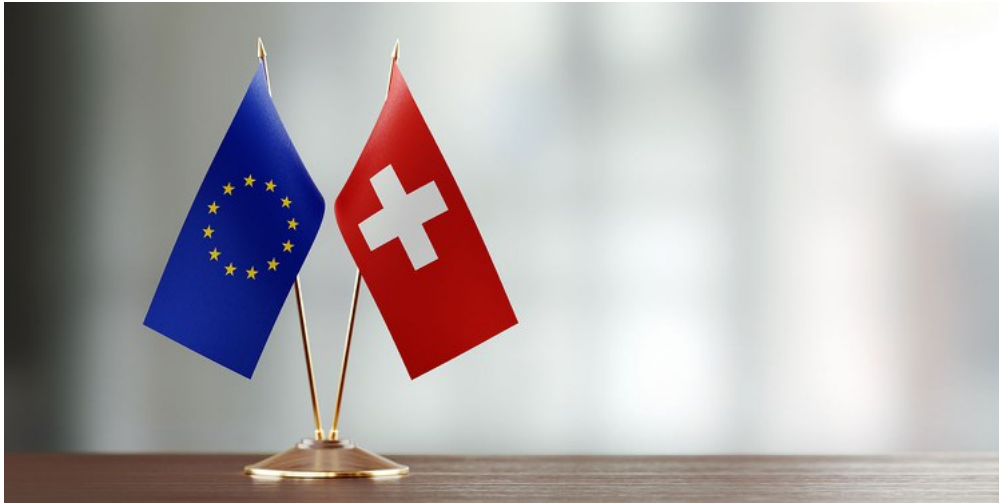


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WORSE CHANCES FOR THE LIMITATION INITIATIVE BECAUSE OF THE CORONA CRISIS

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On September 27, 2020, Switzerland will vote on the SVP's [limitation initiative](#). Acceptance of the initiative would not only end the free movement of people between Switzerland and the EU, but also mean the end of the bilateral path. In this article we show that the limitation initiative has lost support among the Swiss electorate in the wake of the Corona crisis.

The vote on the limitation initiative was originally planned for May 2020. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was postponed to September 2020. What does this mean for the initiative's chances of success? Has the pandemic made the adoption of the limitation initiative more likely or less likely?

Limitation initiative

The initiative "[For moderate immigration \(limitation initiative\)](#)" calls for an independent regulation of the immigration of foreigners to Switzerland without freedom of movement. It demands that the Federal Council terminate the agreement on the free movement of persons with the EU if Switzerland does not succeed in suspending the agreement through negotiations within a year.

From a theoretical perspective, the influence of the Corona crisis on voting behavior is unclear. The pandemic has reinforced nationalist trends worldwide, exposed the health risks of cross-border passenger movement, but also demonstrated the need for international cooperation to combat the pandemic.

Free movement of people was temporarily suspended during the crisis. However, this measure was not without consequences: the Swiss economy was significantly weakened by the crisis, which increased the risks of a deterioration in bilateral relations for Swiss companies and employees.

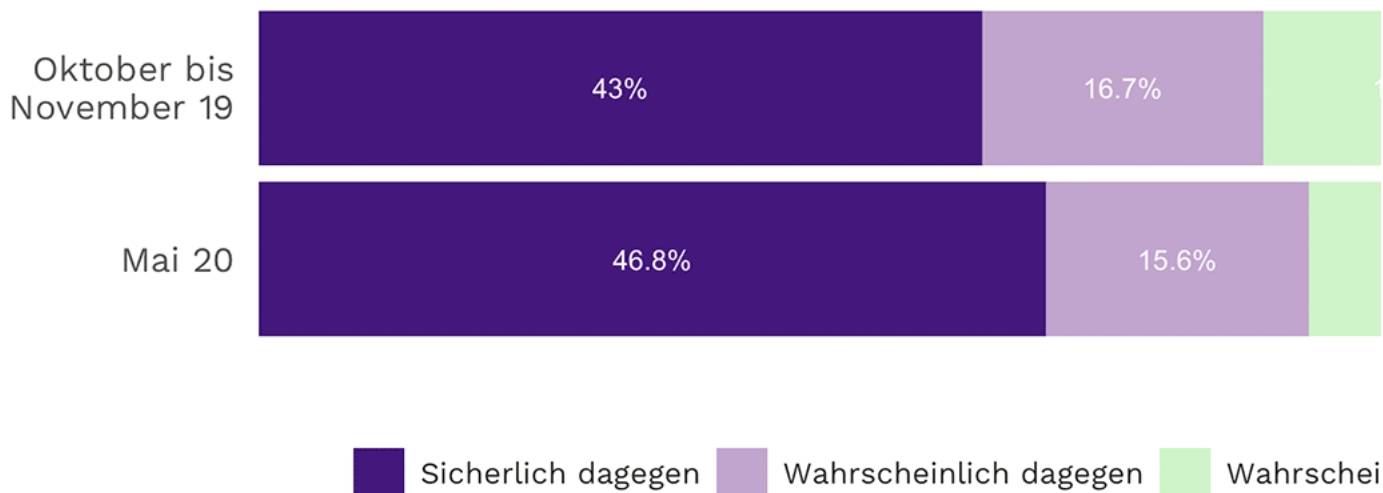
HOW DOES THE CORONA CRISIS AFFECT ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE LIMITATION INITIATIVE?

