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Switzerland – Really Europe's Heart of Darkness?

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Abstract: *Immigration is a prominent and contested global topic of contemporary politics. Several recent popular votes targeting migration such as the minaret initiative, the automatic deportation initiative, and most recently the vote on "mass immigration", evoke however the impression that Switzerland sets particularly harsh standards in migration policy. Based on historical evidence on Swiss migration policy making and comparative analyses on current cantonal integration policy outputs, I argue that - while far from being a new phenomenon - immigrant scepticism has become a more relevant factor of Swiss migration policy making than ever. Yet, immigration and immigrant scepticism do not only challenge direct democratic Switzerland, but all destination countries of immigration.*

Keywords: Migration policy, direct democracy, immigrant scepticism, right-populist parties, Switzerland

Introduction

Immigration is a prominent and contested topic of contemporary politics, not only in Switzerland or Europe, but globally. In many countries, right-populist parties such as the *Front National*, the *United Kingdom Independence Party* (UKIP), or the *Swiss People's Party* (SVP) successfully mobilize nationalist-conservative sentiments and fears against immigration or supranational regulation among the population. The fact that even former settler states such as Australia and the United States prominently discuss issues of asylum seekers and illegal immigration today further highlights the relevance and contested nature of the topic.

The international relevance of the subject notwithstanding, Switzerland seems to set particularly harsh standards in restrictive migration policy making, which comprises fields such as immigration (i.e. admission of immigrants to a country) or integration (i.e. incorporation of resident immigrants) policy (Giugni and Passy 2006: 1, Lavenex 2004: 201). Latest example thereof is the recent narrow adoption of the initiative against "mass immigration" in February 2014 (50,3 per cent yes-votes). Launched by the SVP, but opposed by the whole political establishment, the result of this vote raised many questions, such as what motivated the more than 20 per cent voters who are not SVP adherents to support this initiative? What role did immigrant sceptic attitudes or fear of immigration play here? Are the Swiss people, in spite of the countries' famous humanitarian tradition, particularly xenophobic?

The last question, which resonates in the title to this research note, was already raised in 2007, when a journalist of the British Independent was concerned by the drawing of a white sheep kicking a black sheep out of Switzerland. The contentious

drawing was used by the SVP to campaign for an initiative to deport criminal foreigners, causing the UN's special rapporteur on racism to ask for an official explanation from the Swiss government.[1] Eight years later, not only the automatic deportation initiative, but also the initiative prohibiting the construction of minarets on Swiss soil and the aforementioned initiative against "mass immigration" were adopted by the Swiss people. Thus, questions as the ones mentioned above seem more salient today than ever.

In this research note, I suggest that the result of the vote on "mass immigration" in February 2014 was not that surprising, and that there were clear signs foreshadowing the impressive success of the SVP initiative. I argue that immigration sceptic attitudes among the population were fundamental for this success, which is in line with individual analyses of the voting on "mass immigration" (Sciarini et al. 2014). These attitudes are no new phenomenon. They represent cultural and symbolic resources (Skenderovic 2009), which were, however, optimally mobilized by the right-populist SVP over the last twenty years (Bornschier 2010, Kriesi et al. 2005). As a consequence, we observe today immigrant sceptic voting even in fields such as immigration policy, which was traditionally characterized by the "liberal paradox", meaning the simplifying perspective which identifies pro-immigration tendencies of the market and anti-immigration attitudes among the population as the main drivers of immigration policy (Freeman 1995, Lavenex 2004).

I refer to two types of evidence to substantiate my argument: Historical evidence as well as current empirical evidence arising from cantonal migration policy making, where my focus will be on cantonal integration policy outputs. With this approach, the research note adds a macro-perspective to existing studies, which address the topic of migration policy, and particularly the vote on "mass immigration" of February 2014, from an individual (Sciarini et al. 2014) or micro-structural perspective (Hermann et al. 2014).

The following section sets the vote on "mass immigration" in a historical context. Section three broadens the perspective and considers political actors involved in migration policy making in Switzerland, which are typically neglected in this discussion, such as moderate centrist or left-wing parties. The comparative analyses on cantonal integration policy outputs presented in section four corroborate the relevance of immigrant scepticism in contemporary Swiss migration policy making. The concluding discussion shows that Switzerland is not significantly more or less xenophobic than other European countries, but that direct democracy renders it just more visible.

