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A Two-Level Analysis of the Determinants of Direct Democratic Choices in European Immigration and Foreign Policy in Switzerland

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ABSTRACT

This article employs a unique data set – covering 25 popular votes on foreign, European and immigration/asylum policy held between 1992 and 2006 in Switzerland – in order to examine the conditional impact of context upon utilitarian, cultural, political and cognitive determinants of individual attitudes toward international openness. Our results reveal clear patterns of cross-level interactions between individual determinants and the project-related context of the vote. Thus, although party cues and political competence have a strong impact on individuals' support for international openness, this impact is substantially mediated by the type of coalition that is operating within the party elite. Similarly, subjective utilitarian and cultural considerations influence the voters' decision in interaction with the content of the proposal submitted to the voters as well as with the framing of the voting campaign.

KEY WORDS

- direct democracy
- international openness
- multi-level analysis
- public attitudes

Introduction

In 1992, the ratification of the Maastricht treaty resulted in a No vote by the Danish people and a very narrow 'Yes' majority in France. In the same year, the Swiss rejected the European Economic Area. These popular expressions of Euroscepticism have sparked off a new era for the study of public opinion in foreign policy in general and in European (EU) integration in particular. As a result of the policy deepening of the EU and its extension to East European countries, we have also witnessed growing interest in the determinants of individual preferences toward immigration. There is still an intense debate regarding the forces that drive public attitudes toward the outside world: a first branch of research points to material, cost/benefit calculations as the main source of individual attitudes; a second asserts cultural and identity-related factors as the prime motivational basis; and a third emphasizes the importance of party cues and cognitive factors, which are said to be of importance both directly and in interaction with each other.

Recently, however, scholars have come to acknowledge that all three sets of factors are applicable and that their relative importance varies according to contextual characteristics, such as the state of the national economy, party cues or the degree of division among the party elites (e.g. Brinegar and Jolly, 2005; Hooghe and Marks, 2005; Steenbergen and Jones, 2002). Our article elaborates on this contextual approach and points to additional, project-related context conditions that are theoretically important for understanding support for international openness. More specifically, we argue that the relative weight of utilitarian and cultural factors depends on both the content of the specific proposal submitted to the voters and the framing of the related referendum campaign. Similarly, we contend that the type of coalition among the party elites substantially mediates the effect of political predispositions and cognitive factors. To empirically capture these relationships between individual and contextual determinants, we resort to multi-level regressions with cross-level interactions, where voters are clustered with respect to the project submitted to them.

As the country with the most far-reaching experience in direct legislation and referendum campaigns, the 'Swiss laboratory' lends itself particularly well to an analysis of how individual and contextual characteristics interact and jointly influence voters' decisions (Kriesi, 2005). In addition, whereas existing studies have focused on public support for either EU integration, or immigration or foreign policy, our data set covering 25 popular votes (referendums or initiatives) on European, immigration/asylum and foreign policy held between 1992 and 2006 in Switzerland enables us to look for possible differences in patterns of influence between them.

The article begins with a short review of the international and Swiss literature on the sources of individual attitudes toward international openness and, more importantly, on their conditional impact in different contextual, project-related, circumstances. Building on this literature, we identify additional potential mediators (policy content, framing and party coalition) and we formulate hypotheses regarding how they modify the impact of individual determinants of support for international openness. We then present our data, operationalization and model – setting the stage for the empirical tests. Our results overall demonstrate that the role of utilitarian, cultural, political and cognitive factors can be understood only in interaction with the project-specific characteristics surrounding a popular vote. We summarize our main findings in the conclusion and we highlight some prospects for future research.

Theoretical approaches to attitudes toward international openness

The literature on the sources of public attitudes toward European integration or immigration points to three main sets of individual determinants: interest-based, identity-based and information-based factors. We briefly review this literature and then turn to the more promising conception that the impact of these individual-level determinants varies according to the project-related context.

