

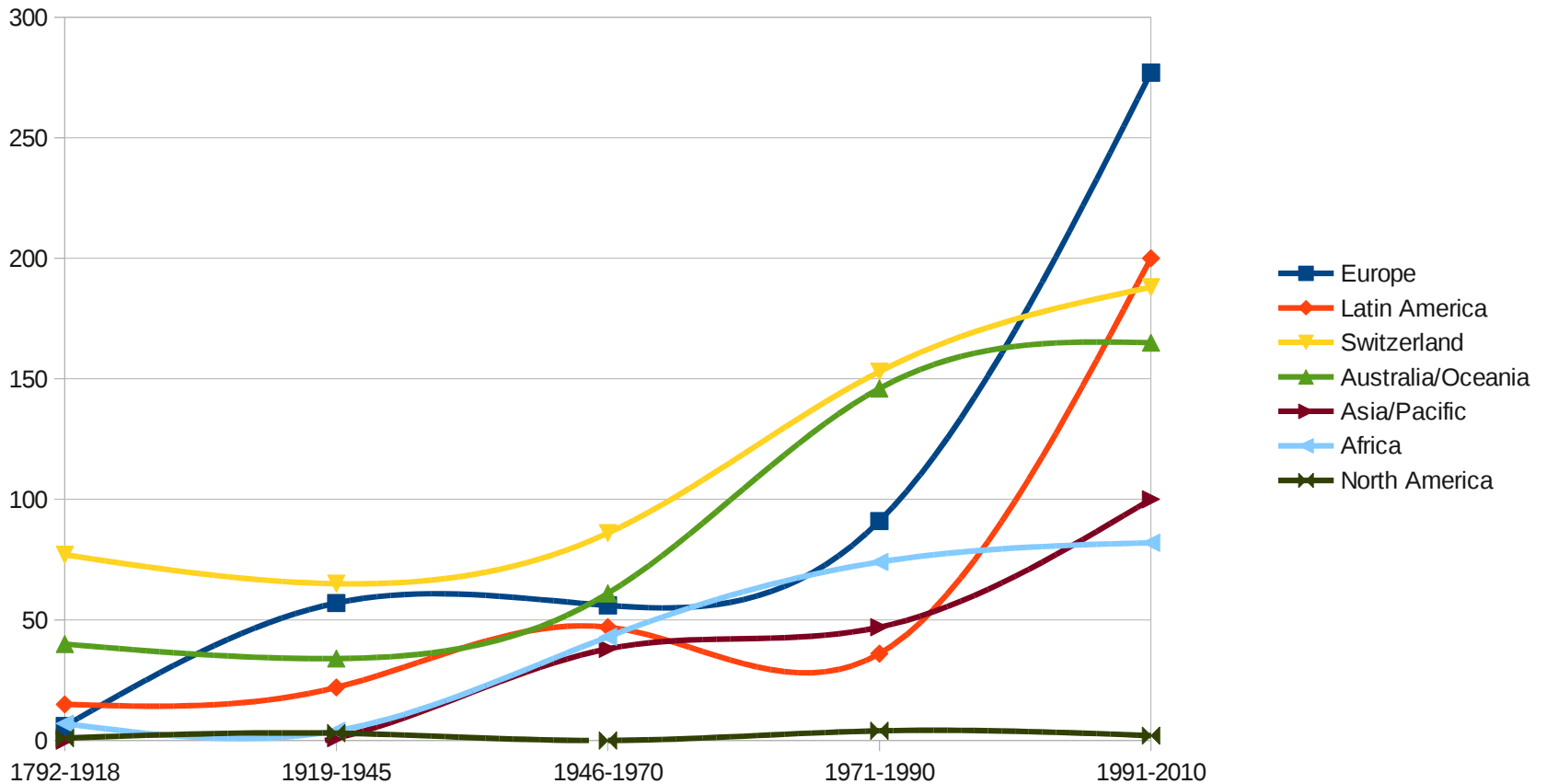


Direct Democracy in Switzerland

Dr. Uwe Serdült

**Center for Democracy Studies Aarau (ZDA) at the
University of Zurich, Switzerland**

Direct Democracy Worldwide



Source: www.c2d.ch



Historical development of MDDs

Cantons: ~1830s

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

Expansion of the electorate:

