

## Switzerland: Political Developments and Data in 2022

Addressing Crisis Upon Crisis Through Swiss-Style “Muddling-Through”

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### Abstract

In 2022, Switzerland’s notorious fame as an “island of bliss” was significantly challenged by a sequence of numerous unprecedented large-scale crises. While the country has managed to phase out most COVID-19 protective measures already in the year’s early weeks, the 202 Russian invasion of Ukraine internationally discredited neutrality—that is, one of the traditional pillars of Swiss identity. This article traces how Switzerland muddled through crisis after crisis. Moreover, it shows how domestic politics was affected by the distinct interconnectedness of the federal and regional (i.e., cantonal) electoral arenas, an above-average number of direct-democratic ballot proposals, as well as by the resignation of two out of seven members of the Federal Council. The article concludes by discussing two major and highly controversial “elephant-in-the-room” issues that are continuing to shape the Swiss political discourse: Swiss–EU relations and institutional reforms to gear up Swiss-style consensus democracy for future crises.

### Introduction

The year 2022 was marked by a sequence of numerous unprecedented crises, keeping Swiss politics on its toes. In the year’s early weeks, the Federal Council announced to gradually phase out most COVID-19 protective measures. Mask requirements in numerous public venues (e.g., shops, restaurants), access limitations regulated by the COVID-19 certificate, and permit requirements for large-scale events, as well as restrictions on private gatherings, were abolished as early as 17 February 2022. By 1 April 2022, also the two remaining measures were eased (i.e., compulsory masks on public transport and in healthcare facilities, five-day isolation requirement). However, the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine triggered yet another series of crises. First, it fundamentally challenged Switzerland’s neutrality—a traditional pillar of Swiss identity. The initial wavering on whether it was joining the EU sanctions over neutrality concerns led to fierce criticism at home and abroad. Second, the Russian attack caused the largest influx of refugees since World War II, with around 75,000 people arriving from Ukraine. Switzerland granted them “protection status S,” allowing them to work and lead as normal a life as possible. Third, in summer and autumn, the federal government responded to the looming energy crisis with the launch of a campaign calling on people to save energy as shortages were expected. All in all, the many crises Switzerland faced in 2022 were addressed in a typically Swiss-style “muddling-through” fashion: A

political elite that is deliberately trying to reconcile international and time pressure(s) with the constraints caused by a “retarding,” consensus-seeking domestic political system.

## Election report

### *Parliamentary and presidential elections*

At the national level, no parliamentary elections were held in Switzerland in 2022.

The President and the Vice-President of the Swiss Confederation, in turn, are elected annually in a joint proceeding of the two chambers of the Swiss federal Parliament (United Federal Assembly). In Swiss-style consociationalism, presidential elections are not competitive at all, and there is an “unwritten rule” that Federal Councillors are elected to the said positions in order of seniority. On 7 December 2022, the outgoing Vice-President of the year 2022, Alain Berset (Social Democrats [SPS/PSS]), Federal Councillor and Head of the Federal Department of Home Affairs, was thus chosen President of the Swiss Confederation for 2023. He received 140 votes (56.9 per cent), well below the 190 Members of Parliaments (MPs; 77.2 per cent) who endorsed him in 2018 when he took on the rotating role of Swiss President for the first time. The result also clearly undercut the average share of some 71 per cent of the votes the elected post-2000 Swiss presidents usually obtained (Vatter 2020: 394). Whereas Alain Berset has repeatedly come out on top in approval ratings, he received negative headlines throughout 2022, which obviously made themselves felt on Election Day. It should be kept in mind that Switzerland is the only country in the world whose federal government works according to the constitutionally enshrined “principle of collegiality.” The seven members of the Federal Council each have equal rights, that is, the President is but *primus inter pares* (first among equals) in order to ensure that no single person can concentrate too much power in its own hands. But with the presidential office, there still comes a whole series of traditional duties (e.g., chairing government meetings, performing representational functions).

### *Regional elections*

Although there has been a wide-ranging process of legislative centralization since the 1848 foundation of the Swiss federal state, the 26 Swiss cantons have retained considerable administrative and, especially, fiscal autonomy (Dardanelli & Mueller 2019). Because there is obviously something at stake, it is crucial to closely monitor the regional (i.e., cantonal) “electoral arenas” as well. In 2022, elections were held in the cantons of Nidwalden, Obwalden, Vaud, Bern, Glarus, Graubünden, and Zug in that respective chronological order. While the cantons’ distinct “institutional patterns” (Vatter et al. 2020) in terms of, for example, the electoral systems, as well as other idiosyncratic, context-specific effects (e.g., the role of personalities) matter, the cantons are still “echo chambers” (Bochsler 2019: 401). Electoral swings in cantonal elections held in the second to the fourth year of the national election cycle can best be predicted by looking at the electoral swings in other cantons (*ibid.*). In the 2022 cantonal elections, this empirical interconnectedness was clearly visible. The electoral outcomes in the seven cantons have further consolidated the three major trends that have been visible since the last Swiss national elections back in 2019. The