Individual determinants: Interest, identity and information

Individual preferences regarding relations with the outside world – whether in terms of participation in supranational institutions, market liberalization or inflow of foreign workers and refugees – are often explained from a *utilitarian, interest-based perspective*. Despite some differences in their conceptual specifications, researchers share the general idea that the process of denationalization constitutes a threat for some people but opens new opportunities for others. It is believed that individuals will favour or oppose this process depending on the material losses or benefits they expect from it (e.g. Gabel, 1998a,b; Gabel and Palmer, 1995; Kriesi et al., 2006).

On the one hand, citizens who feel threatened by increased economic competition and immigration are likely to favour protectionist policies and to seek shelter from international exposure. This sense of material threat can invoke different anxiety factors: people might be anxious about their job or anticipate pressure on their wages, or they might fear a rise in taxes and a reduction in social security benefits (e.g. Citrin et al., 1997). Generally, a sense

of material threat is more widespread among those who, owing to their occupational status or income level, are vulnerable to competition from foreign workers and/or lack the ability to be mobile and to exploit the opportunities created by market liberalization, i.e. low-skilled workers, the 'old middle class' of farmers, craftsmen and shopkeepers, and the unemployed (Citrin et al., 1997; Gabel, 1998a,b; Gabel and Palmer, 1995; Kriesi, 1998; Kriesi et al., 2006; McLaren, 2002; Scheve and Slaughter, 2001). By contrast, the business community and liberal academics – together with the 'new middle class' of managers, sociocultural specialists and technical specialists – are likely to derive benefits from an opening-up of national boundaries and from a liberalization of migration regimes. Because of this, these groups are said to support policies of international openness. In addition to people's objective educational, occupational and financial situations, their *subjective* evaluation of the likely effects of international openness upon their wages and job security, as well as on the national economy in general, also contributes to their attitudes toward immigration or European integration (Christin, 2005; Christin and Trechsel, 2002; Hooghe and Marks, 2005; Sides and Citrin, 2007).

The process of denationalization leads not only to increased market integration and economic competition but also to interdependence and migration, which erode cultural boundaries. Scholars working from an *identity-based perspective* often stress the importance of a 'cultural threat' as the driving force of individual preferences over international openness. As McLaren (2002: 553) argues, 'antipathy toward the EU is not just about cost/benefit calculations [. . .], but about fear of, or hostility toward, other cultures'. Seen from this angle, threats aroused by the erosion of national boundaries are mainly cultural and symbolic: they refer to the fear that international openness will undermine a nation-state's sovereignty or that immigrants will threaten a nation's distinctive identity, culture and way of life (e.g. McLaren, 2002; Sniderman et al., 2004). Opposition to immigration and EU integration is then viewed as a function of the 'degree of antipathy toward other cultures stemming from nationalistic attachments' (McLaren, 2002: 551). Hooghe and Marks (2005: 424), however, argue that whether or not citizens feel threatened by EU integration depends on how they conceive of their national identity – in inclusive or exclusive terms. In their opinion, only the latter leads to Euroscepticism (see also Carey, 2002; McLaren, 2007). Similarly, Sides and Citrin (2007) reveal that people who employ an ethnic definition of nationality – emphasizing cultural homogeneity – are most strongly opposed to immigration.

Both the utilitarian and the cultural approach have paid scant attention to the nature or level of public *information and knowledge*, as it relates to issues

concerning the outside world. Challenging this view, many scholars argue that most citizens simply do not have enough information about policies of international openness to be able to evaluate their likely consequences. Thus, it is assumed that citizens rely on 'proxies' or 'cues' derived from domestic politics when forming their opinion on foreign or EU policy (e.g. Anderson, 1998; Franklin et al., 1994, 1995). A widespread contention is that party cues are especially important and that individuals tend to support the position of the party they feel closest to (e.g. Gabel, 1998a; Hooghe and Marks, 2005; Sciarini and Marquis 2000; Steenbergen and Jones, 2002).

