–   THE URBAN LEFT IN POWER: Comparing the Profiles of 'Municipal Socialists' and the 'New Urban Left' in Swiss Cities

BAPTISTE ANTONIAZZA, ANDRÉ MACH AND MICHAEL ANDREA STREBEL

Abstract

Today, many cities in post-industrial societies are strongholds of left and progressive political forces. Almost 100 years ago, left parties had instituted municipal socialism in several European cities. In this article, we compare these two periods of left urban rule by focusing on the long-term changes over the last 120 years in the socio-demographic profile of urban left elites in four major Swiss cities. Our analysis of left elected representatives at six key dates highlights the main differences between the municipal socialists of the interwar period and the new urban left that rules contemporary cities. The former are members of the working class, blue-collar workers without university education, while the latter are members of the upper-middle class, highly educated sociocultural professionals. The results of our analysis contribute to a better understanding of the sociological composition of urban left-progressive political forces, an aspect that is somewhat neglected in recent research on the urban left. We discuss the potential political implications and further research avenues for contemporary debates in urban studies, in terms of urban policy priorities and political mobilization.

Introduction

In a highly publicized speech given on Swiss National Day in 2021, the president of the national-conservative Swiss People's Party launched a frontal attack against the urban political left that dominates all major Swiss cities. He stressed that the politics of the majoritarian urban left is the politics of 'parasites', which are the 'world champions for grabbing and spending the money that others have earned'.[1] Ninety years earlier, a commentator from the political right attacked the left government of the city of Vienna by stating that 'a whole legislation of assistance and social welfare pushed to the point of luxury has for ransom the great misery of the raided country'.[2]

Although separated by almost 100 years, these characterizations of the urban left are strikingly similar. Apart from their labelling of the urban left elites as parasites and thieves, these attacks have in common that they were made in two historical periods characterized by a dominating urban left in many important cities. Between the 1920s and the 1940s, many European cities, including Birmingham, Vienna and Zurich, experienced extended periods of left domination. This first period of left urban rule is commonly referred to as 'municipal socialism' (Dogliani, 2002; Leopold and McDonald, 2012). Currently, cities such as Barcelona, Paris and London are ruled by

1   Marco Chiesa, quoted in Boris Busslinger, 'L'UDC déclare la guerre aux 'parasites' urbains de gauche', *Le Temps*, 3 August 2021, p. 5; our translation.

2   Marcel Lucain, quoted in 'Quand ils sont les maîtres', *Gazette de Lausanne*, 25 August 1933, p. 3; our translation.

left-wing majorities, and this has sparked debates about a 'new municipalist' movement contesting neoliberal pressures at the local level (Thompson, 2021).

In this article, we study the long-term transformations of the urban left elites, with a focus on these two periods of left dominance, to understand who the political actors are that are depicted as parasites raiding entire countries. We are particularly interested in assessing and comparing the social strata composing the urban political left in these different historical moments. Recent contributions on new municipalism (Russell, 2019; Thompson 2021) have studied these new urban political actors, but they have paid little attention to the composition of these parties or movements in terms of socio-demographic features. However, such a focus is highly relevant to assess the representative and transformative potential of such groups: are they composed of underprivileged strata, or do they themselves belong to the upper echelons of society and act as advocates for marginalized groups? And how do they compare to ruling urban left movements and parties of earlier periods?

Empirically, we focus on the long-term evolution of the urban left in four major Swiss cities—Basel, Geneva, Lausanne and Zurich—from 1910 to 2020. The governance of Swiss cities is particularly interesting for four reasons. First, as a bottom-up political construction, the Swiss political system grants substantial autonomy to subnational levels of government. From a cross-country comparative perspective, cantonal and local/urban authorities have always maintained important implementation and decision-making competencies (Ladner *et al*., 2019). Second, Swiss national politics is and has always been dominated by right-wing parties, with the political left remaining in a minority position. At the local level, however, the political geography of Switzerland has been subject to important transformations, particularly in urban areas. For example, far-right populist agendas have gained momentum in many suburban municipalities (Sellers *et al*., 2013; Audikana and Kaufmann, 2022). More importantly, however, the governments of the country's major cities have undergone substantive power shifts from the right to the left in recent decades—a development that mirrors the ascent to power of left parties in Swiss cities in the 1930s and 1940s. Thus the success of left parties in Swiss cities is not a result of their being in power at the national level, and the comparatively high autonomy of these cities in policymaking makes the Swiss case suitable for an in-depth study of the profile of the *urban* left. Third, the four cities we focus on vary with respect to their relationship with higher-tier governments at the cantonal level. In Basel, the city is also the cantonal government, and in Geneva, the city clearly dominates the canton in terms of population and political leverage. By contrast, the city governments of Lausanne and Zurich face opposition and constraints to their policies from the cantonal level, and relations with higher levels are thus more conflictual (see Russell, 2019). Finally, Switzerland is a multicultural society, and its major cities belong to two different cultural areas (German-speaking in the case of Basel and Zurich, French-speaking in the case of Geneva and Lausanne). To a certain extent, Switzerland's major cities can be considered a proper microcosm of European cities at large.

We can thus consider the four cities studied here as a most-different case selection (Gerring, 2007): they represent different cultural contexts and have different relations with higher-tier governments, but within a context of high levels of local autonomy and relatively weak left political forces at the national level.

The article is structured as follows. First, we provide a historical overview of the European urban left from the ascent of municipal socialism to the recent wave of new municipalism. This is followed by a description of our data and method. We then discuss the transformations of urban left parties in four major Swiss cities and identify key moments for their affirmation, access to power and integration in local political institutions. Next, we analyze the long-term changes in the sociological profiles of left-progressive political elites in terms of education and professional occupation. In

conclusion, we discuss possible political implications of these changes and recommend further areas of study.

The European urban left in historical perspective: from municipal socialism to new municipalism

Until the end of the nineteenth century, European cities were dominated by local urban oligarchies, but with the rise of the nation state and growing urbanization, these local oligarchies progressively lost their dominance (Le Galès and Therborn, 2010). Their power was challenged by the emergence and institutionalization of the labor movement in trade unions and parties—in a context of growing urbanization and industrialization marked by the concentration of social problems in cities. Since then, many European cities have been strongholds of the labor movement and of social democratic parties, experimenting with various forms of progressive urban policies.

As underscored by Katz and Mair (1995: 10), left parties were the first to explicitly claim to represent the interests of only one segment of society: the working class and the labor movement. Left forces were successful at the local level earlier than at the national level and seized political power in some cities. As a result of industrialization and urbanization during the second half of the nineteenth century, large cities soon became strongholds of the labor movement, and in the United Kingdom (UK) the labor movement gained political majorities in major cities at the end of the nineteenth century. The left in France and Belgium followed an essentially similar trajectory, but urban control by the left happened only later in other European countries (for an overview, see Dogliani, 2002; Leopold and McDonald, 2012; Stromquist, 2023).

However, the heyday of municipal socialism came later, after the second world war, when left-wing political majorities become dominant in several European cities, with 'Red Vienna' (1918–1934) being one of the famous examples (Figure 1 presents an
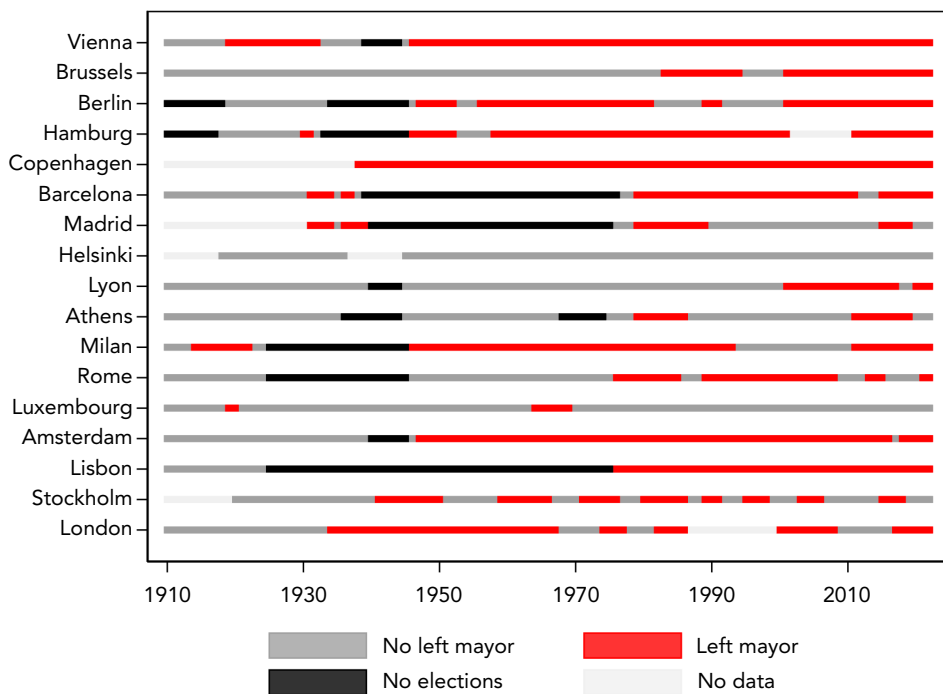
FIGURE 1 The presence of left European mayors in major cities of EU-15 countries, 1910–2020

overview of the presence of left mayors in major cities in EU-15 countries since 1910). The debates about municipal socialism were characterized by severe tensions within the political left over whether being in power at the local level without holding power at the national level was conducive or detrimental to the goal of transforming capitalist societies into socialist ones (for more details on these debates, see Dogliani, 2002: 578). Ultimately, in several European and South American countries, the conflict between radical and moderate socialists—of which the debate on municipal socialism was part—led during the 1920s to the split of the socialist movement into radical left, or communist, parties and social democratic parties. This era of municipal socialism, sometimes called 'gas and water socialism', saw the development of local public services, such as education, hygiene and medical care, gas, electricity and water infrastructures, and targeted public policies to improve the social situation of the working class, such as housing and distribution of food and clothing. The overall objective was to use the local level as a lever to reduce social inequalities in a capitalist society. Moreover, a transnational discussion network around the experiences of municipal socialism also emerged. With its growing electoral success, and the growing number of elected officials in urban councils, the urban political left had become a central political force in managing urban policies.

The post-war growth decades were characterized by a moderation and integration of the left, now cast as social democrats, and more consensual politics at the national and local level (with some notable exceptions, such as the communist administration of 'Red Bologna'; see Jäggi et al., 1977). The 1970s saw a new phase of repoliticization at the local level, with the emergence of a 'new urban left' following the youth contestation of May 1968 and the emergence of new social movements (feminist, ecologist, humanitarian, etc.) in the context of the end of the post-war growth period. As noted by Pinson (2020) on France and Gyford (1985) and Le Galès (1990) on the UK, these changes led to the emergence of new left-wing majorities in many cities during the end of the 1970s and into the 1980s. However, the approach of this new left elite to city governance differed from that of the traditional left parties at the beginning of the twentieth century. While the latter focused on top-down, technocratic problem-solving, the former promoted a more participatory and bottom-up approach to government (Le Galès, 1990: 719–20). This approach is partly rooted in new left ideology, which emphasizes grassroots democracy and decentralization. The new wave of left-wing urban majorities led to the adoption of innovative urban policies stressing citizen participation and quality of life. The new urban left, largely supported by the new, progressive, educated middle class, triggered a new dynamism in the development of cities, which became increasingly appealing and started to attract new inhabitants again during the last decade of the twentieth century, after previous decades of suburbanization and inner-city depopulation (Kübler, 2007). The relative success of left-wing urban policies, combined with more structural changes in the global economy (tertiarization, urbanization) and the weakening of the nation state (Europeanization and decentralization), contributed to the new dynamism and revalorization of European cities (Le Galès, 2002). This also led to some changes in the policy orientation of urban social democratic leaders, away from local socialist experiments toward a more entrepreneurial turn, emphasizing the attractiveness and competitiveness of the city (on the example of Manchester, see Quilley, 2000).

