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Dynamic De/Centralisation in Switzerland

Sean Mueller[1]* and **Paolo Dardanelli**[2]

Abstract

The degree of vertical power sharing is one of the key dimensions of federal political systems. And yet precise measurements of de/centralisation in different policy and fiscal areas, countries, and time periods are lacking. Part of a broader comparative project on dynamic de/centralisation across six major federations, this paper contributes to the panel by analysing Switzerland as a prominent example of a multi-lingual federation. As the degree of de/centralisation in federal system has a significant bearing on territorial inequalities, the paper also speaks directly to the topic of this IPSA World Congress. It first sets out the key features of the Swiss federation at its birth in 1848 and the initial distribution of powers between the federal and the cantonal levels. It then maps the dynamics of de/centralisation across 22 policy areas, taking into account both the legislative and the administrative dimensions, and five fiscal areas, by coding the distribution of powers at 10-year intervals since the formation of the federation (1850–2010). The paper shows that while there has been a wide-ranging process of centralisation, this has primarily affected the legislative dimension of policy-making while the cantons have retained considerable administrative and fiscal autonomy. Although this evolution has entailed frequent constitutional change, it has unfolded primarily through small steps rather than 'big bang' critical junctures. Contrary to some theoretical expectations advanced in the literature, the multilingual and bi-confessional nature of the country has not presented a major obstacle to this centralisation dynamic, particularly so in the post-World War II period.

[1] University of Berne, Switzerland; sean.mueller@ipw.unibe.ch,*corresponding author
[2] University of Kent, UK; p.dardanelli@kent.ac.uk

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1 Introduction

Switzerland became a federal state in 1848, making it the world's second oldest federation. It had previously been for a long time a confederation of states[3], leading some authors (e.g. Hicks, 1978: 156; Elazar, 1994: 246) to consider it the country that most successfully embodies the federal idea. The Swiss federation was formed in the wake of a brief civil war, out of a 'federal bargain' between the cantons – as the constituent units are called (Kley, 2012) – that emerged victorious from the war and those on the losing side of it, under the terms of the 1848 federal constitution (e.g. Rappard, 1948: esp. 94-105; Humair, 2009: 71-90).

At its birth the Swiss federation was composed of 25 cantons[4], all having equal status[5] and retaining residual powers. The 1848 constitution established a bi-cameral parliament inspired by the US model, with a lower house – the National Council – representing the Swiss people as a whole and an upper house – the Council of States – representing the cantons. Members of the lower house were to be directly elected every three years,[6] whereas members of the upper house would be elected following canton-specific procedures.[7] The two houses were given equal powers, thus establishing a system of perfect bicameralism (Vatter, 2014: 314-5). The cantons were allocated a number of seats in the lower house proportional to their population and two seats each in the upper house.[8] The executive, the Federal Council, was, and still is, a collegial body of seven ministers, each of them assuming the role of president on an annual rotating basis. The seven ministers were to be elected individually every three years[9] by the two houses of parliament sitting jointly about two months after the parliamentary elections. Once elected, the ministers would not be politically responsible before parliament and could not be dismissed either individually or collectively by the latter until the next election. The absence of parliamentary confidence thus created a form of executive-legislature relations intermediate between the classic parliamentary and presidential systems (Shugart and Carey, 1992: 26; Klöti, 2007; 148). A Federal Tribunal was also established but was not granted the power of judicial review over federal laws (Humair, 2009: 88-90; Vatter, 2014: 497-8). To protect cantonal autonomy, transferring new policy-making competences to the federal

[3] For a concise overview of Swiss history, see for example Church and Head (2013).
[4] The cantons number 26 since 1979, when the northern part of the Jura territory separated from canton Berne to form the new canton of Jura.
[5] Though six of them, the so-called 'half cantons', have a slightly different constitutional status (Grisel, 1980).
[6] A 1931 constitutional amendment extended the term to four years (Rappard, 1948: 360-2).
[7] At the beginning, most cantons had their members of the upper house selected by the cantonal parliament but in time all came to embrace direct popular election. The last canton to do so was Berne, in 1979 (Vatter, 2014: 314).
[8] The six 'half cantons' have one seat only.
[9] See footnote 6.

level was made possible only on the basis of a constitutional amendment endorsed by a double majority, of the people and of the cantons, in a popular referendum.

Modern Switzerland inherited both religious and linguistic divisions. Since the Reformation the country had been split between a Protestant majority, economically and politically dominant, and a sizeable Catholic minority. In the first half of the 19th century, Protestantism came to be associated with industrialisation and with support for liberalism and federalism while Catholics were mostly concentrated in rural areas and were generally, though not invariably, conservative and confederalist, i.e. defenders of the status quo. The clash between the two sides culminated in the 1847 civil war that preceded the transition to federation. The first federal census in 1850 recorded 59 per cent of Protestants and 41 per cent of Catholics (BFS, 1891: 14),[10] though territorial concentration meant that most cantons had a large majority of either one confession or the other.

Linguistically, the country was, and has remained, divided among four language communities: German, French, Italian and Romansch, spoken as a mother tongue by 71 per cent, 21 per cent, 6 per cent, and 1 per cent, respectively, in 1880 (BFS, 1891: 18).[11] Art. 109 of the 1848 constitution gave German, French and Italian the status of national languages but no attempt to introduce multilingualism in the cantons – where it did not already exist – was made and most of the cantons have remained monolingual. Despite being multilingual, though, Switzerland was, and is, not multinational (Dardanelli, 2011), a factor that has, as we discuss below, played a crucial role in the evolution of Swiss federalism.

Comparativists and students of Switzerland alike have long remarked that the country has undergone an extensive process of centralisation since 1848. Among the former, as early as the mid-1940s, Wheare (1946: 252-3) remarked that many new powers had been conferred to the general government. Twenty years later, Sawer (1969: 97-9) also noted the centralising trend but pointed out that the cantons retained considerable administrative and fiscal autonomy. Among the latter, Rappard (1948: 380) noted the considerable extension in the powers of the federation, Aubert (1967: 53) argued that centralisation was one of the three fundamental trends of Switzerland's political development, while Knapp (1986: 49-50) summarised the transformation of Swiss federalism thus:

> "En 1848, les cantons étaient des entités quasi souveraines. Ils n'étaient que peu limités dans leur possibilité d'action par la Confédération … ont transformé les cantons en des entités plus

[10] Since then Protestansts have experienced a relative decline, numbering 35 per cent, against 42 per cent of Catholics, in 2000 (Bovay, 2004: 11).
[11] In contrast to religious affiliations, patterns of language use have remained broadly stable: in 2000 the respective percentages were 72, 21, 4, and 0.6 (Lüdi and Werlen, 2005: 7-9).

> ou moins autonomes chargées d'exécuter les volontés fédérales en coopérant avec les autorités fédérales et les autres autorités cantonales. On pourrait donc dire que, pour l'essentiel, les cantons sont devenus des exécutants dans le cadre d'un fédéralisme dit coopératif."[12]

More recently, Vatter (2007b: 216; 2014: 431-2), Kriesi and Trechsel (2008: 35), and Dardanelli (2013: 253) characterise the development in very similar terms but point out that the cantons have retained significant administrative and fiscal autonomy. The detailed measuring we present in this paper allows us to both substantiate these claims and deepen understanding of how Swiss federalism has evolved over time.

2 Static de/centralisation at the outset

The Swiss federation was highly decentralised at its birth (Table 1). The modal score across the 22 policy categories for both legislation and administration was 7, meaning most policy areas were exclusively in the hands of the cantons. The mean score was 6 for legislation and 6.52 for administration. As shown by standard deviation figures, the extent of variation across policy areas was higher on the legislative side than on the administrative side. The mean score and the standard deviations both point to the fact that the policy role of the general government was more pronounced in relation to legislation than to administration, though the gap between the two dimensions was rather small. Looking at the disaggregated scores (Table 1), we can see that in 1850 the general government had a dominant role in only three policy areas, all of which are typical central state domains: currency and monetary policy, defence, and external affairs. Even within these areas, however, banknote-issuing, for example, was left to non-governmental actors while the cantons retained a prominent administrative role in the defence field.

The cantons also had high fiscal autonomy, all categories scoring 6 or 7 (Table 2). They were essentially self-financing, the only significant fiscal transfers they received being the compensations they were due for lost income from customs duties and postal services, under the terms of the 1848 constitution (e.g. Humair, 2009: 98-105). The general government derived the bulk of its revenues from customs duties and placed no significant restrictions on cantonal taxation power. The cantons also had unrestricted freedom to borrow.