In the early research on EU support, cognitive skills were also said to have a distinct and direct impact on individual attitudes toward EU integration. According to Inglehart's (1970) 'cognitive mobilization hypothesis', people with higher cognitive capacities receive more information about the EU and develop a better understanding of it, which makes them feel less threatened. Empirical studies have tended to reject Inglehart's hypothesis (e.g. Gabel, 1998a), however.

Elaborating on Zaller's (1992) theory of opinion formation, scholars have come up with a more sophisticated conception. They contend that cognitive skills have an indirect effect on individual preferences for international openness, by mediating the impact of political predispositions or party cues. That is to say, people with higher cognitive skills (the 'politically aware' in Zaller's terms) are more likely to understand and to receive the political messages delivered during a referendum campaign, and they are also better equipped to scrutinize these messages and to resist those that are not consistent with their political predispositions. Less competent citizens, by contrast, tend to accept all of the messages that they can receive. As a result, competent citizens are more likely than less competent citizens to vote in conformity with their underlying political preferences or with their preferred party's cues (Hobolt, 2005; Kriesi, 2005; Marquis and Sciarini, 1999).

Contextual mediators: Health of the economy, party coalitions, framing and policy domain

Whereas earlier studies focused on individual-level determinants of preferences on international openness, more recent research has posited more subtle hypotheses regarding the differential impact of these individual-level determinants, depending on the characteristics of the context. First, with respect to the economic, interest-based approach, it has been suggested that the impact of utilitarian considerations on attitudes toward immigration varies according to the *health of the national economy* or the number of foreigners residing in a particular nation (Citrin et al., 1997; Krishnakumar and Müller, 2007; Sides and Citrin, 2007; Sniderman et al., 2004).¹

Second, the literature on political and cognitive factors posits that the (joint) influence of party cues and citizens' awareness on opinion formation is contingent on the context, especially on the *structure of party competition* (e.g. Gabel and Scheve, 2007; Ray, 2003). According to Zaller (1992), a crucial aspect of party competition is the degree of consensus among the elites. If party elites uniformly favour a given policy, then a 'mainstream effect' is likely to occur, meaning that support for this policy should increase as a function of political competence among sympathizers of all parties. If, however, the party elites are divided, a 'polarization' effect is more likely. In such a scenario, support for a policy depends upon both political competence and predispositions – and not only on competence, as is the case when the elites are in agreement. In the present context, this means that support for international openness increases with the level of competence among the followers of parties that endorse openness and decreases among the followers of parties that reject it.² In line with these theoretical expectations, empirical tests show that political awareness can have a uniformly positive effect on EU support only if all parties take favourable positions on EU integration (Steenbergen and Jones, 2002: 233), whereas cases of divided party elites translate into the predicted polarization effect between the most competent citizens of the two opposing political camps (Marquis and Sciarini, 1999: 465).

In Switzerland, issues relating to international openness (immigration, foreign policy, EU integration) are highly controversial and cause serious divisions within the party system (Marquis and Sciarini, 1999). Left-leaning parties consistently favour international openness whereas conservative right parties uniformly oppose it. Parties of the moderate right take more nuanced positions, sometimes joining the left and advocating openness, sometimes taking a more protectionist stance together with the conservative right. This leaves us with two different constellations of party competition: a centre–left coalition (when the moderate right sides with the left) and a centre–right coalition (when the moderate right backs the conservative right).

Because of this, we expect a polarization effect between left-leaning voters and conservative right voters in any case, regardless of the type of coalition in place among party elites. The situation of moderate right voters is more complex but more interesting, too. Given that the preferences of moderate right parties vary across votes, their followers are likely to display different patterns of support for international openness, depending on the specific party coalition at stake. In other words, we assume that support for integrative policies among moderate right voters increases as a function of political competence in votes with a centre–left coalition but decreases as a function of political competence in votes with a centre–right coalition.

A similar reasoning also applies to non-partisan voters (i.e. to voters who do not feel close to a party). Even if these voters are not exceedingly

sensitive to party cues, they are probably not immune to the messages delivered during referendum campaigns either. Therefore, we expect the same kind of interaction – between party coalition, competence and support for international openness – to be apparent among voters of the moderate right.

