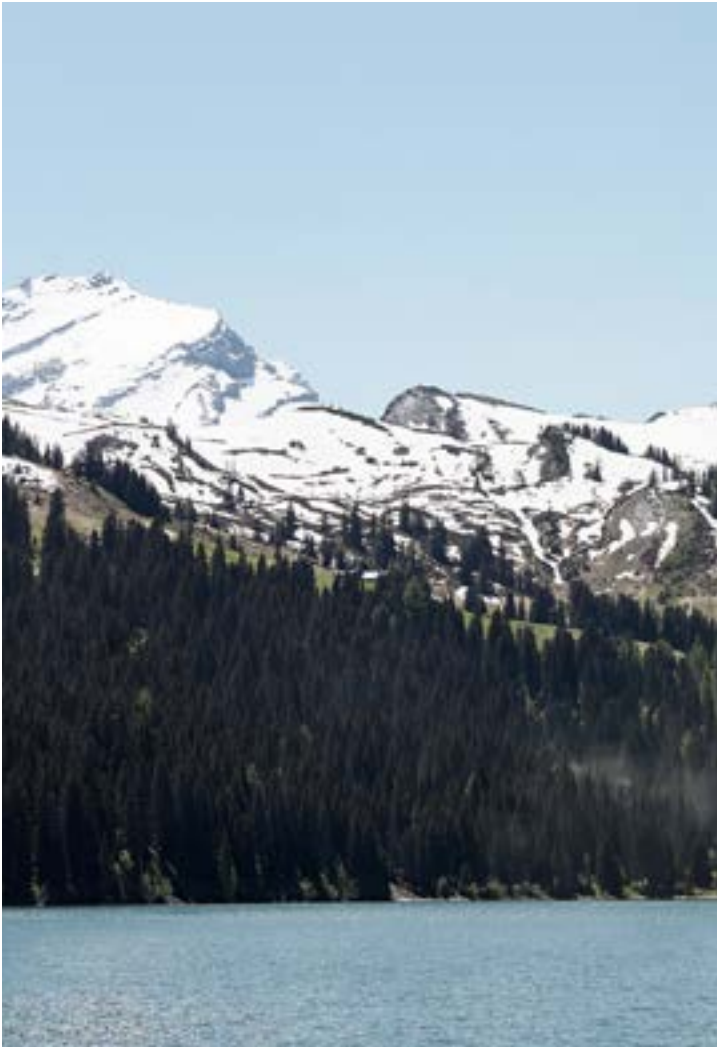


The long-term performance of Swiss equities and bonds (1926-2022)

Commentary



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Summary

- Aggressive rate hikes by the Swiss National Bank in response to a spike in inflation contributed to the negative performance of Swiss bonds and equities alike in 2022.
- In real and nominal terms, last year was the fourth worst for 60/40 Swiss portfolios since 1926, with bonds accounting for one-third of the losses as interest rates spiked. Taking stocks and bonds separately, last year was the worst since 1926 for Swiss bond returns in real and nominal terms and the 11th worst for Swiss equities.
- Looking at long-term average annual returns gives a fuller perspective on performance. A 10-year investment initialised in Swiss equities would have produced a negative performance in only three of the 97 years since 1926. Our analysis shows that nobody who kept their initial investment in Swiss equities for at least 14 years would have made a loss since 1926. This falls to 10 years in the case of a 60/40 Swiss portfolio.
- Making generous assumptions for various portfolio costs, we calculate that CHF1,000 invested in Swiss equities in 1926 would be worth over CHF830,000 today. To achieve CHF1 million from a full century of investing would require an annual return of 6.4% over the next three years—close to the actual long-term average for Swiss equities.
- Since 1926, the average annual return for a 10-year investment in Swiss bonds has been about half that of Swiss equities (3.9% versus 7.7% (in CHF)) in nominal terms. In real terms, the annual average return for a 10-year Swiss bond investment is 2.0% compared with 5.6% for Swiss equities.

