

Bend or Break? Experimental Evidence of Voters' Punishment for Striking Political Compromises

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Abstract

ADD Abstract

1 Introduction

2 Acceptance of Political Compromises

Gender hypothesis ($H1a$): Women politicians are evaluated lower when striking a political compromise compared to men politicians.

Gender hypothesis ($H1b$): Women politicians are evaluated lower when not striking a political compromise compared to men politicians.

Migration hypothesis ($H2$): Politicians with a migration background are evaluated lower when striking a political compromise compared to politicians without a migration background.

Intersection hypothesis ($H3a$): Women politician with a migration background are evaluated lower when striking a political compromise compared to men politicians without a migration background.

Intersection hypothesis ($H3b$): Women politician with a migration background are evaluated lower when not striking a political compromise compared to men politicians without a migration background.

3 Data, Measurement & Method

The survey experiment is conducted in the Netherlands between the 21st of April 2021 and the 4th of May 2021. **WHY NL**

3.1 Data

Participants were told that they are taking part in a survey to get an overview of how Dutch people form their views on politics. The sample, recruited through [KiesKompas](#), consists of 2,004 participants of 18 years and older.¹ Because Kieskompas works with non-random opt-in respondents, I have measured many demographic and political background variables (described in [Section 3.2](#) under *Covariates*). Balance checks are conducted to demonstrate whether certain categories are over represented in a certain experimental group (see [Section 3.3](#), [Figure 1](#)). The study has been approved by the [Research Ethics Review Committee](#) of the *Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam* (see the approval [here](#)). To ensure good quality of our data, two attention checks (discussed in more detail in [Section 3.3 of the Pre-Analysis Plan](#)) are included. All respondents included in the analyses passed both attention checks.

3.2 Measurement

Dependent Variables I rely on four measures reflecting different aspects of how people judge politicians. The evaluation of politicians' character traits are statements deriving from Aaldering and Vliegenthart (2016). The other three measures to evaluate the politician of the treatment are translated from Bauer, Yong, and Krupnikov (2017) – i.e. favorability, representation, and career perspectives. General favorability is shown to be related to vote choice (Elis, Hillygus, and Nie 2010), perceptions of representation are related to legislative compromise and cooperation (Doherty 2013), and career perspective is included because critiques of women are typically manifested in their leadership skills (Eagly 2007).

Experimental Conditions The stimuli in the experiment are news messages in the same style as the Dutch news website [nu.nl](#). In these news messages, we manipulate: a) the *gender* of the politician (male vs. female); b) the *migration background* of the politician (based on a Arabic sounding name (Rachid(a) Amezian) or a native Dutch sounding name (Karel/Karin van der Kleijn)); and c) whether the politician *struck a compromise or not*. This creates a full $2 \times 2 \times 2$ factorial experiment with four rounds (see [Table 1](#)). Every round, the news message covers a new issue. The issues are: “defense” (increase cooperation of the defense units), “immigration” (immigration stop in western countries), “education” (expansion creative elementary school activities), “COVID-19” (emergency legislation to combat the COVID-19 pandemic). For

¹The sample is calculated based on a power analysis presented in the [Pre-Analysis Plan](#).

every round, the politicians’ name, and thereby gender and immigration background, are manipulated in the text and in the picture, as well as the decision to strike a compromise.

Table 1: Experimental Conditions

	Name Politician	Gender	Migration Background	Compromise
1	Rachid Amezian	Men	Yes	Yes
2	Rachid Amezian	Men	Yes	No
3	Karel van der Kleijn	Men	No	Yes
4	Karel van der Kleijn	Men	No	No
5	Rachida Amezian	Women	Yes	Yes
6	Rachida Amezian	Women	Yes	No
7	Karin van der Kleijn	Women	No	Yes
8	Karin van der Kleijn	Women	No	No

The text of the treatment is a Dutch translation of the stimulus material developed by Bauer, Yong, and Krupnikov (2017). The authors have pre-tested the text of the stimuli material several times (see the [Web Appendix](#) of Bauer, Yong, and Krupnikov 2017). The photo’s of their stimuli material can unfortunately not be used, because a) Bauer, Yong, and Krupnikov (2017) only investigate the difference between men and women politicians, using solely photo’s of caucasians; and b) the American flag was present in their material. Instead, I have used photo’s from local politicians of the city of The Hague that are not know to the general public. The men politicians are in real life representatives of the [liberal-progressive party D66](#) (man with immigrant background) and of the [christian democratic party CDA](#) (man without immigrant background). The women politicians are in real life representatives of a [right-wing populist party Hart voor Den Haag/Groep de Mos](#) (woman with migration background) and of the [social democratic party PvdA](#) (woman without immigrant background). Thereby we have a spread over the ideological different parties present in Dutch politics. The names for the politicians without immigration background are *Karel* (man) and *Karin* (woman) *van der Kleijn*, which are typical native Dutch names. For the politicians with an immigration background, we picked *Rachid* (man) and *Rachida* (woman) *Amezian*. All stimulus material is developed by the [Network Institute of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam](#) and can be accessed [here](#).

Covariates

3.3 Method

4 Bend or Break?

4.1 Pre-Registered Hypotheses

Gender Hypothesis H1a states that women politicians are evaluated lower when striking a political compromise compared to men politicians. I inspect this using four different measures of how people can judge the quality of a political representative. The upper-left panel of Figure 2 demonstrates that people’s evaluations of women politicians compared to men politicians differ between measures – displayed on the y-axis of the figure – and between issue areas – displayed with different colors in the figure.

- Looking at trait evaluation, only women who compromise on the issue migration are evaluated more negatively then men, yet the coefficient is not statistically significant. For the other three issues – COVID, defense, and education – the coefficients are positive, yet not statistically significant.
- The same pattern is shown for how well people feel represented by the politician. Women, compared to men, are lower evaluated for the issue migration, but higher evaluated for the other three issues. Only the effect of education is statistically significant. This indicates that if female polticians compromise and vote in favor of the bill on extending extra-curricular activities at elementary schools, people feel better represented by this politician compared to if the same compromise was made by a male politician.

