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The Migration-Mobility Nexus
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**Dual Citizenship:
Advantages and Disadvantages
for (Swiss) Democracy?**

in a nutshell #13, June 2019



SWISS NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

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Messages for Decision-Makers

With its recognition of dual citizenship in 1992, Switzerland was the forerunner of what is now a worldwide trend.

**—
One in every four Swiss citizens residing in Switzerland or abroad is now a dual citizen.**

**—
There are two main advantages to these trends:**

- it makes it easier for immigrants to become naturalized, and therefore to have a voice in political decision-making, which strengthens Swiss democracy.**
- it makes it more difficult to adopt a simplistic view of “us” (Swiss) versus “them” (foreigners).**

**—
Any efforts to restrict dual citizenship should therefore be rejected.**

What is meant by ...

... **dual or multiple citizens** are people who are simultaneously nationals of multiple states.

... **democracies** are political systems in which everyone who is affected by political decisions and subject to political power has reasonable participation in the collective development of objectives and collective decision-making.

... **transnationalization** refers to linkages among national states. Information, people, capital, goods and services, along with harmful substances and crime, move across national state borders. As a result, the politics of states become (inter)dependent. National states respond to this situation with common rules. This means that political power is transnationalized. Dual citizens are described in the study as forerunners of a possible trend whereby, following the transnationalization of political regulation, the same could happen for the people (the demos) and democratic decision-making.

Should Swiss national football players dedicate goals they score to their parents' country of origin? The “double-headed eagle salute” controversy in Switzerland in 2018 triggered a highly emotional debate – for good reason, considering that one in every four Swiss citizens now hold dual citizenship. So it is high time this issue was also addressed as a research topic. This policy brief on dual citizenship presents the key findings of a study commissioned by the Federal Commission on Migration (FCM).

With the revision of the law on citizenship in 1992, which meant that a person who was naturalized was no longer forced to give up the citizenship of his or her country of origin, Switzerland became the pioneer of an international trend. Up until the middle of the 20th century, it was unusual for a person to hold dual citizenship, and under international norms this was a situation to be avoided. In 1963, the Council of Europe issued a statement calling for a reduction of cases of multiple nationality. In the [European Convention on Nationality](#) that entered into force in 2000, it is essentially left up to Member States to decide whether or not to accept dual citizenship. In some cases, however, they are required to tolerate dual citizenship, for children from binational marriages, for example. This change is part of a worldwide process. In recent years, more and more countries have amended their legislation on citizenship rights, and allowed dual citizenship for both emigrants and immigrants.

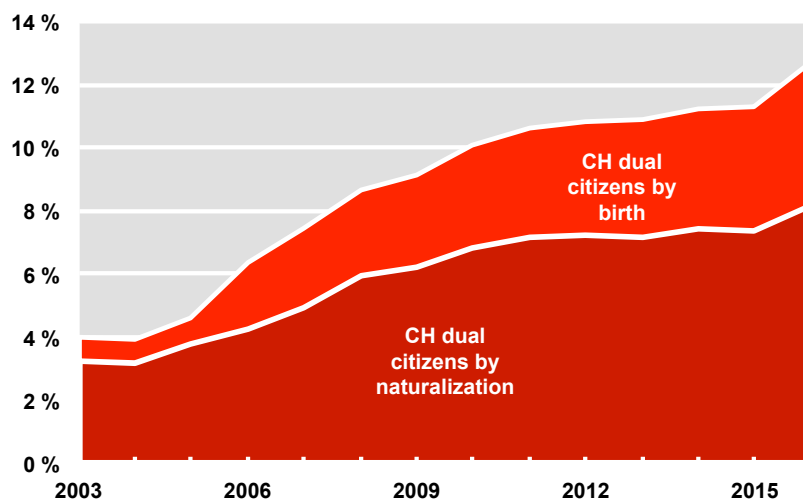
The increased prevalence of dual citizenship in the Swiss context cannot, however, be explained by this trend alone. Other contributing factors include the equal treatment of women and men in citizenship law, and the sharp rise in binational marriages due to migration. Formerly only Swiss males could pass

citizenship by birth on to their children, but Swiss women have also had this right since 1978, and without restriction since 1985. Accordingly, it is increasingly the case in Switzerland that dual citizenship is acquired by birth rather than through naturalization (see Graph 1).

Today, one in four Swiss citizens holds at least one other national citizenship. This situation is particularly widespread among Swiss citizens residing abroad, with three of every four Swiss expatriates holding multiple citizenships. Of the population residing in Switzerland, around 13 percent hold a second passport (see Graph 2). The actual figure is very likely to be higher, however, since these statistics apply only to persons over 15 years of age. Given that one in three marriages in Switzerland are now binational, we may assume that the number of dual citizens among persons under 15 years of age is even higher.