[12] 'In 1848, the cantons were quasi-sovereign. Their margin for manoeuvre was limited only very slightly by the federal government … the cantons have been transformed into more or less autonomous entities tasked with implementing federal decisions in co-operation with the federal government and the other cantonal governments. We can thus say that the cantons have become agents in the context of a so-called co-operative federalism'; see also Aubert (1967: 65).

3 Overview of dynamic de/centralisation

Frequency

Across 17 time points (1850-2010), we have recorded 77 changes of score in the policy sphere and 13 changes in the fiscal sphere (Table 5). The mean frequency of policy score changes per decade is 4.81 but frequency has varied considerably over time (Graph 1). The frequency of dynamic policy de/centralisation has been twice as high in the legislative dimension than in the administrative dimension (Table 5 and Graph 1). Dynamic de/centralisation has been much less frequent in the fiscal sphere, with fewer than one change on average per decade (Graph 5).

Dynamic de/centralization has affected all policy fields, which have each experienced on average 3.54 changes of score (Table 5). Change has been most frequent in the fields of agriculture, citizenship and immigration, defence, economic activity, environmental protection, financial services, natural resources, and social welfare, and least frequent in the fields of currency and monetary supply, primary and secondary education, external affairs, and language.

The higher frequency of change in the legislative sphere at the aggregate level is, by and large, replicated in the individual policy categories, with the exceptions, though, of the media and transport, in which changes have been as frequent on the legislative side as on the administrative side, and defence, tertiary education, and criminal law, in which administrative changes have been more frequent than legislative ones (Table 5 and Graph 2).

In the fiscal sphere, change has been most frequent in the degree of conditionality and in the proportion of own-source revenues, and absent in the cantons' borrowing autonomy (Table 5 and Graph 6).

Direction

Change has been overwhelmingly in the direction of centralisation. No fewer than 76 of the 77 changes of policy score have been centralising and so have 10 of the 13 changes recorded in the fiscal sphere. All policy areas, with one exception only, have experienced cumulative centralisation and so have four of the five fiscal categories. The sole policy exception is external affairs, which has experienced modest decentralisation in the legislative dimension,

while the fiscal exception is the cantons' borrowing autonomy, in which there has been no change.

Magnitude

The magnitude of centralisation has been considerable in the legislative sphere but less so in the administrative sphere and least of all in the fiscal sphere. The modal legislative score dropped from 7 to 2 between 1850 and 2010 but the modal administrative score only dropped from 7 to 6. Mean static de/centralisation dropped by 3.04 for legislation but by only 1.8 for administration (Table 1). Mean static fiscal de/centralisation dropped by between 1 and 1.8, depending on the measure used (Table 2).

Dynamic legislative centralisation has been highest in agriculture, financial services, civil law, media, and social welfare, and lowest in currency and monetary supply, education, and language, while there has only been decentralisation, albeit of a minimal magnitude in the field of external affairs, as already noted. On the administrative side, centralisation has been highest in the media field, while in several categories there has been no change: currency and monetary supply, primary and secondary education, external affairs, language, and civil law (Tables 1 and 5 and Graph 2).

In the fiscal sphere, centralisation has been highest in the degree of conditionality and in the restrictions placed on the cantons' own-revenue sources, while there has been no change in their autonomy to borrow (Tables 2 and 5 and Graph 6).

Tempo

Dynamic de/centralisation has proceeded at a very gradual pace throughout the life of the Swiss federation, via fairly frequent changes of a generally small magnitude (Table 5, Graphs 1, 3, 5, and 7). The only significant exceptions were the adoption of single legal codes for civil and criminal law and some changes in media field, where centralisation has taken place through steps of large magnitude (Table 5 and Graph 2). In the policy sphere change has followed a linear trajectory, i.e. without changes in direction, whereas there has been a small degree of fluctuation in the fiscal sphere, specifically in the proportion of own-source revenues and in the degree of conditionality (Table 5).

It is possible, nonetheless, to identify points in time in which change has been more prominent, in terms of frequency, magnitude, and significance. In the legislative sphere, there have been

peaks of frequency of change in 1880, 1950, and 2000 and magnitude peaks in 1880 and 1950. These reflect, respectively, the adoption of a new constitution in 1874 and the strengthening of the general government's role in the fields of economic regulation and social welfare enacted in 1947, as well as the entry into force of a unified criminal law code in 1942. These two periods thus come closest to being critical junctures in the development of Swiss federalism. Of a lesser quantitative impact[13] but still of major significance are three other points in time: a) the late 19th century, which witnessed the decision to adopt unified civil and criminal law codes as well as the nationalisation of the railways[14]; b) World War I, during which the general government was granted its first significant powers of direct taxation; and c) the turn of the 20th/21st century, with the adoption of a new constitution and further centralising steps in fields such as economic regulation, tertiary education, health care, and the media, as well as the sole instance of decentralisation, in external affairs.

Further on the timing of dynamic de/centralisation, if we divide the life of the Swiss federation into two periods (1850-1920 and 1920-2010) we can see that, in the legislative sphere, the absolute cumulative direction and magnitude of change has been higher in the latter period, but only very marginally so (Table 3). If we divide it into three periods (1850-1910, 1910-1950, 1950-2010), so as to isolate the crisis years of the first half of the 20th century, we can see that the middle period indeed witnessed significantly higher centralisation than the other two periods but also that centralisation was higher in the period up to 1910 than it has been since 1950 (Table 3).

Two other temporal dynamics are noteworthy. The first one is that, as a result of the greater magnitude of centralisation in the legislative sphere, the 'duality' of the Swiss federation, as measured by the mean deviation between the legislative and the administrative scores at each time point, has grown progressively larger (Table 1 and Graph 3). Put another way, Swiss federalism has acquired a progressively more 'administrative' nature over time. The second, and related, dynamic is the sequence between legislative and administrative centralisation. At the outset administration was overwhelmingly in the hands of the cantons while the general government had some important legislative powers whereas today legislation is by and large federal while administration is still in many fields primarily cantonal. If the distinguish between two periods (1850-1950 and 1950-2010), we can see that there was proportionally more

[13] At least in the short term. As we argue below, there has often been a long delay between establishing the principle of the federal government's competence to act in a given policy field, via a constitutional referendum or initiative, and the passage of the implementing legislation.
[14] On the significance of the latter, see Aubert (1967: 55).

administrative centralisation in the earlier period whereas there has been proportionally more legislative centralisation in the later one (Table 4 and Graph 4).

Form

It is clear from the preceding paragraphs that dynamic de/centralisation in Switzerland has taken place primarily in the legislative sphere and to a limited extent only in the administrative and, especially, the fiscal spheres. In a few policy fields, however, administrative centralisation has also been significant: the media, transport, finance and securities, and defence.

In the fiscal sphere, as already noted, dynamic de/centralisation has taken place primarily in the restrictions placed on the cantons' own-revenue sources and in the degree of conditionality attached to general government transfers to the cantons whereas the core categories of the proportion of own-source revenues and of conditional transfers have witnessed limited change. It is important to note, however, that the 'headline' scores for these two categories at most time points mask high variation across the cantons: while wealthy urban cantons such as Basle City and Geneva consistently score highly, relatively deprived rural cantons such as Uri or (after 1979) Jura consistently record a high level of dependence on federal transfers.

Instruments

Dynamic de/centralisation in Switzerland has taken a clearly identifiable 'high road': constitutional change to empower the general government in new areas of competence followed, sometimes much later, by the enactment of framework legislation that leaves a degree of discretion to the cantons both in transposing such legislation and in turning it into policy implementation. By the time it was replaced in 1999, the 1874 constitution had been amended 155 times (Schmitt, 2005: 375), while, as of July 2016, the current constitution has already been amended 27 times (CH, 2016). In the context of Switzerland's 'Europeanisation' in the 1990s and 2000s, the federation's use of its international treaty powers has been more prominent but its impact on de/centralisation, as we argue below, is ambiguous. 'Coercive' horizontal joint action, i.e. instigated by the general government, has not played a notable role but could potentially do so in the near future in the important field of primary and secondary education, following a 2006 constitutional amendment whose effects have not fully materialised yet (Fischer et al., 2010; Giudici, 2016).

Fiscal instruments and court rulings, by contrast, have been much less prominent. While the fiscal capacity of the general government has grown considerably over time, and has been

reflected in the growing restrictions placed on the cantons' ability to raise revenues, this greater fiscal 'firepower' has not, on the whole, been used to restrict cantonal policy autonomy. Transfer conditionality has also risen but within the confines of a proportion of conditional transfer that has remain rather low. The Federal Tribunal has been called upon to interpret the constitution on some occasions, and has generally done so in a centralising direction (Knapp, 1986: 46) but has played no significant role in the key steps through which dynamic de/centralisation has unfolded, which, as mentioned, have generally required constitutional change.

