UBS Worry Barometer 2024

Main concerns are healthcare, the environment and economic uncertainty

Editorial

Dear reader,

Every year, the Worry Barometer sheds light on what concerns the Swiss population the most – and has been doing so for nearly 50 years. I am delighted that UBS will be continuing this interesting publication in collaboration with gfs.bern.

The UBS Worry Barometer provides information on what concerns relating to society, the economy and politics the Swiss population have, and highlights the areas in which they see the greatest need for action. The esteemed survey makes a valuable contribution to shaping opinions in our country. It provides informative results not only in the form of absolute figures, but also in terms of how people's perceptions of the individual topics are changing.

This year, the survey shows that the 20 greatest concerns are more strongly influenced by economic uncertainty than has been the case in the past. The results in particular reflect the rising cost of living: top of the list are health issues, health insurance and premiums, closely followed by retirement provision and rental prices. Protecting the environment and climate are still important topics for people and confidence in political actors has remained stable overall. In addition, Swiss voters consider innovation to be a very important factor in the country's economic development.

Switzerland is one of the most successful and competitive countries in the world. We are proud to play our part in its prosperity and to expand our contribution further: as a lender for individuals and companies, as a wealth manager and taxpayer, and as an educator and employer, by promoting innovation, culture and sports, and much more.
A bank for Switzerland.

I hope you enjoy this informative issue of the UBS Worry Barometer 2024.

Sabine Keller-Busse
President UBS Switzerland

This is a marketing publication and is not subject to the rules on the independence of financial analysis.

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1. Introduction

The **UBS Worry Barometer** is an annual study to record and monitor the opinions of Swiss voters. The Worry Barometer has existed for 48 years (formerly the Credit Suisse Worry Barometer) and has been compiled by gfs.bern since 1995.

Thanks to direct democracy, Swiss citizens can have an active influence at all levels of government – federal, cantonal and municipal – and directly help shape or change various areas organized by the state. The UBS Worry Barometer looks at which political topics and issues voters perceive to be particularly pressing and where they see less need for action.

In addition, the UBS Worry Barometer surveys how the economic and political environment is perceived and how voters assess social and political institutions. These aspects form the central component of the Barometer, which has been changed as little as possible over the years to enable comparisons and allow trends to be assessed over time.

Each year, the core component of the UBS Worry Barometer is supplemented by various questions on a current topic to accommodate today's pressing questions. The focus in 2024 is on questions relating to current geopolitical uncertainties and on how Swiss voters view the topic of innovation and Switzerland as a location for innovation.

The UBS Worry Barometer is therefore a broad-based tool that has been used for many years to study public opinion and comprehensively records the social and political sentiment and views of the Swiss population.

1.1. About the method

To take better account of the current political and economic situation in Switzerland, the UBS Worry Barometer questionnaire is reevaluated annually and moderately adapted to current social and political circumstances.
This is particularly true for the perceived challenges.

To compile the UBS Worry Barometer, a mixed-mode survey was conducted involving 2,250 voters from all over Switzerland. The data collected from the various processes was checked individually for method effects. A systematic weighting was then carried out to ensure the data was representative. The interviews were conducted in August and September 2024. The overview below provides information on the exact parameters of this survey.

Table 1: Survey method

Client	UBS
Statistical population	Swiss voters
Data collection	Face to face (n = 250) Polittrends panel (n =1,807) Online opt-in (n = 193)
Type of sampling	Face to face: random selection of locations, quota selection of respondents by language region (age / gender interlocked) gfs.bern panel: invitation via gfs.bern panel Online opt-in: online recruitment via social media, free access to the survey
Survey period	19 August to 16 September 2024
Sample size	Total respondents N = 2,250
Sample error	±2.1% at 50 / 50 and 95% probability
Weighting	Interlocked by age / gender, language region, type of residential area and method

Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August / September 2024

2. Perception of worries

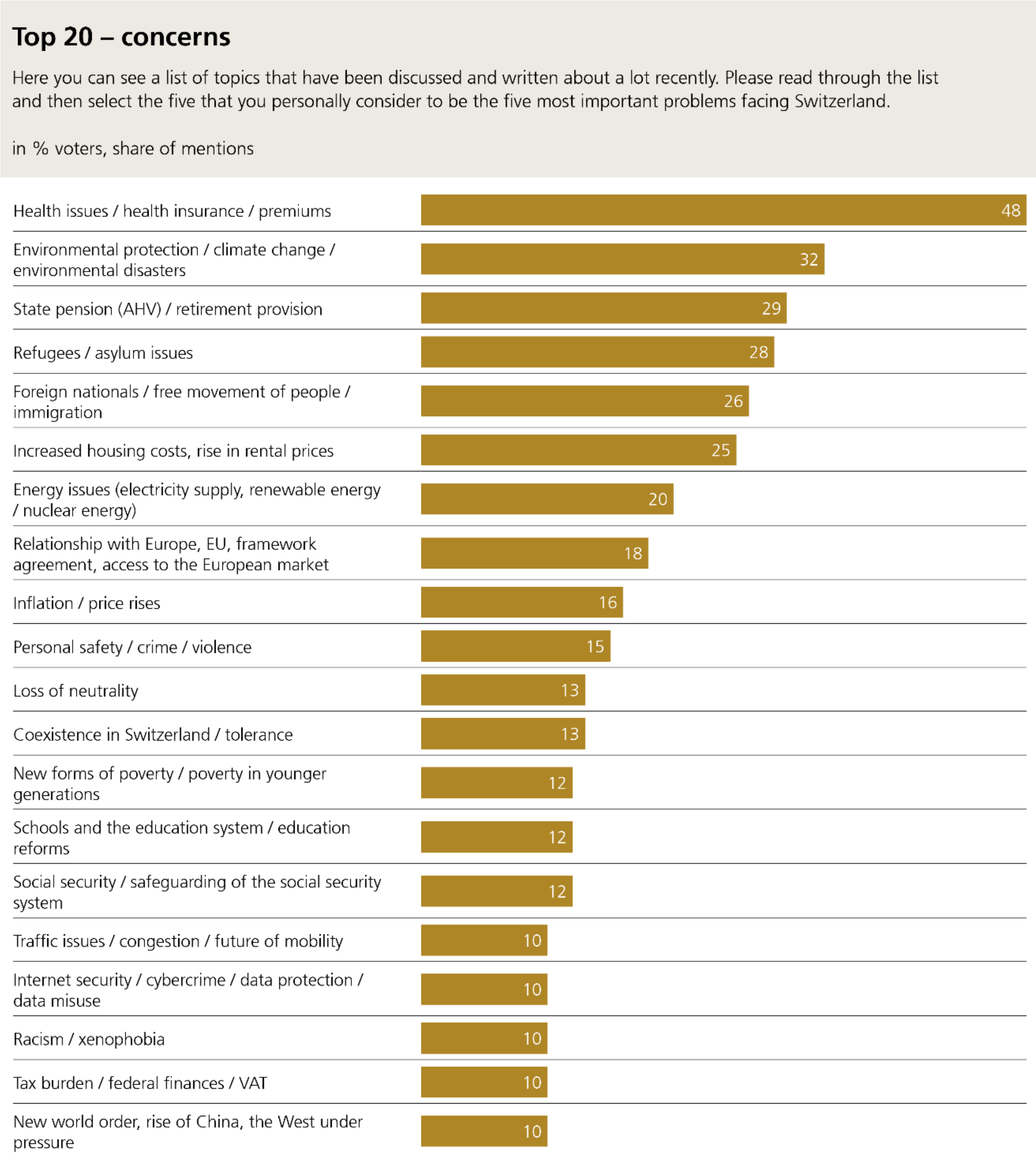
In 2024, Swiss voters are most concerned about the topic of health issues, health insurance and premiums (48%) – and by a significant margin. Rising healthcare costs are also influencing political and public debate, and several health policy proposals were put to a national vote in 2024. In addition, the media announced in the spring that health insurance premiums will rise sharply next year too.

Concern for the environment follows in second place. Around one-third of respondents are concerned about the environment (32%). The topic of state pensions and retirement provision is just behind in third place (29%). The design of the state pension system and the extent to which it will secure retirement provision in the future continues to be a major problem. There is still a need for reform. More than one-quarter of voters are concerned about refugees (28%), immigration (26%) and higher housing costs (25%).

The top 20 concerns of Swiss voters are strongly materialistic. Around one-third of worries relate to financial uncertainty and higher living costs, as a result of rising costs. These concerns include health insurance providers, retirement provision, higher housing costs, inflation, new poverty, safeguarding the future of the social security system and taxes.

A second major topic area is migration, consisting of concerns about refugees (28%) and immigration (26%). On the subject of the free movement of persons, the question about how relations between Switzerland and Europe will be structured is also indirectly linked to the issue of migration. However, concerns about Europe (18%) must also be considered in the context of geopolitical changes. In addition to how relations with the EU should be structured, this topic area includes concerns about Switzerland's loss of neutrality (13%) and the emergence of a new world order in which the West is under increasing pressure (10%).

Figure 1



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (N = 2,250)

The order of the three concerns mentioned most often has not changed compared to last year. However, it's striking that, against the backdrop of the national health proposals, a larger proportion of voters consider health issues and health insurance (premiums) to be one of the biggest worries (+8 percentage points, pp), while the proportion of those who are concerned about environmental protection (-6 pp) and retirement provision (-3 pp) has fallen compared to last year.

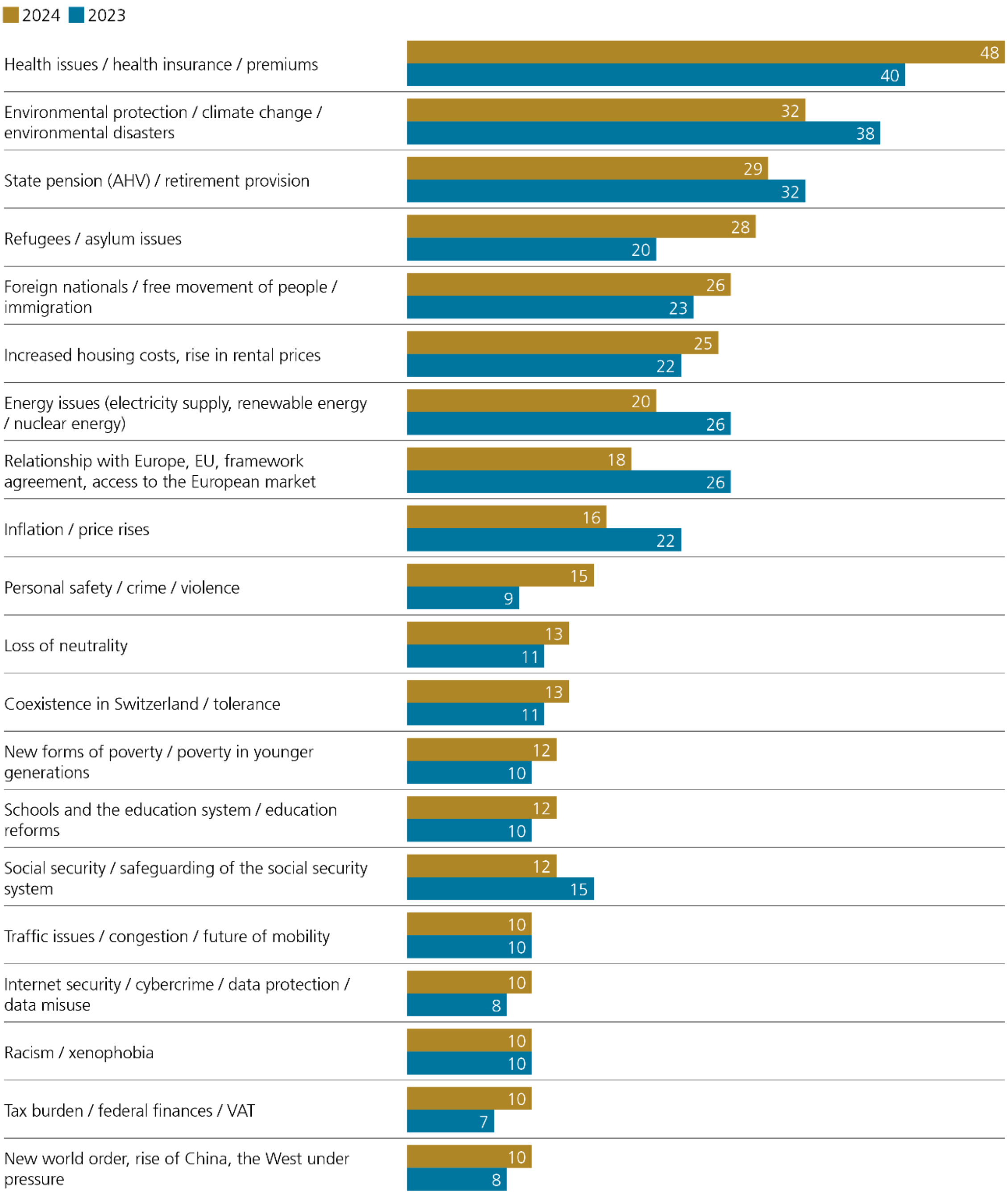
The issue of asylum is mentioned much more frequently as a concern (28%, + 8 pp) and is now in fourth place. This is also true for the related areas of immigration and rising housing costs (both +3 pp). The Swiss are once again more concerned about immigration than they were a year ago. In contrast, energy issues, relations with Europe and inflation are mentioned less frequently. The topic in 10th place, security / crime, is significantly more important compared to 2023 (+6 pp).

Figure 2

Top 20 concerns – 2024 vs. 2023

Here you can see a list of topics that have been discussed and written about a lot recently. Please read through the list and then select the five that you personally consider to be the five most important problems facing Switzerland.

in % voters, share of mentions



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (N = 2,250)

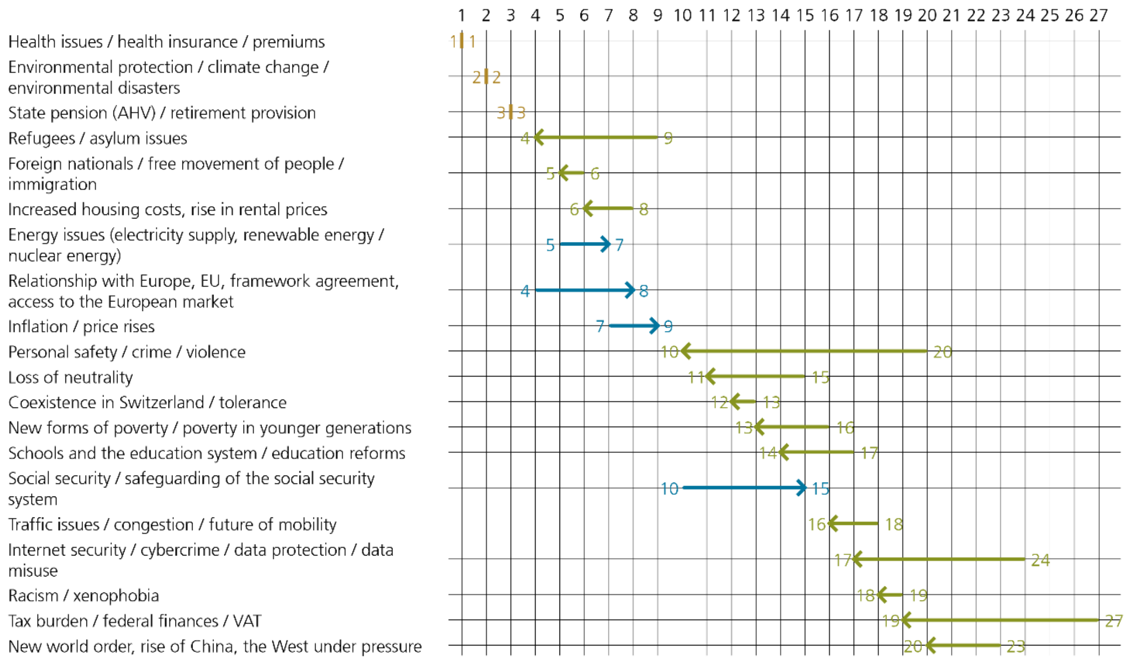
A look at the changes in the rankings between 2023 and 2024 underscores the growing importance of the topic of refugees, which has moved up from ninth place to fourth. The issue of immigration has also climbed one place (from sixth to fifth). The biggest rise by a considerable margin relates to worries about personal safety, crime and violence: the topic rose by a whole 10 places to 10th. Concerns about crime and violence only just made it onto the list of main worries, but voters are much more aware of them than they were just a year ago. The long-term comparison shows that the perception of worries often shifts in line with real developments: if unemployment, immigration or the premium burden increase, so do concerns about the issue in question. The same seems to apply when it comes to worries about crime. According to police crime statistics, the number of crimes committed in Switzerland increased again in 2022 and 2023 for the first time in 10 years.[1]

The topics of energy (down two places), Europe (down four places) and inflation (down two places) are clearly less of a worry. Although some of the topics ranked between 11th and 20th place have shot up the ranking (and in one case dropped sharply), the percentage changes in the prioritization that led to these shifts are comparatively small (see also Figure 2): for example, the issue of taxes moved up eight places (compared to 2023), but the change in the underlying percentages is only 3%.

Figure 3

Top 20 concerns – 2024 vs. 2023 ranking

Shifts in the rankings between 2023 and 2024



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (N = 2,250)

1 Police crime statistics in 2023: https://www.bfs.admin.ch/news/en/2024-0235

2.1. Perception of worries over the years

Looking at the long-term development of concerns in the area of social security, the increasing importance of questions relating to the healthcare system and health insurance is particularly clear: almost half of voters in 2024 rate this issue as one of the five biggest problems in Switzerland. Such high proportions were last reached in the mid-2000s. Health insurance premiums have risen again sharply since 2023, which is reflected in the high priority assigned to this issue by voters. In addition, healthcare costs were a recurring topic in the media this year in connection with several popular ballots in 2024: in March, a vote was held on the two popular initiatives relating to premium discounts and a cap on healthcare costs, and in November the Swiss electorate voted on the uniform financing of outpatient and inpatient services (EFAS).

Retirement provision is also one of Switzerland's largest reform components and was the subject of two popular initiatives in 2024, of which the vote on a 13th state pension was approved in March, contrary to broad expectations.

People also felt strongly about the rejection of the second pillar reform in September 2024. Nevertheless, the Swiss have tended to be less concerned about this issue in recent years. The rejection of the BVG reform may also have to some extent been linked to the fact that the problems relating to the second pillar were considered to be a low priority.