Figure 1: Balance Checks



Table 2: Descriptive Information

Variables	Mean Value	St. Dev	Min. Value	Max. Value
Treatment: Striking Compromise	0.50	0.50	0	1
Gender	0.38	0.49	0	1
Age	33.64	16.37	0	72
Region	2.93	1.39	1	5
Urbanness	2.28	1.45	1	5
Migration Background	1.30	0.89	1	5
Employment	3.36	2.67	1	8
Income	9.75	2.74	1	14
Education	1.27	0.53	1	3
Treatment: Gender Politician	0.50	0.50	0	1
Treatment: Immigration Background Politician	0.50	0.50	0	1
Treatment: Women Politician with Immigration Background	0.25	0.43	0	1
NA	0.09	0.28	0	1
Immigration (%)	22.76	12.78	1	100
Position: Immigration	5.88	2.04	0	10
Position: Defense	2.50	1.05	0	4
Position: Education	3.12	0.82	0	4
Attitude: Women in Politics	3.41	0.92	1	5
Ideology	4.46	2.20	0	10
Political Efficacy (1)	3.12	1.03	1	5
Political Efficacy (2)	3.94	0.85	1	5
Political Efficacy (3)	3.16	0.95	1	5
Political Efficacy (4)	2.87	0.97	1	5
Political Efficacy (5)	2.83	1.00	1	5
Political Efficacy (6)	2.39	1.04	1	5
Political Efficacy (7)	2.74	1.19	1	5
Position: COVID-19	2.86	1.18	1	5
DV: Trait Evaluation	3.21	0.64	1	5
DV: Favorability	5.41	2.01	0	10
DV: Representation	5.86	1.77	0	10
DV: Career Prospects	4.64	1.97	0	10

- Regarding feelings of favorability towards the politician, there is no statistical significant difference between male or female politicians who strike a compromise. The same holds for the politicians' career prospects.

H1b states that women politicians are evaluated lower when not striking a political compromise compared to men politicians. The upper-center-left panel of Figure 2 demonstrates that almost all coefficients are positive – i.e. going against the hypothesized directions.

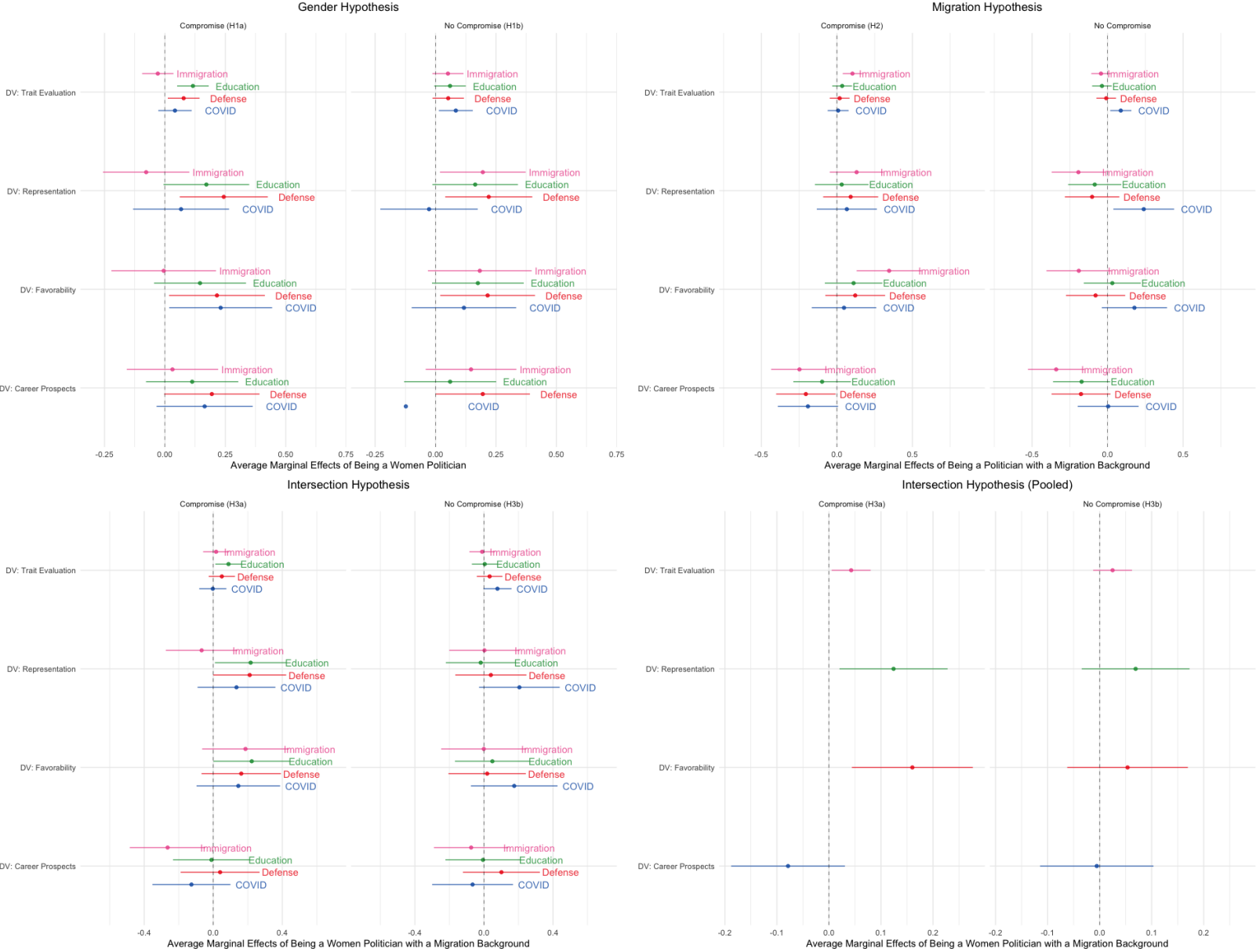
- When women politicians stand their grounds, they are evaluated higher on their leadership skills than their male counterparts. This finding holds accross issues, but is not statistically significant for the issue immigration.
- In addition, compared to male politicians, female politicians that stand their ground make people feel better represented, except when this is about an education-related policy. This finding is statistically significant for the issues immigration and defense.

- Moreover, female politicians are more favourable when standing their grounds. This finding is only statistically significant when women, compared to men, vote against a bill on intensifying cooperation of the army services.
- Also, not striking a compromise is considered good for a women’s career prospects, yet these findings are not statistically significant.

Migration Hypothesis This hypothesis states that politicians with a migration background are evaluated lower when striking a political compromise compared to politicians without a migration background. The upper-center-right panel of Figure 2 demonstrates that politicians with a migration background compared to politicians without a migration background are more positively evaluated on some measures, but more negatively evaluated on other measures.

