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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The electoral behaviour of voters with migration backgrounds and natives at the 2015 and 2019 Swiss National Elections. Two completely different stories?

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Abstract

There is emerging understanding in the literature that voters who have a migration background across Western countries tend to vote for left leaning parties. Yet little is known about whether this implies different drivers of vote choice for citizens with migration background in comparison to natives. This article intends to respond to this question by studying the impact of specific policy issue considerations on the vote of citizens with both migration and non-migration background. To do so, we focus on the 2015 and 2019 Swiss National elections, relying on data from the SELECTS post-electoral studies. Our analyses show that, while Swiss natives' voting choices are consistently affected by key political issues (i.e., foreigners' job market integration and the environment respectively), non-native voters are generally less driven by the main topics discussed at each election, although relevant differences emerge across different migrant backgrounds.

Zusammenfassung

In der Literatur zeichnet sich die Erkenntnis ab, dass Wählerinnen und Wähler mit Migrationshintergrund in westlichen Ländern dazu neigen, linksgerichtete Parteien zu wählen. Es ist jedoch nicht bekannt, ob dies unterschiedliche Faktoren für die Wahlentscheidung von Bürgern mit Migrationshintergrund im Vergleich zu den

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Einheimischen impliziert. Dieser Artikel will diese Frage beantworten, indem er den Einfluss spezifischer politischer Überlegungen auf die Wahlentscheidung von Bürgerinnen und Bürgern mit und ohne Migrationshintergrund untersucht. Dazu konzentrieren wir uns auf die Schweizer Nationalratswahlen 2015 und 2019 und stützen uns auf Daten aus den SELECTS-Nachwahlstudien. Unsere Analyse zeigt, dass die Wahlentscheidung von Schweizerinnen und Schweizern durchgängig von politischen Schlüsselthemen beeinflusst wird (z.B. Integration von Ausländern in den Arbeitsmarkt bzw. Umwelt). Nicht-Einheimische werden im Allgemeinen weniger von den Hauptthemen beeinflusst, die bei den jeweiligen Wahlen diskutiert werden, obwohl relevante Unterschiede zwischen Migrantinnen und Migranten mit unterschiedlichen Migrationshintergründen bestehen.

Résumé

La littérature montre que les électeurs issus de l'immigration dans les pays occidentaux ont tendance à voter pour des partis de gauche. Cependant, on ne sait pas si cela implique des facteurs de choix de vote différents pour les citoyens d'origine immigrée par rapport aux autochtones. Cet article entend répondre à cette question en étudiant l'impact de différentes considération politiques sur le vote des citoyens issus ou non de l'immigration. Pour ce faire, nous nous concentrons sur les élections nationales suisses de 2015 et 2019, en nous appuyant sur les données des études post-électorales SELECTS. Nos analyses montrent que, alors que les choix de vote des électeurs d'origine suisse sont systématiquement influencés par des questions politiques clés (c'est-à-dire respectivement l'intégration des étrangers dans le marché du travail et l'environnement), les électeurs issus de l'immigration sont généralement moins influencés par les principales questions débattues en amont des élections respectives, bien que des différences pertinentes apparaissent entre différents profils migratoires.

KEYWORDS
Environment, migration, policy issues, Swiss national elections, voting behaviour

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INTRODUCTION

Citizens with a migration background represent an increasing portion of national electorates. In fact, globalisation and the internationalisation of labour markets (Rashkova & van der Staak, 2020) have facilitated immigration in recent years and promoted this increase. In Switzerland, the continued naturalisation of immigrants and their descendants have not only enfranchised this voter segment (Strijbis, 2014), but also improved their political integration and made them more likely to attain political knowledge and engage in electoral processes (Hainmueller et al., 2015; see also Ciornei & Østergaard-Nielsen, 2020; Kernalegenn & van Haute, 2020), although participation is still lower relative to the majority population (Ruedin, 2018). The question of how voters with a migration background choose at the ballot box is a part of this scientific debate on the political participation of migrants. In other words, who does this segment of the society vote for, and why? According to Strijbis (2014), little research has so far been conducted about the electoral choices of immigrants and most existing studies are rather descriptive. Yet, there appears to be an emerging general understanding that voters who have a migration background across Western countries tend to vote for left-of-centre parties (Bergh & Bjørklund, 2011; Strijbis, 2014). However, theoretical explanations for this relatively stable voting behaviour differ, ranging from specific migration background voter socialisation in sending countries that impact vote choice (Wüst, 2000), to party identification conditional on migration backgrounds (Strijbis, 2014), to group adherence resulting in ethnic voting that even overshadows identity-related motivations (Bergh & Bjørklund, 2011). Additionally, the reasons behind electoral choices are often country-specific and may depend on the nature of the election, sample size and groups under study. Essentially, most studies focus on the election of parties and their representatives, whereas relatively little research has been conducted on the relationship between issue attitudes and party choice among migrants (Strijbis & Polavieja, 2018). In this paper, we aim to fill this gap by studying how different policy issue preferences drive the electoral behaviour of voters with migration background *vis-à-vis* native voters.

To do so, we focus on the 2015 and 2019 Swiss national parliamentary elections.[1] Switzerland presents an interesting case study for our analysis for several reasons. First, around 37.7% (2,722,000) of all Swiss permanent residents in 2019 had a migration background, ranking Switzerland among the countries with the highest share of migrant population in Europe. Among this population with migrant background, more than one third (992,000) possessed Swiss citizenship, of whom the majority (880,000) was naturalised (FSO, 2019). Naturalisation is significant because it opens the door to active political participation and ensures eligibility to vote in elections and on direct democratic decisions, such as initiatives and referendums (Hainmueller et al., 2015). The process of ordinary naturalisation is relatively restrictive compared to other countries, as immigrants who want to apply for Swiss citizenship must have lived in Switzerland for 10 years prior to their application (SEM, 2021). This long period of residency may contribute to migrants' political knowledge and interest in assuming their rights to vote. Additionally, many migrants are from Europe, i.e., an area identifying migrants with a generally high standing in Swiss society. This status may influence their voting behaviour on specific issues in efforts to retain their privileged status and secure their position in a competitive economic environment (Strijbis & Polavieja, 2018). Given the substantial number of voters with a migration background, their preferences and electoral choices may have a significant impact on political decisions in Switzerland.