Going one step further, we introduce two additional factors that have so far been neglected by studies on individual attitudes to international openness: the framing of the voting campaign and the policy domain at stake. Although *framing* figures prominently in the political communication and political psychology literature, it has rarely been applied to empirical studies on public support for European integration or immigration.

Despite the lack of a common theoretical model underlying framing research (Scheufele, 1999), there is wide scholarly agreement on the general idea that the way in which an issue is framed matters for how citizens think about it (Sniderman and Theriault, 2004: 136). Here, we approach frames as interpretive packages, or organizing principles by which policy conflicts are described and that suggest a particular interpretation and understanding of political issues (e.g. Gamson and Modigliani, 1989). Each issue can be ‘framed’ in several ways, and frames are generally not tied to a specific position for or against a policy proposal. EU integration, for instance, might be presented as an economic project of market liberalization or as a cultural-political project intended to promote peace and cross-national exchanges. Both interpretations can be used to support or to reject the integration process. Depending on which definition is dominant in a voting campaign, citizens may react differently to a ballot proposal and have recourse to different considerations when making their voting choices.³ Therefore, we assume that citizens use frame-consistent ideas in the process of issue interpretation (e.g. Lee et al., 2008: 701). More specifically, we expect citizens to weight utilitarian considerations more prominently in their voting decision when material interest frames gain in visibility during a referendum campaign, and to rely more heavily on cultural and identity-related considerations when the elites frame the vote in primarily cultural terms.

In addition to the framing of the referendum campaign, the *policy domain* is also at stake. Indeed, European, foreign or immigration policy is likely to influence the relative impact of utilitarian or cultural considerations. Earlier studies had offered contradictory opinions regarding the relative weight of cultural and utilitarian factors in Swiss public attitudes to European policy. Some authors saw the conflict between an exclusive and an inclusive conception of Swiss identity as the main driving force (e.g. Kriesi et al., 1993; Sciarini and Listhaug, 1997; Vatter, 1994), whereas others claimed that interest-based considerations outweigh cultural factors (e.g. Brunetti et al., 1998). Recent studies have arrived at more balanced conclusions, emphasizing the

relevance of both types of factors (Anson and Cadot, 2004; Christin and Trechsel, 2002). Similarly, studies carried out in EU countries assert that utilitarian factors and cultural factors are of approximately equal importance in the formation of preferences on EU integration (Carey, 2002; Hooghe and Marks, 2005; McLaren, 2002).

As far as immigration policy is concerned, however, several researchers have concluded that identity-related concerns affect anti-immigrant sentiments more substantially than concerns related to economic interests (Citrin et al., 1997; Sides and Citrin, 2007; Sniderman et al., 2004). This observation, together with the characteristics of the popular votes on immigration policy included in our data set,⁴ leads us to assume that cultural factors are more important than utilitarian factors in this specific policy domain. Finally, in the matter of foreign policy, we are not aware of any study in Switzerland or elsewhere in Europe that has dealt with the relative impact of both utilitarian and cultural factors (for a partial exception, see Bühlmann et al., 2006). However, given that our popular votes on foreign policy raised both cultural issues (e.g. the consequences of UN membership for Switzerland's sovereignty and international solidarity) and material issues (e.g. the financial costs of UN membership), we assume that both sets of considerations play an approximately equal role in foreign policy votes.

With this information established, we are now prepared to summarize our hypotheses:

H1: Individual-level utilitarian factors are stronger predictors of preferences on international openness in times of economic hardship and when material interest frames dominate a campaign.

H2: The relative impact of individual-level cultural factors increases with the visibility of identity frames during the voting campaign.

H3: The relative weight of cultural considerations is higher than that of utilitarian considerations in popular votes on immigration/asylum policy, while the two sets of factors are about equally important in votes on European and foreign policy.