- Looking at their leadership skills (trait evaluation), we see that for the issues COVID-19, defense, and education, there is no difference between politicians with or without a migration background. However, for the issue of migration, we see that if politicians with a migration background compromise – i.e. voting in favor of the bill proposing to put a stop to migration to Western countries – they are considered better political leaders compared to politicians without a migration background.
- Regarding how well people feel represented, there is no difference between politicians with and without a migration background.
- Looking at how favorable people feel towards a politician, we see that people feel more favorable towards politician with a migration background when they compromise on issues related to immigration and education compared to politicians without a migration background, but not for issues related to COVID-19 and defense.
- For career perspectives, people rate the career prospects more negative when a politician with a migration background compromises on the issue migration. For the other issues, there is no difference between politicians with and without a migration background.

Figure 2: Results



Intersection Hypothesis Hypothesis 3a states that women politician with a migration background are evaluated lower when striking a political compromise compared to men politicians without a migration background. This hypothesis is tested in the lower-left panel of Figure 2 for the separate issues, and in the lower-center-right panel of Figure 2 pooling the issues.

- Trait: no differences for COVID-19 and immigration, insignificant positive effects for defense and education, pooling significant positive effect
- Representation: Positive and significant for education, nothing for the other issues, pooling significant positive effect
- Favorability: Positive and significant for education, nothing for the other issues, pooling significant positive effect
- Career prospects: negative and significant for immigration, nothing for the other issues or in the pooled analysis.

Hypothesis 3b states that women politician with a migration background are evaluated lower when not striking a political compromise compared to men politicians without a migration background. This hypothesis is tested in the lower-center-left panel of Figure 2 for the separate issues, and in the lower-right panel of Figure 2 pooling the issues.

- Trait: positive and significant for COVID-19, nothing for the other issues or in the pooled analysis.
- Representation: no differences
- Favorability: positive and significant for COVID-19, nothing for the other issues or in the pooled analysis.
- Career prospects: negative and significant for defense, nothing for the other issues or in the pooled analysis.

Paragraph on what it means for theory, and justification for explorations (below).

4.2 Exploration

To explore heterogeneous effects, I conduct pooled analyses.

Ideology

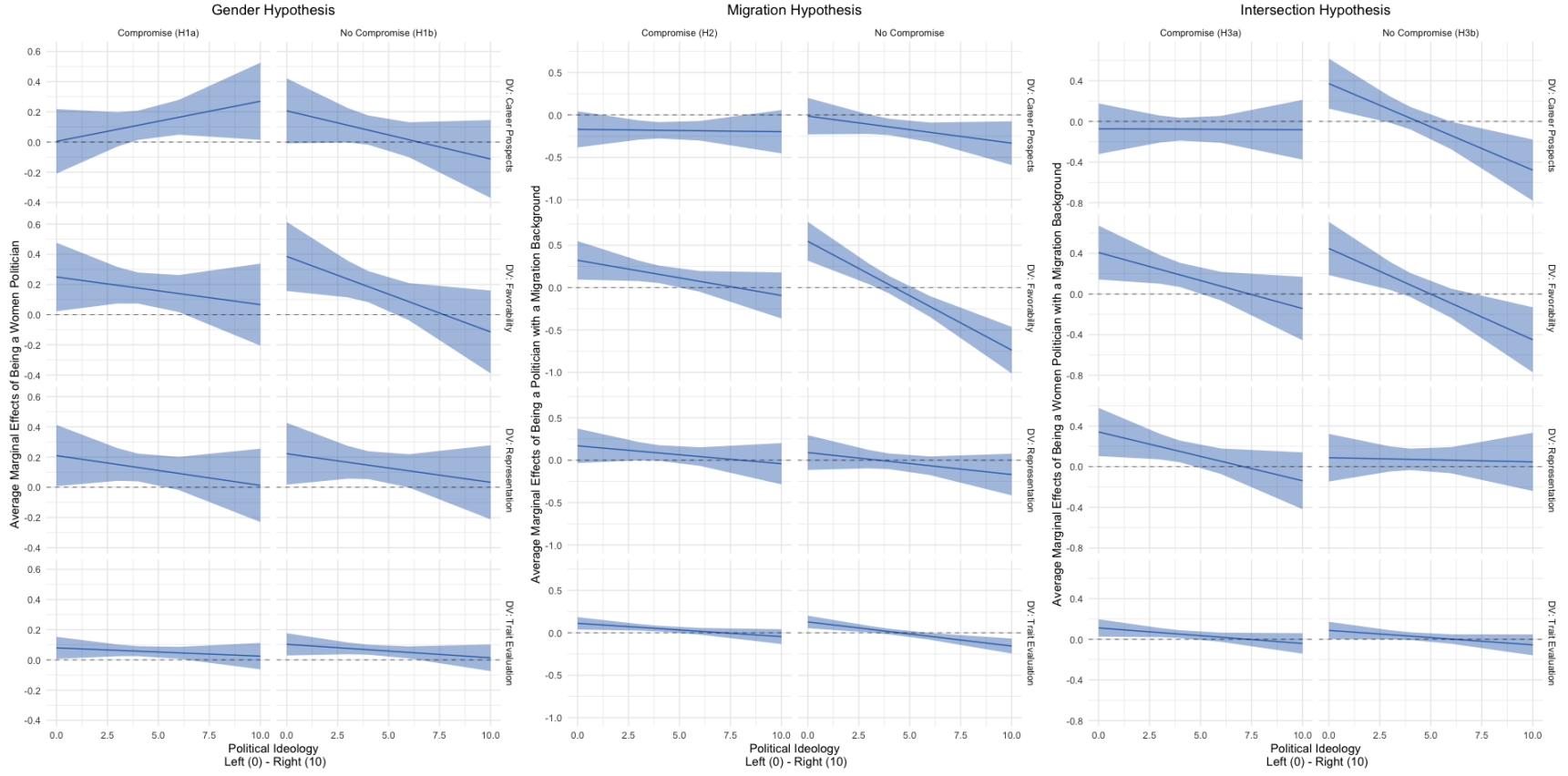
- H1a: People with left-wing ideological position (i.e. `value rile-self <5`) have higher evaluations for female politicians who compromise compared to male politicians who compromise. Compared to male politicians, they find women politicians who compromise more favorable, feel better represented and evaluate their leadership skills higher (yet very small effect). For people with a right-wing ideological position (i.e. `value rile-self >5`), there is no statistical significant difference between female and male politicians who compromise.
- H1b: The opposite holds for people with a right-wing ideological position when evaluating women who do not compromise, compared to male politicians: women who stick to their guns are considered more favorable and better leaders than men who stick to their guns. For people with a left-wing ideological position, there is no statistical significant difference between female and male politicians who do not compromise.
- H2: Left-wing more favorable to people politicians with a migration background who compromise than towards politicians without a migration background – no effect for other three measures. For people with a right-wing ideological position, there is no statistical significant difference between politicians with and without a migration background who compromise. Looking at NOT compromising, we see remarkable differences between people with a left-wing and right-wing ideology. When politicians with a migration background not compromise, they're considered more favorable to left-wingers, but less favorable to right-wingers. Also, not compromising makes them have better leaders according to the left, and worse leaders according to the right.
- H3a: Women with a migration background (compared to women without, and compared to men with and without) who compromise are considered more favorable, better representatives, and to have better career prospects by the left. No statistical difference for the right.
- H3b: No statistical difference for the left of the right

CHECK for DISCUSSION: left-wing over all more agreeable?