From "overforeignization" to "mass immigration"

In spite of the SVP's astonishing success with this topic today, national-conservative debates about cultural demarcation are no new phenomenon, but resistance against immigration and the so called "overforeignization" (*Überfremdung*) by means of direct democratic instruments have a long tradition in Switzerland (Mahnig and Piguet 2004, Skenderovic 2009: 49). The most famous example is the first Schwarzenbach-initiative voted in 1970, which aimed at a reduction of the immigrant share from then 17 per cent to 10 per cent. Neither the Schwarzenbach-initiative, nor several follow-up initiatives aiming

[1] Vallely, Paul (2007): "Switzerland, Europe's heart of darkness?", reprinted in the *Belfast Telegraph*, September 7, 2007. Online: http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/world-news/switzerland-europes-heart-of-darkness-28062699.html (last accessed: January 9, 2015).

at a restriction of immigration could gain a popular majority. However, the close result of the Schwarzenbach vote (46 per cent yes-votes) as well as the permanent politicization of the topic in the direct-democratic arena is assumed to have had an indirect restrictive impact on Swiss migration policy in the subsequent years, when the Swiss government defined quotas on annual immigration (Giugni and Passy 2006: 15, Mahnig and Piguet 2004, Skenderovic and D'Amato 2008: 225).

Turning to the end of the 20th century and the surge of the SVP as a right-populist contender on the party political landscape, one must say that the SVP mobilized primarily symbolic as well as cultural resources which were already firmly established in Swiss society (Skenderovic 2009: 47). However, conflicts around cultural openness and closure became much more salient in the early 21st century. According to this perspective, the success of the SVP in Switzerland as well as of other right-populist parties all over Europe is first of all the result of a global social change and a new cultural conflict between losers and winners of globalization (Arzheimer 2009, Kriesi et al. 2006). Like no other party in Switzerland, the SVP successfully mobilized the losers of globalization with its protectionist and national-conservative political agenda (Bornschier 2010). Throughout the surge of the SVP as a national right-populist contender, direct democracy played an important role to promote the SVP's national-conservative agenda (Kriesi et al. 2005, Skenderovic 2009: 147f).

