

Individual Labor Migration Preferences: Culture, Context or Competition?¹

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16th of July 2021

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Abstract:

Existing literature theorizes that immigration has an impact on the wages and employment of native workers. At the same time, individual attitudes towards migration are also affected by other material, cultural or social concerns. Empirically, however, it is often hard to disentangle these different explanations. By taking advantage of the fact that different types of labor migration, namely either taking residence and working in a country vs. commuting over the border, equally affect labor market competition for natives, but have very different cultural and social implications, we strive to identify the effect of labor migration on attitudes towards migration. We argue that if economic threat was most important to natives' opinion formation, we should not see any differences in respondents' evaluation of our two groups of labor migrants, cross-border commuters vs. resident foreigners. Yet we would expect to see differentiated reactions if respondents also took additional cultural, material and social aspects into account. To empirically explore whether there is a difference in natives' evaluations of the two different types of labor migration, we embedded two experiments within a representative survey of the Swiss population, one priming and one conjoint experiment. By varying, among other things, whether immigrants live in Switzerland or merely commute for work and return to their home country we are able to show that citizens indeed react to the labor market threat posed by cross-border commuters. This effect is especially pronounced for natives most exposed to cross-border commuters.

¹ The authors gratefully acknowledge funding from the Research Commission at the University of Lucerne project Nr. 20-012-LS "Free Movement in the Shadow of the Referendum: The Impact of Culture, Context and Competition on People's". We thank Greta Kurpicz for her research assistance.

1 Introduction

Immigration has become a highly politicized issue over the last decades in most industrialized countries. In theory, economic benefits from the free flow of labor across countries are manifold, reaching from a higher efficiency in production to balancing out shortages or oversupplies within national labor markets. However, opening up domestic labor markets to foreigners is much more contested politically than opening up markets for goods and services from abroad (Goodman & Schimmelfennig, 2020). The issue of labor migration is consistently ranked among the top 10 most important problems facing different nations within the EU (Eurobarometer). Not surprisingly, immigration has become a politicized issue and has increasingly been picked up by parties over the past 20 years (Dancygier & Margalit, 2020). Especially right-wing and populist parties have gained much ground in national election by competing on anti-immigration platforms (Bolet, 2020).

Against this backdrop, research into the reasons of popular discontent especially with the free movement of people and a better understanding of individual opposition to or support of immigration is clearly needed. An extant literature has already sought to explain variation in individuals' opposition to immigration in general (e.g. Goldstein and Peters (2014); Hainmueller and Hiscox (2010); Hainmueller and Hopkins (2014); Malhotra, Margalit, and Mo (2013); Mayda (2006); Scheve and Slaughter (2001); Valentino et al. (2019)). This literature has mostly focused on economic and cultural sources as the two main forms of natives' opposition towards immigration. Depending on immigrant characteristics, prevalence or context, results remain inconclusive as to whether one or the other prevails.

In our contribution, we set out to investigate in more detail the conditions under which the labor market competition hypothesis can act as a useful explanation for individual attitudes towards labor migrants or whether other material, cultural or social explanations prevail. A fundamental problem why we still know little about whether the economic threat of migrants competing for jobs with natives (labor market competition) or the cultural threat migrants might be to the host society is a more useful predictor of people's attitudes towards labor migrants is that it is hard to disentangle the cultural from the economic effects of migrants. Our paper strives to better understand the implications of different types of labor migration, in particular cross-border commuters versus resident foreigners, on people's attitudes towards labor immigration. By taking advantage of the fact that different types of labor migration, namely either taking residence and working in a country vs. commuting over the border, equally affect labor market competition for natives, but have very different cultural and social implications, we strive to identify the effect of labor migration on attitudes.

We argue that if economic threat was most important to natives' opinion formation, we should not see differences in respondents' evaluation of our two groups of labor migrants, cross-border commuters vs. resident foreigners. Yet we expect that respondents also take into account additional cultural, material and social aspects when evaluating labor migration. In particular, we propose two countervailing predictions. On the one hand, if cultural threats are an important factor for native attitude formation vis-à-vis labor migrants, we argue that the evaluation of cross-border commuters should be more favorable as they contribute economically and fiscally in the host country, but do not pose a threat to culture or customs as they do not live and interact with natives of the host country. On the other hand, we submit that if social aspects of deservingness and fairness conceptions are critical in evaluating labor migration, natives may see cross-border commuters as free-riding and not contributing to the host society.

Moreover, as labor migrants of both types are not randomly assigned, we take the varying exposure to migration into account. We submit that local exposure to immigration can have different effects on the evaluation of immigration. The availability of cross-border commuters increases labor supply in border regions and thus the potential economic threat for natives. Cultural threat may vary with local exposure, by making the issue more salient for the native population.

To explore whether there is a difference in natives' evaluations of two different types of labor migration, we embedded two experiments within a representative survey of the Swiss population in September 2020. The survey was fielded just before a national referendum on the free movement of persons took place. Respondents in our first experiment either read about the actual exposure to migrants or the actual exposure to cross-border commuters at the communal, sectoral or the federal level. From our first experiment, we can distill three main findings:

First, our results show that – counter to our expectations – cross-border commuters are perceived more negatively than resident foreigners. A second notable finding from our research is that – depending on the type of migration - local exposure affects attitudes differently. On the one hand, for respondents living in close vicinity to the border, i.e. being more exposed to one type of labor migration (cross-border commuters) the negative effect of reading about cross-border migration further increases. We interpret this finding to show that economic threat, in contrast to our theoretical expectation, seems to be after all more salient than for resident foreigners. On the other hand, exposure to resident foreigners enhances their evaluation by natives providing support for the contact hypothesis from migration research (Allport 1954).

Third, and already exploring the mechanisms behind the perceived unpopularity of cross-border commuters, we find that providing respondents with more detailed information on rights and duties of cross-border commuters helps to make natives less negative about this type of labor migration. Because although in practice cross-border commuters pay taxes and contribute to economic output in the host country, a large part of commuters' unpopularity may arise due to the fact that citizens in the host country (wrongly) perceive cross-border commuters to free-ride on the host country by not paying taxes and taking out unemployment benefits.

In our second experiment, we then look more closely at the mechanisms driving the acceptance of labor migrants in Switzerland by scrutinizing the impact that different characteristics of foreign workers have on their public acceptance. As we know from the literature, acceptance of migration is rarely a one-dimensional phenomenon but rather depends on various different characteristics of potential migrants, such as gender, age, their jobs and level of education. We adopt this idea of multidimensionality to our area of interest and therefore ask respondents to compare persons with varying characteristics (origin, gender, age, high-skilled vs. low-skilled, living vs. commuting to Switzerland, etc.) within a conjoint experiment. Results corroborate our initial findings that people actually seem to prefer labor migrants to settle and contribute to society.

Our paper contributes to the current literature in important ways. First, we turn to an understudied phenomenon within the political science literature on international migration, that is cross-border commuters. Our paper thus provides the first test to differentiate between two different implications from the free movement of people - cross-border commuters and resident foreigners. Second, this differentiation allows us to identify whether the labor market competition hypothesis sufficiently explains individuals' attitudes towards migration. We identify the effect of labor migration on attitudes by taking advantage of the fact that the different types of migration (cross-border commuters and resident foreigners) both affect labor market competition but should have very different effects in cultural and social regards. Third, by taking local exposure to labor migration into account, we can scrutinize whether natives' attitudes towards different types of labor migration change with the saliency of the issue for the local community.

The following paragraphs will first briefly introduce the Swiss case, followed by our theoretical expectations. We will then give a brief overview of our treatments and the empirical strategy, before we present our results.

2 Labor migration into Switzerland

In our paper, we concentrate on immigration to Switzerland as a rather small landlocked country within Europe for two main reasons. First, it shares long stretches of borders with Germany, France, Italy, Liechtenstein and Austria. Switzerland is highly integrated into the EU single market through its various bilateral agreements with the EU and has also implemented the free movement of people from EU/EFTA states from 2002 onwards. As a consequence, Switzerland both attracts a high number of cross-border commuters as well as resident foreigners and therefore provides an ideal case. Nevertheless, along many national borders an increasing number of people work and commute across borders *without* taking residence. Such cross-border commuters or frontier workers have been a common phenomenon for some time, not only within the EU or EEA regions but also on the U.S. Canadian and especially U.S.- Mexican borders and thus insights from the swiss context may prove valuable for other regions.

Second, Switzerland as a direct democracy frequently holds referendums on issues such as immigration, as well as on its international relations making the issue of migration and cross-border commuting highly salient. Ever since Switzerland opened up towards the world and especially to the EU, various referendums on immigration and the free movement of persons have been voted on in the past 20 years. Most famously the 2014 popular initiative “against mass migration”, that strained relations between the EU and Switzerland, but also led to a lot of domestic struggles and eventually to the recent SVP popular initiative “Für eine massvolle Zuwanderung” (limitation initiative) that was rejected at the ballots with a clear margin of 62% against 38% just months ago in September 2020.

To sum up, Switzerland shows both high levels of resident foreigners and cross-country commuters as well as a politicized environment where citizens have a say. Swiss citizens should be familiar with consequences of the free movement of people as well as with discussions about ending the free movement of people. Our paper strives to better understand the implications of different types of labor migration, in particular cross-border commuters versus resident foreigners, on people’s attitudes towards immigration.

So, what does labor migration arising from the free movement of persons imply for Switzerland? In our contribution, we differentiate between two types of labor migration into Switzerland. First, EU/EFTA **cross-border commuters (G)** are nationals of EU/EFTA member states who reside in an EU/EFTA member state and work in Switzerland (either in an employed or self-employed capacity). Second, **resident foreign nationals (B)** are EU / EFTA foreign nationals who reside

in Switzerland for a longer period of time for a certain purpose, with or without gainful employment. **Settled foreign nationals (C)** are foreign nationals who have been granted a settlement permit after five or ten years of residence in Switzerland. Hence, we can identify two groups, G and B/C, for our study that differ on the aspect of residency. The cross-border commuters (G), who are assumed to only have an economic impact on Swiss residents, in contrast to the resident and settled nationals (B/C), who supposedly also leave a cultural mark, because they live and interact with Swiss citizens on a daily basis. Appendix figure A.1 and A.2 show the distribution of permits across cantons and give an indication about labor migrants country of origin. Recent research in economics on the economic impacts of cross-border commuters in Switzerland (Beerli et al 2021: 978) have found that while labor market liberalization of cross-border workers led to a net increase of 10 percentage points of foreign labor, they also find a robust and significant effect of wage increases especially for highly skilled native workers.

3 Attitudes on immigration

Immigration has been a prominent and at times even dominating issue within newsmedia as well as academic discourses for the past years. An extant literature has sought to explain variation in individuals' opposition to immigration (e.g. Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010, Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014, Goldstein and Peters 2014; Malhotra et al 2013; Mayda 2006; Valentino et al. 2017). This literature has mostly focused on two main forms of natives' threats when evaluating immigration: economic and cultural sources.

An understanding whether opposition or support for immigration emanates out of economic or cultural concern is clearly helpful for policy-makers trying to uphold the achievement that people can move freely across borders. The apparent problem within studies on this cultural vs. economic threat literature is that it is hard to disentangle the economic threat immigration poses to a certain individual from the cultural impact of immigration. In this paper, we contribute to the literature with an attempt to separate the economic and the cultural impact labor migrants have by making use of a specific particularity of Switzerland as a rather small landlocked country within Europe that attracts an unusually high number of cross-border commuters. In contrast to regular immigrants, these individuals only come to work in Switzerland but otherwise do not partake in everyday life within communities there. Hence although economically they pose the same threat as labor migrants that reside in Switzerland, culturally and socially they should not. This gives us a

unique opportunity to test whether the labor market competition hypothesis prevails or whether cultural or social factors need to be figured in more closely.