4 Explaining dynamic de/centralisation in Switzerland

Assessing the hypotheses

How do the hypotheses formulated in Dardanelli et al. (2016a) perform against Switzerland's experience? The Swiss federation was highly decentralised at the outset but experienced considerable centralisation. As we discuss in greater detail below, the country's pluralism (multilingualism and biconfessionalism) has not, in the main, posed a major obstacle to centralisation and linguistic diversity even less so than religious diversity. The relatively high number of constituent units is likely to have facilitated the process. Major instances of centralisation occurred well before 1920, one of the peaks in the longitudinal trend being the 1874 constitutional revision. Therefore, H1a, H1b, and H1d are confirmed, whereas H1c and, especially, H1e are rejected.

While most of the H2a-H2d hypotheses are best assessed from a comparative perspective, two points emerge, however, from the Swiss experience. First, neither cantons' residual powers and the relatively high rigidity of the constitution, nor parliament's autonomy from the executive appear to have played a significant role in preventing centralisation. The combination of cantonal residual powers and constitutional rigidity has been overcome with relative ease, although it might have contributed to centralisation unfolding primarily through incremental change rather than 'critical junctures'. While each step has required a constitutional amendment endorsed, following the double majority rule, in a nationwide referendum, such steps have frequently been successful. In the mid-1960s, Aubert (1967: 61) remarked: "Une révision qui a pour but de donner un nouveau pouvoir à la Confédération est, à l'époque actuelle, presque assurée du succès".[15] If Galligan (2006: 532) is correct in arguing that judicial review "provides an ongoing routine channel for constitutional adjustment that

[15] 'A constitutional amendment whose objective is to confer a new power to the federation is nowadays almost guaranteed to succeed.'

takes the pressure off formal amendment in most federations", its absence in Switzerland may have contributed to the high frequency of constitutional change. Second, where Switzerland's experience closely matches the theoretical expectation (H2c) is in the fact that centralisation has largely been confined to the legislative sphere, principally through the use of framework legislation.

Switzerland, on the other hand, provides a good illustration of the impact of the economic and social trends theorised (H3a), with the partial exception of globalisation and regional integration. The effect of technological progress can be seen at work particularly in the fields of defence, media, and transport. As innovations were introduced, which either benefited from significant economies of scale or whose scope transcended cantonal borders, the pressure for handing control over to the general government proved hard to resist. Thus, for instance, while a degree of cantonal control over infantry corps survived into the mid-20th century, tank units and the air force were developed under full general government control from the very beginning. In a similar vein, federal licensing of radio and television was established early on, as was the general government's role in transport by rail, water, air, and motorways (see also Rappard, 1948: 379-80).

Inter-cantonal mobility has certainly risen greatly: the proportion of the population, both citizens and non-citizens, born in a different canton from that of residence grew from 7.3 per cent in 1860 to 24 per cent in 1960, and has remained roughly at that level since (BFS, 1982: 30). This is likely to have weakened the resolve to defend cantonal autonomy (Aubert, 1967: 63).

The drive to build a fully integrated national market has been particularly in evidence (Knapp, 1986: 41). Economic motives had already been at the heart of the transition from confederation to federation in the 1830s and 1840s (Rappard, 1948: esp. 102; Humair, 2009: 13-33, 98) and have remained at the forefront of the centralisation process after 1848. They played a prominent role in the unification of the legal codes approved in 1898 (e.g. Aubert, 1967: 44-5) as well as, of course, in the wide-ranging powers of economic regulation granted to the general government in 1947 (Vatter, 2014: 431).

Less clear are the effects of globalisation and regional integration (H3b and H3c). While Switzerland, despite remaining outside the European Union, has undergone a significant process of 'Europeanisation' (e.g. Church, 2006; Jenni, 2015), its association with centralisation is Janus-faced. On the one hand, centralisation in the fields of economic activity and law enforcement in the 1990s and 2000s, as detailed in the online appendix, can plausibly

be linked to the country making itself 'EU-compatible'. On the other hand, internationalisation has produced the only instance of decentralisation we have recorded throughout the history of the Swiss federation: the modest increase in cantons' autonomy in external affairs under the terms of the 1999 constitution; to which should be added their closer involvement in the general government's own foreign policy (e.g. Dardanelli, 2006: 26-8; Thürer and MacLaren, 2009: 275-8). The mixed impact of regional integration in particular might be due to the fact that it made itself felt at a time when the bulk of dynamic centralisation had already taken place, hence it primarily affected the nature of the general government's own legislation rather than the distribution of powers between the latter and the cantons.

Switzerland also provides a good illustration of how evolution in the patterns of collective identification and in expectations concerning the role of government affects attitudes towards de/centralisation. Albeit already subordinate to a sense of a common Swiss nationality, cantonal identities were very strong when Switzerland became a federation in the mid-19th century, particularly in the former *Sonderbund* cantons (e.g. Zimmer, 2003: 150; Dardanelli, 2011: 302-3). By the end of the 20th century, however, though still important (Mueller, 2013), they came to be dwarfed by identification with the country as a whole, while identification with the language communities has never risen to significant levels (e.g. Kriesi et al., 1996: 55-7; Dardanelli, 2011: 309-10). The fact that this evolution has taken place in spite of the country's multilingual character suggests that it is not multilingualism per se that matters but whether a federation has become multinational or not (H4a). Where Switzerland's multilingual nature might have had an effect is in the patterns of dynamic de/centralisation by policy category, whereby culture, primary and secondary education, and language, all fields that touch upon linguistic and cultural identity, are to this day still highly decentralised.

Expectations concerning the role of government in the economy and society have also changed greatly, particularly in areas such as environmental protection, health care, and welfare services (H4c). In these fields, as Knapp (1986: 41) argued, "Les différences sont dorénavant ressenties au moins comme des entraves".[16]

The Swiss experience is consistent with the hypothesis that instances of dynamic centralisation are more likely to occur at times of economic or security shocks (H5) but only up to a point. As detailed in section 3, while the magnitude of centralisation was highest in the crisis period of 1910-1950, a great deal of centralisation has occurred at times in which major economic and security shocks have been absent. When it comes to the fiscal sphere,

[16] 'Differences [across cantons] have come to be seen at a minimum as obstacles'.

furthermore, the shocks of the first half of the 20th century led to an expansion of the fiscal capacity of the general government rather than to a significant reduction in the cantons' fiscal autonomy. Switzerland nonetheless offers at least one powerful example of how at times of crisis citizens and political actors are more willing to take bold steps. As Hughes ([1954] 1970: 49) pointed out, when the general government's fiscal needs suddenly rose sharply as a consequence of Word War I, cantonal contributions to the federal budget could have risen in line with what the constitution provided for but, instead, the decision was to expand general government taxation and this was a "turning-point in modern Swiss financial history". An external shock such as the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1 also played a role in fostering centralisation in the 1870s (Rappard, 1948: 280-2).

Switzerland also provides a good example of the fact that the attitudes of organised interest groups can act as important intervening variables (H6). The unification of the civil and criminal law codes, approved by referendum in 1898, was preceded by strong lobbying efforts on the part of the legal profession: in 1868-9, the Swiss Bar Association voted resolutions to petition the parliament in favour of unification (Aubert, 1967: 44-5). 'Peak' associations often adopted a centralised structure early on and were thus less likely to defend cantonal autonomy (e.g. Aubert, 1967:64; Criblez, 2008: 18).

The last set of hypotheses (H7a-H7f) display a more mixed performance. The first three[17] are only partially supported while the latter two are clearly rejected. The Swiss party system is still not fully 'nationalised'. While most parties operate federation-wide, their organisation, financial, and programmatic structure is still in many cases that of a federation of cantonal parties rather than a fully unified 'national' actor (e.g. Church, 2004: 60-70; Ladner, 2007: 310-1; Kriesi and Trechsel, 2008: 90-3; Bochsler et al., 2016). Nonetheless, this does not seem to have posed a major obstacle in the way of centralisation, although it may have slowed it down and helped confine it to legislative sphere. H7b is more difficult to assess given that seats in the executive have been shared by parties of both left and right since the 1950s (e.g. Church, 2004: 117-8; Klöti, 2007: 149-52; Kriesi and Trechsel, 2008: 75-81). In any case, if the centralist drive of the 1870s-80s was heavily associated with the left-wing (at the time) Radicals (Rappard, 1948: 375-6), centralisation has continued apace post-1950, even though left-of-centre parties have never had a majority in the federal executive in this period.