1848: all men, including Jews

1971: women

1991: 18 years

1992: Swiss living abroad

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



Some important DD design elements

binding – non-binding

mandatory – optional

Constitution, law, ordinance

automatic, top down, bottom up

Quorums: participation, decision

show of hands – ballot box – letter - internet



Types of financial referendums on the cantonal or local level

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





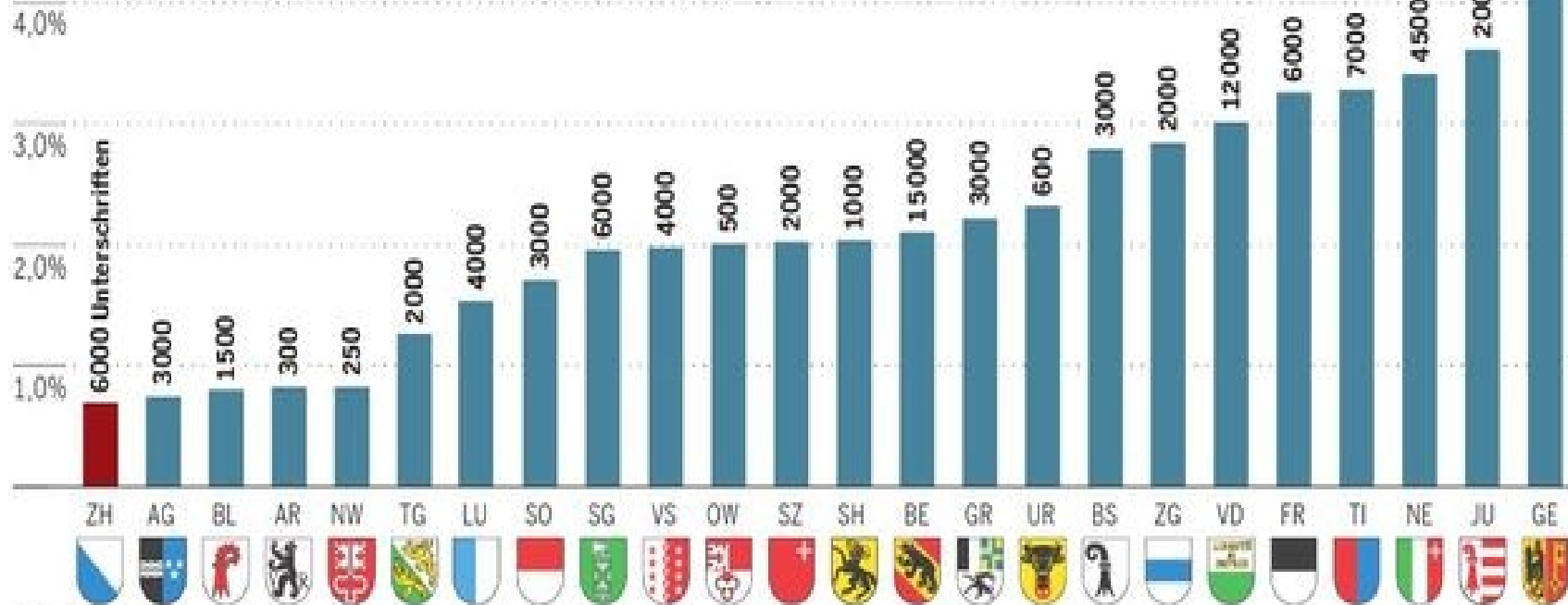
Special (purpose) referendums and initiatives in 'testing phase' in some of the Swiss cantons

- '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

Signature thresholds: huge variance !

