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Definition: **Switzerland** from *Collins English Dictionary*

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1 a federal republic in W central Europe: the cantons of Schwyz, Uri, and Unterwalden formed a defensive league against the Hapsburgs in 1291, later joined by other cantons; gained independence in 1499; adopted a policy of permanent neutrality from 1516; a leading centre of the Reformation in the 16th century. It lies in the Jura Mountains and the Alps, with a plateau between the two ranges. Official languages: German, French, and Italian; Romansch minority. Religion: mostly Protestant and Roman Catholic. Currency: Swiss franc. Capital: Bern. Pop: 7 996 026 (2013 est). Area: 41 288 sq km (15 941 sq miles) German name: **Schweiz** French name: **Suisse** Italian name: **Svizzera** Latin name: **Helvetia** (hɛl'vi:ʃə)



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Summary Article: **Switzerland**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Landlocked country in Western Europe, bounded north by Germany, east by Austria and Liechtenstein, south by Italy, and west by France.

Government Switzerland is a federation of 20 cantons and six half-cantons (canton is the name for a political division, derived from Old French), with a multiparty political system. The 1874 constitution, as amended in 1999, provides for a two-chamber legislature, the Federal Assembly, consisting of the National Council and the Council of States. The National Council has 200 members, elected by universal suffrage, through a system of proportional representation, for a four-year term. The Council of States has 46 members, each canton electing two representatives and each half-canton one. Members of the Council of States are elected for three or four years, depending on the constitutions of the individual cantons.

Federal government lies with the Federal Council, comprising seven members elected for a four-year term by the Federal Assembly. Each member heads a specific federal department and, in rotation, one member also acts as federal head of state (a largely ceremonial post) and chair of government for a year, the term of office beginning on 1 January. The federal government is allocated specific powers by the constitution with the remaining powers left with the cantons, each having its own constitution, assembly, and government. At a level below the cantons are more than 3,000 communes. Direct democracy is encouraged through communal assemblies and referenda through which citizens can challenge any law passed by the legislature if they can gather 50,000 signatures within 100 days. Citizens can also submit constitutional initiatives if they have the support of 100,000 voters.

History In the 1st millennium BC Switzerland was inhabited by Celts. From the 5th century BC the country, especially the south, became a centre of the Celtic La Tène culture of the Early Iron Age. The La Tène culture continued to the Roman conquest, at which time there were two main Celtic tribes, the Helvetii (or Transalpine Gauls) in the northwest, and the Rhaetians in the southeast. The Roman conquest of these tribes began as early as 107 BC, when they were defeated in southern Gaul (modern France), and was completed by Julius Caesar in 58 BC at the Col d'Armecy.

The early Middle Ages The ancestors of many of the modern Swiss are the Germanic tribes who overran this part of the Roman Empire in the 5th century AD: the Alemanni east of the River Aar about AD 406, and the Burgundians in the southwest in 443. They became Christian about 600–650, but the Helvetii were not converted until later.

Charlemagne, king of the Franks from 768 and crowned emperor by the pope in 800, incorporated Switzerland into his domains. At his death the region fell into confusion, and in the subsequent partition of his lands half of modern Switzerland was allotted to the Eastern Frankish kingdom and half to Lotharingia (Lorraine).

In 888 Rudolf of the Guelphic family (see Guelph and Ghibelline) founded the kingdom of Burgundy, of which west Switzerland formed a part, while the German regions fell to the duchy of Swabia in 917. In the 11th century Switzerland was united under the German (Holy Roman) Empire, but in the 12th century many autonomous feudal holdings developed as the power of the Empire declined. Several local dynasties rose to power, such as the houses of Zähringen (1097–1218), Lenzburg, Kyburg, Savoy, and Habsburg. The cities of Fribourg (1178) and Bern (1191) were founded by the Zähringens to secure their supremacy against the attacks of the rural nobility.

The formation of the Swiss Confederation A period of chaos ensued, until in 1273 Rudolf I of Habsburg became Holy Roman emperor, with control of what is now German Switzerland, and subsequently extended Habsburg rule over Austria.

