

Playing with marked cards

How Swisscom, Ringier & Co. steered the e-ID vote in their favour – with Palantir in the background

by Michael Straumann*



Michael Straumann.
(Picture ma)

50.39 per cent in favour, 49.61 per cent against – a difference of just 20,000 votes, barely more than the population of a small Swiss town. The result caused a stir around the world. Many people on social media were appalled that Switzerland of all countries – the land of direct democracy, often ro-

manticised as the “island of freedom in Europe” – had approved the e-ID law.

Shortly after the vote on 28 September, American journalist and co-editor of *Twitter Files* Michael Shellenberger wrote:

“Oh my god. The Swiss people have just approved digital ID. Australia introduced it in December, the UK last week. In all three countries, politicians closely intertwined with the Deep State are behind it. This is a digital ID and censorship emergency.”¹

What a paradox: in the name of democracy, a people can be manipulated into agreeing to the dismantling of their own fundamental rights. Democracy thrives on the public debate space remaining intact: on all relevant arguments being discussed fairly, visibly and without distortion.² But this was not the case in this referendum.

In Switzerland, too, this question was raised again in connection with the vote on the E-ID Act. But the problem here was not the counting of votes – there is no credible evidence of that. The manipulation took place earlier: in the process of shaping public opinion.



A billboard on a country road in the canton of Zurich campaigns against the E-ID law: “Digital coercion? E-ID – No!” (Picture ma)

Swisscom illegally interfered in the referendum campaign

Swisscom AG, Switzerland’s largest telecommunications company, is 51 per cent owned by the federal government³ – and thus under state control. Nevertheless, it actively intervened in the referendum campaign on the E-ID Act and financially supported the “yes” campaign.

On 10 July 2025, Swisscom transferred CHF 30,000 to the “Swiss e-ID Economic Committee”.⁴ However, the payment only became public knowledge on 21 September – one week before the vote. In doing so, Swisscom violated the principle of freedom of voting guaranteed in the Federal Constitution (Art. 34 para. 2 FC).⁵

As a state-affiliated company, Swisscom is obliged to remain politically neutral. It must not influence democratic processes through unilateral interventions – yet this is precisely what happened. Swisscom attempted to justify its actions by arguing that supporting the yes campaign was in its own interest, as e-ID simplifies digital signatures and services.⁶

Andreas Glaser, professor of constitutional and administrative law at the University of Zurich, describes the campaign financing as statutorily inadmissible.⁷ The donation was too high and the

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connection between the e-ID law and Swisscom's core business too weak. Lawyer *Artur Terekhov*, who represents the civil rights movement *MASS-VOLL!*, also states that a donation to a private committee violates the principles of objectivity and proportionality – rules that are binding for state and state-affiliated actors.⁸ In addition, *Swisscom* was indirectly involved in the “yes” campaign through its membership in the lobby association *digitalswitzerland*, whose board includes CEO *Christoph Aeschlimann*.⁹

In view of the controversial donation, *MASS-VOLL!* filed a voting rights complaint. Other committees from the “no” camp followed suit. Initially, they demanded that the vote be postponed¹⁰ and, after the extremely close result, that it be repeated.¹¹

Assistance from Ringier and TX Group

Swisscom was not the only one to resort to unfair means. The country's two largest media companies – *Ringier* and the *TX Group* – also sided with the proponents. Both supported the “yes” campaign with extensive contributions in kind,¹² the extent of which only became known shortly before the vote.

On 24 September 2025, *Ringier*, publisher of the tabloid *Blick*, provided advertising space worth CHF 85,000. Two days later, *TX Group* – the publishing house behind the *Tages-Anzeiger* and *20 Minuten* – followed suit with free advertisements worth CHF 78,000. Together, this amounted to non-monetary support of CHF 163,000, which went to the “Allianz Pro e-ID” alliance. By this point, most voters had already cast their ballots by post. The revelation of this covert campaign support came too late to change voting behaviour.

With this intervention, *Ringier* and the *TX Group* abandoned their role as neutral observers. They became active players in the service of a proposal desired by the government. The reporting by *Blick*, *Tages-Anzeiger* and *20 Minuten* was no longer independent journalism, but part of an orchestrated campaign.

Once again, the political-media complex is evident: the big media houses have long since ceased to act as watchdogs of power, but rather as its stooges. This pattern was already evident during the coronavirus crisis, when *Ringier* CEO *Marc Walder* instructed his employees to “actively support” the government and avoid criticism.