Table 3: Correlation ideology and agreeableness

Ideological Position	Correlation with	Pearson's R
Left-Wing	Against their better judgment, politicians promise more than they can deliver.	0.00
Left-Wing	What in politics is called 'making compromises' is actually just betraying your principles.	-0.04
Left-Wing	A strong head of government is good for the Netherlands, even if he stretches the rules a bit to get things done.	0.25
Right-Wing	Against their better judgment, politicians promise more than they can deliver.	0.08
Right-Wing	What in politics is called 'making compromises' is actually just betraying your principles.	0.22
Right-Wing	A strong head of government is good for the Netherlands, even if he stretches the rules a bit to get things done.	-0.04

Figure 3: Results: Interaction with Ideology



Willingness to Accept Compromises

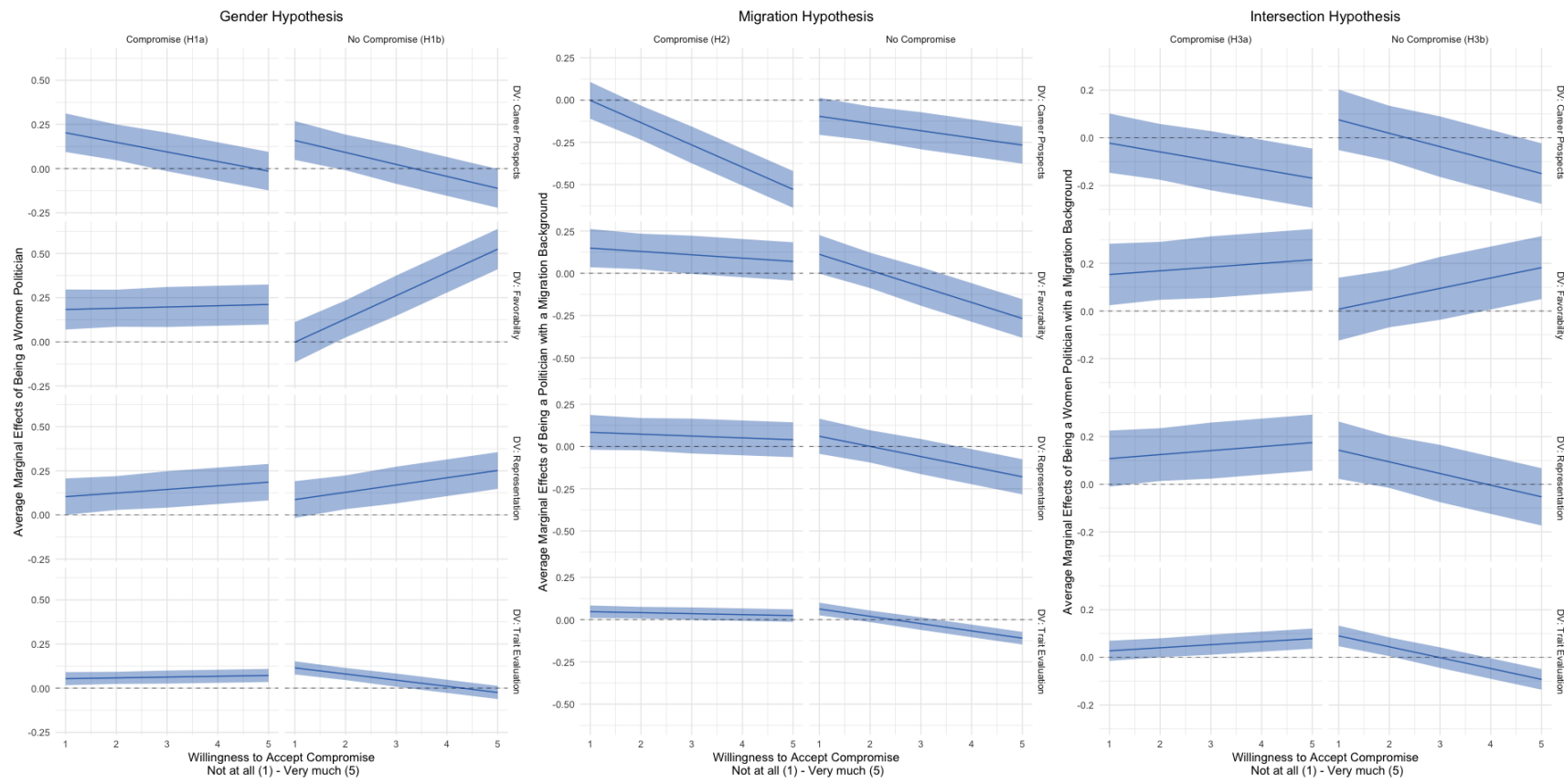
- H1a: people with low scores on WTAC, i.e. those who consider political compromise betraying your principles (scores of 1–3 (inversely coded)), are more likely to consider female politicians who compromise favorable (compared to male politicians who compromise). Both people with high and low scores on WTAC consider female politicians who compromise to be better representatives than male politicians who compromise. People willing to accept compromise consider the career prospects of women who compromise more positive compared to male politicians who compromise.
- H1b: People who are against political compromise rate female politicians who stick to their guns higher in terms of favorability than male politicians who do so. Both people with high and low scores on WTAC consider female politicians who compromise to be better representatives than male politicians who compromise. People willing to accept compromise consider the career prospects of women who compromise more positive compared to male politicians who compromise, also they consider female politicians who do not compromise less favorable, but better leaders.
- H2: People who are against political compromise rate the career prospects of politicians with a migration background who compromise way more negative compared to politicians without a migration background, they are also slightly more negative about the representation of politicians with a migration background compared to those without that background. When you are willing to accept political compromises, you are more positive about politicians with a migration background in terms of career prospects, favorability, representation and leadership traits. When politicians with a migration background stick to their guns, both people who are and are not willing to accept compromise evaluate them lower compared to politicians without a migration background. Moreover, people against political compromises also find politicians with a migration background who stick to their guns less favorable than politicians without a migration background.
- H3a: Female politicians with a migration background are considered more favorable by people who are willing to accept political compromises.
- H3b: Female politicians with a migration background are considered more favorable by people who are not willing to accept political compromises, and less favorable by those who are willing to accept compromise. Also, people against political compromise evaluate the prospects of female politicians with a migration background lower than the prospects of the other groups.