Figure 1 shows that opposition to the limitation initiative increased slightly during the Corona crisis. In May 2020, a majority of 62.4 percent of those surveyed said they would certainly or probably vote against the limitation initiative, while in autumn 2019 59.7 percent had spoken out against the initiative.

The vast majority of respondents did not change their voting intentions during the Corona crisis. Of those who were certain they wanted to vote for the initiative in the fall, only just under three quarters were still certain they were in favor of it in May. In contrast, 91 percent of the declared opponents of the initiative maintained that they would definitely vote against the limitation initiative. Among those who did not yet have a firm opinion in the fall, there is an overall trend against the initiative.

FIGURE 1: VOTING INTENTION FOR THE LIMITATION INITIATIVE

Wie würden Sie abstimmen, wenn der Urnengang zur Begrenzung heute stattfinden würde?



Note: 1,781 respondents, the data was weighted to correspond to a representative sample of the Swiss population.

Data and methods

The empirical analyzes are based on an online panel survey that was designed by Stefanie Walter and carried out by [ghs.bern](https://www.ghs.berne.ch/) as part of the ERC-funded research project " [The Mass politics of disintegration](#) " (Grant Agreement No. 817582) . The first wave of the survey took place from October 25th to November 11th, 2019, and 2,535 people took part. 1,794 people (71%) also took part in the second wave of the survey, which was carried out from May 13 to 28, 2020. Our analysis focuses on respondents who participated in both waves. The sample is representative of the Swiss electorate in terms of age, gender and language region. The descriptive results in the graphics are weighted to take into account the differences in educational level and party affiliation between our sample and the Swiss voting population.

Overall, the Corona crisis has not dramatically changed public opinion regarding the limitation initiative, but it has made the rejection of the referendum somewhat more likely.

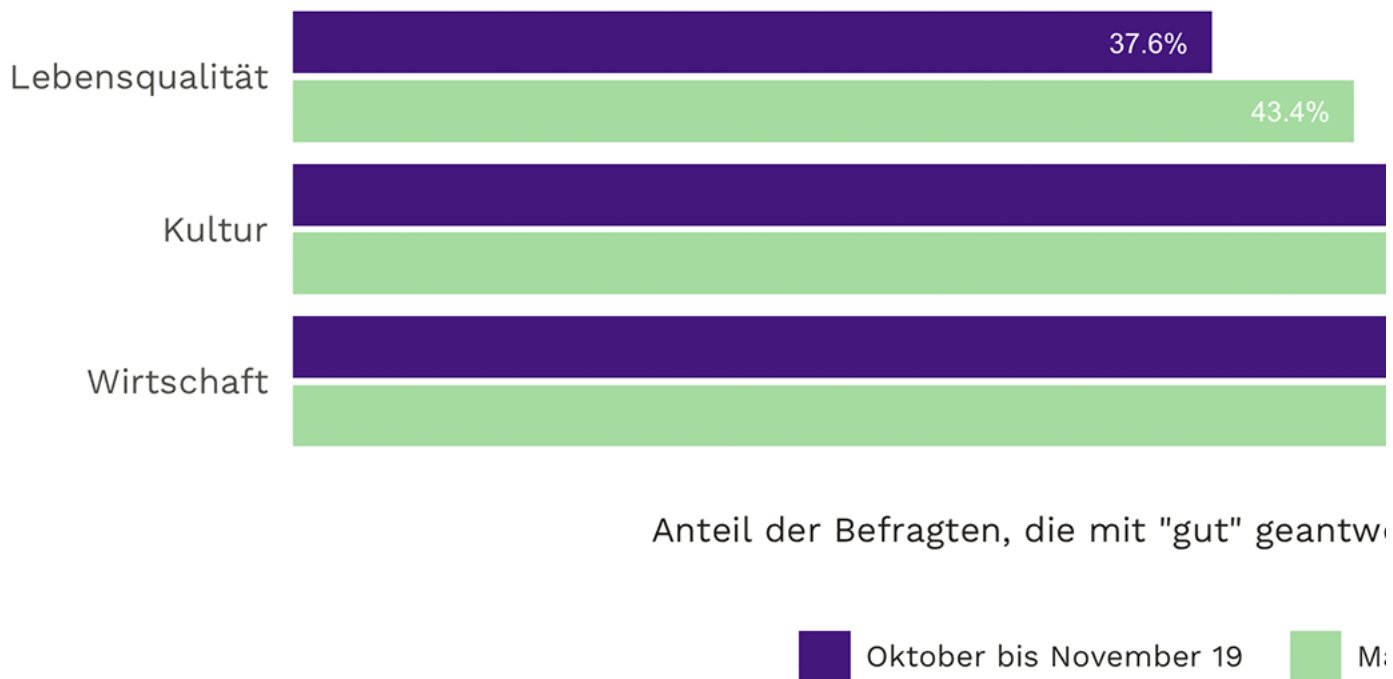
WHAT ARE THE REASONS FOR THIS DEVELOPMENT?