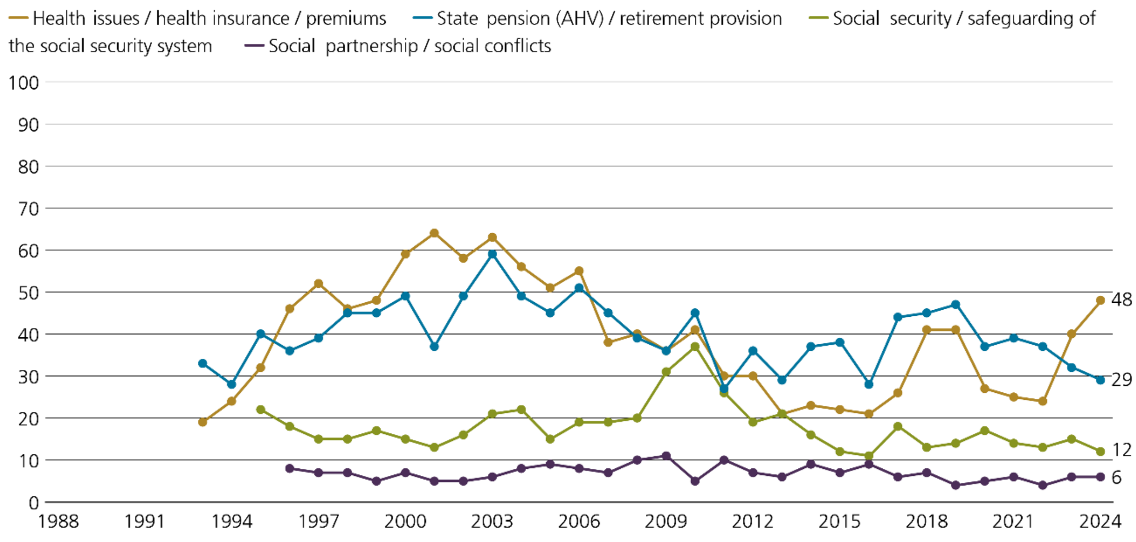
Concern about social security in general and the social partnership has been developing relatively steadily at a lower level in recent years.

Figure 4

Trend: concerns – social security and retirement provision

Here you can see a list of topics that have been discussed and written about a lot recently. Please read through the list and then select the five that you personally consider to be the five most important problems facing Switzerland.

in % voters, share of mentions



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (N = 2,250)

Among the concerns relating to the economy that directly affect the day-to-day lives of voters, the topic of housing costs has become increasingly relevant. Since 2022, the proportion of voters who are concerned about rising rents has increased. Residents of Swiss cities in particular are increasingly being confronted with this challenge. In November, the population also had to vote on two clarifications in Swiss rental law, which raised awareness of the topic. Alongside healthcare costs, the issue of rental costs is the second key topic area affecting people's everyday lives related to rising living costs, which are noticeably preoccupying the population more than in the past. Inflation also ties into this topic, but is less significant compared to 2022 and 2023 when it was a key area of focus. Lower inflation rates are affecting the population's perception of problems.

There is also a very clear decline in worries about unemployment. A large number of voters were still worried about their jobs until the mid-2010s, and this topic has regularly been the main concern in Switzerland since the 1980s. Over the past 10 years, however, worries about unemployment have steadily decreased to become a marginal phenomenon: only 5% of Swiss people still see unemployment as one of the country's biggest problems. This means that the topic that was once the number one worry no longer even features in the top 20 on the list of concerns. It is likely that the perspective of voters has fundamentally changed regarding economic issues in the last 10 years: the question is no longer "Do I have work and a salary?" – now it's "Can I actually afford to finance my life with my current income?"

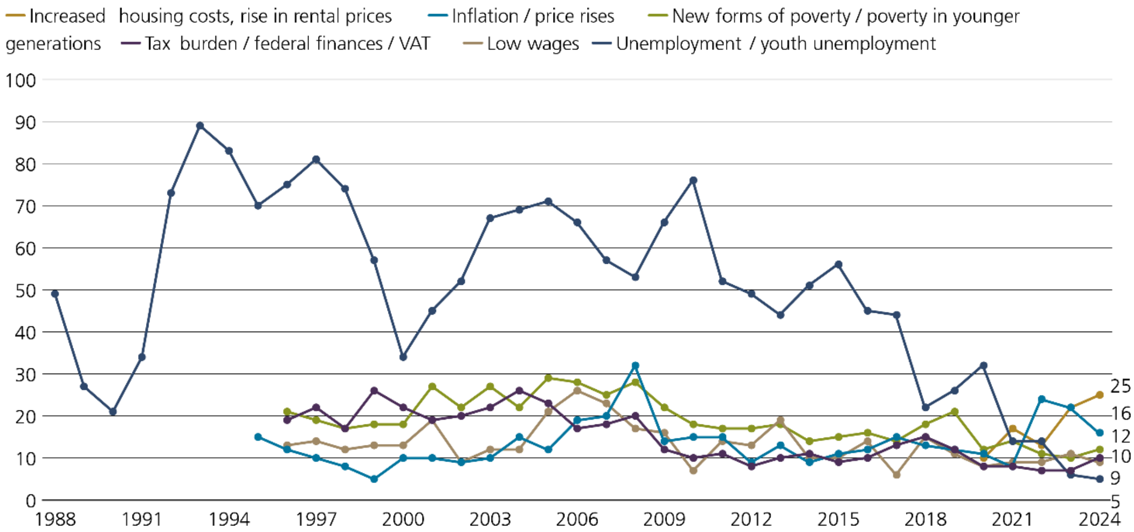
Poverty, taxes and salary levels are also not among the main concerns, but they are more frequently mentioned than the fear of unemployment.

Figure 5

Trend: concerns – economy (individual perspective)

Here you can see a list of topics that have been discussed and written about a lot recently. Please read through the list and then select the five that you personally consider to be the five most important problems facing Switzerland.

in % voters, share of mentions



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (N = 2,250)

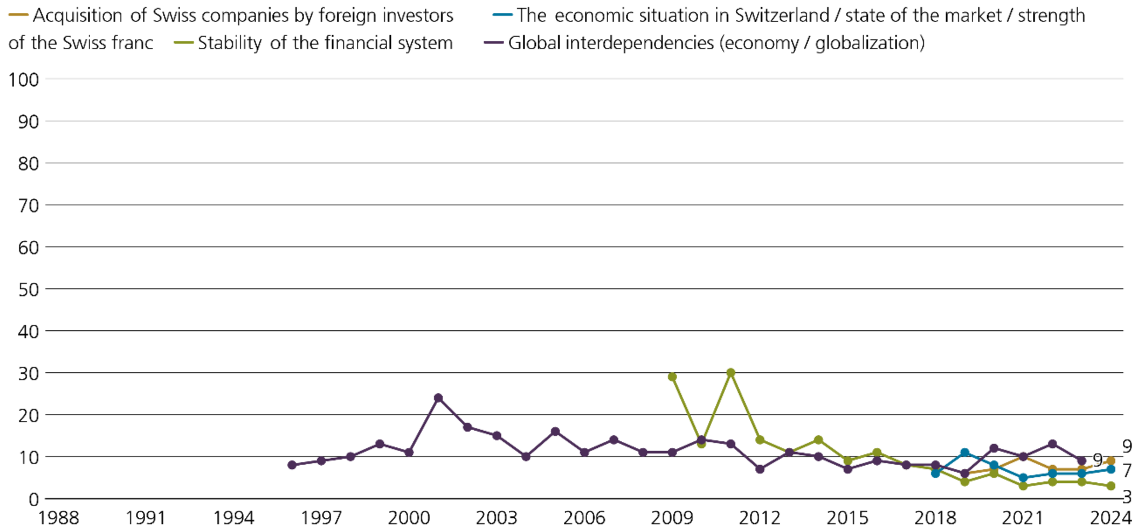
In addition to the day-to-day, individual view of the economy, there is also a systemic perspective: here too, in 2024 how concerned people are about the economy has hardly changed. Fewer than 10% of voters count either the takeover of Swiss companies by foreign investors or the economic situation among their biggest concerns. The stability of the financial system is also not called into question. The takeover of Credit Suisse by UBS around a year and a half ago also did not lead to voters expressing greater concern about this topic in the survey. In general, trust in the development of the Swiss economy appears to be stable – or the questions are not seen as a priority in the grand scheme of things.

Figure 6

Trend: concerns – economy (systemic perspective)

Here you can see a list of topics that have been discussed and written about a lot recently. Please read through the list and then select the five that you personally consider to be the five most important problems facing Switzerland.

in % voters, share of mentions



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (N = 2,250)

By contrast, almost one-third of voters consider climate change and environmental protection to be top concerns. This figure has decreased compared to the period between 2021 and 2023. Overall, however, the topic remains in second place among the worries participants were asked about. In principle, climate and environmental issues have regained momentum since the rise of the climate strike movement in 2018. The topic received the most attention in the late 1980s when forest dieback and the hole in the ozone layer shaped public debate.

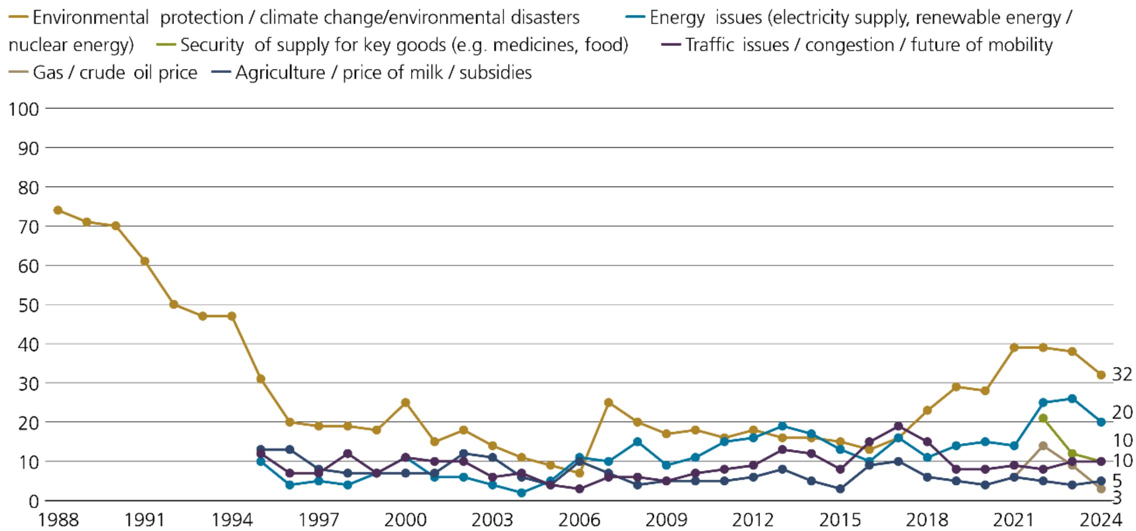
Over the long term, energy issues have also become more important. However, in 2022 and 2023, when Switzerland faced a potential electricity shortage and initiated various energy-saving measures, the perceived pressure to solve the problem was higher than it was this year. The Swiss are also less concerned about the overall security of supply, including relating to medicines or food, than they were two years ago.

Figure 7

Trend: concerns – environmental and energy issues

Here you can see a list of topics that have been discussed and written about a lot recently. Please read through the list and then select the five that you personally consider to be the five most important problems facing Switzerland.

in % voters, share of mentions



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (N = 2,250)

The topic of migration – and asylum in particular – is once again an area of growing concern among Swiss citizens. This is despite the fact that fewer people moved to Switzerland in the first half of 2024 than in the previous year and emigration increased.[2] Nevertheless, Switzerland's total population continued to rise, largely due to the immigration of people from EU / EFTA countries. Here, too, the trend in terms of how people prioritize their concerns is consistent with actual developments in Switzerland with regard to this issue.

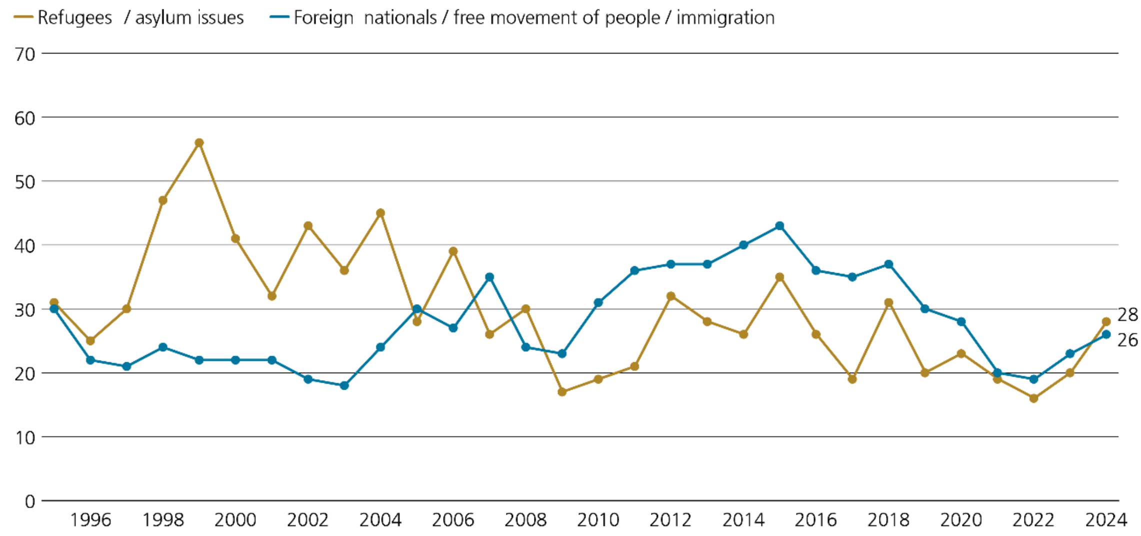
This year, the State Secretariat for Migration is expecting the same number of asylum applications as in 2023.[3] Nevertheless, voters perceive the issue of asylum as being considerably more important. The SVP traditionally focuses heavily on this topic and the party's success in the last federal elections means that migration has also become even more of a key issue.

Figure 8

Trend: concerns – asylum system and migration

Here you can see a list of topics that have been discussed and written about a lot recently. Please read through the list and then select the five that you personally consider to be the five most important problems facing Switzerland.

in % voters, share of mentions



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (N = 2,250)

2 https://www.admin.ch/gov/de/start/dokumentation/medienmitteilungen.msg-id-102015.html#:~:text=Ende%20Juni%202024%20lebten%202,als%20im%20gleichen%20Zeitraum%202023

3 https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/de/home/sem/medien/mm.msg-id-99913.html

2.2. Differences between generations, genders and party affiliation

2.2.1. Generation Z

Looking separately at the group of young adults aged between 19 and 29 – also known as "Generation Z" – reveals the concerns the younger segment of the population are particularly focused on and that could thus play a greater role in the future. Compared to the population as a whole, Generation Z is much more concerned about environmental protection and the climate: for 46% of participants from Generation Z these topics are among their biggest worries. The figure for Swiss voters as a whole is just 32%.

Health issues, too, are also a priority for the young. A year ago, one-third of Generation Z described this topic as a main concern; this figure has now risen to 46% – almost as high as among the entire voting population. Young people are also increasingly concerned about rising healthcare costs in Switzerland.

Issues related to retirement provision continue to preoccupy Generation Z more strongly than might be expected due to their age. The topic is in fourth place, similar to among voters as a whole, but is mentioned as a main concern by a higher proportion (34%). Just as many voters from Generation Z are concerned about higher housing costs. Since people in this age range rarely own residential property, it makes sense that they are more concerned about rising rents. Generation Z also seems to be more concerned about inflation than voters as a whole: almost a quarter say inflation is one of their five biggest worries. Perhaps this is due to the fact that younger people often have lower incomes and therefore tend to notice higher prices more.

In addition, the priorities between female and male voters within Generation Z differ significantly in some cases: while more than half of young women mention the topic of health (51%) in 2024, health issues are only ranked second among men (40%). For male voters, environmental protection is the biggest concern (46%). However, women in Generation Z consider environmental and climate issues as the main concern (45%) almost as often, and they therefore rank above retirement provision (38%), higher housing costs (33%) and inflation (25%) for young women.

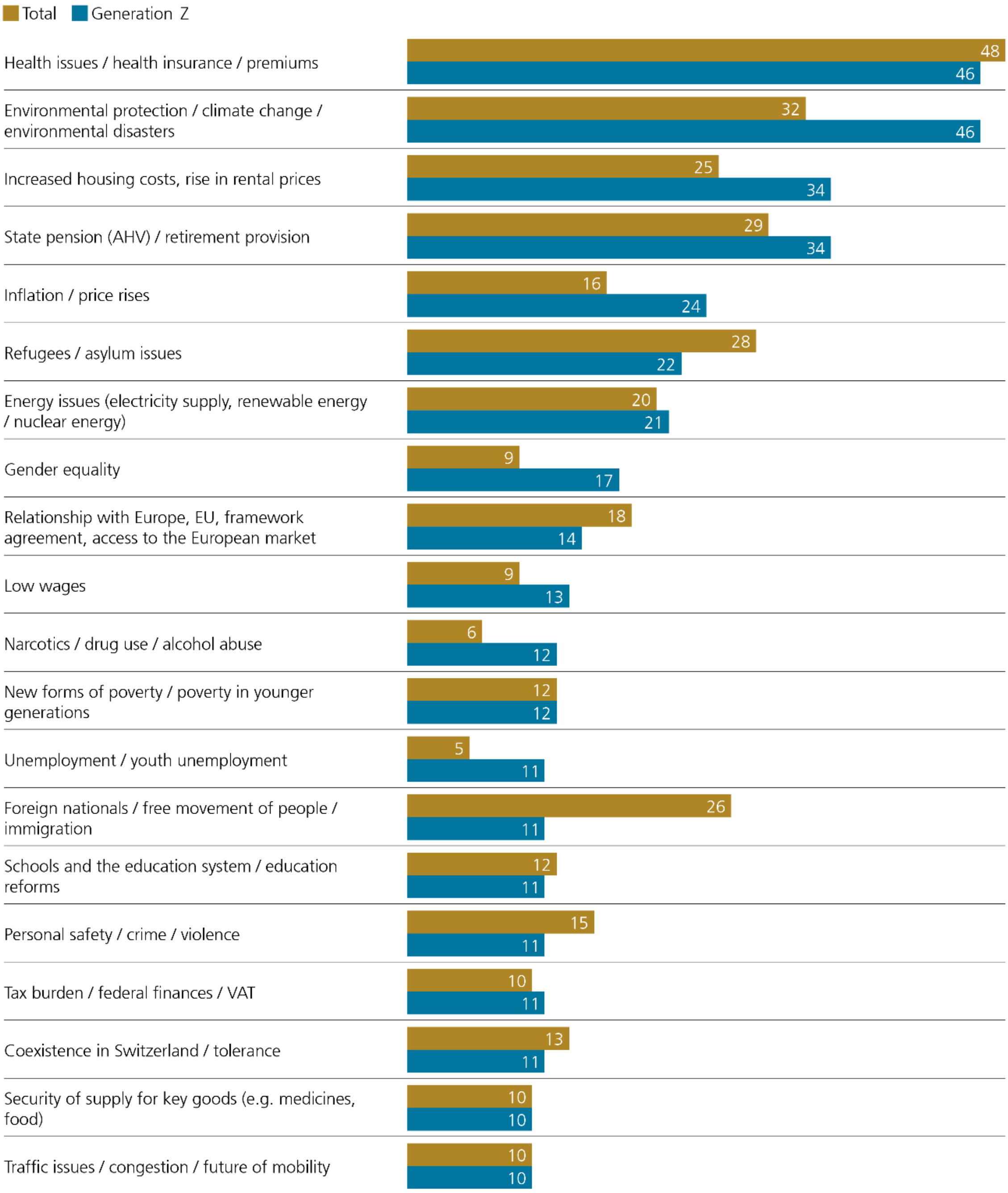
Young men worry about housing costs roughly as often as young women, but are a little less concerned about retirement provision (29%). Male Generation Z voters (29%) are much more concerned with energy issues than younger female voters (14%). Around one-quarter of female voters in this age group rank gender equality among their main concerns. In contrast, this figure is only 8% for men. It seems that gender equality issues are much less of a priority for men than for women, who are usually more frequently confronted with this issue in their day-to-day lives.