CHECK: do people who are willing to accept compromise have higher trust in politics?

Table 4: Correlation WtAC and Other measures of Pol. Eff

Attitude towards Compromise	Correlation with	Pearson's R
Negative	The political parties are only interested in my vote and not in my opinion.	0.28
Negative	Most politicians are skilled people who know what they are doing.	-0.24
Negative	Politicians are able to solve the most important problems.	-0.18
Negative	I feel well represented by Dutch politicians.	-0.29
Positive	The political parties are only interested in my vote and not in my opinion.	0.19
Positive	Most politicians are skilled people who know what they are doing.	-0.16
Positive	Politicians are able to solve the most important problems.	-0.15
Positive	I feel well represented by Dutch politicians.	-0.24

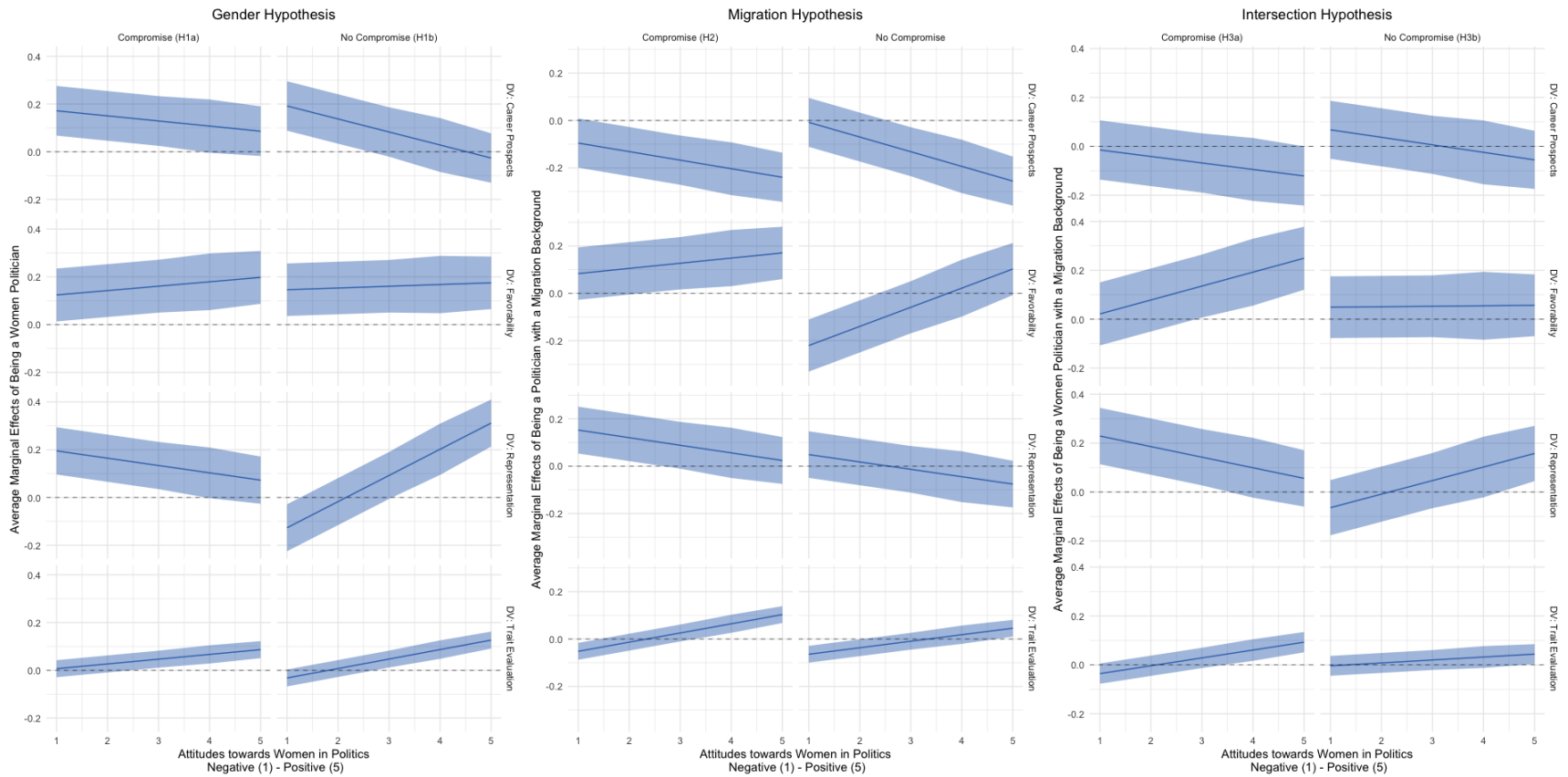
Figure 4: Results: Interaction with Willingness to Accept Compromise



Attitude towards Women in Politics

- H1a: Whether or not you're positive towards women in politics, female politicians who compromise are considered more favorable than male politicians – the same holds for women who do not compromise. For those negative towards women in politics, they evaluate women politicians who compromise as having better career perspectives, being better representatives, yet having lower leadership skills. For those positive about women in politics, female politicians who compromise are seen as worse representatives than males who compromise. The opposite holds for leadership skills.
- H1b: For those negative towards women in politics, they evaluate women politicians who do not compromise as having better career perspectives, yet being worse representatives. There is no difference in their leadership skills (effect of 0). For those positive about women in politics, female politicians who do not compromise are seen as better representatives than males who do not compromise. The same holds for leadership skills.
- H3a: People who have a negative attitude towards women in politics evaluate female politicians with a migration background lower. They rate their career perspectives and leadership skills more negative. People with positive attitudes towards women in politics rate female politicians with a migration background who compromise – relative to other groups – higher in terms of career prospects, favorability and leadership skills.
- H3b: When female politicians with a migration background do not compromise, they are lower evaluated on their career prospects, but are considered to be better representatives by those with a positive attitude towards women in politics. When female politicians with a migration background do not compromise, their career perspectives are evaluated lower, but they are considered better representatives by people with positive attitudes towards women in politics.