We explore this topic in our study by comparing the voting behaviour of native-born Swiss citizens (with both or at least one parent born in the country) and first-generation immigrant

[1]We will refer to these elections simply as national elections throughout the paper.

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voters in the Swiss national elections in 2015 and 2019. The electoral successes of the right-wing populist Swiss People's Party (SVP) in 2015 and of the Green parties in 2019 pose several intricacies in the interpretation of voting behaviour of citizens with migration backgrounds. Within this context, we compare the effect that key policy issues during each respective election had on party choices among this group of voters. Our assumption is that immigrant citizens, like native-born Swiss citizens, were significantly affected by the increasing relevance of migration in public discourse in 2015, and of environmental issues in public discourse in 2019 (see also Bernhard, 2020). We test our expectations through a series of logistic regression models performed on both the 2015 and 2019 SELECTS post-electoral studies datasets (SELECTS, 2016, 2021), reshaped in the so-called stacked form, and using respondents' party choices in both the 2015 and 2019 national elections as our dependent variables (e.g., van der Eijk, 2018). Using this empirical strategy, we evaluate the explanatory power of individual-level issue considerations (alongside usual predictors of voting behaviour) on the electoral calculus of both immigrant citizens and native-born Swiss nationals in the two most recent Swiss national elections.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. In our second section, we present and discuss existing scholarly literature on the voting behaviour of citizens with migration background and present our explorative assumptions. In section three, we outline the structure and sources of our data, as well as the operationalisation of our variables. The fourth section presents the results, followed by a discussion of our findings and avenues for further research.

VOTING BEHAVIOUR OF CITIZENS WITH MIGRATION BACKGROUND

Two major strands of research emerge when examining migrant voting behaviour. First, scholars have tried to assess why immigrants engage less in electoral processes than natives (see for example Wass et al., 2015). Secondly, some authors evaluate why migrants vote for certain parties or policies (see for example Michon et al., 2007). We first provide a brief overview of potential explanations for low voter turnout among migrants and the migrant voter turnout in the 2015 and 2019 Swiss national elections. We then outline the literature on migrant voter party choice and their voting preferences in Switzerland, from which we derive our explorative questions.

Turnout among voters with migration background

Recent contributions highlight that a plethora of factors may influence turnouts among voters with migration backgrounds. Analysing data on turnout in the 2012 Finnish municipal elections, Wass et al. find that "political participation among immigrants is a multifaceted phenomenon" (2015: 420). Previous democratic experiences in the sending country, being in a relationship with a local spouse, and the length of stay in the host receiving country increase the likelihood to vote among people with migration backgrounds. Debating several theoretical models, the authors specifically highlight the assimilation model, in which having a native spouse and a large family increase turnout among foreign-born voters, although a similar effect occurs among natives. In a similar setting, Ruedin (2018) evaluates the 2015 municipal elections in the Swiss Canton of Geneva and finds that variations in social origin (education, age, income), political engagement, civic integration, networks, and voting socialisation influence voter turnout. He theoretically conceptualises a socialisation effect by describing how individuals are more likely to vote if their parents voted. He finds that parental participation in the electoral process actually increases the likelihood to vote among children. Strijbis (2014) argues that turnout among migrant voters is lowest if both parents are born

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abroad, whereas turnout among first-generation immigrants and Swiss-born voters with one parent born abroad is higher. This indicates a positive effect of naturalisation on motivations to participate in the electoral process.

However, a substantial participation gap remains between nationality groups, which cannot be accounted for by the variables tested in Strijbis' study (2014). In contrast, Spies, Mayer and Goerres argue that immigrant-specific variables are not fruitful in assessing this group's voter turnout because they follow the same logic and can be "adequately – but not fully – explained by standard electoral research approaches" (2019: 1). Other studies find that socio-demographic factors such as age and education are not strongly associated with differences in voter turnout between migrants and nationals, but they do highlight significant differences between nationalities (Heath et al., 2011). These studies question the applicability of standard resource theories of time, money, and civic skills (Brady et al., 1995) associated with electoral participation to migrant voters. They instead suggest that research should focus on generational effects among different minority groups (Heath et al., 2011).

Party preferences among voters with migration background

Groups with migration backgrounds are often described as predominantly voting for parties on the left. Scholarly research suggests a variety of theories explaining migrant vote choice. Early sociological models assume that political positions are structured along class- and religion-based alignments of voters (Michon et al., 2007). Although somewhat limited in their explanatory power, these theoretical approaches suggest that many immigrants belong to the group of traditionally left leaning party voters based on their social stratification. Similarly, identity-related theories suggest that immigrants tend to vote for left-of-centre parties because they have a shared interest in the liberal immigration policies promoted by such parties (Lehmann & Zobel, 2018). Some studies analysing voting behaviour in the UK even go as far as referring to migrants voting for parties on the left as the "iron law of party choice" (Saggar, 2000: 121). This iron law seems persistent across elections in various Western countries. Analysing local elections in Norway (Bergh & Bjørklund, 2011), in the Netherlands (Michon et al., 2007), as well as presidential elections in the United States (de la Garza & Cortina, 2007) and national elections in Germany (Goerres et al., 2018), these studies find a tendency for migrants to vote more to the left although variations exist between migrant groups.

Some theories account for the heterogeneity of party preferences among migrant background voters by focusing on how positively migrants are perceived in the host society (Strijbis, 2014). In this respect, which migrant groups belong to the so-called *ingroup* (i.e., they are positively perceived) and which ones to the *outgroup* (i.e., they are negatively perceived) depends on country-specific ethnic hierarchies in which native citizens rank foreigners according to their status (Hagendoorn, 1993; Strijbis, 2014). For Switzerland, Ruedin (2020) shows that the immigrant groups that are perceived as most threatening are generally those that are seen as more culturally distant and more likely to enjoy welfare benefits. Strijbis (2014) explicitly describes the country's outgroup as foreign residents and Swiss citizens with South East European background, Muslims, Sub-Saharan Africans, and asylum seekers (Strijbis, 2014: 615). He further outlines that citizens belonging to an outgroup generally have a higher propensity to vote for left-of-centre parties due to party identification, with one exception: citizens with Eastern European backgrounds instead see increases in the propensity to vote for centre-right parties.