Our data make it possible to examine the mechanisms for this development in more detail. We focus on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on attitudes towards immigration, international and particularly European cooperation, economic concerns and satisfaction with government.

Figure 2 compares attitudes towards migration before and during the pandemic. Regardless of whether we asked about the impact of immigration on life as a whole, culture, or the economy, respondents viewed immigration more positively overall in May 2020 than in fall 2019. These attitudinal changes are associated with a lower likelihood of supporting the cap initiative .

FIGURE 2: SUPPORT FOR MIGRATION

Ist es Ihrer Meinung nach generell gut oder schlecht für die So Lebensqualität/Kultur/Wirtschaft, dass Einwander*innen in die



Note: 1,781 respondents, the data was weighted to correspond to a representative sample of the Swiss population.

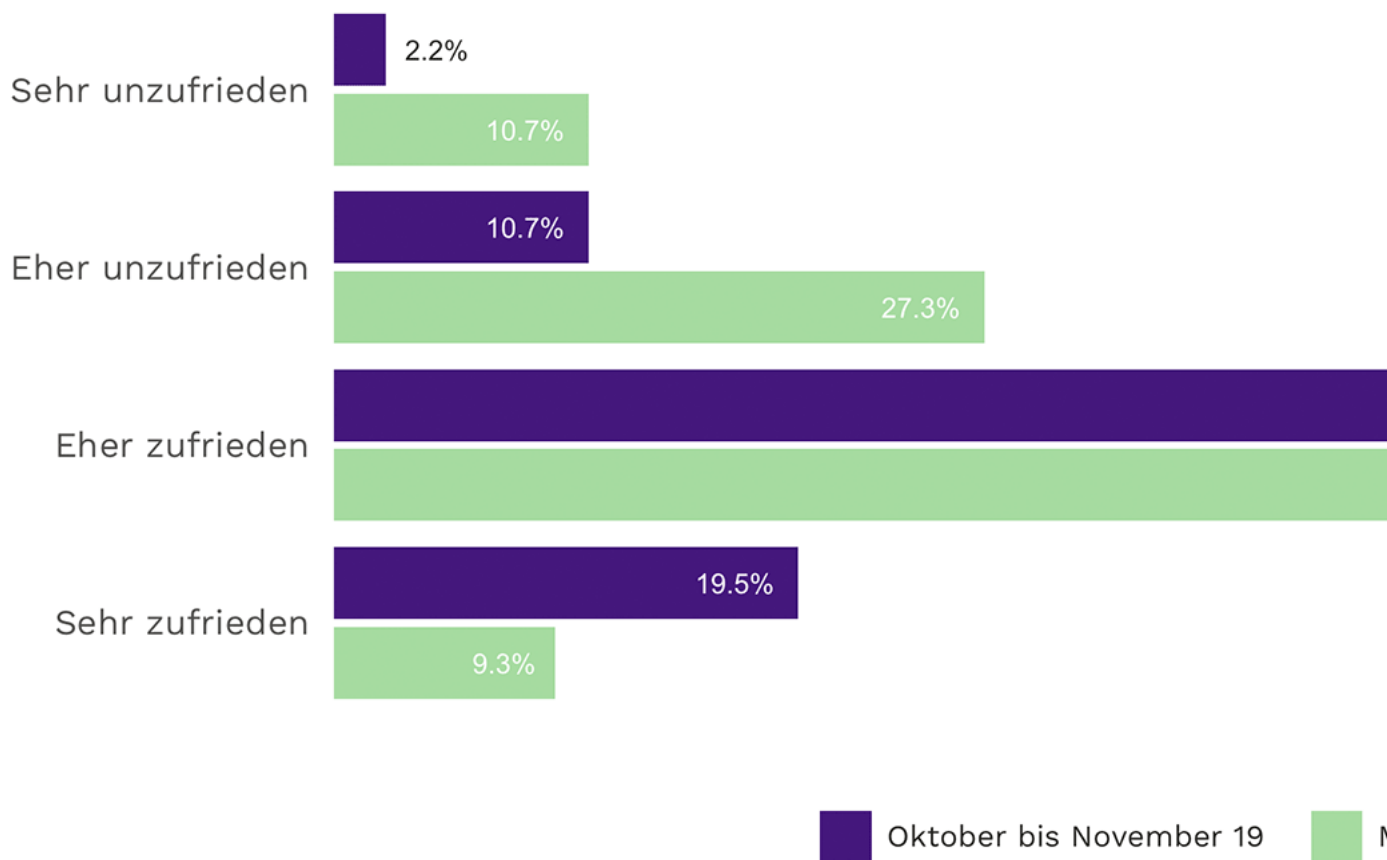
CRISIS-RELATED CONCERNS ABOUT THE ECONOMY

On the occasion of the launch of the voting campaign against the limitation initiative, both employers and unions argued that acceptance of the limitation initiative would cause further damage to the Swiss economy, which has already been weakened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Do the Swiss electorate share these concerns?

Figure 3 shows that the assessment of the economic situation in Switzerland has deteriorated in recent months. While in November 2019 a majority were satisfied with the economic situation in Switzerland, in May 2020 ten percent were very dissatisfied and over 25 percent were rather dissatisfied with the economic situation - even if, perhaps surprisingly given the COVID-19 crisis, one The vast majority of respondents are still "somewhat satisfied" (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 3: SATISFACTION WITH THE ECONOMY

Wie zufrieden sind Sie insgesamt mit der aktuellen wirtschaftlichen Situation in der Schweiz?

