset: 1957 = 11; 1980 = 16; 2000 = 13; 2015 = 20. N for Regional dataset: 1957 = 21; 1980 = 18; 2000 = 22; 2015 = 19.

professional terms. Therefore, we should take into account that the low political professionalization of regional and local political offices in Switzerland makes it difficult to consider career decisions as a single issue of costs and benefits in purely professional terms.

As shown by Pilotti (2017, 362, table A28), the type of elected offices held by MPs before their election to the Federal Assembly has remained extremely stable over time, and most of them are non-professional offices in cantonal or communal legislative instances. In order to consider a 'career' in professional terms, it is necessary to refine the centripetal ratio by distinguishing professional and non-professional subnational mandates (Figure 3, see Federal dataset). If we look only at executive bodies in cantons and large cities, the centripetal career movement becomes much lower: only 14.8% of the MPs in 1957 had previous *professional* political experience, which decreased to 8.9% in 2015.

We can also observe a weak and declining centripetal movement for the regional dataset (Figure 3, see Regional dataset), meaning that 30.2% of regional executive members in 1957 accessed the federal Parliament in their career.

Following a strictly professional definition of political mandates nuances much of the unidirectional career pattern. Moreover, we also need to pay attention to another aspect that could alter the centripetal movement from local to national: the cumulative character of these professional political mandates. Did MPs really use local and regional mandates as 'springboard legislatures' – in other words, as stepping stones to access other mandates (Squire



**Figure 3** Centripetal ratios with and without professional political mandates (both datasets). N for Federal dataset: 1957 = 211; 1980 = 216; 2000 = 216; 2015 = 226. N for Regional dataset: 1957 = 60; 1980 = 44; 2000 = 29.

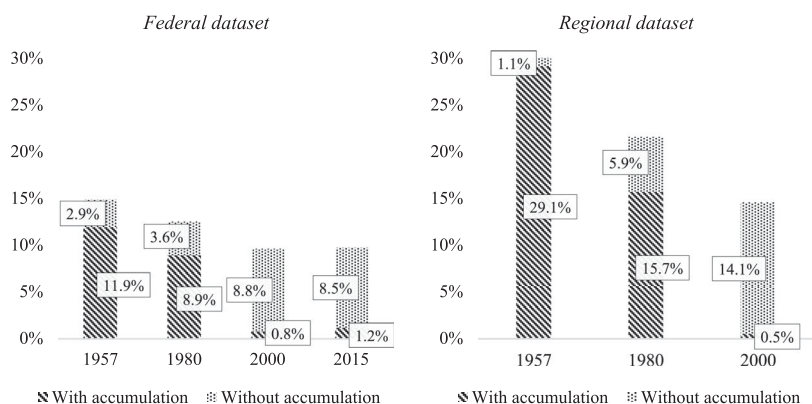
Note: For the regional dataset, we did not have information on the non-professional mandates held by the regional representatives. For this reason, the y axis does not have the same scale.

1988) – or did they accumulate political mandates, such as to balance out the low professionalization of Swiss politics? As explained by Borchert (2011, 133), ‘accumulation of offices is a more defensive strategy geared at least as much towards career maintenance as to career advancement. One person may hold several offices concurrently in order to combine several incomes, to increase his or her job safety by pre-empting potential competitors, or to create options for further career moves’. That is, accumulation can make the unidirectional path somehow ‘impure’ and obscure the direction of political career, in the sense that political positions would be less organized as a clear hierarchy, not using them as a springboard but more as strategic cumulative positions that politicians want to personally preserve in a multilevel system.

Indeed, Swiss federalism gives considerable importance to the subnational (communal and cantonal) levels. During most of the twentieth century, it was common for national MPs to continue to exercise, in parallel with their federal mandate, other political responsibilities at the local or regional level, enabling them to maintain direct relations with their local or regional community or offering a professional income by combining several semi-professional offices. Such accumulation was particularly strong because the cantonal constituencies are the same for cantonal and federal elections. As explained by Borchert (2011, 133): ‘In that case, representing both will not cost much extra effort, but keep possible challengers at bay. Also, offices may be accumulated in order to keep control of the selectorate in charge of renomination’.