Figure 9

Top 20 concerns – total vs. Generation Z

Here you can see a list of topics that have been discussed and written about a lot recently. Please read through the list and then select the five that you personally consider to be the five most important problems facing Switzerland.

in % voters, share of mentions



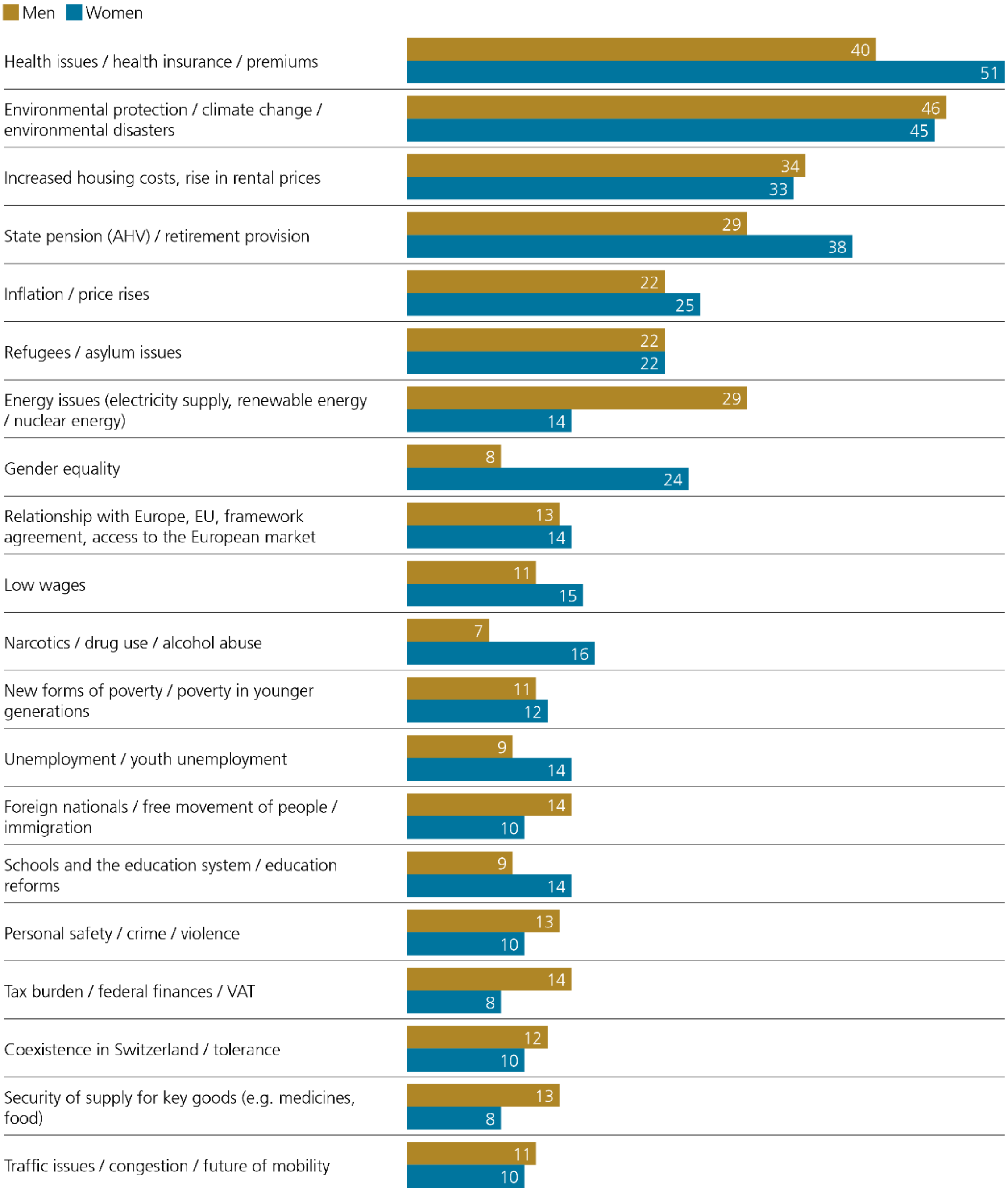
Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (N = 2,250)

Figure 10

Top 20 concerns – Generation Z only, men vs. women

Here you can see a list of topics that have been discussed and written about a lot recently. Please read through the list and then select the five that you personally consider to be the five most important problems facing Switzerland.

in % voters, share of mentions



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (n = 227)

2.2.2. Party affiliation

The analysis of respondents‘ leanings toward a particular party shows that environment / climate is the biggest concern for left-wing voters and Green Liberal Party (GLP) supporters. The worries these voters perceive are therefore consistent with the issues the parties stand for. SP supporters consider the topic of health to be just as important as the environment. For voters who support the Green Party (GPS) and the GLP, the topic of health is in second place. Housing costs are the third-largest concern for SP and Green supporters. This is hardly surprising, since both parties see themselves as representing the renting population. In addition, gender equality and racism make it into the top 10 concerns for the two major left-wing parties. GLP supporters are relatively more concerned about retirement provision and energy issues. This group of the population is also characterized by increased concern about the war in Ukraine and the topic of IT security.

Voters who support the center / center-right political party “Die Mitte” consider health issues to be Switzerland’s most important problem by a considerable margin. The supporters of the two parties that proposed health initiatives for a popular ballot in 2024 therefore rated health policy as their highest priority. In addition, those who support the center are very concerned about retirement provision, followed by the topics of asylum, the environment and housing costs.

FDP supporters ascribe high importance to several thematic areas but there is no one main concern that stands out like the environment among the center-left parties and healthcare for SP and “Die Mitte” supporters. Health issues are the top priority for FDP supporters but with “only” 39%. More than one-quarter of FDP-affiliated voters are also concerned about asylum, retirement provision, Europe and energy. They are also the only ones for which traffic issues are a top 10 concern.

Among those who support the Swiss People’s Party (SVP), the perception of problems is comparatively homogeneous: half of them say the asylum system and half say immigration are some of Switzerland’s biggest problems in general. Health issues rank just behind them in third place. SVP supporters are also very concerned about retirement provision and Switzerland’s neutrality. European-related issues are “only” in 10th place. Although the SVP is heavily involved in the debate surrounding relations between Switzerland and the EU, other topics seem to have a higher priority among staunch supporters at present.

Figure 11

Top 10 concerns by party affiliation

Here you can see a list of topics that have been discussed and written about a lot recently. Please read through the list and then select the five that you personally consider to be the five most important problems facing Switzerland.

in % voters, share of mentions

GPS	SP	GLP	The Center (Die Mitte)	FDP	SVP
Environment / climate (69%)	Environment / climate (58%)	Environment / climate (62%)	Health (55%)	Health (39%)	Asylum (50%)
Health (38%)	Health (58%)	Health (51%)	Retirement provision (38%)	Asylum (34%)	Immigration (49%)
Housing costs (25%)	Housing costs (33%)	Retirement provision (31%)	Asylum (28%)	Retirement provision (29%)	Health (46%)
Energy (24%)	Retirement provision (27%)	Energy (30%)	Environment / climate (28%)	Europe (29%)	Retirement provision (31%)
Retirement provision (22%)	Social security (31%)	Housing costs (27%)	Housing costs (26%)	Energy (26%)	Neutrality (28%)
Coexistence (21%)	Energy (21%)	Europe (27%)	Energy (24%)	Immigration (23%)	Safety / crime (26%)
Europe (19%)	Racism (19%)	Coexistence (20%)	Immigration (22%)	Safety / crime (22%)	Housing costs (23%)
Equality (18%)	Europe (19%)	The war in Ukraine (15%)	Safety / crime (19%)	Environment / climate (19%)	Inflation (20%)
Education (17%)	Equality (19%)	New world order (14%)	Europe (18%)	Traffic (17%)	Energy (16%)
New forms of poverty (17%)	Coexistence (17%)	IT security (14%)	Inflation (15%)	Inflation (15%)	Europe (15%)

Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (n between 210-479)

3. Politics

People's concerns are often closely linked to their political view. Whether they feel taken seriously or alienated from decisions, both influence to what extent they are actually concerned with political issues and how much trust they place in various actors.

Viewed from a long-term perspective, interest in political issues among voters has increased in recent years. Up until the mid-2010s, around 60% of voters said they were very or somewhat interested in politics. Since then, this figure has risen to over 80%, mainly because significantly more people describe themselves as "very interested in politics". The proportion of people who are somewhat interested in politics has changed less noticeably.

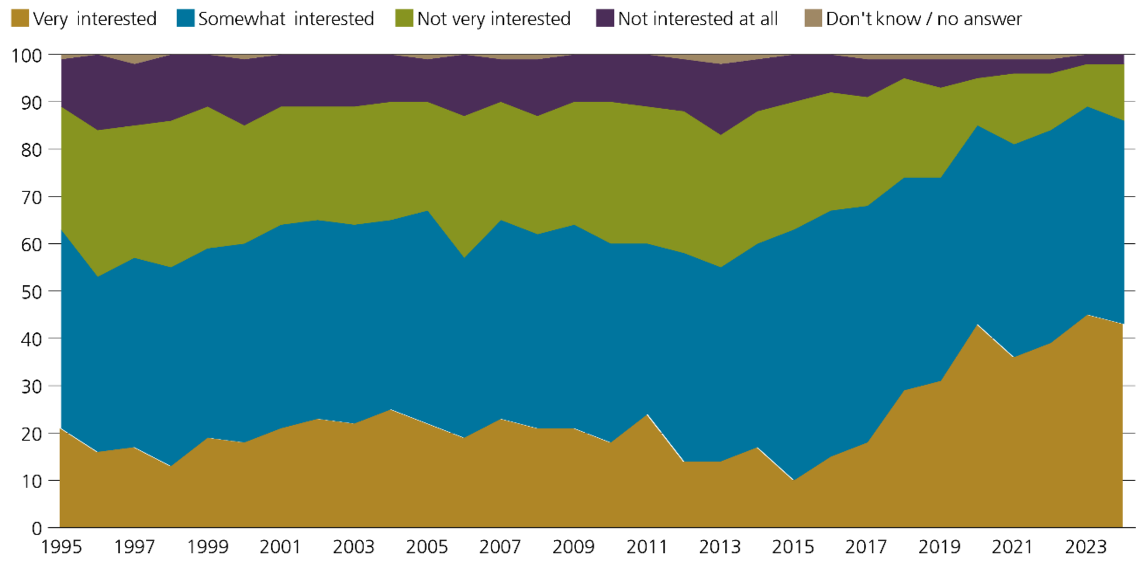
There have been a number of radical changes on the international political scene over the past decade, including the rapid rise of right-wing populist movements in many Western countries. Numerous crises have shaped global politics and continue to do so, including conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, increasing migration flows and international health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. It is conceivable that in times of greater uncertainty, people will be more concerned with political issues, as the feeling of personal involvement increases. In line with the heightened interest in politics, there have also been several election Sundays in recent years with above-average voter participation.

Figure 12

Trend: interest in politics

Generally speaking, how interested are you in political issues?

in % voters



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (N = 2,250)

A stable democracy requires not only the interest of the population, but also their fundamental trust in the institutions involved in the political process. The elected representatives play a central role in Swiss politics, as do other institutions and authorities from a wide variety of areas. Trust in these actors forms the basis for accepting political decisions and tackling social challenges together.

The level of confidence that the Swiss have in various political actors and authorities has not changed significantly in recent years. On a scale of 1 to 7, the police and the Federal Supreme Court continue to enjoy the highest average rating (5.3, +0.2 points compared to 2023). The Swiss National Bank (SNB) is in third place (5.1, +0.2 points), followed by the Federal Council (4.9, -0.1 points). This is followed by the public administration, the National Council, the Council of States and the army (between 4.4 and 4.5 points).

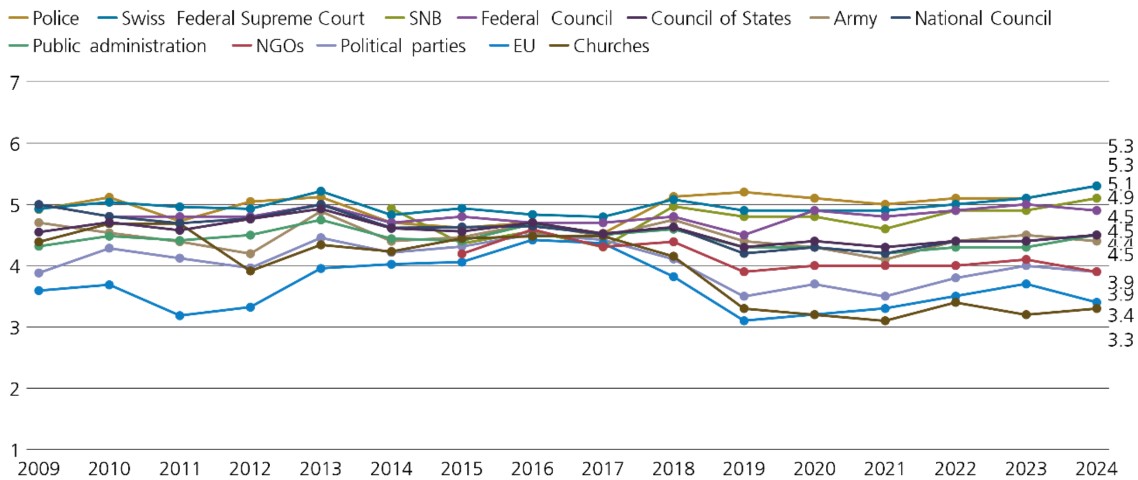
A third group consists of political parties and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), both of which have an average rating of 3.9%. Voters' trust in the European Union (3.4, -0.3 points) and in churches (3.3) is lowest, with averages close to the midpoint on the scale – meaning no institution is viewed with clear mistrust. It's not surprising, however, that the citizens of Switzerland – a country that is traditionally more skeptical when it comes to Europe – rate the EU comparatively lower than national actors. Likewise, considering the numerous scandals that have become public in recent years, it's unsurprising that churches have the lowest level of trust of all the institutions in the survey.

Figure 13

Trend: average confidence in politics and authorities

There are various institutions in Switzerland, such as the government, courts and banks. People have varying levels of confidence in these institutions. Using this scale, please tell me how much confidence you personally have in each of these institutions listed below. "1" means that you have no confidence in it, "7" means that you have great confidence in it. You can use the values on the scale below to fine-tune your response.

Average values for voters



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (n = 1,252)

The various economic institutions enjoy a similar amount of confidence from voters, although since 2018, employee organizations have consistently been slightly better rated than employer organizations and banks.

Since measurements began, confidence in all economic actors has developed slightly negatively. However, average ratings have stabilized over the past five years. The long-standing negative trend can also be understood in the context of several recent voting decisions that have turned out to be “economically critical” – for example, the rejection of Corporate Tax Reform III, the abolition of stamp tax or, most recently, the rejection of the new Axpo contracts in the Canton of Schaffhausen.

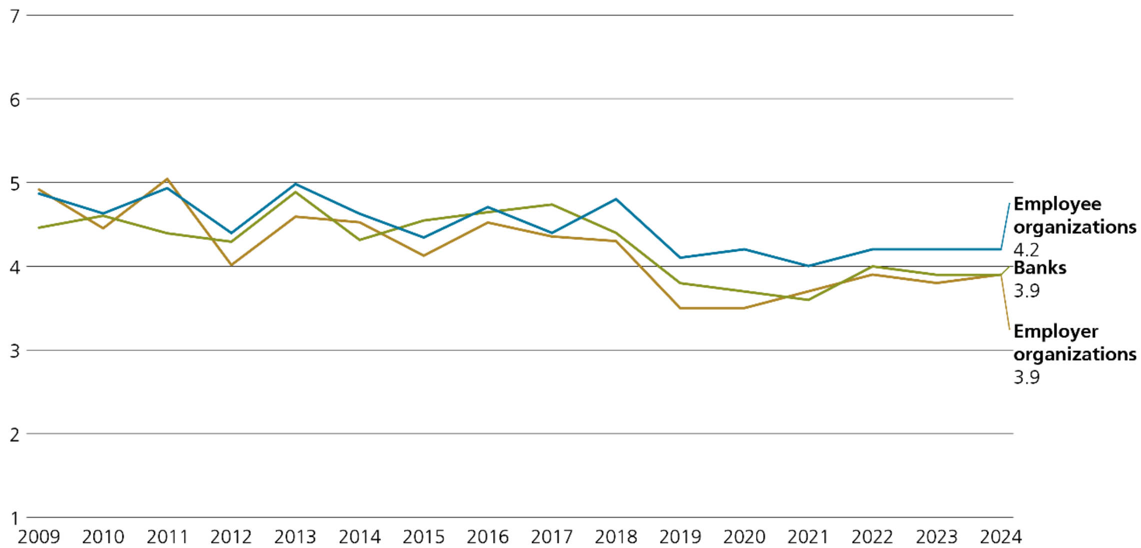
In addition, according to the survey, the takeover of Credit Suisse by UBS last year had no impact on the level of trust voters have in banks. This finding is also in line with the fact that the perception of worries in connection with the stability of the Swiss financial system does not show any fluctuations during this period.

