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# What should Switzerland's direction be over the next four years? Welcome to our big 2023 election survey.

THEODORA PETER UND MARC LETTAU

In around two months' time, on 22 October 2023, Switzerland's voters will choose a new parliament. The 246 newly elected National Council and Council of States members will then shape the country's political course over the next four years. In December, parliament will appoint the seven-member federal government, the Federal Council, for a new term. According to an unwritten rule, referred to as the "magic formula", the three biggest political parties are entitled to two Federal Council seats each, and the fourth-strongest party to one seat. This arrangement could change based on how the current parties in government (the SVP, SP, FDP, and Centre) perform in the parliamentary elections. With Alain Berset (SP) announcing that he will step down from the government at the end of the year (see page 8), there is already one vacant seat up for grabs. The six remaining members of the Federal Council intend to stand for election again.

## Parliament plays a key role

The Federal Council and parliament pass legislation and set the course for



making decisions that affect our everyday lives and shape the outlook of future generations. In direct democracy, voters can influence the country's political course through referendums and initiatives. Nevertheless, the composition of parliament plays a key role in determining the overall orientation. Over the next few years, Switzerland faces significant political challenges both domestically and abroad. What is the country's position on Europe? Must we redefine Swiss neutrality in view of Russia's war of aggression? How do we meet our climate goals? How will Switzerland meet its future energy needs? How do we secure the long-term funding of pension provision?

## Six parties in the spotlight

"Swiss Review" grilled Switzerland's six biggest political parties ahead of the elections. We wanted to know the positions of the SVP, SP, FDP, Centre, Greens, and Green Liberals in three key areas: environment and energy; neutrality and foreign policy; and society and domestic policy. We also focused on the "Fifth Switzerland" in our survey. What do you think about the Swiss Abroad exercising their po-

litical rights? Should Switzerland go ahead with e-voting? And the key question: why should Swiss citizens living abroad vote for your party?

On pages 18 to 23, you can now read the answers that the political parties gave to these and other fundamental questions. Further questions and answers are available online – in addition to a comprehensive dossier containing every "Swiss Review" article on the 2023 elections to date. Finally, page 24 contains the names of the candidates from the "Fifth Switzerland" who are standing for a seat in the National Council. It also includes an explanation as to why it is particularly hard for these candidates to get elected to parliament.

### Further information

How the main political parties approach the "Fifth Switzerland": [revue.link/parties](https://www.revue.ch/link/parties)

Online guidance for voters ahead of the federal elections: [revue.link/aides](https://www.revue.ch/link/aides)

Election dossier of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad: [www.elections-2023.ch](https://www.elections-2023.ch)



### Swiss People's Party (SVP)

Right-wing national-conservative party; strongest party since 2003. 2019 election: 25.6%. Current political weight: 53 seats in National Council, 7 seats in Council of States, 2 seats in Federal Council.  
www.svp.ch



Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz

### Swiss Social Democratic Party (SP)

The only left-wing party in government; roots go back to labour movement. 2019 election: 16.8%. Current political weight: 39 seats in National Council, 7 seats in Council of States, 2 seats in Federal Council.  
www.sp-ps.ch

**FDP**  
Die Liberalen

### FDP – The Liberals

Merged with the Liberal Party in 2009 to establish FDP.The Liberals. 2019 election: 15.1%. Current political weight: 29 seats in National Council, 12 seats in Council of States, 2 seats in Federal Council.  
www.fdp.ch

Approved by voters on 18 June 2023, the Climate and Innovation Act points the way towards making Switzerland carbon-neutral by 2050. Do we need further climate action?

**No.** There is no need for government intervention in a free-market economy. We need to intensify energy research instead. To ensure safe electricity production, we also need new fourth-generation nuclear power plants as well as a system for recycling spent fuel rods.

**Yes.** To meet our climate goals, we must expedite our energy transition towards renewables. We must improve energy efficiency, speed up the modernisation of buildings, enhance public transport, regulate and hold the financial sector to account, and reduce energy consumption to a reasonable level.