With respect to the perceptions of the local population, recent studies have aimed at better understanding attitudes towards immigration and to identify whether these attitudes are primarily driven by, among others, economic competition or identity issues (e.g., Goldstein and Peters 2014; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014; Helbling and Traunmüller 2016; Malhotra et al. 2013; Mayda 2006).²

Competition in the labor market

With respect to *economic sources*, existing literature theorizes that immigration -through its impact on the labor supply- influences wages and employment prospects of native workers. Economic threats within a standard factor-proportion framework usually emanate from natives' relative position in the labor market, meaning that high skilled immigrants usually compete with high skilled native workers and low skilled immigrants with low skilled native workers (Scheve and Slaughter 2001, Kriesi and Helbling 2014). This type of labor market competition (LMC) should then lead to a rejection of equally skilled immigrants by natives because they threaten their economic benefits in the labor market. There is some empirical evidence for this argument (Mayda 2006; Scheve and Slaughter 2001). In line with studies on other aspects of globalization (e.g. trade as the free movement of goods), for example, scholars have found sectoral belonging to be an important factor for preference formation on the movement of people across borders (Dancygier & Donnelly 2013; Goldstein & Peters 2014).

In line with this literature, our point of departure is the labor market competition hypothesis. It states that individuals first and foremost evaluate immigration in reference to their own employment situation. With respect to cross-border commuters in the Swiss case, we can test the true effect of labor market competition net of any other potentially confounding aspects such as competition for housing or social security or cultural aspects etc. Thus, given the labor market threat hypothesis were to hold, *we would expect no difference between the evaluation of cross-border commuters (commuters) and resident or settled foreign nationals (resident foreigners)*. Both groups of externals should strain the Swiss labor market and potentially raise fears with respect to employment and wages beyond natives in the same way.

² See Hainmueller and Hopkins (2014) for a detailed literature review.

Culture: Threat to identity and customs

Cultural concerns are recognized as a second potential threat according to which natives form their attitudes on immigration. Cultural threat theories stress that *ethno-cultural factors* (religion, ethnicity, language) may be paramount on how the local residents perceive migrants (Diehl, Hinz, & Auspurg, 2018; Hainmueller & Hangartner, 2013). In particular, some natives might perceive immigrants as a threat to their usual way of life, their customs and tradition. For example, Hainmueller and Hopkins (2014) show that such identity or cultural concerns are potentially more important than economic ones in explaining opposition to immigration.

In comparing the two incoming types of foreigners in Switzerland (“commuters” and “resident foreigners”) we may find few arguments whether the in-group may prefer one over the other based on cultural concerns. While cross-border commuters overwhelmingly enter Switzerland from the culturally relatively similar bordering areas in Germany, Austria, Italy and France, resident foreigners are coming from different parts of EU/EFTA states that are arguably more distant culturally (see Appendix figure A.2). In the everyday lives of Swiss native, other than congesting motorways and public transportation, cross-border commuters only come to Switzerland to work and otherwise leave the country and its citizens alone. Cross-border commuters are less present in the day-to-day activities of natives outside of the work context. In essence, we argue that cross-border commuters do not pose a plausible cultural threat to the identity and the customs of the local population. Thus, if the cultural threat hypothesis was to hold, *we assume that natives prefer commuters over foreigners.*

Context: Exposure

Does local exposure to labor migration affect attitudes differently depending on the type of migration? As the phenomenon we are interested in pertains to attitudes towards different types of labor migration, we would first generally assume that being more exposed to actual labor migration makes it more salient and thus might affect natives’ attitudes. The importance of economic context for attitudes on migration (Dancygier & Donnelly 2013) and – as a potential consequence – radical right voting (Bolet 2020) is well-known. For example, Malhotra et al. (2013) stress that in explaining individual attitudes towards immigration and disentangling economic from cultural threats, researchers need to pay attention to those circumstances where the actual threat is present. In our context, we thus expect that higher levels of local exposure leads to labor migration being viewed more critically. With respect to labor market competition, we have assumed above

that more labor supply might affect wages and employment prospects negatively. Higher levels of exposure may thus lead to intensified competition and more negative attitudes towards labor migrants. With respect to the effect of exposure on a potential cultural threat, the literature sustains a debate whether exposure leads to more tolerance or more threat perceptions beyond natives (Maxwell 2019). Exposure may promote conflict over scarce resources (Dancygier 2010) and thus lead to more negative attitudes in local contexts that are more exposed. Or it might increase tolerance due to more extensive contact between natives and foreigners (Allport 1954).

In sum, we expect that exposure intensifies the explanations mentioned above and we should thus assume that *increases in exposure leads to both groups of labor migrants being viewed more critically*.

Assessing attitudes towards commuters and residents – a survey-experimental approach

To understand how attitudes towards different types of labor market competition vary in the Swiss context, we fielded a survey containing two experiments. Since we want to find out whether people view cross-border commuters, i.e., worker who come to Switzerland to work but commute back to their home country, differently than resident foreigners, who work and settle in Switzerland, we view an experimental design that randomly varies whether respondents focus on resident foreigners versus commuters as most appropriate. For one, existing literature shows that simply asking respondents about their attitudes towards immigrants is often raked with social desirability (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014). In addition, an experimental set-up further allows us to control the additional information environment in which our respondents make their assessment on resident foreigners versus commuters.

Specifically, we implemented a priming experiment in which respondents were either provided with information about foreign residents or cross-border commuters in Switzerland. In a second step, we asked all respondents to answer a conjoint experiment consisting of six different attributes associated with foreign workers to better understand how the dimension of a foreign worker living in Switzerland differs from the dimension of commuting (from different countries) while controlling for other important attributes of foreign workers, such as gender, age or sector of employment. The survey was fielded to a sample of 4'000 respondents in Switzerland via IPSOS in September 2020. The sample is representative of the Swiss voting-age population in terms of

age, gender, and region³. The respondents from our survey came from all 26 cantons in Switzerland with a slight over-sampling of rural areas as can be observed in Figure 1a and b.

Figure 1a: Map of Switzerland with respondents' locations (n=4000)

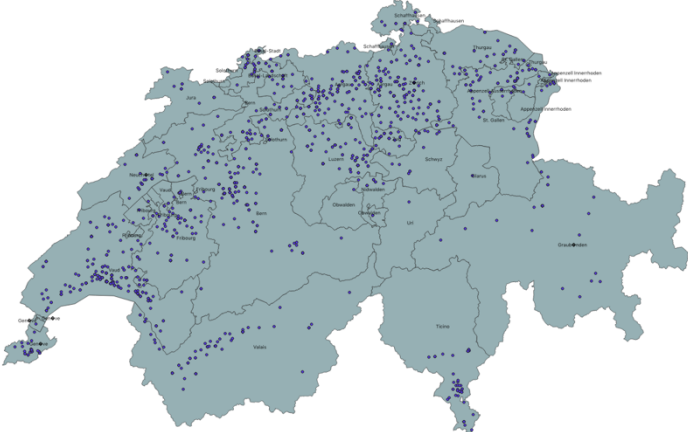
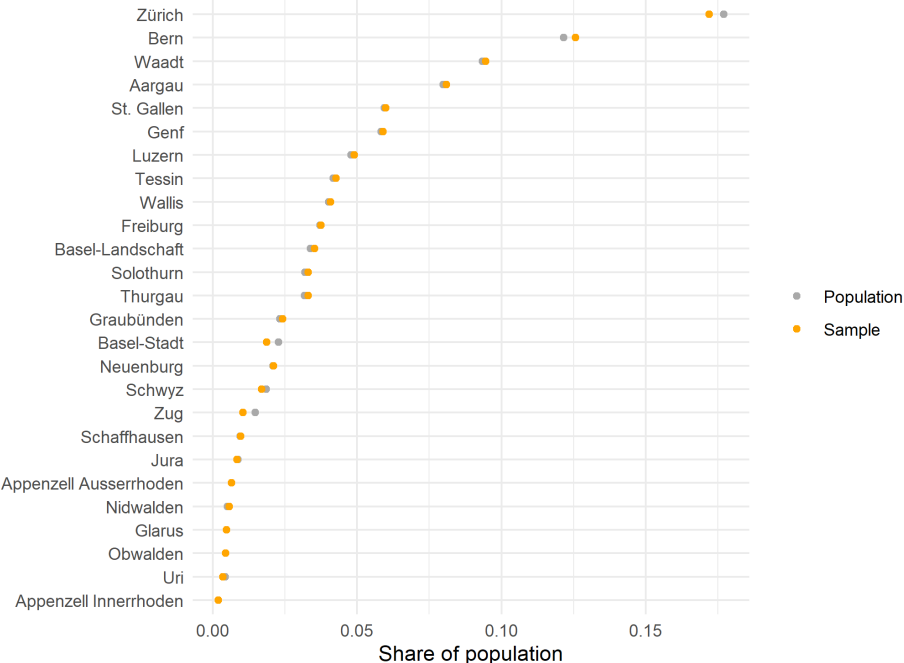


Figure 1b: Share of cantonal respondents versus population



³ We over-sampled respondents from rural areas.

Priming experiment

Our first survey experiment is designed to allow us to test the main argument of this paper on the differential effects of resident foreigners and commuters on individual support and evaluation of immigration. Thus, each of the experimental treatment conditions primes respondents to think about either resident foreigners or commuters with one group primed to think about both. However, to be able to control for other important differences in the perceptions of resident foreigners and commuters, such as their sector of employment or the amount of geographic exposure, we split the major treatment groups consisting of resident foreigners versus commuters into four more fine-grained treatments.

Figure 2 display the set-up of our priming experiment. We included two control groups (T1a and T1b) that simply ask respondents about their opinion concerning resident foreigners and cross-border commuters. These two control groups differ only in the order of questions, i.e. whether we respectively asked for their assessment of foreigners or commuters first, which allows us to control for any potential question order effects.

Second, we have four treatment groups receiving information on resident foreigners: Group T2 received information on how the actual number of resident foreigners who lived in Switzerland has changed from 2010 to 2019. Groups T3 and T4 received information on the number of resident foreigners but with respect to specific sectors. In combination with information on the skill-level of our respondents, these treatment groups allow us to test the mechanism of labor market competition in more detail. To this end, we chose an example of a sector employing mainly high-skilled individuals, i.e. the science sector, and a sector employing mainly low-skilled individuals, i.e. the construction sector⁴. The rationale behind this selection is to test whether respondents working in high (low) skilled sectors react differently to resident foreigners/commuters working in high (low) skilled sectors, as research on the labor competition hypothesis would suggest (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014). Finally, T5 provided individualized information on how the number of resident foreigners who lived in the respective commune of the respondent (they had to provide their place of residence in the demographics) has developed from 2010 to 2019. To this end, we collected data for all Swiss communes as to how many foreigners lived there and how many commuters worked there from 2010 to 2019. With this treatment group we strive to better understand how actual exposure to resident foreigners (or commuters for T10) affect Swiss

⁴ High-skilled (scientific and technical services, e.g., engineers, architects, tax counselors) & low-skilled (construction workers).

residents' perception of the respective group and whether exposure amplifies economic or cultural threats.

Treatment groups T6, T8, T9 and T10 provide the exact same information but focusing on commuters instead of resident foreigners.

In addition to these main treatment groups, we have two further information groups. To test our theoretical expectation that Swiss residents might perceive cross-border commuters as contributing too little to Swiss society, we provided group T7 with the same information as group T6, i.e. the number of commuters, but they also received further explanations concerning the fact that commuters actually pay (some) taxes in Switzerland and that in case of unemployment, it is their host country that needs to pay unemployment benefits. Finally, treatment group T11 informed respondents on how *both* the number of cross-border commuters and resident foreigners have changed from 2010 to 2019 allowing us to assess which of the two priming information potentially prevails.