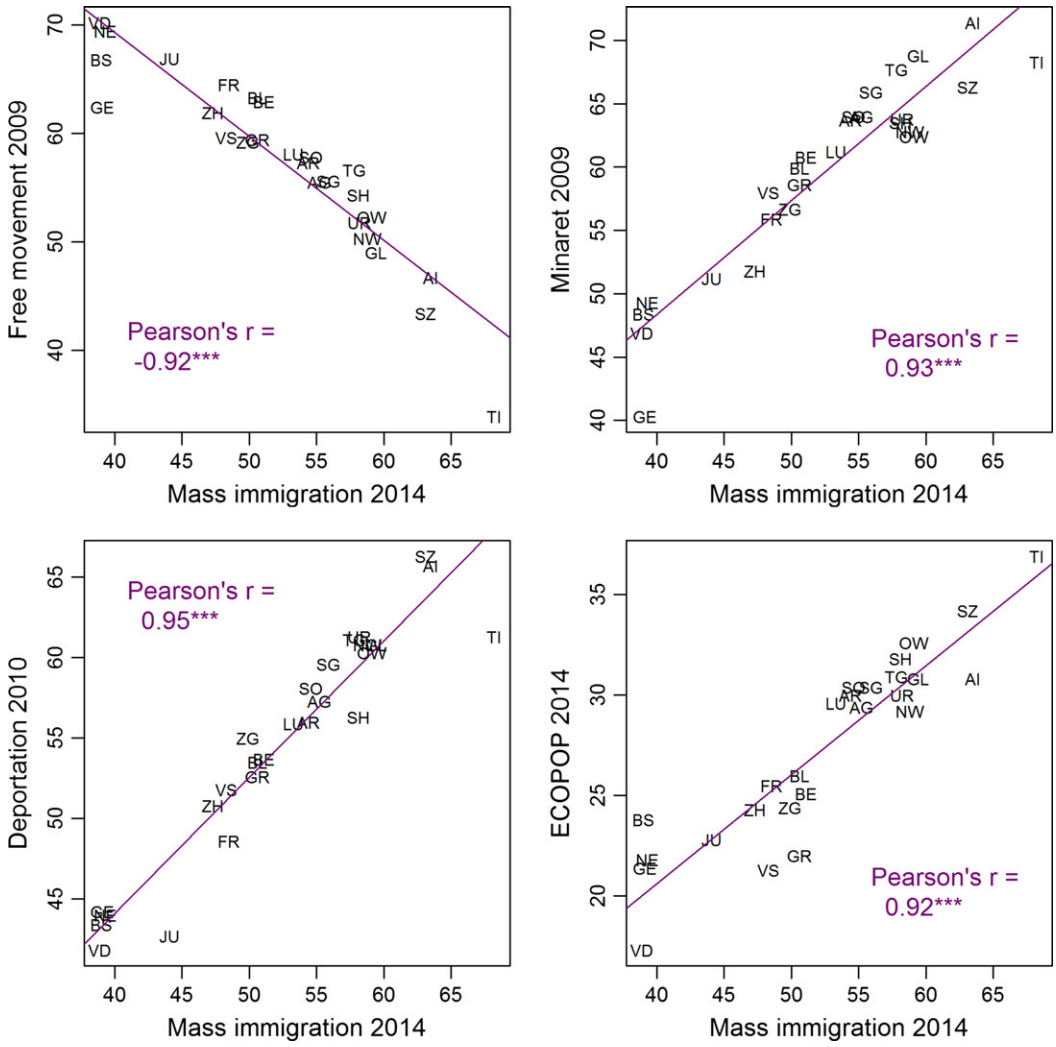
Returning to the present, the scatter plots in Figure 1 show that cantonal results of the vote on "mass immigration" are not only highly correlated, as one would expect, with other votes on topics related to immigration, such as the vote on the free movement of people from 2009, the ECOPOP initiative from 2014, or the deportation initiative from 2010. Bivariate correlations are equally pronounced between the "mass immigration" vote and the minaret vote from 2009, which does not concern immigration but the regulation of religious minority rights (cf. Freitag and Rapp 2013). Thus, even the rather crude aggregate cantonal vote results show a clear pattern, suggesting that the three different SVP votes were mainly driven by one and the same factor, immigrant scepticism.

This interpretation is in line with individual and micro-structural analyses of the vote on "mass immigration". According to Sciarini et al. (2014) and Hermann el al. (2014), individual and communal vote decisions were strongly influenced by opposing attitudes towards immigration. Analyses based on Swiss survey data show that already in 2013 roughly 51 per cent of the interviewed individuals stated that immigration should be reduced (Ackermann and Freitag 2015). Although prominently discussed in the forefront to the vote (Bernhard et al. 2014), other factors such as the economic benefits of immigration, but also the ecological lack of space argument ("*Dichtestress*") played only a subordinate role in this vote (Hermann et al. 2014, Sciarini et al. 2014).

Political actors and their positions towards immigration

Especially in consensual Switzerland with its strong power sharing institutions (Vatter 2008), policy making does not occur in an experimental-like context with clearly identifiable treatment variables, but it is the result of diverging and competing interests. This section draws a more comprehensive picture of the political actors involved in migration policy making in Switzerland, paying particular attention to political mainstream parties, which are often neglected in this debate. To delimit the discussion in a meaningful way, I only focus on the major parties as they are represented in the Federal

Figure 1: Free movement of people and immigrant sceptic votes from 2009 to 2014



*Notes: Illustrated are bivariate correlations, *** (Pearson's r) denotes a significance level of $p < 0.001$. Data: Swiss Federal Statistical Office.*

Council.[2] Besides the SVP, the discussion includes the centrist parties FDP.The Liberals and the Christian Democratic People's Party (CVP) plus the leftist Social Democrats (SP). In addition, I refer to trade associations and unions as important non-partisan actors in Swiss migration policy making. I will also try to match parties' positions regarding the initiative on "mass immigration" with their ideological profiles regarding immigration, which are not as evident as it might seem, given the long neglect of the immigration topic by mainstream parties (Freeman 1995: 885, Mahnig 2001, but see Ruedin 2013). Yet, with

[2] I will not consider the Conservative Democratic Party (BDP) here, since it is not a major party and due to its only recent independence from the SVP.

immigration becoming an increasingly relevant topic on the new cleavage between cultural demarcation and openness, mainstream parties are more and more forced to take a position in this regard.