H4a: Regardless of the type of party coalition, support for international openness increases with the level of political competence among supporters of the political left and decreases with political competence among sympathizers of the conservative right – leading to a polarization effect.

H4b: Among voters of the moderate right and non-partisans, the interaction between party cues and political competence varies according to the type of party coalition: support for international openness increases with political competence in votes with a centre-left coalition and decreases with political competence in votes with a centre-right coalition.

Data, measures and model

We analyse 25 popular votes held in Switzerland between 1992 and 2006. Out of these votes, 13 dealt with immigration and asylum policy, 7 pertained to the relationship between Switzerland and the EU and 5 concerned foreign policy (see the full list in the Online Appendix).⁵

We employ a standardized data set taken from the so-called 'VOX surveys', which are completed after each popular vote at the national level (Brunner et al., 2007). These surveys contain information about respondents' characteristics and voting behaviour in each ballot proposal. Initially, there were a total of 29,352 observations. Eliminating respondents who did not participate in the popular vote and those who cast an empty ballot reduces the sample to 14,813 observations. Owing to missing answers on some independent variables, we must eliminate about 600 more cases.

Measures

Our dependent variable is the individual voting decision in the 25 popular votes under study. In most cases, voting 'Yes' meant approving Switzerland's opening-up to the outside world (e.g. by joining the United Nations). After recoding the cases where casting a Yes vote meant closing the country to the outside (e.g. by tightening immigration or asylum policy), a value of 1 indicates support for international openness, 0 reflects support for closedness.

Individual-level explanatory factors are coded as follows. To account for the role of *utilitarian* considerations, we resort to two objective indicators of one's own economic situation – income and occupational status – and to one subjective measure dealing with the assessment of the economic consequences of international openness. Information about occupational status is not very detailed in the VOX survey but nevertheless allows us to distinguish between the expected 'winners' from international openness (liberal academics, managers and teachers/students) and the likely losers (farmers, independents, workers and a residual category of the unemployed, retirees and housewives), with employees as the reference category. Measuring people's subjective evaluation of economic consequences is more complex and merits additional explanation. The VOX surveys contain a series of questions (usually six) in which respondents are asked for their positions on the main arguments – for and against a ballot proposal – put forward by the political elite during the voting campaign. Based on their substantive content, we classified these arguments – whenever possible – into a utilitarian and a cultural category.⁶ Typically, the utilitarian category contained arguments such as 'costs are too high', 'leads to higher unemployment', 'important for our economy' and 'opens up new markets'. Respondents were asked whether

they (fully) agree or (fully) disagree with the arguments. Our variable ranges from -2 to +2, where those who fully agree with a utilitarian argument in favour of international openness (and those who fully disagree with a utilitarian argument against openness) get a value of +2.

We proceeded by constructing an indicator for *cultural* considerations in the same way. Respondents' positions on cultural arguments – such as 'for opening-up', 'for more international collaboration', 'protect our traditions', 'by solidarity', 'threatens our sovereignty' and 'there are too many foreigners already' – were taken as an indicator of their assessment of the cultural and identity-related consequences of international openness. Note that this indicator is the only available measure of cultural factors in the VOX surveys.

Party cues are measured by respondents' party identification and by their self-positioning on a left–right scale (Kriesi, 2005). We consolidate the high number of political parties in Switzerland into three party families: the conservative right (Swiss People's Party, Swiss Democrats, other parties of the radical right), the moderate right (Christian Democrats, Radicals, Liberals, other small parties) and the left (Social Democrats, Greens, Workers Party, other small left parties). Voters who do not identify with a party but position themselves clearly on one side of the left–right scale are added to the corresponding category (Kriesi, 2005: 142), whereas respondents who do not identify with a party or do not position themselves on either side of the left–right scale serve as the reference category.

