



**ONLINE** FORUM  
ON MODERN  
**DIRECT DEMOCRACY**

# Swiss Direct Democracy in Practice

Issues and Campaigns

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# Outline

1. Recurrent important ballots topics
2. Users of the direct democratic tools
3. Campaign
4. Are votes «corruptible»?



# 1. Recurrent important ballots topics

- In the past 50 years the most recurrent topics were:
  - Social policy (e.g. old-age insurance)
  - Infrastructure and living environment (e.g. road transport infrastructure)
  - State order (e.g. naturalisation, citizens' rights)
- Ballot topics so generally reflect the (perceived) political focal points

# 1. Recurrent important ballots topics

Topic	1971–1980	1981–1990	1991–2000	2001–2011	2012–2020	Total
State order	8	7	21	13	14	63
Foreign policy	3	1	7	7	6	24
Security	3	4	7	6	7	27
Economy	15	9	11	2	20	57
Public finances	16	3	9	7	20	55
Infrastructure and living environment	16	21	19	14	18	88
Social policy	13	13	28	26	32	112
Education, culture, media	7	6	3	6	7	29
Total votes	81	64	105	81	124	455

## 2. Users of the direct democratic tools

Phase	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
Period	1848– 1874	1875– 1891	1892– 1919	1920– 1939	1940– 1969	1970– 1990	1991– 2016	1848– 2016
Number of votes (ø/year)	12 (0,4)*	27 (1,6)	41 (1,5)	55 (2,8)	88 (2,8)	148 (7,4)	253 (9,7)	624 (3,7)
Mand. referenda (ø/year)	12 (04)	8 (0,5)	18 (0,6)	15 (0,8)	35 (1,1)	59 (3,0)	48 (1,8)	195 (1,2)
Opt. referenda (ø/year)	–	19 (1,1)	12 (0,4)	15 (0,8)	26 (0,8)	28 (1,4)	80 (3,1)	180 (1,1)
Popular initiatives (ø/year)	–	–	10 (0,4)	20 (1,0)	21 (0,7)	47 (2,4)	111 (4,3)	209 (1,2)
Counterproposal (ø/year)	–	–	1 (0,0)	5 (0,3)	6 (0,2)	14 (0,7)	14 (0,5)	40 (0,2)