Figure 14

Trend: average confidence in economic institutions

There are various institutions in Switzerland, such as the government, courts and banks. People have varying levels of confidence in these institutions. Using this scale, please tell me how much confidence you personally have in each of the institutions listed below.

Average values for voters



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (n = 1,258)

As the so-called fourth estate, media professionals are faced with the task of monitoring political processes, uncovering abuse of power and informing the public appropriately. The media thus act as an intermediary between the state and society, as well as an independent control body. The level of trust that the Swiss population has in various media channels is correspondingly important.

Over the past five years, voters have rated traditional media – radio, paid newspapers and television – better on average than the internet, free newspapers and information on YouTube. In the mid-2010s, the various media channels were still assessed almost identically. Since then, however, the level of trust in online news and free newspapers has deteriorated significantly. The spread of fake news has increasingly become a topic of social debate in recent years, partly due to the rapid development of applications in the field of artificial intelligence. This may have led to voters being more aware of the potential for abuse – and, accordingly, to increased mistrust in news that can be found free of charge online.

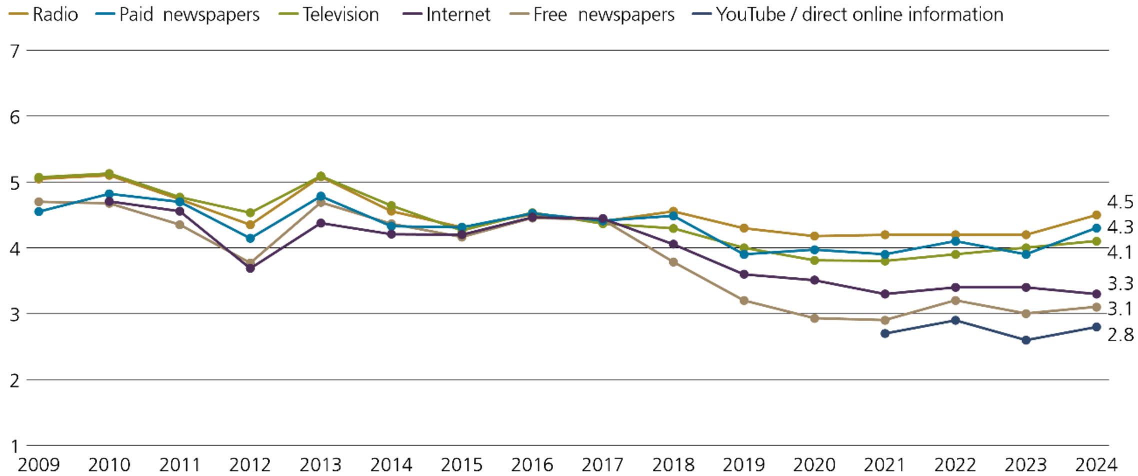
Traditional media channels have also seen a negative trend (with the exception of radio) since 2017, but this development is much less pronounced. Confidence in radio and paid newspapers has even risen slightly compared to 2023.

Figure 15

Trend: average confidence in media

There are various types of media in Switzerland. People have varying levels of confidence in them.
Using this scale, please tell me how much confidence you personally have in each of the types of media mentioned.
"1" means that you have no confidence in it, "7" means that you have great confidence in it.
You can use the values on the scale below to fine-tune your response.

Average values for voters



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (n = 1,234)

Overall, Swiss voters are much more likely to trust national stakeholders than international ones. This applies in particular to those who represent the cornerstones of the country and the government's authority. First and foremost, therefore, is trust in the police, the Federal Supreme Court, the Swiss National Bank and the Federal Council. Confidence in the legislative branch of government (National Council and Council of States) as well as in the public administration and the army is somewhat lower in comparison.

Actors who do not belong directly to these three pillars of state power enjoy slightly less trust. In particular, this group includes NGOs, representatives of the economy (employer organizations, banks) and political parties. This group enjoys roughly the same degree of trust as NATO and the UN, the highest-rated international stakeholders.

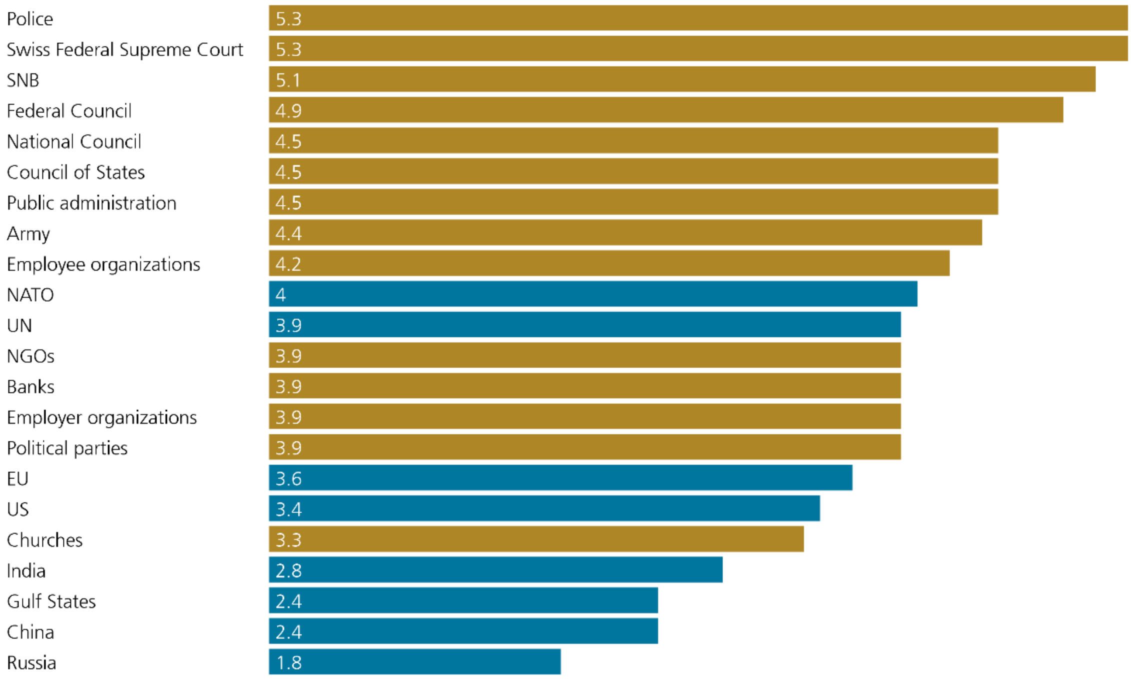
Although the EU and the US are ranked significantly lower than NATO and the UN, they enjoy much more confidence than other geopolitical powers such as India, China, the Gulf States and Russia in particular.

Figure 16

Trend: average confidence in stakeholders – global and national

Please also tell me how much confidence you have in the following countries, associations of states and organizations and their policy toward Switzerland. "1" means that you have no confidence in it, "7" means that you have great confidence in it. You can use the values on the scale below to fine-tune your response.

Average values for voters



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (n = 1,227)

The basic level of confidence in various political actors has changed only slightly in recent years. However, in 2024, almost one in two people entitled to vote said that they often feel that the Swiss government and administration fail in crucial matters. The last time this figure was so high was back in the mid-2000s. The proportion of those who rarely feel that policy has failed has been declining again for some time. During the COVID-19 pandemic between 2020 and 2022, the sense that the state had failed was felt less frequently, probably because government action became more noticeable in daily life for the entire population during this period. However, this effect seems to have dissipated in the meantime.

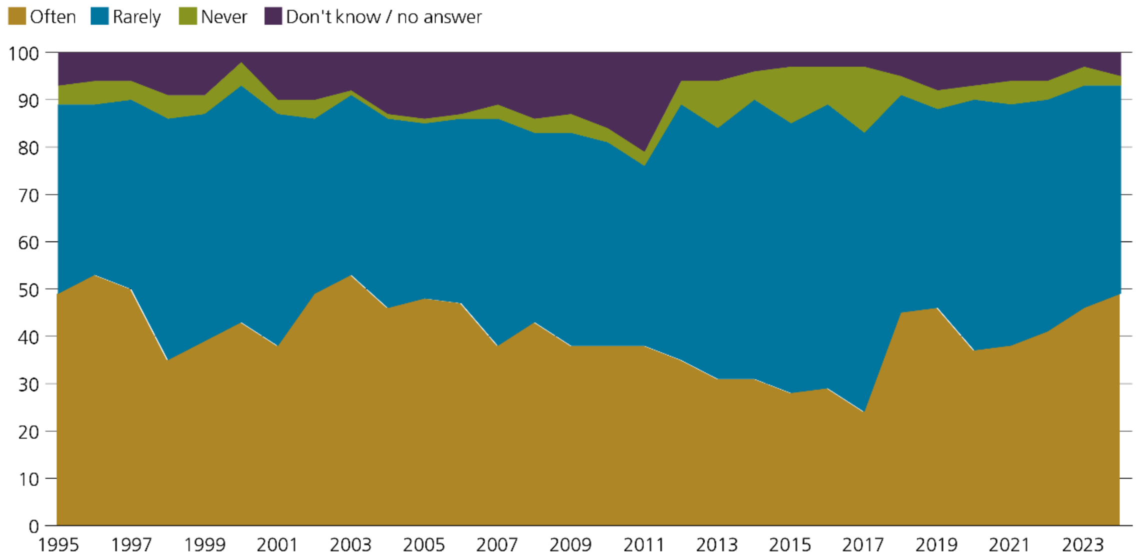
The feeling that the economy is failing is similarly common: almost half of voters often feel that the economy is failing in crucial matters, while just as many rarely feel that way. Similar to political institutions, hardly anyone thinks that the economy never fails. However, developments in recent years have been more stable: the opinions on the failure of the Swiss economy do not show a clear trend during this time.

Figure 17

Trend: policy failure

Do you feel that the policies pursued by government and administration are failing in key areas?

in % voters



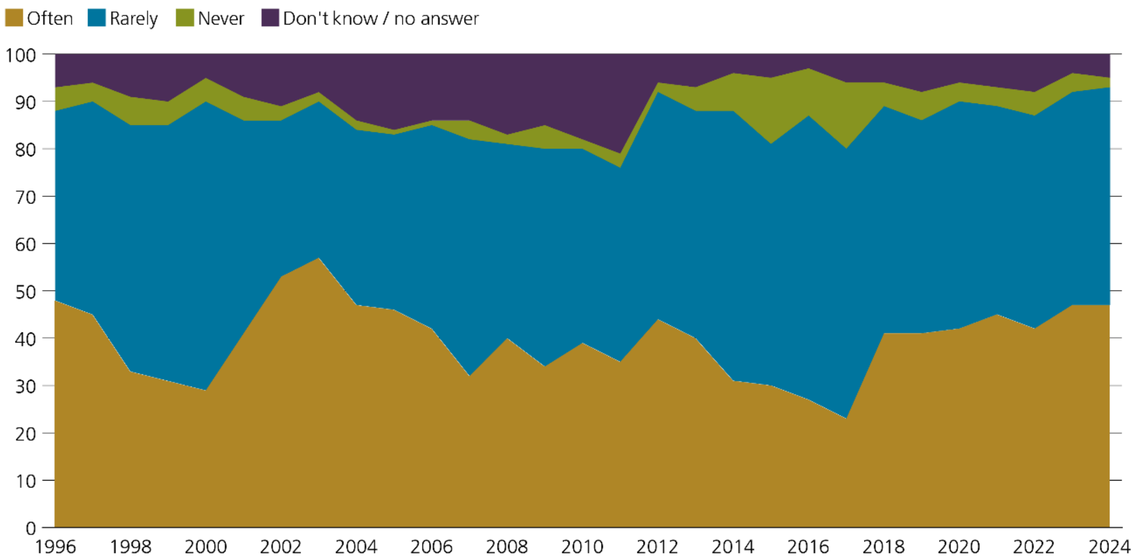
Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (N = 2,250)

Figure 18

Trend: economic failure

Do you feel that the economy is failing in key areas?

in % voters



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (N = 2,250)

Despite the growing feeling of political failure, large swathes of voters remain proud of various elements of the Swiss political system:

– The vast majority (93%, +2 pp) Swiss people are proud or very proud of being able to launch popular initiatives and referendums.

– Almost as many people value the country's economic and political stability, the Federal Constitution and the coexistence of different language groups (all 86%–87%). Compared to 2023, slightly more people say they are proud of Switzerland's political stability (+3 pp).

– The proportions of those who are proud of the cross-party government (83%, +6 pp) and Swiss federalism (81%, +5 pp) have increased significantly.

– Moreover, 81% of voters expressed pride in both Switzerland's social stability and its independence.

– Three-quarters of voters are particularly proud of the security of supply.

– In recent years, fewer and fewer voters have said that they are proud of Switzerland's neutrality. Compared to last year, however, this value is stable (72%, +2 pp). Although the figure remains on the high side, it follows that some voters are more critical of Swiss neutrality than in previous years in light of the attacks on Ukraine in violation of international law and considering the current period of geopolitical upheaval.

– The proportion of those who are proud of the militia system has tended to decline over the entire survey period. However, this figure started rising again a few years ago (71%, +3 pp).

- A total of 69% say they are proud of Switzerland's diplomatic services.
- Around two-thirds of voters are proud of the social partnership between employers and employees. In the mid-2010s, the figures were significantly higher. Values have remained stable over the past five years. During the same period, voters also said they often felt Switzerland had failed in economic terms.

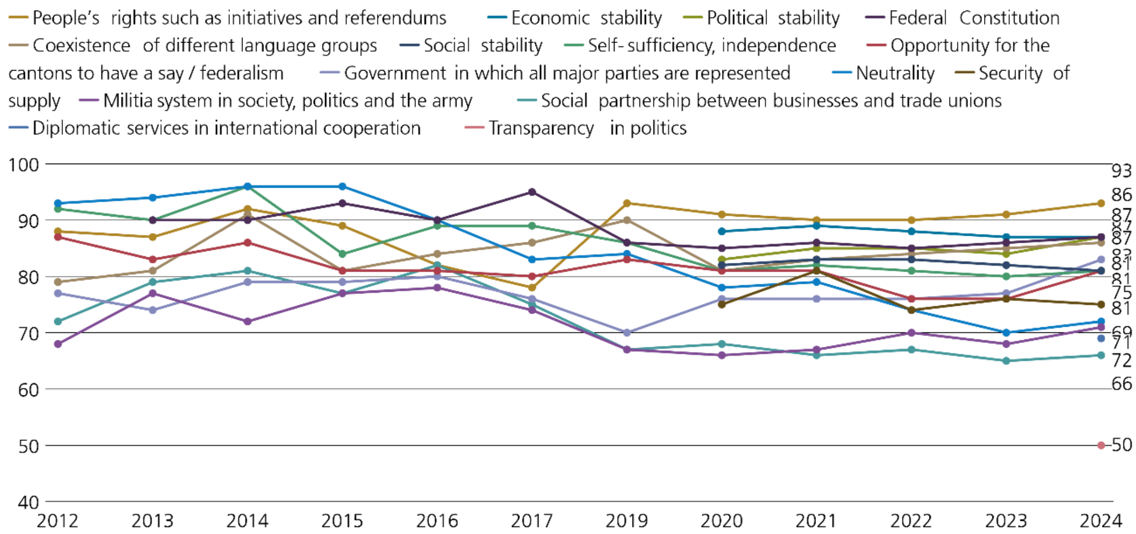
The only element that respondents are not particularly proud of is **transparency in politics**. Only half of voters are proud of this. Despite the new mandatory disclosure of party financing, voters still perceive a need for more to be done. This is in contrast to many other elements that set the Swiss political system apart.

Figure 19

Trend: pride in elements of Swiss politics

Are there certain things about Swiss politics that you are particularly proud of?

in % voters, proportion very / fairly proud



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (N = 2,250)

Note regarding the graphic: to improve readability, the Y-axis has been adjusted in this graphic (40 to 100 instead of 0 to 100 as usual).

Overall, the Swiss are very proud of most aspects of their democracy. And, as in previous years, they are most likely to identify with Switzerland as a country: more than half say they identify with Switzerland either first or second. However, this proportion has decreased compared to 2023 (53%, -7 pp). More people again say that they identify with their canton of residence (45%, +4 pp) or their municipality of residence (42%, +12 pp). The number of people who identify with their own municipality has increased significantly: the last time so many people said they identify with their municipality of residence first or second was back in 2013.

Respondents ranked their own language region in fourth place (35%). This aspect was much more often the focus in the middle of the last decade. Identification with the language region has been at a lower, relatively stable level for several years.

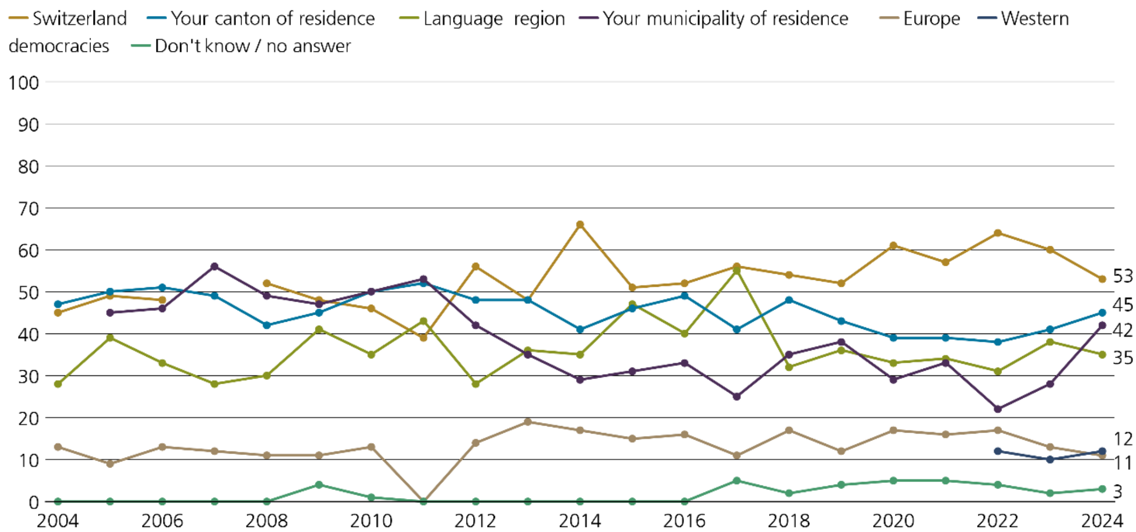
On the other hand, only very few people identify primarily with Europe (12%) or Western democracies (11%). In addition, identification with Europe has been declining for several years.