[17] Excluding H7c, which cannot be assessed given that the Federal Tribunal, as we have seen, is not entrusted with supervising the 'federal balance'.

Direct democracy has taken centre stage, of course, in Switzerland's centralisation 'drama' (Eschet-Schwarz, 1989) but has not proved itself to be a powerful bulwark against it, though it has probably made it slower than it might otherwise have been. While voters have turned down centralising proposals on a number of occasions, most major steps, as detailed in the online appendix, have been approved the first time they have been presented to voters.[18]

Very much at odds with H7e and H7f, dynamic centralisation in Switzerland has not occurred in the fiscal sphere first. On the contrary, as detailed above, the fiscal sphere has experienced the *least* centralisation. Likewise, there is not much evidence that political actors' incentives to reduce tax competition has played a major role. While the cantons' freedom to exploit tax bases has progressively been reduced as the general government has expanded its taxation powers (see F2 table in the online appendix), there is still a considerable degree of tax competition in the country, both horizontally and, though to a lesser extent, vertically (e.g. Feld, 2000; Wasserfallen, 2015).

The dog that didn't bark: multilingualism and centralisation

To explore in greater depth the role played by linguistic and religious diversity in Switzerland's experience of dynamic de/centralisation, we have analysed the voting behaviour of different linguistic and religious groups in all the 67 referendums that have significantly affected the 'federal balance', divided into six periods. The results, displayed in Graph 5, suggest the following points. First, throughout the life of the Swiss federation, albeit with one major exception, religion has been a stronger determinant of voters' attitudes to centralisation than language. Second, Catholic opposition to centralisation had already lost most of its strength by the turn of the 20th century (see also Eschet-Schwarz, 1989: 104). Third, since about 1950, French-speaking Protestants have actually been more supportive of centralisation than German-speaking Protestants, who can be considered the 'hegemonic group'. Once again, these data confirm that the religious cleavage has almost always been stronger than the linguistic cleavage in Swiss politics[19] and that multilingualism, in particular, is 'the dog that didn't bark' in the centralisation of Swiss federalism.

The strong opposition to centralisation among Catholics in the 19th century was part of the broader pattern of Catholic alienation from the new federal state in a period of Radical

[18] While constitutional revisions require a double majority, general government acts (if challenged by an optional referendum) only require a popular majority and are not subject to a minimum turnout quorum.
[19] In line with similar patterns in other political spheres, see Linder et al. (2008).

hegemony, which started to fade away only after the first Catholic-Conservative was elected to the Federal Council in 1891 (Eschet-Schwarz, 1989: 103; Kriesi and Trechsel, 2008: 77). The major exception to the rule that language was not a powerful determinant of voting behaviour mentioned above was the defeat of the 1872 constitutional revision. On that occasion, unusually, French-speaking Protestants sided with Catholics of all language regions in voting against it (Rappard, 1948: 284). This was due to the fact that the movement behind the constitutional revision, particularly in relation to centralisation of the army and unification of the legal codes, had been heavily influenced by Germany and was thus seen by many French speakers as a form of Germanisation (Rappard, 1948: 280-2; Aubert, 1967: 69; Humair, 2009: 141; Kölz, 2013: 560-3). Once these aspects had been removed or weakened, French-speaking Protestants overwhelmingly approved the 1874 constitutional revision. After World War I, Germany was no longer seen as a model in German-speaking Switzerland so French speakers had no reason to equate centralisation with Germanisation any more. Furthermore, especially after World War II, centralisation has often been associated with 'progressive' policies such as the building of a welfare state, enhanced protection of the environment and so forth. Given the higher support for left-of-centre ideas and parties in the *Suisse romande*, particularly among Protestants (Eschet-Schwarz, 1989: 104), centralisation has thus come to be seen as the price to pay for the development of progressive policies nationwide (Mueller, 2015: 185-207; Mueller and Dardanelli, 2014). This may explain why French-speaking Protestants have been those most supportive of centralisation over the last 60 years.

5 Conclusions

In this paper we have presented the results of what we believe to be the first ever detailed measurement of dynamic de/centralisation in Switzerland since 1848. They show that the Swiss federation was highly decentralised at the outset and has undergone an extensive process of centralisation in the legislative sphere but less so in the administrative and fiscal spheres. Centralisation has taken place mainly in an incremental fashion throughout the life of the federation. Thus, despite its relative international isolation and its internal diversity, Switzerland has largely shared the same broad socio-economic and socio-cultural trends that have fostered centralisation in most other federations. Direct democracy has been the chief arbiter of the 'federal balance' over time but neither it nor the other institutional properties of the political system have posed a major obstacle in the way of political agency responding to the above trends.

These findings both substantiate and challenge the existing literature. On the one hand, they broadly confirm the prevailing assessments of how Swiss federalism has evolved over time and substantiate them with detailed quantitative indicators. On the other hand, they warn against simplistic portrayals of Switzerland as a 'decentralised federation' based on fiscal data alone and, more importantly, they show that multilingualism does not significantly affect dynamic de/centralisation when it is not allied to multinationalism. In the concluding paper (Dardanelli et al., 2016b) we further explore the significance of these findings from a comparative perspective.

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Tables and graphs

Table 1 – Static policy de/centralisation, 1850 and 2010

	1850		2010	
	Legislative	*Administrative*	*Legislative*	*Administrative*
P1 Agriculture	7**	7*	2**	6*
P2 Citizenship and immigration	5**	6**	2**	5**
P3 Culture	7*	7*	5*	6*
P4 Currency and monetary supply	2**	N/A	1**	1**
P5 Defence	3**	5**	1**	2**
P6 Economic activity	6**	7*	2**	5*
P7 Education – pre-school to sec.	7***	7***	6***	7***
P8 Education – tertiary	6***	7***	5***	5***
P9 Elections and voting	6**	6**	4**	5**
P10 Employment relations	7**	7*	3**	6*
P11 Environmental protection	7**	7**	3***	5***
P12 External affairs	2**	2**	3**	2**
P13 Finance and securities	7**	7**	2**	3*
P14 Health care	7**	7**	4**	6**
P15 Language	6*	6*	5*	6*
P16 Law – civil	7**	6**	2**	6**

P17 Law – criminal	6**	7***	2**	5**
P18 Law enforcement	7*	7*	4*	6*
P19 Media	6*	7*	1*	1*
P20 Natural resources	7*	7*	3*	6*
P21 Social welfare	7***	7***	2**	6*
P22 Transport	6**	7**	2**	3**
Total	*131*	*136†*	*64*	*103*
Mode	*7*	*7*	*2*	*6*
Mean	*5.95*	*6.48*	*2.91*	*4.68*
Standard deviation	*1.59*	*1.17*	*1.44*	*1.81*
L-A mean deviation	*-0.53*	*0.53*	*-1.77*	*1.77*

Note: 1=exclusively general government; 2=almost exclusively general government; 3=predominantly general government; 4=equally general government and constituent units; 5=predominantly constituent units; 6=almost exclusively constituent units; 7=exclusively constituent units. †21 categories only.

Table 2 – Static fiscal de/centralisation, 1850 and 2010

	1850	2010
F1 Proportion of own-source revenues out of total CU&local govt* revenues	6*	5 (4-6)**
F2 Restrictions on own-source resources**	7**	4**
F3 Proportion of conditional grants out of total CU&local govt revenues***	7*	6 (5-7)**
F4 Degree of conditionality (for conditional grants only)**	6*	2*
F5 CU public sector borrowing autonomy****	7**	7**
Total	*33*	*24*
Mean	*6.6*	*4.8*
Weighted mean‡	*6.67*	*5.17*
Core meanǂ	*6.5*	*5.5*
Standard deviation	*0.55*	*1.92*

Note: *1=0-14; 2=15-29; 3=30-44; 4=45-59; 5=60-74; 6=75-89; 7=90-100; **1=very high; 2=high; 3=quite high; 4=medium; 5=quite low; 6=low; 7=very low; ***1=86-100; 2=71-85; 3=56-70; 4=41-55; 5=26-40; 6=11-25; 7=0-10; ****1=very low; 2=low; 3=quite low; 4=medium; 5=quite high; 6=high; 7=very high; ‡ F1+F2+(F3+F3+F4/3)+F5/4; ǂF1+F3/2.