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2022, *annus horribilis* for Swiss bonds and equities—but the long-term appeal of a 60/40 portfolio remains

THE END OF NEGATIVE INTEREST RATES

Largely thanks to disinflation, long-term interest rates in Switzerland trended downward for three decades starting in the early 1990s. But mid-2021 marked the end of this long period as the energy crisis, post-pandemic supply bottlenecks and fiscal stimulus contributed to a sharp acceleration in inflation throughout the developed world, including Switzerland. However, price increases have been more modest in Switzerland than in the euro area and the US for several reasons. First, the strength of the Swiss franc has helped to reduce imported inflation. Second, while a large share of it comes from Russia, Switzerland's dependence on natural gas is comparatively low as the country's electricity

needs are almost entirely met by hydro energy and nuclear power. Third, there are government-imposed price controls on a wider range of goods and services than in euro area countries. The recent correction in energy prices and the easing of supply bottlenecks is already bringing down the annual rate of inflation. But the outlook looks highly uncertain and Swiss inflation could remain above its pre-pandemic level in the coming years, driven by the energy transition and the trend towards 're-shoring'.

The Swiss National Bank (SNB) has played a major role in keeping inflation lower than elsewhere by moving away from trying to weaken the Swiss franc towards aiming to keep it strong. The SNB started tightening in mid-2022, raising its key interest rates by 50 bps in June, the first rate rise in 15 years. This was followed by a further 75 bps rate hike in September that brought the policy rate up to 0.5% and ended the period of negative interest rates in Switzerland. Ending negative rates helps banks and other lenders and means people and companies are no longer charged on their bank deposits. But the large increase in the yield on bonds (*see chart 1*) has hurt their performance, as we discuss later.

While Switzerland's inflation rate of around 3% is low by international comparison, it is still well above the 0% to 2% range that the SNB equates with price stability. The SNB will probably continue with its hikes in 2023, although a lower rate of inflation and the SNB's credibility in maintaining price stability mean it does not face policy dilemmas of the same magnitude as the European Central Bank and Federal Reserve. SNB rate hikes should be milder this year, partly restoring the traditional interest-rate differential with the US and euro area.

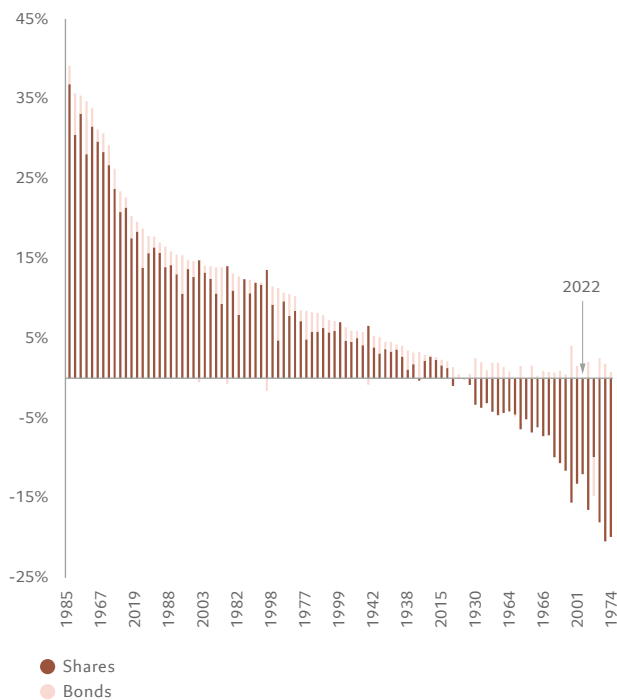
CHART 1
10-year Swiss government bond yield



Source: Pictet Wealth Management, FactSet, as of 31.12.2022

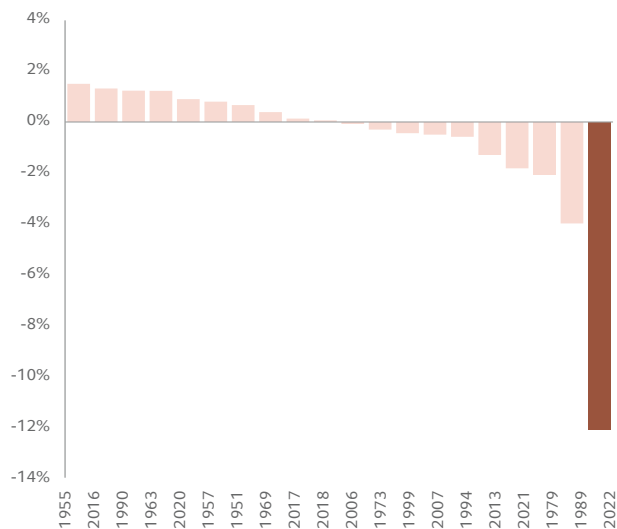
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CHART 2
Performance of a 60/40 Swiss portfolio, ranked from best to worst year since 1926



