

The Swiss abroad vote : I vote!

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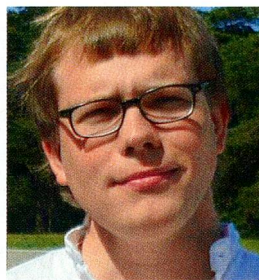
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I vote!

Of the 700,000 or so Swiss abroad, just under 136,000 are entered in electoral registers in Switzerland, enabling them to participate in elections and referenda in their homeland. We are featuring some of them in this election year and asking what their reasons are for taking part in politics from afar.



*First name: Cornelia
Last name: Tschichold
Age: 48
Place of residence:
Swansea, Wales, UK
Since: 2006*



*First name: Dario
Surname: Cavegn
Age: 29
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Since: 2006*

Will you take part in the elections on 23 October? Do you vote regularly?

CORNELIA TSCHICHOLD: YES.

DARIO CAVEGN: I've always taken part in elections, but with federal referenda it depends on the proposal.

What are your memories of the first election or referendum you took part in?

The issue was not that interesting; I can't even remember whether I ended up on the "winning side" or not. I went to the village hall with my parents, had our papers stamped, put them in the ballot box and left again.

It was a great moment. I voted in a referendum for the first time in 2000. It involved several proposals that were important to me.

And why do you take part in elections and referenda?

I'd have no right to complain about the government if I didn't! Seriously, I believe that change from below is the only real change. Democracy only works well if people take their vote seriously.

I think not taking part in elections and referenda is inexcusable, particularly if you have an opinion on things. Political participation is the purest expression of responsibility and patriotism in our country.

How do you decide who to vote for?

Through a mix of my general political outlook, looking at the parties' and politicians' statements, following the discussions in the media, and a general tendency to vote for women.

A society has to be able to function. This means the state and the law must ensure balance between different interests. I vote for parties and politicians who stand up for this principle.

Swiss abroad can vote even though they do not pay taxes. This is often met with criticism. What is your opinion?

I pay taxes in my country of residence, but cannot vote here. The right to vote is a human right that we shouldn't lose just because we live abroad. I can also imagine returning to Switzerland, still my home country, one day. So I take great interest in what goes on there.

Most Swiss abroad contribute through social agreements or voluntary payments, for example, to Old Age and Survivors' Insurance (AHV). The notion that paying taxes equates to assuming responsibility is not very well thought through. Responsibility is not determined by taxes, but rather by the entitlement to have a say.

What are the key issues that Swiss politicians have to resolve?

The unjust taxation system which privileges the very rich, the absurdly overblown banking sector and its grip on politicians, the growing environmental problems caused by climate change, and the increasing xenophobia in some parts of Switzerland, and the way this is exploited by some groups.

The privatisation and deregulation trend has to come to an end. Switzerland needs a uniform health insurance system. Switzerland should show greater self-assurance towards the EU, but it should not join. That would be the end of our political system.