

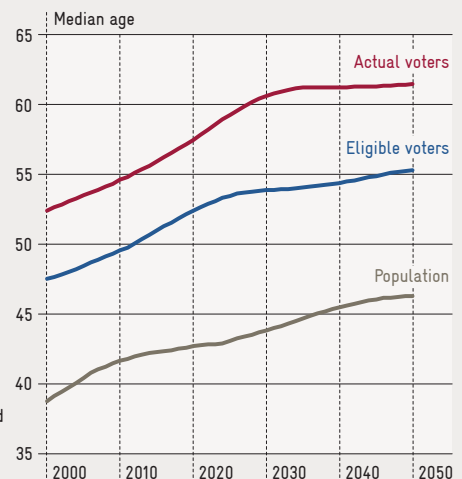
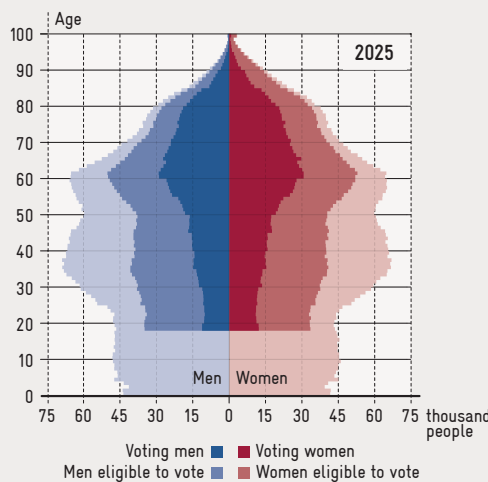
The Old Electorate

Today, half of all active voters are 60 or older. They are thus close to retirement age or have already reached it. This balance of power at the ballot box heightens the risk of redistribution from young to old.

Situation

Demographic aging is not sparing the electorate either. While the median age of the resident population stands at 43 today, that of eligible voters already stands at 53.5 years. Those who actually vote are markedly older still, since older citizens cast ballots far more often than younger ones: turnout among 20- to 29-year-olds is about 30 percent, while more than 60 percent of 70- to 79-year-olds vote. This has political consequences: on measures with age-dependent costs and benefits, older cohorts usually get their way.

Active voters are markedly older than the population as a whole



Swiss citizens are eligible to vote from age 18. Older citizens cast ballots twice as often as younger ones. As a result, the median age of actual voters is another six years above that of eligible voters.

Facts

59.6 years

This is the median age of those who actually vote: one half is younger, the other older. It has risen by seven years since 2000; from 2035 on, it is likely to level off at around 61 to 62.

■ Age is likely to shape outcomes more and more

Studies on the age-dependence of voting behavior are scarce. One master's thesis based on post-vote surveys shows that between 1984 and 2019, 25 percent of ballot measures produced different majorities among 18- to 30-year-olds and those over 65. That share rose to 40 percent for 2020 to 2024. On the measures affected, older voters prevailed in 63 percent of cases between 1984 and 2019 – and their dominance climbed even further, to 71 percent, from 2020 to 2024.

■ The skew will persist

Through 2050, 60- to 80-year-olds will remain the strongest voting cohorts, with 25,000 to 30,000 voters per age year. Young people will account for only 11,000 to 13,000 voters per age year.

■ The imbalance is hard to correct

Lowering the voting age to 16 would cut the median age by less than half a year. A ten-percentage-point rise in turnout among under-35s would reduce it by only 1.25 years, and voting rights for children by at most 4.7 years.

Recommendations

The high median age can hardly be lowered. Many reform ideas – such as compulsory voting, voting rights for children, or weighting votes by age – are **questionable** or outright unacceptable **on democratic grounds**. Policymakers must therefore accept the graying electorate as a reality, and factor the distribution of power

into any reform with age-dependent costs and benefits from the outset. One long-overdue reform might offer some relief: **aligning the retirement age with life expectancy**. That would keep voters in the workforce longer, which would likely shift certain preferences over how government spending is allocated.