Source: Pictet Wealth Management, FactSet, as of 31.12.2022

CHART 3
Last year saw the worst annual returns for Swiss bonds since 1926



Source: Pictet Wealth Management, FactSet, as of 04.01.2023

BALANCED ALLOCATIONS TAKE A TUMBLE

Along with presenting our annual analysis of the long-term returns of Swiss equities and bonds separately, this year we look at the long-term performance of a balanced Swiss portfolio consisting of 60% Swiss equities and 40% Swiss bonds. Our calculations assume that the portfolio is rebalanced annually to ensure the 60/40 mix is maintained, in line with our annual time series.

What changing monetary policy will mean for assets in 2023 remains to be seen, but 2022 performances show the impact of last year's rapid rise in interest rates. Indeed, as chart 2 shows, last year turned out to be the fourth-worst year for a balanced Swiss portfolio since 1926—just behind 1974 (the aftermath of the first oil shock), 2008 (the global financial crisis) and 1931 (the sequel of the 1929 Wall Street crash). But 2022 was quite different, in the sense that whereas previous exceptionally bad years were solely driven by a major equity sell-off, in 2022 we saw a decline in equities and bonds alike. Bonds alone accounted for one third of the losses experienced by a 60/40 Swiss portfolio last year.

The main driver of bonds' poor performance was sticky inflation, which, as explained, pushed the SNB, like other central banks, to tighten policy aggressively, leading to a rapid rise in bond yields.

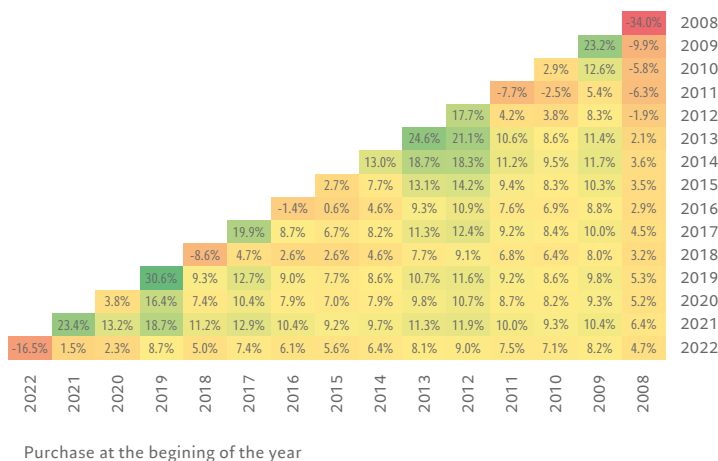
Last year was also the fourth-worst year for Swiss balanced portfolios since 1926 if one looks at returns in real (ie. inflation-adjusted) rather than nominal terms. The worst-ever years, with negative real returns for both bonds and equities, were 1973 and 1974, when inflation was 11.9% and 7.6%, respectively. Annual consumer inflation in Switzerland was a much lower 2.8% in 2022—but was still considerably higher than the 0.7% average of the past 30 years.

THE WORST YEAR ON RECORD FOR SWISS BONDS

With a nominal return of -12.1% in CHF, 2022 was the worst year on record for Swiss government bonds and compares with -4% for the second-worst year (1989, see chart 3). Last year was also the worst on record for Swiss bonds in real terms, although

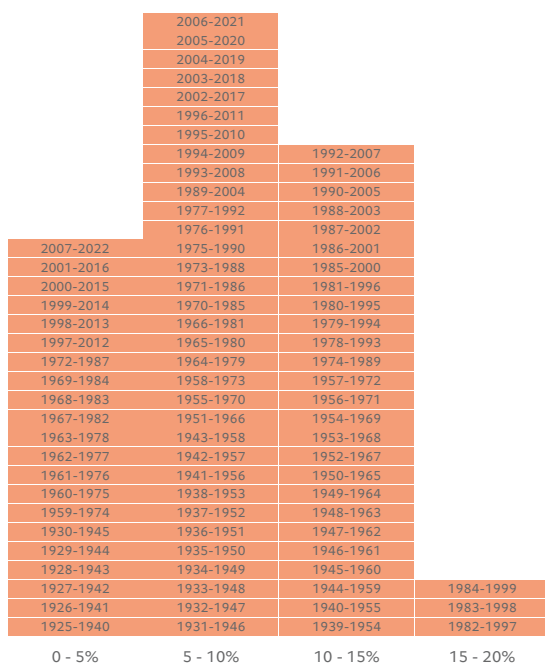
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CHART 4
Average annual CHF returns on Swiss equities
over the past 15 years