**Yes.** Provided we implement liberal policies to meet our climate goals. This includes agreeing on targets and carbon trading rules for the industrial sector as well as implementing measures related to buildings and mobility. We should look for technology-neutral solutions in all areas.

As approved by voters in 2017, Swiss law bans the construction of new nuclear power stations. Should we lift the ban?

**Yes.** Because the catastrophic meltdown at the Japanese nuclear power plant in Fukushima influenced the electorate's decision to approve the ban. This disaster is irrelevant to Switzerland and the safety of our power plants.

**No.** As part of the Paris Agreement, Switzerland and other countries are committed to limiting global warming to no more than 1.5°C. This means moving away from fossil fuels and nuclear power.

**Neither yes nor no.** Apart from a massive expansion in renewable energy, Switzerland urgently needs new big power plants to ensure energy security with enough base-load capacity throughout the year, including winter.

The expansion of solar power, wind power and hydropower is increasingly to the detriment of environmental protection. Is this a justifiable trade-off?

**Neither yes nor no.** It depends on whether the expansion in renewables relates to existing infrastructure such as dams or installations on buildings that already have an environmental impact, or to new infrastructure with a highly detrimental impact on wildlife and the natural landscape.

**Yes.** But the SP has already suggested specific ways in which to reconcile the rapid roll-out of hydro, wind and solar with environmental concerns. It is possible to turbocharge the development of renewables while preventing irreversible biodiversity loss.

**Yes.** We need a rapid expansion in power capacity. Both the public sector and electricity suppliers must drive the increase in renewables and take advantage of simplified approval procedures. Efforts by the left-green faction and environmental organisations to oppose this are counterproductive.

The Swiss Evangelical People's Party (EVP) (3 seats in National Council), the Partei der Arbeit Schweiz (PdAS) (1 seat), Solidarités (1 seat), the Federal Democratic Union of Switzerland (EDU) (1 seat), and Lega (1 seat) were not included in the survey. One independent sits in the Council of States.



### The Centre

Founded in 2021 following the merger of the Christian Democratic People's Party (CVP) and Conservative Democratic Party (BDP). 2019 election (cumulative result): 13.8%. Current political weight: 28 seats in National Council, 14 seats in Council of States, 1 seat in Federal Council. [www.die-mitte.ch](http://www.die-mitte.ch)



### Swiss Green Party (the Greens)

Left-wing party whose roots go back to the anti-nuclear movement. 2019 election: 13.2%. Current political weight: 28 seats in National Council, 5 seats in Council of States, 0 seats in Federal Council. [www.gruene.ch](http://www.gruene.ch)



### Green Liberal Party (the Green Liberals, GLP)

Founded in 2007 as a moderate splinter group of the left-leaning Greens. 2019 election: 7.8%. Current political weight: 16 seats in National Council, 0 seats in Council of States, 0 seats in Federal Council. [www.gruenliberale.ch](http://www.gruenliberale.ch)

**Yes.** The Climate and Innovation Act delivers on the net-zero goal of the Paris Agreement. With its stimulus programme for residential buildings, its emission reduction targets, and its promotion of innovation, the legislation constitutes an effective, balanced package. It is an important step in the right direction. Further democratically approved steps are still necessary.

**Yes.** The legislation sets climate goals and promotes key action. But more money is needed. This is why the Greens have co-launched the Climate Fund Initiative, calling for 0.5 to 1 per cent of GDP to be set aside for the purpose of fighting climate change and protecting the environment.

**Yes.** We need further action to achieve the aims of the legislation. Our four-pronged strategy (efficiency, renewables, energy storage, and Europe) offers intelligent solutions to optimise the synergies between ecology and economy while ensuring energy security.

**No.** We oppose the construction of new nuclear power stations. Instead, we need quick to implement, realistic, pragmatic solutions focusing on domestic, renewable energy to ensure energy security, drive the switch from nuclear and fossil fuels, and reduce our reliance on foreign energy.

**No.** Any new plant would take decades to start producing energy, while costing billions of francs. There are also major safety issues, not to mention the still unsolved problem of nuclear waste. There are good, less expensive, more quickly available renewable alternatives like solar and wind.