Figure 5: Results: Interaction with Attitudes towards Women in Politics



Position on Political Issues

- H1a:
 - COVID-19: When opposing COVID-19 policies, people rate female politicians who compromise as more favorable than male politicians who compromise. People who are in favor of the COVID-19 policies do not evaluate male and female politicians who compromise differently.
 - Defense: No difference between positive or negative towards defense, people always rate compromising female politicians as more favorable. When you are negative towards defense policies: find women who compromise better representatives, when positive about defense policies, you evaluate their career prospects more positive.
 - Education: When negative position on education, you rate compromising female politicians higher than compromising male politicians in terms of favorability, as representatives, and in terms of their leadership skills.
 - Immigration: When estimating low percentages of immigration in the Netherlands, you're more positive towards compromising female politicians in terms of career prospects, favorability and representation.
- H1b:
 - COVID-19: People who are negative towards COVID-19 policies find female politicians who stick to their guns better representatives and evaluate their leadership skills higher compared to male politicians who compromise. People who are positive towards COVID-19 policies find female politicians who stick to their guns more likeable.
 - Defense: People who are negative towards defense policies find female politicians who stick to their guns more favorable, and think they have better career prospects. People who are positive towards defense policies find female politicians who stick to their guns better representatives.
 - Education: Position on education has no effect for favorability and leadership skills. For both hold that women sticking to their guns are higher evaluated than male politicians doing the same. If you're negative towards education, you rate the career prospects of women sticking to their guns higher, and when you're positive towards education, you find women sticking to their guns better representatives.
 - Immigration: Positive on immigration find compromising female politicians more favorable.
- H2:
 - COVID-19: No differences between people pro- or con COVID-19 policies for the evaluation of compromising politicians with or without migration background. When politicians with a migration background do not compromise, however, people pro-COVID foresee a more negative career for them.
 - Defense: Con-defense position rate compromising politicians with a migration background negatively regarding their career prospects – they also do that when not compromising (same holds for pro-defense), yet positively in terms of favorability. Pro-defense, no differences are found in their evaluations. When politicians with a migration-background stick to their guns, people con-defense find them more favorable and people pro-defense the opposite.
 - Education: When politicians with a migration background compromise, they are seen as having worse career prospects, less favorable, being worse representatives, and have worse leadership skills by people con-education. No differences for people pro-education. When sticking to their guns, they politicians are seen as less favorable by con-education, and worse career prospects by people pro-education.
 - Immigration: Once you think that the population of people with an immigrant background in the Netherlands is bigger than 25%, you're more negative about the career prospects, the favorability and the leadership skills of a compromising politician with a migration background (compared to politicians without a migration background). Yet, when you're positive on migration, you're more likely to rate a compromising politician with a migration background as more favorable and better representative. When politicians with a migration background do not compromise, people who think that the population of people with an immigrant background in the Netherlands is smaller than 25% are more negative about their career prospects – similar to people that are negative about immigration. Moreover, when people negative on immigration, they find them less favorable.

- H3a:
 - COVID-19: No differences
 - Defense: When female politicians with a migration background compromise, they're seen as better representatives by people con-defense
 - Education: No differences
 - Immigration: Once you think that the population of people with an immigrant background in the Netherlands is bigger than 25%, you're more negative about the career prospects, the favorability, representativeness, and the leadership skills of a compromising female politician with a migration background (compared to politicians without a migration background), yet when you think the population of people with an immigrant background in the Netherlands is smaller than 25%, you find compromising female politicians more favorable and better representatives. Moreover, having a positive attitude on migration leads to evaluating female politicians with a migration background who compromise higher in terms of career prospects, favorability and representativeness.
- H3b:
 - COVID-19: No differences
 - Defense: When female politicians with a migration background stick to their guns, they're seen as more favorable by people con-defense.
 - Education: When female politicians with a migration background stick to their guns, they're evaluated to have better career-prospects by people con-education.
 - Immigration: No differences

