

Direct Democracy in Switzerland: New Findings from Voting Research

Panel at the 2022 Global Forum; Friday, 23rd September, 12.30-15.45;
University of Lucerne, Frohburgstrasse 3, Room 4.B55 (4th floor)

In this panel, political scientists present their recent findings on the functioning of direct democracy in Switzerland and discuss them with the public. The presentations are based on scientific analyses but are presented in a way that is comprehensible to a general, international audience.

Elements of direct democracy are of paramount importance to Swiss politics and society and make the political system of Switzerland unique on a global level. During more than one and a half century of holding direct democratic votes on Switzerland's federal level, rich experience with their actual functioning has accrued. Taking advantage of the relevant data, the presentations take different perspectives to shed light on three big questions: How susceptible has direct democracy been to misuse and manipulation? Has direct democratic voting had rather divisive or uniting effects on the society? And are Switzerland's direct democratic institutions able to deal with modern challenges, or do they need to be reformed?

The six presentations of the panel rely on the contributions to the novel anthology «Direkte Demokratie in der Schweiz: Neue Erkenntnisse aus der Abstimmungsforschung» that is being published by Seismo Press in summer 2022.

Each contribution will be discussed with the audience. There will be ample opportunity to ask questions to prominent researchers on Swiss direct democracy.



Program / Schedule

12.30	Introduction and welcome	Adrian Schmid
12.35	Direct Democracy in Switzerland – new insights into old questions – introduction to the panel	Marc Bühlmann
12.45	The collection of signatures: A suitable measure of the significance of initiatives and referendums?	Hans-Peter Schaub
13.00	Discussion	Audience
13.10	The digitalization of direct democracy and its ambivalence	Wolf Linder
13.25	Discussion	Audience
13.35	Mobilisation through issues? An analysis of voter turnout in national and municipal referenda	Martina Flick Witzig
13.50	Discussion	Audience
14.00	Break	
14.30	Differences between the language regions: Measuring the Röstigraben	Sean Mueller

14.45	Discussion	Audience
14.55	Direct democracy and climate change: Under what conditions are climate policy proposals successful at the ballot box?	Isabelle Stadelmann-Steffen
15.10	Discussion	Audience
15.20	Curse or Blessing? The role of direct democracy for gender equality policies since 1971	Anja Heidelberger
15.35	Discussion	Audience
15.45	End of the Panel	

Dr. Martina Flick Witzig has been a postdoc at the Institute of Political Science at the University of Bern since 2017. Her research focuses on Swiss politics and political institutions.

Dr. Anja Heidelberger is co-director of Année Politique Suisse at the University of Bern, where she is responsible for the policies of social insurance and public finance. She researches participation, campaigns and direct democracy.

Prof. emeritus Dr. Wolf Linder taught political science at the University of Bern. In addition to academic research on Swiss democracy and democratization in developing countries, he produced numerous expert reports for Swiss authorities. Linder was Dean of the Faculty and Ombudsperson of the University of Bern as well as a member of the Swiss National Science Foundation Research Council and the Swiss Science Council.

Dr. Sean Mueller is Assistant Professor at the Institute of Political Studies, University of Lausanne. His research focuses on Swiss politics and comparative federalism.

Dr. Hans-Peter Schaub works at Année Politique Suisse at the University of Bern. He is project manager of the Swissvotes data platform, the most comprehensive data collection on direct-democratic votes in Switzerland. His research focuses on democracy and Swiss politics.

Adrian Schmid is the President of the Schweizer Demokratie Stiftung and Project Manager of the Global Forum 2022. He is Secretary General at the Initiative and Referendum Institute Europe.

Prof. Dr. Isabelle Stadelmann-Steffen is Professor of Comparative Politics at the University of Bern. Her research interests cover the areas of public policy (especially family policy and energy policy), direct democracy, and political behavior and attitudes.

Prof. Dr. Marc Bühlmann studied political science and philosophy in Bern and Geneva. He has been Director of Année Politique Suisse since 2011 and Associate Professor at the Institute of Political Science at the University of Bern since 2013. His teaching and research areas include participation, democratic theory, Swiss politics and direct democracy.