Finally, Thompson (2021) describes the most recent wave of urban contestation with the emergence of a new municipalism—defined as a new global social movement that aims to repoliticize the local level. New municipalism has emerged since the global financial crisis of 2007–2008 in reaction to the impact of neoliberal pressures on urban areas. However, it relies less on institutional politics and the public policies of the local state and more on citizen initiatives promoting participatory and solidaristic projects at the local level (Mayer, 2013). Like municipal socialism, new municipalism partly

relies on transnational exchanges and collaboration between activists, as illustrated by the international Fearless Cities summit held in Barcelona in 2017 (Russell, 2019; Thompson, 2021).

Contrary to the sharp decline of social democratic parties in many European countries since the beginning of the 2000s, cities witness not a decline but a rise of left-progressive forces (see Figure 1). In some cases, they have become the new hegemons in city politics. This is largely because left political parties in cities often comprise a wealth of different progressive forces, from social democratic to radical to new left and Green parties.

This overview of the long-term evolution of the urban left aids in understanding the ups and downs and the strength of left-progressive political forces in European cities. Despite national and intercity differences, this long-term evolution outlines different phases of political contestation and ascent to power in urban contexts, with two high points: the phase of municipal socialism during the interwar period and the ascent to power of the new urban left since the 1970s–1980s, enriched by the recent wave of new municipalism since the financial crisis. As we shall see, each phase is marked by the access of different categories of actors to local positions of power.

Studying urban political elites' profiles: data and method

In the remainder of this article, we describe the transformations of the urban left in Switzerland in more detail by focusing on the profiles of these political actors. Existing research on municipal socialism and new municipalism has been surprisingly silent about the actors in these movements—particularly in relation to their socio-demographic traits and backgrounds. Our actor-centered, sociological approach to these movements advances and complements existing accounts that are focused on describing the movements as such but not necessarily the individuals within them. Analyzing the profiles of urban left elites may lead to a better understanding of their transformative potential. More generally, collective biographies of other groups, such as those involved in urban everyday politics, might shed new light on their actions and how to situate them in urban society more broadly, thus advancing the field of urban studies.

For our analysis of left elites' profiles, we compiled a biographical database of 2,738 members of the executive (government) and legislative (city council) bodies of Basel,[3] Geneva, Lausanne and Zurich (see Table 1). Among them, there are 1,238 left-wing elected representatives, including 914 members of the Social Democratic Party, 200 members of radical left parties[4] and 126 members of the Green Party. We have identified political elites in six different benchmark years—1910, 1937, 1957, 1980, 2000 and 2020. These cohorts allow us to study the transformations that have taken place over more than a century in the largest Swiss cities.

The members of the city councils of the four cities are elected by the eligible voters according to proportional rule, except in Geneva and Zurich in 1910 and in Lausanne in 1910 and 1937, when majority rule was used. The number of seats in city councils differs depending on the city and the year.[5] The government members of the four cities are elected by voters according to majority rule (except for Lausanne between 1910 and 1980). Positions in the legislature are typical 'militia mandates', meaning that

---

3   The political authorities of Basel are simultaneously cantonal and communal authorities. Given that the city and the cantonal territory almost fully coincide (apart from two small municipalities, Riehen and Bettingen), the city of Basel does not have its own political authorities.

4   The following political parties were classified as radical left: Parti communiste suisse, Parti suisse du Travail—Parti Ouvrier Populaire, Parti progressiste, solidaritéS, Progressive Organisationen, Alternative Liste, Frauenliste and Frauen Macht Politik!.

5   In Basel, the legislative body has 130 seats from 1910 to 2000, and 100 seats in 2020. In Geneva, the number of seats is 41 in 1910, 64 in 1937, 79 in 1957 and 80 thereafter. In Lausanne and Zurich, the number of seats is 100 and 125 respectively throughout the period. Due to departures and arrivals during the legislature, the number of people taken into account for each cohort might sometimes differ from the number of seats.

TABLE 1 Datasets of elected representatives in the four cities for six cohorts (1910–2020)

	1910	1937	1957	1980	2000	2020
Basel Government	7 (2)	7 (4)	7 (3)	7 (3)	7 (4)	7 (4)
Basel Council	132 (43)	140 (63)	136 (59)	131 (57)	136 (72)	100 (48)
Geneva Government	5 (0)	5 (2)	5 (1)	5 (2)	5 (4)	5 (4)
Geneva Council	41 (1)	66 (29)	79 (26)	80 (33)	80 (44)	80 (44)
Lausanne Government	5 (0)	5 (3)	7 (2)	7 (4)	7 (4)	7 (6)
Lausanne Council	100 (16)	100 (55)	100 (48)	100 (52)	100 (61)	100 (61)
Zurich Government	9 (4)	9 (5)	9 (4)	9 (4)	9 (5)	9 (6)
Zurich Council	125 (48)	127 (65)	134 (48)	137 (56)	125 (60)	125 (69)
Total	*424*	*459*	*477*	*476*	*469*	*433*

NOTE: Number of left representatives in parentheses.

they are not professionalized and do not pay a living wage.[6] Thus, local politicians have a main profession besides their political mandate. In contrast, executive positions in the four cities under scrutiny are full-time occupations and have been remunerated accordingly since the end of the nineteenth century (for an overview on political mandates at the three levels of the Swiss federal system, see Pilotti and Mazzoleni, 2019). In this analysis, members of both the executive and legislative bodies are included (for more details on the composition of the database, see Table A1 in the Appendix).

To document the evolution of the profile of left-wing elected representatives of the four cities, we collected data on the educational and professional background of all the city government and council members for the six cohorts.[7] These data were collected from various sources in the municipal archives of the four cities, such as lists of candidates and elected representatives, as well as from local newspaper articles.[8]

In documenting the educational background, we distinguish whether or not an elected representative has obtained a university degree. Following Pierre Bourdieu's distinction between economic and cultural capital, higher education represents a key resource in social class structuring (Savage, 2016) that can yield several advantages when looking for a job or negotiating a salary.

Documenting the professional background of political elites is a classic dimension of the analysis of elected representatives, allowing us to show which occupations are associated with access to a political mandate and which are over-represented among elected politicians. In terms of professional background, we have coded the information according to different schemes. First, we rely on a classification developed specifically for politicians (Gruner, 1970; Best and Cotta, 2000; Pilotti, 2017; Di Capua, 2022) that consists of 6 broad categories and 21 subcategories (see columns 1 and 2 in Table 2). For the members of city governments, the profession corresponds to the main professional activity practiced just before their election. For members of city councils, it is the profession practiced at the time of the election and during their mandate.

---

6   Borrowed from military language, the 'militia mandate', an expression commonly used in Switzerland, is predicated on the notion that citizens assume public mandates without remuneration.
7   Data on education is missing for 6.5% (178) and on profession for 1.6% (45) of elected representatives.
8   Part of the data is available online on the Database of Swiss Elites created by the Swiss Elite Observatory at the University of Lausanne (https://www2.unil.ch/elitessuisses/).

TABLE 2 Two classifications of politicians' occupations

1 Best and Cotta (2000), Gruner (1970), Pilotti (2017), Di Capua (2022)		2 Oesch (2006)
6 categories	21 Subcategories	Class scheme
Liberal professions	Lawyer/Notary	Large employer/self-employed professional
	Other Liberal Professions (for example architect, engineer, physician)	Large employer/self-employed professional
Entrepreneur	Medium Sized Business Owner	Large employer/self-employed professional
	Farmer	Small business owner
	Small Merchant	Small business owner
Professional politicians and interest group officials	Party Official (paid officials of local parties and political journalists)	Manager (except for political journalists coded as Socio-cultural professional)
	Trade Unionist	Manager
	Public Interest Group Official	Manager
	Business Association Official	Manager
Public employee	Public Manager (for example head of department in the administration, pastor)	Manager
	Public Employee University	Socio-cultural professional
	Public School Teacher (primary, secondary)	Socio-cultural professional
	Public Health and Social Care Employee	Socio-cultural professional
	Public Non-Manual Employee	Office clerks/service workers
	Public Manual Employee	Production worker
Private employee	Private Manager	Manager
	Private Non-Manual Employee	Office clerks/service workers
	Private Manual Employee	Production worker
Not professionally active	Retired	Not professionally active
	Student	
	Housekeeper	

A limit of this classification is that it is tailored to politicians and is less well suited to characterize the more general social class affiliation of individuals according to their profession. To provide a comprehensive understanding of urban left elites' social class, we thus situate elected representatives in the general class structure based on their profession. Important class schemes are those developed by John Goldthorpe and his collaborators, who notably distinguish between employers and employees, and separate the latter according to their degree of skills and autonomy (Savage, 2016). Useful also is the work of Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich (2013), who describe a 'professional-managerial class' made up of people who have university education and practice professions such as scientist, journalist, teacher, or lower- or middle-class manager—that is, those in employee relationships without belonging to the working class. Based on this diversification of middle-class professions, Oesch (2006: 66–9) has developed a new and widely recognized class scheme that distinguishes professions based on the required skill set and the work logic, which takes into account the fundamental socio-economic changes that have occurred since the 1970s—such as the growth of the service sector, the expansion of the welfare state and the increase of women in the labor market. We have also coded the information according to eight categories highlighted by Oesch (2006); see column 3 in Table 2. The use of Oesch's class scheme allows us to complete our classification and to provide a clearer positioning of urban political elites in the general class structure.

The evolution of the left in Basel, Geneva, Lausanne and Zurich

At the national level, the Swiss Social Democratic party was officially founded in 1888, but local organizations of social democrats were already in existence. At the end of the nineteenth century, the labor movement was weakly organized and divided into different, often competing, local organizations, either trade unions or political parties. Swiss industrialization unfolded in a decentralized manner with different regional specializations, and it was not exclusively concentrated in cities. Yet, it was also a time of
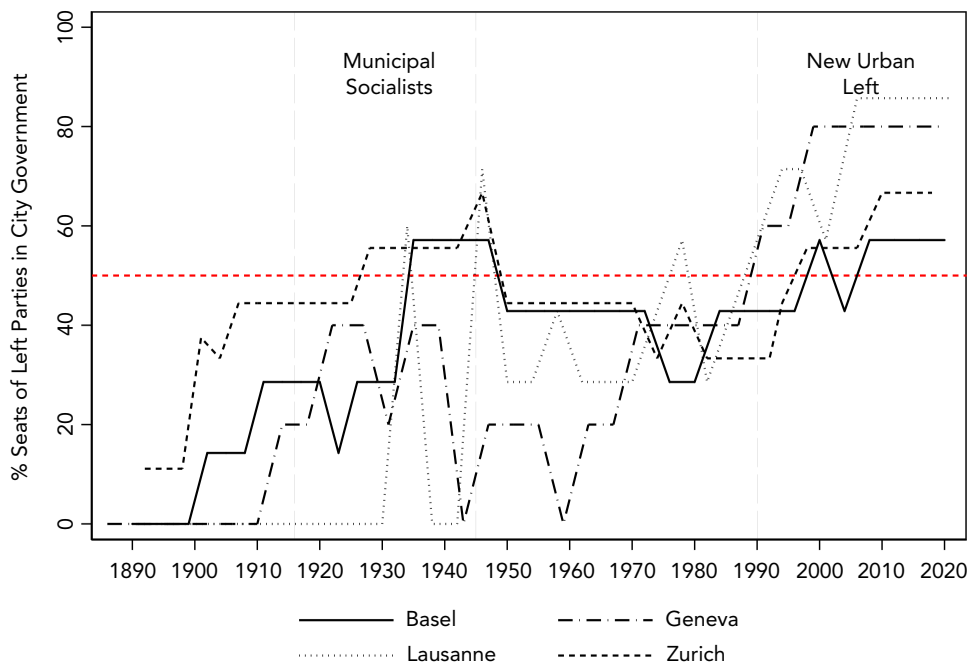
FIGURE 2 Strength of left-progressive parties in the governments of the four cities, 1890–2020

working-class mobilization: numerous strikes—expressions of working-class grievances in a context of rapid urbanization and industrialization—were organized in Swiss cities (Jost, 1990; Walter, 1994: 242ff.). Before that, Swiss cities were largely dominated and governed by local oligarchies controlling the most important local companies and dominating the composition of city councils. The leaders of the first labor movement organizations were excluded from these inner circles of power in the cities (Strebel *et al.*, 2021). During this period, social democrats in city councils remained exceptional.