As shown by Pilotti (2017), since the 1980s–1990s, the number of MPs holding simultaneously elected office at various levels has markedly declined.<sup>7</sup> This particularity of the Swiss political system and these recent trends led us to distinguish MPs who combined their regional mandate with their federal mandate from those who carried them out successively (see Figure 4).

As explained above, the centripetal career movement decreased considerably if we only take into account previous professional political experience. Furthermore, until the 2000s, most of these previous political experiences, in reality, did not end once one was elected to the federal parliament. In 1957, only 2.9% of the MPs (Figure 4 Federal dataset) used previous professional mandates as a real springboard with which to access the national parliament, whereas 11.9% of them were combining their previous professional mandates with the federal one. This tendency to combine mandates was upturned during the 1990s. In 2000, 8.8% of the MPs had a previous local or regional political professional position and ended their previous mandates once elected to the national parliament. Only three MPs were still combining their federal mandate with a previous regional mandate in 2015. We observe the same trend for the regional dataset (Figure 4 Regional dataset).



**Figure 4.** Centripetal ratios with and without accumulation (both datasets). N for Federal dataset: 1957 = 36; 1980 = 31; 2000 = 24; 2015 = 24. N for Regional dataset: 1957 = 60; 1980 = 44; 2000 = 29.

Note: We considered MPs who served more than 2 years at the same time in the federal parliament and in a regional professionalized executive office (cantonal or urban) as cumulative MPs.

The drastic decline can largely be explained by the formal prohibition in several cantons, as well as in the statutes of certain parties, from having both a cantonal mandate and a federal parliamentary mandate. In addition, the workloads of the cantonal executives and the federal parliament have both increased considerably, making it increasingly difficult to deal with holding multiple offices.

Again, these results nuance considerably the unidirectional pattern of political careers. If we focus only on the centripetal movement generated by professional career, until the 1990s, most of the previous professional mandates in reality were not ended once one was elected at the federal level. This means that, before the 1990s, subnational professional political positions were not really perceived as being along a clear hierarchy and successive positions from the local to the national level, in which the exclusive career goal was to move up. The main remuneration came from the cantonal or communal executive offices and not from the national parliament. Swiss politicians did not use the local and regional professionalized positions as real springboards with which to access the upper level but more as a way to compensate for the federal level's low professionalization, in terms of income.

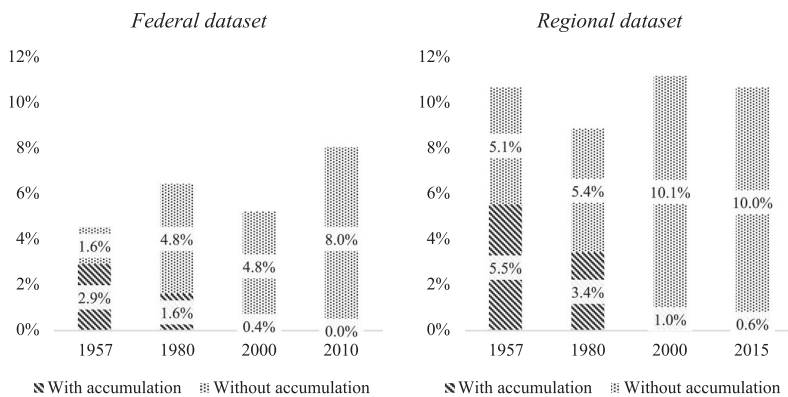
However, the decline of multiple office holding does not mean that the national and cantonal/urban levels had become increasingly disconnected in terms of political careers. Nowadays, political mandates at these levels are generally occupied *successively* and no longer simultaneously. Indeed, as shown in Figure 4 for both dataset, the proportion of professional politicians experiencing a centripetal career without accumulation (Figure 4, grey part of plots for both datasets) has clearly increased since the 1980s. This means that

MPs are increasingly using previous political professional experiences as real *springboards* to pursue their career at the federal level.