Table 3 – Timing of dynamic policy de/centralisation*

Two periods	*1850-1920*		*1920-2010*
Absolute	-1.27		-1.77
Adjusted (rate of change/year)	-0.018		-0.020
Three periods	*1850-1910*	*1910-1950*	*1950-2010*
Absolute	-0.95	-1.18	-0.91
Adjusted (rate of change/year)	-0.016	-0.0295	-0.015

Note: *measured by cumulative direction and magnitude of change in the legislative sphere.

Table 4 – Sequence of dynamic policy de/centralisation

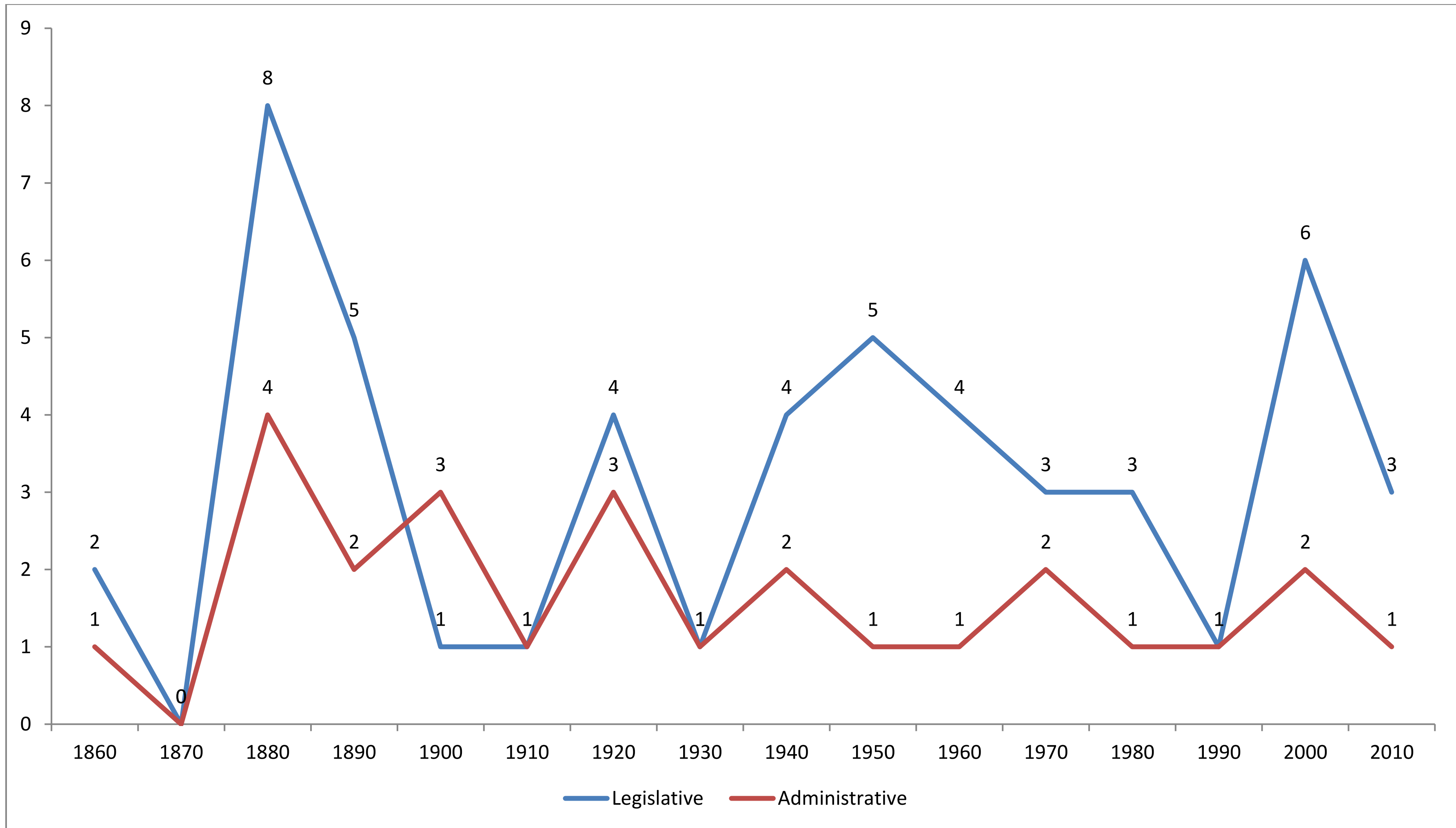
	1850-1950	*1950-2010*
Legislative (total = 3.04)	2.13 (70%)	0.91 (30%)
Administrative (total = 1.8)	1.39 (77%)	0.41 (23%)

Table 5 – Frequency and magnitude of dynamic de/centralisation by policy and fiscal category

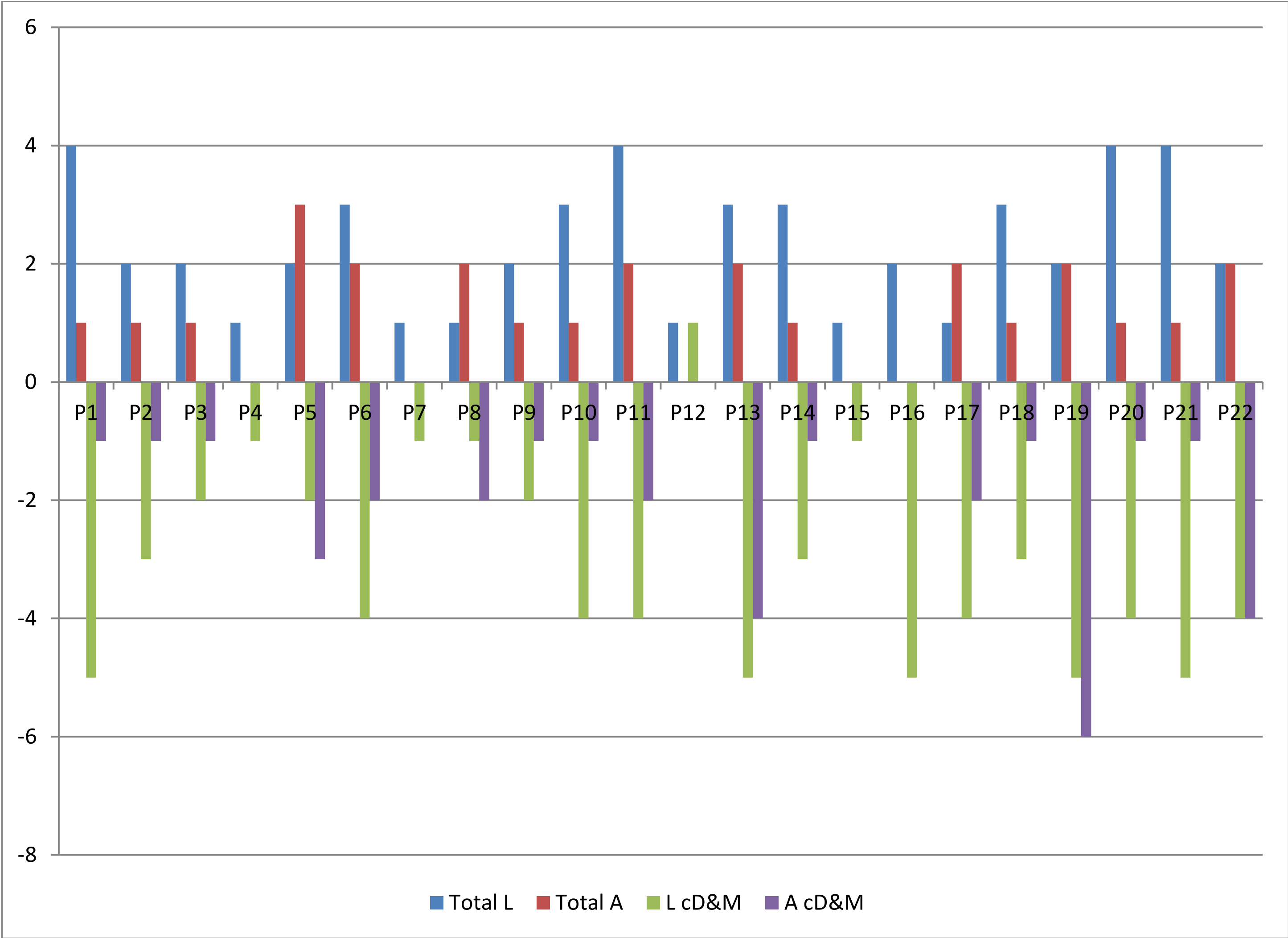
	Total	Total L	L 1	L -1	L -2	L -3	L -4	L cD&M	Total A	A -1	A -2	A -3	A -4	A cD&M
P1	5	4	0	3	1	0	0	-5	1	1	0	0	0	-1
P2	3	2	0	1	1	0	0	-3	1	1	0	0	0	-1
P3	3	2	0	2	0	0	0	-2	1	1	0	0	0	-1
P4	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	-1	0	0	0	0	0	0
P5	5	2	0	2	0	0	0	-2	3	3	0	0	0	-3
P6	5	3	0	2	1	0	0	-4	2	2	0	0	0	-2
P7	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	-1	0	0	0	0	0	0
P8	3	1	0	1	0	0	0	-1	2	2	0	0	0	-2
P9	3	2	0	2	0	0	0	-2	1	1	0	0	0	-1
P10	4	3	0	2	1	0	0	-4	1	1	0	0	0	-1
P11	6	4	0	4	0	0	0	-4	2	1	0	0	0	-2
P12	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
P13	5	3	0	1	2	0	0	-5	2	1	0	1	0	-4
P14	4	3	0	3	0	0	0	-3	1	1	0	0	0	-1
P15	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	-1	0	0	0	0	0	0
P16	2	2	0	1	0	0	1	-5	0	0	0	0	0	0
P17	3	1	0	0	0	0	1	-4	2	2	0	0	0	-2
P18	4	3	0	3	0	0	0	-3	1	1	0	0	0	-1
P19	4	2	0	0	1	1	0	-5	2	0	1	0	1	-6
P20	5	4	0	4	0	0	0	-4	1	1	0	0	0	-1
P21	5	4	0	3	1	0	0	-5	1	1	0	0	0	-1
P22	4	2	0	1	0	1	0	-4	2	1	0	1	0	-4
Total	*77*	*51*	*1*	*38*	*8*	*2*	*2*	*-67*	*26*	*21*	*1*	*2*	*1*	*-34*
Mode	*5*	*1&2&3*							*1*					
Mean	*3.54*	*2.36*							*1.18*					
F1	4	-	2	1	1	0	0	-1						
F2	3	-	0	3	0	0	0	-3						
F3	1	-	0	1	0	0	0	-1						
F4	5	-	1	3	1	0	0	-4						
F5	0	-	0	0	0	0	0	0						
Total	*13*	-	*3*	*8*	*2*	*0*	*0*	*-9*						