Lesebeispiel: Im Kanton Zürich braucht es 6000 gültige Unterschriften (0,7% der Stimmbevölkerung), um eine Gesetzesinitiative einzureichen

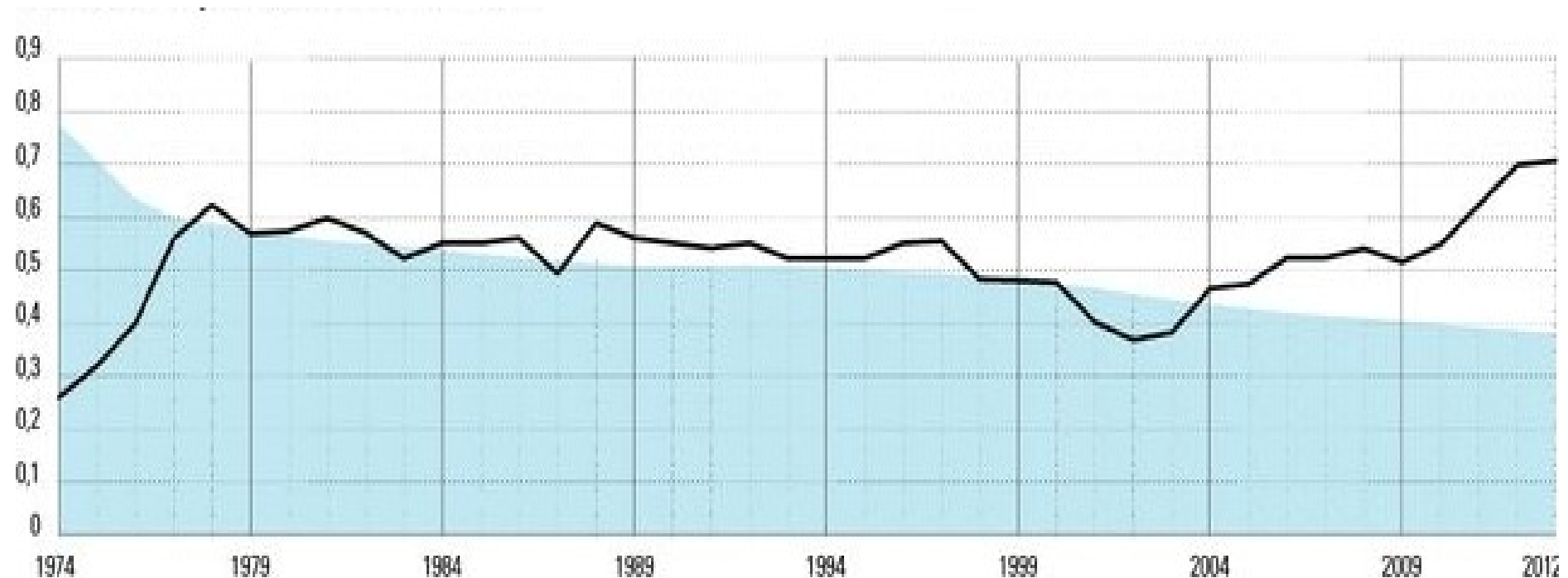
Unterschriftenhürde in % (ohne Kantone Appenzell Innerrhoden und Glarus)



TA-Grafik ib / Quelle: Kantonale Verfassungen sowie www.c2d.ch

Practice and legal constraints to trigger an initiative

5-year-moving-average of all cantons (1970-2012)



Serdült, Uwe (2014) Switzerland, in: Qvortrup, Matt (Ed.) *Referendums around the World*
Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Evolution of direct democracy from bottom up

