

# **Centre for Democracy Studies Aarau (ZDA) at the University of Zurich**

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[www.zdaarau.ch](http://www.zdaarau.ch)



# Swiss Direct Democracy



Glarus, Landsgemeinde.









## Historical development:

**Cantons:** 1830s

**Federal:** 1848 – 1874 – **1891** - 1921 – 1977 – 2003

## Expansion of the electorate:

1848: all men, including Jews

1971: women

1991: voting age from 20 to 18 years

1992: Swiss living abroad

2000: on local and cantonal level, partly, non-Swiss





# Some important DD design elements

**binding – non-binding**

**constitution, law, ordinance**

**automatic, top down, bottom up**

**participation and decision quorums**

**show of hands – ballot box – mail – internet**

**campaign rules**

**frequency of votes**



# City of Aarau, Canton of Argovia

Population: ~20'000

Budget 2014: 160 Mio CH



- **Mandatory referendum** (municipal charter, city borders, budget, accession to special purpose associations, foundation of new municipal organisation, single expense above 6 mio CHF, or new recurrent expense above 400'000 CHF.
- **Optional referendum** (parliamentary decisions opposed by 10% of electorate within 30 days, or upon parliamentary decision)
- **Citizen's initiative** (10% of electorate)



# City of Aarau, mandatory tax referendum

STADT AARAU



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## Stimmzettel

Urnenabstimmung vom 24. November 2013

Wollen Sie das Budget 2014 der  
Einwohnergemeinde Aarau mit einem  
Steuerfuss von 94% gutheissen?

Antwort



## Types of financial referendums on the cantonal or local level

- Expenses – single or recurring (in % or nominal)
- Expenses for road construction
- Debt, issuing bonds
- Taxes
- Taking a share in private companies
- Real estate transactions



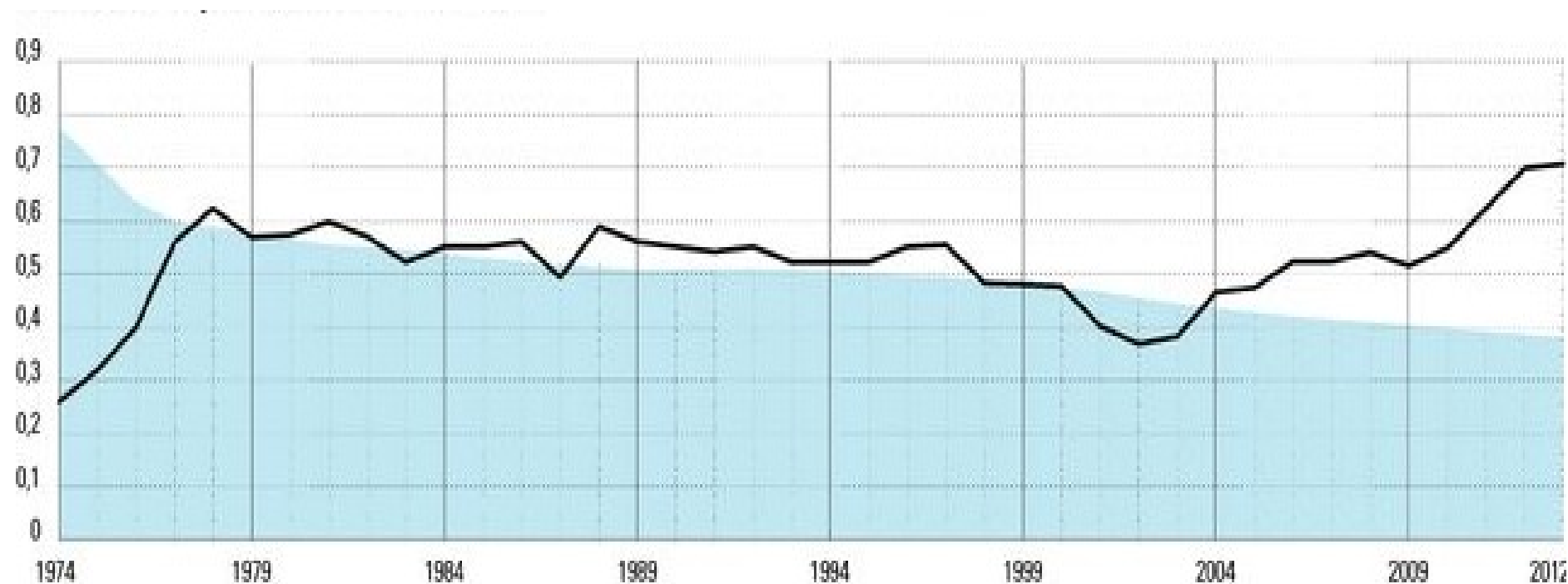


## **Special referendums and initiatives in 'testing phase' in some Swiss cantons**

- 'constructive' referendum
- 'single person', municipality or state institution initiative
- treaty initiatives
- water or hydro power concession referendums
- 'new cantonal hospital' referendum
- optional planning decision referendums
- referendum whether to start a total revision of the constitution
- triggering a national level referendum
- response to consultation procedure in the realms of nuclear power