Note: L=legislative, A=administrative; 1, -1, -2, -3, -4: direction and magnitude of score changes; cD&M: cumulative direction and magnitude.

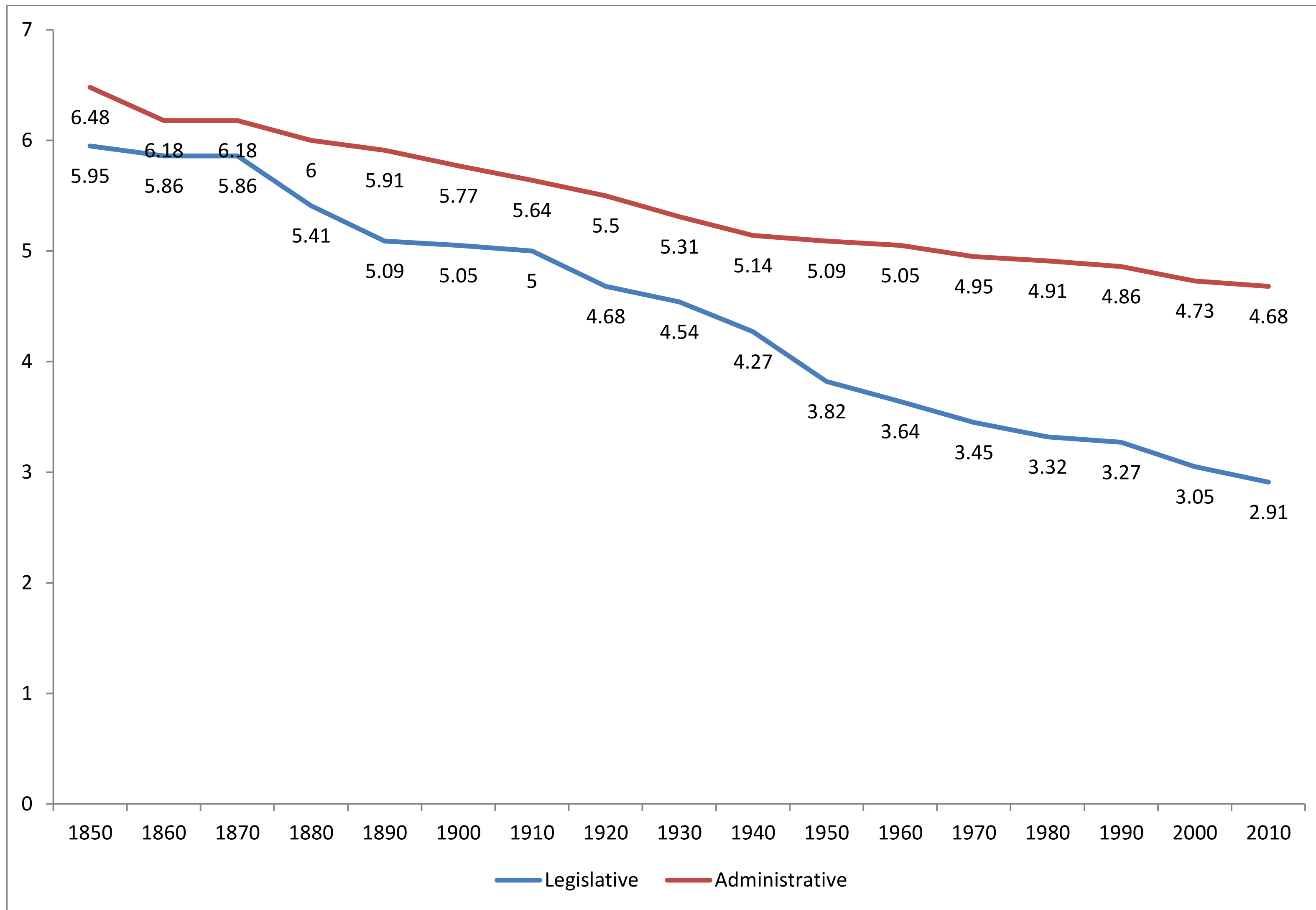
Graph 1 – Frequency of dynamic policy de/centralisation by time point



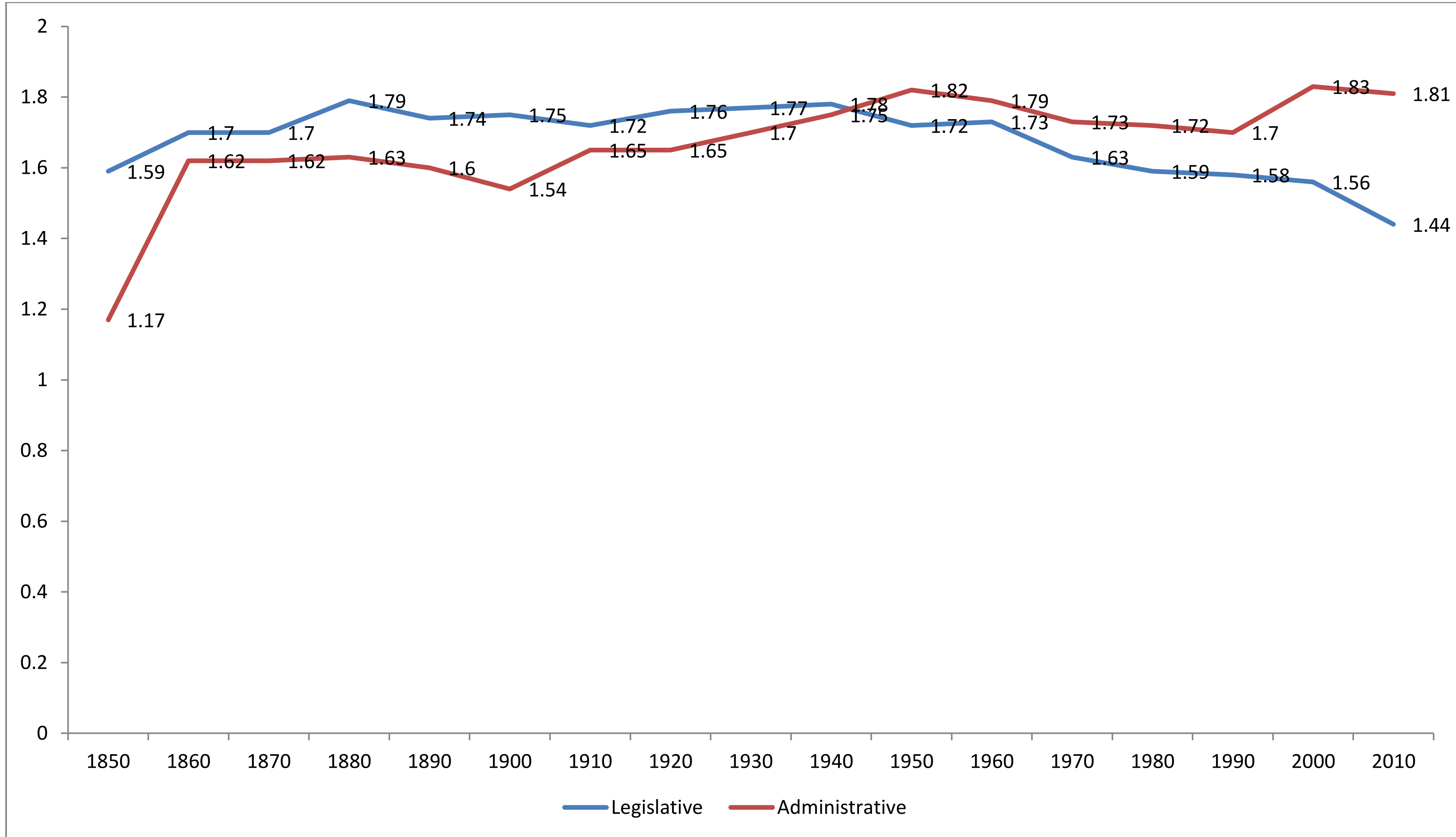
Graph 2 – Frequency, direction, and magnitude of dynamic policy de/centralisation by category