Figure 2: Treatment Groups

Control group	<i>Randomization into Treatment and Control groups</i>	T1a: Questions on commuters first, then on foreigners
		T1b: Questions on foreigners first, then on commuters
Resident Foreigners		Foreigner swiss-wide (T2)
		Foreigner high-skill sector (T3)
		Foreigner low-skill sector (T4)
		Foreigner community level (T5)
Cross-border Commuters		Commuter swiss-wide (T6)
		Commuter swiss-wide Plus (T7)
		Commuter high-skill sector (T8)
		Commuter low-skill sector (T9)
		Commuter community level (T10)
Commuter & Foreigners	Commuter & Foreigner swiss-wide (T11)	

In the following box, we provide examples of our treatments. A comprehensive list of our treatments can be found in the Appendix.

Box 1. Examples for treatments:

1) Treatment commuter swiss-wide T3:

«Beispielhaft hat sich schweizweit die Anzahl der **ausländischen Grenzgänger** von 231'000 im Jahr 2010 auf 323'000 im Jahr 2019 verändert.»

→ Across Switzerland, the number of **foreign cross-border workers** has changed from 231'000 in 2010 to 323'000 in 2019.

2) Treatment foreigner swiss-wide T2:

«Beispielhaft hat sich schweizweit die Anzahl der **ausländischen Aufenthalter** (ausländische Zuwanderer mit B oder C Bewilligung) von 1'120'000 im Jahr 2010 auf 1'426'000 im Jahr 2019 verändert.»

→ Across Switzerland, the number of **foreigners with B and C permit** has changed from 1'120'000 in 2010 to 1'426'000 in 2019».

After each treatment we ask the following outcome measures

- 1) Do you think that the current number of cross-border commuters/resident foreigners is too low or too high?
 - a. 5-point answering scale: too low; somewhat low; just right; somewhat high; too high
- 2) Generally speaking, do you evaluate cross-border commuters/foreigners from the EU/EFTA area as positive or negative for *Switzerland, yourself, your community*?
 - a. 5-point answering scale: very positive; positive; neither positive nor negative; negative; very negative

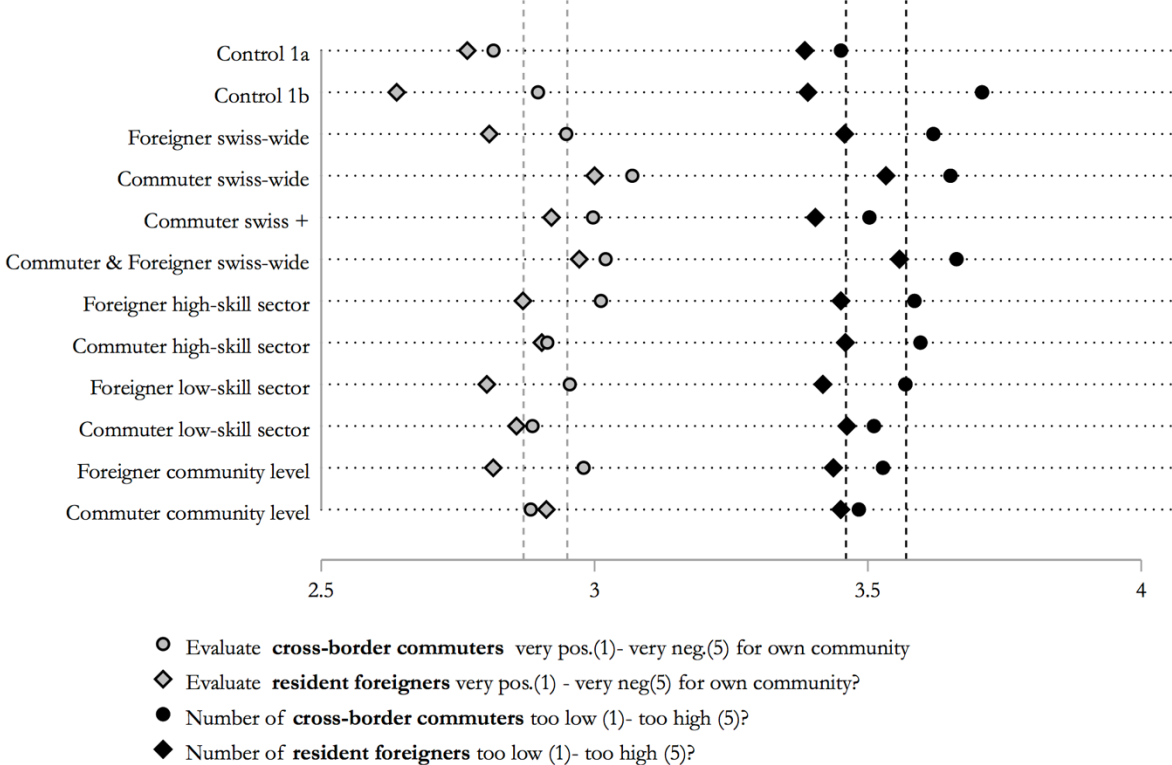
While the first dependent variable gets at how respondents perceive the scope of resident foreigners/commutes and whether respondents simply perceive it as too much or not, our second dependent variable rather asks for a more general evaluation of the impact of the different types of labor market competition on Switzerland, respondents' community and for them personally.

Results priming experiment: Attitudes towards commuters versus foreigners

Do individuals perceive cross-border commuters and settled migrants differently? Beginning with a descriptive analysis, Figure 3 shows the means by experimental groups for two of our dependent variables: whether the current number of cross-border commuters/resident foreigners is perceived

as too high or too low and whether respondents perceive cross-border commuters/resident foreigners as positive or negative for their community.

Figure 3: Mean of evaluation of resident foreigners and cross-border commuters by treatment group

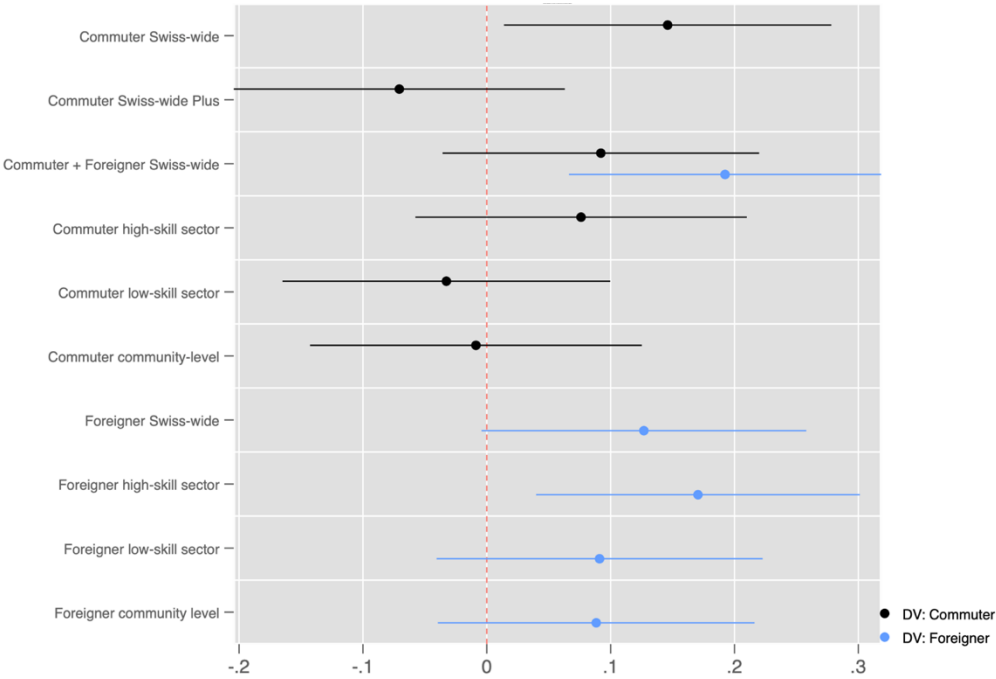


The right panel in Figure 3 suggests that over all different treatment groups and independent of the type of foreign worker their current number is always perceived as rather too high. Since our dependent variable is measured on a scale from 1, implying the number of commuters/resident foreigners to be considered too low (or for the evaluation variables: very positive attitudes vis-à-vis commuters/resident foreigners), and 5, implying the number of commuters/foreigners to be consider too high (or for the evaluation variables: very negative attitudes) higher values imply more negative views. Since for the right panel in Figure 3 all groups have a mean above 3, which would indicate that the number is about right, all treatment groups tend to view the number of cross-border commuters/resident foreigners as to high. However, substantive variation in this assessment also exists, with some groups (e.g., the group receiving information on both, cross-border commuters and resident foreigners); a variation we will explore in the next step of the analysis.

If we turn to the left panel in Figure 3, however, it becomes apparent that the evaluation of either cross-border commuters or resident foreigners for respondents' community is less negative as their assessment of whether their number is too high. Thus, while respondents think there are too many cross-border commuters and resident foreigners in Switzerland, they evaluate their impact in a more nuanced way.

Finally and somewhat unexpectedly, over all treatment groups cross-border commuters (diamond symbols) are evaluated worse compared to resident foreigners (circle symbol), both with regard to their number and the evaluation for the respective community of the respondent. This (descriptive) finding is a first indication that Swiss respondents indeed perceive resident foreigners differently from cross-border commuters. However, unlike argued based on the cultural threat argument above, commuters are apparently seen in worse terms than resident foreigners.

Figure 4: Difference in the evaluation of the number of commuters or foreigners by treatment group in comparison to the control group based on regression analysis



Note: Dependent variable ranges from 1 (number of commuters/foreigners is too low) to 5 (number of commuters/foreigners is too high)

Moving from these descriptive findings to a regression-based analysis, Figure 4 shows the difference in evaluating the number of resident foreigners/cross-border commuters for each of our treatment groups in relation to the (combined) control group.⁵

Various aspects of Figure 4 seem noteworthy. First, in general, we find few statistically significant effects, a fact that is most likely due to two reasons. First, our experiment was conducted at a time when the Swiss electorate was about to vote on a popular initiative to curb immigration. Hence the general information environment was such that most people can be considered to be highly informed. Priming individuals in this context was therefore more difficult than in other rather low information environments. Second, the rather negative evaluation of commuters in the control group (see Figure 3) makes it hard to find any further negative significant effects of our priming treatments.