Figure 6: Results: Interaction with Position on COVID-19

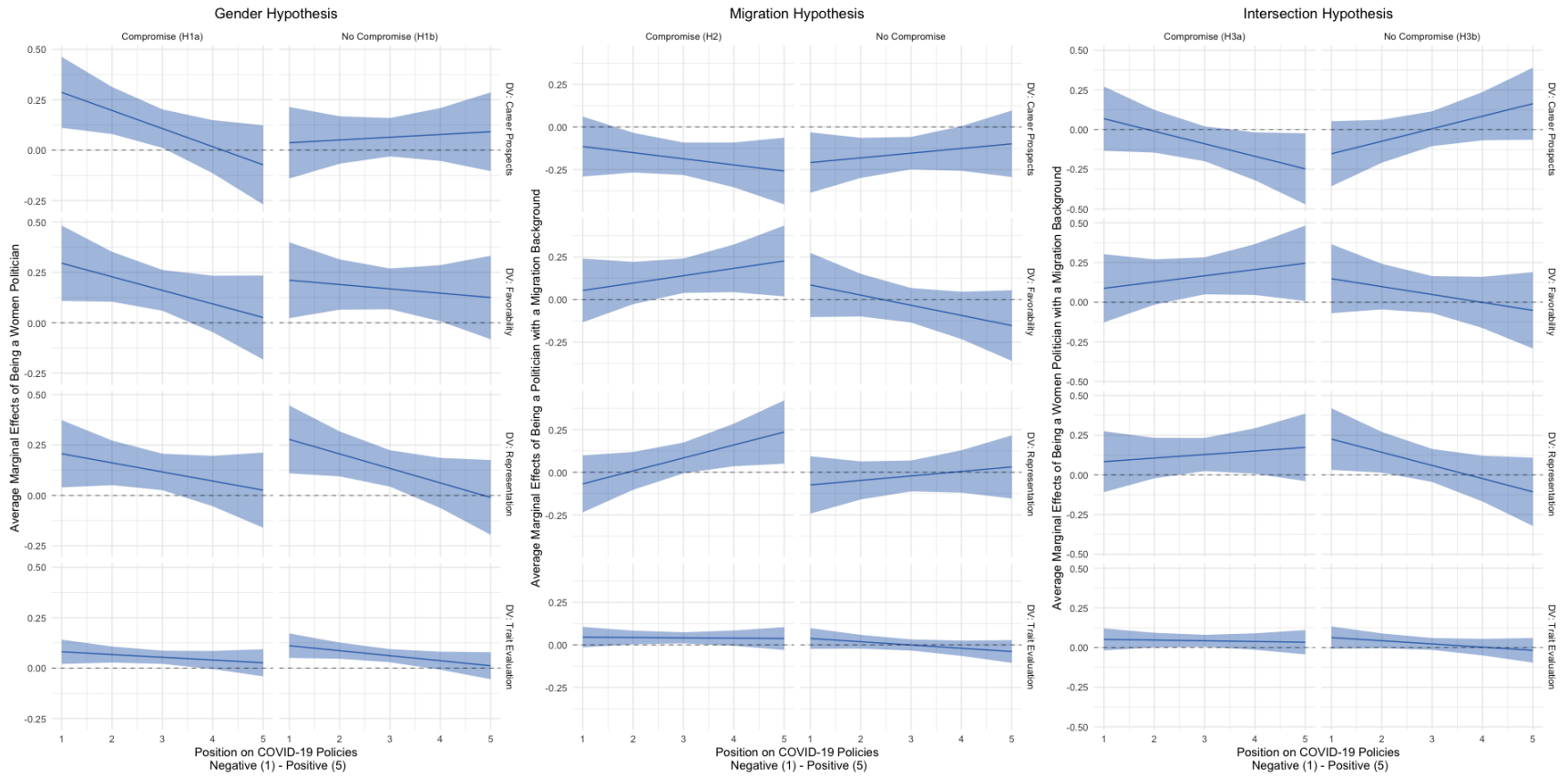


Figure 7: Results: Interaction with Position on Defense

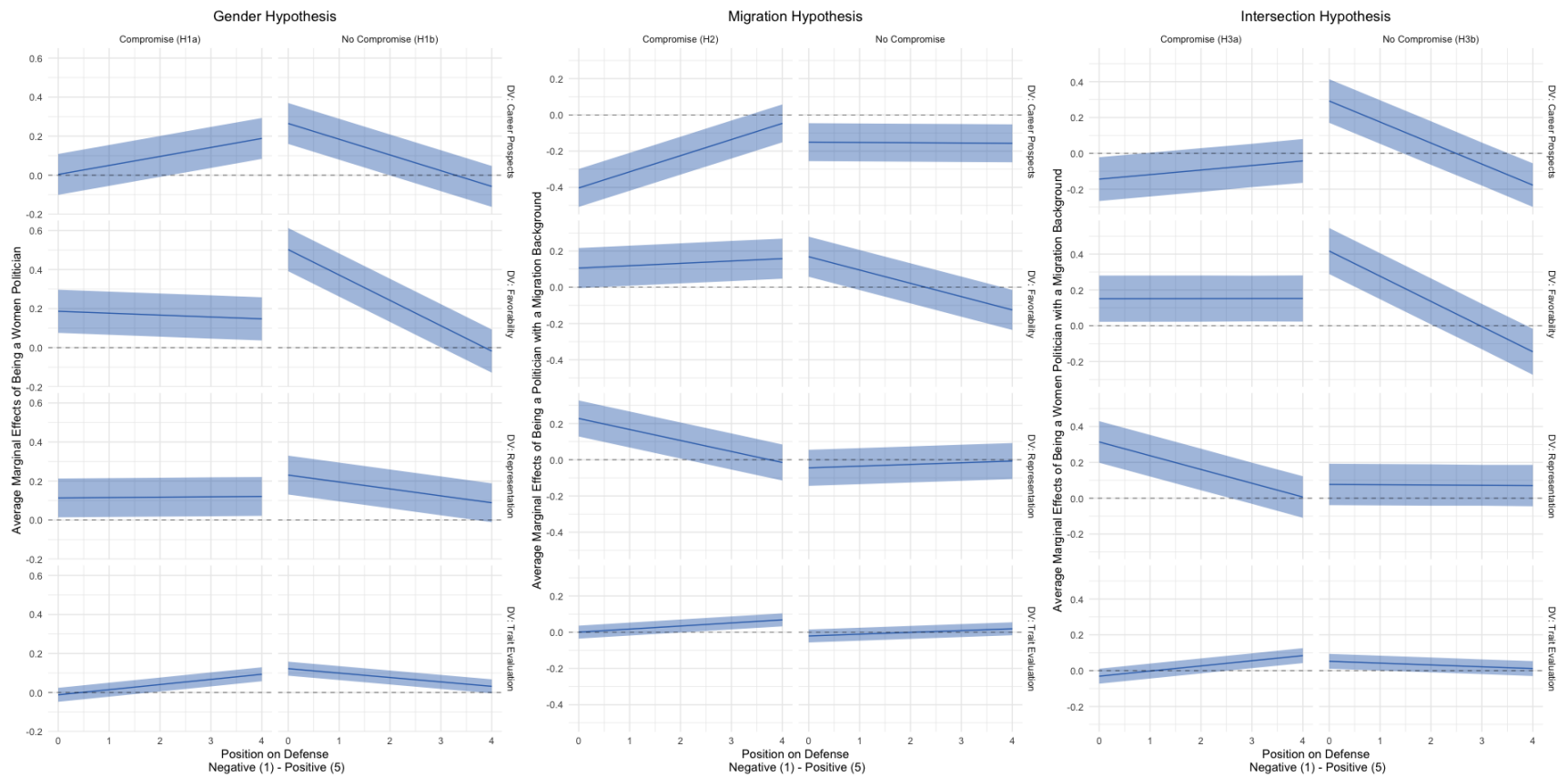


Figure 8: Results: Interaction with Position on Education