The situation gradually changed and the Social Democratic Party started to gain seats in local, cantonal and national representative institutions (see Figure 2, as well as Figures A1–A3 in the Appendix for an overview of left strength in the four cities). Gaining political influence in cities was considered important by left actors. An illustration of this is that, since 1907, the Swiss Social Democratic Party has organized a regular 'Kommunaltag' (municipal day) devoted to debating the experiences of municipal socialism.

It was mainly after the first world war that real progress in municipal socialism was made, with Social Democrats gaining political majorities in many cities. Already in 1907, the country's first Social Democratic mayor was elected in the small industrial city of Bienne, and left majorities were achieved in the watch-making town La Chaux-de-Fonds in 1912. The left obtained a political majority in the city council of Zurich in 1919 and in the executive in 1928, leading to the 'Red Zurich' during the 1930s. This was also the case in Basel and in other important Swiss cities, such as Lausanne (1934–37) and Schaffhausen, as well as in the canton (but not in the city) of Geneva between 1933 and 1936. For the first time, Social Democrats governed cities with a clear majority or as a dominant partner in coalition with right-wing parties. In contrast to other European countries (see Benedetto *et al.*, 2020), Social Democrats never gained a majority at the national level, remaining a strong minority with 30% of the vote between 1920 and 1940.

After the second world war, and despite an electoral peak of the radical left parties in the immediate post-war years, the domination of left-wing parties in major Swiss cities came to an end and right-wing parties regained their majorities. However, the left remained an important political actor, often governing in coalitions with right-wing political parties but in a minority position. In a context of economic growth and more consensual politics, the Social Democratic Party was integrated at all levels in Swiss political institutions. At the national level, the party has held two out of seven seats in the national coalition government from 1959 onwards, and at the cantonal and local level, they were equally involved in governments as junior coalition partners.

As in other European countries, the 1970s were marked by the emergence of new social movements and a new left in the aftermath of the 1968 youth movement. These movements materialized in the form of new political parties—particularly in major Swiss cities—with the creation of the Green Party and new radical left parties. The new left contributed to the diversification of the Swiss political left, which was historically dominated by the Social Democratic Party and marked by tensions with the Communist Party.

However, in contrast to France and the UK, this new urban left could not gain majorities in major cities during the 1970s and 1980s. It was only at the beginning of the 1990s that the balance of power started to change profoundly in all major Swiss cities, with the emergence of new center-left majorities generally composed of coalitions between the Social Democrats, the Greens and the radical left (see Figures A2 and A3 in the Appendix). Beginning with Lausanne in 1989,[9] all the other major Swiss cities underwent a similar transformation (Basel, Bern, Geneva, Winterthur and Zurich) that was uninterrupted until 2020. Left-wing parties have now become the dominant political force in all major Swiss cities. Contrary to other European countries, the Swiss Social Democratic Party has not followed the social liberal turn promoted by Tony Blair in the

---

9   As can be seen in Figure 2, the left-wing parties already obtained a majority in 1978 in Lausanne. However, at this time, the Greens were allied with the right-wing parties.
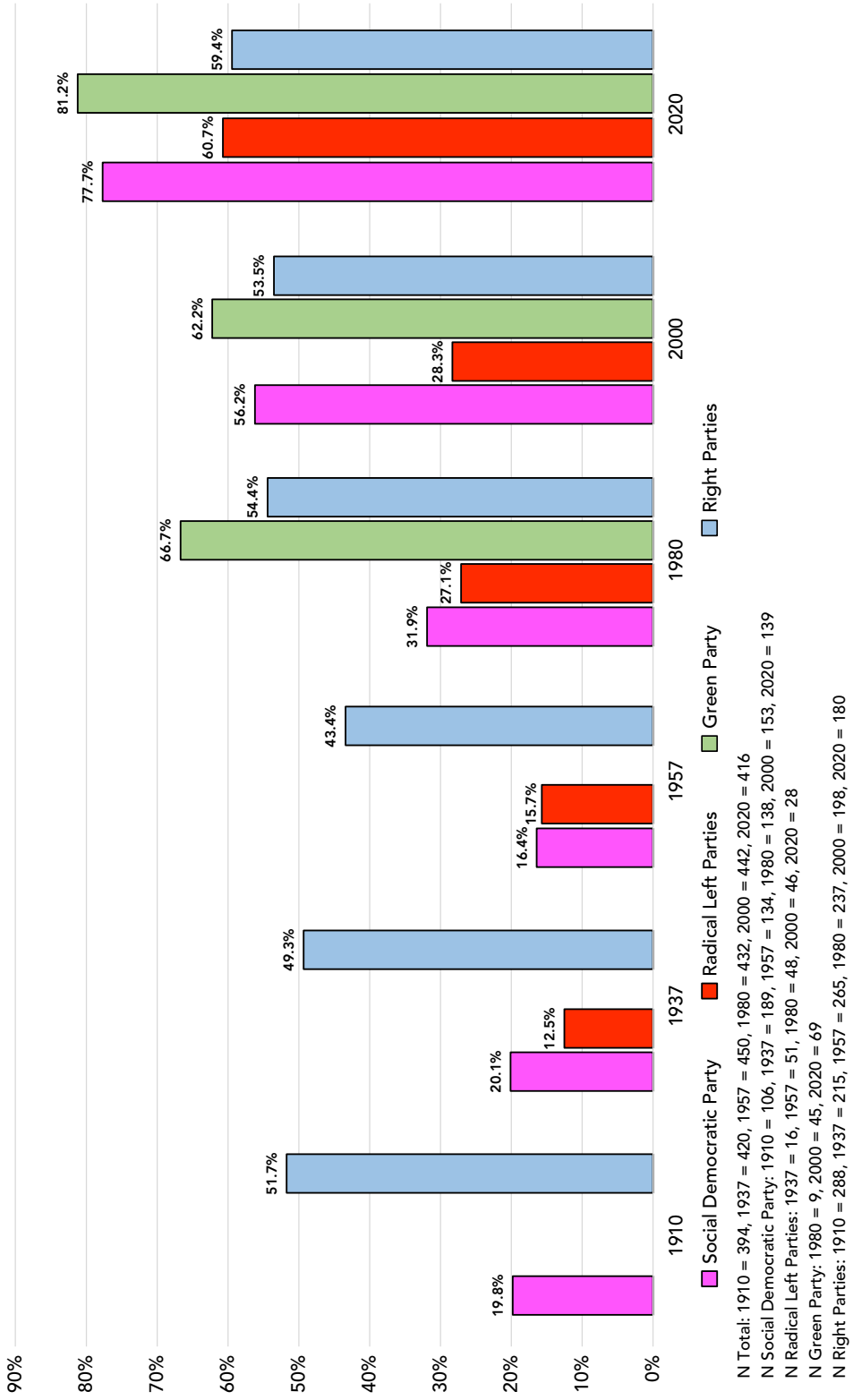
FIGURE 3   Share of left- and right-wing elected representatives with a university degree in the four cities, 1910–2020 (%)

N Total: 1910 = 394, 1937 = 420, 1957 = 450, 1980 = 432, 2000 = 442, 2020 = 416
N Social Democratic Party: 1910 = 106, 1937 = 189, 1957 = 134, 1980 = 138, 2000 = 153, 2020 = 139
N Radical Left Parties: 1937 = 16, 1957 = 51, 1980 = 48, 2000 = 46, 2020 = 28
N Green Party: 1980 = 9, 2000 = 45, 2020 = 69
N Right Parties: 1910 = 288, 1937 = 215, 1957 = 265, 1980 = 237, 2000 = 198, 2020 = 180

■ Social Democratic Party   ■ Radical Left Parties   ■ Green Party   ■ Right Parties

UK and Gerhard Schröder in Germany, and it could maintain its positions at the national level and in urban regions—despite some small electoral losses, mainly to the Green Party. Center-left urban coalitions between Social Democrats, Greens and radical left movements enjoy large electoral majorities.

The evolution of urban left-wing politicians' socio-demographic profile

In this section, we shed light on urban left elites' socio-demographic profile, how it has evolved, and how it differs from that of right-wing politicians in two dimensions: educational background and main profession.

–   The growth of university education among the urban left

Education represents an important resource for obtaining a political mandate. Historically, politicians emerging from the labor movement with a working-class background could generally not rely on these circumstances to favor their political career, with the exception of a few leaders of workers' organizations. As shown in Figure 3, this clearly changes during the twentieth century, with a growing proportion of the population obtaining university education (Gaxie and Godmer, 2007). How are these general trends linked to the educational composition of urban left-wing politicians?

Until 1980, the proportion of right-wing politicians with a university degree is clearly greater than that of left-wing politicians. This situation is reversed in 2000 and 2020, when the number of left-wing elected representatives with a university degree clearly exceeds that of their right-wing counterparts.

In general, there has been a clear increase in the share of left-wing elected representatives with a university degree, which parallels changes among the general population of the four cities, where the proportion of those with university education among the working population has increased sharply since the 1970s (see Figure A4 in the Appendix). In the case of members of radical left parties, this evolution has seen two leaps (shown in Figure 3): one between 1957 and 1980, and a second, larger increase between 2000 and 2020, which is also the year in which most elected representatives have a university degree. For members of the Social Democratic Party, there is a nonlinear evolution in the first half of the century. Indeed, the proportion of Social Democrats with university education at the beginning of the century and during the interwar period is greater than their proportion in 1957. An explanation could be found in what Gaxie and Godmer (2007: 116) have called a process of 'proletarianization' of left-wing party elites in Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. According to them, theorists within the social democratic parties and the communist parties felt that the working class should represent itself and that parliaments saw an over-representation of the bourgeois intellectual class even within left-wing parties. The aim was therefore to recruit candidates from the working class within the left-wing parties. In the second half of the twentieth century and until 2020, there is a steady increase in the number of university graduates among left-wing parties. For members of the Social Democratic Party, since 1980, the proportion of university graduates increases by at least 20% at each date: from 31.9% in 1980 to 56.2% in 2000 and 77.7% in 2020. It can therefore be said that most of the representatives of the new urban left have a university education.[10] This is in line with the trend observed for the Social Democratic national MPs, who had the highest proportion of university graduates in 2000, whereas until 1980 they had the lowest proportion (Mazzoleni *et al.*, 2010: 343–44). In the case of radical left parties' representatives, the increase occurs later, between 2000 and 2020, when the percentage of university graduates increases from 28.3% to 60.7%. In 2020, the Greens have the