The low proportion of MPs pursuing a career professionally speaking (Figure 3) and the fact that until the 2000s most of these previous professional mandates were in fact cumulated with the federal one (Figure 4), are two important reasons that leads us to reconsider the existence of a unidirectional model in Switzerland. Instead of the latter, we think the 'integrated model' fits better with the Swiss case: until today, only few politicians have experienced a centripetal career which is professional, and the widespread practice to cumulate federal mandate with a regional mandate generates neither clear boundaries nor clear hierarchy between professional (or semi-professional) offices at the national and the regional levels.

### An integrated model with a changing pattern for moving down career

After having reconsidered the Swiss model as an integrated model, we now focus the analysis on the changing pattern of career. In the last decades, in parallel with a declining centripetal movement (as shown in Figure 4 above), a newly growing professionalized political path for moving down career is emerging. Indeed, if we pay attention to the proportion of professional politicians experiencing a centrifugal career (i.e. moving down career) with or without accumulation (Figure 5), we can observe a new trend that progressively emerged in the most recent period: the growing



**Figure 5.** Centrifugal ratios with and without accumulation (both datasets). N for Federal dataset: 1957 = 11; 1980 = 16; 2000 = 13; 2010 = 20. N for Regional dataset: 1957 = 21; 1980 = 18; 2000 = 22; 2015 = 19.

Note: for the federal dataset, we used the 2010 benchmark here to obtain deeper historical hindsight and include most of the centrifugal moves which took place in these last years within in the federal dataset. The number can still increase in the next few years.

number of national MPs who pursue their political career in cantonal or urban executive branches and abandoned their national mandate: from 1.6% in 1957–8.0% in 2010. We observe the same trend for the regional dataset: in 1957, 5.1% of the urban and cantonal executives had previous national experience in the federal parliament without combining their mandates (against 10.0% in 2015).

It should also be stressed that politicians following this career path were particularly prominent politicians. Among them, we can mention Pierre-Yves Maillard, former vice president of the Social Democratic Party (SP); Christophe Darbellay, former president of the Christian Democratic Party (CVP); Ruth Genner, former president of the Green Party; and Oskar Freysinger, former vice president of the Swiss People's Party (SVP).<sup>8</sup>

This new type of non-cumulative 'moving down' career choice can be explained by the partial revalorization and professionalization of cantonal/urban executive work. If the 'moving down' career choice was, before the 1980s, an option taken to compensate for the low professionalization of the Swiss Parliament in terms of income, nowadays, because of the quasi disappearance of cumulative mandates, this career movement can be considered a consequence of the new attractiveness of cantonal/urban executive mandates, which politicians consider today as an option to pursue and foster their career. Today, these regional and urban executive positions seem to be considered as career promotions after a federal mandate. There has always been in Switzerland a strong interest in executive functions. However, while in the past access to a cantonal executive depended primarily on a local and cantonal political career, nowadays the passage through the federal parliament has become a means to increase its legitimacy and visibility to run for a mandate in a cantonal or city executive position. Even if the centrifugal ratio is low (concerning around 10% of both datasets), this trend is clearly increasing if we exclude the cumulative option. Switzerland has a newly growing, professionalized political path towards cantonal and urban executive positions after an experience in the national parliament. Besides the formal and/or de facto interdiction of multiple office holdings, another explanation refers to the rejuvenation of national MPs, who are eager to pursue political careers after their national experience (see Di Capua, Pilotti, and Mach 2017). Moreover, by giving them greater visibility, the increased media coverage of national politics and the personalization of politics are two processes that may have, these last decades, increased the inclination and favoured the candidacy of national MPs to try to pursue their career in a professionalized regional position.

## General discussion and conclusions

When we look at the high centripetal movement without taking into account the professional or non-professional nature of the mandates and the

accumulation of mandates (Figure 1) and the low centrifugal movement toward cantons (Figure 2), Switzerland seems to clearly belong to the unidirectional model, exhibiting political careers that are hierarchically directed towards the centre.