Source: Pictet Wealth Management,
FactSet, as of 31.12.2022

CHART 5
Swiss equities' annualised returns grouped by 15-year
periods (y-axis) and return range (x-axis)



Source: Pictet Wealth Management,
FactSet, as of 31.12.2022

the performance gap looks less daunting, with a real return of -14.5% in 2022 compared with the next-year years (-10.9% in 1973, -9.6% in 1940 and -8.6% in 1989).

SWISS EQUITIES: TO TIME OR NOT TO TIME

Taking the Swiss Performance Index (SPI) as a reference, Swiss equities went from an annual return in CHF of 23.4% in 2021 (the 19th highest since 1926) to -16.5% in 2022 (the 11th lowest). Taken together, Swiss equities returned an annual average of 1.5% in 2021-2022 (see chart 4).

Chart 4, showing average annual returns for Swiss equities between 2008 and 2022, is an extract from a much larger series, represented as a triangle, that can be downloaded at this link:

<https://www.pictet.com/ch/en/corporate-news/historical-performance-of-shares-and-bonds-in-switzerland>

The last row of the extract gives annualised CHF returns up to the end of 2022 for different starting years. If we strip out 2020 (distorted by the covid crisis), annualised returns on Swiss equities for investments starting between 2009 and 2019 ranged between 5% and 9% at the end of last year—not far from the 7.7% initial investments have achieved since 1926.

Investors who unfortunately invested in the Swiss stock market at the beginning of 2008 saw an average annual performance of -1.9% in the five-year period to the end of 2012. But assuming these investors did not withdraw their money, the average annual return had rebounded to 4.7% in CHF by the end of 2022—not bad taking into account the 34% loss they would have suffered in 2008 alone and the 16.5% loss in 2022.

An equity drawdown is always stressful. But these numbers show one needs to consider the ability of equities to recover after a sell-off. Smoothed over a long time period, the impact of drawdowns tends to dissipate. An unlucky investor with a five-year time horizon would have faced a negative total return on Swiss equities 14 times over the 97 years between 1926 and 2022. Those 14 occurrences are linked to three major market events: the Wall Street crash in 1929, the bursting of the 'dot com' bubble in 2001 and the global financial crisis in 2008. But investors

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with a 10-year horizon would have suffered a negative return if their initial investment had been made in only three different years since 1926, all linked to the 1929 crisis. Our analysis suggests that since 1926, nobody who invested in Swiss equities for at least 14 years would have experienced a loss on their initial investment (chart 5 illustrates the range of returns for investments in Swiss equities held for 15 years). The time period to breakeven shortens to 10 years for a 60/40 Swiss portfolio. In short, a disciplined, patient approach to equity investing is the best response to the old adage that “you can’t time the market”. Even if investors cannot time the market, they can build up their portfolio’s resilience through a buy and hold approach.

**THREE MORE YEARS TO
BECOME A MILLIONAIRE**

With figures going back to 1926, we now have almost a century’s worth of data on annual returns. A good way to illustrate the ‘magic’ of compounding is to track the total returns from CHF1,000 invested in Swiss equities at the end of 1925 (assuming that dividends are rein-

vested and no money is withdrawn). Our analysis shows that the initial CHF1,000 would have grown to CHF1.31 million 97 years later. Of course, this figure is too good to be true: we need to consider the costs (brokerage fees, stamp duties, cost of portfolio rebalancing...) linked to equity investing. To take these costs into account in our calculations, we deduct 50 bps from annual equity returns since 1926. This gives us a cumulative total return on the CHF1,000 investment of CHF830,162 between 1926 and 2022. To reach a century return of CHF1 million after costs would require an annual 6.4% return over the next three years—in other words, close to the long-term annual average. Patience remains a virtue; as returns compound over time, investors’ time horizon can make all the difference.