Our indicator of *political competence* is project specific. It is based on three sets of information collected in the VOX surveys. The first set of data measures voters' knowledge of the title of the project submitted to the popular vote and their ability to describe its content. Respondents receive one point for correctly answering each of these two questions. The second set measures respondents' ability to justify their voting choice. These data are based on an open-ended question through which respondents are asked to supply two reasons for their Yes (or No) vote. Again, they receive one point if they are able to answer the question, even in vague terms – provided that their justification relates to the vote in question and does not contradict their vote. Finally, our third measure is taken from the respondents' ability to describe their position, answering a set of closed-form questions on the major arguments of the campaign. Respondents who answer all these questions receive one point. The combination of these three sets of questions results in a scale of political competence that ranges from 0 to 5.

Finally, we include a series of *control* variables that previous studies suggest play a role in voters' decisions on foreign and immigration policy (e.g. Kriesi et al., 1993; Krishnakumar and Müller, 2007; Sciarini and Listhaug, 1997): age, gender, education, language, religion and urbanity.

At the contextual level, we look at the 'objective coalitions' that form on the basis of parties' voting recommendations, in order to account for the structure of *party competition* during the voting campaign. Whereas Kriesi (2005) distinguishes between no fewer than five types of coalition, we can reduce this to a two-category division in our data: a centre-left (reference category) and a centre-right coalition. The latter grouping unites all parties of the conservative and the moderate right in opposition to the left; the former sets the parties of the left and the moderate right against the conservative right. Although the centre-right coalition is generally dominant in Swiss politics – especially on issues regarding economic, financial or social policy – the centre-left coalition appears frequently in the field of foreign policy (Kriesi, 2005). It is no surprise, therefore, that there are 18 centre-left coalitions in our data set but only 7 centre-right coalitions.

To measure the *framing* of the voting campaign, we once again use the arguments put forward by the political elites during the referendum campaign. More specifically, we use the overall number of utilitarian arguments – regardless of whether they are in favour of or against international openness – included in the VOX questionnaire as an indicator of the visibility of utilitarian considerations. We do the same for cultural arguments, in order to measure the cultural framing of the campaign.⁷

To tap the influence of *economic context*, we employ the unemployment rate at the time the votes took place.⁸ Finally, we account for the specific *policy domain* at stake and distinguish between immigration/asylum policy, European policy and a residual category of foreign policy votes (reference category).

Note that all continuous independent variables have been standardized with a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1 to facilitate comparisons between the estimated coefficients.

Model

We use a logistic multi-level model where the dependent variable is approval or rejection of ballot proposals related to questions of international openness and where individual characteristics at level 1 are nested within contextual determinants at level 2. Political scientists have only recently started to use multi-level models, mostly to examine the impact of geographical units such as countries, regions or districts on individuals' electoral behaviour (e.g. Johnston et al., 2007; Jones et al., 1992). In the literature on public support for EU integration or on voting behaviour in EU referendums, most authors either rely on country dummies (e.g. Eichenberg and Dalton, 1993; Gabel, 1998b; McLaren, 2002, 2007) or instead estimate separate models for different groups of countries (e.g. Anderson, 1998; Christin, 2005; Hobolt, 2005) to

control for the impact of geographical context. Only a handful of studies are based on multi-level modelling (e.g. Brinegar and Jolly, 2005; Hooghe and Marks, 2005; Steenbergen and Jones, 2002), although such models offer many advantages over the two other approaches. Whereas the estimation of separate models requires the onerous practical inconvenience of computing as many regressions as there are sub-units at the contextual level (and there can be many), the inclusion of dummies leaves at least two questions unanswered. First, dummy variables can account for contextual variation across sub-units but they do not show *how much* of the variation in individual-level opinion can be attributed to contextual rather than individual factors (Brinegar and Jolly, 2005: 165). Second, although dummy variables can be used to capture clustering in the data and to absorb the variation between contextual sub-units, they do not explain *why* the regressions for the sub-units are different or show which contextual characteristics actually matter (Steenbergen and Jones, 2002: 220). By contrast, multi-level modelling permits the analysis of substantive explanations of contextual variation, while also accounting for the dependency of individual observations within sub-units.