The Swiss People's Party (SVP)

Since the SVP's transformation into a right-populist catch-all party in the late 1990's, the party represents a decisive immigrant sceptic ideology, and it is the only major party occupying the national-conservative pole on the new cleavage. This immigration critical stance reflects emblematically in the initiative on "mass immigration" launched by the SVP. With this initiative, the SVP played the card of the opposition party, since not only all major parties opposed the initiative, but also the federal council, the parliament, as well as trade associations and unions (Bernhard et al. 2014). Adherents to the SVP almost unanimously supported the initiative (Sciarini et al. 2014).

Centrist parties: FDP.The Liberals and the Christian Democratic People's Party (CVP)

Traditionally, the position of centrist mainstream parties regarding immigration was one of issue avoidance (Freeman 1995, Kriesi et al. 2006, Mahnig 2001). As their closest neighbours, centrist parties may be the first actors to be attracted by the success of right-populist parties (Bale et al. 2010, Kriesi et al. 2006). There are signs of such an approximation of the centrist parties, surprisingly especially the FDP, to the restrictive immigration stance of the SVP (Bühlmann and Gerber forthcoming), suggesting that economic liberalism does not necessarily imply cultural liberalism. The results of the vote on "mass immigration" confirm this indecisive stance of centrist parties regarding immigration with a slight pro-SVP tendency among the FDP: While 66 per cent of CVP supporters rejected the initiative, only 60 per cent of FDP adherents did so (Sciarini et al. 2014).

The Social Democratic Party (SP)

Social democratic parties such as the SP in Switzerland represent the most prominent counterpart of the SVP on the new cleavage. With their culturally liberal and pluralistic ideology, leftist mainstream parties are considered the most important allies of immigrants (Giugni and Passy 2006: 198, Janoski 2010). This interpretation is further supported by the increasing literature on immigrants' political attitudes and behaviour which shows that - although immigrants are far from being a homogeneous group in this respect - immigrant voters are often inclined to favour leftist parties (cf. Dancygier and Saunders 2006, Strijbis 2014). In line with this inclusive orientation, the initiative on "mass immigration" was massively rejected by adherents to the SP (Sciarini et al. 2014).

Trade associations and unions

With their focus on the economic benefits of the free movement of workers, trade associations are the most important non-partisan supporters of the free movement of people (Bernhard et al. 2014: 33, Lavenex and Manatschal 2014: 678). Trade unions are more divided when it comes to immigration, but they have become important advocates

of resident immigrant interests (Giugni and Passy 2006: 15, Ireland 1994: 6). Switzerland's largest trade union *Unia* even characterizes itself as the "biggest immigrant organization" in Switzerland.[3] It comes to no surprise that both trade associations and unions clearly opposed the initiative on "mass immigration" before the vote (Bernhard et al. 2014: 6).

Empirical evidence: Cantonal integration policy outputs

In the remainder of this research note, I combine the theoretical insights from the preceding sections and put them under closer scrutiny. In other words, I test to what extent Swiss migration policy is the dynamic result of competing party political or advocacy group interests, or to what extent these policies reflect established and stable cultural notions of belonging in terms of inclusive or exclusive attitudes towards foreigners. My analytical focus is on one specific aspect of migration policy making in Switzerland, cantonal integration policy outputs. I use the integration policy index developed by Manatschal (2011, 2013) comprising seven components of integration policy: access to nationality, political participation rights, access to cantonal employment, family reunion, anti-discrimination, cultural obligations and religious rights. Positive values on this index represent more liberal or multicultural policies, whereas negative values stand for more restrictive or assimilationist policies.[4] The subnational analytical level allows me to keep the focus on the Swiss case while taking a comparative perspective with the 26 cantons approximating a most similar systems design.