first major trend is the inroads both the Green Party (GPS/PES) and the Green Liberal Party (GLP/PVL) kept making—with the “green wave” rolling mostly at the expense of the SPS/PSS (especially in Bern and Vaud), but elsewhere also to the detriment of the Liberals (FDP/PLR (e.g., in Ob- and Nidwalden). Second, the four national-level governing parties—SPS/PSS, The Centre/Le Centre,<sup>1</sup> FDP/PLR, and Swiss People’s Party (SVP/UDC)—are having a hard time appealing to voters. Most notably the Christian-democratic, center to center-right Centre/Le Centre, but to a somewhat lesser degree also the social-democratic SPS/PSS, suffered (significant) electoral losses. The records of the center-right FDP/PLR and the radical right-wing populist SVP/UDC were more mixed, as both political parties managed to (slightly) increase their vote share in certain cantons (i.e., Obwalden, Glarus) while still being defeated in a majority of places (i.e., Nidwalden, Vaud, Bern, Graubünden; Zug only in terms of SVP/UDC). A third and final major trend is the increasing proportion of female MPs in cantonal parliaments. With the exception of the canton of Obwalden, women progressed in all seven cantons by over 1.2 (Zug) and 11.6 percentage points (Graubünden) as compared to the last cantonal election. All in all, the results of the 2022 cantonal elections thus mark important “political windsocks” ahead of the 2023 Swiss federal elections.

Data on the regional elections can be found in Table 1.

### *Referenda*

In 2022, Swiss voters voted on 11 nationwide ballot proposals, that is, a total number that is slightly above the average of some nine nationwide ballot proposals annually during the last three decades (Swissvotes 2023). Following the pre-fixed “referendum days,” Swiss voters headed to the polls thrice.

The first popular vote took place on 13 February 2022 when four proposals were on the ballot (Table 2). The popular initiative “*Yes to a ban on animal testing and experiments on living creatures*” sought to ban all experiments on humans and animals, along with the import of new products developed using such methods. Whereas supporters wanted to halt tests, stressing they are unethical and unnecessary, the “No” committee supported by, for example, the umbrella organizations for higher education institutions and the powerful pharmaceutical industry, raised concerns that a ban would harm the research and health sectors. With a share of only 20.9 per cent “Yes” votes and none of the 26 Swiss cantons in favor, the plan to make the country the first one worldwide to ban animal testing was among the least supported nationwide ballot proposals of all time (Swissvotes 2023). As revealed by the post-ballot survey, the vast majority of voters prioritized medical treatment and basic research over animal welfare, believing that the current level of animal testing is already limited to what is absolutely necessary (Golder et al. 2022a: 16–23).

On the same day, Swiss voters also voted on a second popular initiative, entitled “*Yes to the protection of children and the young against tobacco advertising*.” Even though being home to the world’s largest cigarette companies, Switzerland has historically had one of the weakest laws against tobacco advertising and sponsorship in Europe. Moreover, research has shown that most adult smokers—around one in four people in Switzerland—began when they were minors, also due to exposure to tobacco advertising in public places. The proponents’ core message that health is more important than economic interests obviously hit a nerve, as 56.7 per cent of the voters and 15 cantons backed the popular initiative. Since

Table 1. Results of regional (i.e., cantonal) elections in Switzerland in 2022

Region	Canton of Nidwalden 13 March 2022			Canton of Obwalden 13 March 2022			Canton of Vaud 20 March 2022			Canton of Bern 27 March 2022			
	Votes %	Seats	%	Votes %	Seats	%	Votes %	Seats	%	Votes %	Seats	%	
Date of election													
Total number of seats		60			55			150			160		
Electorate		31,164			26,761			443,973			744,939		
Total votes cast		14,921			11,829			152,206			237,746		
Turnout		47.9%			44.2%			34.3%			31.9%		
Total valid votes		14,463			11,445			149,190			235,962		
Share of valid votes		96.9%			96.8%			98.0%			99.2%		
Party													
FDP: The Liberals	<i>Freisinnig-Demokratische Partei der Schweiz</i>	26.3%	16	26.7%	18.0%	11	20.0%	31.3%	50	33.3%	11.3%	18	11.3%
Social Democratic Party	<i>Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz</i>	3.0%	2	3.3%	12.5%	6	10.9%	20.1%	32	21.3%	18.9%	32	20.0%
Swiss People's Party	<i>Partei der Schweiz Schweizerrische Volkspartei</i>	24.3%	15	25.0%	25.6%	13	23.6%	14.1%	23	15.3%	25.8%	44	27.5%
Evangelical People's Party	<i>Evangelische Volkspartei</i>	0.0%	0	0.0%	0.0%	0	0.0%	0.1%	0	0.0%	5.6%	9	5.6%
Christian Social Party	<i>Christlich-soziale Partei</i>	0.0%	0	0.0%	9.9%	4	7.3%	0.0%	0	0.0%	0.0%	0	0.0%
Green Liberal Party	<i>Grünliberale Partei der Schweiz</i>	8.0%	5	8.3%	5.9%	2	3.6%	7.5%	11	7.3%	9.8%	16	10.0%
The Centre	<i>Die Mitte</i>	25.9%	15	25.0%	28.1%	19	34.6%	1.1%	0	0.0%	7.4%	12	7.5%
Party of Labour	<i>Partei der Arbeit der Schweiz</i>	0.0%	0	0.0%	0.0%	0	0.0%	1.1%	3	2.0%	0.2%	0	0.0%
Autonomous Socialist Party of Southern Jura	<i>Parti socialiste autonome du Sud du Jura</i>	0.0%	0	0.0%	0.0%	0	0.0%	0.0%	0	0.0%	0.6%	2	1.3%
Green Party	<i>Grüne Partei der Schweiz</i>	11.2%	7	11.7%	0.0%	0	0.0%	15.3%	25	16.8%	12.7%	19	11.9%
Solidarity	<i>Solidarité</i>	0.0%	0	0.0%	0.0%	0	0.0%	0.0%	1	0.7%	0.0%	0	0.0%
Swiss Democrats	<i>Schweizer Demokraten</i>	0.0%	0	0.0%	0.0%	0	0.0%	0.0%	0	0.0%	0.1%	0	0.0%
Federal Democratic Union	<i>Eidgenössisch-Demokratische Union</i>	0.0%	0	0.0%	0.0%	0	0.0%	0.0%	0	0.0%	3.9%	7	4.4%
Other	<i>Übrige</i>	1.3%	0	0.0%	0.0%	0	0.0%	9.4%	5	3.3%	3.1%	1	0.6%