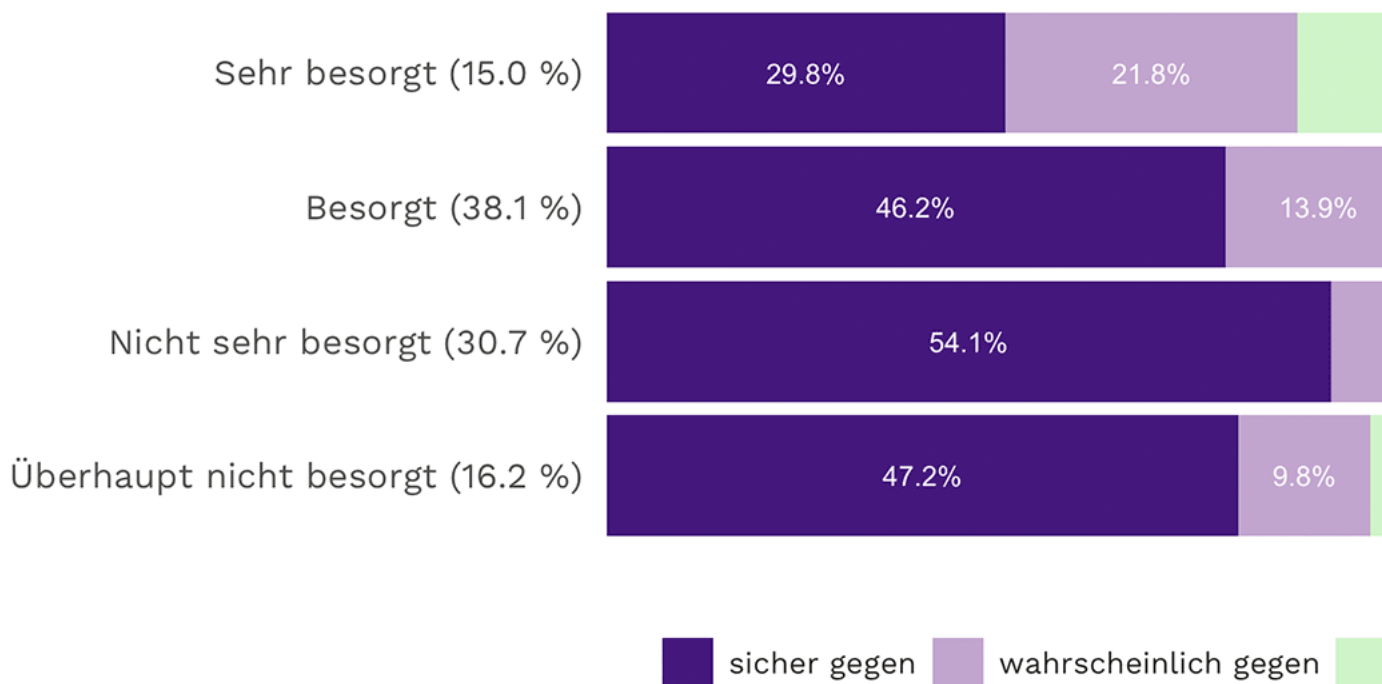


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At the same time, 53 percent of those surveyed are worried about losing their job. Respondents who are more worried about losing their jobs appear to be more likely to vote for the cap initiative (Figure 4). However, our statistical analyzes show that respondents who are worried about their jobs have become more moderate in their attitudes since the fall. On average, these respondents are now less strongly in favor of the initiative