An alternative explanation for the influence of different migration backgrounds on vote choice focuses on the role of political socialisation or previous party identification in the home country (Wals, 2013; Just, 2019). For example, studies exploring party choice in German elections found that voters from the former Soviet Union (Goerres et al., 2018) and immigrants from

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Eastern European countries (Wüst, 2000) are more right-leaning and vote for the Christian Democratic Union, whereas Turkish immigrants rather tend to vote for the centre-left Social Democratic Party.

Issue voting and party choice among migrant voters

While the studies mentioned above show links between migration background and party choice, only few studies explore the dimension of electoral decision-making and particularly the importance of policy preferences in explaining migrant voters' party choices. Yet, political scientists have long argued that issues are an important driver of vote choice, along with other important factors (see also Weldon & McNeney, 2019). According to Down's (1957) rational-choice approach, self-interest is the main driver of electoral behaviour and a citizen's vote choice strongly depends on their expected gains from the implementation of each party's policy platform. In other words, voters evaluate parties based on perceived utilitarian benefits and, depending on their own background, they may associate different benefits with different parties based on parties' focus towards specific social and/or political problems as well as perceived competence on policies (Lachat, 2014). In line with this theoretical argument, a study among Turkish voters in Germany finds that voter preferences for social-democratic and green parties are based on whether those parties' programmes and policies focus on minority rights and integration issues or not (Uslucan & Sauer, 2020). Similarly, a study of the vote choice of resettlers – ethnic Germans from the Soviet Union – finds that this group's party choice in the 2017 German election was driven by the salience of specific political issues as well as anti-immigrant policy orientations (Goerres et al., 2020). Finally, Dancygier and Saunders (2006) find that British immigrants are in principle not more likely to support social spending and redistribution than native voters. However, economic disadvantages and minority status in the host society function as triggers for policy voting based on economic issues in this group.

More recently, Sanders et al. (2014) show that voting calculations are not necessarily different between ethnic minorities and the white British majority. These authors combine party identification with valence and spatial calculations of ethnic minority voters.

Overall, only few studies have addressed the connection of policy preferences and party choice among migrants compared to native voters. Moreover, there is a lack of contributions exploring this issue from a general perspective, i.e., not focusing on party-specific aspects such as the affinity between migrant backgrounds and particular party preferences but rather on the decision-making process underlying such preferences. To our view, covering this gap could help achieve a better understanding of migrant political participation in all its facets. Before presenting our analytical strategy in this respect, in the next section we provide an overview of how migrant backgrounds appear associated to specific patterns of electoral participation and voting behaviour in Switzerland according to the empirical data we use.

Voting behaviour among Swiss voters with migration background

Comparing the voting behaviour of citizens with a migration background in the 2015 and 2019 Swiss national elections reveals interesting results. According to the Swiss Election Study

[2]Analysing turnout among voters with migration background, the SELECTS study from 2015 distinguishes between the following sub-groups: 'not Swiss at birth', 'born abroad', 'one parent born abroad' and 'both parents born abroad'. The SELECTS study from 2019 only distinguishes between 'naturalised citizens' and 'citizens with at least one parent born abroad'.

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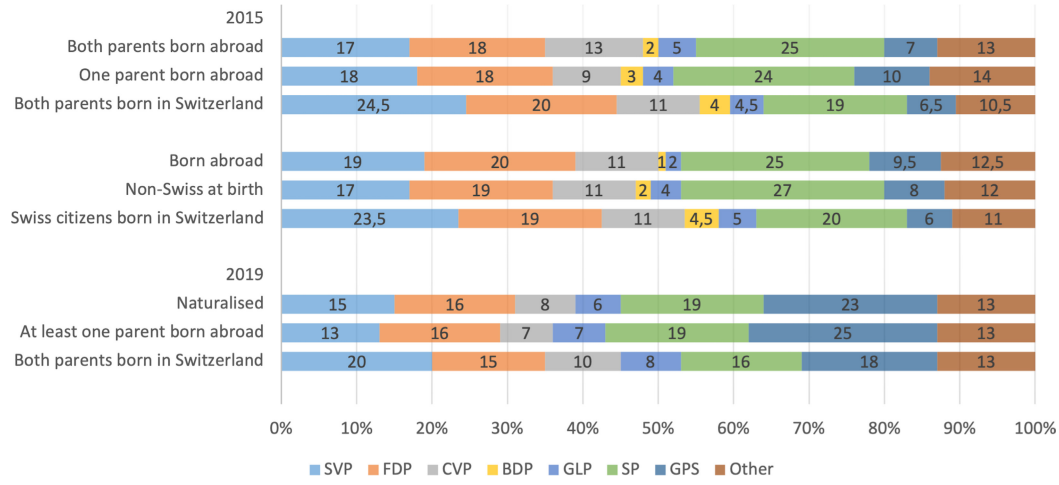


FIGURE 1 Voting Decision by Migration Background (in %)
SELECTS 2015: Swiss citizens born in Switzerland N = 2573; Non-Swiss at birth N = 590; Born abroad N = 828; Both parents born in Switzerland N = 2513, One parent born abroad N = 510, Both parents born abroad N = 560.
SELECTS 2019: Both parents born in Switzerland N = 2976; At least one parent born abroad N = 1555; Naturalised N = 992.
SVP = Swiss People's Party, FDP = Free Democratic Party, CVP = Christian Democratic People's Party,
BDP = Conservative Democratic Party, GLP = Green Liberal Party, SP = Social Democratic Party, GPS = Green Party.