The extension of Habsburg power in Switzerland caused alarm and resistance in the regions round the Lake of Lucerne, and a few days after Rudolf's death in 1291 the first Perpetual (or Everlasting) League of the three 'forest cantons' (Uri, Schwyz, and Unterwalden) was formed, which, in 1315, defeated the Austrian Habsburg forces at the Battle of Morgarten.

War with the Austrian Habsburgs continued off and on, and Austria was defeated again at Sempach and Nafels. Other cantons joined the League: Lucerne in 1332, Zürich in 1351, Zug and Glarus in 1352, and Bern in 1353. As a result, the League extended its influence and lands, and from this time is usually referred to as the Swiss Confederation. Switzerland began to prosper, and education, art, and industry all began to develop during this period.

From 1474 to 1477 the Confederation was at war with Charles the Bold of Burgundy, defeating him at Grandson and Morat in 1476. In 1481 Fribourg and Solothurn came into the confederation. In 1499 the Austrian Habsburg emperor, Maximilian I, attempted to reassert his rule over the eastern region of Rhaetia – which as the Grey League (Grisons or Graubünden) had asserted its independence – but he was defeated at Calven.

Later, during the Reformation, Austria was more successful, but the Grey Leaguers retained their independence until they at last joined the Swiss Confederation in 1803. Switzerland's de facto independence dates from the Swiss victory over the Empire at Dornach in 1499, after which the Confederation was released from its obligation to pay the imperial tax.

The Reformation in Switzerland The Reformation led to internal dissension in Switzerland. During the period 1523–29 the northern cantons of Zürich, Berne, and Basel accepted the reformist teachings of Ulrich Zwingli, while the forest cantons remained Roman Catholic. In the hostilities that resulted the Catholic troops were victorious, Zwingli was killed in 1531, and a truce was arranged, whereby each canton was left free to determine its own religion.

In 1536 Bern took the Vaud from the dukes of Savoy, and in the same year a French theologian, John Calvin, arrived in Geneva and established a college of pastors there. After a long battle with some of the leading citizens, Calvin eventually turned the city into a theocratic republic, which had such influence that it became known as the 'Protestant Rome'. The city was visited by John Knox and other Scottish and English theologians. Calvin was succeeded by Théodore Beza.

Calvin's doctrines were far stricter than Zwingli's, and the Calvinists tolerated no opposition, either from Catholics or from dissident Protestants within their territory. So while Zwingli introduced Protestantism into the country and by his struggle and death ensured its survival, Calvin's doctrines reaped much of the benefit of his efforts.

Complete independence From the early 16th century Swiss mercenaries were widely employed in Europe, and fighting for foreign kings became a flourishing trade. The Swiss themselves became involved in the Italian wars, and were defeated by the French at Marignano in 1515 (see Marignano, Battle of). After this, good relations were established with France, and the Swiss saw that to keep their linguistically and religiously fragmented Confederation together they needed to adopt a policy of neutrality in European wars. Switzerland managed to maintain its neutrality in the Thirty Years' War (1618–48), and at the end of the war the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) recognized the final separation of Switzerland from the Habsburg Empire.

Through the 17th and 18th centuries, continued peace helped the growth of industry and general prosperity, although during this period the peasantry were much oppressed, and their attempt in 1653 to secure better conditions was crushed. This confirmed the hold on power in the various cantons of the patrician oligarchies.

The Helvetic Republic For 150 years after 1648, the Swiss were able to maintain their neutrality in Europe's many wars. Following the French Revolution the French invaded Switzerland in 1798, and established the Helvetic Republic, a 'sister republic' with a centralized government, under French control. This centralization did not conform to the Swiss tradition of local self-government; nevertheless it created for the first time a national unity, though imposed from outside. The Helvetic Republic introduced a uniform Swiss monetary system, using Latin inscriptions, so as not to conflict with any of the various language groups – a device still in use today.

In the Act of Mediation (1802–03), Napoleon recognized the sovereignty of the cantons, making Switzerland a democratic federation. But only in 1815 was Switzerland's independence fully restored, and its permanent neutrality guaranteed, at the Congress of Vienna. Switzerland also received Geneva and other territories, increasing the number of cantons to 22.

