

# “Institutional Attachment and the Shaping of Attitudes Towards Europe”.

SPP „Switzerland - Towards the Future“ – Module: Evolution of Political Institutions  
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## European integration and institutional attachment

Our research project parts from 4 fundamental statements: First, the Swiss political system is based on 3 political institutions: neutrality, federalism and direct democracy. Second, the attachment of the citizens to these institutions is strong and contributes to a sense of national identity. Third, the process of European Integration will put these institutions under pressure, because none of them will remain unaffected. Fourth, should Switzerland join the European Union (EU), it will be up to the electorate to take this decision.

We generally hypothesise that “the stronger institutional attachment is among the citizens, the lesser their probability of being in favour of joining the EU”.

## Framework of Analysis

In order to empirically test our hypotheses we relied on survey data. In 1999 and in 2000 the first Eurobarometer surveys were conducted in Switzerland. Some special questions have been added to these surveys, allowing us to test our hypotheses. We have produced a series of research papers presented in several national and international conferences. This year, one of them will be published in the well-known journal “European Union Politics”. This poster contains some descriptive as well as more complex analyses.

## Relevance

Without any doubt, European integration must be counted among the major challenges for the near future of Switzerland. So far, no scientific analysis has been undertaken where the citizens' institutional attachment has been linked to their willingness to join the EU. As it will be not only most likely but ultimately up to the electorate to decide upon both issues, namely institutional change and the adhesion to the European Union, our analyses are of great significance to the understanding of public opinion in Switzerland.

## Attachment to Swiss political institutions and support for European Union membership

Swiss citizens are very attached to all of these three institutions. They show the highest degree of attachment towards direct democracy. More than 85% of them are proud of or consider direct democracy as important. Three out of four citizens consider neutrality & federalism as rather (or very) important or are rather (or very) proud of them. Considering the perception of the consequences of EU membership on these three institutions, it is clear that 6 out of 10 respondents consider that Swiss EU membership will have negative consequences. Table 1 displays these results.

Table 1: Perception of the consequences of EU membership

Type of consequence	Perception of the consequences of EU membership on...		
	Neutrality	Federalism	Direct Democracy
Positive	24%	27%	20%
None	13%	17%	17%
Negative	64%	57%	63%
Respondents	482	412	460

The relationship between the importance of the institutions and support for EU membership shows two main results: 1) Attachment to neutrality has the strongest negative effect on support for EU membership. Attachment to federalism has a quite strong effect but slightly more limited. The impact of attachment to direct democracy is weak.. Neutrality is therefore a central variable in explaining support for Swiss EU membership.

2) People **not** attached to these institutions, especially neutrality and federalism are strongly in favour of Swiss EU membership. The citizens attached to these institutions are either in favour or opposed to joining the EU.

## Structural Equation Modelling (standardised coefficients)

This path analysis allows us to emphasise the relationships between several dimensions and support for Swiss EU membership. Controlling for the other variables in the model, ‘perception of the consequence of EU membership on national economy’, ‘threat to national interests’, ‘importance of neutrality’ and ‘national identity’ are important dimensions in the explanation of attitudes towards the EU. ‘Image of neighbours’ has a strong impact on ‘threat to national interests’. Overall, our model can explain 51% of the variance in the attitudes towards EU membership. From an inferential point of view the model is compatible with the data