(SELECTS), around one third of the 5.3 million eligible voters in 2015 had a migration background themselves or through their parents. Turnout among voters with a migration background (born abroad, parents from abroad, or without Swiss citizenship at birth[2]) was significantly lower at 35% compared to native-born Swiss citizens (54%). While the SELECTS 2019 report is less detailed on turnout among voters with a migration background, it reiterates that turnout among these voters was lower (33% to 35% depending on the sub-group) than among citizens without a migration background (50%). These findings point towards a form of parental socialisation, although the survey makes no statements about the actual cause for this socialisation.

Looking at the electoral behaviour of Swiss voters with a migration background yields interesting insights for individual vote decisions among this group of voters and acts as a starting point for the development of our explorative questions. While most studies argue that geographic and ethnic backgrounds impact the party choice of migrant voters, little research exists on issue voting and migrant electoral behaviour in countries with high numbers of voters from similar geographical areas, such as in Switzerland. In accordance with existing research, we find certain patterns among migrant and native voters in the 2015 and 2019 Swiss national elections. Figure 1 provides an overview of voters and their decisions by variations in migration backgrounds compared to native citizens for both electoral years.

In 2015, the SP (Social Democratic Party) was overrepresented among voters with a migration background, whereas the SVP was the second-strongest party among most sub-groups along with the FDP. Native-born Swiss citizens and respondents and whose parents were both born in Switzerland, however, predominantly voted for the SVP. For the other parties, the differences are relatively small. In 2019, the SP and GPS performed rather well both among naturalised and native-born Swiss citizens with at least one parent born abroad. Both groups voted significantly less often for the SVP (13% and 15%) compared to native-born Swiss citizens (20%). These numbers provide an interesting pattern. Hainmueller et al. (2015) argue that the naturalisation process itself has a positive effect on political integration and participation, but in Switzerland it does not necessarily increase the propensity to vote for parties on the right. Moreover, differences in party preference depending on the (non-)migratory background of the voter's parents may suggest a

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TABLE 1 List of Independent Variables and Descriptive Statistics

	2015					2019				
	Mean	**Min.**	**Max.**	**St.dev.**	**N.**	**Mean**	**Min.**	**Max.**	**St.dev.**	**N.**
Psychological closeness to a party	0.27	0	3	0.69	22791	0.27	0	3	0.69	32137
Attitude towards immigration (y-hat)	0.50	0.19	0.86	0.14	20981	0.50	0.18	0.86	0.13	27676
Attitude towards environmental protection (y-hat)	0.50	0.02	0.89	0.14	20852	0.50	0.02	0.89	0.16	27664
Attitude towards taxation for high incomes (y-hat)	0.50	0.07	0.86	0.11	20761	0.50	0.06	0.90	0.12	27750
Attitude towards social spending (y-hat)	0.50	0.11	0.89	0.13	20848	0.50	0.09	0.89	0.15	27686
Socio-demo characteristics (y-hat)	0.50	0.01	0.98	0.15	12347	0.50	0.02	0.97	0.16	17684
Ethnic background										
Swiss native	0.66	0	1	0.47	34572	0.59	0	1	0.49	44942
Second-generation Swiss	0.16	0	1	0.37	34572	0.15	0	1	0.36	44942
Western foreigner	0.12	0	1	0.33	34572	0.17	0	1	0.38	44942
East/extra-European	0.06	0	1	0.24	34572	0.09	0	1	0.29	44942

Source: 2015 and 2019 SELECTS post-election studies.

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political socialisation effect based on stronger identification with their native family (Strijbis & Polavieja, 2018). Specific migration backgrounds may affect voters' party preferences in federal elections to a certain extent, but the numbers portrayed in Table 1 are somewhat limited in providing further evidence as to why and to what extent migrants differ in their electoral behaviour. Strijbis (2014) argues that Swiss voters with migration background often vote for left-of-centre parties, but they do not engage in bloc voting. In line with theories on ingroup/outgroup status and discrimination, he finds that their electoral behaviour depends on group-specific factors.

However, these analyses cannot say anything about the specific motivations behind the electoral behaviour and issue voting strategies of citizens with migration background in Switzerland. Some recent findings would suggest that voters with migration background rely on similar motivations as natives when casting a vote because of similar experiences with labour market competition (Strijbis & Polavieja, 2018). Yet, those results focus on vote choice during the 2014 popular initiative against mass immigration rather than vote choice during a national election. In addition, we know that there are conditions – other than the job market – that affect migrants experience in the host country and that can shape the interests and political reasoning of immigrants in different ways compared to natives (e.g., immigration laws relative to family reunification, Strijbis, 2014).

In the light of all this, and given the lack of in-depth empirical studies on this topic, it seems there would be arguments both in favour and against a potential (dis)similarity between nationals' and immigrants' electoral behaviour. In this paper, we intend to dig further into this issue by testing whether citizens with a migrant background develop specific patterns of issue voting in comparison to natives, by focusing on the last two Swiss national elections. Our focus on citizens' issue considerations is motivated by the highly policy-centred character of Swiss national party competition. We know that electoral campaigns in both 2014 and 2015 were dominated by stances over immigration. Migrants' economic integration had a peculiar importance, as it triggered anti-immigrants attitudes based on fears that the Swiss labour market could be overwhelmed by immigration flows (Strijbis & Polavieja, 2018; see also Polavieja, 2016). In such a context, the populist right-wing SVP witnessed a massive increase in vote share and, with 29.4% of votes, became the most successful radical right party in Western Europe. In 2019, however, the environmental issue predominated the national election. Consequently, the Greens (GPS) and the Green Liberal party (GLP) increased their shares of votes and seats in the parliament. The GPS almost doubled their votes, surging by 6.1% to a 13.2% share, and gaining 17 seats in the Swiss National Council. This was an unprecedented surge, topping the SVP's record of 15 additional seats won in the 1999 election. The GLP also exceeded expected results, with a gain of 3.2% and 9 additional seats. The debate on climate change turned out to be the most important factor determining voters' party choices. Around 25% of all participating voters stated that this issue was essential for their voting decision (Hermann et al., 2019; Bernhard, 2020). Against this background, we consider immigration and the environment respectively as the pivotal issues which the 2015 and 2019 elections revolved around. In this context, we test the relevance of these issues comparing native and second-generation Swiss respondents with foreign-born residents, while also controlling for additional general policy, social and psychological factors which are known to affect voting behaviour. We provide a more in-depth overview of the design of our analyses in the following section.