Table 1. (Continued)

Region	Canton of Glarus 15 May 2022			Canton of Graubünden 15 May 2022			Canton of Zug 2 October 2022		
	Votes %	Seats	%	Votes %	Seats	%	Votes %	Seats	%
Date of election									
Total number of seats		60			120			80	
Electorate		26,248			141,327			75,895	
Total votes cast		9,126			54,237			33,395	
Turnout		34.8%			38.4%			44.0%	
Total valid votes		8,754			53,044			32,629	
Share of valid votes		95.9%			97.8%			97.7%	
Party	Votes %	Seats	%	Votes %	Seats	%	Votes %	Seats	%
FDP: The Liberals	19.2%	11	18.3%	22.1%	27	22.5%	21.9%	18	22.5%
	(FDP/PLR)								
Social Democratic Party	12.2%	8	13.3%	0.0%	25	20.8%	10.2%	8	10.0%
	(SPS/PSS)								
Swiss People's Party	30.3%	18	30.0%	21.1%	25	20.8%	21.6%	18	22.5%
	(SVP/UDC)								
Evangelical People's Party	0.0%	0	0.0%	0.0%	0	0.0%	0.5%	0	0.0%
	(EVP/PEV)								
Green Liberal Party	6.6%	3	5.0%	6.1%	7	5.8%	7.5%	6	7.5%
	(GLP/PVL)								
The Centre	17.6%	12	20.0%	28.0%	34	28.3%	24.0%	19	23.8%
	(Die Mitte/Le Centre)								
Green Party	13.7%	8	13.3%	0.0%	2	1.8%	14.3%	10	12.5%
	(GPS/PES)								
Other	0.4%	0	0.0%	22.7%	0	0.0%	0.0%	1	1.2%
	(Übrige)								

Notes:

1. The residual category labeled "Other" (*Übrige*) encompasses minor (or splinter) political parties that are grouped together by the Federal Statistical Office. A detailed breakdown can be found in the below-mentioned source.
2. In the canton of Vaud, numerous multi-party lists competed for votes (*Mischlisten*).
3. In the canton of Graubünden, SPS/PSS and GPS/PES competed for votes on a joint list (*gemeinsame Liste*), which obtained a total of 22.7% of the total votes cast. This is why the respective vote share of SPS/PSS and GPS/PES cannot be reported each individually.
4. In the canton of Zug, the *Alternative Linke Zug* (Alternative Left Zug) joined the Green Party back in 2009 to form the *Alternative—die Grüne Zug* (Alternative Left—the Greens Zug). The votes that the joint list of the *Alternative—die Grüne Zug* obtained in 2022 are listed in the row that displays the vote share of the GPS/PES.

Source: Federal Statistical Office (2023). [www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/politik/wahlen/kantonale-parlamentswahlen.html](https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/politik/wahlen/kantonale-parlamentswahlen.html)

Table 2. Results of four referenda held on 13 February 2022 in Switzerland

<i>Referendum 1</i>		<i>Referendum 2</i>	
Date of referendum	13 February 2022	Date of referendum	13 February 2022
Electorate	5,532,520	Electorate	5,532,520
Total votes cast	2,445,370	Total votes cast	2,447,652
Total valid votes	2,394,546	Total valid votes	2,420,284
Referendum question	Valid answers	Valid answers	Valid answers
	Yes	No	Yes
	N	N	N
	%	%	%
Outcome			
Do you want to accept the popular initiative “Yes to a ban on animal testing and experiments on living creatures — Yes to future research paths with impulses for security and progress?”	499,485	1,895,061	1,371,177
	20.9%	79.1%	56.7%
Fail			Pass
Wollen Sie die Volksinitiative “Ja zum Tier- und Menschenversuchsverbot – Ja zu Forschungswegen mit Impulsen für Sicherheit und Fortschritt” annehmen?/Acceptez-vous l’initiative “Oui à l’interdiction de l’expérimentation animale et humaine – Oui aux approches de recherche qui favorisent la sécurité et le progrès”?			
Do you want to accept the popular initiative “Yes to the protection of children and the young from tobacco advertising (children and young without tobacco advertising)?”	44.2%	98.9%	1,049,107
	44.2%	98.9%	43.3%
Pass			Fail
Wollen Sie die Volksinitiative “Ja zum Schutz der Kinder und Jugendlichen vor Tabakwerbung (Kinder und Jugendliche ohne Tabakwerbung)” annehmen?/Acceptez-vous l’initiative populaire “Oui à la protection des enfants et des jeunes contre la publicité pour le tabac (enfants et jeunes sans publicité pour le tabac)”?			