Figure 20

Trend: geographical affiliation (first and second)

Which of the geographical units on this list do you feel you belong to first and foremost? And which do you feel you belong to secondly?

in % voters



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (n = 1,237)

4. Economy and innovation

4.1. Individual financial situation

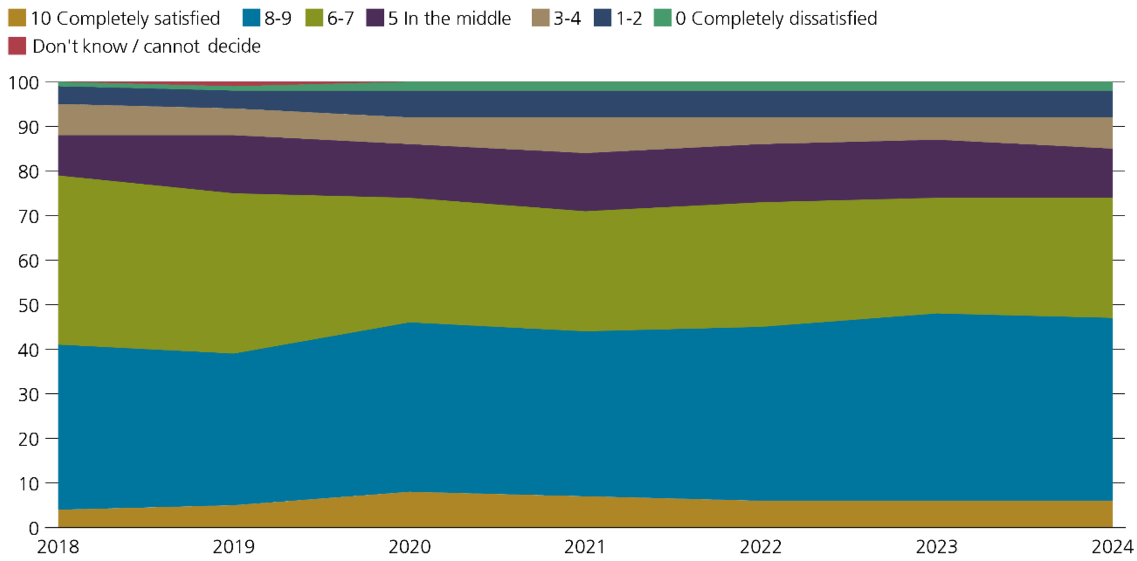
Voters are once again more concerned about politics failing, and the sense that the economy is failing remains roughly the same as in previous years. However, general satisfaction with life does not seem to be affected by these developments: almost half of voters give a rating of at least 8 (47%) on a scale of 0 to 10, i.e. their satisfaction with life is high to very high. The rating given by just over one-quarter of voters is between 6 and 7, and another quarter is moderately satisfied to dissatisfied with their own lives (values between 0 and 5). This basic assessment has hardly changed in the last five years.

Figure 21

Trend: satisfaction with current situation

On a scale of 0 to 10, how satisfied are you with your life overall?

in % voters



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (N = 2,250)

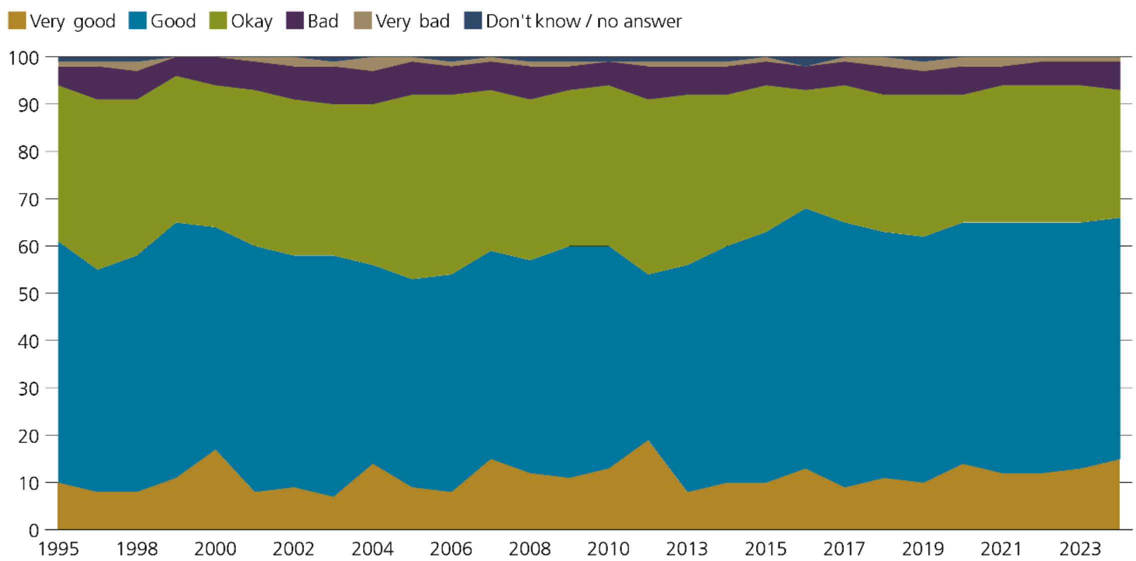
Participants also assessed their own financial situation similarly to in the past: almost two-thirds of people say that they are currently doing well financially (51%) or even very well (15%). While 27% think they are doing okay, only a few consider their own financial situation to be bad (6%) or very bad (1%). Despite the current recurring crises, major uncertainties and turmoil, people tend to be better off today than they were 30 years ago, according to their own assessment.

Figure 22

Trend: current individual financial situation

How would you describe your financial situation at the moment?

in % voters



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (N = 2,250)

In addition, the majority of voters continue to expect their personal financial situation to remain the same in the coming year (72%, +5 pp). While 11% expect it to improve (-2 pp), 13% expect to be worse off (-5 pp) and 4% cannot or do not want to answer the question (+3 pp).

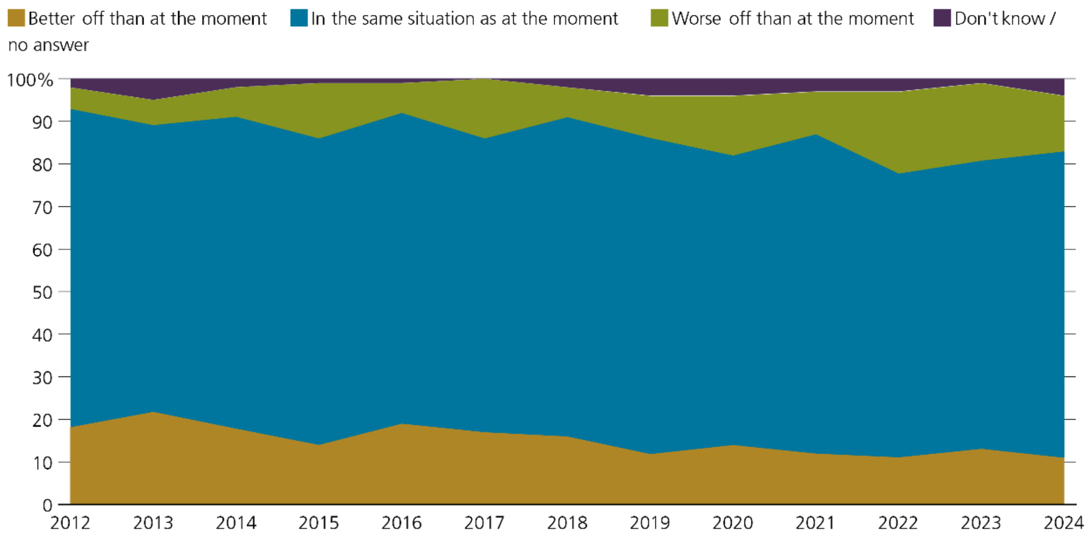
However, it's striking here that the proportion of voters who are looking to the future with a certain degree of pessimism has increased at a low level in a ten-year comparison: fewer people expect to be better off. In contrast, more people expect their financial situation to get worse.

Figure 23

Trend: future individual financial situation

If you think about the next 12 months, how do you expect your financial situation will look?

in % voters



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (N = 2,250)

For employees, the assessment of their own future financial situation depends heavily on job security. The majority of people are not worried about this: 51% of employees think that their job is somewhat secure and 38% even believe it is very secure. These values are stable compared to the previous year. Less than 10% consider their own job to be somewhat insecure or very insecure.

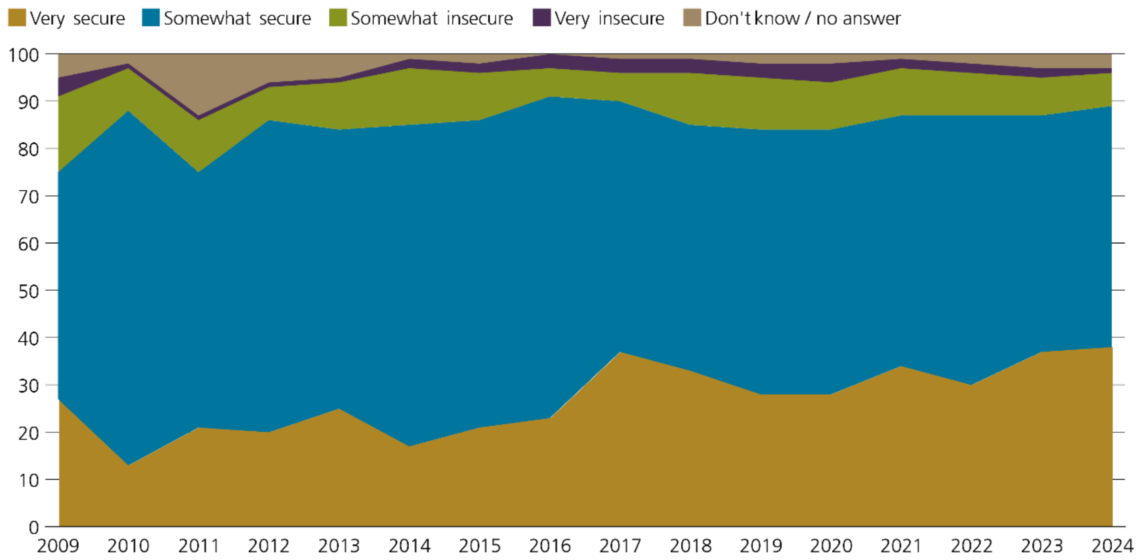
This perception of a relatively high degree of security is in line with people's actual experiences: in the last year, only 4% of voters have lost their jobs. In 2023, it was also 4%.

Figure 24

Trend: security of own job

And generally speaking, how secure do you think your particular job is?

in % working voters



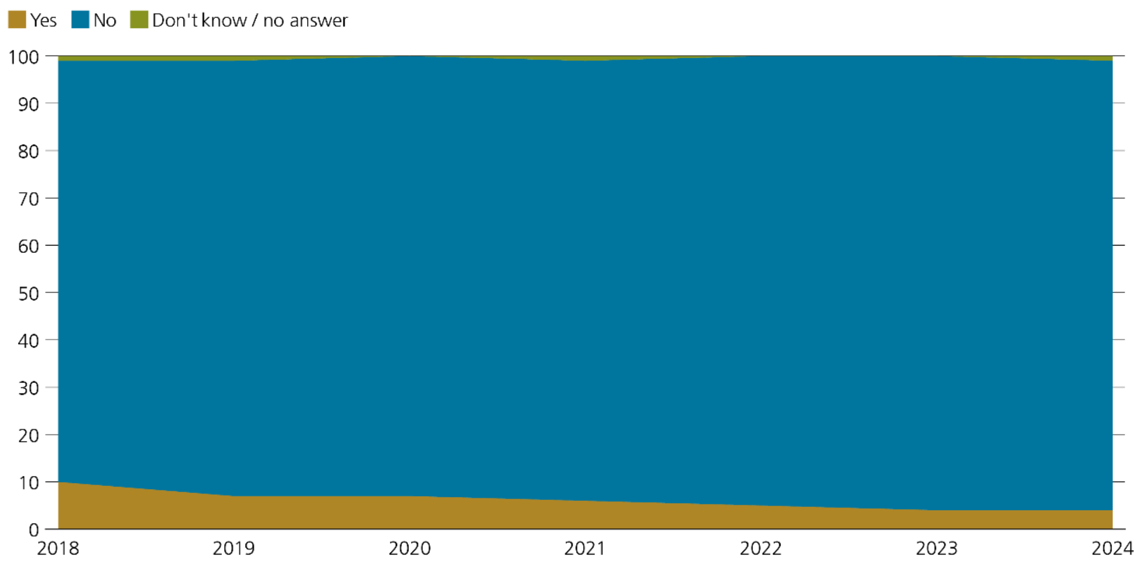
Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (n = 1,417)

Figure 25

Trend: job loss in the last 12 months

Have you lost a job at least once in the last 12 months?

in % voters



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (N = 2,250)

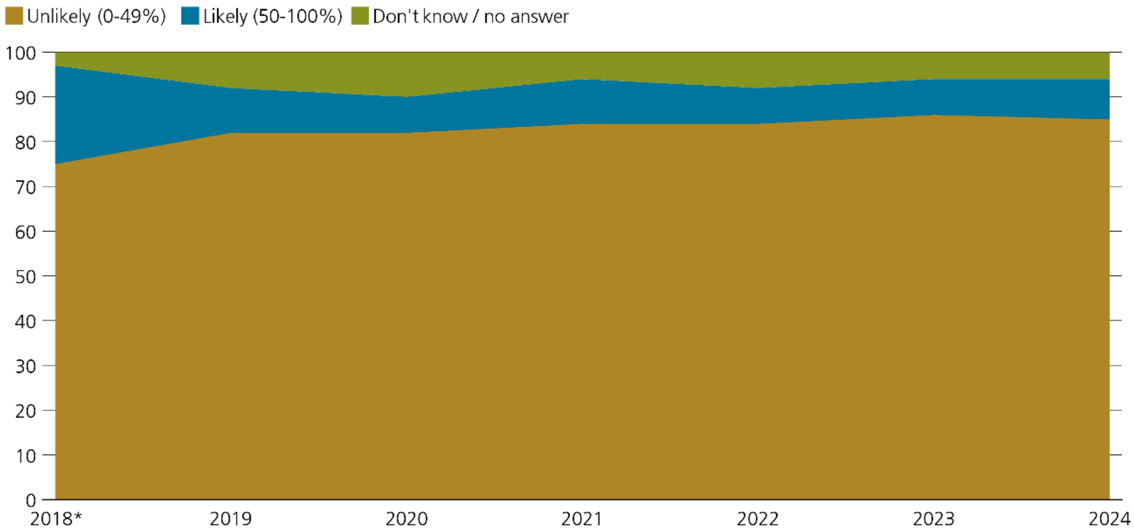
At a time when new applications in the field of artificial intelligence are playing an ever greater role, the automation of the world of work remains a highly topical issue. Nevertheless, the vast majority of Swiss employees do not expect to lose their jobs as a result of advancing automation within the next five years. A total of 85% of respondents estimate that the likelihood of automation is less than 50%. By contrast, 9% consider losing their job due to technological changes to be likely. Finally, 6% of employees do not provide an answer. The Swiss therefore feel that their jobs are hardly under threat, both overall and with regard to automation.

Figure 26

Trend: probability of job loss due to new technology

How likely do you think it is (0–100) that your job will be automated by a robot, new technology or intelligent software in the next five years?

in % working voters



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (n = 1,417), *2018: in the next 10 years

4.2. General economic situation

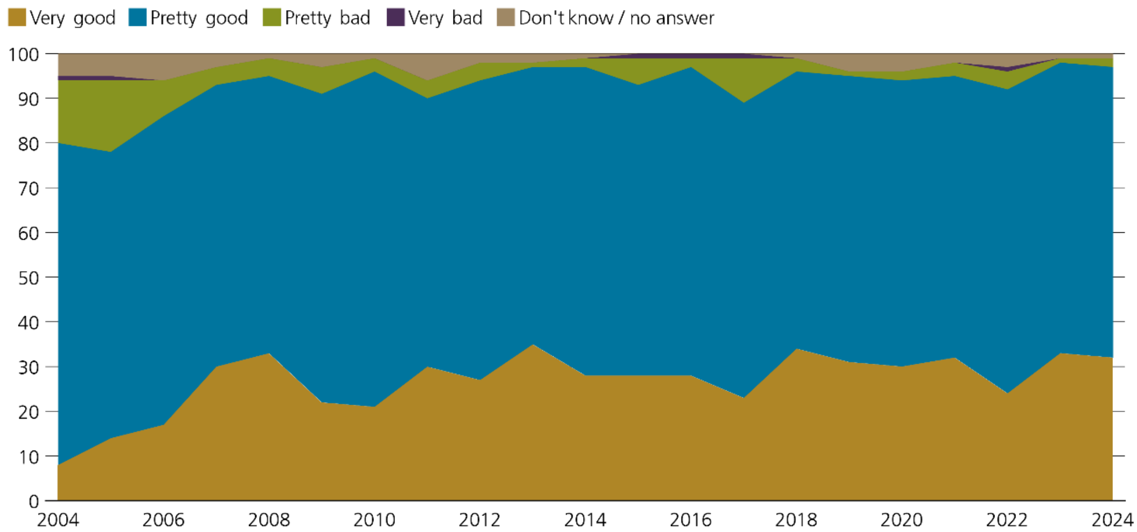
Most voters are not really concerned about their individual financial situation. They also perceive the general economic situation in Switzerland to be pretty good (65%) to very good (32%) compared to other countries. None of the respondents say that Switzerland's economy is very bad, and only 2% feel that the economic situation is pretty bad compared to the economy outside Switzerland. This extremely positive assessment of the Swiss economy has already been seen in previous years.