Religious conflict and constitutional reform During the 19th century religious differences led to bitter controversy and conflict. In 1847 war broke out between Liberal Protestants and the seven Roman Catholic cantons, the latter having formed a separatist league or Sonderbund (1845), as a result of the suppression of various monasteries by the Liberals in the canton of Aargau. After a short campaign, Gen G H Dufour, at the head of the federal army, defeated the Catholics.

In 1848 a new federal constitution was adopted, and peace signed, giving the Protestants nearly all they had fought for. Switzerland was transformed from a confederation of independent states into one federal state, with the central government possessing wide powers. Bern was chosen as the capital. In 1874 a revision of the federal constitution was introduced, giving wider powers to the state, especially

in military matters, but also introducing the principle of the referendum.

Manufacturing industry continued to develop in the 19th century, which also witnessed the introduction of the railways, and tourism began to emerge as an important industry; these factors led to growing prosperity.

The early 20th century Surrounded by belligerent countries during World War I, Switzerland nevertheless retained its neutrality, though the French-speaking and German-speaking populations naturally differed in their sympathies. Switzerland participated in a non-military capacity by organizing Red Cross units, tracing the missing, and permitting incapacitated prisoners of war to be interned within its frontiers.

In 1920 Switzerland joined the League of Nations, which made its permanent headquarters in Geneva. For the next 19 years Switzerland was therefore at the centre of international politics. In 1923 Switzerland formed a customs union with Liechtenstein.

Switzerland in World War II In World War II the conquest of France by Germany in 1940 made Switzerland economically dependent upon the latter, and in August 1940 a new trade agreement between the two countries was signed. In the same year the Federal Council dissolved the Swiss Nationalist Movement, a totalitarian organization connected with the Nazis, and soon afterwards the Communist Party was also dissolved. When the war spread to the USSR and the Balkans the trade agreement Switzerland had made with the USSR earlier in 1941 became worthless.

Germany then brought pressure on Switzerland to enter into the closest possible economic association, and, as a reprisal against this second agreement, the UK intensified its blockade against Switzerland. The country's position was made more difficult by attempts to subvert it from within by the highly organized German Nazi Party in Switzerland itself. After the German invasion of the USSR Germany demanded that Switzerland participate in the 'fight for Europe' and adhere to the 'New Order'. Only very few Swiss fought in the German army, however, and these were condemned by Swiss military courts for serving with a foreign power.

Switzerland's international role Switzerland did not become a member of the United Nations (UN) after World War II, but joined UNESCO and other international organizations, and took part in the Marshall Plan, the programme of US economic aid to post-war Europe. Switzerland joined the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) in 1960 and the Council of Europe in 1963, but has not sought membership of the European Union (EU). In March 2001, in the third referendum on the issue since 1992, voters overwhelmingly rejected a proposal to open EU membership negotiations. In June 2005 Swiss voters agreed by a 55% majority for the country to join the Schengen and Dublin treaties. This brought the country into Europe's passport-free zone and led to greater cooperation on crime and asylum matters.

A referendum in 1986 rejected the advice of the government and came out overwhelmingly against membership of the UN. A further referendum in June 1994 rejected a proposal for Switzerland to participate in UN peacekeeping operations. However Switzerland is the headquarters of many UN and other international bodies (such as the World Health Organization and the International Red Cross) and has been the site of many peace conferences. In 2002, Switzerland finally joined the UN after a March 2002 referendum in favour – membership was supported by 55% of the popular vote and by 12 cantons.

Social and economic affairs Switzerland's economic development has been peaceful and prosperous, and political stability has helped it to become, per person, one of the world's richest countries. Switzerland absorbed large numbers of migrant workers, who account for about one-sixth of the country's labour force. In a referendum held in 1975 the Swiss electorate, following the advice of the federal government, rejected the idea of repatriation of migrant workers.

Tourism has been a growth industry in Switzerland, bringing in large amounts of foreign currency.

The formation of a new canton, Jura, along the Franco-German linguistic frontier caused some friction, and even violence, between the two communities. The French-speaking Catholic inhabitants of the area had pressed for separation from the predominantly German-speaking Protestant canton of Bern, and in 1979 Jura officially became the 23rd canton.