As is the case in other studies of voting behaviour in Switzerland (e.g. Kriesi, 2005; Sciarini et al., 2007), we do not account for geographical context and instead focus on the context of the popular vote and the associated voting campaign. The estimation of an empty model (not reported here) shows that the variation across ballot proposals accounts for about 11% of the total variance. Given this significant variance at the contextual level, we define a two-level random intercept model with predictor variables at the individual and contextual levels, and with cross-level interactions.⁹ The formal representation of our general model closely follows Snijders and Bosker (1999: 216):

$$\text{logit}(P_{ij}) = \gamma_0 + \sum_k \gamma_k X_{ijk} + \sum_l \gamma_l Y_{ijl} + \sum_m \gamma_m Z_{jm} + \sum_n \gamma_n Y_{ij} Z_{jn} + U_{0j}.$$

The logit of P_{ij} represents the probability that a voter will support policy proposals in favour of international openness, as a sum of a linear function of individual-level (X , Y) and context-level (Z) explanatory variables, cross-level interactions ($Y \times Z$) as well as a random, context-dependent deviation U_{0j} . The deviations U_{0j} are assumed to have zero as their mean (given all the values of all explanatory variables) and a variance of τ_0^2 .

First, we test this model with *objective* utilitarian, political and cognitive factors. The *subjective* cultural and utilitarian variables, which measure respondents' assessment of the consequences of each legislative act, are included separately in a second step, together with the related framing of the voting campaign. Both models are tested with MLwiN 2.10 beta 5 (Rasbash et al., 2008) using Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) estimations.

Empirical tests

Table 1 presents the results of the two-level models.¹⁰

Starting with utilitarian factors, model 1 demonstrates that the influence of our two objective individual-level measures (income and occupation) on voters' support for international openness is in line with previous studies. Support is higher among high-income voters than it is among medium- or low-income voters, and it is higher among the 'winners' (liberal academics, teachers) than among employees (the reference category) and the 'losers' (farmers, independents, workers), who demonstrate a particular dearth of

Table 1 The determinants of support for international openness, 1992–2006 (multi-level logistic regression models)

<i>Estimates</i>	<i>Model 1</i>		<i>Model 2</i>	
	<i>Coeff.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Coeff.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>
Constant	0.077	0.161	–0.422	0.302
First-level predictors				
<i>Utilitarian factors</i>				
Income (ref: average income)				
Low income	0.009	0.045	0.008	0.059
High income	0.205***	0.052	0.022	0.068
Occupation (ref: employee)				
Farmer	–0.543***	0.121	–0.426**	0.153
Independent	–0.148*	0.071	–0.104	0.096
Worker	–0.141*	0.060	–0.039	0.078
Unemployed/pensioners/housewives	–0.003	0.076	0.056	0.094
Manager	0.051	0.092	0.027	0.116
Liberal academic	0.415*	0.183	0.308	0.220
Teacher/student	0.237*	0.107	0.199	0.135
Subjective utilitarian considerations			0.545***	0.091
<i>Cultural factors</i>				
Subjective cultural considerations			1.664***	0.077
<i>Partisanship and cognitive skills</i>				
Party identification (ref: non-partisans)				
Left	1.181***	0.062	0.863***	0.088
Moderate right	0.407***	0.057	0.310***	0.078
Conservative right	–1.216***	0.076	–0.667***	0.099
Political competence	0.170***	0.041	0.093	0.058
Left*political competence	0.176*	0.069	0.181	0.096
Moderate right*political competence	–0.005	0.062	–0.016	0.084
Conservative right*political competence	–0.429***	0.078	–0.400***	0.101