**No.** We can ensure energy security with renewables. Nuclear brings major risks and involves the unresolved question of how we dispose of the waste. Our four-pronged strategy (efficiency, renewables, energy storage, and Europe) is clearly a better alternative. However, we support nuclear research.

**Yes.** The Climate and Innovation Act means that Switzerland is committed to net-zero emissions by 2050. We therefore believe it is acceptable to prioritise specific projects aimed at generating renewable energy. This includes developing dams and pushing solar power.

**No.** Biodiversity and the switch from nuclear and fossil fuels are inextricably linked. We, the Greens, are committed to expanding renewable energy in tandem with nature. This means stopping energy wastage as well as installing solar panels on all suitable roofs, facades and infrastructure to mitigate the environmental impact.

**Yes.** Provided there is no irreversible, disproportionate impact that cannot be offset through suitable replacement or compensatory measures. Furthermore, we are against irreversibly damaging and destroying natural or cultural assets of national importance. The benefits must also be sufficient to justify the environmental impact.

Additional questions and answers can be found in our online edition: [www.revue.ch](http://www.revue.ch)





Several European countries would like to supply Ukraine with Swiss-manufactured weapons, but this is not possible under Swiss law as it stands. Should Switzerland allow the re-export to take place?

**No.** A country that respects the rule of law keeps to the agreements that it has signed. The unilateral re-export of arms to a warring party would violate Swiss neutrality. We would lose our international status as a neutral country – and consequently our role as an unbiased intermediary.

**Yes.** Although Switzerland is a neutral country, it has a legal, political and moral duty to support Ukraine. The SP advocates a solution that would allow the Federal Council, under strict conditions based on international law, to approve requests to re-export weapons to Ukraine by way of exception.

**Yes.** The war in Ukraine has shown that the War Materiel Act in its current form is unsuitable for the challenges of today. For months, the FDP has been committed to finding a solution compatible with neutrality.

Russia's war on Ukraine is testing Swiss neutrality. Must we redefine what neutrality means?

**No.** Switzerland is a sovereign country. Our neutrality defines our foreign policy and forbids us from being a party to armed conflicts between other countries. However, we must provide humanitarian assistance to all warring parties and support all peace negotiations.

**Yes.** We must adapt neutrality to the reality of the times. Neutrality does not mean championing a country or a group of countries with imperial aspirations, but standing on the side of international law at all times. This also includes being more proactive in supporting the UN and its objectives.

**Neither yes nor no.** Neutrality is an instrument for maintaining security and not a means to shirk responsibility. We should always adapt it to the prevailing circumstances. Neutrality was never meant to be rigid.

The retirement age for men and women will be 65 from 2028. Should the retirement age be raised again for both sexes to secure the long-term funding of the welfare system?

**Neither yes nor no.** Further reform will be necessary in future. Demographic changes mean that the retirement age needs to be made more flexible. The current reform has stabilised Old-age and survivors' insurance (OASI) until at least 2030. We will see what the next reform brings, as soon as we begin to address the time beyond 2030 within the next few years.

**No.** The right-wing parties want to hollow out the welfare state bit by bit. Less money is available thanks to their policies. Instead, we need to shore up pensions to protect purchasing power. This is why the SP is against a further increase in the retirement age and in favour of a 13th OASI pension payment.

**Yes.** OASI is heading for financial meltdown due to demographic changes. By raising the retirement age to 66 and linking the retirement age to life expectancy, our Pension Initiative is exactly what is needed to address the problems besetting OASI and ensure that the state pension system continues to work in future.

Around a quarter of Switzerland's population have no Swiss passport. Should we lower the obstacles to citizenship?

**No.** In our direct democracy, citizens have the final say on political decisions. It is, therefore, important that people who arrive in Switzerland understand and learn about their responsibility, the workings of our country, and the long-term consequences of future decisions. This takes time, interest and commitment.

**Yes.** We believe that it is in the interests of us all that the people who live here shape the future of our country. To do so, they need to be allowed to have a say and take decisions like the rest of us. We need uniform, formal naturalisation criteria at federal level, while the naturalisation procedure itself also needs to be quick and inexpensive.