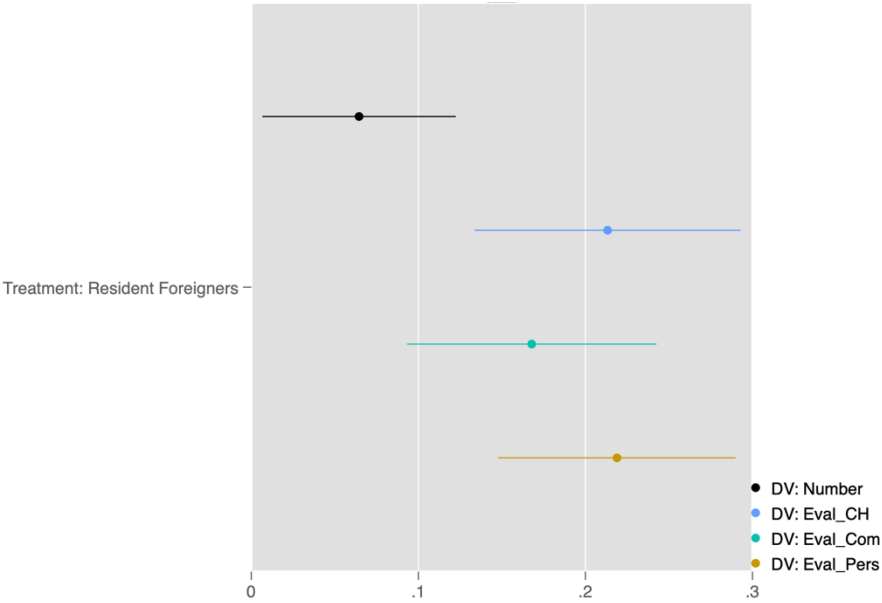
Nevertheless, one statistically significant finding we do observe is the significantly more negative evaluation in the treatment group that received information on the number of cross-border commuters to Switzerland (first row in Figure 4). This is in stark contrast to the group that received additional information that cross-border commuters also pay taxes in Switzerland and are *not* eligible to receive swiss unemployment benefits. In contrast to the treatment group that was *only* primed to think about commuters at the national level, this additional information significantly improves respondents' evaluation of cross-border commuters (second row in Figure 4). In our reading this might suggest that many Swiss citizens might have a (rather diffuse) sense of unfairness with regard to their evaluation of cross-border commuters and their (non-)contribution to swiss society.

A further significant finding is that providing people with both the actual number of cross-border commuters and resident foreigners together (third row in Figure 4) increases the negative perception of respondents especially with regard to resident foreigners, for cross-border commuters the effect does not reach standard significance levels. Another treatment group that evaluates resident foreigners more negatively compared to the control group is the group reading about high-skilled resident foreigners. While this finding goes somewhat against existing literature that mostly finds that high-skilled immigrants are preferred to low-skilled immigrants (e.g., Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007, 2010), we will explore the aspect of skill-level in more detail in our analysis below.

⁵ Figure A.5 shows the results when relying on the question with regard to the evaluation of labor migration for Switzerland. These results, as well as the results using the other two dependent variables (evaluation of cross-border commuters/resident foreigners for Switzerland and for oneself), do not provide substantive different findings.

Above in our theoretical argument, we had also formulated expectations on the direct test of the commuter vs. foreigner treatment groups. Thus, testing whether respondents who were primed to think about resident foreigners (cross-border commuters) differ in their evaluation of the two groups in comparison to someone who received information about cross-border commuters (resident foreigners). In line with our theoretical expectations, if the labor market hypothesis was to hold, we should not see any differences between the two groups as both persons strain the swiss labor market in the same way as it should not make a difference for a swiss person whether the job she/he applied for is taken up by a resident foreigner or a cross-border commuter. However, if the cultural threat hypothesis was to hold, we would expect to see a more negative evaluation of resident foreigners in comparison to cross-border commuters.

Figure 5 Difference in Evaluation between Cross-border commuters and Resident/Settled Migrants (resident foreigners)



Note: The graph shows the difference between a respondent’s evaluation of commuters minus her/his evaluation of foreigners depending on the respective treatment (foreigner versus commuter treatment).

From Figure 5, however, we can read the exact opposite, namely that priming individuals to think about resident foreigners makes them more positive in their evaluation compared to those who read about cross-border commuters. More precisely, Figure 5 shows the within respondent difference in evaluating cross-border commuters versus resident foreigners (i.e., respondent i’s assessment of commuters minus respondent i’s assessment of resident foreigners) depending on the respective treatment. Since this difference is positive if commuters are seen worse compared

to foreigners, a positive effect implies that this difference increases.⁶ To simplify our analysis somewhat and since most treatments within the respective treatment group (foreigner versus commuter treatment) had the same effect (see Figure 4) we combine in our analysis underlying Figure 5 all foreigner and all commuter treatments. Thus Figure 5 shows the effect for the resident foreigner treatment group in comparison to the commuter group and for all four dependent variables.

For all of our dependent variables, Figure 5 displays that resident foreigners are significantly evaluated more positive than cross-border commuters with the effect being least pronounced for the dependent variable asking respondents to evaluate the current numbers of both group. Yet, above we had argued that if the cultural threat hypothesis was to hold, respondents in our treatment conditions that mention “resident foreigner” immigration into Switzerland should be less favorable towards this group than those learning about “cross-border commuters” coming to Switzerland. Again, this is not what we see here. In contrast, resident foreigners are evaluated significantly better.

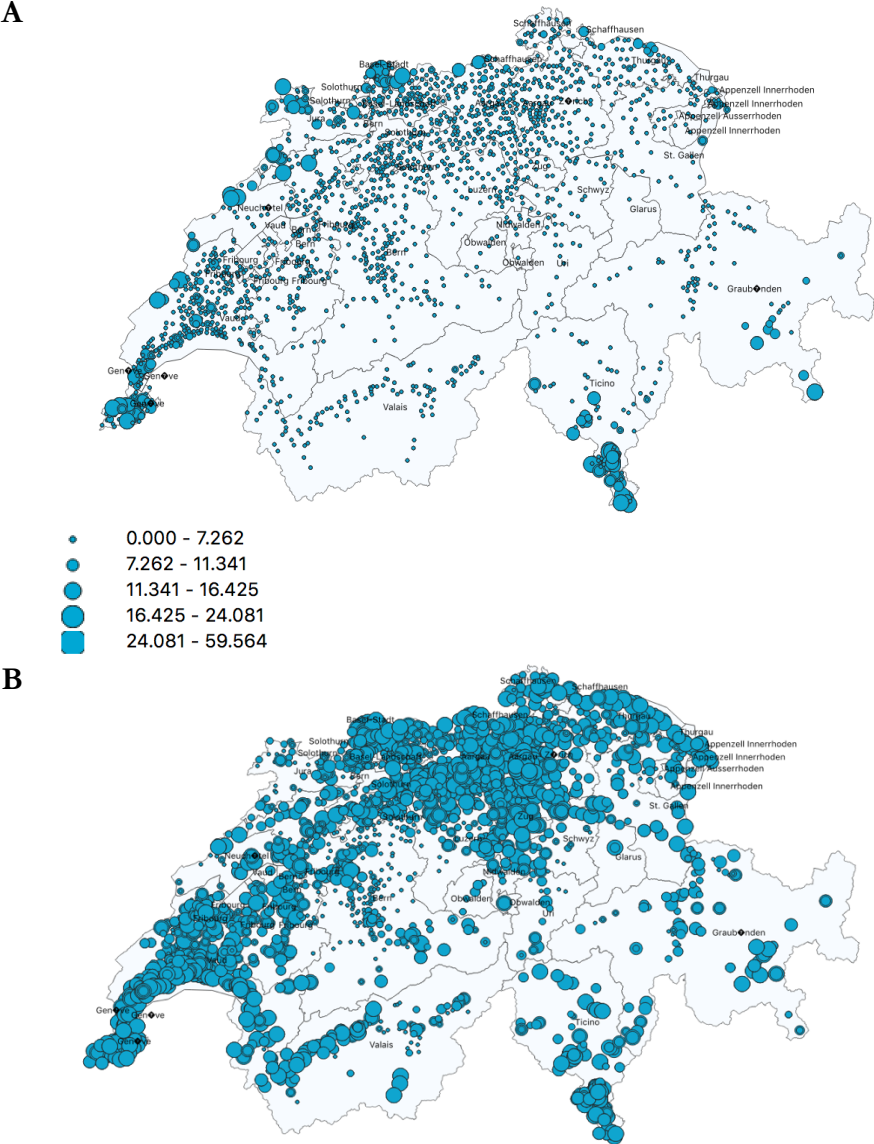
Mediating effects: skill level and exposure to resident foreigners/commuters

As argued above, both actual exposure in terms of the numbers of resident foreigners and cross-border commuters as well as the skill-level of our respondents might affect how individuals perceive the two types of labor migration. Thus, as a next step, we evaluate whether the effect of our treatments change with the actual exposure in terms of labor migration and with respect to the skill level of our respondents.

We begin this endeavor with evaluating the mediating effect of actual exposure. To this end, the actual numbers of foreigners/commuters at the respondent’s community may give us the most direct indication of a respondent’s sense of exposure, which should then relate to his/her attitude and evaluation of immigration. The map in Figure 6 shows this by plotting the actual number of cross-border commuters (Panel A) and resident foreigners (Panel B) at the community level in Switzerland. Interestingly, we observe a clear clustering of commuters, Panel A, but much less clustering and a more uniform distribution in the case of resident foreigners in Panel B.

⁶ While this difference could increase because of either the evaluation of commuters becoming worse or the evaluation of foreigners becoming better we observe this is mainly due to the latter. We will provide this in the Appendix soon.

Figure 6: Map of Switzerland where dots represent the actual number of cross-border commuters (Panel A) and resident foreigners (Panel B) on the communal level in 2018.



To account for these differences, we now use the actual numbers of resident foreigners and cross-border commuters in relation to the population at the respondent’s locality in the year 2019 to account for the actual exposure to those two different kinds of migration. Starting with exposure to commuters, Figure 7a shows that irrespective of the treatment, exposure to cross-border commuters leads to significantly more negative impact on attitudes, measured here using the question on the number of commuters/foreigners. Interestingly, however, figure 7b depicts that a higher percentage of foreigners in the community does not lead to an evaluation that there are too many resident foreigners, but rather the other way around. Thus, exposure only leads to significantly more negative perceptions in those communes that are affected by cross-border

commuters and not necessarily in those affected by resident foreigner while our treatments do not make a difference in either case.

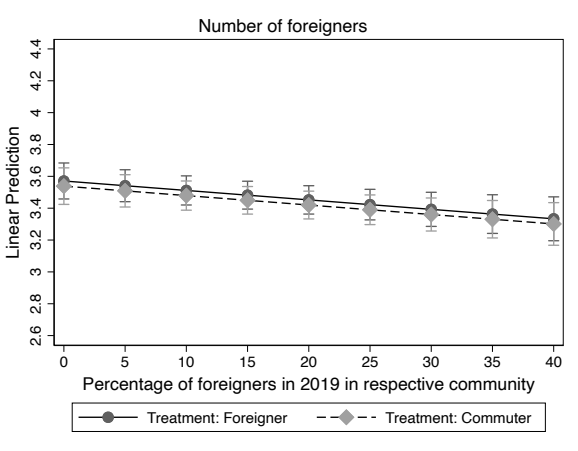
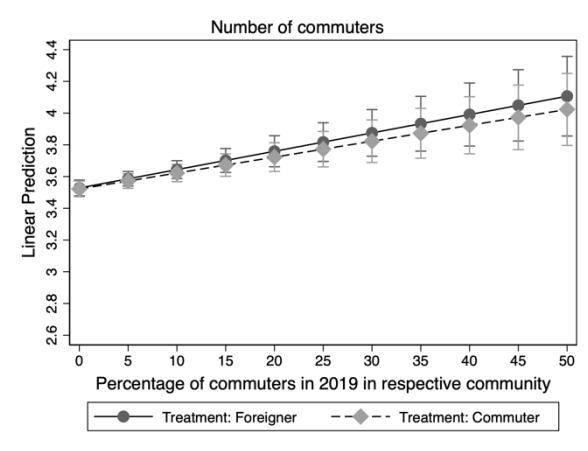


Figure 7a Difference in evaluation of the **number of commuters** between treatment group on Resident/Settled Migrants (Foreigners) and Cross-border commuters conditional on actual percentage of commuters at community level