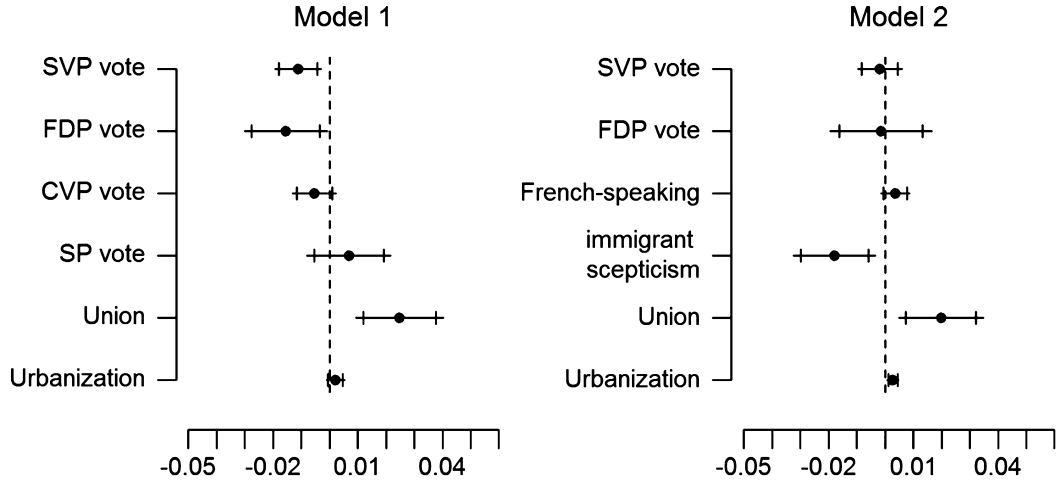
Figure 2 shows the results of the two OLS regression models, with Model 1 representing the party dynamic perspective, whereas Model 2 visualizes the path dependent model (for details on all variables, data and operationalization, see Table A1 in the appendix). A look at Model 1 reveals that party ideology indeed seems to affect cantonal integration policy outputs, and it does so largely in line with theoretical expectations. Cantons with a strong SVP formulate more restrictive integration policies, which corroborates existing research reporting a restrictive impact of right-populist party ideology on migration policy making (Howard 2010, Koopmans et al. 2012). Likewise, a strong cantonal representation of the FDP coincides with more restrictive or exclusive integration policies revealing a liberal conservative orientation of the FDP. As concerns the field of cantonal integration policy, there are signs of an ideological approximation of the FDP to the SVP in matters of migration.

The indecisive stance of the second centrist mainstream party, the CVP, in turn, does also show up when it comes to cantonal integration policy, as the coefficient is negative, but not significant. Surprisingly, the coefficient for the leftist SP fails conventional statistical significance levels, although it points in the expected positive direction. Instead, trade unions evolve as powerful representatives of immigrant interests, as their organizational density coincides with more liberal or inclusive cantonal integration policies. Considering that immigrants live concentrated in urban cantons (Pearson's $r = 0.66$, significant at the 0.1 per cent level), the positive coefficient for urbanization suggests a pragmatic and liberal approach of urban cantons to the challenge of integration (cf. Wichmann et al. 2011), yet it is not significant in this model.

[3] See http://www.unia.ch/de/ueber-uns/interessengruppen/migration/ (last accessed: January 15, 2015).

[4] For a detailed discussion of all components, indicators and sub-indicators of this cantonal integration policy index, see also Manatschal (2013).