than they were in October and November. This suggests that respondents who have been particularly affected by the Corona crisis are more likely to want to avoid another blow to the Swiss economy.

FIGURE 4: VOTING INTENTION FOR THE LIMITATION INITIATIVE, TAKING CONCERNS ABOUT THE JOB INTO ACCOUNT

Wie würden Sie abstimmen, wenn der Urnen heute stattfinden würde?



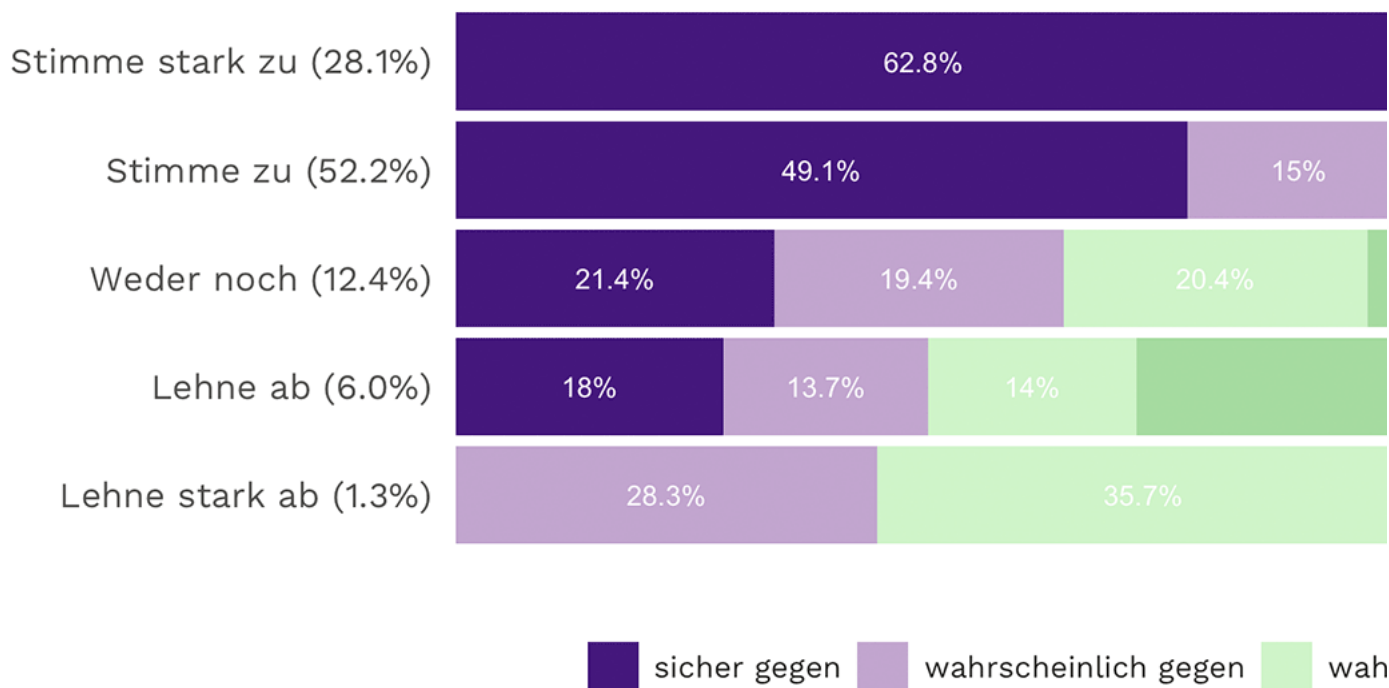
Note: 1,781 respondents, the data was weighted to correspond to a representative sample of the Swiss population.