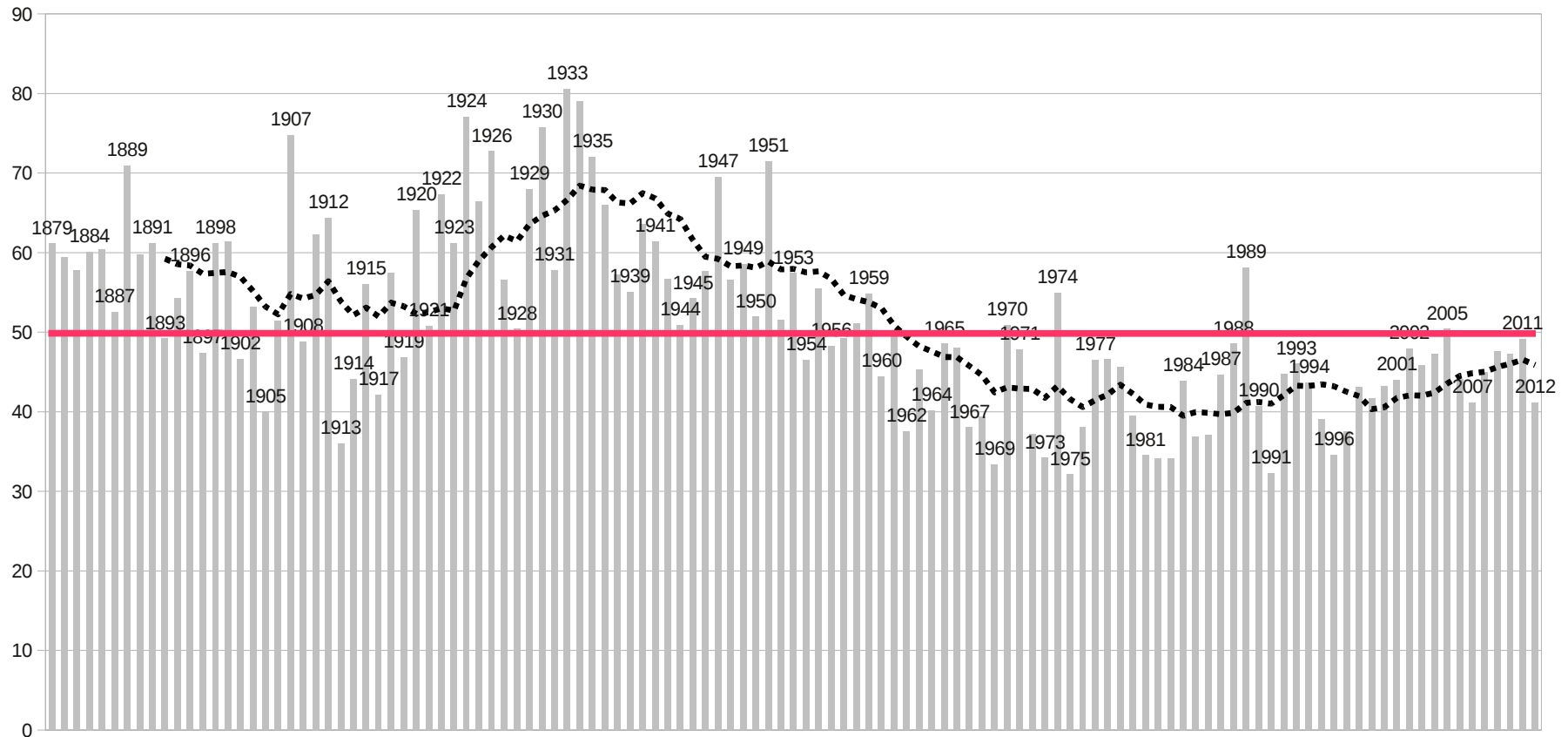
Period	Initiator (%)			Total N
	Parties in Government	Parties in Opposition	Civil Society	
1874-1919	4,9%	68,3%	26,8%	41
1920-1959	4,3%	39,1%	56,5%	69
1960-2009	15%	16,9%	68,1%	213