## Practice and legal constraints to trigger an initiative 5-year-moving-average of all cantons /1970-2012)



## Evolution of direct democracy from bottom up

Period	Initiator (%)			Total N
	Parties in Government	Parties in Opposition	Civil Society	
<i>1874-1919</i>	4,9%	68,3%	26,8%	<b>41</b>
<i>1920-1959</i>	4,3%	39,1%	56,5%	<b>69</b>
<i>1960-2009</i>	15%	16,9%	68,1%	<b>213</b>



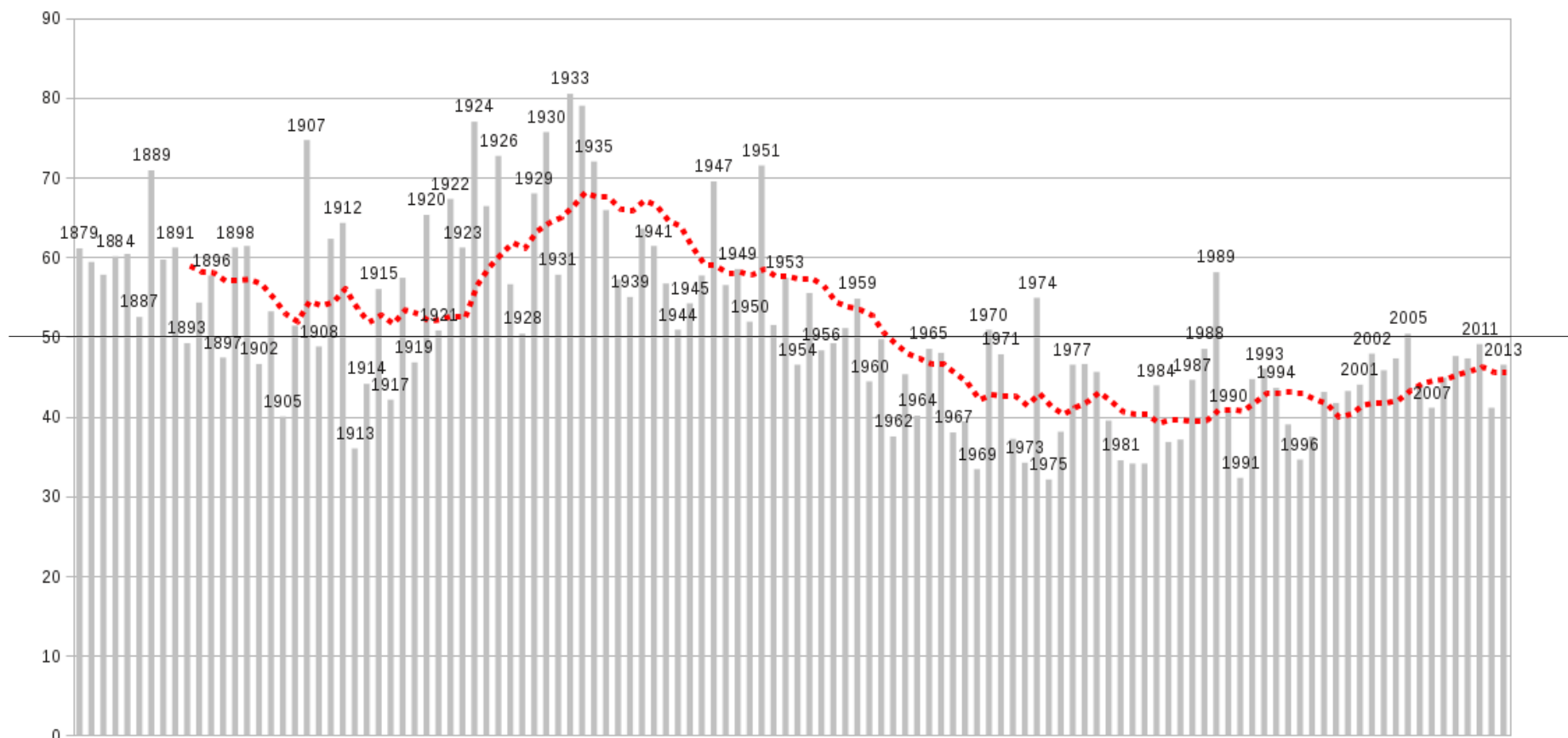
**Power  
maintenance**

**Power  
competition**

**Power  
control**

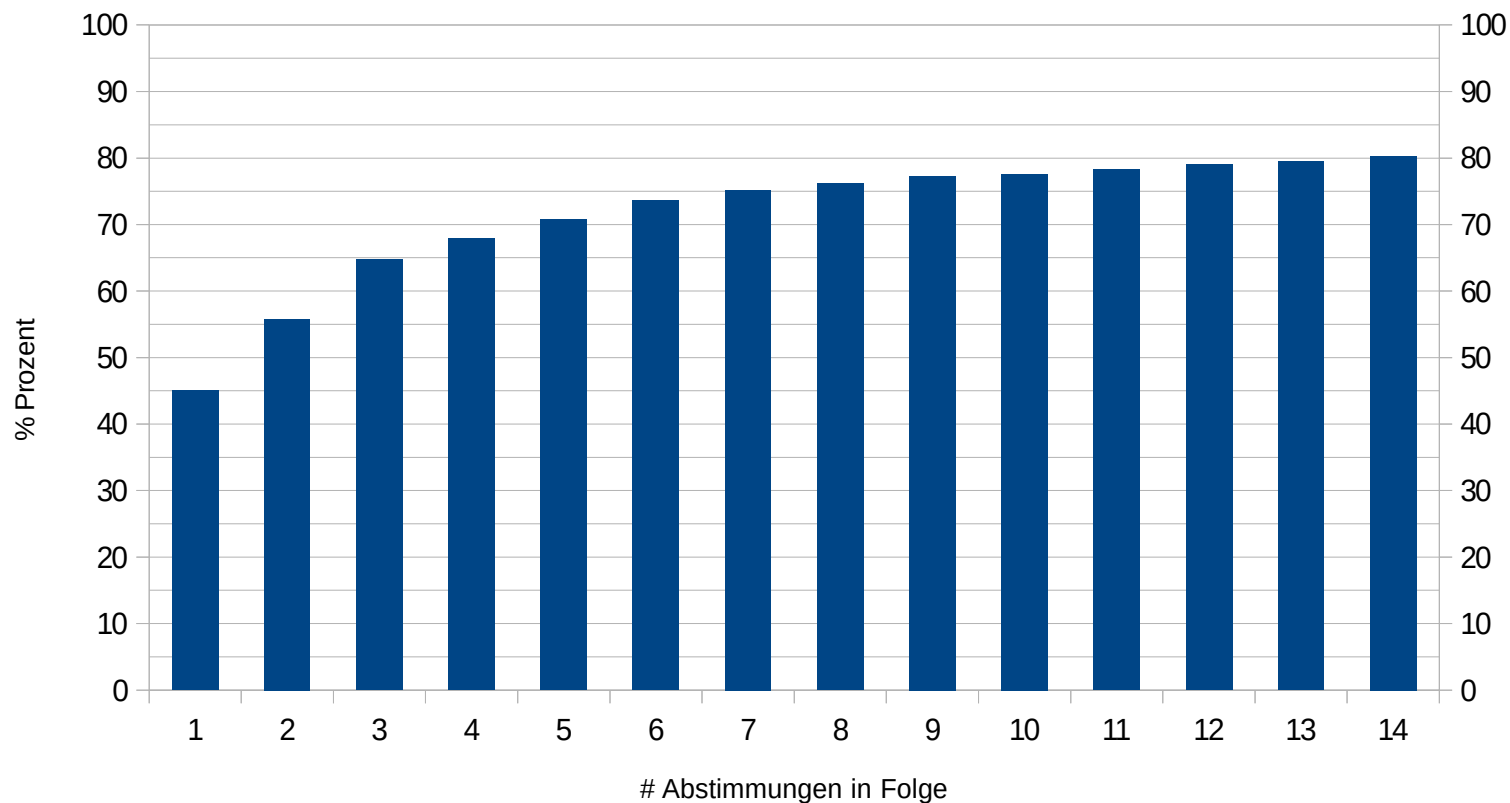


# Average Turnout Rates for National Referendum Votes per Year (grey) and 10-Year Moving Average (red), 1879-2013



Quellen: [www.c2d.ch](http://www.c2d.ch), [www.admin.ch](http://www.admin.ch)

## Cumulative Turnout in the City of St. Gallen for 14 Consecutive Votes, 2010-2013 (max = 80.3%)



Quelle: Fachstelle für Statistik Kanton St. Gallen, Statistikdaten Stimmbeteiligte Stadt St. Gallen. Eigene Berechnungen.



**Why DD works well in Switzerland and  
would not work or even be dangerous  
in some other settings?**