Table 2. (Continued)

<b>Referendum 3</b>		Valid answers		N	%	Outcome
Date of referendum	13 February 2022	Yes		883,251	37.4%	Fail
Electorate	5,532,520					
Total votes cast	2,435,868			44.0%		
Total valid votes	2,363,416			97.0%		
Referendum question						
Do you want to accept the amendment of 18 June 2021 to the Federal Act on Stamp Duty (StG)?	<i>Wollen Sie die Änderung vom 18. Juni 2021 des Bundesgesetzes über die Stempelabgaben (StG) annehmen?/Acceptez-vous la modification du 18 juin 2021 de la loi fédérale sur les droits de timbre (LT)?</i>	No		1,480,165	62.6%	
<b>Referendum 4</b>						
Date of referendum	13 February 2022					
Electorate	5,532,520					
Total votes cast	2,442,217			44.1%		
Total valid votes	2,388,446			97.8%		
Referendum question						
Do you want to accept the Federal Act on a Package of Measures to Benefit the Media of 18 June 2021?	<i>Wollen Sie das Bundesgesetz vom 18. Juni 2021 über ein Massnahmenpaket zugunsten der Medien annehmen?/Acceptez-vous la loi fédérale du 18 juin 2021 sur un train de mesures en faveur des médias?</i>	Yes		1,084,802	45.4%	Fail
		No		1,303,644	54.6%	

Source: Swissvotes (2023).



the instrument's 1891 introduction, this was only the 25th popular initiative that has passed the rigid "double-majority requirement" of approval of a majority of those who vote and a majority of the cantons. Exit polls indeed emphasized the broad acceptance it received among left-leaning and center voters (Golder et al. 2022a: 24–32).

The third proposal of the day was a *referendum on the amendment of the Federal Act on Stamp Duty*. In Switzerland, a stamp tax on equity capital is levied when a company wants to raise funds by issuing securities (e.g., stocks, shares). It is imposed only on amounts above CHF 1 million, and it currently amounts to 1 per cent of the value of the capital raised. According to the Federal Council's estimates, around 2300 businesses paid stamp duty in 2020, generating around CHF 250 million a year. To speed up the bounce-back in the economy after the COVID-19 crisis and to boost the Swiss financial industry's international competitiveness, the Parliament wanted to reduce the tax burden on large companies by ending the stamp tax. While a majority of Swiss MPs stressed the economic benefits of tax cuts, the left-wing parties along with the trade unions launched a referendum, decrying the measure as a "gift" to the richest multinationals. The stamp duty was dismissed at the ballot box (37.4 per cent "Yes" votes) with the electorate worrying that citizens would have to make up for the shortfall in revenue (Golder et al. 2022a: 33–41).

Finally, on 13 February, Swiss voters also decided on a *referendum on a package of state-funded measures to benefit the media*. In light of the numerous challenges the media faces (e.g., huge losses in advertising revenue due to tech giants like Google and lower subscriptions), Parliament adopted a new government policy to allocate a total funding of around CHF 3 billion over a seven-year period. The package included both indirect subsidies (e.g., subsidizing of morning newspaper delivery) as well as direct subsidies for online media and for outlets with decidedly regional/local content. In fear of the emergence of uncritical "state media" and concerns over disproportionately privileging Switzerland's large publishing houses, a committee of politicians mainly from the right of the political spectrum launched a referendum to veto parliament's decision. Winning only 45.4 per cent of the vote, the government-sponsored measures to benefit the media fell short of a majority. For most voters, their vote was a matter of principle: Taxpayers' money should not be spent on media (Golder et al. 2022a: 42–50).

On 15 May 2022, Swiss voters voted on three optional referendums (Table 3). Known as "Lex Netflix (Netflix law)," the *referendum on the amendment to the Federal Act on Film Production and Film Culture* challenged Parliament's decision to oblige online streaming platforms to invest up to 4 per cent of their revenue from Switzerland in Swiss films and TV series. Should they fail to do so, Netflix, Amazon, Disney+, and the like will have to pay an equivalent tax aimed at promoting the Swiss film industry—a measure that applies in similar veins in almost half of the countries in Europe. While a referendum committee led by the youth wings of Switzerland's center-right and right-wing parties saw the compulsory investments requested from online streaming platforms as an attack on economic freedom, a solid majority of 58.4 per cent of the voters approved the legislation with a view to supporting the domestic film industry (Golder et al. 2022b: 14–21).