Power
maintenance

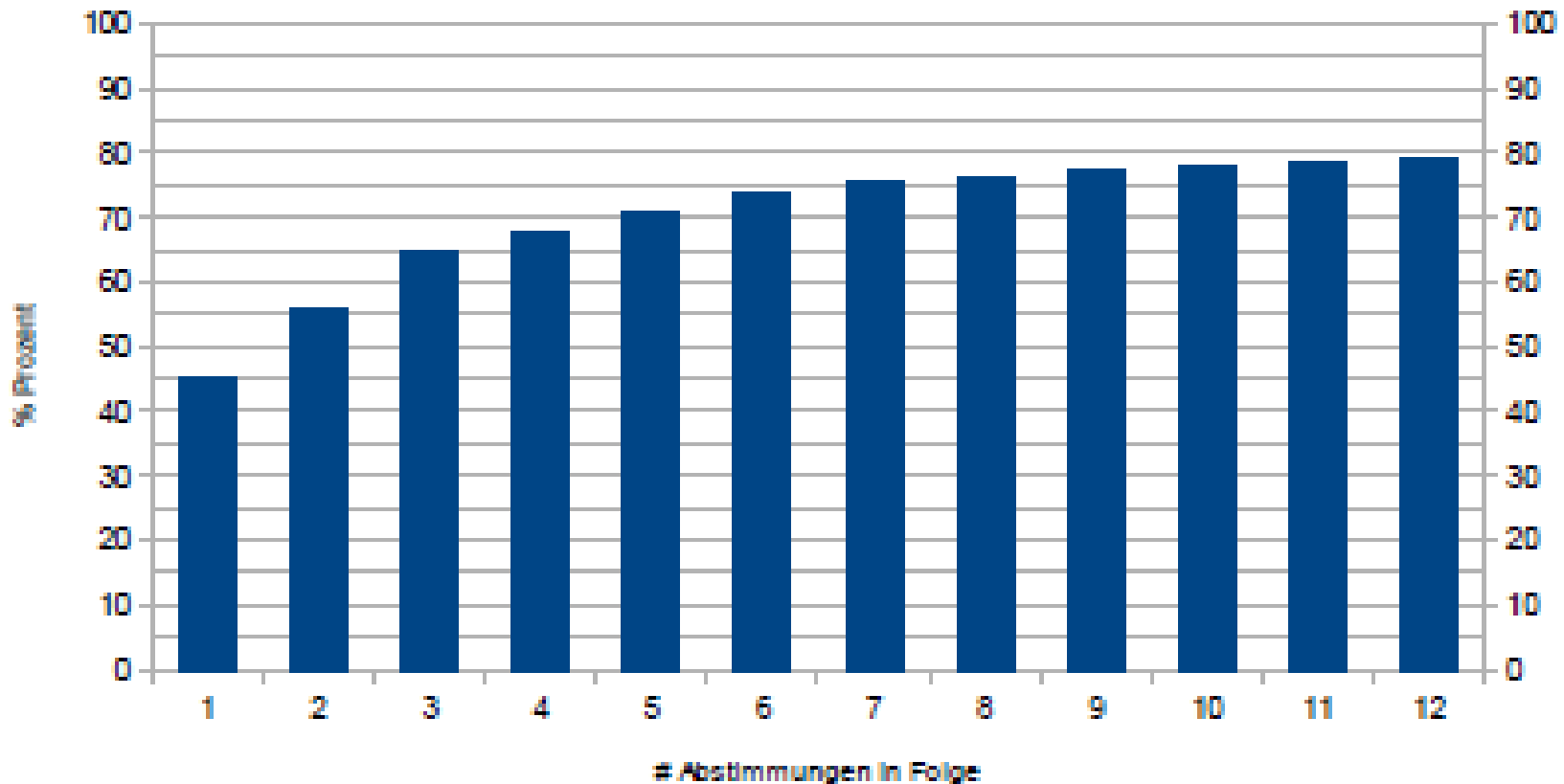
Power competition

Power
control

Longterm average of turnout (1879-2012), in percent, national level

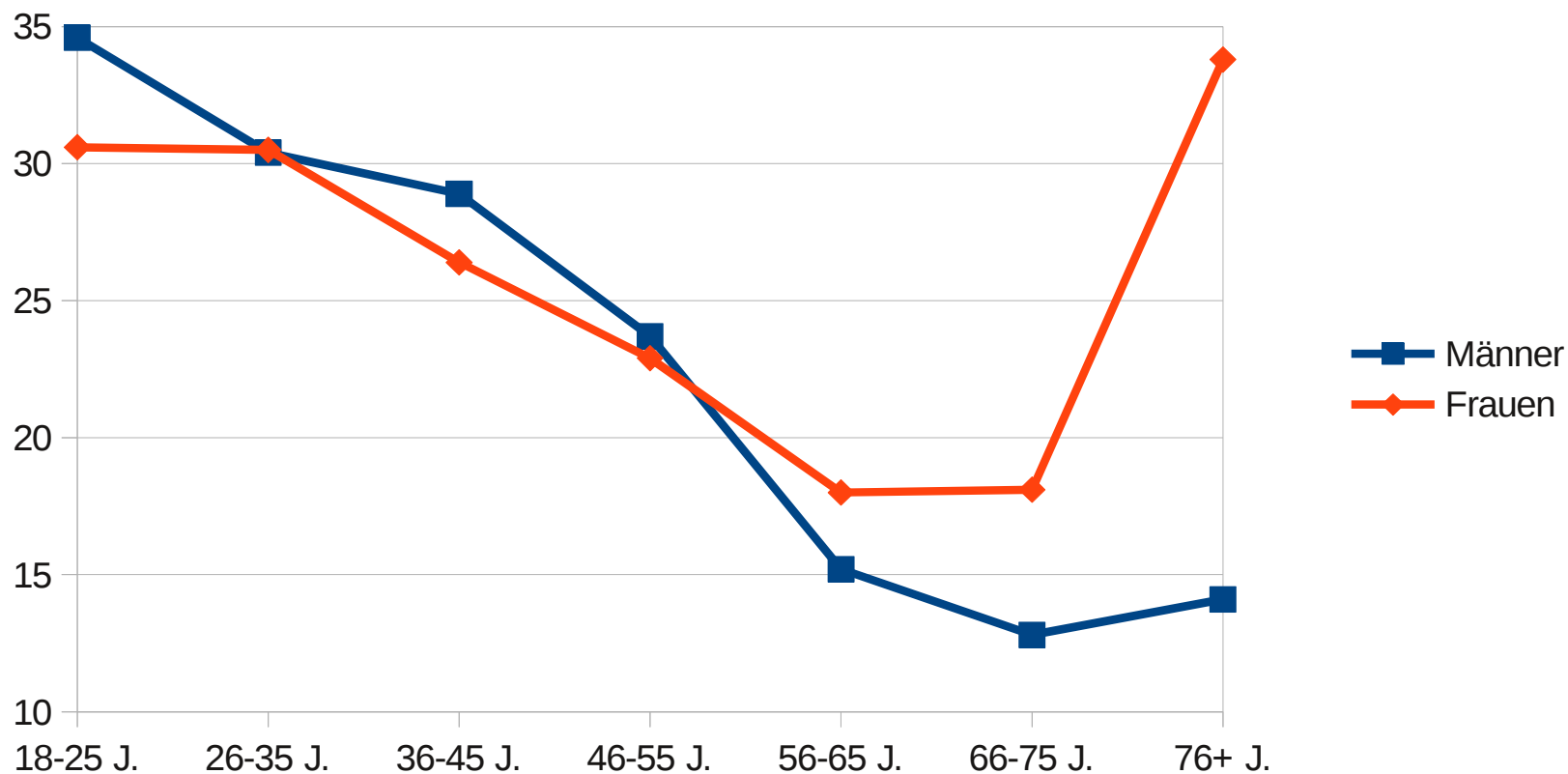


Cumulative turnout in the City of St. Gallen for eleven consecutive referendum votes, 2010-2013



Serdült, Uwe (2013) Partizipation als Norm und Artefakt in der schweizerischen Abstimmungsdemokratie - Entmystifizierung der durchschnittlichen Stimmbeteiligung anhand von Stimmregisterdaten aus der Stadt St. Gallen, in: Andrea Good und Bettina Platipodis (Hrsg.) Direkte Demokratie: Herausforderungen zwischen Politik und Recht. Festschrift für Andreas Auer zum 65. Geburtstag. Bern, Stämpfli Verlag, 41-50.

Never participated in seven consecutive votes, City of St. Gallen (2010-2012)



Strengths and weaknesses, effects - 1

Conflicts with human rights

- Anti-Minarett initiative, expulsion of criminal foreigners
- Direct democracy vs rule of law

Long lasting decision-making processes

- Pre-parliamentary process takes time (consultation procedure)
- However: decision-making in purely parliamentary systems can last as well ...

NIMBY problems still difficult to solve

- Nuclear waste disposal not solved
- Tendency to postpone with moratoriums (GMOs, Nuclear power plants)

Strengths and weaknesses, effects - 2

Economic effects

- Finance referendums result in lower public deficits

Civic education

- Strong citizen participation seems to stimulate political debate and have a positive effect on civic education level

Legitimacy of political decisions

- High acceptance of political decisions
- Easier implementation