

Swiss to nix immigration cap proposal to save environment

November 19 2014, by Nina Larson



Protesters hold placards reading in German "No to Ecopop-dead end" during a demonstration in Bern against an immigration cap initiative on November 1, 2014

The Swiss look set to vote down a demand to cap immigration in the name of protecting the environment, a poll showed Wednesday, also suggesting two other national referenda would be rejected.

The so-called Ecopop initiative, which will be put to a vote on

November 30, calls for sharp immigration cuts in Switzerland.

Launched by a committee of ecologists, it maintains that [population growth](#) is placing too much strain on the small Alpine nation's environment.

To help rein in over-population beyond Switzerland's borders, it also calls for 10 percent of the country's development aid budget to be dedicated to family planning initiatives abroad.

The government, all the [political parties](#), employers and unions have rejected the initiative, slammed by some as xenophobic, and a [poll](#) published Wednesday hinted that voters will do the same.

The poll, conducted by the grf.bern institute, showed that 56 percent of the more than 1,400 people surveyed planned to reject the plan, while 39 percent aimed to vote "yes".

Ecopop has though grown marginally in popularity since the last poll in late October, when 58 percent said they would vote against it.

Anita Messere, a member of the initiative committee, said polls had misjudged tendencies ahead of several recent referenda and predicted there could "be a surprise on November 30."



Demonstrators hold a banner reading in French "Fake ecologists, real fascists, No to ECOPOP" during a demonstration in Bern against an immigration cap initiative, on November 1, 2014

It would not be the first time.

Last February, the approval of an initiative demanding quotas for immigration from the EU, of which Switzerland is not a member, caught many by surprise and threw Swiss relations with the neighbouring bloc into turmoil.

If Ecopop were to pass, its proposed 0.2-percent annual limit on population growth through immigration would have far-reaching consequences, the government has warned.

With only around 17,000 [immigrants](#) allowed in each year, "some sectors of the economy would be unable to recruit the workers they require," it

cautioned.

Scrap tax-breaks for foreign millionaires?

In a second referendum on November 30 as part of Switzerland's direct democratic system, voters look set to reject an initiative that would end a preferential tax system for wealthy foreigners residing in the country, Wednesday's poll showed.

A full 46 percent said they opposed the initiative, marking a 10-percentage-point drop from the October poll, while 42 percent said they were in favour.

The initiative, put forth by left-leaning political parties and unions, wants to axe a system that allows rich resident foreigners who do not work in the country to pay a lump sum of tax based on their spending rather than income.

Switzerland counts 5,729 millionaires and billionaires with foreign passports, who together pay around one billion Swiss francs (\$1.04 billion, 830 million euros) in taxes annually.

They would have paid far more if they had been Swiss citizens, according to the initiators.

Wednesday's poll also hinted Swiss voters would reject an initiative to force the country's central bank to increase its gold reserves.

Only 36 percent said they favoured the motion, down from 44 percent in the October survey, while 47 percent said they were opposed, up eight points from previously.

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