DATA AND METHODS

To test our expectations, we relied on the two latest Swiss post-electoral studies (SELECTS). As previous studies have pointed out, this is a well-established data source that includes an extensive series of standardised variables measured at regular intervals in time (e.g., Lutz & Lauener, 2020). The information richness of this dataset applies very well to our case, as we intend to compare the effects of a specific set of indicators on party choice in two very

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distinct occasions (i.e., the 2015 and 2019 national elections). Nevertheless, we acknowledge that our research questions focus on how certain policy considerations affected party choice in general, i.e., irrespective of the nature of the party voted for, rather than asking if and how particular factors led to vote choice for specific parties (e.g., did populist attitudes drive support for the SVP?).[3] Such focus is based on the premise that elections are a terrain of communication between voters and elites, where a good part of parties' cues revolves around positions on specific policy issues, and where citizens care about such positions when deciding what party to vote for. Such setup is meant to ensure a proper representation of voters based on their substantive policy interests and desires, which is also often considered as an important precondition for sound and healthy democratic rule (Wlezien, 2017). Since the literature has not yet clarified to what extent this model applies to immigrants, the aim of our analysis is to explore similarities (or differences) between foreign and Swiss-born citizens when it comes to the role that key policy issues play in orienting their electoral preferences.

As correctly pointed out by previous studies, such research objective can only be properly pursued if data are put in the so-called stacked form (e.g., van der Eijk et al., 2006; Franklin & Renko, 2013). A stacked dataset is a reshaped version of an originally 'respondent*variable' dataset where each case is multiplied by the number of parties he or she gets to choose from at an election.[4] Our dependent variable within this framework, i.e., party choice in the 2015 and 2019 national elections, assumes a value of 1 corresponding to the respondent's party choice and a value of 0 in the case of all other competing parties. This strategy enables the researcher to overcome the limits associated with traditional approaches to voting behaviour, which often represent party choice as a purely binary decision (i.e., between a preferred option and all the others, which are indistinctively discarded), and to better approximate the complexity of voters' preferences (and their determinants) in multiparty contexts (van der Eijk, 2002). For the sake of understanding, please find a graphical representation of such transformation in Figure 2 below.

Based on our assumptions, the independent variables in our models account for the issue voting theory (Walgrave et al., 2020; Angelucci et al., 2020) by including respondent positions on both immigration and environmental protection in our models. Drawing upon previous research arguing the centrality of perceived economic pressures in developing anti-immigrant attitudes (e.g., Strijbis & Polavieja, 2018), our operationalisation of the immigration variable focuses on attitudes towards migrants' integration in the labour market. This is a variable measuring respondents' accordance to equal opportunities for natives and foreigners on a scale from 1 ("Strongly for equal opportunities") to 5 ("Strongly for better opportunities for the natives"). As for the environment, our measurement relies instead on the preferred trade-off between further environmental protection and economic growth, once again on a scale from 1 ("Environmental protection is much more important") to 5 ("Economic growth is much more important"). Since in a stacked environment the units of analysis are no longer individual respondents but dyads (respondent*party combinations), both these policy variables must be adjusted accordingly to reflect their importance in predicting vote choice for each political party.

[3]For a wider discussion of the distinction between generic and party-specific research questions in voting behaviour analyses, please see van der Eijk (2018) and Anker (1992).

[4]Concretely, we did this by splitting each SELECTS post-electoral sample in three sub-parts, corresponding to the three Swiss linguistic areas, and stacked the data according to respondents' most preferred parties in each sub-part. For the record, the most preferred parties across the different areas were the Swiss People's Party (SVP/UDC), the Liberal Radical Party (FDP/PLR), the Christian Democratic People's Party (CVP/PDC), the Social Democratic Party (SP/PS), the Green Liberal Party (GLP/PVL) and the Green Party (GPS/PES). In the French-speaking area our list also included the Geneva Citizens' Movement (MCG) for both elections and the Party of Labour (PdA/PdT) in 2019. In the German-speaking part we considered instead the Conservative Democratic Party of Switzerland (BDP/PBD) in 2015, while in the Italian part we accounted for the Ticino League in both elections.

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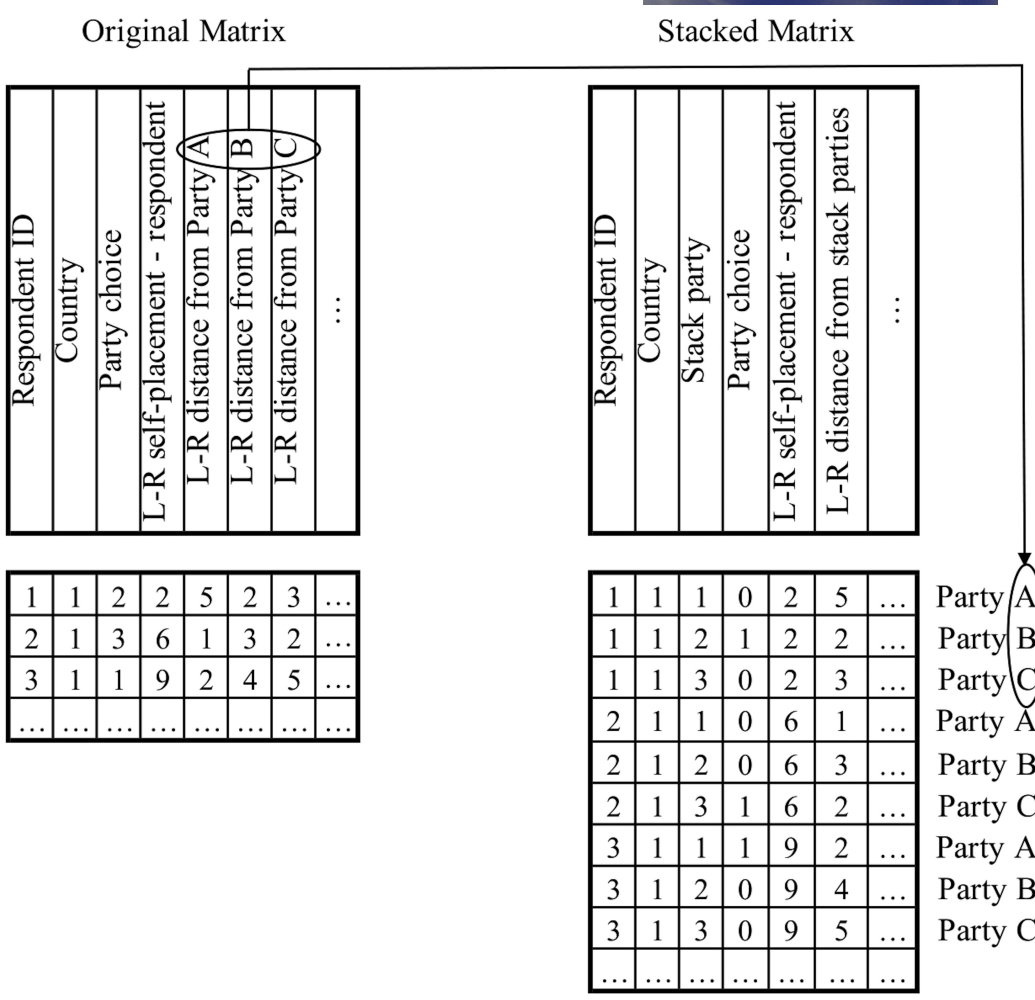


