Restricted (Over)view: Audit of Google's and Bing's AI summaries in the context of Swiss popular votes

Corinna Hertweck[a,b], Giovanni Astante[b], Aleksandra Urman[b], Oliver Marsh[c], Angela Müller[a] and Aniko Hannak[b]

[a] *AlgorithmWatch CH, Zurich, Switzerland*
[b] *University of Zurich, Zurich, Switzerland*
[c] *AlgorithmWatch, Berlin, Germany*

1. Motivation

Search engine results pages (SERPs) have evolved from ranked link lists to elements like Google's featured snippets, which answer queries directly and often reduce traffic to their third-party sources (Oliveira & Teixeira Lopes, 2023; Gleason et al., 2023). Bing introduced LLM-generated AI summaries in 2024, Google followed in 2025 with *AI Overviews (AIO)*: a single, seemingly authoritative answer on the SERP, reducing incentives to consult other sources. This raises concerns around quality and accuracy (Hu et al., 2025), the unaccounted-for concentration of power, threatened access to reliable information and media diversity.

Despite these concerns and Switzerland's direct democracy with several popular votes per year, AI summaries remain under-researched in Swiss politics. We study them for the June 14, 2026 vote on the "10 million initiative," launched by the right-wing *Swiss People's Party* (SVP) to cap the population at 10 million, focusing on their **frequency** (Section 2) and **who they cite** (Section 3).

2. RQ1: Frequency of AI summaries

2.1. Methods

Our scraper queried Google and Bing twice daily (8am, 5pm) from Zurich and Bern from April 13 until the vote on June 14, 2026, recording AI summaries and their citations; the first week was a testing period. Queries covered the four official Swiss languages and English.[2] Search terms (Table 1) comprise the initiative's official name,[3] two shortened variants and synonyms from public discourse, notably the con side's negative reframings ("chaos initiative" and "termination initiative"), cross-checked against Google Trends. Paired with eight suffixes (Table 2), this yielded 456 queries per run from April 21 on.

SEASON 2026, September 15–17, 2026, Hamburg, Germany
EMAIL: hertweck@algorithmwatch.ch (A. 1); giovanni.astante@uzh.ch (A. 2); urman@ifi.uzh.ch (A. 3); marsh@algorithmwatch.org (A. 4); mueller@algorithmwatch.ch (A. 5); hannak@ifi.uzh.ch (A. 6)
ORCID: 0000-0002-7639-2771 (A. 1); 0009-0008-0500-6416 (A. 2); 0000-0003-3332-9294 (A. 3); 0000-0002-0612-6320 (A. 6)
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[2] Terms were developed and reviewed by team members, except the Romansh suffixes, translated with the help of Claude (Anthropic) and not independently verified. Non-official terms were thus not translated to Romansh. We included English as 12% of Switzerland's population does not indicate a national language among their main languages (Federal Statistical Office, 2024).
[3] Derived from The Federal Council (2026).

Table 1

Search terms across categories and languages: The search terms fall into two groups: official names taken from the federal website (in full, long, and short forms) and synonyms. The synonyms are organized by their framing.

Category	German	French	Italian	Romansh	English
Official name	Keine 10-Millionen-Schweiz! (Nachhaltigkeitsinitiative)	Pas de Suisse à 10 millions ! (initiative pour la durabilité)	No a una Svizzera da 10 milioni! (Iniziativa per la sostenibilità)	Na ad ina Svizra da 10 milliuns! (Iniziativa per la persistenza)	No to Switzerland of 10 million! (Sustainability Initiative)
	Keine 10-Millionen-Schweiz! Nachhaltigkeitsinitiative	Pas de Suisse à 10 millions ! initiative pour la durabilité	No a una Svizzera da 10 milioni! Iniziativa per la sostenibilità	Na ad ina Svizra da 10 milliuns! Iniziativa per la persistenza	No to Switzerland of 10 million! Sustainability Initiative
10 million initiative	10 millionen initiative	initiative 10 millions	iniziativa 10 milioni	–	10 million initiative
	10 millionen schweiz	suisse 10 millions	svizzera 10 milioni	–	10 million switzerland
	10 millionen schweiz initiative	initiative suisse 10 millions	iniziativa svizzera 10 milioni	–	10 million switzerland initiative
	keine 10 millionen schweiz	pas de suisse 10 millions	no 10 milioni svizzera	–	no to 10 million switzerland
	10 millionen schweiz initiative svp	initiative udc suisse 10 millions	iniziativa svizzera 10 milioni udc	–	10 million switzerland initiative svp
Sustainability initiative	nachhaltigkeitsinitiative	initiative durabilité	iniziativa sostenibilità	–	sustainability initiative
	nachhaltigskeitsinitiative svp	initiative udc durabilité	iniziativa sostenibilità udc	–	sustainability initiative svp
Chaos initiative	chaos initiative	initiative chaos	iniziativa caos	–	chaos initiative
	chaos initiative svp	udc initiative chaos	iniziativa caos udc	–	chaos initiative svp
Termination initiative	kündigungsinitiative 2	initiative résiliation 2	iniziativa limitazione 2	–	–
	kündigungsinitiative 2 svp	initiative udc résiliation 2	iniziativa limitazione 2 udc	–	–