On the same day, Swiss voters also got to vote on the *referendum on the amendment to the Federal Transplantation Act*. By means of a counterproposal to a popular initiative, Parliament decided on a fundamental change in the national organ donation system: moving from explicit to presumed consent. The system change was meant to catch up with European



Table 3. Results of four referenda held on 15 May 2022 in Switzerland

<b>Referendum 1</b>		Valid answers		N	%	Outcome
Date of referendum	15 May 2022	Yes		1,255,038	58.4%	Pass
Electorate	5,538,252					
Total votes cast	2,217,142				40.0%	
Total valid votes	2,148,408				96.9%	
<b>Referendum question</b>						
Do you want to accept the amendment of 1 October 2021 to the Federal Act on Film Production and Film Culture (Film Act, FiA)?	<i>Wollen Sie die Änderung vom 1. Oktober 2021 des Bundesgesetzes über Filmproduktion und Filmkultur (Filmgesetz, FiG) annehmen?/Acceptez-vous la modification du 1er octobre 2021 de la loi fédérale sur la culture et la production cinématographiques (loi sur le cinéma, L.Cin)?</i>	No		893,370	41.6%	
<b>Referendum 2</b>						
Date of referendum	15 May 2022	Yes		1,319,276	60.2%	Pass
Electorate	5,538,252					
Total votes cast	2,229,714				40.3%	
Total valid votes	2,191,395				98.3%	
<b>Referendum question</b>						
Do you want to accept the amendment of 1 October 2021 to the Federal Act on the Transplantation of Organs, Tissues and Cells (Transplantation Act)?	<i>Wollen Sie die Änderung vom 1. Oktober 2021 des Bundesgesetzes über die Transplantation von Organen, Geweben und Zellen (Transplantationsgesetz) annehmen?/Acceptez-vous la modification du 1er octobre 2021 de la loi fédérale sur la transplantation d'organes, de tissus et de cellules (loi sur la transplantation)?</i>	No		872,119	39.8%	

Table 3. (Continued)

<b>Referendum 3</b>		Valid answers		N	%	Outcome
Date of referendum	15 May 2022	Yes		1,523,005	71.5%	Pass
Electorate	5,538,252	No		607,673	28.5%	
Total votes cast	2,214,228	Valid answers as share of electorate		40.0%		
Total valid votes	2,130,678	Valid votes as share of votes cast		96.2%		
Referendum question						
Do you want to accept the adoption of the regulation on the European border and coast guard and repealing regulations (development of the Schengen Acquis)?	<p><i>Wollen Sie den Bundesbeschluss vom 1. Oktober 2021 über die Genehmigung und die Umsetzung des Notenaustausches zwischen der Schweiz und der EU betreffend die Übernahme der Verordnung (EU) 2019/1896 über die Europäische Grenz- und Küstenwache und zur Aufhebung der Verordnungen (EU) Nr. 1052/2013 und (EU) 2016/1624 (Weiterentwicklung des Schengen-Besitzstands) annehmen?/Acceptez-vous l'arrêté fédéral du 1er octobre 2021 portant approbation et mise en oeuvre de l'échange de notes entre la Suisse et l'Union européenne concernant la reprise du règlement (UE) 2019/1896 relatif au corps européen de garde-frontières et de garde-côtes et abrogeant les règlements (UE) no 1052/2013 et (UE) 2016/1624 (développement de l'acquis de Schengen)?</i></p>					

Source: Swissvotes (2023).

countries where the principle of presumed consent for organ donation is widespread. Moreover, the reform was deemed necessary as demand for organs outstrips supply. The referendum passed with 60.2 per cent “Yes” votes with hardly any segment of the voting population largely opposing the new “opt-out” system of organ donation (Golder et al. 2022b: 22–30).

Third and finally, *the funding of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex)* was put to a referendum vote. As a member of the border-free Schengen Area, Switzerland contributes to the funding of Frontex proportional to its gross domestic product (GDP). The agency’s global budget has been increased in the aftermath of the 2015 migrant influx in order to deploy more staff on the ground as a means to tighten control of EU’s external borders. Amid concerns over the “militarization of borders,” “criminalization of migration,” and migrant pushback, migrant support organizations and green/left-leaning political parties jointly initiated a referendum. However, a vast majority of 71.5 per cent of the voters endorsed the increase of the country’s contribution to Frontex, mostly due to security considerations (Golder et al. 2022b: 31–39).

On 25 September 2022, another four proposals were on the ballot (Table 4). The popular initiative “*No factory farming in Switzerland*,” launched by animal rights and welfare organizations, aimed at both eradicating intensive livestock and poultry farming and imposing stricter important regulations for animal products. Yet the clear rejection of only 37.1 per cent “Yes” votes and only one approving “half-canton” was a sign that voters were not convinced by the claim that there was abuse in need of fixing, especially since Switzerland has some of the strictest animal protection laws anyway (Golder et al. 2022c: 17–24).

The second and third proposal of that day were both linked to the *reform of the Federal Act on Old-Age and Survivors’ Insurance (OASI)*, that is, the cornerstone of the three-pillar Swiss social insurance system. The OASI scheme, introduced in 1948, is financed through salary deductions in a pay-as-you-go system. As its long-term financial stability was at risk due to, for example, the rise in life expectancy, the government and Parliament worked out a comprehensive reform (“OASI 21”). Among other things, “OASI 21” stipulated the increase of the ordinary retirement age for women from 63 to 65 (including compensatory measures for “female transitional generations”) and flexible retirement age rules, as well as the rise in value added tax (VAT) on goods and services from 7.7 per cent to a new rate of 8.1 per cent. Although raising the ordinary retirement age for women remained a major bone of contention (especially for the political left and trade unions), both proposals—that is, the supplementary financing of OASI by increasing VAT passed and the “OASI 21” package—passed with a “Yes” vote share of 55.1 per cent and 52.2 per cent, respectively. This is a notable outcome as over the past 25 years, a series of OASI reform proposals were rejected, most recently in 2017 (Golder et al. 2022c: 25–45).