FIGURE 2 Graphical Representation of Data Reshaping

To do that, we relied on an established strategy based on regressing the actual vote choice on each policy issue position (e.g., van der Brug et al., 2000). The resulting predicted probabilities, i.e., *y-hats*, were then subtracted from their mean at the level of each stack party to prevent any party-specific disturbance in the estimates and included in our dataset (De Sio & Franklin, 2015). These *y-hat* scores are potentially comparable across different contexts, and in our case can be employed as a new independent variable measuring the extent to which specific considerations, including those related to policies, affect party choice in an election (e.g., van der Eijk, 2002).[5] Within this framework, it is also important to clarify that the resulting regression coefficients will not provide information about the direction of the estimated effects of our variables (e.g., if being pro-environment positively affects respondents' electoral choices) but rather on the prominence that specific types of considerations (both positive and negative) have in voters' minds while at the ballot box. Such an approach is particularly suitable to the exploration of *generic*, rather than

[5]An important advantage of using the *y-hat* variables in a stacked analysis framework is that the strength of their effects can be interpreted as if they were standardised beta weights. As correctly pointed out by Franklin and Renko (2013), while lower coefficients identify poor relationships, higher coefficients highlight the importance of specific variables in the vote function. Such aspect is particularly well suited for a direct comparison of the impact of the two issue variables at the core of our model.

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party-specific, research questions such as the one explored here (i.e., 'to what extent are the electoral choices of migrants driven by specific policy motives?') (see also van der Eijk, 2018).

Based on the same procedure, we accounted also for attitudes towards relatively less salient policy topics, i.e., social spending and taxation of high incomes. In both cases, the computation of the predicted probabilities applied to a variable ranging from 1 (=strongly for a reduction) to 5 (=strongly for an increase).

Finally, we also controlled for an additional set of factors that traditionally affect party choices at national elections beyond the domain of policy issues. The first one is the generic feeling of *psychological closeness to a party* (e.g., Franklin & Lutz, 2020). This predictor results from the combination of two different variables: 'presence of psychological closeness' (where 1 represents feeling close to a party and 0 identifies all other non-partisan cases) and 'strength of closeness' (where partisan respondents are assigned the values of 1, 2, or 3 according to whether they report a 'weak', 'moderate' or 'high' closeness to a particular party). We also controlled for the effect of *socio-structural characteristics* on vote choice (e.g., Goldberg, 2017; Langsaether, 2019). Here, we relied on the same predicted probability form (*y-hats*) used for the previously mentioned issue voting variables. The predictor variables concerned here are: *gender, age, highest educational attainment* (in 11 categories, from no schooling completed to university), *marital status* (married or in a registered partnership, widowed, divorced/separated, or single), *belonging to a trade union or employee association* (yes vs. no), *household size* (from 1 to 7 or more), *religious affiliation* (Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, other religion, other Christian religion, None), *religious service attendance* (on a 7-point scale ranging from "Never" to "Several times per week"), *current employment status* (in 10 categories), and *total gross monthly household income* (in 15 categories, from less than 2000 CHF to more than 15000 CHF). In this case, we derived a single 'summary' *y-hat*, or predicted value, based on multiple regressions involving vote choice for each party and the aforementioned predictors.

Finally, to account for the ethnic profile of the respondent, we created an additional variable distinguishing between Swiss natives, on the one hand, and three different types of migrant backgrounds: second-generation Swiss, Western (i.e., from Western Europe, North America or Oceania), and East/extra-European (see also Strijbis, 2014).[6] This categorisation builds upon information available in the SELECT studies and tends to encompass the one proposed by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (FSO), which defines the population with migration background as foreign nationals and naturalised Swiss citizens, along with Swiss citizens at birth whose parents were both born abroad (FSO, 2019). In the light of the available data, where migrant background respondents represent a minority of the whole sample, this solution constitutes the most convincing balance between a sufficient distinction of different ethnic backgrounds, by drawing from previous work by Strijbis (2014), and the robustness of our statistical models.[7] Descriptive statistics for the variables described above can be seen in Table 1.[8]

[6]For the record, the few respondents (61 across the two surveys) who did not fit any of these categories, as they were coded as stateless, missing or from unspecified countries, were excluded from our analysis.

[7]A possible criticism of this study is that we cannot ensure that the same results would have applied if the same exact group of individuals had been tracked over time, because we worked on two distinct samples of voters (one collected in 2015 and one in 2019). The SELECTS panel studies unfortunately do not cover a 5-year-long time span. In theory, it would be possible to compare vote choices in 2019 with 2015 vote recall in the latest post-electoral dataset. Nevertheless, such strategy would entail explaining past electoral behaviour based on opinions and attitudes measured at a later time, which is of course problematic, not to mention that the reliability of vote recall questions is still a debated topic in electoral research (e.g., van Elsas et al., 2014). In the light of all that, working on two separate post-election studies appears to be the best solution in our case.