Figure 2: Predictors of cantonal integration policy outputs



Notes: Reported values are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients with 90 and 95 per cent confidence intervals. N (Model 1 and Model 2) = 25, with Appenzell Inner Rhodes (AI) as the only missing case in both models, since there are no parties elected in parliament, and hence, no vote-share available for this canton. Variance explained amounts to R^2 *= 0.88 (Model 1) and 0.90 (Model 2). Robust standard errors (hc3) were calculated to deal with heteroscedasticity. Multicollinearity was tested for by the computation of uncentred variance inflation factors (VIF), with factors > 5 considered critical. The results of both Models remain robust to the exclusion of influential cases (Cook's D statistics).*

Model 2 in Figure 2 is motivated by the assumption that the party political story told by Model 1 may be incomplete. Two indicators capture the idea that cantonal integration policies reflect established cantonal understandings of integration (Brubaker 1992, Favell 2001, Ireland 1994), and are thus path dependent: Immigrant scepticism as an indicator for the cantonal social consensus on integration (Favell 2001: 28) and the cultural-linguistic heritage of a canton. Influenced by the culture of adjacent countries through the common language, French-speaking cantons should exhibit more liberal integration policies, inspired by France's jus soli citizenship conception. German-speaking cantons (plus Italian-speaking Ticino), in turn, are expected to have more restrictive integration policies, which correspond more closely to Germany's (and Italy's) restrictive jus sanguinis citizenship tradition (Cattacin and Kaya 2005, Zincone and Basili 2010).

As Model 2 shows, especially immigrant scepticism evolves as a significant negative predictor of cantonal integration policy. The path dependent factor language region points into the expected positive direction, yet it slightly fails the 10 per cent significance level. Conversely, the dominant party political factors from Model 1, i.e. the vote shares of SVP and FDP, both lose their explanatory power in this comprehensive model. As further tests showed, SP and CVP vote shares remain insignificant in this path-dependent specification (not reported here). These findings suggest that established cultural notions of inclusion or exclusion are a stronger predictor of restrictive integration policy making than the more volatile electoral strength of specific parties. The coefficient for urbanization is now also significant and positive.

In spite of these clear empirical results, the analytical models presented here suffer from certain limitations. The number of 25 cases (all cantons with the exception of Appenzell Inner Rhodes, cf. note to Figure 2) is relatively small, and it implies that the inclusion of explanatory factors in the analytical models is necessarily selective. Yet, all results are highly robust to the exclusion of influential observations, and using classical or robust standard errors makes no difference. Alternative models (not reported here) further confirm the robustness of the findings, showing, for instance, that cantonal integration policy making is not related to governmental party representation, corroborating the restricted influence of parties in consensual governments (Schmidt 2002). What is more, integration policy outputs are not related to bare immigrant shares. Yet, as suggested above, the presence of immigrants may have an indirect liberalizing effect on integration policy through urbanization.

Another challenge regards multicollinearity. Especially language region relates to several central factors under consideration, such as the SVP's vote share (Pearsons'r = -0.59, significant at the 0.1 per cent level), or union density (Pearsons'r = 0.52, significant at the 0.1 per cent level). While the use of Variance Inflated Factors (cf. note to Figure 2) helps to deal with this challenge analytically, it does not solve it. However, additional analyses isolating the cultural-linguistic effect, which base on German-speaking cantons plus Ticino only, confirm the robustness of the empirical findings presented in this research note, most importantly the negative relationship between immigrant sceptic attitudes and cantonal integration policy outputs.

Conclusion

Throughout this research note, I have developed the argument that the outcome of the vote on "mass immigration" was not so unexpected, but rather reflected the increasing importance and contested nature of topics like immigration and immigrants in contemporary destination countries of immigration. Far from being a new phenomenon, fears of immigration and its consequences are pronounced again very prominently today, not only in Switzerland, but internationally. Right-populist parties exploit these fears most successfully, and they dominate the political migration discourse with their decisive anti-immigrant stance. Yet, the result on the vote against "mass immigration" as well as the empirical evidence on cantonal integration policy making presented in this research note suggest that immigrant scepticism plays a more decisive role in Swiss migration policy making than mere right-populist party adherence.

The question whether popular initiatives opposing immigration really translate into more restrictive immigration policies requires rigorous scientific scrutiny, and future votes on the topic need to show whether we can speak of a trend. The result of the "mass immigration" initiative however suggests that the liberal paradox lost its relevance and that immigrant sceptic attitudes evolve as the most important challenge of immigration policy. This interpretation is in line with individual and communal analyses on the vote against "mass immigration" (Hermann et al. 2014: 6, Sciarini et al. 2014). In this sense, immigration policy would resemble more and more typical fields of migration policy like integration policy, which reflects more strongly cultural understandings of belonging and, thus, of including or excluding attitudes towards immigrants (Brubaker 1992, Favell 2001, Ireland 1994).