Table 2
Suffixes across languages: Each base search term was paired with eight suffix variants to capture the range of ways people search for ballot information, ranging from neutral to explicitly partisan. The "none" variant uses the bare term with no suffix.

Suffix	German	French	Italian	Romansh	English
none	–	–	–	–	–
summary	zusammenfassung	résumé	sommario	resumaziun	summary
arguments	argumente	arguments	argomenti	arguments	arguments
how_vote	wie abstimmen?	comment voter ?	come votare?	co votar?	how to vote?
pro	pro	pour	pro	pro	pro
yes	ja	oui	sì	gea	yes
con	kontra	contre	contro	cunter	con
no	nein	non	no	na	no

2.2. Results

Our scrapers executed 192,976 searches. We excluded "termination initiative" queries to balance pro- and con-framings, keeping the more debate-representative "chaos initiative" terms. Of the remaining 173,177 searches, 22% returned an AI summary, with a large difference between the engines.

Bing. Bing initially returned AI summaries for around 80% of queries, but this collapsed to near zero within days (see Figure 1). Microsoft possibly deployed bot detection, at times serving irrelevant results in unrelated languages or even alphabets. Our attempted countermeasures failed.

Figure 1: Share of Bing AI summaries over time

Google. Google answered 43% of queries with an AI Overview, varying strongly by language: French 56%, Romansh 55% (though often interpreted as Italian), English 57%, German 33%, Italian 23%. Variation was also high within languages: for example, 23% of the 128 German search terms almost always (>95%) triggered an AI Overview while 47% almost never (<5%) did.

3. RQ2: Who gets cited?

3.1. Methods

Raw citation data tells us little as, e.g., not every cited link concerns the 10 million initiative and counts alone do not account for organizations with multiple domains. We therefore annotated references by entity domain (e.g., mapping svp.ch and udc.ch to the SVP), entity type (e.g., government, party, media, platform), topic (10 million initiative or not), position (pro, leaning pro, overview, leaning con,

con, unclear) and language. This was feasible because citations are highly concentrated (see Figure 2: the roughly 940,000 references from all collected AI summaries stem from under 14,000 unique URLs; about 78 URLs account for over half. Seven team members annotated the 638 most-cited links in a purpose-built tool, covering about 82% of references; 178 links were double-coded to ensure agreement among annotators.