[8]Consistent with the stacked format being used, the "N" of this Table indicates the overall number of "respondent*party" observations in each post-electoral dataset.

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TABLE 2 Explaining party choice at the 2015 and 2019 national elections (binary logistic regression models)

	2015		2019	
VARIABLES	**Model 1**	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**
Attitude towards the environment	0.471	0.465	2.344***	2.476***
	(0.342)	(0.343)	(0.246)	(0.285)
Attitude towards migrants' labour market integration	1.190**	1.254**	1.274***	1.267***
	(0.468)	(0.526)	(0.271)	(0.271)
Psychological closeness to party	2.879***	2.882***	2.491***	2.491***
	(0.110)	(0.110)	(0.0679)	(0.0679)
Attitudes toward taxation of high incomes	1.650***	1.660***	0.931***	0.956***
	(0.535)	(0.536)	(0.296)	(0.298)
Attitudes toward social spending	1.176**	1.163**	1.041***	1.033***
	(0.467)	(0.465)	(0.245)	(0.245)
Socio-demographic background	2.116***	2.108***	2.327***	2.337***
	(0.318)	(0.319)	(0.263)	(0.264)
Main effects				
Second-generation Swiss		0.0158		−0.0791
		(0.587)		(0.430)
Western		0.157		0.0483
		(1.127)		(0.391)
East/Extra-European		−0.126		0.602
		(0.976)		(0.458)
Interaction terms				
Second-generation Swiss*Attitude towards migrants' job market integration		−0.122		
		(1.112)		
Western*Attitude towards migrants' job market integration		−0.688		
		(2.103)		
East/Extra-European*Attitude towards migrants' job market integration		−0.228		
		(1.673)		
Second-generation Swiss*Attitude towards the environment				0.00402
				(0.750)
Western*Attitude towards the environment				−0.376
				(0.698)
East/Extra-European*Attitude towards the environment				−1.525*
				(0.835)
Constant	−6.758***	−6.757***	−7.340***	−7.377***
	(0.315)	(0.335)	(0.230)	(0.249)
Pseudo R2	0.61	0.61	0.57	0.57

(Continues)

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TABLE 2 (Continued)

	2015		2019	
VARIABLES	**Model 1**	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**
N (respondents*parties)	8,851	8,851	14,859	14,859
N-clusters (respondents)	1,353	1,353	2,230	2,230

Robust standard errors in parentheses.
Source: 2015 and 2019 SELECTS post-election studies.
***$p < 0.01$, **$p < 0.05$, *$p < 0.1$.

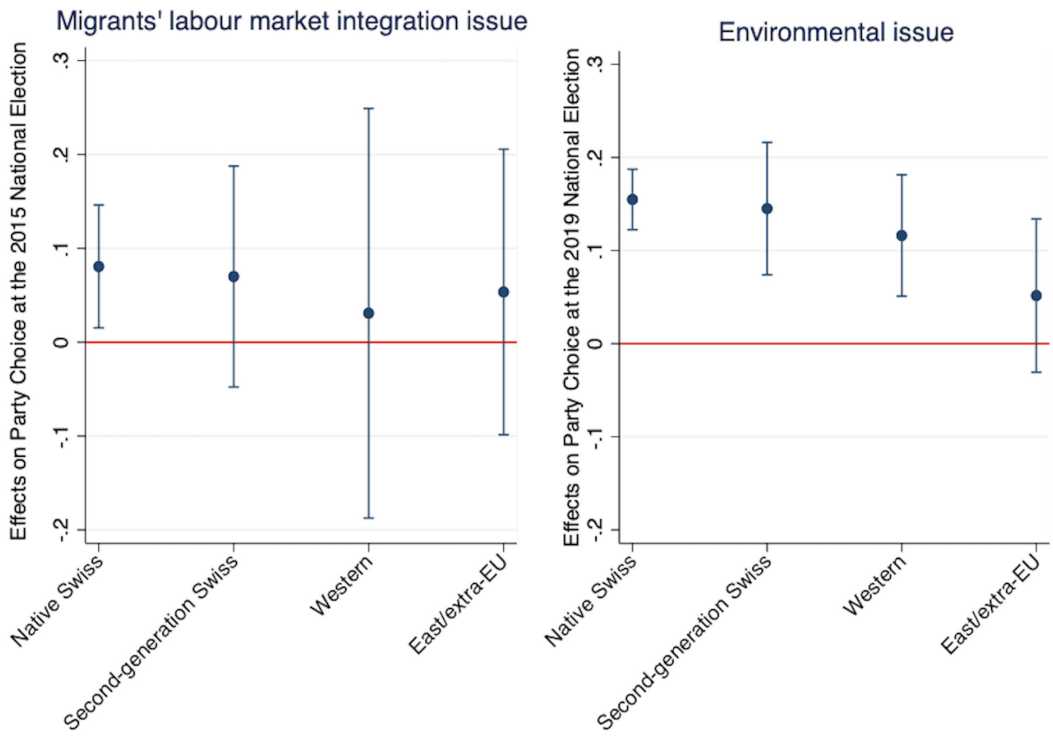


FIGURE 3 Conditional Marginal Effects of Key Policy Issues on Party Choice at the 2015 and the 2019 National Elections: Differences Across Ethnic Backgrounds (95% CI)
Note: All other variables are kept at their observed values in the dataset.

RESULTS

We test our expectations based on two sets of logistic regressions, each pertaining to one of the two elections at hand: 2015 and 2019 (see Table 2). Along with the controls specified above, the models estimate the fixed effects of the relevant policy attitudes for each year (towards the environment in 2019 and towards immigration in 2015) as well as their conditional effect according to the migration background of the respondents, based on statistical interactions (see Model 2 and Model 4). It is important to note that, since each individual in a stacked data matrix is multiplied by the number of relevant parties they must choose from, we considered the resulting dependency among observations by setting each candidate as a separate cluster. Operationally, this implied the incorporation of the robust estimate of variance (i.e., the

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so-called Huber-White Sandwich estimate of variance), in combination with the cluster option in our estimates (van der Brug et al., 2009).