The *MASS-VOLL!* movement is now calling for the vote to be annulled and repeated. Given the razor-thin margin of around 21,000 votes, it is more than conceivable that the result would have been different without these interventions. The publishers' defence is hardly convincing. The *TX Group* points to an allegedly strict separation between editorial and advertising, while *Ringier* points to its journalistic independence and common industry practice. But given the political significance of this vote, little remains of this self-justification.

Palantir also played a role behind the scenes

The data company *Palantir* also had a hand in the game – albeit indirectly. The Silicon Valley-based company is considered one of the most powerful players in the global surveillance industry. Founded with money from the CIA,¹³ *Palantir* is now deeply rooted in the US security apparatus.

Palantir has also been present in Switzerland since 2021. The company opened its so-called European hub in Altendorf in the canton of Schwyz.¹⁴ What is little known is that *Palantir* is a member of the lobby organisation *digitalswitzerland*¹⁵ – the influential business alliance that was one of the biggest financiers of the “yes” campaign for the e-ID law. The association contributed a total of CHF 178,800 in direct and indirect donations.¹⁶

Palantir's connection to the media company *Ringier* is also controversial. CEO *Marc Walder* is not only the *founder of digitalswitzerland*,¹⁷ but has also had business relations with *Palantir* for years.¹⁸ Since 2018, *Ringier* has been cooperating with the US data company and uses its software both for advertising placement and in the *Blick* newsroom to tailor content more specifically to its readership.

An aftermath with an open outcome

The vote is not yet a foregone conclusion. The voting rights complaints that have been filed are pending, and it remains to be seen whether they will be upheld – and thus a repeat of the referendum ordered.

When a federally owned company such as *Swisscom* openly interferes in the referendum campaign, when media groups such as *Ringier* and the *TX Group* donate free advertising worth hundreds of thousands of Swiss francs shortly before the vote, and when a US data company

such as Palantir is involved behind the scenes, democracy becomes a farce.

Source: <https://www.straumedia.ch/p/spiel-mit-gezinkten-karten>, 14 October 2025

(Translation "Swiss Standpoint")

¹ <https://x.com/shellenberger/status/1972353824229921122>

² <https://www.manova.news/artikel/der-leise-tod-der-offentlichen-debatte>

³ <https://www.uvek.admin.ch/de/swisscom>

⁴ <https://politikfinanzierung.efk.admin.ch/app/de/campaign-financings/512/forms/19-1-425-512-66>

⁵ <https://5-minuten-jus.ch/schweizer-recht-zusammenfassungen-uni-basel-staatsrecht-11-art-34-bv-politische-rechte>

⁶ <https://www.nzz.ch/schweiz/gegner-der-e-id-reichen-abstimmungsbeschwerde-ein-ld.1903726>

⁷ <https://www.nzz.ch/schweiz/gegner-der-e-id-reichen-abstimmungsbeschwerde-ein-ld.1903726>

⁸ https://massvoll.swiss/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Stimmrechtsbeschwerde-Rimoldi-und-MASS-VOLL-an-RR-ZH_online.pdf

⁹ <https://www.nzz.ch/schweiz/gegner-der-e-id-reichen-abstimmungsbeschwerde-ein-ld.1903726>

¹⁰ <https://massvoll.swiss/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Noveneingabe-Rimoldi-und-MASS-VOLL-an-RR-ZH.pdf>

¹¹ <https://massvoll.swiss/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Noveneingabe-Rimoldi-und-MASS-VOLL-an-RR-ZH.pdf>

¹² <https://weltwoche.ch/daily/nach-umstrittener-spende-der-swisscom-auch-die-grossmedienhaeuser-ringier-und-tx-group-unterstuetzten-das-ja-lager-bei-der-e-id-abstimmung-mit-163-000-franken>

¹³ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/andygreenberg/2013/08/14/agent-of-intelligence-how-a-deviant-philosopher-built-palantir-a-cia-funded-data-mining-juggernaut>

¹⁴ <https://www.handelszeitung.ch/unternehmen/tech-riese-palantir-lasst-sich-im-kanton-schwyz-nieder>

¹⁵ <https://digitalswitzerland.com/de/membership-partnership/>

¹⁶ <https://politikfinanzierung.efk.admin.ch/app/de/campaign-financings/514/forms/19-1-426-514-66>

¹⁷ <https://www.ringier.com/de/uber-uns/organisation/marc-walder/>

¹⁸ <https://insideparadeplatz.ch/2025/08/26/ringier-ceo-pusht-e-id/>