The fourth and final proposal on which the Swiss electorate decided on 25 September 2022 was the *referendum on the Federal Act on Withholding Tax* meant to challenge Parliament’s decision to scrap the 35%-withholding tax on interest from Swiss bonds. Amid a deteriorated state of the economy, however, only a minority of 48 per cent “Yes” voters supported the tax cuts whose main beneficiaries would have been wealthy investors (Golder et al. 2022c: 46–54). This was also the last proposal put to the ballot in the year 2022—and, in fact, the last in a while.

Table 4. Results of four referenda held on 25 September 2022 in Switzerland

<b>Referendum 1</b>		Valid answers		N	%	Outcome	
Date of referendum	25 September 2022	Yes	1,062,703	371%		Fail	
Electorate	5,549,085	Votes cast as share of electorate				52.3%	
Total votes cast	2,900,889	Valid votes as share of votes cast				98.7%	
Total valid votes	2,861,791						
<b>Referendum question</b>		Valid answers		N	%	Outcome	
Do you want to accept the popular initiative “No factory farming in Switzerland?”	<i>Wollen Sie die Volksinitiative “Keine Massentierhaltung in der Schweiz (Massentierhaltungsinitiative)” annehmen?/Acceptez-vous l’initiative populaire “Non à l’élevage intensif en Suisse (initiative sur l’élevage intensif)”?</i>	No	1,799,088	62.9%			
<b>Referendum 2</b>		Valid answers		N	%	Outcome	
Date of referendum	25 September 2022	Yes	1,570,813	55.1%		Pass	
Electorate	5,549,085	Votes cast as share of electorate				52.2%	
Total votes cast	2,894,562	Valid votes as share of votes cast				98.5%	
Total valid votes	2,852,260						
<b>Referendum question</b>		Valid answers		N	%	Outcome	
Do you want to accept the Federal Decree of 17 December 2021 on the supplementary financing of Old-Age and Survivors’ Insurance (OASI) by increasing value-added tax?	<i>Wollen Sie den Bundesbeschluss vom 17. Dezemeber 2021 über die Zusatzfinanzierung der AHV durch eine Erhöhung der Mehrwertsteuer annehmen?/Acceptez-vous l’arrêté fédéral du 17 décembre 2021 sur le financement additionnel de l’AVS par le biais d’un relèvement de la TVA?</i>	No	1,281,447	44.9%			

Table 4. (Continued)

<b>Referendum 3</b>		Valid answers		N	%	Outcome	
Date of referendum	25 September 2022	Yes	1,442,591	50.6%	50.6%	Pass	
Electorate	5,549,085	Votes cast as share of electorate				52.2%	
Total votes cast	2,895,809	Valid votes as share of votes cast				98.6%	
Total valid votes	2,853,987						
<b>Referendum question</b>		Valid answers		N	%	Outcome	
Do you want to accept the amendment of 17 December 2021 to the Federal Act on Old-Age and Survivors' Insurance (OASIA)?	<i>Wollen Sie die Änderung vom 17. Dezember 2021 des Bundesgesetzes über die Alters- und Hinterlassenenversicherung (AHVG) (AHV 21) annehmen? / Acceptez-vous la modification du 17 décembre 2021 de la loi fédérale sur l'assurance vieillesse et survivants (LAVS) (AVS 21)?</i>	No	1,411,396	49.4%	49.4%		
<b>Referendum 4</b>		Valid answers		N	%	Outcome	
Date of referendum	25 September 2022	Yes	1,316,230	48.0%	48.0%	Fail	
Electorate	5,549,085	Votes cast as share of electorate				51.7%	
Total votes cast	2,869,258	Valid votes as share of votes cast				95.6%	
Total valid votes	2,742,687						
<b>Referendum question</b>		Valid answers		N	%	Outcome	
Do you want to accept the amendment of 17 December 2021 to the Federal Act on Withholding Tax (VstG)?	<i>Wollen Sie die Änderung vom 17. Dezember 2021 des Bundesgesetzes über die Verrechnungssteuer (Verrechnungssteuergesetz, VStG) (Stärkung des Fremdkapitalmarks) annehmen?/Acceptez-vous la modification du 17 décembre 2021 de la loi fédérale sur l'impôt anticipé (LIA) (Renforcement du marché des capitaux de tiers)?</i>	No	1,426,457	52.0%	52.0%		

Source: Swissvotes (2023).