So far so good, but how should we explain the clear rejection (only 25,9 per cent yes-votes) of the similar but more far-reaching proposal against immigration by the

association for the environment and the population (ECOPOP) in November 2014? A straightforward answer is that the demands of ECOPOP were all too similar to the already accepted vote on "mass immigration" only nine months earlier, but at the same time too extreme, as even the SVP opposed the initiative. Yet, like the very narrow result of the initiative on "mass immigration" itself, this clear counter-reaction in the ECOPOP vote reflects first of all the polarized and divisive nature of the topic among Swiss voters.

This brings me back to the initial title question: Are Swiss citizens more xenophobic than citizens of other countries? Most probably not. Although Switzerland exhibits one of the highest levels of resident immigrants and immigrant influx in international comparisons, immigrant scepticism in Switzerland is, if at all, below European average (Meuleman et al. 2009, Pehrson et al. 2009). What sets Switzerland apart from other European societies is that, thanks to direct democracy and popular votes on these topics, immigrant scepticism is more overtly visible. Whether consensual, majoritarian, direct democratic or representative, it seems like the litmus test of contemporary democracies consists in recognizing the fact that they are countries of immigration, while at the same time acknowledging and taking seriously the concerns and fears of the native population. This is certainly no easy task. Nevertheless, the movement against the anti-Islamist movement Pegida[5] in Germany and the immediate public condemnation of the Islamist terrorist attacks against the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo by French Muslims show that democracy and freedom of expression are favourable strategies to address this challenge.

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[5] Literally „Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes", see also *Introduction* to this symposium.

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Appendix

Table A1: Variables, operationalization and data

Variable	Descriptives	Operationalization / Source
Dependent variable		
Cantonal integration policy index	Mean: 0.00 SD: 0.35 Min.: -0.54 Max.: 0.76	Standardized additive index covering the years 2005 to 2008 including the policy components access to nationality, political participation rights, access to cantonal employment, family reunion, anti-discrimination, cultural obligations and religious rights. *Source*: Manatschal (2013).
Independent variable		
French-speaking	Mean: 18.51 SD: 32.82 Min.: 0.20 Max.: 90.00	Percentage of cantonal French speaking population 2001. *Source*: Federal Statistical Office (BFS).
Immigrant sceptic attitudes	Mean: 37.86 SD: 6.75 Min.: 25.13 Max.: 51.35	Share (per cent) of opposing respondents to the question: "are you in favour of equal opportunities for Swiss citizens and non-nationals"? Cantonal mean for the years '95, '99, '03 and '07. *Source*: SELECTS.
SVP vote share	Mean: 19.46 SD: 8.46 Min.: 0.00 Max.: 41.00	Electoral strength of the Swiss People's Party (SVP) 2003, in per cent. *Source*: Federal Statistical Office (BFS).
FDP vote share	Mean: 23.26 SD: 6.22 Min.: 11.20 Max.: 35.20	Electoral strength of the Liberal Democratic Party (FDP.The Liberals) 2003, in per cent. *Source*: Federal Statistical Office (BFS).
CVP vote share	Mean: 22.92 SD: 15.92 Min.: 0.00 Max.: 54.10	Electoral strength of the Christian Democratic Party (CVP) 2003, in per cent. *Source*: Federal Statistical Office (BFS).
SP vote share	Mean: 19.46 SD: 8.46 Min.: 0.00 Max.: 41.00	Electoral strength of the Social Democratic Party (SP) 2003, in per cent. *Source*: Federal Statistical Office (BFS).

Table A1: Continued

Variable	Descriptives	Operationalization / Source
Union density	Mean: 10.74 SD: 7.69 Min.: 1.42 Max.: 33.00	Cantonal share of union members of the total working population, 2003. *Sources*: SGB (2004), BADAC, own calculations.
Urbanization	Mean: 54.63 SD: 30.78 Min.: 0.00 Max.: 100.00	Cantonal degree of urbanization (in per cent), 2001. *Source*: BADAC.

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