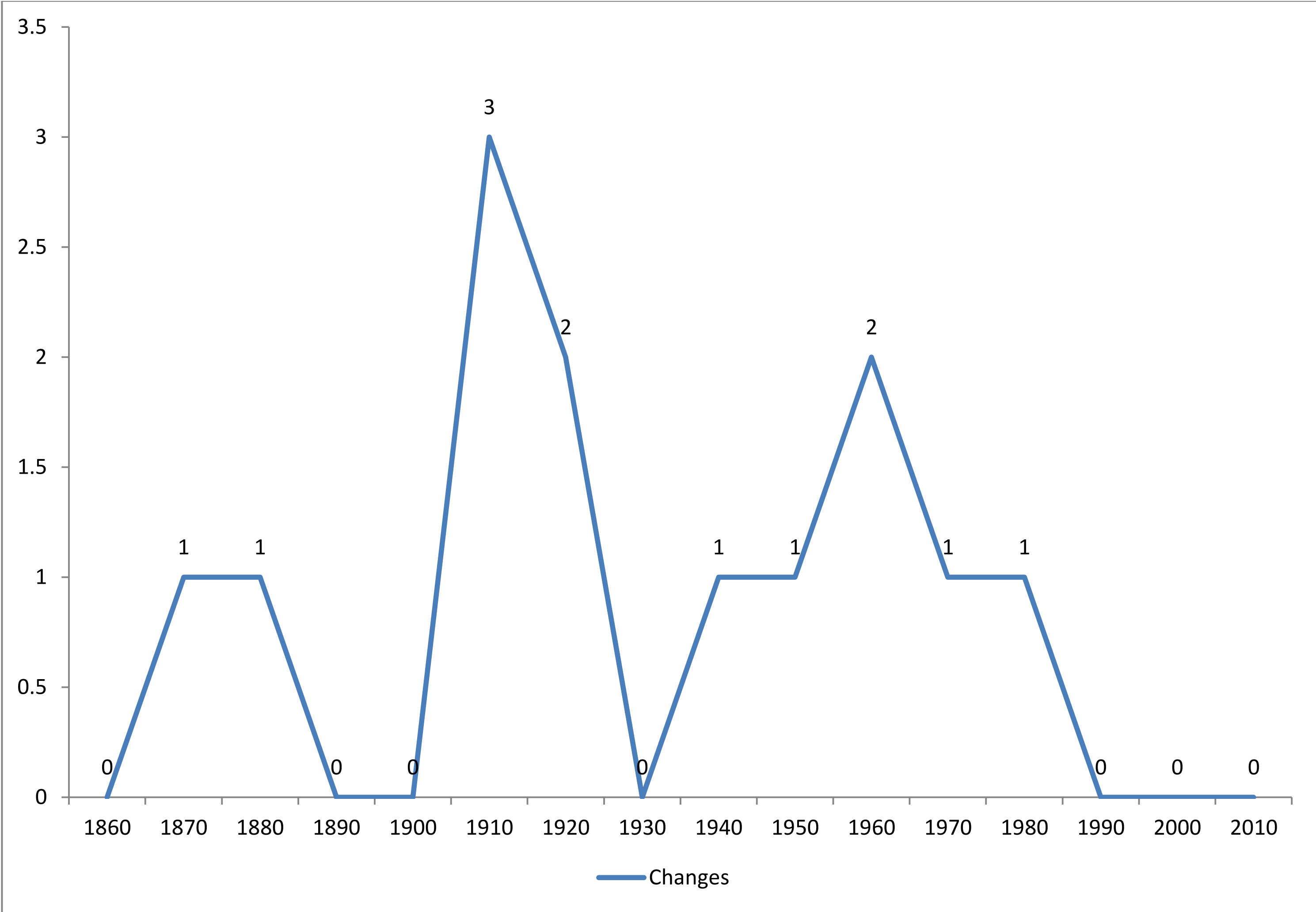
Graph 3 – Mean static policy de/centralisation, 1850-2010



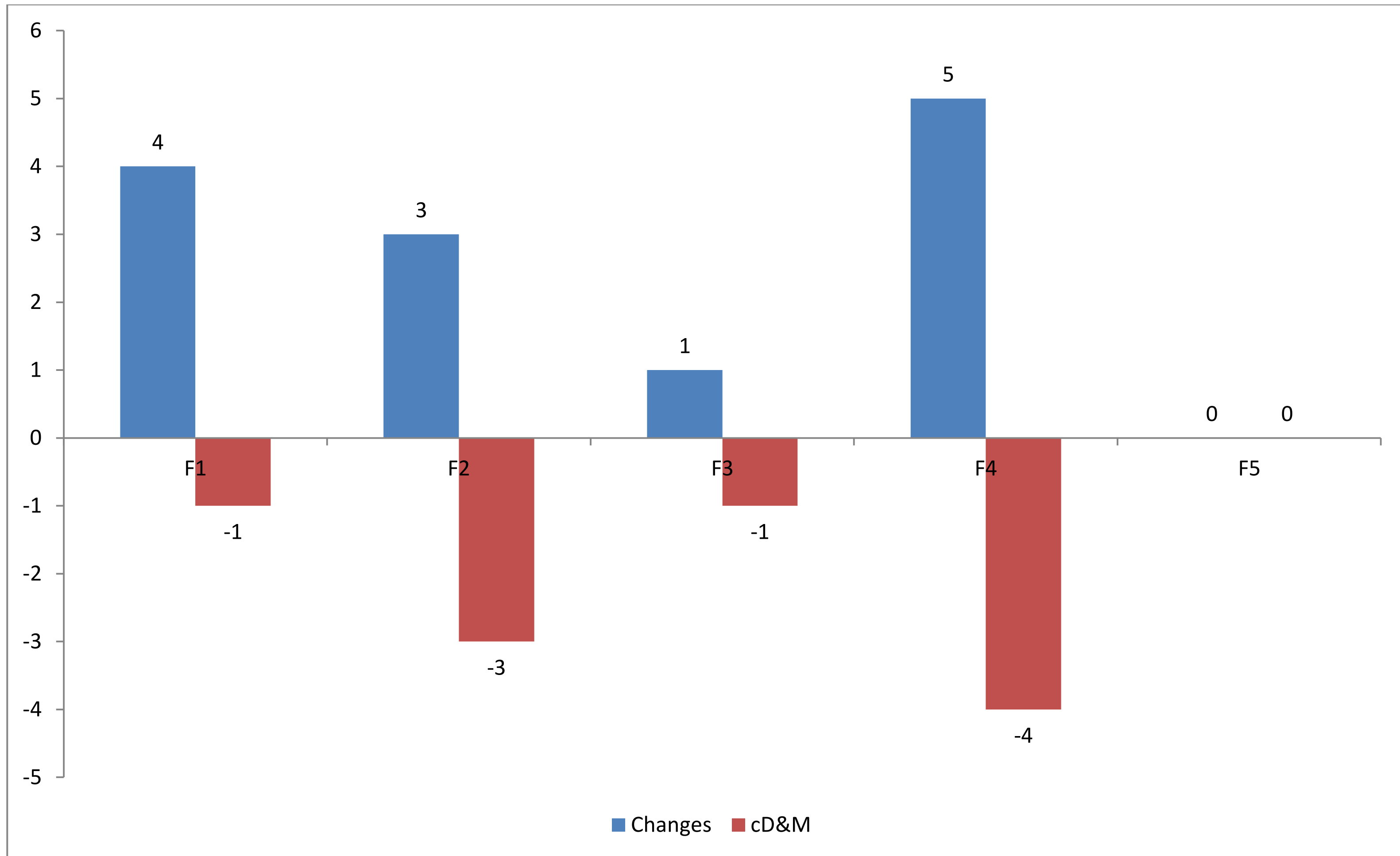
Graph 4 – Aggregate static policy de/centralisation standard deviation, 1850-2010