Figure 27

Trend: comparison of Swiss and foreign economies

How does the Swiss economy compare to the economy outside Switzerland: is it very good, pretty good, pretty bad or very bad compared to other countries?

in % voters



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (n = 1,237)

As a small country in the heart of Europe, Switzerland is reliant on economic relations with other countries. The surrounding EU countries are currently Switzerland's most important trading partners.[4] However, due to the uncertain development of bilateral relations with the EU, the question arises as to what extent Switzerland would be able to switch to other trading partners.

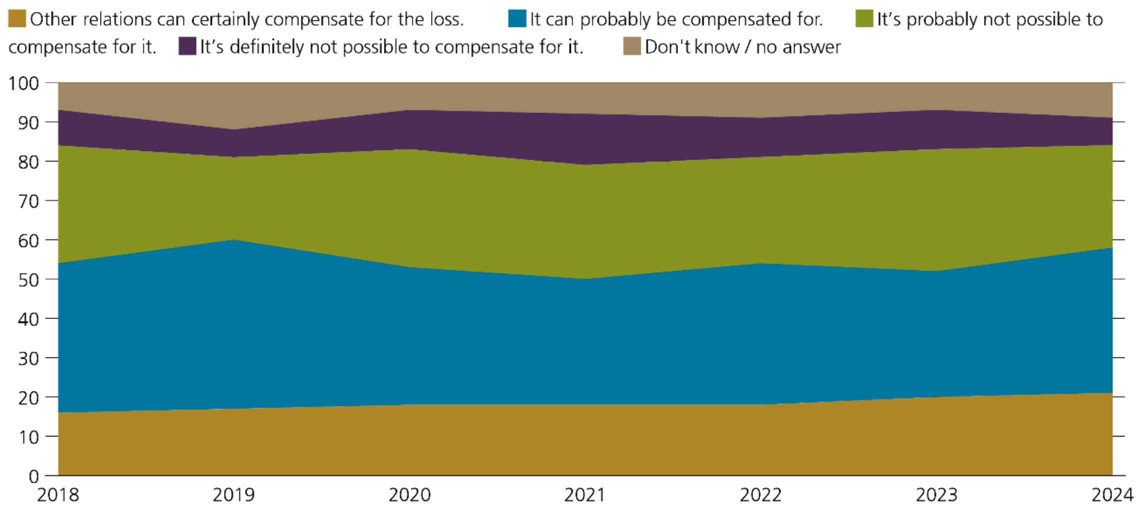
As in the previous year, around one-fifth of the electorate believe that economic relations with third countries, such as China or the US, could certainly compensate for poorer market access to the EU. A further 37% think that the loss can probably be compensated for. In other words, a combined majority of 58% feel that it's probably or certainly possible for Switzerland to achieve the same economic performance with other trading partners. This proportion is higher than in 2023 (+6 pp). Another 26% feel that it would probably not be possible to compensate for the loss (-5 pp) and 7% say that it would definitely not be possible (-3 pp). The remaining 9% cannot or do not want to express an opinion (+2 pp). Overall, the proportion of those who are optimistic about stronger trading relations with third countries has increased again somewhat.

Figure 28

Trend: substitute for trade relations

If market access to the EU were to deteriorate for our economy: Do you think that strengthening Switzerland's trade relations with large third countries such as China or the US could sufficiently compensate for the loss? Is it possible to compensate for it?

in % voters



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (n = 1,237)

4 https://www.eda.admin.ch/europa/en/home/dienstleistungen-publikationen/schweiz-eu-in-zahlen.html

In view of the growing influence of major powers in world trade, Switzerland also needs to think hard about its long-term strategy in economic policy. Voters are divided about whether a niche policy or a position closer to the EU would be more likely to succeed in this area. Nearly half (48%) are in favor of Switzerland leaning more strongly on a united EU position. However, a large minority of 38% are in favor of independent economic policy. In addition, 14% of the population cannot or do not want to give an assessment.

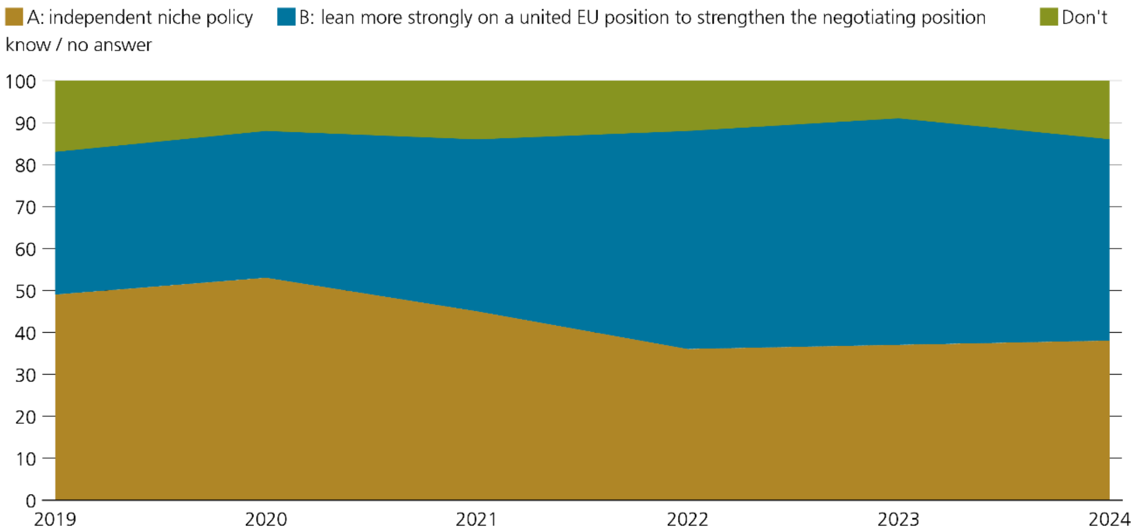
Since 2022, the fronts have moved little on this issue. Between 2019 and 2021, however, the supporters of a niche policy still represented the (relative) majority. In summary, most citizens see potential in trading with large third countries outside the EU. In parallel, Switzerland should avoid becoming too isolated from its European neighbors in terms of trade policy so that it can remain competitive in global trade.

Figure 29

Trend: a suitable strategy for Switzerland in terms of global trade

World trade is sometimes controlled by the power politics of major powers. Which strategy should Switzerland pursue here – A or B?

in % voters



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (n = 1,237)

4.3. Economics, politics and society

Switzerland's economic performance has an impact not only on the country's general financial situation but also at a societal level. For the vast majority of voters, it remains clear that society as a whole benefits if the Swiss economy is doing well (83%).

At the same time, almost three-quarters find it unfair that companies in Switzerland are being taxed less while the middle class have to pay higher social security contributions and per capita premiums (73%). Admittedly, the number of people who agreed somewhat or strongly with this statement was significantly higher in 2023 (-14 pp). And a majority of voters continue to support the statement that politicians must offer companies attractive conditions to make up for Switzerland having lost ground as a business location against international competitors (57%). According to the survey, voters want to strengthen Switzerland as a business location in the future – but not exclusively through tax cuts that have to be offset by rising taxes for the population.

Around 60% of voters believe that Swiss companies are too internationally oriented and do not show enough interest in everyday social life in Switzerland. Although the number of people agreeing with this statement is significantly lower than in 2023 (-10 pp), a large proportion still feels that action is needed in this regard.

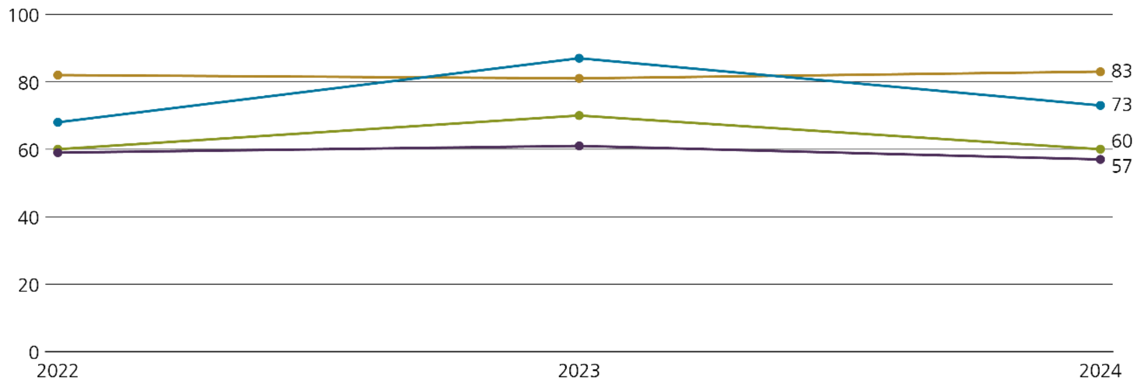
Figure 30

Trend: statements on economics and politics

Now you will see some statements on the subject of the economy and politics. In each case, please indicate whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree.

in % voters, proportion strongly / somewhat agree

— If Switzerland's economy is doing well, society as a whole benefits. — It is unfair that companies in Switzerland are being taxed less and less, while the middle class is being burdened with increasing social security contributions and per capita premiums. — Swiss companies and corporations are too internationally oriented and show too little interest in everyday social life in Switzerland. — Switzerland has lost ground in the international competition as a business location, and politicians must offer companies attractive conditions to make up for this.



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (n = 1,237)

People's expectations regarding companies' social engagement primarily concern the areas of education, the environment and socially disadvantaged groups. By contrast, people very rarely want companies to be involved in politics.

– Nearly half of respondents consider education to be one of the three areas in which they believe corporate engagement is the most important (48%).

– This is closely followed by commitment to the environment (46%). Developing sustainable business practices and innovation are also a high priority for many (38%).

– In third place is social engagement for disadvantaged people (40%).

– Of those surveyed, 27% consider promoting health programs to be particularly important.

– Less than one-fifth expect companies to be primarily engaged with each of the following: social minorities, the arts and culture, animal welfare and sports.

– People also seldom express the wish for companies to participate actively in national politics. Almost no respondents prioritize donating money to political parties.

Furthermore, people set the priorities for corporate engagement slightly differently depending on their gender and age: women are more likely than men to want companies to be involved in environmental protection, animal welfare and protecting minorities, while men want greater engagement in helping disadvantaged people, developing sustainable business practices, political debate and sports.

Sports are also particularly important to young people, as are commitment to the environment and engagement for disadvantaged people. Older people, by contrast, appreciate sponsorship and support for culture, animal welfare and political issues.

Figure 31

Engagement of companies in society by gender and age

In which areas do you find it commendable when companies are engaged in and contribute to society?
Please choose the three areas that you personally find most important.

in % voters

Engagement	Men	Women	18-39 years old	40-64 years old	65+ years old
Engagement in education and lifelong learning	48	49	49	49	46
Commitment to the environment (climate change, biodiversity, etc.)	43	48	51	45	41
Social engagement for disadvantaged people	42	39	46	38	37
Development of sustainable business practices and innovation	40	35	32	43	35
Promotion of health and wellness programs in the community	28	26	22	31	26
Active support for minorities (e.g. LGBTQ, people with disabilities, etc.)	17	21	22	17	18
Support for the arts and culture	18	18	15	16	23
Commitment to animal welfare	11	22	18	11	24
Active participation in the political debate of a country	18	14	9	17	22
Sponsorship in sports	18	13	20	14	12
None of the above	2	2	3	2	1
Donations to political parties	2	1	0	1	2

Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (n=1,263)

4.4. Innovation and digitalization

For Swiss voters, it's clear that innovation is a very important factor in a country's economic development. This opinion is shared by 52% of respondents. In addition, 43% say that innovation is somewhat important. Accordingly, the proportion of those who consider innovation to be rather unimportant or not important at all for the economy is extremely small (4%). Voters also consider innovation to be of great importance to them personally although not to the same extent as it is to economic development: 38% say that innovation is very important to them personally; for 54%, innovation is somewhat important.

Figure 32

Importance of innovation for a country's economic development

How important is innovation for a country's economic development?

in % voters

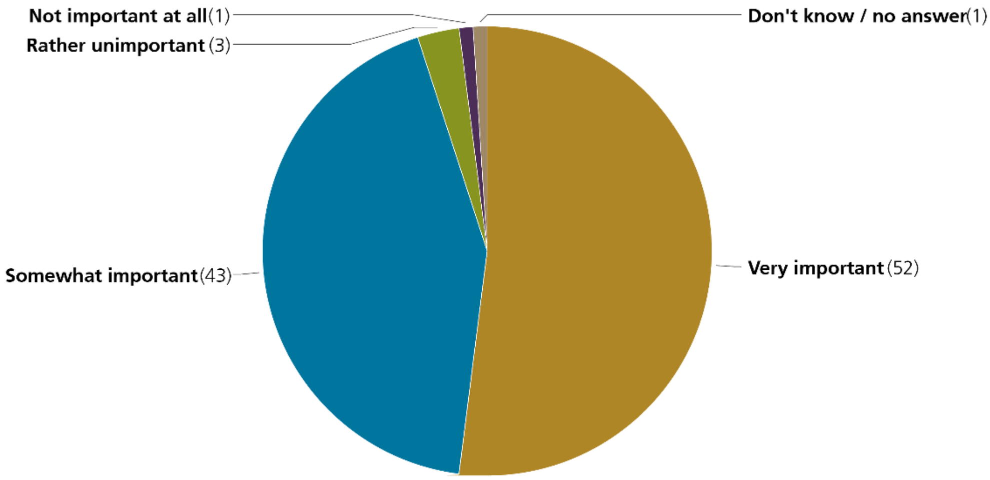
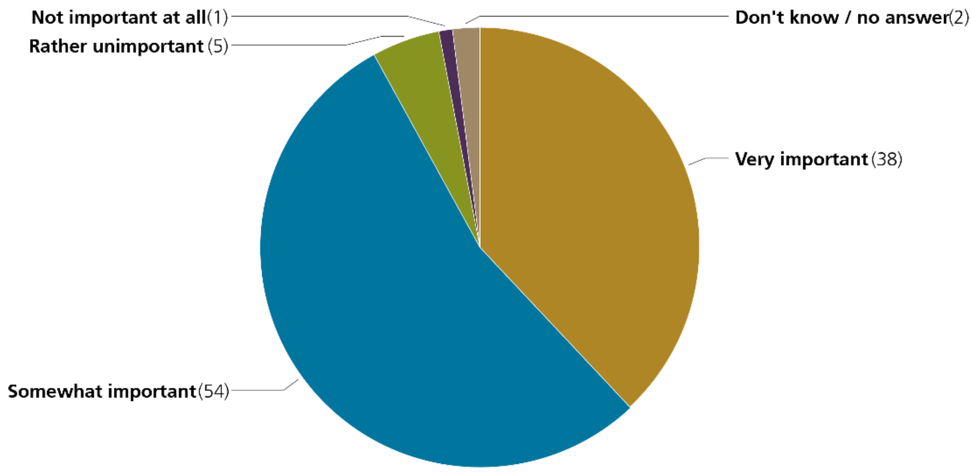


Figure 33

Importance of innovation

How important is innovation for you personally?

in % voters



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (n=1,263)

In the view of voters, Switzerland tends to be innovation-friendly: on average, voters rate the climate for innovation as 6.4 on a scale of 0 (extremely anti-innovation climate) to 10 (extremely innovation-friendly climate).

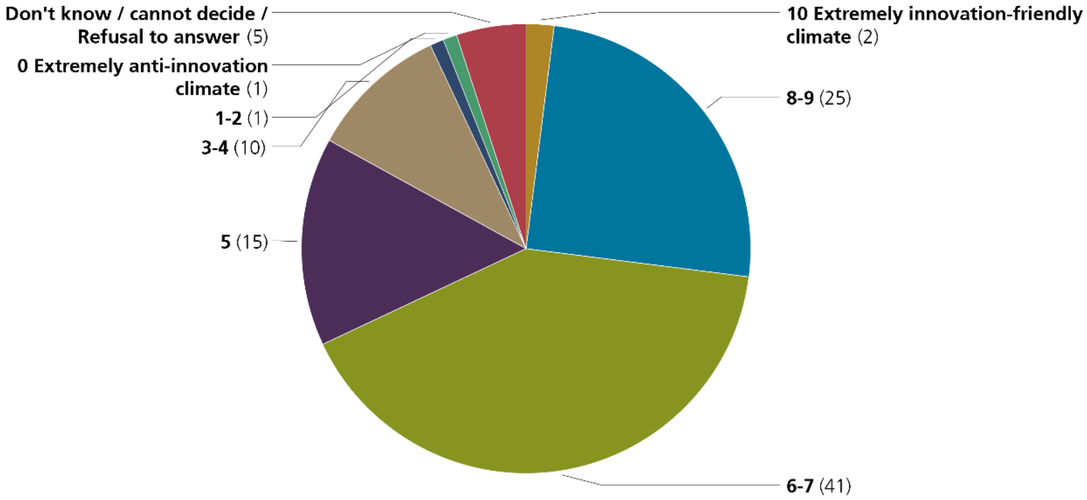
The majority of respondents rate the climate for innovation in Switzerland as 6 or 7 (41%). One-quarter rate it as 8 or 9, while 2% of voters consider Switzerland to be extremely innovation-friendly. Overall, therefore, Switzerland is rated as quite innovation-friendly, with voters significantly more likely to assign values of 6 and 7 than the values at the upper end of the scale. By contrast, only 12% of those surveyed rate the climate for innovation with a value of less than 5.

Figure 34

Assessment of the climate for innovation in Switzerland

How would you rate the climate for innovation in Switzerland? Please rate on a scale of 0 (extremely anti-innovation climate) to 10 (extremely innovation-friendly climate).

in % voters



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (n=1,263)

For voters, Switzerland's innovative strength is closely linked to the country's education and research institutions. A total of 61% believe that the education sector contributes a lot to Switzerland's innovative strength. A further 34% feel that it contributes a bit.

SMEs and startups in Switzerland are also seen as drivers of innovation: 84% of voters rate the contributions of each of these sectors as quite / very big. The proportion of people who think that startups contribute a great deal to the country's innovative strength is greater than for SMEs.

Fifth and sixth places are occupied by international companies (81% contribute a bit / a lot) and recruited specialists / skilled workers (78%).

Around half of voters believe that the Federal Council or the population ("people like you and me") generally contribute to Switzerland's innovative strength. In the case of parliament, this figure is only 38%.