COVID-19 AND THE ASSESSMENT OF INTERNATIONAL AND EUROPEAN COOPERATION

The population's attitude towards international cooperation in a broader sense is also an important factor in the context of the limitation initiative. On the one hand, a large majority of respondents, eighty percent, agree that the medical and economic problems caused by the COVID-19 crisis can only be solved if all countries work together. This view correlates strongly with a rejection of the limitation initiative (see Figure 5).

FIGURE 5: VOTING INTENTION FOR THE LIMITATION INITIATIVE, TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE ATTITUDE TOWARDS INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

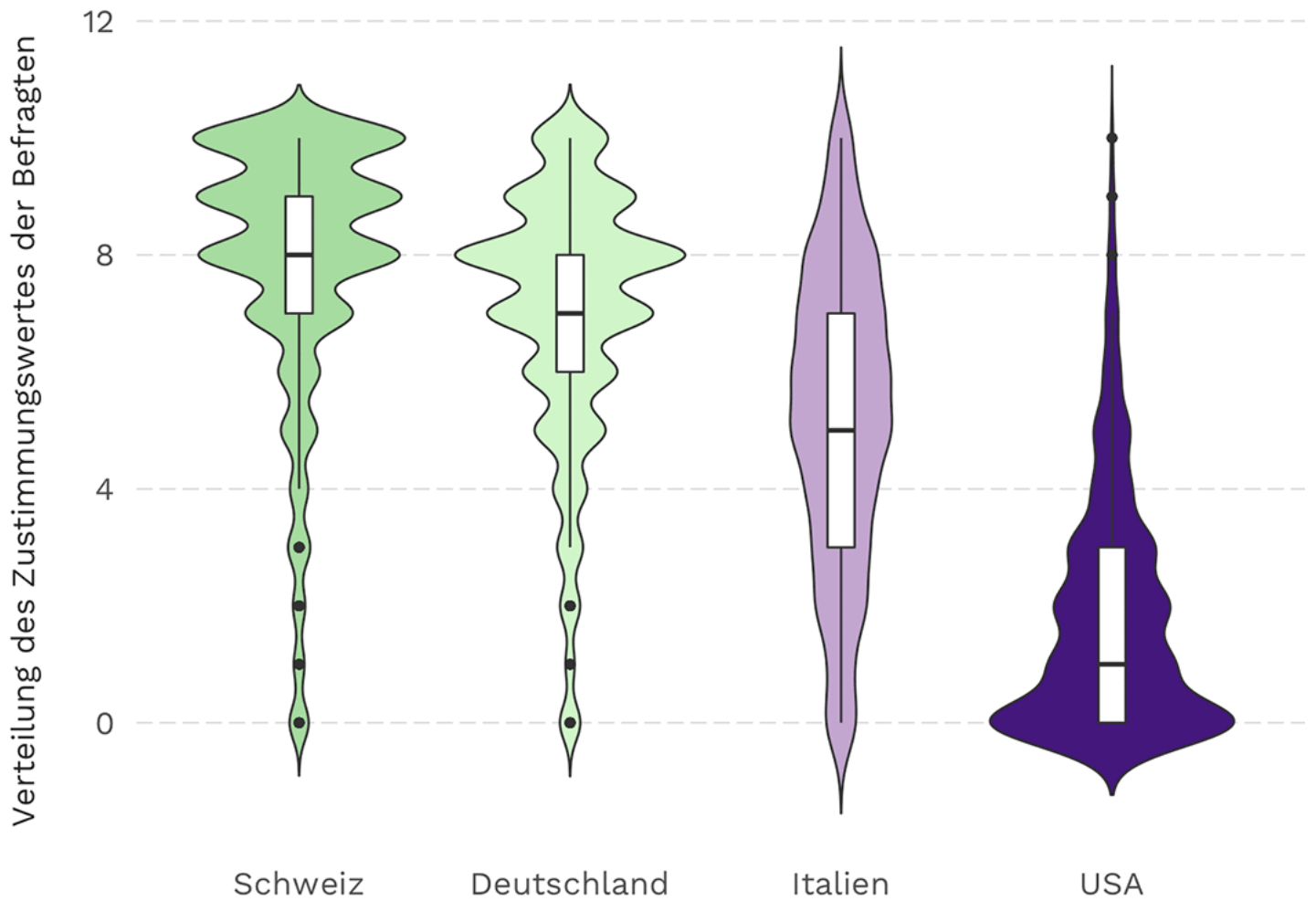
Wie würden Sie abstimmen, wenn der Urnengang zur heute stattfinden würde?