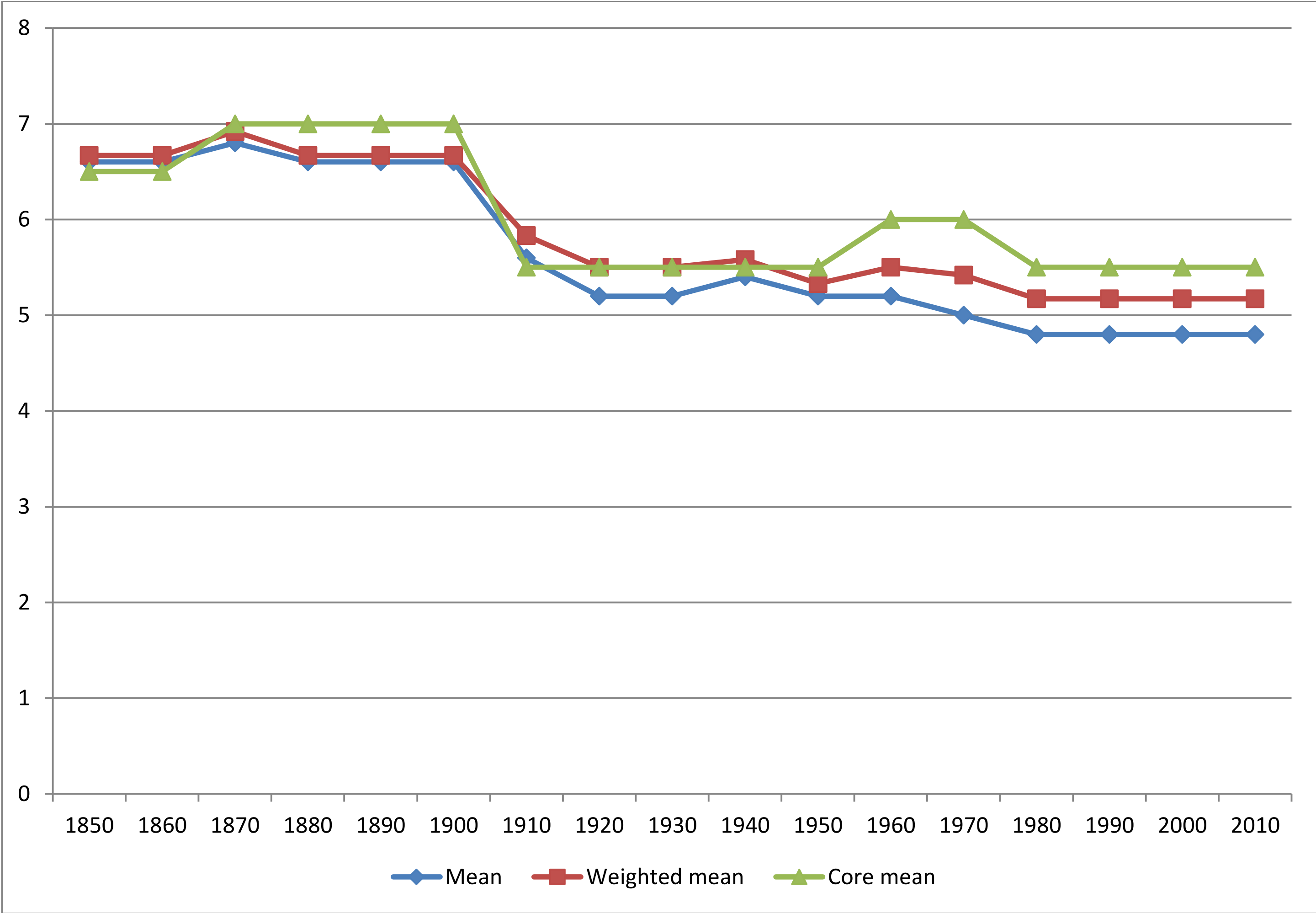
Graph 5 – Frequency of dynamic fiscal de/centralisation by time point



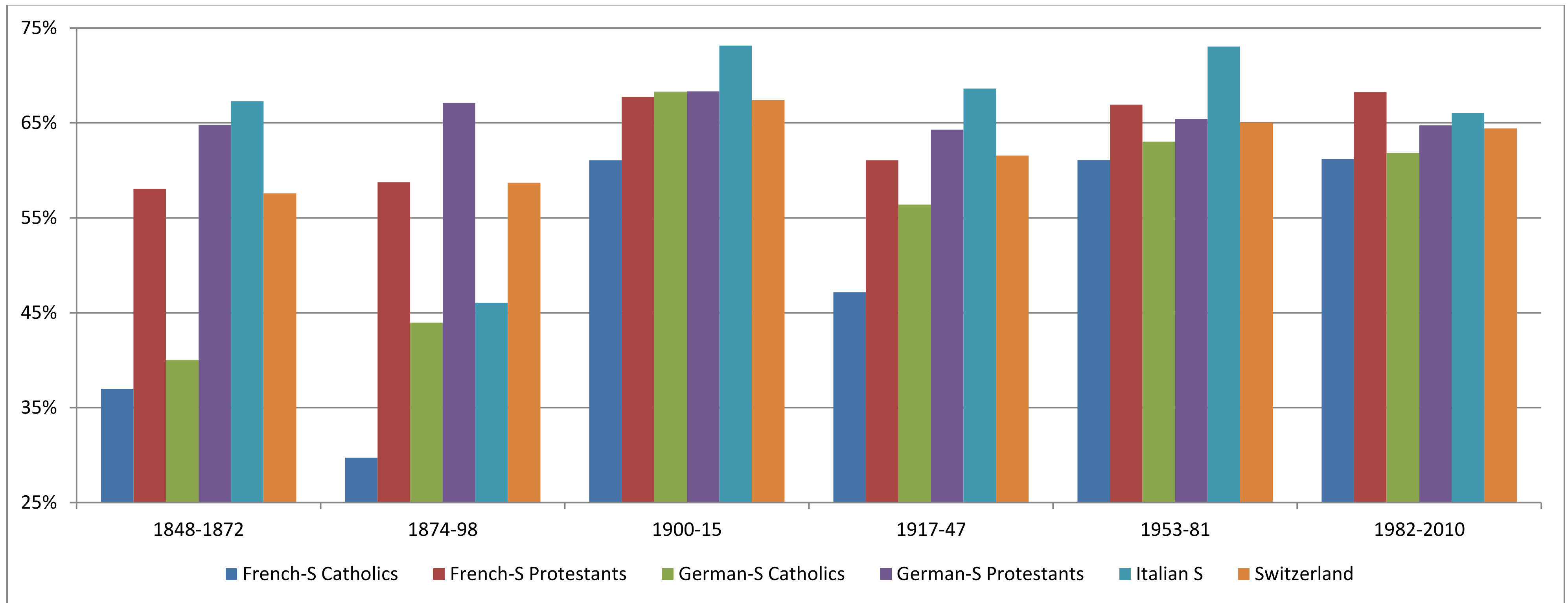
Graph 6 – Frequency, direction, and magnitude of dynamic fiscal de/centralisation by category



Graph 7 – Mean static fiscal de/centralisation, 1850-2010



Graph 8 – Mean support for centralisation by linguistic and religious group, six periods



Note: percentage of Yes votes in popular votes touching upon centralisation in given period.