---

10   It should be noted that there is a marked difference in the level of university education between city council members and government members throughout the entire period. The level of education of the latter is much higher.
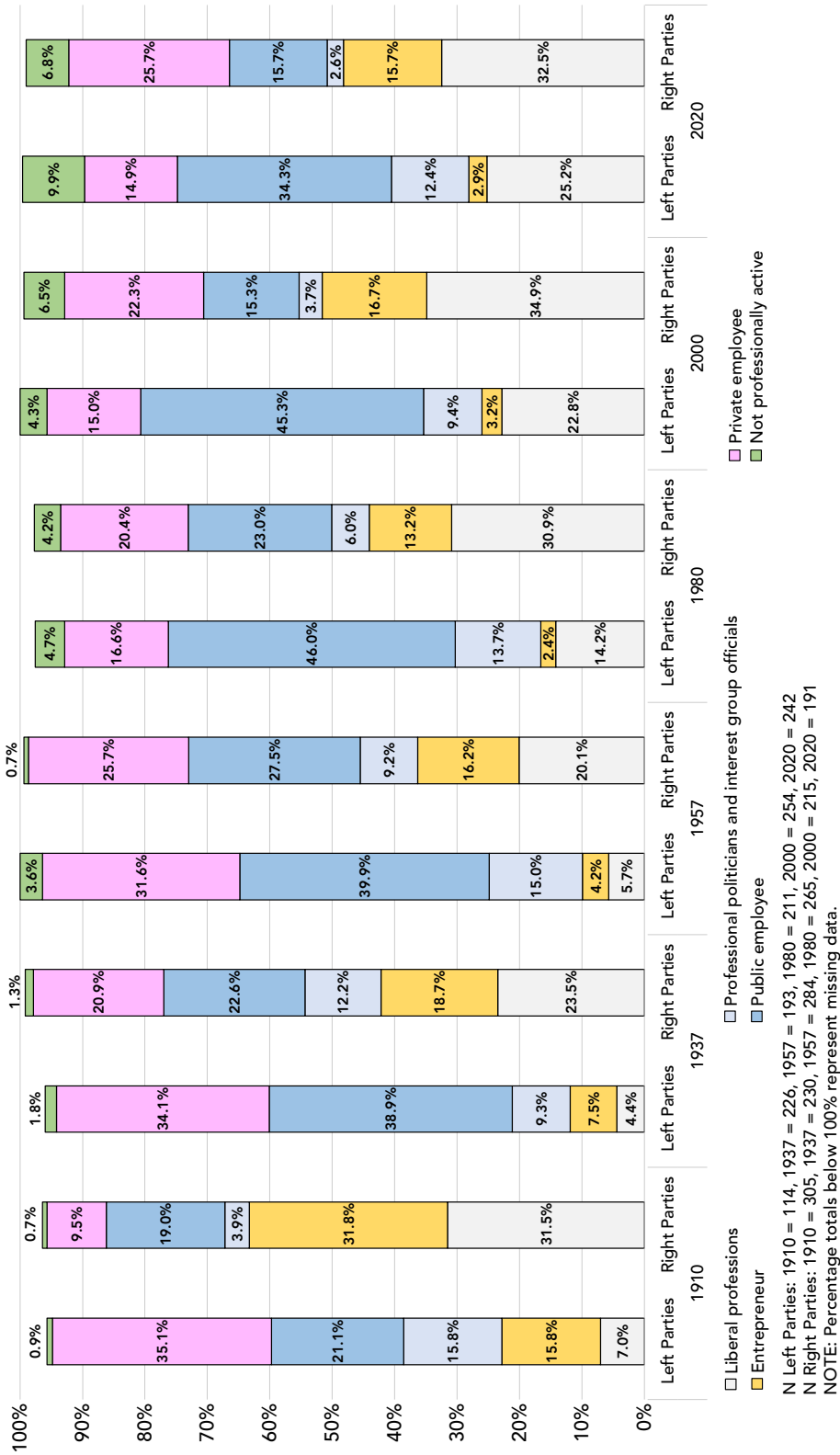
FIGURE 4 Professional categories among left- and right-wing elected representatives in the four cities, 1910–2020 (%)

N Left Parties: 1910 = 114, 1937 = 226, 1957 = 193, 1980 = 211, 2000 = 254, 2020 = 242
N Right Parties: 1910 = 305, 1937 = 230, 1957 = 284, 1980 = 265, 2000 = 215, 2020 = 191
NOTE: Percentage totals below 100% represent missing data.

highest proportion of university graduates among their representatives. This can be explained by the fact that unlike the Social Democratic Party, the Green Party is a product of the new social movements of the 1970s and does not have a working-class origin. Indeed, environmental political groups opposing the construction of highways or nuclear power plants appear in Switzerland in the early 1970s. These groups united at the national level as the Green Party in the 1980s (see Baer and Seitz, 2009).
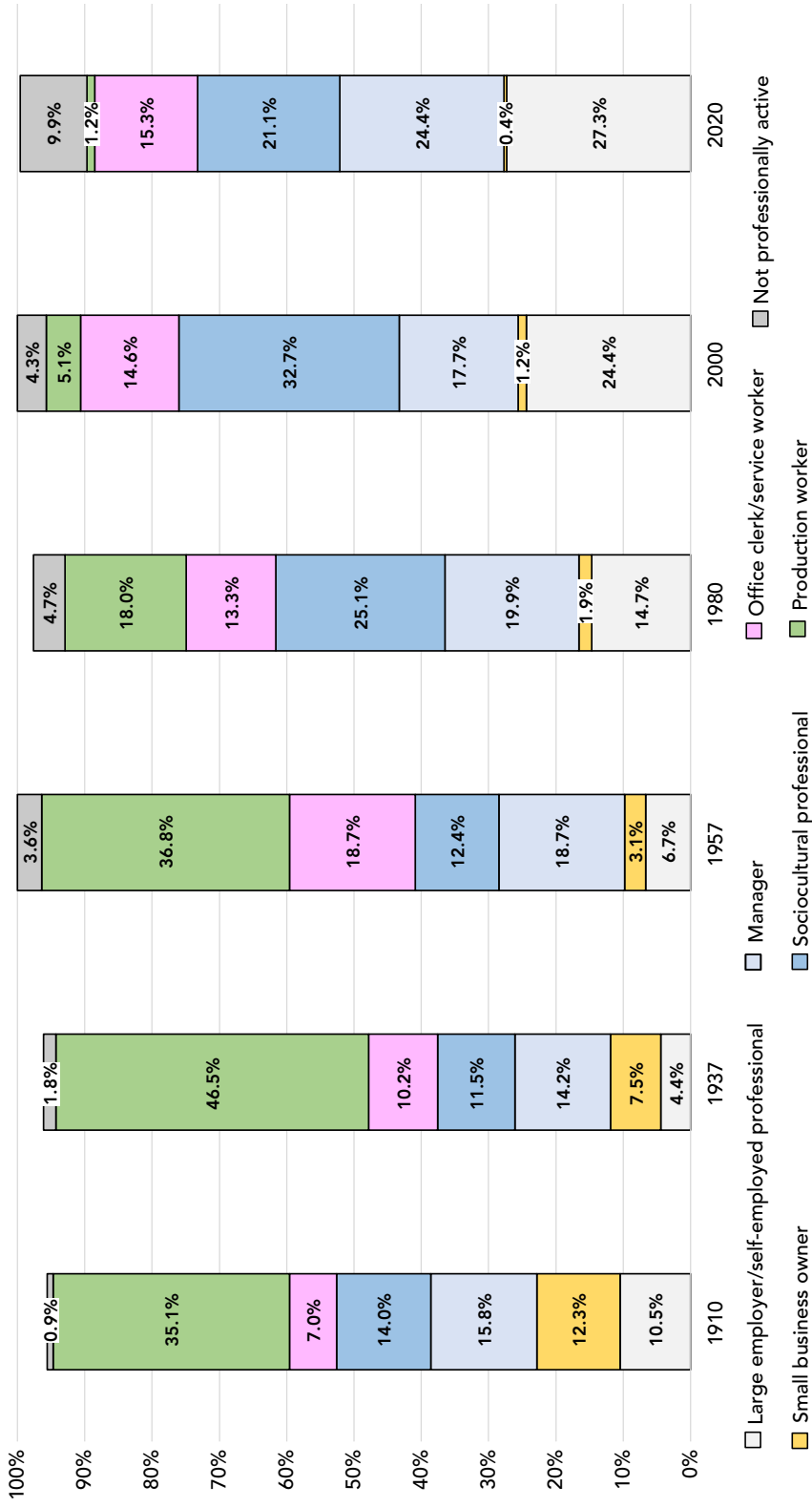
If we compare the four cities, the trends with respect to university graduates are very similar, with a few minor differences (see Figure A5 in the Appendix). In the German-speaking cities of Basel and Zurich, a first big leap takes place between 1957 and 1980, while the increase of left-wing elected representatives with university degrees happens later (1980–2000) in the French-speaking cities of Geneva and Lausanne. However, in 2020, the situation is reversed: Geneva and Lausanne have a slightly higher proportion of left-wing elected representatives with a university degree than Basel and Zurich.

We can therefore clearly see a change in the profile of urban left-wing politicians over the long term, and that today a very high proportion of left-wing representatives hold a university degree (as shown in Figure 3). There is an increase in the cultural capital of left-wing elected representatives measured by the growth in university degrees. Whereas the municipal socialists had a higher level of education than the left elected representatives in the post-war period, the most remarkable change occurs later, in 2000, when the proportion of university graduates among the new urban left exceeds that among the elected representatives of the right. The easier access to university studies within the population is therefore reflected in the profile of left-wing elected representatives. However, the proportion of urban left-wing politicians with a university degree is higher than the share of university graduates among the general population of the four cities (see Figure A4 in the Appendix). Moreover, there are notable differences between left-wing parties. In particular, the share of Green Party university graduates, whose origins go back to the new social movements, is higher than among radical left parties' members, whose cultural capital is lower.

–   Professional background of left political elites: a dynamic of 'upgrading'

As identified by Pilotti *et al.* (2020), several trends in the evolution of the professional background of left political elites at the cantonal and national level can also be observed in the four cities (see Figure 4). First, except for 1910, public employees are the largest professional category over the whole period, although they decline from 46% in 1980 to 34.3% in 2020. Second, while private employees are the largest professional category in 1910 and still represent 31.6% in 1957, the share of private employees drops significantly from 1980 onwards. These changes also correspond to transformations within the working population of the four cities, where the proportion of production workers has been falling since 1990 (see Figure A6 in the Appendix). This decrease is partly compensated by a rise in the number of elected representatives engaged in a liberal profession: still marginal until 1957, they gradually rise from 14.2% in 1980 to 25.2% in 2020. Third, a stable presence of professional politicians and interest group officials can be observed throughout the period. At 15.8% in 1910, they fall below 10% only twice, in 1937 and 2000, but they are at 15% in 1957 and 13.7% in 1980. Finally, the slight increase in the number of people who are not professionally active is due to the increasing presence of students among the elected representatives since 2000.

Even if we can identify some trends of 'similarization' with right-wing representatives (see Ilonszki, 2007), such as the growth of liberal professions and the general upgrading of professions among left representatives, some important differences remain. One lies in the number of private and public employees, whose proportions are practically reversed: the former are more numerous among right-wing representatives, while the latter are more highly represented among left-wing politicians. Second, the share of entrepreneurs is always higher among right-wing parties, whereas the share of professional politicians and interest group officials is marginal among right-wing politicians.

FIGURE 5 Left-wing elected representatives classified according to Oesch (2006) class scheme in the four cities, 1910–1920 (%)

Legend:
- Large employer/self-employed professional
- Small business owner
- Manager
- Sociocultural professional
- Office clerk/service worker
- Production worker
- Not professionally active

N: 1910 = 114, 1937 = 226, 1957 = 193, 1980 = 211, 2000 = 254, 2020 = 242
NOTE: Percentage totals below 100% represent missing data

Data by year:

Category	1910	1937	1957	1980	2000	2020
Not professionally active	0.9%	1.8%	3.6%	4.7%	4.3%	9.9%
Production worker	35.1%	46.5%	36.8%	18.0%	5.1%	1.2%
Office clerk/service worker	7.0%	10.2%	18.7%	13.3%	14.6%	15.3%
Sociocultural professional	14.0%	11.5%	12.4%	25.1%	32.7%	21.1%
Manager	15.8%	14.2%	18.7%	19.9%	17.7%	24.4%
Small business owner	12.3%	7.5%	3.1%	1.9%	1.2%	0.4%
Large employer/self-employed professional	10.5%	4.4%	6.7%	14.7%	24.4%	27.3%

Comparing the four cities, we find similar long-term trends in the predominance of public employees, the decline of private employees and the recent growing proportion of liberal professions. Some differences remain in the temporality of these changes (see Figure A7 in the Appendix). Indeed, in Geneva and Zurich in 1957, private employees are more predominant than public employees. In the case of Geneva, this can be explained by the greater presence of members of radical left parties in 1957, which, contrary to the Social Democratic Party, have a higher share of private employees than public employees until 1980.

We can state that during the interwar period the municipal socialists are dominated by public and private employees. From the 1980s onwards, the professional profiles of the emerging new urban left start to move away from this working-class domination, as evidenced by the strong proportion of public sector employees and the growing share of liberal professions.