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On the other hand, respondents are skeptical about European cooperation and internationally coordinated efforts to address the crisis. The attitude towards the EU has not changed significantly compared to autumn 2019. The assessment of the crisis management by the EU and the WHO is inconsistent, especially in comparison to Switzerland's Corona strategy, which is assessed very positively (see Figure 6). Both the positive assessment of the Swiss Corona strategy and the EU's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic correlate with a higher rejection of the limitation initiative.

FIGURE 6: ASSESSMENT OF CORONA POLICY BY THE RESPONDENTS - BY ACTORS



Note: 1,781 respondents, the data was weighted to correspond to a representative sample of the Swiss population.

THE SWISS ELECTORATE IS SATISFIED WITH THE FEDERAL COUNCIL AND THE STATUS QUO - DESPITE THE CORONA CRISIS

The positive assessment of the Swiss Corona crisis strategy is also reflected in a significant increase in satisfaction with the government and democracy in general (see Figure 7).

If satisfaction and trust in the Federal Council remain high, this could give more weight to the Federal Council's decisive and unified appeal for a vote against the limitation initiative and increase the pressure on the initiative.

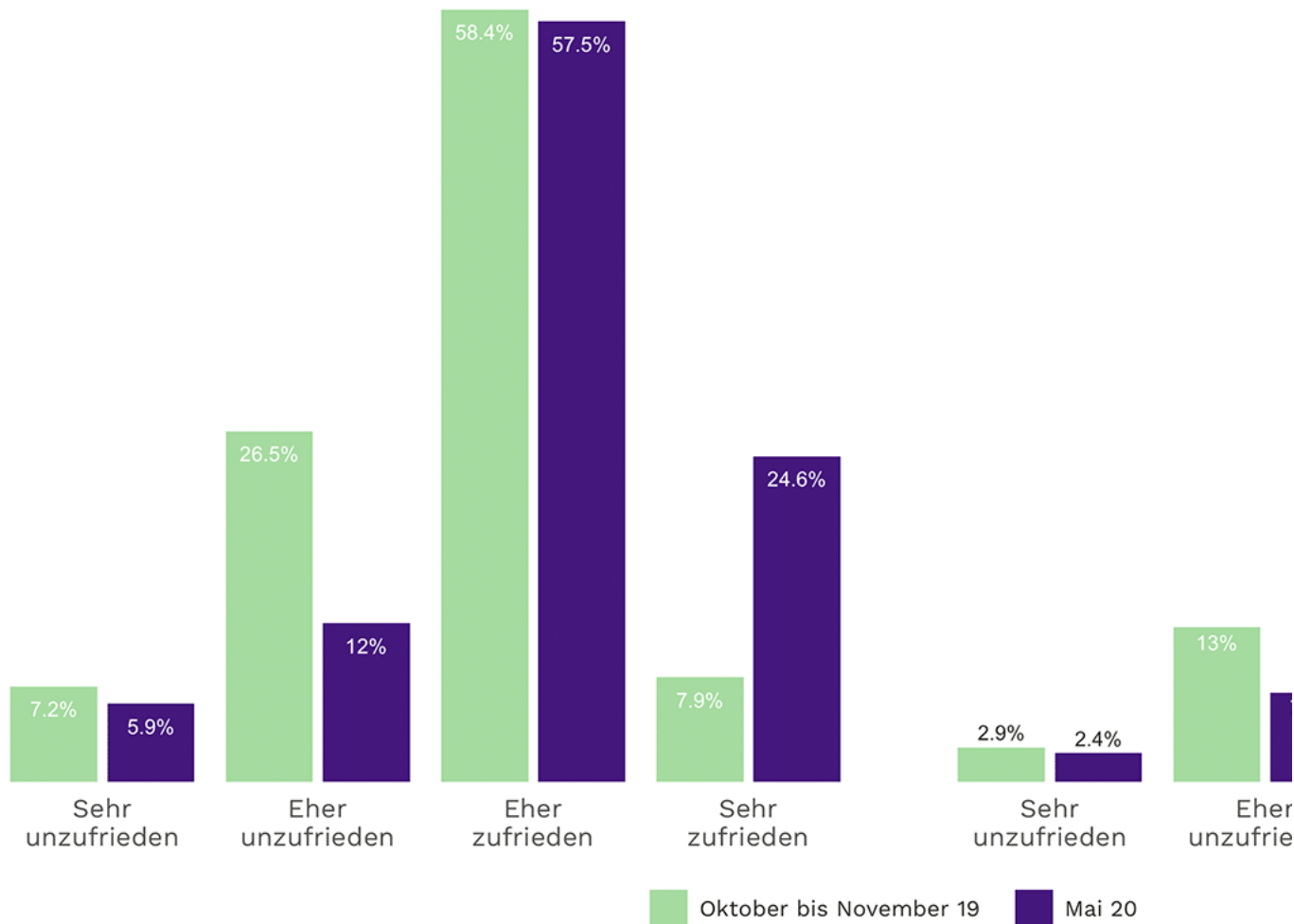
FIGURE 7: SATISFACTION WITH GOVERNMENT MEASURES AND DEMOCRACY

Zufriedenheit mit den Maßnahmen der Regierung

Wie zufrieden sind Sie mit der Art und Weise, wie der Bundesrat seine Arbeit macht?