However, if we use a stricter and finer definition of what is a centripetal or centrifugal career, by considering only professionalized mandates without the accumulation of political mandates, the results are very different (Figures 3–5). This stricter definition corresponds to a purer conception of professional political careers, i.e. moving up or down only through professional (remunerated) positions and using these positions as springboards, with the only aim being to open the doors to ‘upper’ positions (without the option to hold multiple offices). It also allows to obtain a clearer analysis of the direction of political career.

Refining like this the measure of multilevelness gives a completely different picture of political careers in Switzerland. In fact, the Swiss unidirectional model, as underlined by Stolz (2003), is mainly composed of non-professional career positions (communal and cantonal legislative arenas). This path was not following a *professional* career but a political one, as historically shaped by the so-called ‘militia system’ prevailing in Switzerland. As for the few professional politicians who followed a unidirectional career pattern (grabbing the few subnational professionalized political positions that were available), until the 1990s, they did not actually use the different levels as springboards with which to access the national level but mostly as a means of compensating for the federal level’s weak professionalization and thus accumulating several sources of political income.

These findings lead us to consider the prevalence of the ‘integrated model’ in Switzerland, in which many politicians broke the boundaries between the different levels (contrary to Germany, see Borchert and Stolz 2011b; Jahr 2015). In this model, no clear hierarchy of political mandates exists (as in the unidirectional model) between the national and the regional levels (highlighted by the close results for the professional centripetal and centrifugal ratios without accumulation), nor are there any clear legal or political boundaries, as in the alternative model.

But this integrated model has profoundly changed over time. While holding multiple offices was the dominant logic of integrating the multiple level of political career, (as well as occupying non-professional political mandates before accessing the Swiss parliament<sup>9</sup>) until the 1990s, during the recent period, the growing professionalization at all levels and the interdiction of holding multiple offices has led to political career patterns marked by the successive occupation of professional political mandates at different levels (see Figure 6 for an overview of both career patterns in an integrated model). Today, a growing number of national MPs and regional executive members pursue their political careers at another level after leaving their



political mandate, either in the federal Parliament for regional executive members or in regional executive positions for national MPs. Today, both options (legislative positions at the federal level and executive positions in cantons and large cities) clearly represent the most attractive political offices in Switzerland (after the federal government), not occupied simultaneously, but in a successive way. The ‘moving down’ trend of political careers observed is the result of both the general professionalization of political careers (with a growing proportion of national MPs aiming to pursue their political career in an executive position, after having abandoned the option of the federal government) and the new attractiveness of cantonal/urban executive positions.

How this research contributes theoretically to the general literature on multi-level political careers? First, this study highlights similar trends concerning the new attractiveness of regional and local executive positions also observed in other multi-level systems. For example, in Italy and Spain with the recent decentralization reforms in the 1990s, a significant proportion of regional chief executives have had political experience as members of the national parliament (Grimaldi and Vercesi 2018; Botella et al. 2010). In Germany too, as underlined by Borchert and Stolz (2011b: 217), professionally paid positions at the local level have become more attractive, with state legislators running for mayorship in cities. Switzerland as an old and stable federal system, but a latecomer in terms of political professionalization, and despite the absence of state decentralization, we observe similar ‘moving down’ movement toward executive positions in cantons or in the local government of major cities.

Second, our case-study shows that some less apparent opportunity structure modifications such as *the interdiction of multiple office holdings* (a process still under way in western democracies: see Pilet 2013 on Belgium; Abel and Navarro 2013 on France<sup>10</sup>) have a significant impact on career trajectories. However, the literature has until now to a certain extent neglected

	Opportunity structure		Attractiveness of professional positions	Perception of offices positions	Type of career encouraged
<i>Integrated model 1</i>	<b>Low professionalisation + no restrictions for cumulation</b>	<b>Multi-office holding possible</b>	<i>Accumulation of multiple partial salary</i>	<i>Weak hierarchy between positions and no clear boundaries</i>	<i>Simultaneity</i>
<i>Integrated model 2</i>	<b>High professionalisation + restrictions for cumulation</b>	<b>Multi-office holding impossible</b>	<i>Professional springboard or professional pinnacle</i>	<i>Clearer hierarchy between positions and clearer boundaries</i>	<i>In succession</i>

**Figure 6.** Changing opportunity structure and its impact on career paths.

these less apparent changes produced by the political professionalization and this can lead – as we have shown for the Swiss case – to prematurely classify a country in a given prevalent political career patterns. Moreover, these changes are ongoing processes and concern contemporary federal states as unitary states with decentralized political institutions. Thus, literature and research agendas on political careers should now focus further on these recent opportunity structure modifications.