Moving on to the results, two points appear particularly clear in Models 1 and 3. We notice that environmental attitudes among the general electorate, while statistically negligible in 2015, kicked in as a very relevant factor in the minds of voters in 2019. This finding is particularly consistent with recent accounts pointing out how environmental issues came to dominate the electoral campaign, and consequently voting decisions, in the latest elections (Ladner, 2020). This does not mean, however, that immigration-related considerations did not play any role compared to 2015. Indeed, migrants' labour market integration appears to have kept a certain importance in voters' minds over time (as demonstrated by its persistently significant regression coefficient) despite the increasing time distance from the topical referendum against mass immigration and the consequent change of opinion climate in the country (Bernhard, 2020). Interestingly, attitudes toward social spending and taxation of high incomes also had a positive effect on party choice in both elections along with all other controls, including psychological closeness to a party and socio-demographic characteristics. These latter results confirm the continued importance of long-term determinants of voting behaviour in the country (e.g., Goldberg, 2014).

This brings us back to the policy domain and particularly to the central question of this article: did migration background voters behave any differently from natives when it comes to the role that key issues played in their voting decisions in 2015 and 2019? We answered this question by interacting the ethnic background of the respondents with their attitudes toward the environment and migrants' integration in the job market respectively (see Models 2 and 4). The results, which are displayed in graphical form in Figure 3 below for the sake of simplicity, show that native Swiss citizens (i.e., those with both parents born in the country) are constantly driven by key policy issues in their electoral reasoning, while non-Western respondents (i.e., East Europeans, Africans, and Asians) appear generally disconnected from policy considerations. The fact that the main topics of national politics are irrelevant to this voting group's decisions could be a sign that this set of respondents – which is often addressed as the *outgroup* both in scientific research and public debates (e.g., Strijbis & Polavieja, 2018) – has developed a specific political identity and relies on different voting motivations compared to the *ingroup*. Not by chance, higher-status migrant background respondents – such as second-generation Swiss citizens and Western foreigners of all sorts – exhibit a relatively more similar profile to natives. This especially applies to the effect of environment-related considerations in 2019.[9]

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we explored the similarities and differences associated with the voting behaviour of citizens with both migration and non-migration backgrounds in the 2015 and 2019 Swiss national elections. Recent studies have shown that voters with migration backgrounds were in support of anti-immigration policies as much as natives during the 2014 referendum (Strijbis & Polavieja, 2018). Some scholars suggested that native and migration background citizens in Switzerland might be driven, at least to some extent, by the

[9]Another potential explanation, however, is simply that migrant voters become more familiar with the host political environment and its public discourse over time, which means that the effect of their positions on host country's policy issues might emerge only at a certain point during their life. In order to test such possibility, our immigration and environment-related predictors should be interacted with both ethnic background and a variable expressing respondents' length of stay in the country (in years). Unfortunately, such a variable is not available in the SELECTS datasets, which is why we relied on the length of stay in the current canton instead. The results, which are available in the Appendix, do not show a clear role of the length of stay in strengthening policy voting across different ethnic backgrounds.

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same interest-based logic (see also Polavieja, 2016). Nevertheless, such results refer to a very particular event (i.e., the 2014 referendum), which is clearly distinct from the usual national elections. Previous studies on Switzerland have indeed outlined how in *first-order* electoral contests the political preferences of natives and voters with migrant backgrounds tend to diverge (Strijbis, 2014). Importantly, this is in accordance with the so-called "ethnic vote" hypothesis, according to which migrants tend to share several political interests and priorities, which are distinct from those of the natives and can result in migrant-specific party preferences (Barreto, 2007). Nevertheless, inferential studies on this point are still rather rare. Moreover, a thorough assessment of native *vis-à-vis* migrant electoral decision-making in Switzerland over time (and particularly in the period between 2015 and 2019, during which opinion climate experienced a shift toward the prominence of the environmental issue) is still missing.

In this study we aimed at covering such gaps by means of a tailored stacked analysis of SELECTS post-electoral data (2015 & 2019). Our results provide evidence that two topics that were most mobilised during the 2015 and 2019 elections (i.e., migrants' labour market integration and the environment respectively) did count in Swiss citizens' voting decisions. In this respect, our models also show that such key issues did not impact citizens with different ethnic backgrounds to the same extent. Indeed, as already mentioned, while Swiss natives appear steadily driven by key policy issues, the group of respondents closest to Strijbis and Polavieja's (2018) definition of *outgroup* in the Swiss context (i.e., East and extra-Europeans, including all African and Asian nationalities) turns out to be highly detached from the key topics of the two elections at issue in their electoral decisions. On the other hand, migrant background voters of relatively higher status (i.e., second-generation Swiss citizens and Western foreigners, see also Strijbis & Polavieja, 2018) relied on environment considerations almost to the same extent as Swiss natives. The reasons behind such differences should be carefully explored in the future. In the meantime, it appears very reasonable to conclude that the electoral reasoning of voters with migrant backgrounds is not radically different from that of non-migrants. Future research will have to put this finding more into perspective, enlarging the analysis to other determinants of party choice (including additional types of policy issues and longer-term factors such as ideological proximity or feelings of closeness to a party) and combine the observation of the Swiss case with the study of (dis)similar party systems for the sake of a thorough comparative appraisal. In so doing, they will meaningfully contribute to the flourishing debate in the field of transnational political behaviour and participation (e.g., Ciornei & Østergaard-Nielsen, 2020), by offering an original perspective on the decision-making process underlying the electoral choices of citizens with migrant backgrounds.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data is available from FORS (https://forscenter.ch/projects/selects/) for research purposes (Dataset No.726 "Selects 2015 Post-Electoral Study" and Dataset No.1179 "Selects 2019 Post-Election Survey"). Codes for data reshaping and analysis replication (Stata do-files) are available upon request from the corresponding author.

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