**No.** Simplified naturalisation for third-generation foreign nationals was an important step in 2018. You can always talk about making certain changes here and there, but the FDP believes that the naturalisation procedure works well by and large. The principle still holds that citizenship comes after the process of integration and does not precede it.



**Yes.** The Centre believes that Switzerland must stand with Ukraine and allow other countries to transfer Swiss weapons to Ukraine. We will work constructively towards solutions to support Ukraine as effectively as possible.

**No.** The War Materiel Act forbids the export of Swiss armaments to countries embroiled in war, while our military neutrality precludes making decisions on a case-by-case basis. Switzerland must support Ukraine by providing much more financial assistance, freezing all oligarch assets and banning Russian commodity trading.

**Yes.** Because Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a criminal war of aggression under international law.

**Neither yes nor no.** Neutrality is a foreign policy instrument and not an end in itself. Its function is to ensure Switzerland's independence, security and prosperity in a turbulent world. Swiss neutrality does not absolve us of our responsibility to take a stance.

**Yes.** The war has changed what we thought we knew. Switzerland must contribute to security and stability in Europe. The debate on neutrality has begun. For us, Switzerland clearly stands on the side of international law and human rights.

**Yes.** The Federal Council's interpretation of neutrality is too strict. Where the use of force violates international law, Switzerland must be able to support the victim, particularly by providing essential supplies (e.g. protective helmets and vests) to the civilian population.

**No.** The latest reform has secured the funding of OASI for the next few years. A further increase in the retirement age is, therefore, neither financially necessary nor socially acceptable. However, OASI still discriminates against married couples by capping their pensions. This needs to stop (see our Fair Pensions Initiative).

**No.** A further increase in the retirement age is unnecessary. OASI can easily be funded through a fair reallocation of SNB profits and a slight increase in the contribution percentage rate. The Greens also support an inheritance tax on the superrich to the fund OASI.

**Yes.** Retirement provision is becoming increasingly unbalanced as a result of demographic change. To keep pension benefits at their current levels, we need to change the retirement age and make it more flexible. But other measures are still needed (e.g. a debt ceiling for OASI).

**No.** The Centre opposes any changes to the Swiss Citizenship Act, which was only amended five years ago. To become a Swiss citizen, you must meet certain conditions. Acquisition of citizenship is the outcome, not a condition, of successful integration.

**Yes.** Because our democracy becomes stronger when more people are able to participate in it. This is why the Greens support the Democracy Initiative to make naturalisation a fundamental right, with the same fair conditions for naturalisation applying to everyone.

**Yes.** We want the following: 1) The process of becoming Swiss to start at school: those in compulsory education for at least 5 years considered to be integrated in and familiar with Swiss life. 2) Naturalisation applications can be made after 7 years instead of after 10. 3) The minimum period of stay in the municipality should be reduced to 1 to 3 years. 4) No more naturalisation "interviews".



Several cantons have voted no to lowering the cantonal voting age from 18 to 16. Should 16-year-olds be allowed to vote at federal level?

**No.** Sixteen-year-olds are children in the eyes of the law and do not have the same rights and obligations as adults. They are not yet integrated into the world of work either, which is why lowering the voting age is inappropriate. All decisions at the ballot box have consequences. A 16-year-old cannot make these decisions yet.

**Yes.** Political participation is crucial. Teenagers under 18 are unable to vote despite the fact that political decisions will affect them the longest. This is wrong. They should have voting rights at municipal, cantonal and national level from the age of 16.

**No.** In several cantons, a lowering of the voting age has been rejected at the ballot box or at parliamentary level. Introducing this change at federal level and presenting the cantons with a fait accompli would be undemocratic. The voting age should remain at 18, when children legally become adults. Instead of making more exceptions, we need to have a fundamental discussion about the adult legal age.

E-voting pilots took place again in three cantons on 18 June. Should we now push ahead with e-voting and make it available to all Swiss Abroad in particular?

**Neither yes nor no.** Our system is secure and well thought out. E-voting, on the other hand, is prone to fraud (e.g. through hacking). Unfortunately, our suggestion that voting papers be sent to the Swiss Abroad by email and returned by post fell on deaf ears.