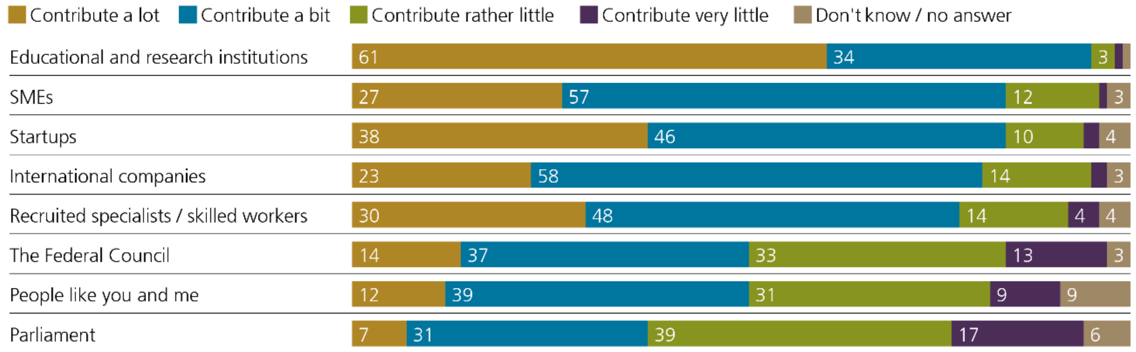
The education and research sector is therefore considered to be the most important player in the field of innovation. People feel that both SMEs and startups make a strong contribution to innovation – even more so than international companies.

Figure 35

Contributing to Switzerland's innovative strength

Switzerland is considered to be one of the most innovative countries in the world. Which of the following groups or stakeholders do you think contribute to Switzerland being so innovative?

in % voters



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (n=1,263)

This range of strong players is probably the reason why Switzerland ranks best in terms of innovative strength compared to other countries: on average, voters give a rating of 7.1 on a scale of 0 (not innovative at all) to 10 (extremely innovative), and 43% of the electorate rate Switzerland as 8 or higher.

There is a bit of a gap between Switzerland and the next countries on the list, China, the US and South Korea, which are grouped together quite closely. Their innovative strength ratings range on average between 6.4 and 6.6. Nearly one-third of people rate these countries with a top score of between 8 and 10. It's also striking that more people rate these countries with the highest score of 10 than Switzerland, although the average ratings for China, the US and South Korea are significantly lower.

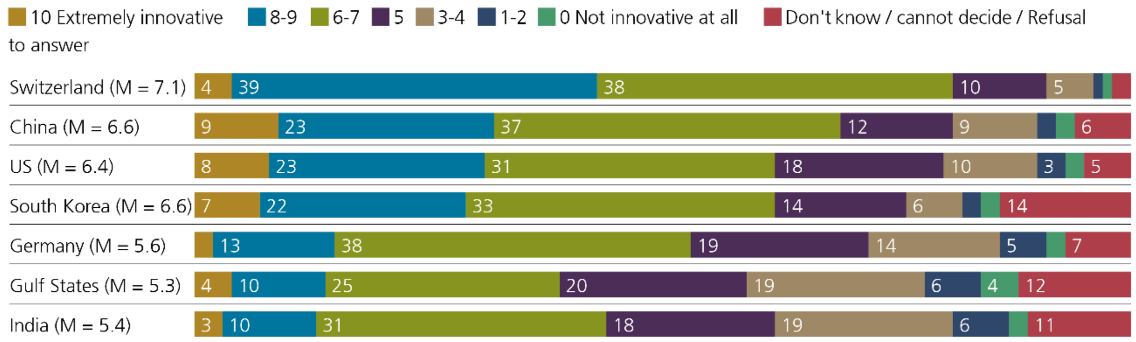
Germany (5.6 on average), India (5.4) and the Gulf States (5.3) occupy the bottom places in the ranking.

Figure 36

Innovative strength of different countries

In general, how innovative do you think the following countries are at the moment? Please rate them on a scale of 0 (not innovative at all) to 10 (extremely innovative).

in % voters



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (n=1,263)

Anyone following recent developments in innovation will be familiar with the new applications in the field of generative artificial intelligence (AI). These tools are characterized by the fact that they use complex models to create new text, image or music content according to users' wishes.

Awareness of these applications and the number of people using them have increased significantly over the past year. Nowadays, almost half of voters use tools such as ChatGPT, of which 10% say they use them every day (+7 pp) and 37% say they use them from time to time (+11 pp). Compared to 2023, the proportion of those who are not familiar with such tools has fallen to 13% (-8 pp). Around 38% say that they are familiar with the principle of the new chatbots, but have never used them themselves (-9 pp). Overall, public awareness is therefore 85% (familiar with and use).

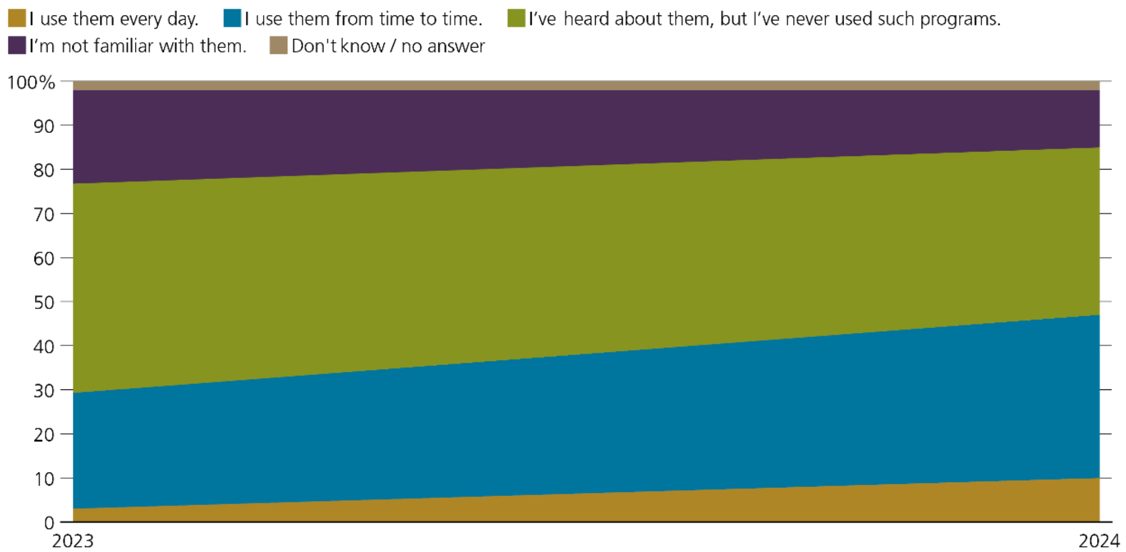
However, the level of confidence in the AI systems currently available varies greatly. While 30% of voters say they have a lot or at least some confidence in the accuracy of today's systems, 37% have little or no confidence in them. Nevertheless, the proportion of people who do not trust the systems at all has fallen compared to the previous year (11%, -7 pp). In comparison, more people are ambivalent about them: 31% feel neutral when it comes to confidence in the reliability of AI systems (+8 pp). It remains to be seen in which direction confidence in AI tools will develop in the future.

Figure 37

Trend: knowledge and use of chat bots

Are you familiar with and do you use ChatGPT or similar tools?

in % voters



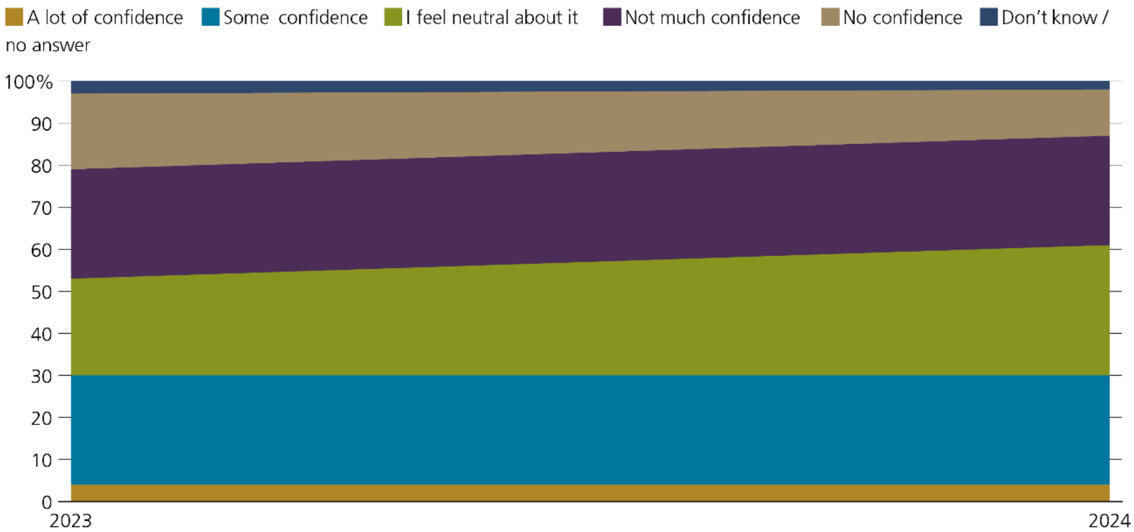
Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (n =1,263)

Figure 38

Trend: confidence in reliability and accuracy of today's AI systems

The advent of artificial intelligence is currently a major topic. How much confidence do you have in the reliability and accuracy of today's AI systems?

in % voters



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (n =1,263)

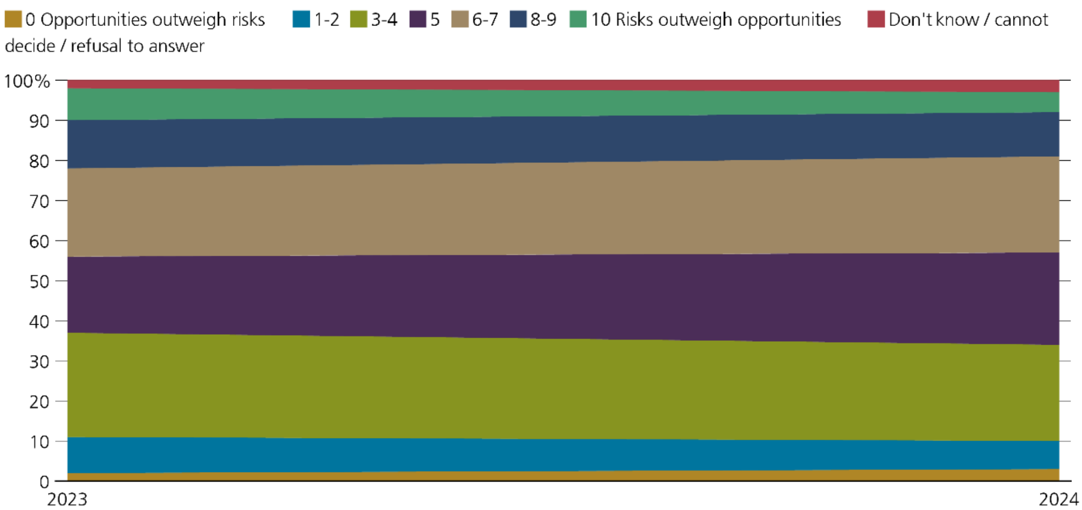
The sentiment regarding the opportunities and risks of AI is similar to that regarding confidence in AI systems. For 34% of voters, the opportunities outweigh the risks (value below 5 on a scale of 0 to 10), while 40% consider the risks to be greater (value above 5). Nearly one-quarter feel that the opportunities and risks are balanced (23%), and 3% did not respond. Overall, people currently rate the risks of AI as somewhat higher, with a large minority emphasizing the opportunities it creates. In addition, a relatively large number of people are undecided, which indicates that it can be challenging at this early stage to form a conclusive opinion.

Figure 39

Trend: assessing opportunities and risks of artificial intelligence

In your opinion, do the opportunities of artificial intelligence outweigh the risks, or do the risks outweigh the opportunities? Please rate on a scale of 0 (opportunities outweigh risks) to 10 (risks outweigh opportunities).

in % voters



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (n = 1,263)

5. Geopolitics

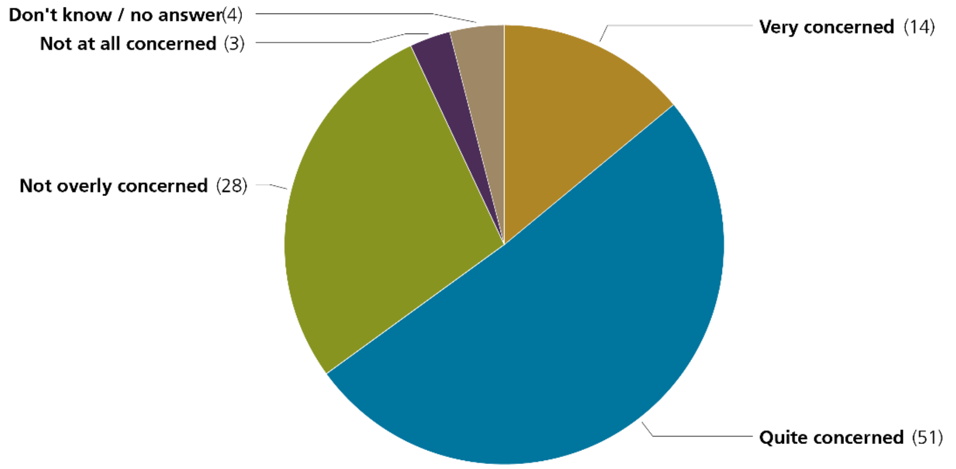
The world is in constant flux, and wars, conflicts, new alliances and shifts of power often dominate the headlines. Most Swiss voters are worried about the major geopolitical changes that may lie ahead. Half of the electorate are quite concerned about the geopolitical situation and 14% even state that they are very concerned. Only just under one-third state that they are not overly concerned or not at all concerned (31%).

Figure 40

Concerns about possible major geopolitical changes in the future

To what extent are you personally concerned about any major geopolitical changes in the future?

in % voters



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (n=1,237)

Not all citizens are equally concerned about potential geopolitical upheaval to the same extent. People with a high level of education tend to be more concerned (73%) than those with a medium or low level of education (55% or 56%). This is not surprising, as highly educated people are also more likely to keep abreast of politics and international political events.

Voters on the left are also more likely to be concerned about the geopolitical situation (77%) compared to people who are in the center of the political spectrum (58%) or to the right (63%). The perception of worries is also more pronounced in cities (70%) than in the intermediary municipalities (61%) and rural areas (54%).

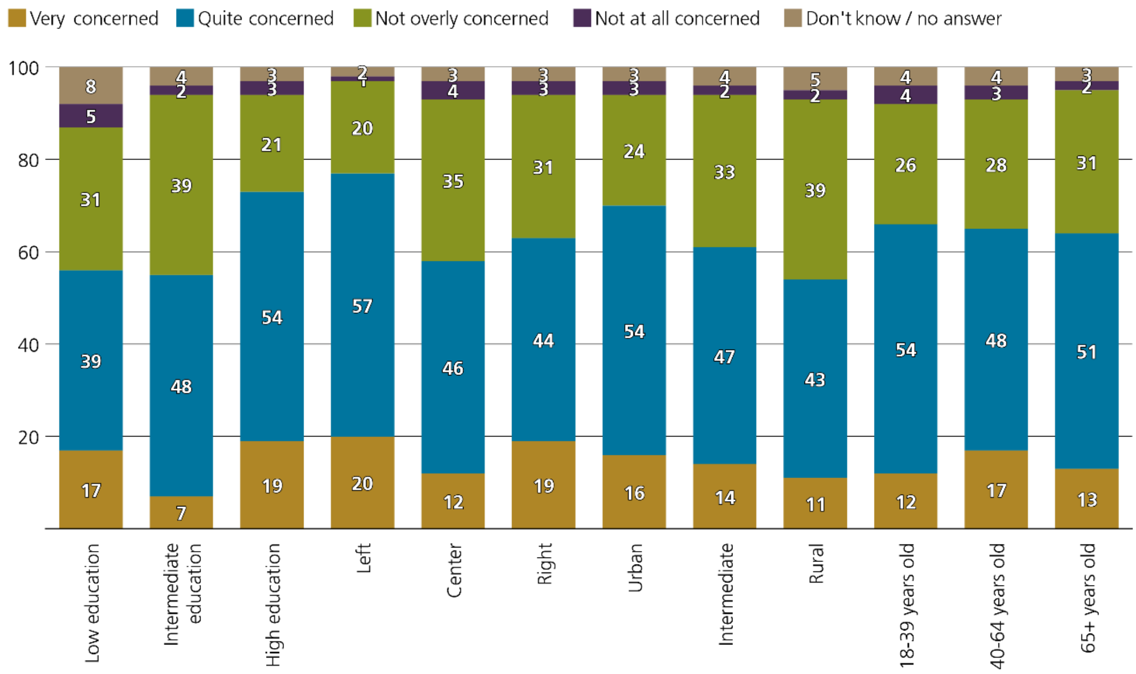
By contrast, age has no influence on the extent to which people are concerned about future geopolitical changes.

Figure 41

Concerns about possible major geopolitical changes in the future – comparison

To what extent are you personally concerned about any major geopolitical changes in the future?

in % voters



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (n=1,237)

Despite the major concerns voiced about geopolitical developments, voters tend to have confidence in Switzerland's degree of preparation and adaptability: almost half assume that Switzerland is very or pretty well prepared for any major geopolitical changes. However, 42% are (pretty) pessimistic.