In just 20 years (1996-2016), the number of Swiss citizens holding dual citizenship has not only increased significantly, but their percentage of the Swiss residential population has quadrupled. In terms of percentages of the Swiss residential population, out of Swiss dual citizens, foreigners and Swiss single citizens, it is the dual citizens group that shows the fastest growth.

Graph 1: Share of dual citizenships by birth and by naturalization as a percentage of the Swiss population



Data source: Swiss Federal Statistical Office, Swiss Labor Force Survey (SLFS)

**Dual citizens:
Between Swiss Single Citizens
and Foreigners in Socioeconomic
and Sociocultural Terms**

Dual citizens are well educated, better than foreigners, but not as well as Swiss citizens holding only one passport. They also hold the middle position for other criteria such as earning status or volunteer activities. There is, however, some at times significant variation in the socioeconomic and sociocultural characteristics of dual citizens according to what second citizenship is held.

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“Rapid growth in the percentage of dual citizens in the Swiss residential population.”
—

**Dual Citizenship:
Opportunities for Democracy
Clearly Outweigh the Risks**

The authorization of dual citizenship lowers the barriers to naturalization, since immigrants no longer have to choose between the citizenship of their country of origin and that of their country of residence. The ability for a democratic community to increase naturalization percentages in this way is highly desirable from the perspective of the quality of democracy. This helps to ensure that those who are required to obey the laws of a country also have a voice in formulating them.

These linkages have been very evident in the Swiss context. Following the acceptance of dual citizenship for immigrants in 1992, the annual naturalization percentage doubled from one to two percent of the foreign population. Similar impacts have been documented for other

countries. This is particularly important for Swiss democracy, since the right to become naturalized is comparatively restrictive. This leads to a democratic deficit, since a particularly large percentage of the Swiss residential population remains excluded from participation in political decision-making. As well as helping to reduce this major democratic deficit, increased naturalization percentages also benefit Swiss democracy through a high level of interest in politics, better political integration, and participation by naturalized immigrants.

There are further benefits resulting from the fact that tolerating dual citizenship makes it easier for immigrants to gain citizenship of their new country of residence. Naturalized citizens not only gain the free choice of place of residence, but also become entitled to diplomatic protection abroad, and are guaranteed the right to re-enter Switzerland at any time. There is a demonstrable decrease in discrimination against them in the labor and housing markets. From the perspective of the recipient country, this means an increase in the level of their socioeconomic integration.

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“Dual citizenship reduces the democratic deficit.”
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By accepting dual citizenship, a democratic state recognizes that in today's world many people have a sense of belonging to multiple societies. This recognition appears to be paying off for Switzerland. According to initial surveys, dual citizens participate and identify with Switzerland just as strongly as single citizens. When asked what concerns motivated their political participation, Swiss dual citizens cited taking into account

Swiss interests when expressing themselves politically or cited concerns related to life in Switzerland as the reason for participation significantly more frequently than citizens with just one citizenship. Citizens now not only appear to be able to have a sense of belonging to multiple political entities at local, regional, national and continental levels – they can also feel they belong to multiple entities on the same level: many dual citizens identify both with Switzerland and another country.

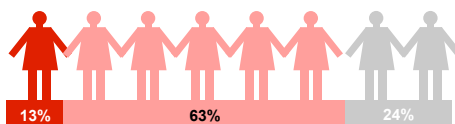
The phenomenon of dual citizenship can therefore play a role in overcoming thinking in terms of simplistic oppositions. One in four Swiss nationals now no longer feels they are properly accommodated by the dichotomy between the categories of “foreigner” on the one hand, versus “Swiss” on the other. Instead, they see themselves as both one and the other. This reduces opportunities for one group to be played off against the other in political discourse. Dual citizens therefore represent a bulwark against reawakened nationalism in Europe and the world.

The acceptance and increased prevalence of dual citizenship also has its disadvantages and risks, however. States are able to deprive dual citizens of their citizenship, for example, which is not the case for single citizens. This represents a risk from the dual citizen's perspective, although more and more European countries regard the option of deprivation of citizenship in connection with Islamic extremists as an opportunity. Dual citizenship also makes it easier for states to “sell” citizenship to wealthy individuals, who can thus become more internationally mobile. This encourages a tendency for membership of a political community to be viewed as a form of property right, which can be granted, acquired or withdrawn for purely self-serving and instrumental reasons.

But dual citizenship appears problematic from the democracy perspective particularly in situations where dual citizens can vote and take part in elections in more than one country, and therefore have more political influence than single citizens. Recently, many countries have made it easier for their citizens abroad to exercise their political rights in their country of origin. Where dual citizens lead a transnational life, and are therefore subject to the laws of different countries, it is, however, perfectly justified for them to have a voice in decisions made in multiple countries. Another positive aspect of the political participation of dual citizens is their ability to bring external perspectives and interests to bear. In this way they can help to make national state political processes less “nation-centric”, thereby enhancing international cooperation.