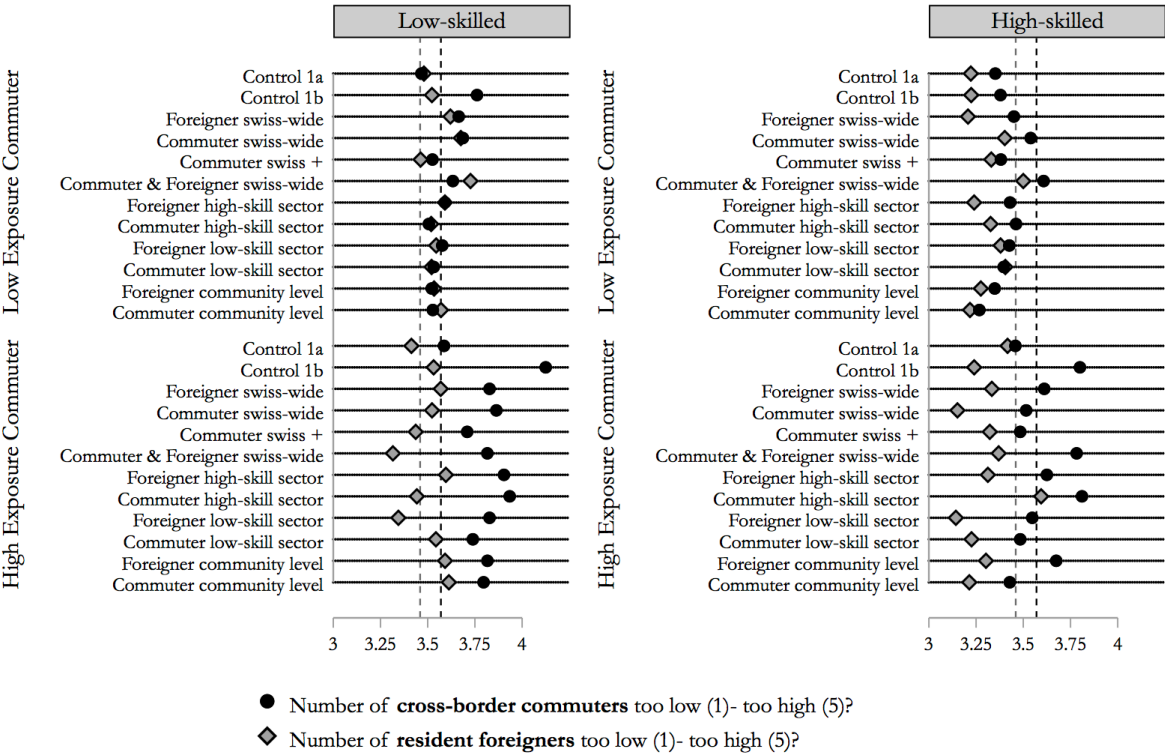
Figure 7b Difference in evaluation of the **number of foreigners** between treatment group on Resident/Settled Migrants (Foreigners) and Cross-border commuters conditional on actual percentage of foreigners at community level

Finally, in Figure 8 we combine exposure with the skill level of our respondents.⁷ This analysis strongly reinforces the results from Figure 7: both low- and high-skilled respondents do not seem to differ much in their assessment of cross-border commuters and foreign residents *without exposure* (two upper panels in Figure 8). However, if we consider those respondents who live in a community with high exposure⁸ the evaluation of cross-border commuters and foreign residents widens drastically. In particular, it is the assessment of the cross-border commuters that becomes much more negative, especially but not only for the low-skilled respondents. An interesting further aspect is that high-skilled respondents under high-exposure react especially negatively towards high-skilled commuters, as can be seen in the lower right-hand panel in Figure 8; a finding that aligns well with the prediction of the labor market competition hypothesis (e.g., Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007, 2010).

⁷ Figure A.6. shows the results if we use exposure to resident foreigners and A.7 shows the analysis for skill level only.

⁸ For ease of implementation, we coded exposure as a dichotomous variable taking on the value of 1 for those respondents who live in a community that is above the 75% percentile of commuter (foreigner) exposure and 0 otherwise.

Figure 8: Evaluation of the Number of Resident/Settled Migrants (**foreigners**) and Cross-border commuters by *exposure to commuters* and *skill level* of respondent



Conjoint experiment

To look more closely into the mechanisms driving the acceptance of labor migrants in Switzerland, we scrutinize the impact that different characteristics of foreign workers have on their public acceptance. To this end, each respondent answered three times a choice-based conjoint experiment in which they had to choose between two foreign workers. We administered the conjoint experiment following the priming experiment but after a short interruption, in which we asked respondent completely unrelated questions. The proposals randomly varied the dimensions of the six attributes listed in Table 1: gender, age, sector of employment, how the worker commutes to her/his work place, whether she/he has children (to indirectly get at potential service competition with natives at day-care facilities) and most important her/his place of residence as our way to assess whether someone is a resident foreigner or a cross-border commuter from one of the three main neighboring countries from which people cross the border to work in Switzerland, Germany, France and Italy. Following standard procedures (e.g., Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto

2014), we randomly varied both the row in which the respective goal was displayed, e.g., number of children, as well as the specific attributes of the goal (one toddler, one school kid, no kids).

The specific dimensions as well as their attributes were explained to respondents in a short introduction before the conjoint experiment. Respondents also received information on how the conjoint experiment worked and were asked to read and evaluate each proposal carefully. Given the fact that our conjoint experiment consisted of only six dimensions with three attributes each, we are confident that respondents were well able to mentally process the provided information and provide meaningful choices.

Table 1: Dimensions and attributes of the conjoint experiment

Attributes of foreign employees	Dimensions
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 55 • 45 • 35 • 25
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woman • Man
Profession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waiter/Waitress • Scientist • Physician • Construction worker • Architect • (Male) Nurse
Number of children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One toddler • One school kid • No kids
How does the worker commute to work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By public transport • By car • By bike or foot
Place of residence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-border commuter (Italy) • Cross-border commuter (France) • Cross-border commuter (Germany) • Foreign Resident (Switzerland)

To further illustrate the exact conjoint task, Table 2 shows a hypothetical example of such a conjoint task.

Table 2: Example of a conjoint task

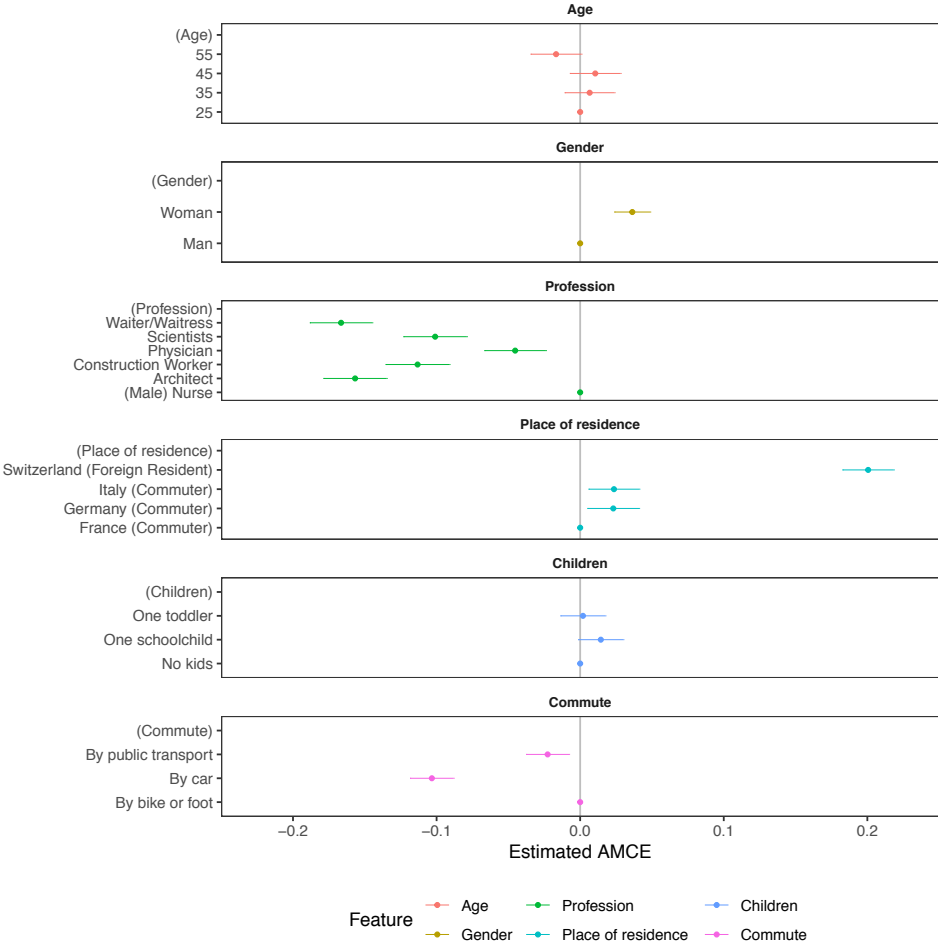
Attribute	Worker 1	Worker
Age	25	45
Gender	Male	Female
Profession	Architect	Scientist
Number of children	No kids	No kids
Commuting to work	By car	By bike or foot
Place of residence	Cross-border commuter (France)	Foreign Resident (Switzerland)
Which employee do you prefer?		

Next to asking respondents which of the two proposals they would prefer, we also asked them to rate each proposal on a seven-point scale.

Results

Figure 9 shows the results of our conjoint experiment in the form of average marginal component effects (AMCEs) based on the binary choice task. For each of the different attributes, these AMCEs allow an interpretation relative to the respective baseline category (dot on the vertical zero line). If a dimension is to the left of the vertical zero line it decreases the likelihood of our respondents favoring this worker whereas a dimension to the right of the zero line increases the likelihood to support this worker.

Figure 9: Results of Conjoint Experiment in the form of AMCEs



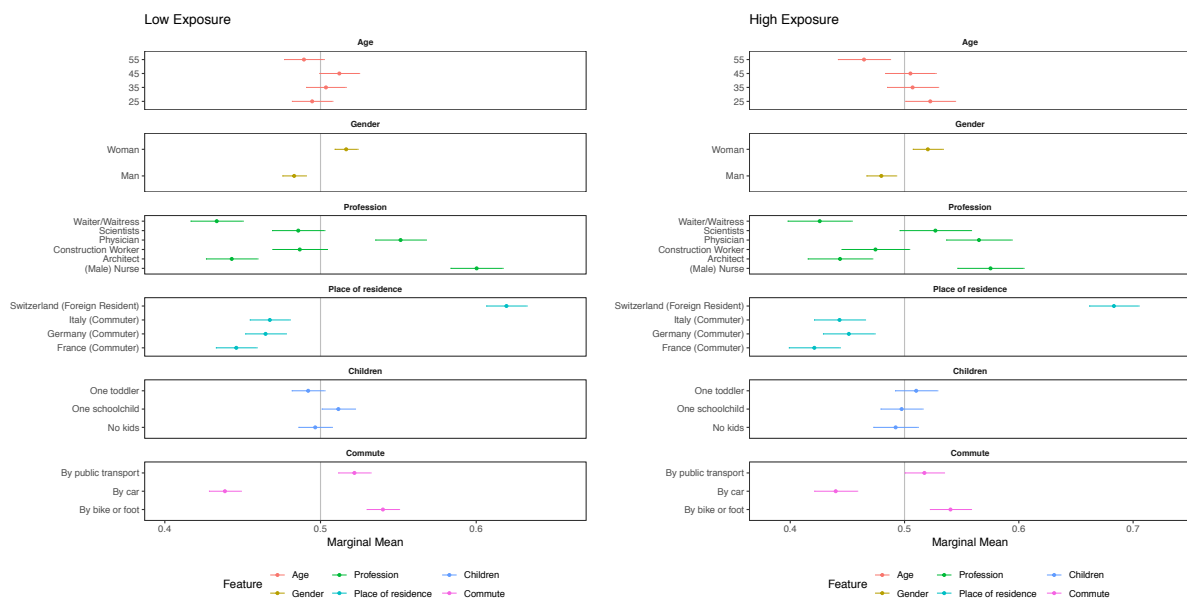
Again, several findings seem noteworthy. Most importantly in terms of effect size but, of course, also with regard to our theoretical argument, the effect of *place of residence* is the most accentuated: Foreign workers residing in Switzerland compared to any type of cross-border commuters are preferred by a large margin. While we already observed this more negative evaluation of commuters or rather more positive evaluation of resident foreigners in our priming experiment, the results of our conjoint experiment are in fact more than clear in that our respondents clearly and significantly prefer foreign workers who reside in Switzerland to cross-border commuters. The importance of the conjoint results, in addition to the priming experiment, comes from the conjoint experiment controlling for the multi-dimensionality of evaluating foreign workers. Thus, even if we experimentally control for the gender, age, profession, etc. of workers, resident foreigners are distinctly preferred to cross-border commuters.