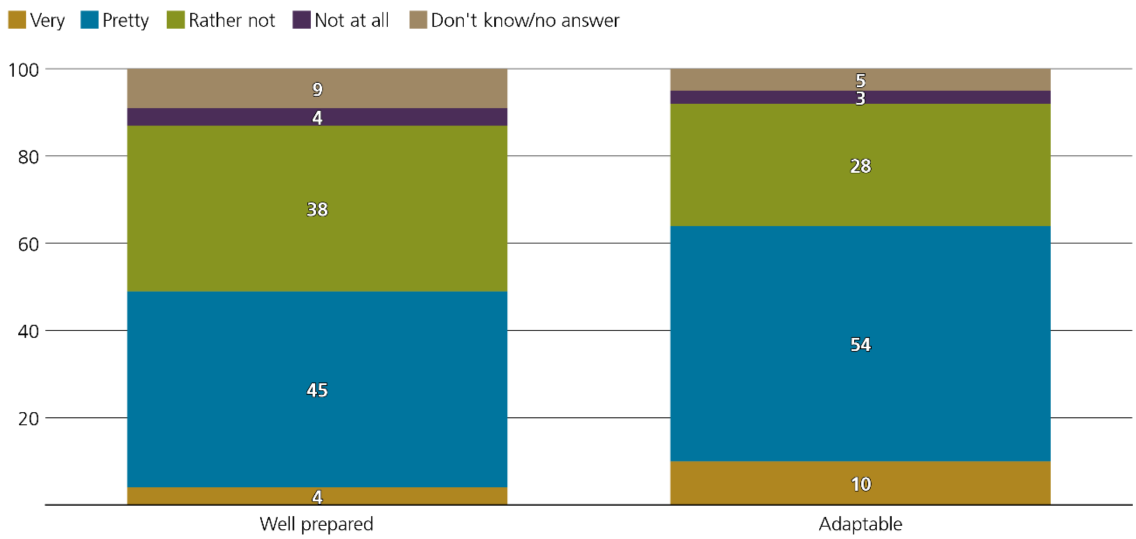
In addition, almost two-thirds of voters are convinced that the country is capable of adapting to major changes on the geopolitical stage. Only 31% believe that Switzerland would not be (very) adaptable in this case.

Figure 42

Switzerland's ability to adapt to major geopolitical changes

How well do you think Switzerland is prepared for any major geopolitical changes that might occur in the future?
How adaptable do you think Switzerland is in the event of major geopolitical changes?

in % voters



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (n=1,237)

The US presidential election in November 2024 provides a highly topical example of potential geopolitical changes. At the time of the survey, it was not yet clear whether the Democrat candidate Kamala Harris or Republican ex-President Donald Trump would win their bid for the White House. Many analysts anticipated a close race right up until election day. Significant shifts in international politics are to be expected, especially in the case of victory for Donald Trump – which was the eventual outcome.

A majority of voters say that they are very / quite concerned about the (at the time) upcoming US elections (54%). A large minority of 43%, by contrast, are not (overly) concerned.

Female voters tend to be more concerned about the outcome of the US presidential election than male voters. One reason for this could be the potential additional curtailing of women's rights in the US under Trump: after he had appointed several conservative Supreme Court judges during his first term of office, the national right to abortion was revoked in 2022, for example.

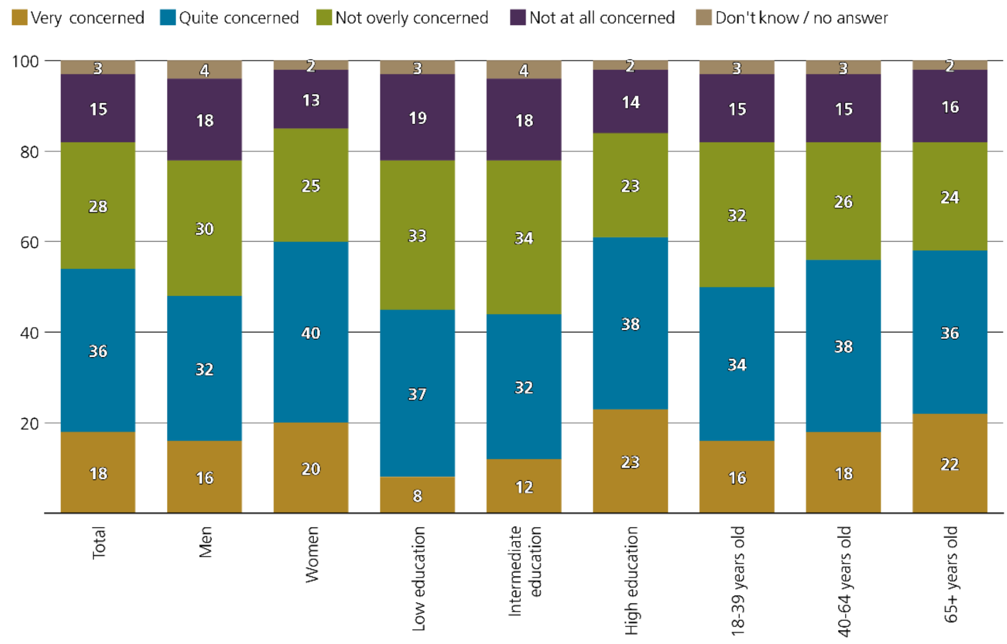
A small majority of people with a low or medium level of education are not overly concerned about the elections in the US, while 61% of those with a high level of education are concerned. Concerns about the US elections differ only slightly across the various age categories, with older voters tending to be more concerned than younger ones.

Figure 43

Concerns about the upcoming US presidential elections: comparison

How concerned are you about the upcoming US presidential election?

in % voters



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (n=1,237)

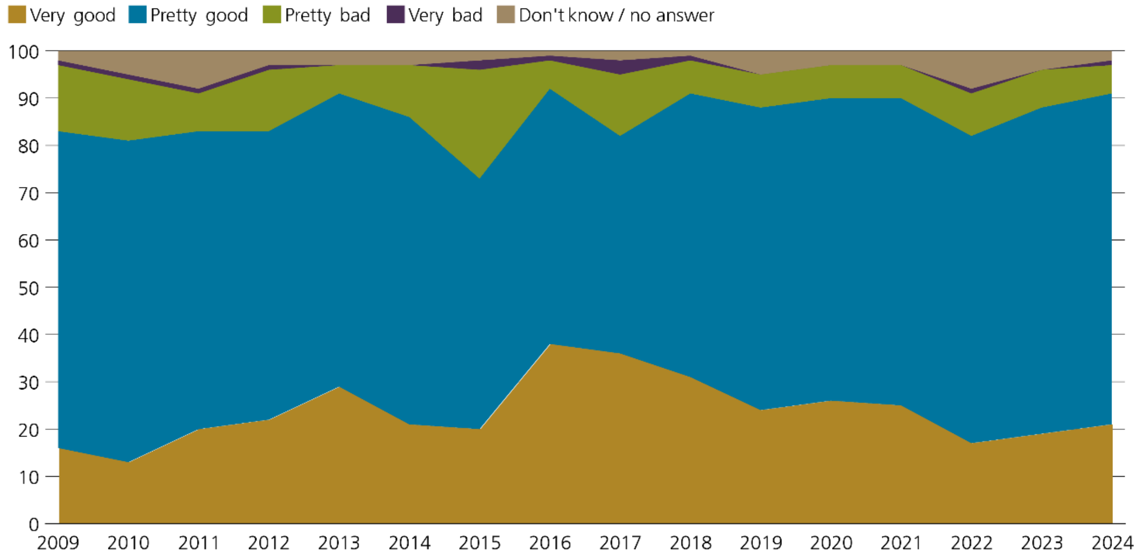
Although voters are divided on the US presidential election, they largely agree on Switzerland's image abroad. The vast majority think that Switzerland's international reputation is good: 70% rate their country's reputation as pretty good, and 21% as very good. This means that the image of Switzerland is somewhat more positive overall than in the previous year (+3 pp). Less than 10% of people think that Switzerland has a (pretty) bad image abroad.

Figure 44

Trend: Switzerland's current reputation / image abroad

In your opinion, what is Switzerland's reputation/image abroad?

in % voters



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (n = 1,237)

Most voters also feel that Switzerland's image has not changed in the last 12 months (40%). That is somewhat higher than in 2023 (+6 pp). However, one-third think that its reputation has deteriorated somewhat and 3% perceive its reputation as much worse than in the previous year. By contrast, only 18% of voters think that Switzerland's image has improved somewhat over the past year.

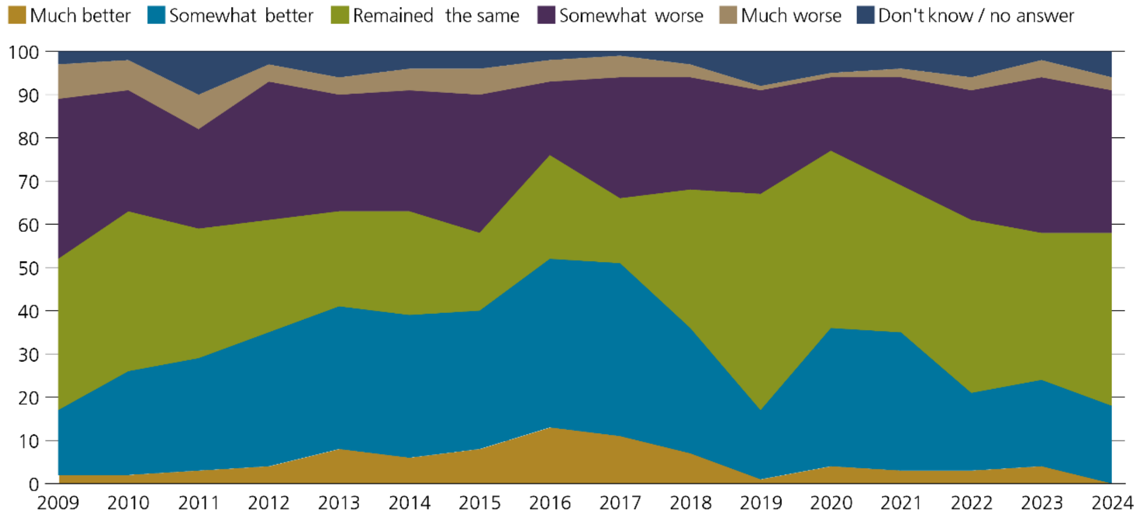
Overall, therefore, voters in Switzerland still feel that their country is viewed positively abroad. While some people fear that its image has deteriorated recently, most expect Switzerland's reputation to remain stable (or even improve slightly).

Figure 45

Trend: change in how Switzerland is viewed/perceived abroad over the last 12 months

How has Switzerland's image abroad changed in the last 12 months?

in % voters



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (n = 1,237)

For a small country like Switzerland, the increasingly demanding global political situation poses a challenge. Politicians in Switzerland need to think about the best way to assert the country's interests abroad.

In the opinion of voters, Switzerland is somewhat defensive / restrained on the international stage when it comes to its own interests: 55% of people are of this opinion. And 13% even feel that Switzerland is very defensive / restrained. By contrast, less than one-quarter describe Switzerland's stance as somewhat / very aggressive (22%). The assessment has been comparable over the last five years. In the mid-2010s, a (relative) majority still felt that the Swiss approach was aggressive. The discussions on the framework agreement between Switzerland and the EU, as well as the impasse following a breakdown in the first negotiations in 2021, may have contributed to the impression that Switzerland has become increasingly defensive.

The majority of voters feel that Switzerland should take a more aggressive stance toward foreign countries in order to defend its interests (76%): 55% would like Switzerland to be more aggressive and 21% would like it to be much more aggressive. Only 13% would recommend a more defensive stance than at present. Although the desire for a more aggressive stance has declined slightly compared to the previous year, it corresponds to the long-term average.

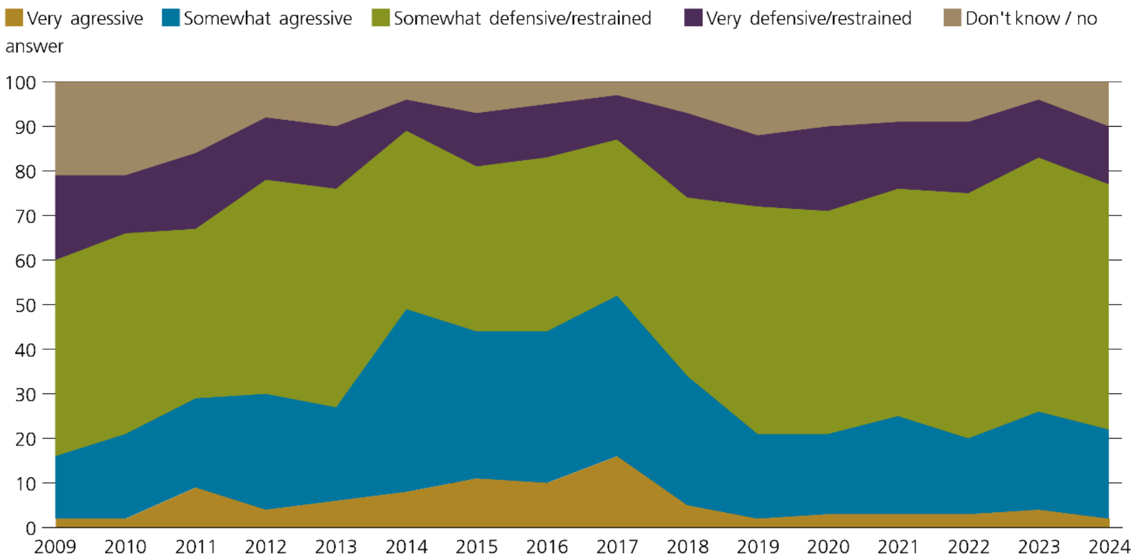
There is therefore a gap between the current perception of Switzerland's stance abroad and voters' preferences. In geopolitically challenging times, many feel that a more aggressive stance by Switzerland would be appropriate.

Figure 46

Trend: stance of Swiss politics towards other countries

What stance does Swiss politics take toward foreign countries when it comes to the country's concerns?

in % voters



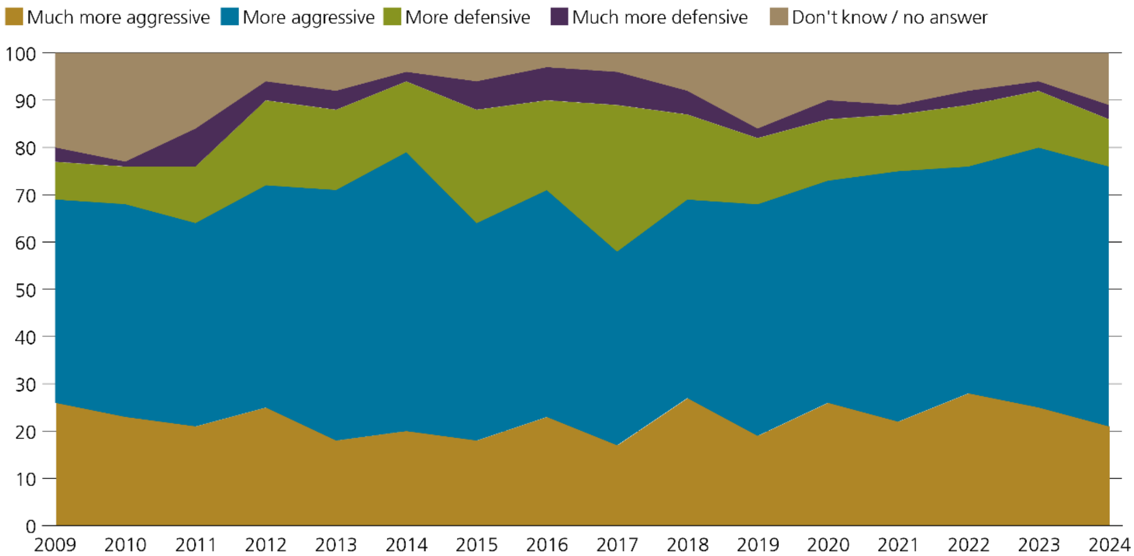
Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (n = 1,237)

Figure 47

Trend: desired stance of Swiss politics towards other countries

And what stance should Swiss politics take toward foreign countries when it comes to the country's concerns?

in % voters



Source: gfs.bern, UBS Worry Barometer, August/September 2024 (n = 1,237)

6. Synthesis

Below, we provide a summary of the findings in thesis form:

All eyes on healthcare

The pressing problems in the healthcare sector are turning into a burning issue that is clearly pushing all other topics into the background. On the one hand, the increase in healthcare costs is a key factor in the widespread concerns about the rising cost of living in general. On the other, the healthcare sector has also been top of mind for the population due to the numerous political proposals put to a popular vote in 2024 (premium discounts, cap on healthcare costs, EFAS legislation). Along with retirement provision, healthcare is the policy area in which fundamental reforms are considered to be essential, but at the same time there are hardly any visible ways of achieving these. The complexity of the topic, the various interests of numerous players and the fear of deteriorating healthcare services pose enormous challenges in this regard.

Increasing uncertainty in everyday life

In a world increasingly characterized by uncertainty, there is a significant shift toward materialistic fears and everyday security concerns. While existential issues relating to the provision of basic services, such as those that were still prominent during the COVID-19 pandemic or in the discussion about energy supply, have declined in significance, other topics are becoming more important: in particular, rising living costs that some people feel to be excessive, and – for the first time after a long gap – personal safety. In parallel, there is a marked increase in concerns about migration, particularly with regard to refugees and immigration. These developments create fertile ground for right-wing conservative policies and solutions. However, when it comes to living costs and the interplay between business and society, solutions from the left (i.e. 13th state pension / reform of company pensions) are repeatedly – and often contrary to expectations – able to win over the majority of voters.

Geopolitical situation

The Swiss population believes in the country's ability to withstand a crisis. This belief is based in particular on its strong economic position. However, there is greater uncertainty about Switzerland's ability to cope with geopolitical events. As with the question of relations with the EU, Swiss voters' understanding of geopolitical and foreign policy issues is largely shaped by economic considerations and has to be evaluated in terms of the position as an economic center. While some perceive the EU as a community of values, Switzerland is focused on trade and market access in particular. Geopolitical developments beyond Europe's borders are therefore also often viewed in this economic context. In this regard, there seems to be a need for an objective, fact-based discussion that looks at Switzerland's dependencies (in particular on the EU), the potential leeway for independent strategies and the country's overall resilience.

Climate change remains one of the main worries

The increasing uncertainty caused by extreme weather events such as storms, water scarcity and heat waves is becoming increasingly noticeable – in Europe as well as in other parts of the world. These phenomena are stark evidence of how climate change affects daily life and make it clear that the impact is no longer abstract or limited to scenarios in the distant future. For voters, climate change remains one of the key issues, not only due to the environmental aspects, but also because of the direct ramifications for the economy, society and personal living conditions.

Divides and conflicts

Younger people in particular are very concerned about the environment. Although the media repeatedly talk about the generational divide, to date there is little evidence to show that this could actually develop into an imminent conflict in Switzerland. There are certainly major gaps between the youngest members of the electorate and the vast majority, particularly when it comes to the environment, living costs and securing retirement provision. However, Generation Z is by no means a homogeneous group: young men and young women sometimes have fundamentally different priorities, not only in terms of social security, but also with regard to equality and security of supply.

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