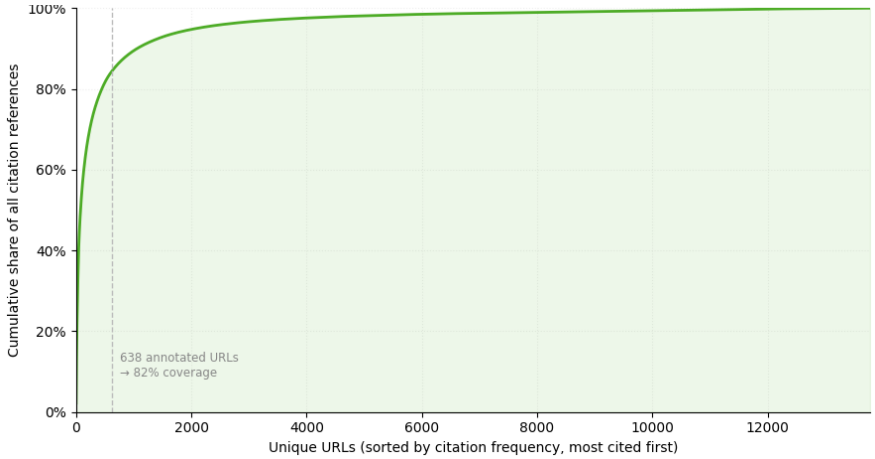


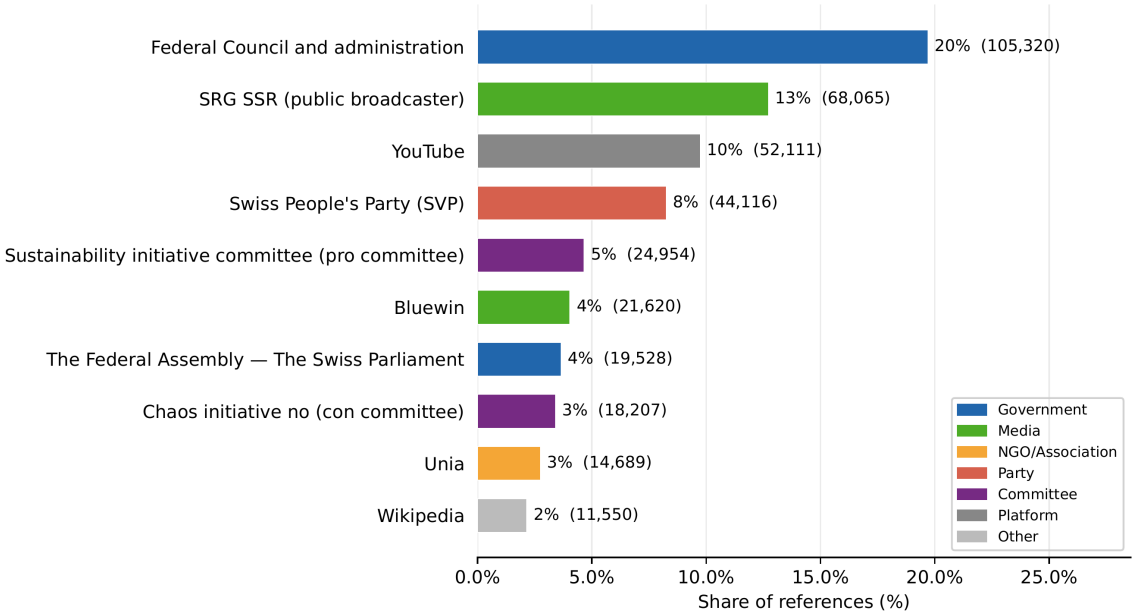
Figure 2: Annotating a small share of URLs captures most references.

3.2. Results

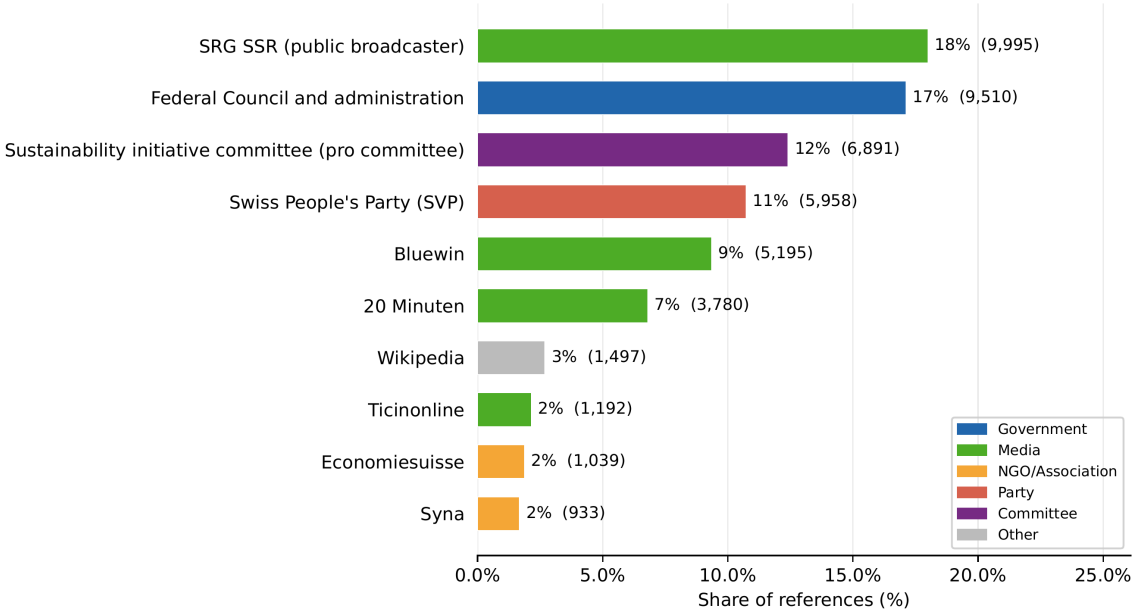
We restricted this analysis to annotated links about the 10 million initiative, again excluding "termination initiative" queries.[4] An interactive dashboard[5] makes our data and annotations available to journalists and researchers.