This near-disappearance of the working class is also visible through the classification developed by Oesch (2006). Indeed, Figure 5 shows that the traditional working class—represented by production workers, who constitute a relative majority of representatives until 1980—is overtaken by sociocultural professionals and becomes marginal from 2000. Although the changes that have occurred within the employment structure since the 1970s may partly explain this decline, it should be noted that office clerks and service workers—i.e. part of the new working class—experience only a slight increase between 1957 and 2000. In fact, we can state that the elected representatives of the new urban left are members of a different social class, largely composed of sociocultural and self-employed professionals as well as managers in the public sector. This group shares characteristics with the professional-managerial class. Unlike in the United States, where the professional-managerial class has been in decline since the 1980s (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich, 2013), it is on the rise within the Swiss new urban left. A similar transformation took place at the same time within the electorate of left-wing parties. Indeed, they lost their working-class support in favor of support from the salaried middle classes (Rennwald, 2020). Yet, the near-disappearance of production workers among urban left elites in 2020 is still striking—given that their share among the general population of the four cities lies at around 10% (see Figure A6 in the Appendix).

– Two central occupational categories among urban left elites

Given their prevalence among left elected politicians and because they belong to the most active members of left political forces, we explore two professional categories in more detail: public employees and professional politicians/interest group officials.

Figure 6 depicts a striking development for a subcategory of public employees: the near-disappearance of public manual employees among left representatives from 2000 onwards, although they represented more than half of urban left elites in 1937 and were at 26.8% in 1980. To some degree, the manual employees are replaced by the health and social care employees, which, after appearing at 1.3% in 1957, reach around 15% in 1980 and 18.2% in 2000, illustrating the progressive change in professional background of urban left elites. As shown by Di Capua (2022), the socio-economic transformations within cities in the second half of the twentieth century decisively contributed to the changing profile of elected representatives. Indeed, while the manual employees were largely attached to the former federal companies and to local public service providers (Swiss Post, Swiss Federal Railways, local public transport companies, etc.), the tertiarization of urban employment during the second half of the twentieth century favored the presence of health and social care employees[11] as well as those working in

---

11   Women are particularly over-represented in this category. In general, women are much more highly represented among left-wing elected representatives than among right-wing parties since the introduction of women's suffrage (in 1971 at the national level, and earlier in our four cantons): 22.3% in 1980 for the left (against 16.6% for the right) and 45.8% in 2020 (against 26.7% for the right).
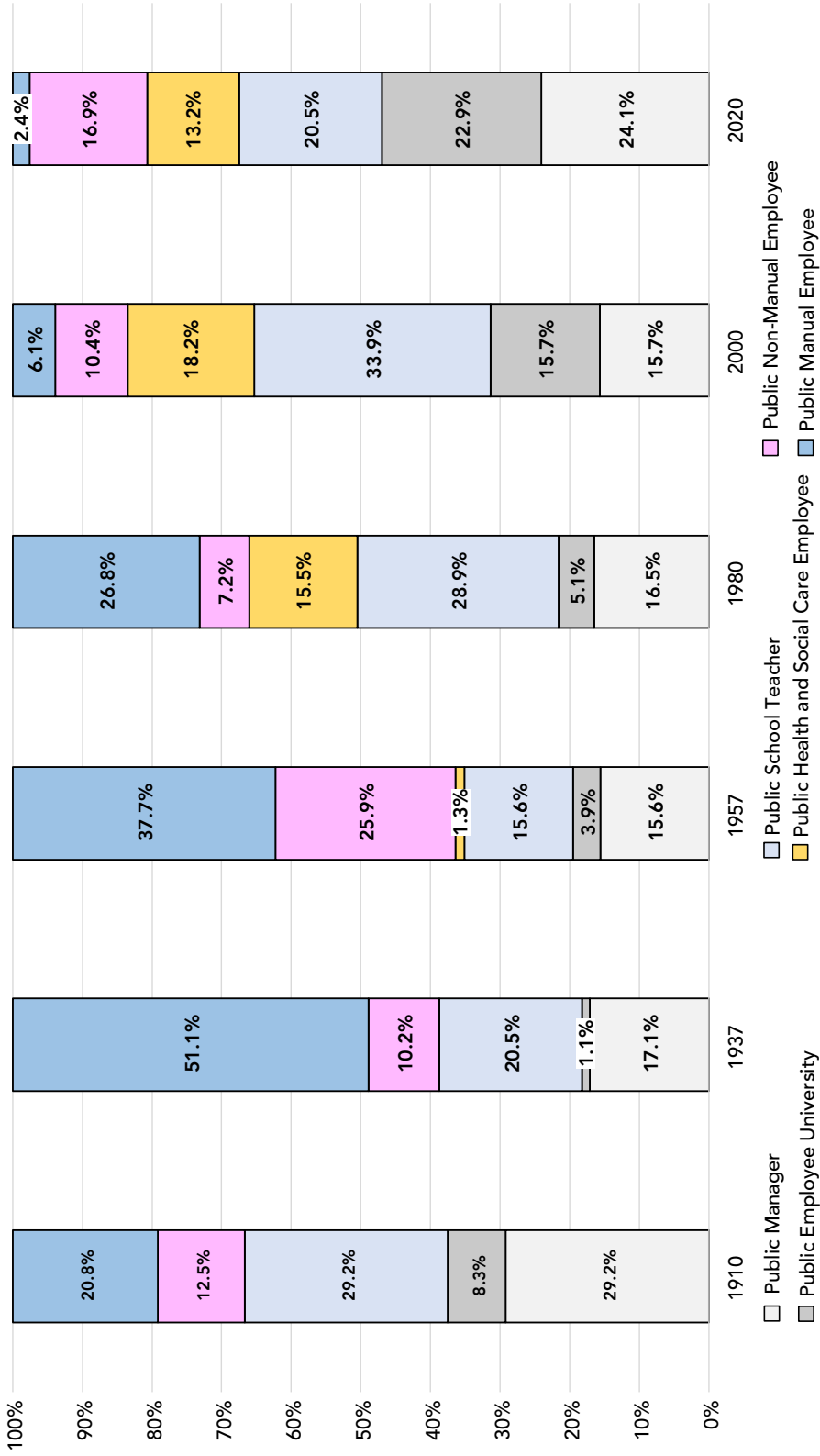
FIGURE 6 Professional subcategories of public employees among left-wing elected representatives in the four cities, 1910–2020 (%)

N : 191 0 = 24 , 1937 = 88, 1957 = 88, 1980 = 97, 2000 = 115, 2020 = 83

universities, a subcategory also experiencing strong growth between 1980 and 2020 (from 5.1% to 22.9%).

Another interesting development is the change in the proportion of public managers, which follows a U-shaped curve. Very present in 1910, when they reach 29.2%, their proportion declined thereafter, reaching its lowest point in 1957. While the presence of public managers stays stable until 2000, they increase to 24.1% in 2020. Whereas in 1910 the majority were local judges, in 2020 the majority are high civil servants of the public administration, either local or cantonal. This can probably be explained by the left-wing takeover of the cities since the 1990s and the subsequent employment of persons with a left-progressive ideology in key positions of the local public administration. Finally, the substantive share of primary and secondary school teachers among left elected politicians is also worth noting. During the twentieth century, teachers are a strong group among social democratic representatives in Europe, as shown by Sawicki (1997: 54–7) for the French case. Even though this is much less the case in Switzerland at the federal level (Pilotti, 2017: 239, 359), the presence of teachers among left representatives is higher at the local level, reaching nearly 34% in 2000 and around 20% of public employees in 2020.

The second professional category we explore in more detail includes professional politicians and interest group officials. They are often central actors among the urban left. Trade unionists and party officials represent more than 60% of this category for the whole period, except for 2020 (Figure 7). From 1957 to 2000, trade unionists are the most important subcategory, reaching 55.2% in 1980. This is not surprising: this high percentage reflects the historically strong connections between the Social Democratic Party and the trade unions (Siegenthaler, 1975; see also Widmer, 2007, for the more recent period).

The second subcategory, party officials, was highly dominant during the first half of the twentieth century but declined substantially after 1957. In the first half of the twentieth century, these officials were mainly political journalists paid by political parties. Indeed, these partisan journalists also often occupied political mandates in local,

N: 1910 = 18, 1937 = 21, 1957 = 29, 1980 = 29, 2000 = 24, 2020 = 30
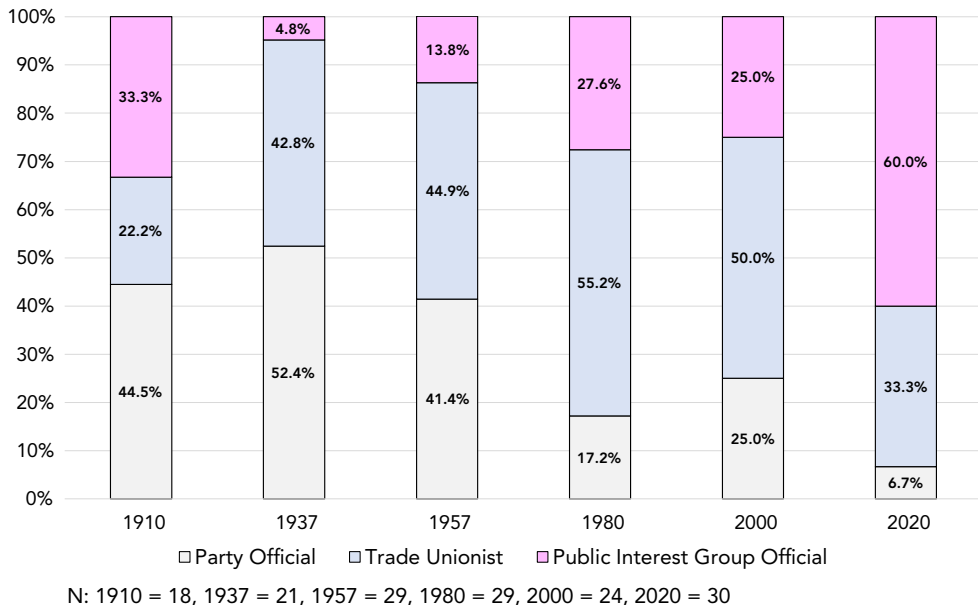
FIGURE 7 Subcategories of professional politicians and interest group officials among left-wing elected representatives in the four cities, 1910–2020 (%)

cantonal or federal parliament. Their decline during the second half of the twentieth century is related to the progressive disappearance of the political press and the rise of the commercial press.

However, in 2020, trade unionists and party officials are strongly outnumbered by public interest group officials. These new political figures of the urban left are active mainly in social, cultural or environmental associations such as the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) or local social organizations and are thus able to relay the demands of urban social movements within formal institutions. Although trade union officials are less numerous than representatives of public interest groups, they still represent one-third of this category in 2020, demonstrating the persistent close connections between the political left and the trade unions.

The changes within these two central professional categories are particularly illustrative of the general social transformations among urban left elites. First, the changing occupations of public employees among urban left politicians—from manual workers to public managers, school teachers, university employees, and social and health professionals—reflect the general social upgrading in terms of education and profession among urban left elites. Second, the evolution of professional politicians and interest group officials shows the partial transition from traditional working-class organizations, such as trade unions, toward new public interest groups. While still maintaining close relations to trade unions, the Swiss urban left has also diversified its connections to new social movements and public interest groups that first emerged during the 1970s and progressively consolidated afterwards (Eichenberger, 2021).

Conclusion

Our actor-centered, sociological and historical study of the urban left in power in four major Swiss cities reveals significant differences between the profiles of municipal socialists and the new urban left. When they first gained political majority during the 1920s and 1930s, left-wing parties often had to fight conflictual electoral campaigns to gain political majorities: they were clearly the newcomers that were challenging the dominance of established political forces. Their representatives were also largely individuals without higher education who occupied subordinate professions and were predominantly members of the working class. By contrast, since the 1990s, when left-wing political parties again took power in the major Swiss cities, they already had important executive experience in each city, even if in minoritarian positions. In addition, and in contrast to their predecessors of the 1930s, current representatives of the new urban left stem from the new urban middle class, with high cultural capital (university degree) and professional activities predominantly in the public sector and in the sociocultural domain. Our findings demonstrate that, over the decades, a clear process of 'social upgrading' of urban left elites has been unfolding in terms of education, as well as in terms of professional occupation and social class—to the point where the percentage of university graduates among urban left elites is higher than among political elites on the right in 2000 and 2020, as well as in comparison to the general population in the four cities. Despite the cities' variation in cultural/linguistic terms and in terms of the relation between city and cantonal governments, the four cities' left elites all underwent this profound change. More generally, this mirrors the developments among the electorate of the European urban left at large—which is increasingly supported by members of the urban upper-middle class, in either the private or the public sector, who are inclined to vote for progressive political forces, such as center-left or Green parties (Andreotti *et al.*, 2015: 49). In sum, all of this suggests that we might observe similar dynamics in other European cities as well.