Zufriedenheit mit der Demokratie

Wie zufrieden sind Sie mit der Demokratie in der Schweiz?

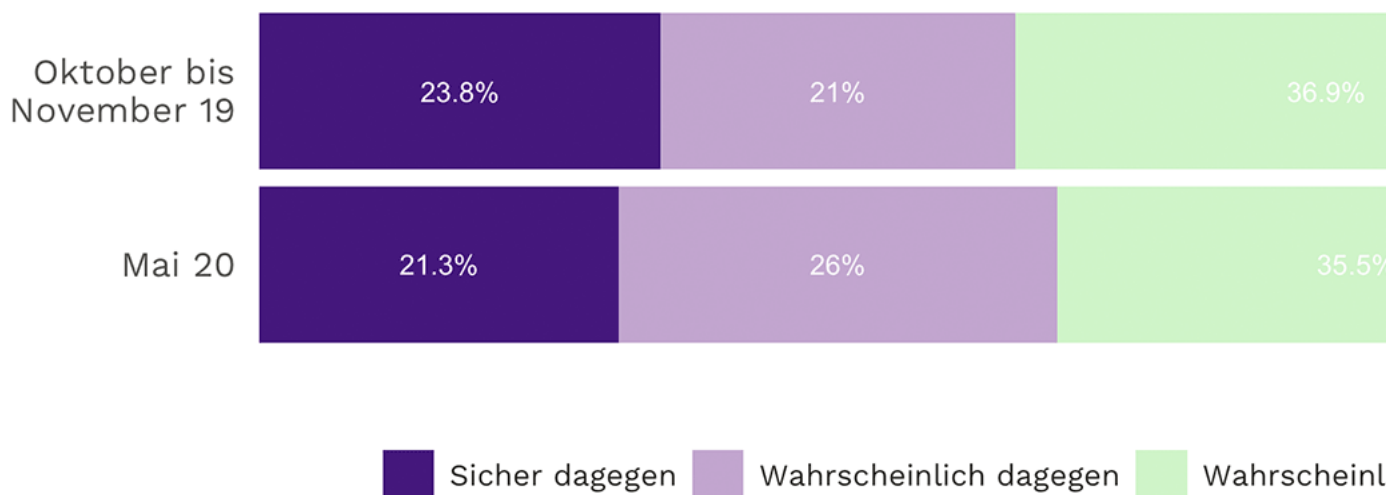


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At the same time, the increased satisfaction of those surveyed also indicates great support for the status quo. Acceptance of the limitation initiative would represent a major challenge to this status quo. This is also a factor that explains why support for the initiative has weakened slightly over the course of the pandemic. Put simply, our analyzes suggest that Swiss voters want everything to stay as it is with the EU.

FIGURE 8: VOTING INTENTION FOR THE FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT

Wie würden Sie abstimmen, wenn der Urnengang zum Rahmenal heute stattfinden würde?



Note: 1,781 respondents, the data was weighted to correspond to a representative sample of the Swiss population.

However, strong support for the status quo could cause problems between Switzerland and the EU in another place: the framework agreement. This agreement also represents a departure from the status quo, albeit towards increased cooperation. Figure 8 shows that although a majority of respondents continue to support the framework agreement, the proportion of opponents has increased slightly compared to autumn 2019. Here, satisfaction with the status quo means less willingness to deepen Switzerland-EU relations.

However, trouble threatens here. The EU has made it clear that it is not prepared to continue on the bilateral path that is so popular in Switzerland without a framework agreement. Without a framework agreement, the bilateral contracts would no longer be updated, so that bilateral relations would become increasingly difficult. The status quo is very popular in Switzerland, but in the long term it is no longer an option.

But this is a challenge for the future. First, the bilateral relationship must pass the hurdle of the limitation initiative. It currently appears that the COVID-19 pandemic will help prevent a serious destabilization of Switzerland-EU relations.

Credentials:

Image: [Federal Administration](#)