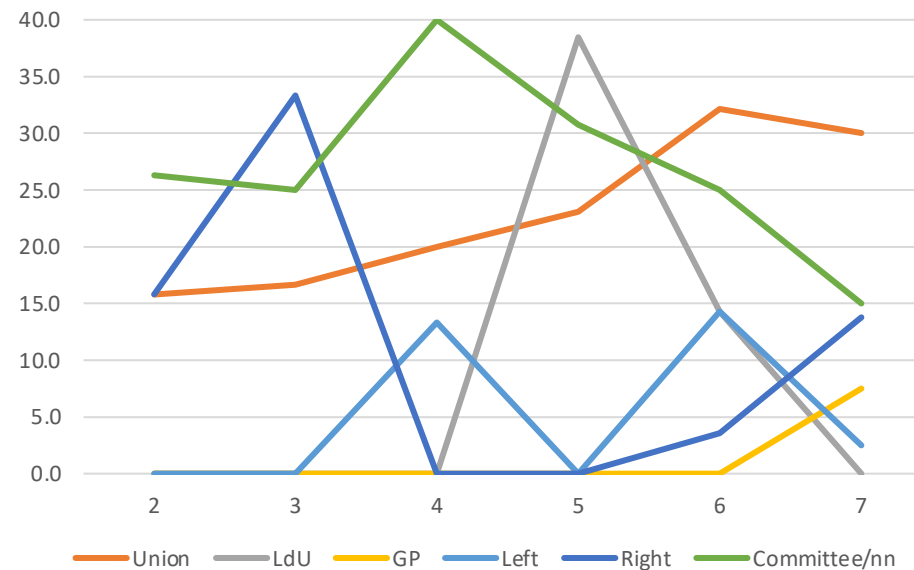
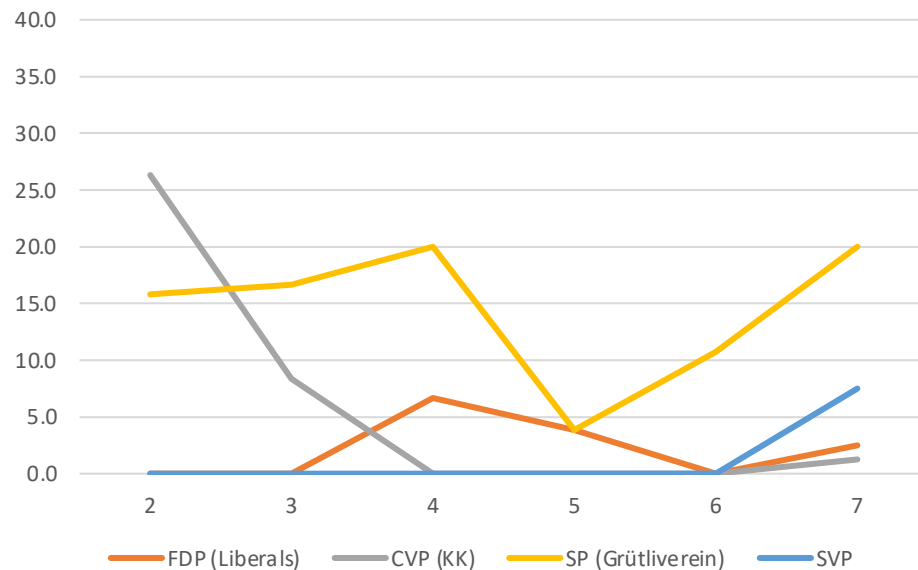
Initiator optional referenda (in %)								
<i>Initiator popular initiatives (in %)</i>								
FDP/Liberals	–	0	0	6,7	3,8	0	2,5	2,2
		–	0	0	14,3	0	0,9	1,9
CVP (KK)	–	26,3	8,3**	0	0	0	1,3	3,9
		–	40,0	0	0	0	1,8	2,9
SP/Grütliverein	–	15,8	16,7	20,0	3,9	10,7	20,0	15,6
		–	30,0	20,0	28,6	12,8	18,0	18,7
BGB/SVP	–	0	0	0	0	0	7,5	3,3
		–	0	0	0	0	9,9	5,3
Other parties	–	15,8	33,3	13,3	38,5	32,1	23,8	26,1
		–	0	30,0	28,6	27,7	9,9	17,2
Union	–	15,8	16,7	20,0	23,1	32,1	30,0	26,1
		–	30,0	30,0	23,8	31,9	35,1	32,5
Committee/nn	–	26,3	25,0	40,0	30,7	25,0	15,0	22,8
		–	0	20,0	4,8	27,7	24,3	21,5

*Comments:* Reading examples: \* In phase 1 (1848-1874) a total of 12 proposals were voted on (on average 0.4 proposals per year); \*\* in phase 3 (1892-1919) the CVP (or the Catholic-Conservative Party) was the initiator of 8.3 percent of all 12 submitted optional referendums and 40 percent of the 10 submitted popular initiatives. nn = not specified: no attribution possible (in 17 of the 180 facultative referenda, the initiators could not be identified or attributed; these 17 cases were assigned to the