### *Cabinet report*

In 2022, two members of the Federal Council announced their resignation by the end of the year. Ueli Maurer (SVP/UDC), Federal Councillor and Head of the Federal Department of Finance, pronounced that he is stepping down on 30 September 2022. On 2 November 2022, family reasons made Simonetta Sommaruga (SPS/PSS), Federal Councillor and Head of the Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications, take the same decision after her husband suffered a stroke. With a period of office of 14 and 13 years, respectively, both Federal Councillors have served for a period well above the average of some 10 years (Vatter 2020: 112). Parliament was due to elect successors on 7 December 2022. In Swiss-style consociationalism, the outcome of government elections is in uttermost cases a story of “fresh faces, old coalition formula”: The two outgoing ministers were replaced by Federal Councillors-elect Albert Rösti (SVP/UDC) and Elisabeth Baume-Schneider (SPS/PSS), respectively. Hence neither the party-political nor the gender composition of the Cabinet has changed (Table 5). Still, there was a historic component in the election as Baume-Schneider became the first person from the canton of Jura to be represented in the Swiss national government—that is, the youngest canton, which was founded in 1979 amid a severe territorial conflict. Noteworthy, with an average age of 60 years, Switzerland now has the oldest Cabinet in Europe (Zumbrunn et al. 2023).

### *Parliament report*

In 2022, six MPs of the lower house (National Council) stepped down for reasons ranging from resignation from political offices altogether to election to the Federal Council or the government of their home canton. While the party-political composition of the lower house was not affected by the legislative turnover, the share of female National Councillors was slightly pushed down from 42.5 per cent to 41.5 per cent (Table 6).

In the upper house (Council of States), there has been but one change: as Elisabeth Baume-Schneider (SPS/PSS), Councillor of States, was elected to the national government, Mathilde Crevoisier Crelier (SPS/PSS) was sworn in her place to represent the canton of Jura (Table 7).

### *Political party report*

There were no changes in the Swiss party landscape, neither in terms of the parties' organization nor in terms of leadership.

### *Institutional change report*

At the national level, no major institutional changes occurred besides the amendments to the Federal Constitution, triggered by the popular initiative requesting a ban on tobacco advertising and sponsorship as well as by the mandatory referendum on the rise in VAT, which both passed in a popular vote (see section “Election report”).

Table 5. Cabinet composition of the Federal Council (*Bundesrat/Conseil fédéral*) in Switzerland in 2022

Type of Cabinet	Oversized coalition	Seats in Cabinet		Seats held by women		Seats in Parliament	
		N	%	N	% of party	N	%
A.	Party/gender composition on 1 January 2022						
	Swiss People's Party	2	28.6%	0	0.0%	59	24.0%
	<i>Schweizerische Volkspartei/Union démocratique du centre</i>						
	FDP:The Liberals	2	28.6%	1	50.0%	41	16.7%
	<i>FDP.Die Liberalen/PLR.Les Libéraux-Radicaux</i>						
	Social Democratic Party	2	28.6%	1	50.0%	48	19.5%
	<i>Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz/Parti Socialiste</i>						
	The Centre	1	14.3%	1	100.0%	41	16.7%
	<i>Die Mitte/Le Centre</i>						
	Totals	7	100.0%	3	42.9%	189	76.9%
B.	Composition of the Federal Council on 1 January 2022						
	<i>See previous editions of the Political Data Yearbook for Switzerland or http://politicaldatayearbook.com</i>						



Table 5. (Continued)

C.	Changes in composition of the Federal Council during 2022	Outgoing minister	Outgoing date	Incoming minister	Comments
	Ministerial title				
	Federal Councilor, Head of the Federal Department of Finance	Ueli Maurer 1950 Male SVP/UDC	31 December 2022	Albert Rösti 1967 Male SVP/UDC	Resigned
	Federal Councilor, Head of the Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications	Simonetta Sommaruga 1960 Female SPS/PSS	31 December 2022	Elisabeth Baume-Schneider 1963 Female SPS/PSS	Resigned

Table 5. (Continued)

D. Party/gender composition on 31 December 2022	Seats in Cabinet		Seats held by women		Seats in Parliament	
	N	%	N	% of party	N	%
Swiss People's Party <i>Schweizerische Volkspartei/Union démocratique du centre</i>	2	28.6%	0	0.0%	59	24.0%
FDP: The Liberals <i>FDP: Die Liberalen/PLR: Les Libéraux-Radicaux</i>	2	28.6%	1	50.0%	41	16.7%
Social Democratic Party <i>Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz/Parti Socialiste</i>	2	28.6%	1	50.0%	48	19.5%
The Centre <i>Die Mitte/Le Centre</i>	1	14.3%	1	100.0%	41	16.7%
Totals	7	100.0%	3	42.9%	189	76.9%

Notes:

1. In Switzerland, the term of office of the members of the national government is constitutionally fixed, that is, all Federal Councillors are elected for a four-year-period. The Cabinet cannot be dismissed/dissolved. The term of this Council is from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2023.
  2. "Parliament" refers to the United Federal Assembly and thus consists of the seats in both chambers (i.e., National Council and Council of States), adding up to a total of 246 seats.
  3. The President and the Vice-President of the Swiss Confederation rotate annually. Since they are elected from the seven members of the Federal Council, their one-term-period-of-office does not change the party/gender composition of the Cabinet (see section "Election report" for details).
- Source: The Federal Council (2023).