In addition to this main finding, the results in Figure 9 show that while the age of workers do not seem to matter much for their evaluation, their gender does in that women are significantly

preferred to men. Somewhat surprisingly whether workers have children does not seem to matter. Probably, respondents did not perceive this attribute to fully capture service competition as intended. In contrast and as intended, workers who commute by car are less likely to be evaluated positively than workers who commute by public transportation or by bike/foot, which is the most preferred way of transportation.

Finally, with regard to the profession of workers, we observe a mixed picture. We chose the different types of profession to again induce variation with regard to skill level but also with regard to the actual demand in the Swiss labor market. Different to our expectation and in contrast to some of the labor market competition literature, we do not observe that the high-skilled jobs, such as architect or scientist, are necessarily the most preferred. It is rather the category (male) nurse followed by physician that are the most preferred dimension. A fact that might be due to the current circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 10: Results of Conjoint Experiment in the form of Marginal Means – High versus low exposure

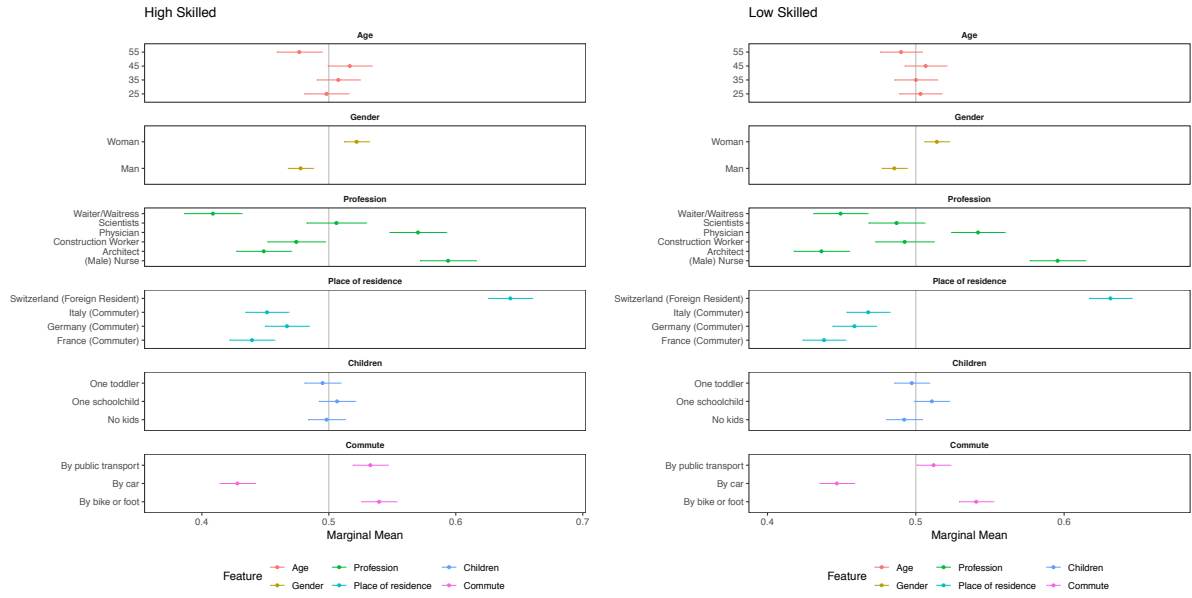


In accordance to our analysis of the priming experiment, Figure 10 shows the results if we differentiate by actual exposure of our respondents to cross-border commuters⁹ and Figure 11 shows the results if we differentiate by skill level of the respondent. Following Leeper et al. (2019) we rely on marginal means instead of AMCEs for our subgroup analyses. The results in Figure 10 confirm our findings from above: while both groups, high and low exposure, evaluate commuters

⁹ As above, we coded exposure as a dichotomous variable taking on the value of 1 for those respondents who live in a community that is above the 75% percentile of commuter (foreigner) exposure and 0 otherwise.

the worse compared to the three types of commuters, for those respondents living in communities with lots of exposure the effect is even more pronounced (with resident foreigners being perceived even more positively). With respect to skill-level, we do not see any differentiated reaction towards commuter versus resident foreigners since both groups, high- and low-skilled, assess commuters in similarly negative terms compared to resident foreigners. However, the two groups differ somewhat in terms of what kind of professions they like or rather dislike that vary along the skill level of the proposed migrant profiles.

Figure 11: Results of Conjoint Experiment in the form of Marginal Means – High versus low skilled respondents



Finally, to show that our results are not biased because respondents were primed by our first experiment, Figure A.7 in the Appendix shows the results for the control groups of experiment 1 only. While, of course, the confidence intervals are much larger due to the lower number of respondents in the control group, the main findings are identical to those in Figure 9 above.

Digging even deeper into the mechanisms

While we clearly see that on average cross-border commuters are always evaluated more negatively compared to foreign residents and that respondents with actual exposure and/or low-skills evaluate this group of labor migrants even more negatively, we still know relatively little as to why this is

the case. In this final part of the paper, we therefore aim at extending standard accounts on individual immigration preferences which narrowly focus on competitiveness or cultural concerns. We thus argue that there are other aspects in which foreign residents and commuters differ, which so far, however, have not received much attention in the literature.

First, in terms of social competition, cross-border commuters (in contrast to foreign residents) do not compete with natives over scarce resources such as living space, childcare and other services. Rents are already sky-rocketing in swiss cities and resident foreigners intensify the competition for these commodities and services.

Second, we argue that a crucial aspect of individual's perceptual differences with respect to the two implications of the freedom of movement of persons (cross-border commuters vs. resident foreigners) has to do with fairness perceptions. There are two ways in which these fairness perceptions might be working. One has to do with the question if commuters are seen to be contributing in a fair way to the host society's welfare. While cross-border commuters are obviously contributing to swiss GDP, they may not be seen to be contributing to society and to the welfare state. Moreover, people may simply not be informed about the (arguably complicated) rights and duties of cross-border commuters with respect to both their host and home country. We would thus expect that informing people about these duties (paying source tax etc.), would lead to a more positive evaluation.

Another potential comparison might arise out of the relative perception of cross-border commuters being able to afford a higher lifestyle compared with a native working the same job but having to pay swiss cost of living. Commuters can accordingly profit from a higher living standard given the high Swiss salaries and the lower living expenses in most neighboring countries. Hence, we presume that both of these considerations of unfairness could influence natives' perception regarding cross-border commuters versus foreign residents and thus be a potential explanation of our results.

Therefore, in the final step of our analysis, we look at potential mechanisms by evaluating more detailed reasons for the potential support of or opposition against cross-border commuters and foreign residents. To this end, Figure 12 shows the answers to several questions pertaining to reasons why one group of labor migrants might be preferred over the other.

Figure 12: Reasons for support of or opposition against cross-border commuters and foreign residents

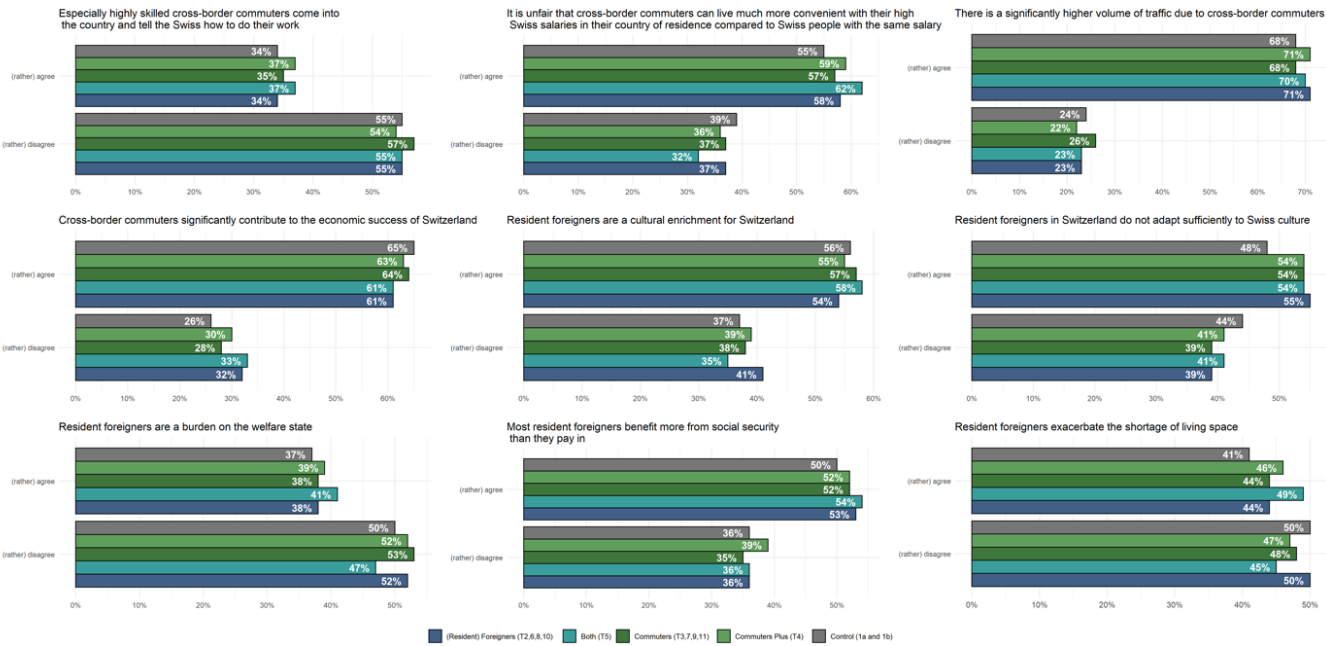


Figure 12 lists the answers to various questions that we group by the big treatment categories of our priming experiment. One aspect that becomes apparent immediately is that the answers do not depend on our treatment since all treatment groups show highly similar response patterns. Furthermore, some answer would rather suggest that it is the foreign residents that should be evaluated more negatively as, for instance, a majority of our respondents think that resident foreigners benefit more from social security than they pay in or that they do not adapt sufficiently to Swiss culture. At the same time, most respondents also believe that resident foreigners are a cultural enrichment for Switzerland and are not a burden on the welfare state.

When it comes to cross-border commuters two main reasons stick out as to why they might be not liked as much as foreign residents. One is that many respondents think they contribute to a higher traffic density, a valid reason for individuals living in exposed communities to dislike the phenomenon of commuting, we would say. More importantly, however, might be that perceptions of unfairness may be one driving factor underlying the more negative attitudes towards cross-border commuters. When we ask respondents whether they find it unfair that commuters can live much more convenient given their high Swiss salaries in comparison to Swiss residents a vast majority agrees and interestingly over all treatment groups. This finding together with the result comparing the two different vignettes regarding the cross-border commuters at the national level (T6: Commuters Swiss-wide and T7: Commuters Swiss-wide but with additional explanation) lead us to conclude that indeed neither of the two broad explanations (labor market competition vs.

cultural threat) is probably the main driving force in explaining Swiss people's attitudes toward different forms of labor migration. Rather misperceptions of cross-border commuters rights and duties and thus their contribution to swiss society at large as well as a sense of unfairness seem to matter for the relatively more negative evaluation of cross-border commuters.