Things are different for bonds. On the one hand, risk indicators look less forbidding: Swiss bonds show an annualised standard deviation (a measure of volatility) of 4% compared with 20% for Swiss equities, while the maximum drawdown (the maximum potential loss from investing at market tops and selling at market troughs) is also lower for

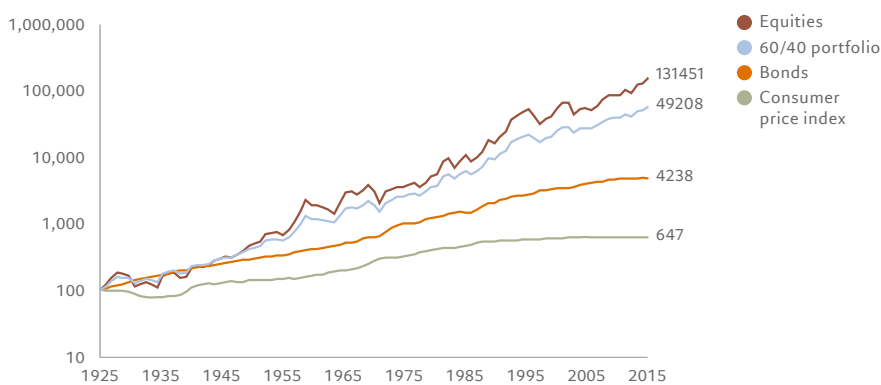
Swiss bonds than for Swiss equities (12% for Swiss bonds in 2022 vs. 34% for Swiss equities in 2008). But while they fared relatively better than equities last year, the average annual return offered by Swiss bonds has also been much lower over the long term, at 2.2% between 2003 and 2021. The annual total returns from Swiss bonds are around half those earned on Swiss equities if one looks even further back—3.9% since 1926 versus 7.7% for Swiss equities (in CHF). In short, while bonds, despite the 2022 mishap, have proved their worth in mitigating portfolio risk since 1926, equities remain the investment of choice over the long term (see chart 6). Put another way, a decent long-term investment horizon together with a certain risk tolerance justify a significant allocation to equities. As chart 6 shows, equities are also the main driver of 60/40 portfolios’ long-term returns.

**EQUITIES OFFER BETTER
REAL LONG-TERM RETURNS
THAN BONDS**

The average annualised return (geometric mean) for Swiss equities and bonds in CHF over 10 years now stands at 7.7% and 3.9% in nominal terms, respectively. Given the 2022 sell-off in both asset classes, these figures are somewhat lower than in July 1998 (the first year we published long-term return updates), when 10-year returns stood at 8.6% and 4.6%, respectively.

The resurgence of inflation post covid means that paying attention to real returns (which take account of erosion in the value of money) is more relevant than before. In real terms, the return from Swiss equities averaged 5.6% between 1926 and 2022, only slightly down from the 6.0% figure for the period between 1926 and 1998. The variation is smaller for Swiss bonds, which made an average annualised 10-year real return of 2.0% up to the end of 2022 compared with 2.1% at end-1998. Again, these figures show that equities provide better returns than bonds over the long run.

CHART 6
Equities provide a larger share of a 60/40 portfolio’s returns than bonds
Increase in the nominal value of a Swiss equity, bond and 60/40 portfolio since 1926 (Base=100)



Source: Pictet Wealth Management, FactSet, as of 31.12.2022

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Conclusion: more of the same

Our long experience of looking after private investors and family offices suggests that drastically reducing equity exposure in reaction to near-term performance issues and then missing the subsequent market upturn is the biggest risk to long-term total: the experience of 2021-2022 is an extreme example of this.

Consequently, it could make sense for investors to map out a long-term, robust and sustainable investment strategy and think carefully about how it is implemented. Only too often, this vitally important question takes second place to other considerations felt to be more important (cost of asset management and advice, cost of analysis etc.).

Equities remain the investment of choice over the long term given how difficult it is to 'time the market'. Good advice and a long-term perspective can make a big difference to investors' wealth, both in nominal and real terms.

Appendix: where do our data come from?

Our study of Swiss equities and bonds, originally published in 1988 and updated annually since 1998, uses data going back to 1926. We have used the Swiss Performance Index (SPI) as a base for calculating equity returns since 1992. The Pictet Bond index is used for our analysis of the performance of Swiss bonds until end 2003. Last year, for reasons of simplicity

and consistency, it was decided to switch to the Swiss Bond Index Total Return AAA-BBB Index for annual returns since 2004. This switch has necessitated slight adjustments to historical data on bonds from 2004 to 2021. Such a change does not impact our past comments but will make future updates easier.

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