We conclude this study by discussing the political implications of our results and by highlighting how our sociological and historical approach can inspire future research in urban studies and urban politics. A first key point is to examine whether the changes

in (left) elites' profiles affect the policies they advocate, campaign on and implement once they are in power. Do left political elites with a more middle- or upper-class background campaign more on platforms that appeal to the upper-middle class rather than to lower social strata? For instance, they might emphasize environmental issues, cycling infrastructure or the promotion of cultural institutions more than investments in key local welfare services—even if they continue to provide and improve these services, such as affordable childcare in order to promote the inclusion of women in the workforce. In other words, due to their socio-demographic background, does the new urban left try to appeal to the interests of other social groups beyond those the municipal socialists appealed to and hence represent those that are like them? Based on the debate on descriptive and substantive representation (Pitkin, 1967)—i.e., whether in order to represent someone's interest, elected representatives need to share their socio-demographic background—some might argue that in order to effectively represent the interests of the lower-middle classes, those representing them need to come from lower-middle-class backgrounds. Consider, for instance, the context of an ongoing housing affordability crisis, where many city centers are becoming spaces that are effectively barred to the lower-middle class. It is a highly sensitive issue whether left political actors will defend public and cooperative housing—and enable access to city-center living for the lower-middle class—or whether they will be more lenient towards real estate companies and sell public land and housing to them—as was, for example, the case in Berlin (Beveridge and Koch, 2021: 459).

A second aspect that needs further research is how left-progressive urban elites deal with the double pressures of promoting the attractiveness and competitiveness of their city in a neoliberal context marked by more globalized and financialized markets (Savitch and Kantor, 2002; Pinson and Morel Journel, 2017), while preserving social cohesion and counteracting segregation tendencies in the urban context (Ranci, 2017). In Switzerland, parties of the urban left have until now succeeded rather well in navigating this tension—perhaps because Swiss cities were relatively little affected by the global financial crisis and subsequent austerity politics. Swiss cities remain highly attractive places for international business, while left majorities continue to invest in social policies that benefit lower social strata. Left governing coalitions—composed of the Social Democratic, Green and radical left parties—seem to have been rather successful at integrating the varied interests of different left constituencies. This integration of interests has certainly contributed to the long-lasting electoral success of these left-progressive urban coalitions since the beginning of the 1990s.

Third, our study and approach provide avenues for further research on the rise of new municipalism and left-populist parties in European cities. Unlike other social democratic parties in Europe (Benedetto et al., 2020), the Social Democrats in Switzerland have never abandoned their decisively left program in social and economic policy and have not endorsed social liberal positions. This might be why Swiss cities up to now have not witnessed the rise of new political forces—such as left-populist or new municipalist movements—to the extent observed in other contexts. Moreover, governing coalitions of the urban left integrate different types of left parties—from social democratic to Green parties to more radical left parties—which means that these different left forces have an impact on urban governments' policy programs and agendas. Yet, as our results have shown, the profiles of the political elites of these different parties are increasingly similar and mirror the profile of urban middle-class professionals. Future research can examine the extent to which the profiles of the actors of new municipalist movements resemble those of the more established new urban left, as well as how they cooperate politically or are in conflict, in Switzerland and elsewhere. That these movements might be composed of actors from similar social strata is suggested by Bickerton and Accetti (2018: 141), who state that Podemos—a party closely connected with new municipalist movements in Spain—has been labelled

as the 'partido de profesores' (party of professors), indicative of the socio-demographic background to which its key figures belong.

Fourth, an actor-centered, sociological and historical perspective might further stimulate scholarship on anti-politics and everyday politics in the urban context (see, e.g., Beveridge and Koch, 2019; 2021). In the wake of depoliticizing tendencies that have also affected urban political decision making, alternative forms of collective engagement and contestation have gained the attention of scholars. For instance, the notion of urban everyday politics refers to practices such as the Critical Mass cycle rides, squatting, food-sharing cooperatives and dumpster diving. An interesting avenue for future research is to assess the links between actors involved in formal politics and actors engaging in urban everyday politics. Does the latter serve as an entry point for some individuals' transition to more formal politics? While urban everyday politics is characterized by a 'direct intervention in the urban here and now' (Beveridge and Koch 2019: 143) and differs from direct involvement in institutional politics, several individuals initially engaged in everyday urban politics have later become elected officials of left parties in our four cities. Such a perspective linking actors involved in alternative forms of political engagement and formal politics is even more relevant when left political parties have been born out of urban social movements, as was the case for the Montreal Citizens Movement or for Barcelona en Comú (Lustiger-Thaler and Shragge, 1998). Do the profiles of 'leading' figures change once collective efforts to transform urban politics become more formalized and take on the form of political parties?

Finally, our article's focus on the evolution of the urban left and their socio-demographic profiles can be squared with the recent surge of far-right and right-wing populist parties and movements in urban areas (Audikana and Kaufmann, 2022). While the political geographies of left- and right-wing dominance rather clearly delineate city centers from surrounding areas in Switzerland, this is not necessarily the case in other urban areas (Weinstein, 2019). In Brazilian, Indian and Philippine cities, right-wing populist movements have gained traction. While such far-right forces are electorally still marginal in most major European cities, they nevertheless leave their imprint on urban spaces (Shoshan, 2019). Thus, to better understand the transformations of urban political elites, it is important to focus not only on the left but also on the (far) right. Is the (diminishing) traditional working class currently more represented among the urban right than among the left? Our results suggest that this might be the case: right parties have both a lower percentage of university graduates and a (slightly) higher percentage of workers among their ranks. This in turn is likely linked to the broader developments in post-industrial societies' spaces of party competition that are characterized by a realignment of voter groups and the rise of new political conflicts which revolve less around economic and more around societal and cultural issues (Oesch, 2006; Kriesi et al., 2008). Combined with spatial segregation tendencies that increasingly reshape European urban areas, these political conflicts between liberal and right-wing nationalist-conservative forces are increasingly enshrined in the political geographies of metropolitan areas (Sellers et al., 2013).

Baptiste Antoniazza, Institute of Political Studies, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Lausanne, Géopolis, CH-1015 Lausanne, Switzerland, baptiste.antoniazza@unil.ch

André Mach, Institute of Political Studies, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Lausanne, Géopolis, CH-1015 Lausanne, Switzerland, andre.mach@unil.ch

Michael Andrea Strebel, Institute of Political Studies, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Lausanne, Géopolis, CH-1015 Lausanne, Switzerland, michael.strebel@unil.ch

References

Andreotti, A., P. Le Galès and F.J. Moreno-Fuentes (2015) *Globalised minds, roots in the city: urban upper-middle classes in Europe*. John Wiley & Sons, Chichester.

Audikana, A. and V. Kaufmann (2022) Towards green populism? Right-wing populism and metropolization in Switzerland. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 46.1, 136–56.

Baer, M. and W. Seitz (eds.) (2009) *Les Verts en Suisse. Leur politique. Leur histoire. Leur base* [The Greens in Switzerland. Their policy. Their story. Their basis]. Rüegger, Zurich.

Benedetto, G., S. Hix and N. Mastrorocco (2020) The rise and fall of social democracy, 1918–2017. *American Political Science Review* 114.3, 928–39.

Best, H. and M. Cotta (eds.) (2000) *Parliamentary representatives in Europe 1848–2000: legislative recruitment and careers in eleven European countries*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Beveridge, R. and P. Koch (2019) Urban everyday politics: politicising practices and the transformation of the here and now. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 37.1, 142–57.

Beveridge, R. and P. Koch (2021) Contesting austerity, de-centring the state: anti-politics and the political horizon of the urban. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 39.3, 451–68.

Bickerton, C.J. and C.I. Accetti (2018) 'Techno-populism' as a new party family: the case of the Five Star Movement and Podemos. *Contemporary Italian Politics* 10, 132–50.

Di Capua, R. (2022) Un système 'de milice' sélectif. Le mythe de la réprésentativité politique au sein des villes suisses (1945–2016) [*A selective 'militia' system. The myth of political representativeness in Swiss cities (1945–2016)*]. Seismo, Zurich and Geneva.

Dogliani, P. (2002) European municipalism in the first half of the twentieth century: the socialist network. *Contemporary European History* 11.4, 573–96.

Ehrenreich, B. and J. Ehrenreich (2013) *Death of a yuppie dream: the rise and fall of the professional-managerial class*. Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, New York, NY.

Eichenberger, S. (2021) The rise of citizen groups within the administration and parliament in Switzerland. *Swiss Political Science Review* 26.2, 206–27.

Federal Statistical Office (2023) Census [WWW document]. URL https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home/basics/census.html (accessed 26 June 2023).

Gaxie, D. and L. Godmer (2007) Cultural capital and political selection: educational backgrounds of parliamentarians. In M. Cotta and H. Best (eds.), *Democratic representation in Europe: diversity, change, and convergence*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Gerring, J. (2007) *Case study research: principles and practices*. Cambridge University Press, New York, NY.

Gruner, E. (1970) *Die schweizerische Bundesversammlung 1920–1968 / L'assemblée fédérale suisse 1920–1968* [The Swiss Federal Assembly 1920–1968]. Francke, Bern.

Gyford, J. (1985) *The politics of local socialism*. George Allen & Unwin, London.

Ilonszki, G. (2007) Socialist and communist members of parliament: distinctiveness, convergence, and variance. In M. Cotta and H. Best (eds.), *Democratic representation in Europe: diversity, change, and convergence*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Jäggi, M., R. Müller and S. Schmid (1977) *Red Bologna*. Writers and Readers, London.

Jost, H.U. (1990) Switzerland. In M. van der Linden and J. Rojahn (eds.), *The formation of labour movements 1870–1914: an international perspective*, vol. I, E.J. Brill, Leiden.

Katz, R.S. and P. Mair (1995) Changing models of party organization and party democracy: the emergence of the cartel party. *Party Politics* 1.1, 5–28.

Kriesi, H., E. Grande, R. Lachat, M. Dolezal, S. Bornschier and T. Frey (2008) *West European politics in the age of globalization*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Kübler, D. (2007) Agglomerations. In H. Kriesi, P. Knoepfel, W. Linder, Y. Papadopoulos and P. Sciarini (eds.), *Handbook of Swiss politics*, Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Zurich.

Ladner, A., H. Baldersheim, P. Swianiewicz, N.K. Hlepas, N. Keuffer, K. Steyvers and C. Navarro (2019) *Patterns of local autonomy in Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

Le Galès, P. (1990) Crise urbaine et développement économique local en Grande-Bretagne : l'apport de la nouvelle gauche urbaine [Urban crisis and local economic development in Great Britain: the contribution of the new urban left]. *Revue française de science politique* 40.5, 714–35.

Le Galès, P. (2002) *European cities: social conflicts and governance*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Le Galès, P. and G. Therborn (2010) Cities. In S. Immerfall and G. Therborn (eds.), *Handbook of European societies*, Springer, London.

Leopold, E. and D.A. McDonald (2012) Municipal socialism then and now: some lessons for the global South. *Third World Quarterly* 33.10, 1837–53.

Lustiger-Thaler, H. and E. Shragge (1998) The new urban left: parties without actors. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 22.2, 233–44.

Mayer, M. (2013) First world urban activism: beyond austerity urbanism and creative city politics. *City* 13.1, 5–19.

Mazzoleni, O., A. Mach and A. Pilotti (2010) Entre professionnalisation et proximité. L'évolution du profil des candidats et des élus socialistes depuis les années 1950 [Between professionalization and proximity. The evolution of profiles of socialist candidates and elected representatives since the 1950s]. In S. Nicolet and P. Sciarini (eds.), *Le destin électoral de la gauche. Le vote socialiste et vert en Suisse* [The electoral destiny of the left. The socialist and green vote in Switzerland], Georg, Chêne-Bourg.