Top entities. Google's AI Overviews most often cited the Federal Council and administration (20%), the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation SRG (13%), YouTube (10%) and the SVP (8%); Bing the SRG (18%), the Federal Council and administration (17%), the official pro committee (12%), the SVP (11%) and blue News (9%) (see Figure 3). Google's frequent YouTube citations echo research on its self-promotion (Jeffries & Yin, 2020). Positively, authorities and public broadcasters rank highly. However, other large outlets like Watson or NZZ were rarely cited.

[4] Links giving an overview of all June 14 ballot items (~5% of annotated links) were excluded as negligible. Testing-period data was retained, as it contains most of our Bing data and barely changed Google results.
[5] Available at https://restricted-overview.algorithmwatch.ch/.



(a) Google



(b) Bing

Figure 3: The ten most-cited entities across all languages

Most-cited party vs most-cited side. On both engines, con-side citations pointed to diverse websites, whereas pro-side citations mostly led to the SVP and the pro committee. Google cited con-leaning content (49%) over three times as often as pro-leaning content (16%); Bing was more balanced (28% pro, 32% con). Still, the SVP was by far the most-cited party: Bing cited it (11%) over fourteen times as often as any other party (<1% each); on Google, the FDP (1.8%), SP (1.8%), and GLP (1.2%) trailed the SVP (8%) by a factor of four to seven.

Leaning of sources. Only about a third of cited links (Google: 32%, Bing: 37%) (mostly government or journalistic pages) offered a balanced overview of the arguments; the rest leaned for or against the initiative.

4. Discussion

Generative AI is deeply integrated into search in Switzerland. However, the AI summaries are not neutral: Google and Bing differ in whom they cite and how often, as do languages. These differences reflect providers' choices, whose criteria remain opaque. Switzerland's draft law on communication platforms and search engines (KomPG/LPCom) should therefore account for generative AI within search; otherwise, the arguably most consequential part of the search experience may fall outside the law's reach.

Limitations. We cross-checked our queries against Google Trends only during the testing period; if search behavior shifted, our stable query set may be less representative, though comparable over time (alternatives include keyword research tools (Schultheiß et al., 2023)). We studied a single vote: smaller-scale data on the March 8 vote suggests citation patterns differ between votes, especially for initiatives not launched by the SVP. Finally, our aggregate-level analysis does not support conclusions about the content of the average AI summary.

Future work. We plan to analyse AI summaries at the individual level and via semantic clustering. Further directions include source positions within summaries, summary positions on the SERP, comparing AI citations with organic results and covering further votes.

5. AI transparency note

The team used Claude Code to write the scrapers, build the annotation tool, the dashboard and to support analysis. We deemed this proportionate due to the increased speed of programming and the cleaner code structure. We checked the plausibility of the results of the scrapers by manually searching some search terms and checking the frequency of AI summaries. To ensure the correctness of the analysis, we cross-checked the numbers from the dashboard with alternative calculations in Jupyter notebooks. The authors also used Claude to write a first draft of the blog post this paper is based on as well as in editing the language of the paper and shortening it. The text was edited to ensure correctness and clarity.

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