**Yes.** Many Swiss Abroad are unable to exercise their constitutionally enshrined political rights, because voting papers continue to arrive too late for many. E-voting is the only way to ensure that the entire "Fifth Switzerland" can take part in elections and popular votes.

**Yes.** Many Swiss Abroad are still unable to exercise their right to vote, because voting papers arrive too late or not at all. E-voting could help to redress this – but not completely, because the necessary codes would still have to be sent by post.

Do we need to take other concrete steps to ensure that the Swiss Abroad can exercise their political rights? If so, what exactly should be done?

**No.** Compared to other countries, our expatriates have generous voting rights. The Swiss Abroad can take part in elections and popular votes at municipal, cantonal and federal level. What is more, it is possible for Swiss Abroad to be elected to the National Council, the Council of States or the Federal Council, even if that is somewhat unlikely.

**Yes.** The Federal Council and the cantons must work towards developing a reliable, trustworthy and financially secure e-voting channel specifically for the "Fifth Switzerland".

**Yes.** The introduction of a government e-ID scheme is vital to ensuring that the necessary codes for e-voting can be sent electronically. An e-ID scheme would also simplify various government and consulate services.

The Swiss Abroad have an indefinite right to vote. Should this right to vote be time-limited instead, e.g. to 30 years?

**No.** Any time limit would be very hard to implement. It is likely that third- or later-generation expats rarely exercise their right to vote anyway, because they no longer have a real connection to Switzerland – unless they actually return to Switzerland.

**No.** More and more Swiss live abroad for differing lengths of time. Many of them will return sooner or later. It is, therefore, right that the Federal Constitution allows them to continue exercising their political rights even if they stay abroad for several decades.

**No.** Swiss have the right to vote both at home and abroad. Swiss Abroad must make sure that they are on the electoral register. Those who no longer have a close connection to Switzerland tend not to exercise their voting rights anyway.



**No.** The youth wing of our party supports lowering the voting age. We are more sceptical. You would first have to lower the adult legal age to 16, which we do not support.

**Yes.** Young people, who still have a long time to live, should also be involved in taking decisions that affect their future. People in modern, progressive democracies should be able to vote from the age of 16. Greater participation makes democracies stronger and more future-proof.

**Yes.** Young people should be able to vote earlier on issues that affect their future (e.g. pension provision, environmental policy, climate and energy policy).

**Yes.** E-voting is very important for Swiss Abroad. It makes it easier for our expatriate nationals to exercise their political rights. The Centre believes, therefore, that the introduction of e-voting is an absolute priority.

**Yes.** However, for security reasons, pilots should be strictly limited to Swiss Abroad and to people with physical and/or mental impairments, to whom e-voting offers genuine added value. If all Swiss Abroad could be officially assigned to their own canton, this would expedite the process.

**Yes.** As long as we can ensure that e-voting is fraud-proof.

**Yes.** The Centre supports concrete measures that allow the Swiss Abroad to participate in Switzerland's political and social life. International election lists is one such measure, which is why we will again have candidates from the "Fifth Switzerland" representing our party this year at the national elections.

**Yes.** We want to make it easier for Swiss Abroad to vote. The Greens believe that embassies and consulates should oversee the process, without the need for any more time-consuming postal deliveries. Furthermore, we support a change in the constitution that would ensure that Swiss Abroad are also represented in parliament.

**Yes.** We should make voting easier wherever possible. This also includes authorities being more proactive in informing Swiss Abroad of their right to vote.

**No.** The Centre believes there is no need to put a time limit on voting rights for Swiss citizens, either at home or abroad.

**No.** The Greens want to extend, not remove, political rights. The Swiss Abroad are no exception in this regard. But it also applies to foreign nationals in Switzerland.

**No.** Swiss expatriates clearly have a role to play in our country's political life. We are committed to increasing expat participation in elections and popular votes. This is why we have launched our international section, GLP International.

Additional questions and answers can be found in our online edition: [www.revue.ch](http://www.revue.ch)