Third, we reaffirm the important impact that political professionalization has on political careers. Political professionalization, combined with the formal or de facto interdiction of multiple offices holding, modifies profoundly individual career choices. On a methodological point of view, we pointed out that we cannot simply take the centripetal or centrifugal movement for granted but must measure these movements by distinguishing between professionalized and non-professionalized offices. Above all, we must consider the proportions of politicians who follow these career paths by cumulating offices, especially in contexts of weakly professionalized political life like in the Swiss case. Future research on political career should thus focus more on the impact of political professionalization and its relationship to restrictions of multiple office holding. The presence or absence of such restrictions affects both how multiple political mandates (horizontal or vertical ones; legislative or executive ones) will be strategically combined in a career – as a way of cumulating salaries to live from politics or as a simple stepping stone –, and if career will be achieved simultaneously in different offices or in succession from one political position to another.

## Notes

1. The Swiss Parliament includes many MPs who are full-time politicians as party secretaries, journalists or interest groups officials (business or farmer associations, trade unions, etc.). What is specific to Switzerland, however, is its low professionalization of the parliamentary mandate itself (see Wiesli 2003).
2. The first, very modest, annual salary for Swiss MPs was introduced only in 1968 (3,000 francs at the time). It was then increased several times: 15,000 francs in 1981, 30,000 francs in 1988 and 59,000 francs in 2012 (Pilotti 2017, 140ff.; see also pp. 335-337).
3. Multiple office holding was very common in Switzerland and often complemented one another in terms of remunerations (see Pilotti 2017 and Gruner 1970).
4. In the regional dataset, we do not have systematic data on their communal or cantonal political mandates. We only have systematic information concerning their national mandates.
5. These samples come from the Swiss Elites Database created by the Swiss Elite Observatory (University of Lausanne; see [www.unil.ch/obelis](http://www.unil.ch/obelis)). This database includes more than 30,000 entries about political, economic, administrative, and academic elites during the 20th and 21st century for seven reference years: 1910, 1937, 1957, 1980, 2000, 2010, and 2015 (for more details, see the

online database: <https://www.unil.ch/elitessuisses>). The choice of the four benchmark years used in this article was imposed by the general database. But, such complete data for all national MPs and members of cantonal and urban governments with an approximate 20 years interval allow for a systematic analysis of the political careers of Swiss politicians and their evolution over time.

6. We considered MPs who served for *more* than 2 years in both the federal parliament *and* a regional professionalized executive office (cantonal or urban) as cumulative MPs. When there is no formal interdiction of double office holding, politicians do not immediately resign from one office but often 'finish' their mandate during one or two years.
7. This trend can be observed, in particular, between the cantonal and federal levels: whereas 126 MPs held office at both levels in 1957 (38 professional mandates and 88 unprofessional mandates), only 12 did it in 2016 (among which only 4 were professional mandates). The combination of professional or semi-professional mandates at the communal level with a national mandate decreased much less between 1957 and 2016 (Pilotti 2017, 267, Table 26).
8. Moreover, our datasets do not include several examples of former MPs who tried to access executive positions at the regional levels but failed, either during regional party's selection process or during the electoral campaign.
9. We should add that occupying a non-professional or semi-professional position is also a strategy for career advancement (collecting experience and credentials) or for career maintenance (keeping a check on possible competitors or cultivating a clientele).
10. In France, recent legislative reforms formally prohibit the accumulation of local executive functions with the mandate of deputy or senator and with the mandate in the European Parliament (entered into force in 2017). Then, since 2017, French deputies and senators have been prohibited from exercising a local executive function. This transformations of the opportunity structure in France could have an important impact on future careers patterns of French politicians.

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