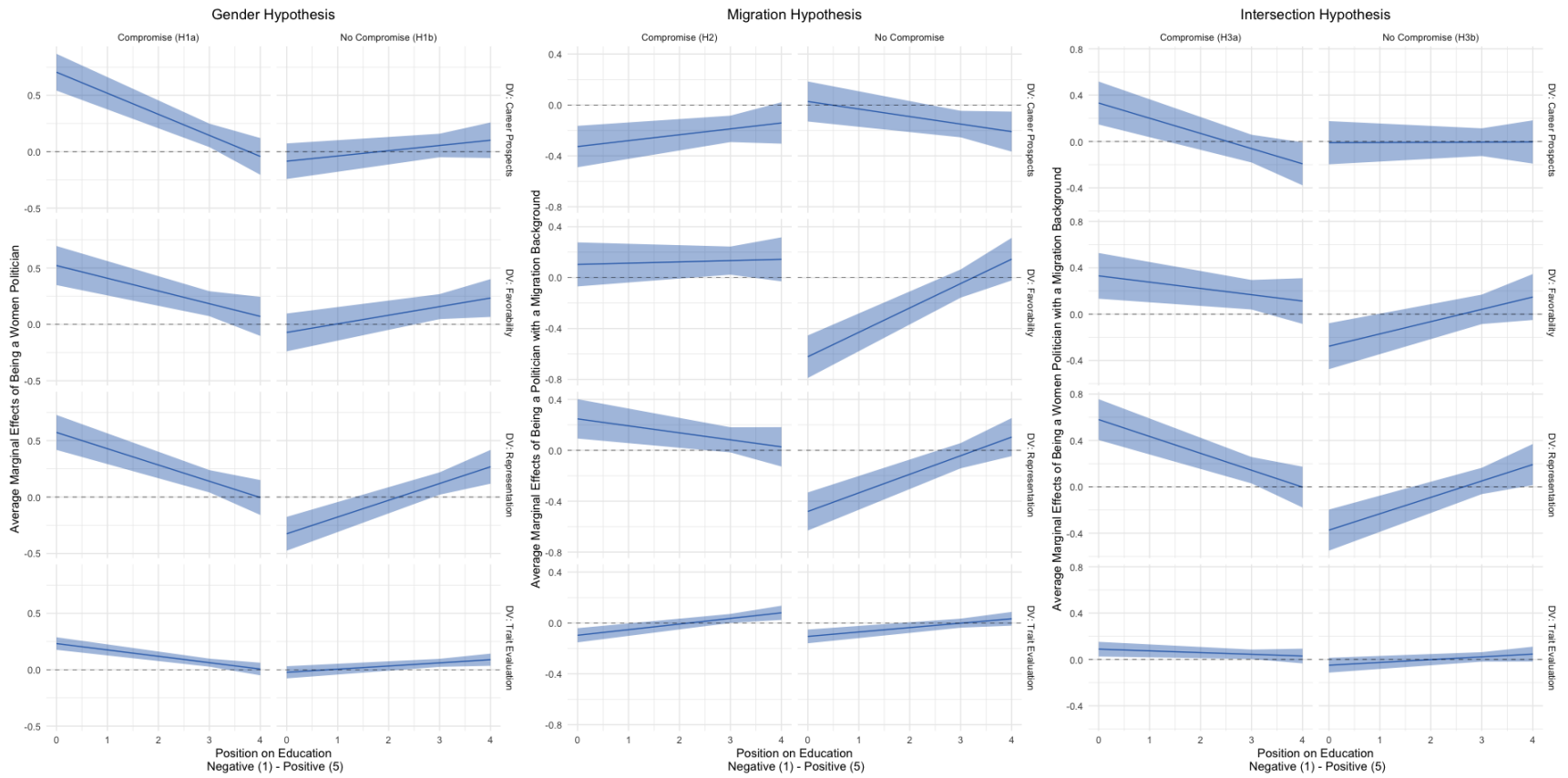
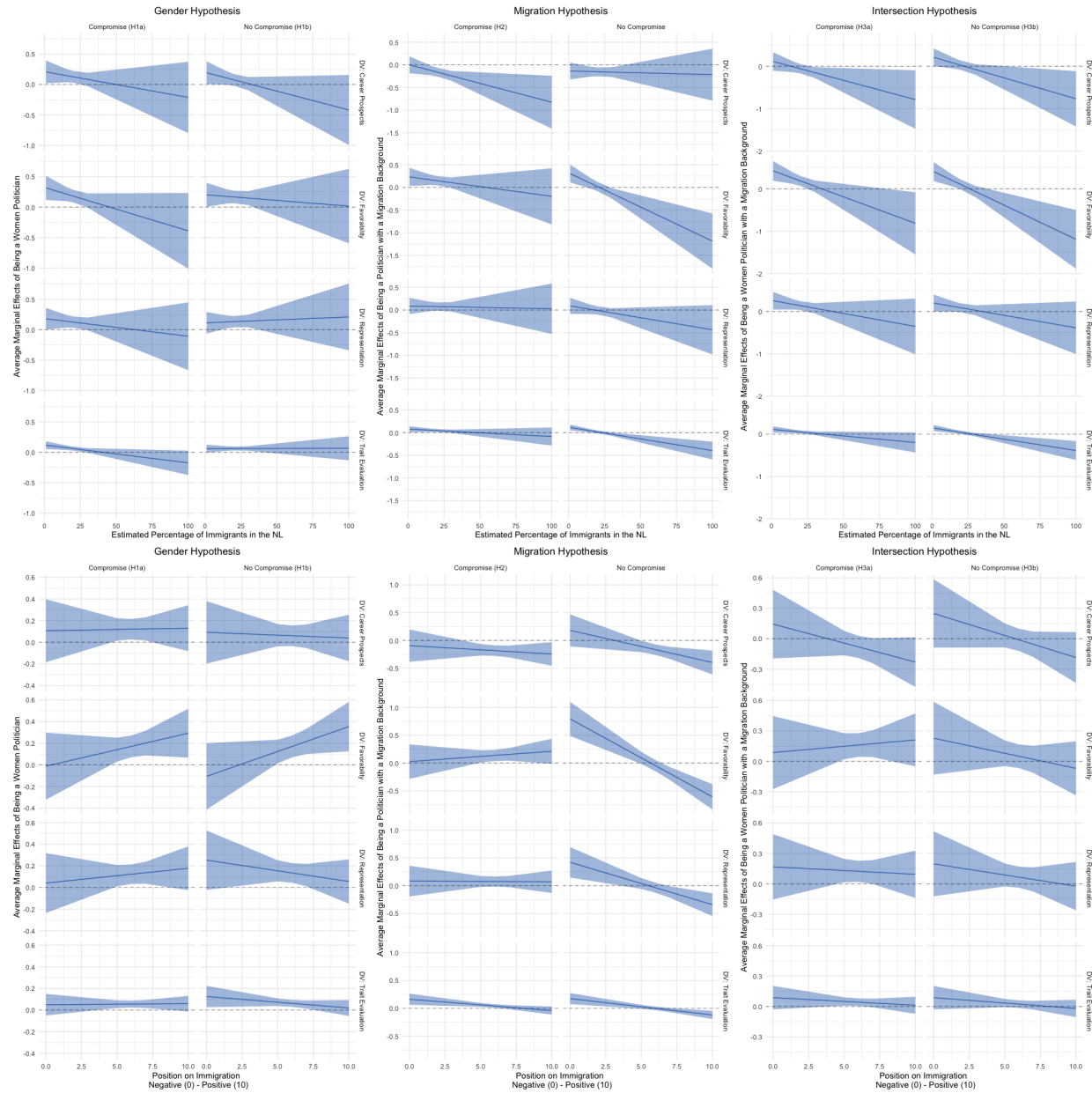


Figure 9: Results: Interaction with Position on Immigration



5 Discussion

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