6 Conclusion

Both the literature on immigration preferences and the literature on party politics agree that anti-immigration attitudes have increased over the last years. However, the exact reason for why individuals perceive which kind of immigrants as a potential threat are still debated, ranging from labor market competition over sociotropic concerns to cultural reasons for opposing specific types of immigrants. In this paper, we make use of crucial differences between resident foreigners and cross-border commuters to shed further light on this question.

The results from our two survey-embedded experiments, one priming and one conjoint experiment, show that – counter to our expectations – resident foreigners are *not* perceived more negatively than cross-border commuters. We expected Swiss respondents to perceive resident foreigners more negatively since in addition to competing with natives on the labor market, they also demand the same scarce resources, such as childcare and living space, and are, on average, culturally more different than the typical cross-border commuter. In contrast to this logic, we show that there might be two potential reasons underlying this more negative assessment of cross-border commuters. For one, we observe that actual exposure to cross-border commuters increases the negative assessment. Thus, it might simply be that for natives living close to the border the actual labor market competition induced by commuters is much more pronounced than for resident foreigners thereby leading to this more negative assessment. For another, although in practice, cross-border commuters pay taxes and contribute to economic output in the host country, citizens in the host country might still perceive commuters to free-ride on the host country. Studies such as Helbling and Kriesi (2014) have found that welfare chauvinism (c.f. Kymlicka 2015) is important within the Swiss context. However, our results can somehow confirm this as mentioning that cross-border commuters pay taxes in Switzerland and that they have to rely on their home country unemployment benefits makes cross-border commuters much more popular.

We believe that findings from our survey-experimental set-up eventually have important implications for our theoretical understanding of the drivers of anti-immigrant preferences in Switzerland and beyond. Set in a time where populist parties that strengthen nationalistic tendencies and welfare chauvinism within the population are on the rise AND where we observe

an increasing disintegration of nation-states from supranational as well as international cooperation, our result may provide much needed insights into the relationship between labor migration and attitudes towards the free movement of persons.

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8 Appendix

Figure A.1. Different permits as share of cantonal population

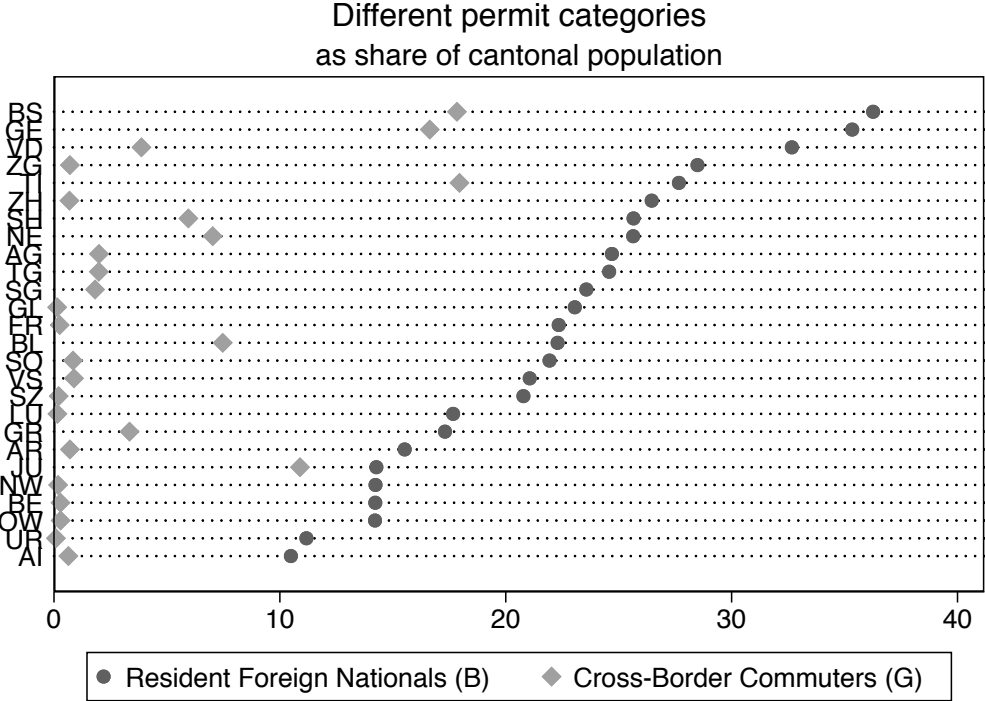


Figure A.2.: Country of origin of labor migrants on different permits

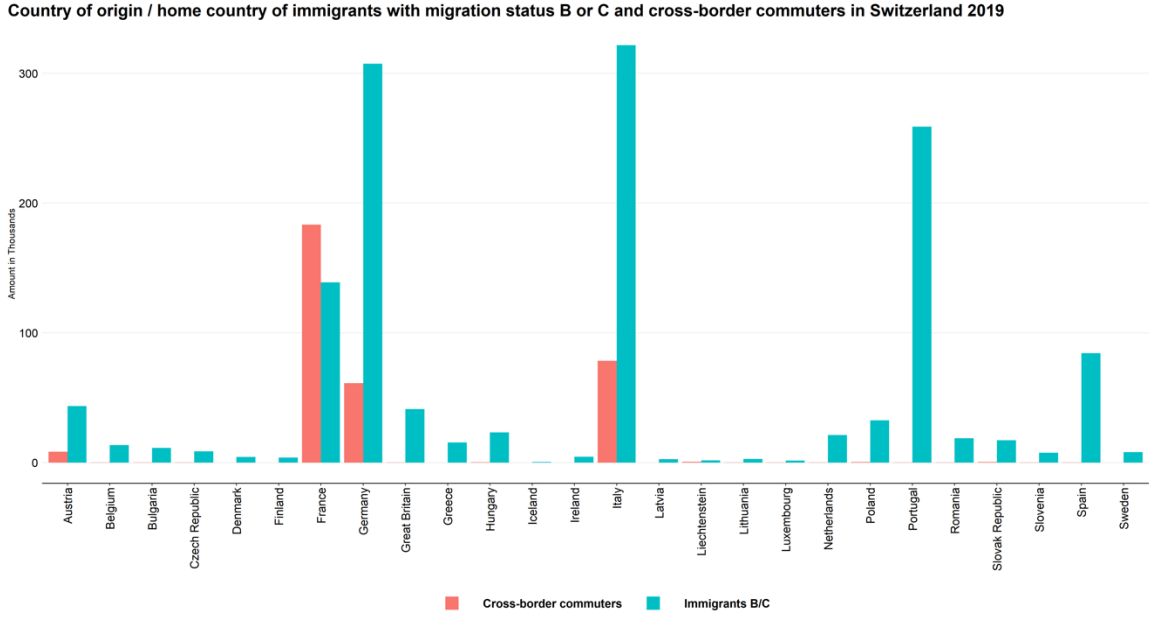


Figure A.3. Representativeness with respect to age and gender

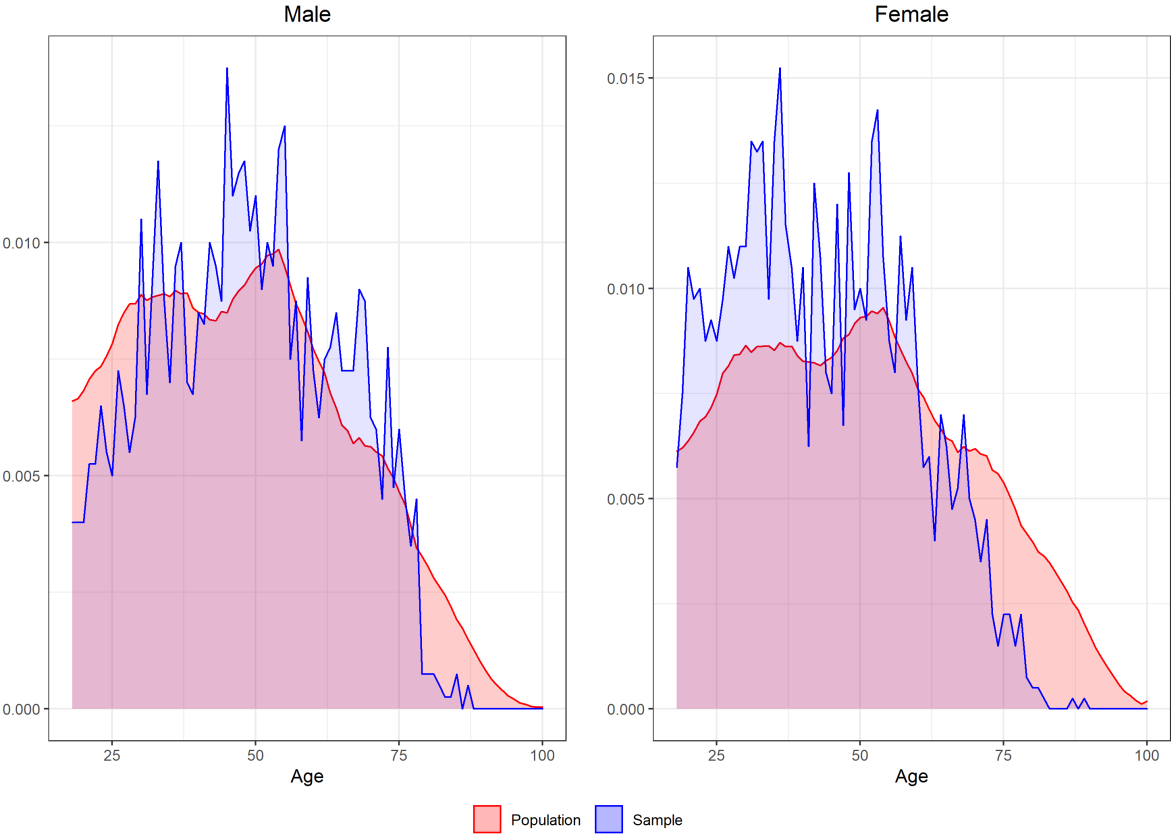
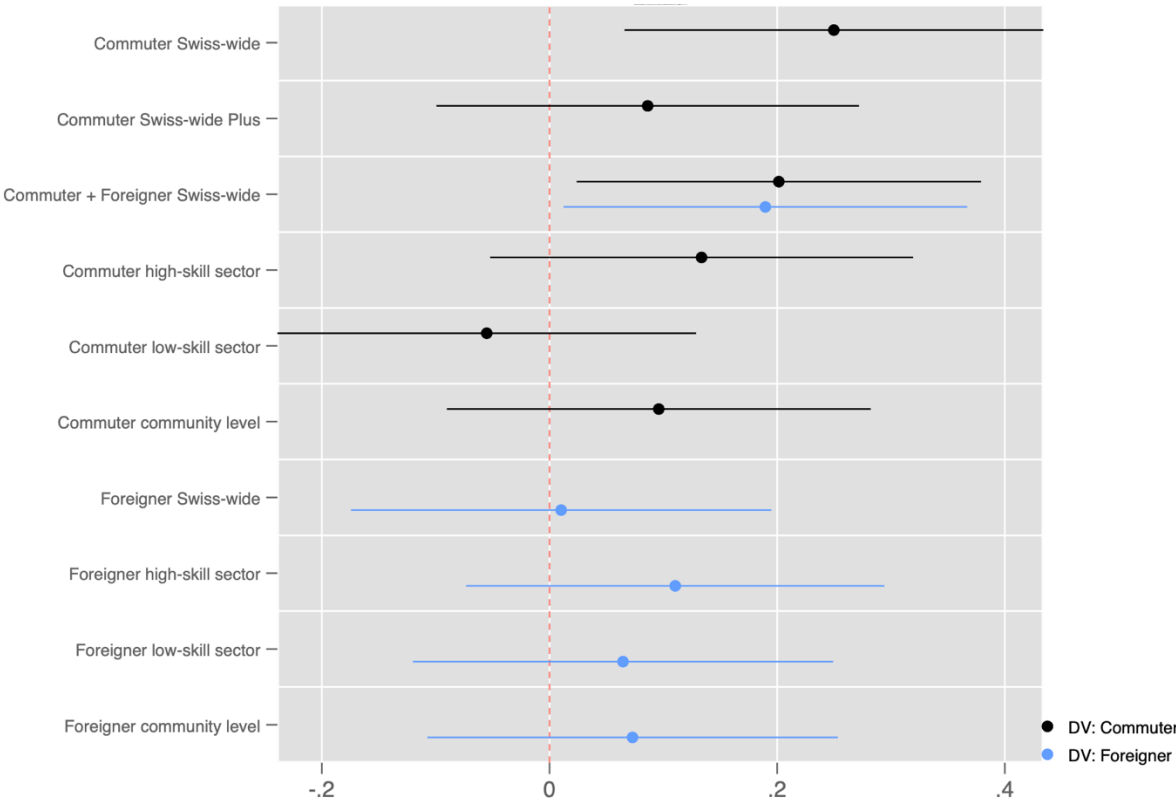
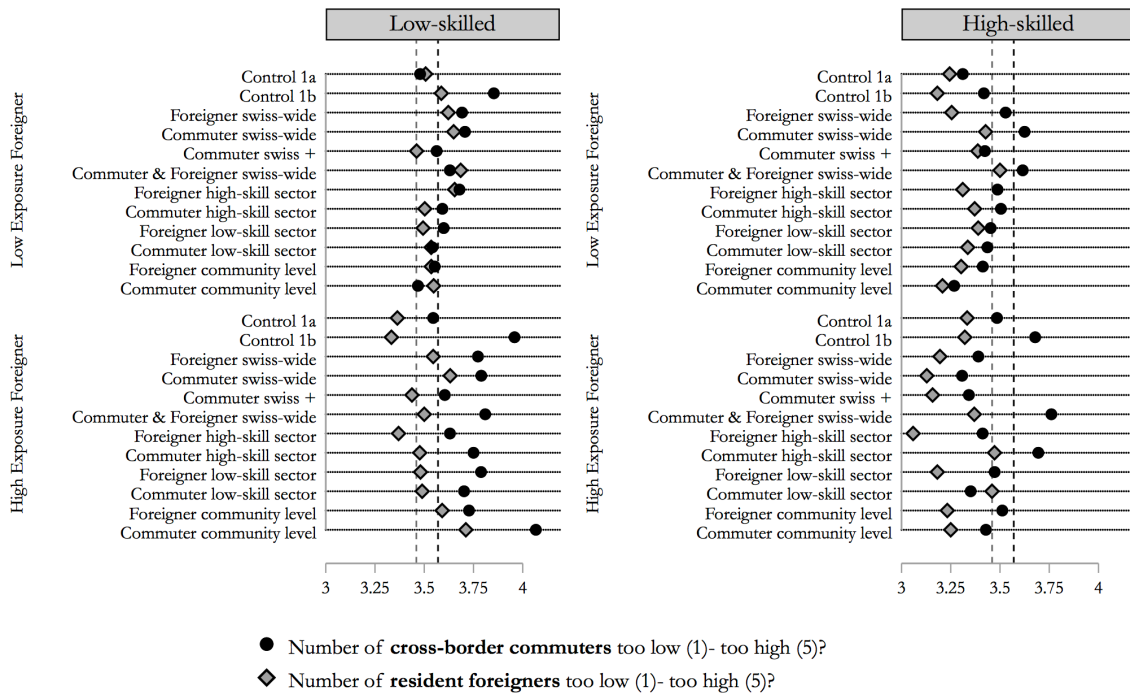