Graph 2: Dual citizens as a percentage of the resident population in Switzerland, of Swiss citizens residing abroad and of all Swiss citizens

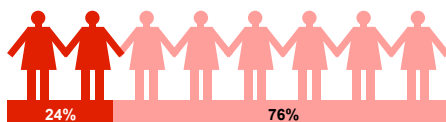
Share of Swiss **dual citizens**, **single citizens** and **foreigners** among the **resident population** over 15 years in Switzerland (2016)



Share of Swiss **dual citizens** and **single citizens** among the **Swiss abroad** (2016)



Share of **dual citizens** and **single citizens** among **Swiss citizens** (2016)



Data sources: Swiss Federal Statistical Office, Swiss Labor Force Survey (SLFS); FDFA statistics on the Swiss abroad

There is, however, an increasing problem when national states try to address common problems (e.g. in the protection of the environment) and mutual dependencies (e.g. in tax policy) through international cooperation. Dual citizens have influence on more than one government and their positions in such negotiations. Wherever binding rules are set down in bilateral and multilateral negotiations, there is therefore a breach of the fundamental principle of “one person, one vote”.

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“Identification with multiple countries is possible.”
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Dual Citizens as Forerunners of a Transnationalization of National Democracies

In light of the numerous advantages of dual citizenship for democracy, these problems should not, however, lead to dual citizens being deprived of the right to vote in multiple countries. Instead, national democracies should open up this opportunity to all citizens, i.e. both those who prefer to stay at home and the internationally mobile, both single and dual citizens. An outline of how this might work in practice is provided in the [study](#) carried out for the FCM, and described in more detail elsewhere by [Joachim Blatter](#) (see list of references). Switzerland, with its high numbers of dual citizens, could therefore point the way toward how democracies can be transnationalized, without getting disconnected from the citizens.

Further Reading

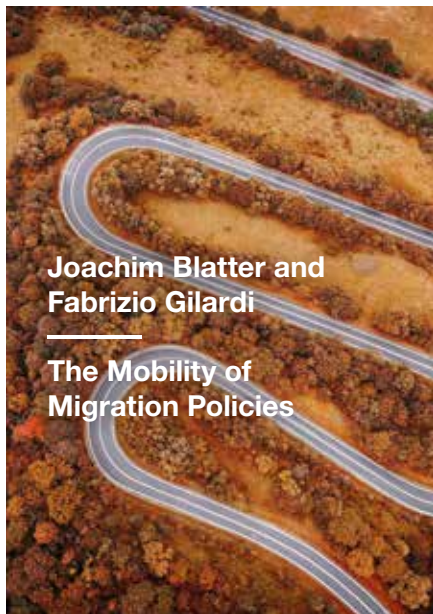
Blatter, Joachim, Martina Sochin D’Elia und Michael Buess. [“Bürgerschaft und Demokratie in Zeiten transnationaler Migration. Hintergründe, Chancen und Risiken der Doppelbürgerschaft”](#). Bern: EKM, 2018.

Blatter, Joachim and Rainer Bauböck (eds.). [“Let me vote in your country, and I’ll let you vote in mine. A Proposal for Transnational Democracy”](#). *EUI Working Paper RSCAS* 2019/25.

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Andrea Schlenker, Joachim Blatter and Ieva Birka. [“Practising Transnational Citizenship: Dual Nationality and Simultaneous Political Involvement among Emigrants”](#). *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 43:3 (2016), p. 418–440.

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The Mobility of Migration Policies

A project of the nccr – on the move Joachim Blatter, University of Lucerne

The movement of people across national boundaries creates interdependencies among states. We investigate how (much) migration policies in other nation-states and/or on the supranational level influence national policies and the consequences of interdependent policy-making.

in a nutshell #13 is based on a [study](#) by Joachim Blatter, Martina Sochin D’Elia and Michael Buess, commissioned by the Federal Commission on Migration FCM.

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The nccr – on the move is the National Center of Competence in Research (NCCR) for migration and mobility studies and aims to enhance the understanding of contemporary phenomena related to migration and mobility in Switzerland and beyond. Connecting disciplines, the NCCR brings together research from the social sciences, economics and law. Managed from the University of Neuchâtel, the network comprises fourteen research projects at ten universities in Switzerland: The Universities of Basel, Geneva, Lausanne, Lucerne, Neuchâtel, Zurich, ETH Zurich, the Graduate Institute Geneva, the University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Western Switzerland, and the University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Northwestern Switzerland.

“in a nutshell” provides answers to current questions on migration and mobility – based on research findings, which have been elaborated within the nccr – on the move. The authors assume responsibility for their analyses and arguments.

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