## 2. Users of the direct democratic tools

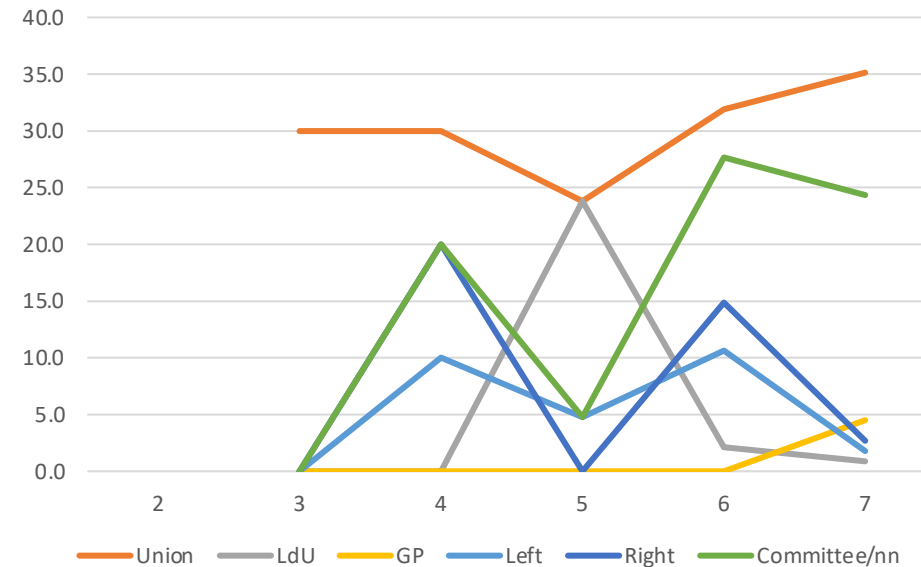
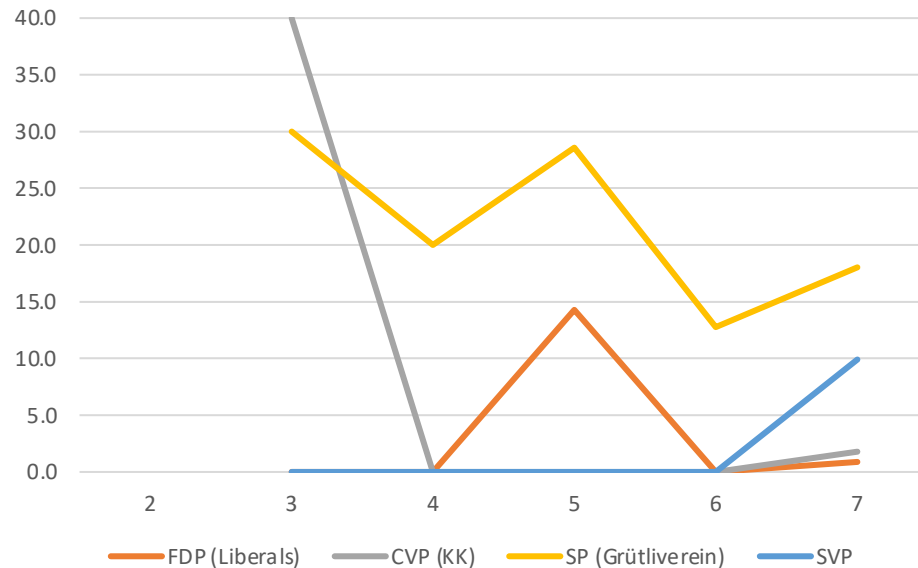
Optional referendum initiated by... (in % pro phase)



Source: Bühlmann (2018: 149)

## 2. Users of the direct democratic tools

Popular initiatives initiated by... (in % pro phase)



## 2. Users of the direct democratic tools

- Popular initiatives and optional referendum are used as an **opposition** instrument by:
  - Catholic-Conservatives (at the very beginning)
  - SP
  - Swiss People's Party
  - Unions
  - Ad hoc committees



## 2. Users of the direct democratic tools

- The increasing legislative activity of the Parliament lead to an increase in political decisions and, hence, in the use of optional referendum as a post control instrument by non-parliamentary actors.



## 3. Campaign

- Analysis of the political advertisements of the forthcoming ballots:
  - Above-average number of advertisements on the hunting Act, whereby the opponents of the draft clearly placed more advertisements than the proponents.
  - The number of advertisements for the Limitation Initiative is comparatively low in view of the importance of the SVP petition ascribed in advance.
  - The paternity leave and the buy of New Fighter Aircraft were advertised below average.
  - Only nine advertisements about the deduction for third childcare.

## 4. Are votes «corruptible»?

- Money never hurts – and can be conducive to ballot box success.
- But money is no panacea as the relationship between money spent for a campaign and votes result is complex (other aspects play a role, e.g. predispositions to the topic).
- No transparency rules whatsoever – Switzerland regularly criticized over opaque political financing (e.g., parties, campaigns).

# Literature

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# Appendix - Turnout