Oesch, D. (2006) *Redrawing the class map: stratification and institutions in Britain, Germany*, Sweden and Switzerland. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.

Pilotti, A. (2017) *Entre démocratisation et professionnalisation : le Parlement suisse et ses membres de 1910 à 2016* [Between democratization and professionalization: the Swiss parliament and its members from 1910 to 2016]. Seismo, Zurich and Geneva.

Pilotti, A., B. Antoniazza, R. Di Capua and K. Lasseb (2020) From class representativeness to class gap: the social transformation of the left political elites in Switzerland (1910–2016). Paper presented at ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, virtual event, 14–17 April.

Pilotti, A. and O. Mazzoleni (eds.) (2019) *Le système de milice et la professionnalisation politique en Suisse* [The militia system and the political professionalization in Switzerland]. Alphil, Neuchâtel.

Pinson, G. (2020) Quelle gauche urbaine ? *[What urban left?]* L'Économie politique 85.1, 102–12.

Pinson, G. and C. Morel Journel (eds.) (2017) *Debating the neoliberal city*. Routledge, London and New York, NY.

Pitkin, H.F. (1967) *The concept of representation*. University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.

Quilley, S. (2000) Manchester first: from municipal socialism to an entrepreneurial city. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 24.3, 601–15.

Ranci, C. (2017) Neoliberalism and the European city: reshaping the competitiveness/social cohesion nexus. In G. Pinson and C. Morel Journel (eds.), *Debating the neoliberal city*, Routledge, London and New York, NY.

Rennwald, L. (2020) *Social democratic parties and the working class: new voting patterns*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

Russell, B. (2019) Beyond the local trap: new municipalism and the rise of the fearless cities. *Antipode* 51.3, 989–1010.

Savage, M. (2016) End class wars. *Nature* 537.7621, 475–79.

Savitch, H.V. and P. Kantor (2002) *Cities in the international marketplace: the political economy of urban development in North America and Western Europe*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

Sawicki, F. (1997) *Les réseaux du Parti socialiste. Sociologie d'un milieu partisan* [The socialist party networks. Sociology of a partisan environment]. Belin, Paris.

Sellers, J.M., D. Kübler, M. Walter-Rogg and A.R. Walks (2013) *The political ecology of the metropolis*. ECPR, Colchester.

Shoshan, N. (2019) Spatial configurations of right-wing populism in contemporary Germany. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* [WWW document]. URL https://www.ijurr.org/spotlight-on/political-geographies-of-right-wing-populism/spatial-configurations-of-right-wing-populism-in-contemporary-germany/ (accessed 18 November 2022).

Siegenthaler, J.K. (1975) Current problems of trade union-party relations in Switzerland: reorientation versus inertia. *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 28.2, 264–81.

Strebel, M.A., B. Antoniazza and A. Mach (2021) Getting rid of their ties: the long-term evolution of Swiss elite networks and profiles in the three largest Swiss cities, 1890–2020. *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 61, 161–80.

Stromquist, S. (2023) *Claiming the city: a global history of workers' fight for municipal socialism*. Verso Books, New York, NY.

Thompson, M. (2021) What's so new about new municipalism? *Progress in Human Geography* 45.2, 317–42.

Walter, F. (1994) *La Suisse urbaine 1750–1950* [The urban Switzerland 1750–1950]. Éditions Zoé, Geneva.

Weinstein, L. (2019) Political geographies of right-wing populism: introduction. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* [WWW document]. URL https://www.ijurr.org/spotlight-on/political-geographies-of-right-wing-populism/introduction-populism/ (accessed 18 November 2022).

Widmer, F. (2007) Stratégies syndicales et renouvellement des élites : le syndicat FTMH face à la crise des années 1990 [Union strategies and elites' renewal: the FTMH union facing the 1990s' crisis], *Swiss Political Science Review* 13.3, 395–431.
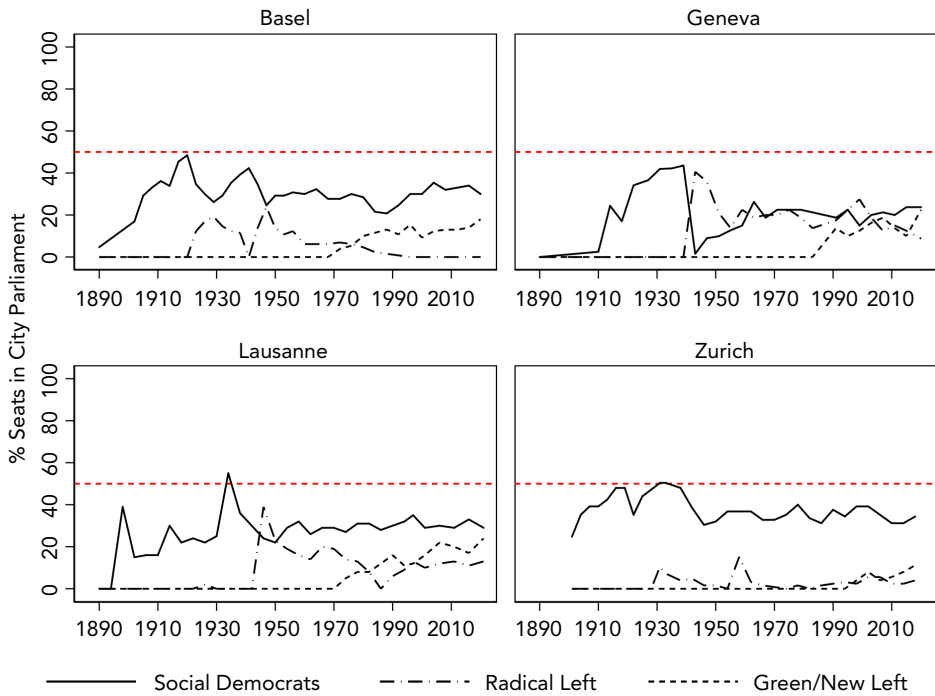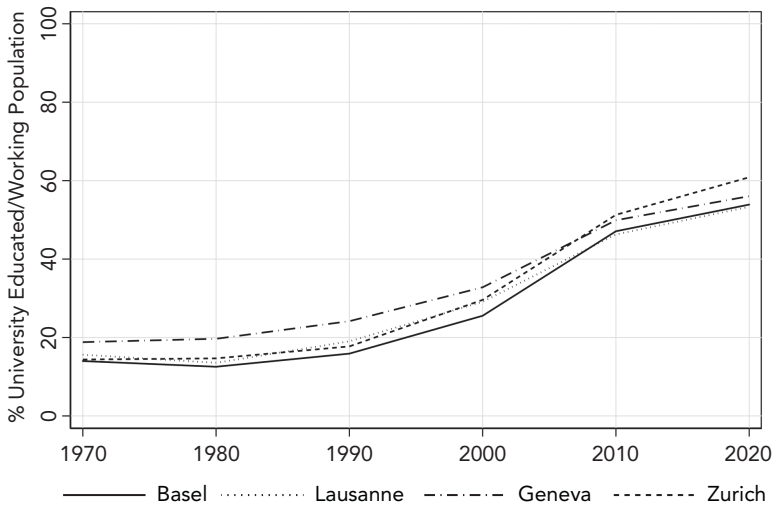
Appendix A
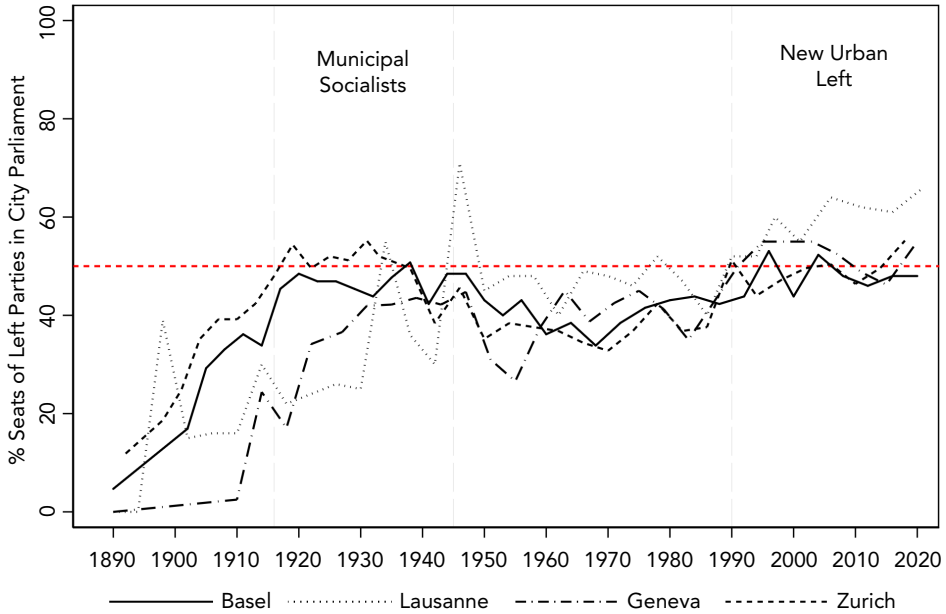
FIGURE A1 Strength of left-progressive parties in the councils of the four cities, 1890–2020
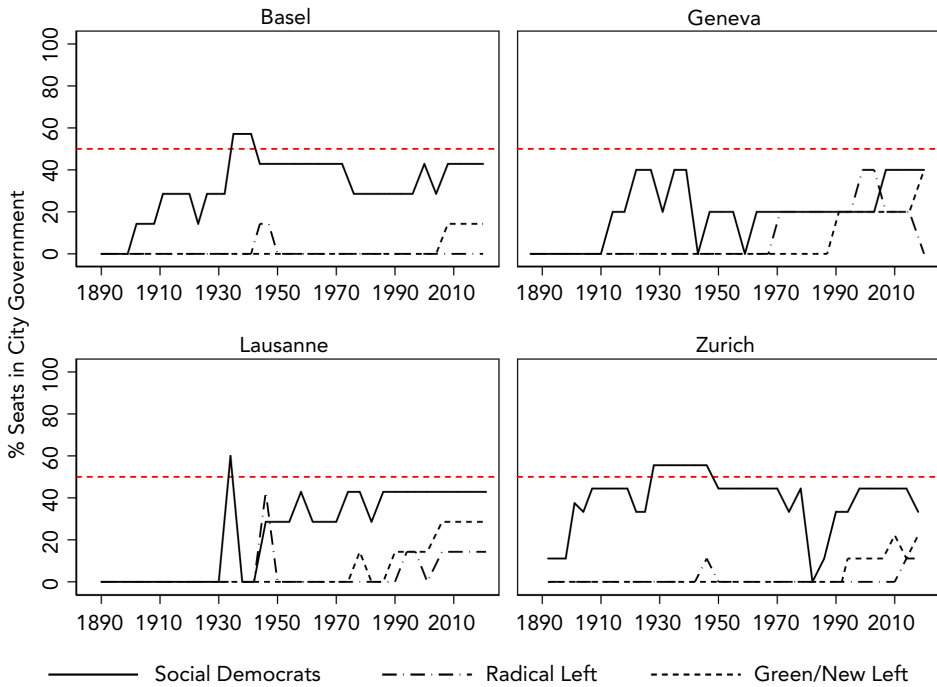
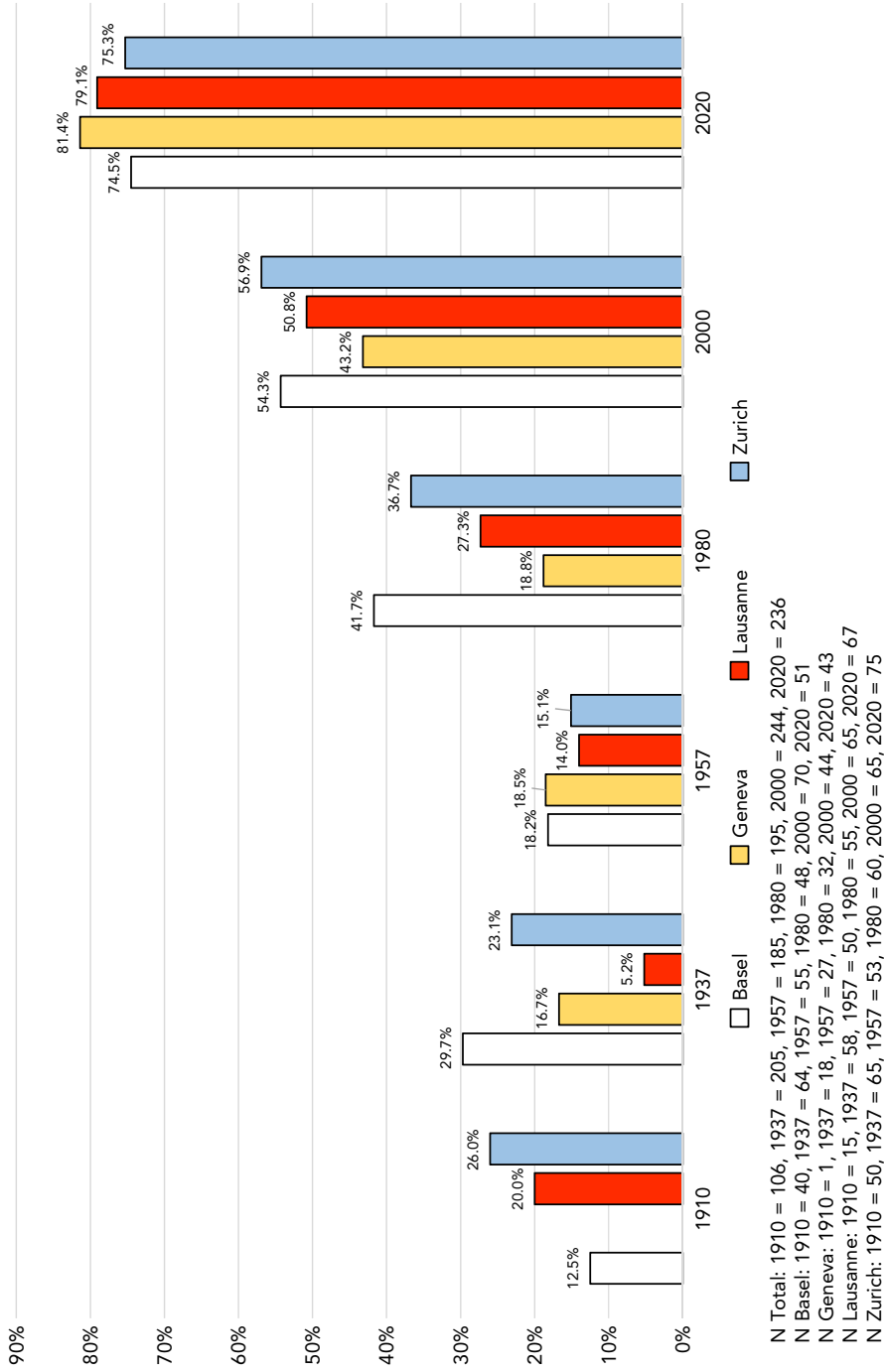**FIGURE A2** Type of left-progressive parties in city governments, 1890–2020