Table 6. Party and gender composition of the lower house of Parliament (*Nationalrat/Conseil national*) in Switzerland in 2022

Party	1 January 2022						31 December 2022					
	All			Women			All			Women		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Swiss People's Party	55	27.5%	14	25.5%	55	27.5%	14	25.5%	55	27.5%	14	25.5%
<i>Fraktion der Schweizerischen Volkspartei/Groupe de l'Union démocratique du centre</i>												
Social Democrats	39	19.5%	24	61.5%	39	19.5%	24	61.5%	39	19.5%	24	61.5%
<i>Sozialdemokratische Fraktion/ Groupe socialiste</i>												
The Centre Group	31	15.5%	9	29.0%	31	15.5%	9	29.0%	31	15.5%	9	29.0%
<i>Die Mitte-Fraktion. Die Mitte.EVP/Le groupe du centre.Le centre.PEV</i>												
Centre.EPP	29	14.5%	12	41.4%	29	14.5%	12	41.4%	29	14.5%	12	41.4%
<i>FDP.The Liberals Fraktion/ Groupe libéral-radical</i>												
Liberal Group	30	15.0%	18	60.0%	30	15.0%	18	60.0%	30	15.0%	18	60.0%
<i>Grüne Fraktion/ Groupe des Verts</i>												
Green Group	16	8.0%	8	50.0%	16	8.0%	8	50.0%	16	8.0%	8	50.0%
<i>Grünliberale Fraktion/ Groupe vert libéral</i>												
Green Liberal Group	200	100.0%	85	42.5%	200	100.0%	85	42.5%	200	100.0%	85	42.5%
<i>Totals</i>												

Notes: Parliamentary groups are not identical to political parties, as either MPs who belong to the same political party or MPs who share similar ideological views may get together to form a parliamentary group.

Source: The Federal Assembly (2023).

Table 7. Party and gender composition of the upper house of Parliament (*Ständerat/Conseil des États*) in Switzerland in 2022

Party	1 January 2022						31 December 2022					
	All			Women			All			Women		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
The Centre Group. The Centre. EPP	14	30.4%	5	35.7%	14	30.4%	5	35.7%	14	30.4%	5	35.7%
FDP. The Liberals Group	12	26.1%	1	8.3%	12	26.1%	1	8.3%	12	26.1%	1	8.3%
Social Democrats	8	17.4%	3	37.5%	8	17.4%	3	37.5%	8	17.4%	3	37.5%
Swiss People's Party	7	15.2%	0	0.0%	7	15.2%	0	0.0%	7	15.2%	0	0.0%
Green Group	5	10.9%	4	80.0%	5	10.9%	4	80.0%	5	10.9%	4	80.0%
Totals	46	100.0%	13	28.3%	46	100.0%	13	28.3%	46	100.0%	13	28.3%

Source: The Federal Assembly (2023).

Turning to the cantons, the complete overhaul of the electoral system in the canton of Graubünden is worth mentioning. In early 2022, Graubünden and Appenzell Innerrhoden were the only two remaining cantons utilizing purely majority and plurality methods for cantonal elections. In 2019, the Swiss Federal Supreme Court, however, ruled that Graubünden's electoral system violates the principle that every vote counts the same and is thus unconstitutional. After Graubünden's electorate rejected the switch to proportional representation (PR) eight times at the ballot box, the 2021 "*Bündner Kompromiss*" finally passed—a compromise that delicately balanced proportional representation of all votes and proportional representation of all valley populations (regions). The 2022 cantonal elections were thus the first ones held under biproportional apportionment, that is, a PR method that is also common in other cantons (Vatter et al. 2020).

### *Issues in national politics*

Traditionally, the Swiss political discourse is largely shaped by the practice of direct democracy, that is, the many proposals that are put to the ballot up to four times per year. Also in 2022, popular votes have set new topics on the agenda (e.g., eco-friendly farming, animal welfare), forced the political elite to take a stand on "morality politics" (e.g., organ donation), and/or manufactured broad *ad hoc* campaigning coalitions Swiss politics is in need of in order to pass the high referendum hurdles (e.g., OASI reform).

Besides, there have been two major and highly controversial "elephant-in-the-room" issues. The first issue is Swiss–EU relations. After the Federal Council unilaterally broke off negotiations with the EU on an overriding institutional framework agreement in 2021, both sides kept struggling to sort out their differences and to look for a new way forward. The explanatory talks since the Swiss rejection of the deal have revealed a political standoff: Switzerland has continued to seek opt-outs of some of the single market rules, while Brussels is not keen to concede too much. The manifold consequences of this ongoing stalemate are all obvious. Most notably, Switzerland's loss of participation in the "Horizon Europe" research program is a heavy blow for Swiss universities (Walter & Wasserfallen 2024).

Second, in light of the 2 Russian invasion of Ukraine and subsequent global turmoil, 2022 was also marked by numerous attempts at gearing up the country for future crises. In principle, Swiss-style consensus democracy is more capable of crisis management than majoritarianism (Freiburghaus et al. 2023). Still, the COVID-19 pandemic, the massive influx of refugees, and the looming energy crisis have shown that intergovernmental relations between the federation and the cantons, as well as the institutional make-up of the Federal Council, are in dire need of reform (e.g., Freiburghaus & Mueller 2024; Freiburghaus et al. 2021). Otherwise, the Swiss federal government will need to continue to use emergency powers to speed up the required responses. These are challenges that have been identified by scholars and practitioners alike—but have so far failed to pass the rigid rules for institutional reform(s) in Switzerland.

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## Note

1. Previously known as CVP/PDC.

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