Political stability The country's domestic politics have been characterized by coalition governments and stability. Since 1959 four major parties have participated in coalition governments: the centre-right, Catholic-oriented Christian Democrats (CVP); the centre-left Social Democrats (SP); the centrist, Protestant-oriented liberal Free Democrats (FDP); and the right-wing Swiss People's Party (SVP). Membership of the Federal Council was apportioned in accordance with a 'magic formula' that remained fixed until 2003, with two seats each going to the CVP, SPO, and FDP and one to the SVP.

In 1971 women gained the right to vote in federal elections, and, in 1991, 18-year-olds were allowed to vote for the first time.

The October 1987 election returned the four-party coalition to power, although there was a significant increase in the number of seats held by the Green Party. The October 1991 election saw little change in the resulting seat distribution, with the four-party coalition again retaining control. In 1999 Ruth Dreifuss served as the first female president of the Swiss Confederation.

Swiss banks and wartime gold In 1997 Switzerland came under international pressure over allegations that its banks were holding deposits worth billions of pounds made by Jewish families during World War II. The three banks principally implicated, Crédit Suisse, the Union Bank of Switzerland, and Swiss Bank Corp, agreed in February 1997 to set up a \$70 million/£43 million compensation fund for heirs of the Holocaust victims. In March 1997 the government announced plans to endow a £3 billion foundation for victims of Nazi genocide. With threats that Swiss businesses would be boycotted unless the question of 'lost' Jewish bank accounts and wartime gold dealing was addressed, politicians and diplomats were forced to meet the growing crisis with concrete action.

Swing to the right Switzerland's far-right populist SVP, which was hostile to immigration and against joining the EU, made spectacular electoral gains in parliamentary elections held in October 1999, emerging as the second strongest force in parliament, but the four-party coalition remained in power. The SVP drew its strongest support in predominantly German-speaking cantons and jumped from fourth to second place with 23% of the vote, winning 45 seats in the 200-member lower house. It sought tightening of the laws on immigration. In September 2000 Swiss voters rejected a proposal to limit the proportion of foreigners in Switzerland to 18% of the population (it stood at 20%). However, later governments placed greater controls over immigration from eastern Europe.

In December 2001, Swiss voters rejected a referendum proposal to disband their armed forces. Campaigners estimated that the neutral country spends 9 billion Swiss francs/£3.9 billion a year (almost a fifth of the national budget) on its army. At a further referendum, in September 2013, voters rejected

ending military conscription.

The October 2003 general election saw the SVP become the largest party in the National Council. This led to a change in the 'magic formula' under which Federal Council seats were distributed: the SVP now having two members and the CVP only one.

Divisions within the right At the October 2007 general election, the SVP won 29% of the vote, the highest share ever achieved by a single party. However its leader Christoph Blocher's strong anti-immigration election campaign led to parliament refusing to re-elect him to the Federal Council. The SVP responded by threatening to withdraw its two members from the Federal Council and form Switzerland's first opposition group since the 1950s.

However, Blocher's more moderate replacement on the federal council, Eveline Widner-Schlumpf, decided to continue and, with other SVP moderates, formed the breakaway Conservative Democratic Party (BDP). She went on to serve as federal president in 2012.

The BDP attracted 5% of the vote at the October 2011 general election, which led to support for the SVP falling to 27%. However, the SVP remained the largest single party and continued to set the political agenda.

In February 2014 Swiss voters narrowly approved a SVP referendum proposal to re-impose the quotas on immigration from EU countries, which had been lifted in 2000. The SVP had argued that net immigration, averaging 80,000 a year, was too high, placing undue pressure on health, education, housing and transport services. Switzerland's other parties had opposed the proposal, but the government agreed to implement the initiative, which would take three years and require renegotiation of a Swiss–EU agreement on freedom of movement.

In the October 2015 general election, the SVP received a record 29% of the vote and 65 of the 200 National Council seats. This enabled the SVP to gain a second seat on the seven-member federal council, doing so at the expense of Widner-Schlumpf of the CDP, which had won only had 4% of the vote.

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