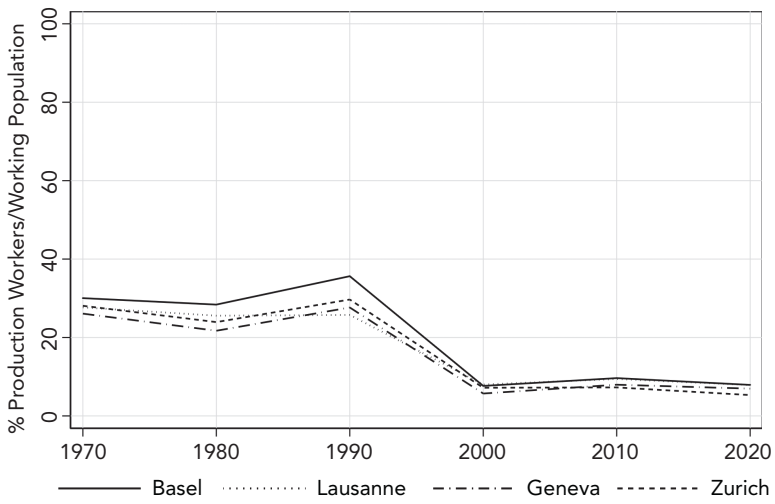**FIGURE A3** Strength of left-progressive parties in city councils, 1890–2020

FIGURE A4 Share of the working population with a university education in Basel, Geneva, Lausanne and Zurich, 1970–2020 (%) (*source*: Federal Statistical Office, 2023)

FIGURE A5 Share of left-wing elected representatives in Basel, Geneva, Lausanne and Zurich with a university degree, 1910–2020 (%)

N Total: 1910 = 106, 1937 = 205, 1957 = 185, 1980 = 195, 2000 = 244, 2020 = 236
N Basel: 1910 = 40, 1937 = 64, 1957 = 55, 1980 = 48, 2000 = 70, 2020 = 51
N Geneva: 1910 = 1, 1937 = 18, 1957 = 27, 1980 = 32, 2000 = 44, 2020 = 43
N Lausanne: 1910 = 15, 1937 = 58, 1957 = 50, 1980 = 55, 2000 = 65, 2020 = 67
N Zurich: 1910 = 50, 1937 = 65, 1957 = 53, 1980 = 60, 2000 = 65, 2020 = 75

FIGURE A6 Share of production workers among the working population in Basel, Geneva, Lausanne and Zurich, 1970–2020 (%) (*source*: Federal Statistical Office, 2023)

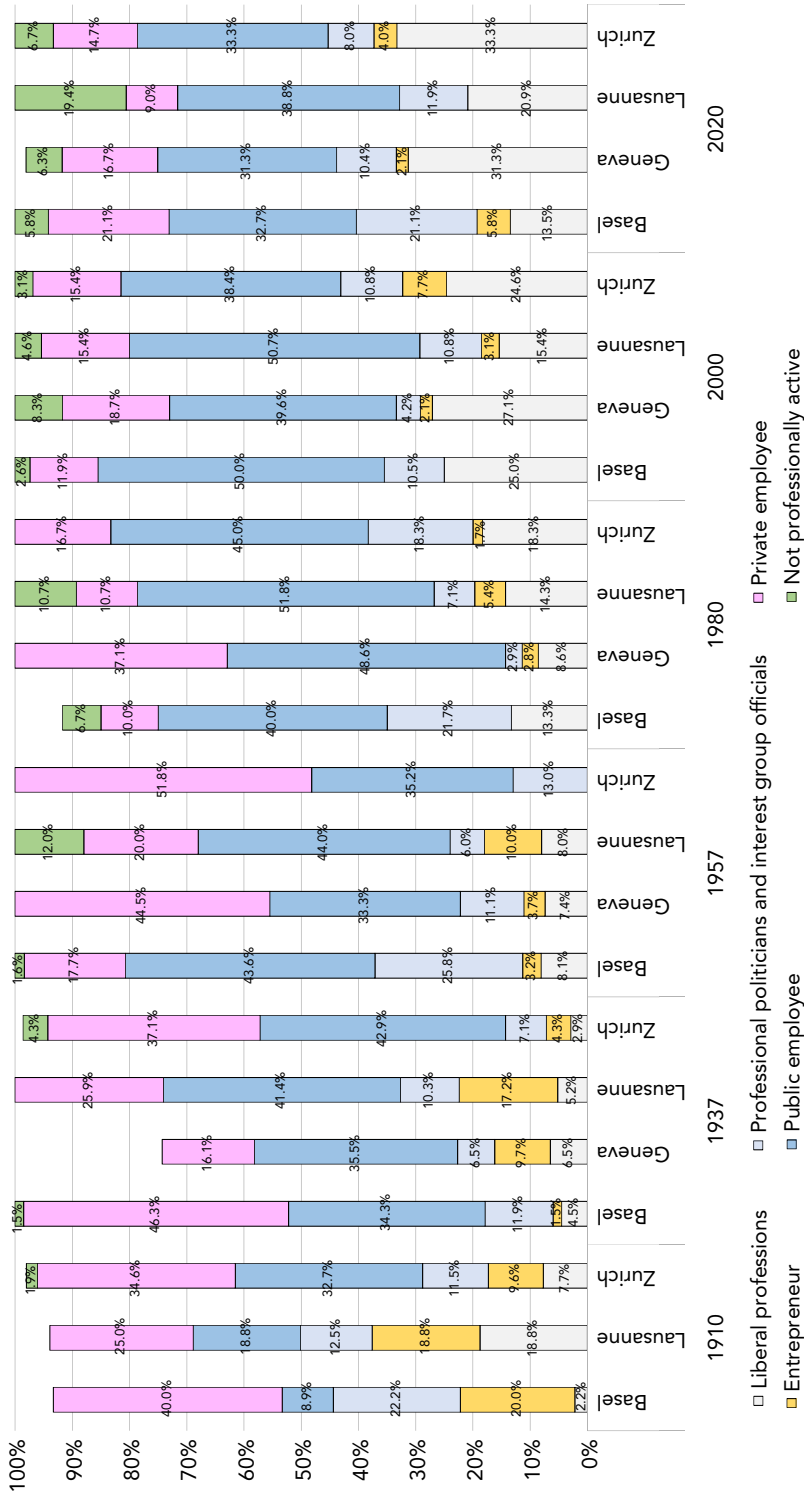**FIGURE A7** Professional categories among left-wing elected representatives in Basel, Geneva, Lausanne and Zurich, 1910–2020 (%)

N Total: 1910 = 108, 1937 = 217, 1957 = 193, 1980 = 206, 2000 = 254, 2020 = 241
N Basel: 1910 = 42, 1937 = 67, 1957 = 62, 1980 = 55, 2000 = 76, 2020 = 52
N Geneva: 1937 = 23, 1957 = 27, 1980 = 35, 2000 = 48, 2020 = 47
N Lausanne: 1910 = 15, 1937 = 58, 1957 = 50, 1980 = 56, 2000 = 65, 2020 = 67
N Zurich: 1910 = 51, 1937 = 69, 1957 = 54, 1980 = 60, 2000 = 65, 2020 = 75
NOTE: Percentages missing at 100% represent missing data.

TABLE A1 Datasets of left-wing elected representatives in the four cities for six cohorts, 1910–2020

	1910	1937	1957	1980	2000	2020
Basel Government	2	4	3	3	4	4
Social Democratic Party	2	4	3	3	4	3
Radical Left Parties	-	-	-	-	-	-
Green Party	-	-	-	-	-	1
Basel Council	43	63	59	57	72	48
Social Democratic Party	43	48	43	37	51	35
Radical Left Parties	-	15	16	20	8	-
Green Party	-	-	-	-	13	13
Geneva Government	-	2	1	2	4	4
Social Democratic Party	-	2	1	1	1	2
Radical Left Parties	-	-	-	1	2	-
Green Party	-	-	-	-	1	2
Geneva Council	1	29	26	33	44	44
Social Democratic Party	1	29	10	18	12	19
Radical Left Parties	-	-	16	15	22	7
Green Party	-	-	-	-	10	18
Lausanne Government	-	3	2	4	4	6
Social Democratic Party	-	3	2	3	2	3
Radical Left Parties	-	-	-	-	1	1
Green Party	-	-	-	1	1	2
Lausanne Council	16	55	48	52	61	61
Social Democratic Party	16	55	31	31	35	33
Radical Left Parties	-	-	17	13	13	11
Green Party	-	-		8	13	17
Zurich Government	4	5	4	4	5	6
Social Democratic Party	4	5	4	4	4	3
Radical Left Parties	-	-	-	-	-	1
Green Party	-	-	-	-	1	2
Zurich Council	48	65	50	56	60	69
Social Democratic Party	48	62	48	53	50	43
Radical Left Parties	-	3	2	3	3	10
Green Party	-	-	-	-	7	16
Total	114	226	193	211	254	242