Figure A.5: Difference in the evaluation of commuters or foreigners for Switzerland as positive or negative by treatment group in comparison to the control group based on regression analysis



Note: Dependent variable ranges from 1 (commuters/foreigners are very positive for Switzerland) to 5 (commuters/foreigners are very negative for Switzerland)

Figure A.6: Evaluation of the Number of Resident/Settled Migrants (**foreigners**) and Cross-border commuters by *exposure to foreigners* and *skill level* of respondent



Graphs by high_skilled

Figure A.7: Evaluation of the Number of Resident/Settled Migrants (**foreigners**) and Cross-border commuters by skill level of the respondent only

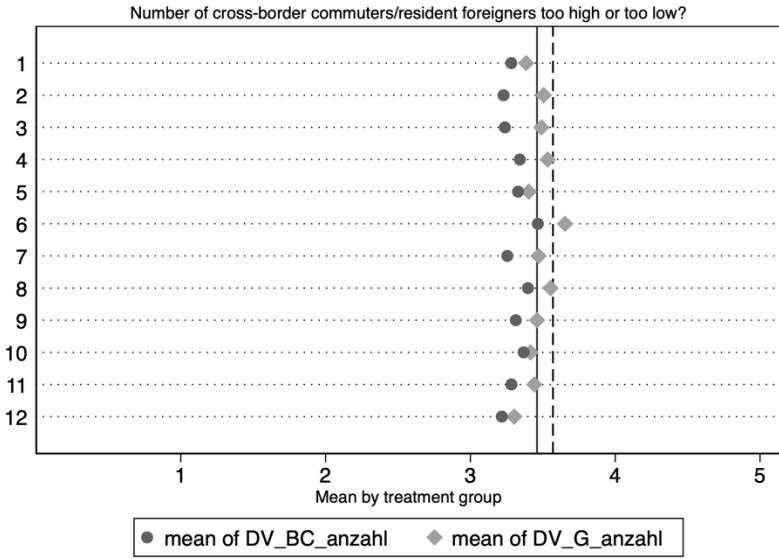
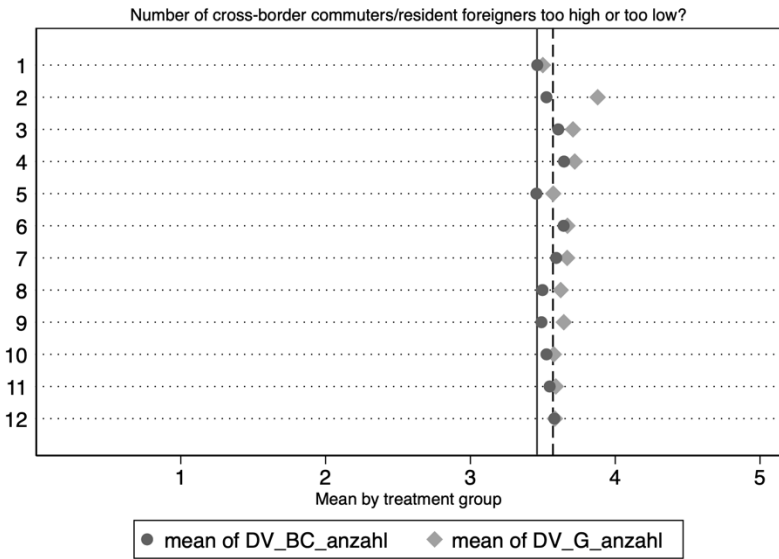


Figure A.8: Results of Conjoint Experiment in the form of AMCE for control group only

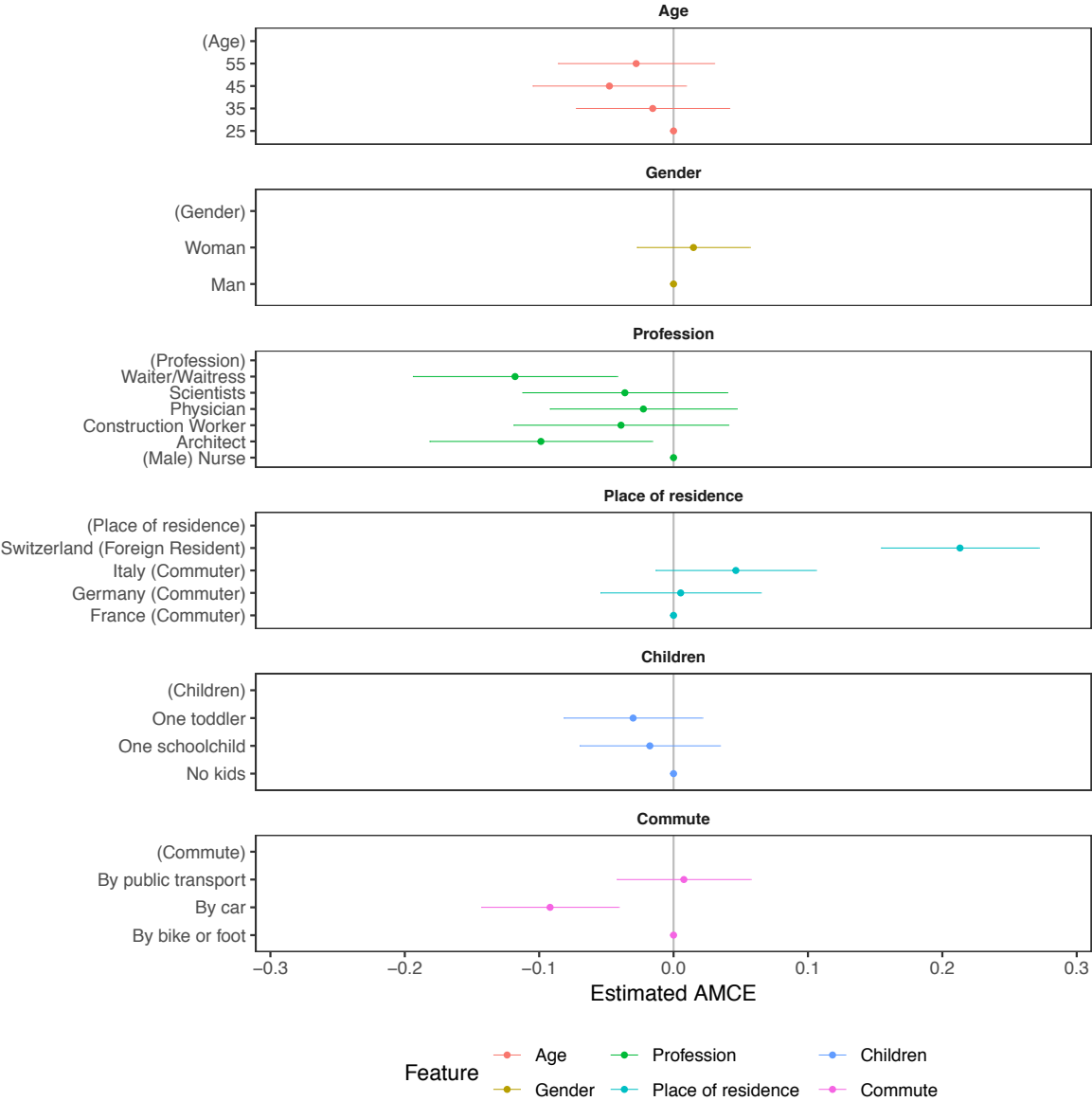


Figure A.9: Results of Conjoint Experiment in the form of Marginal Means differentiating by distance to border