Table 1 continued

<i>Estimates</i>	<i>Model 1</i>		<i>Model 2</i>	
	<i>Coeff.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Coeff.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>
<i>Control factors</i>				
Age	-0.042	0.022	-0.007	0.028
Gender (ref: male)				
Female	0.202***	0.043	0.161**	0.053
Religion (ref: Protestant)				
Catholic	-0.125**	0.043	-0.055	0.056
Other	-0.188**	0.059	-0.070	0.078
Language (ref: German-speaking)				
French-speaking	0.424***	0.047	0.287***	0.061
Italian-speaking	-0.185	0.099	-0.072	0.129
Urbanity (ref: agglomeration)				
Rural	-0.136**	0.050	-0.069	0.063
Urban	0.084	0.050	0.092	0.062
Education (ref: apprenticeship)				
Compulsory school	-0.146*	0.066	0.041	0.082
High school degree	0.516***	0.080	0.404***	0.106
Higher vocational training	0.237**	0.072	0.197*	0.094
University of applied sciences (UAS)	0.585***	0.087	0.425***	0.113
University/Federal Institute of Technology	0.661***	0.076	0.495***	0.102
<i>Second-level predictors</i>				
Unemployment rate	-0.027	0.093	-0.144	0.171
Utilitarian framing			0.200	0.135
Cultural framing			-0.155	0.145
Party coalition (ref: centre-left)				
Centre-right coalition	-1.119***	0.241	-0.962**	0.296
Policy issue (ref: foreign policy)				
European policy	0.032	0.222	0.452	0.460
Immigration policy	-0.254	0.151	0.282	0.434
<i>Cross-level interactions</i>				
Left*centre-right coalition	0.259*	0.112	0.468**	0.150
Moderate right*centre-right coalition	-0.515***	0.115	-0.267	0.142
Conservative right*centre-right coalition	0.037	0.186	-0.290	0.214
Political competence*centre-right coalition	-0.484***	0.081	-0.436***	0.099
Left*political competence*centre-right coalition	0.246*	0.120	0.237	0.146
Moderate right*political competence*centre-right coalition	0.009	0.116	0.052	0.133
Conservative right*political competence*centre-right coalition	0.159	0.163	0.145	0.187

Table 1 continued

<i>Estimates</i>	<i>Model 1</i>		<i>Model 2</i>	
	<i>Coeff.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Coeff.</i>	<i>S.E.</i>
Subjective utilitarian considerations*utilitarian framing			0.996***	0.075
Subjective utilitarian considerations*immigration policy			-0.005	0.095
Subjective utilitarian considerations*European policy			0.283**	0.104
Subjective cultural considerations*cultural framing			0.295***	0.052
Subjective cultural considerations*immigration policy			-0.363***	0.085
Subjective cultural considerations*European policy			-0.631***	0.101
<i>Variance components</i>				
Level-two variance:				
$r_0^2 = \text{var}(U_{0j})$	0.240	0.082	0.516	0.199
DIC	16085.69		10431.16	
<i>N</i> (individual level)	14,269		14,236	
<i>N</i> (context level)	25		25	

Note: DIC = deviance information criterion.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

support. However, the magnitude of these effects is fairly weak: the difference in the probability that a voter will support international openness amounts to only 5% between the lowest and the highest income category and to 23% between farmers and liberal academics – the two occupational categories with the lowest and highest levels of support. In addition, and more importantly, further tests that are not included here show that these factors do not matter more in times of economic slowdown. Contrary to our expectations, the impact of objective utilitarian factors *does not* seem to depend on the health of the economy. Although this result invalidates H1, our subjective measure of utilitarian considerations tells a different story (see below).

The results pertaining to the impact of political competence and party cues are hard to grasp based on the coefficients because these two variables are embedded in a complex pattern of interactions – between each other as well as with the project-related context (party coalition). For instance, the significant and positive impact of political competence on support for international openness reported in model 1 holds only for the reference category

with respect to political orientation, namely for the non-partisans, and only for a specific type of votes, namely for votes with a centre-left coalition (reference category). To obtain a clearer view of these complex, interactive effects, we calculate the predicted probabilities of voting for openness for the four categories of voters (left, moderate right, conservative right and non-partisans), depending on both their level of competence and the type of party coalition (centre-right or centre-left) – setting the other variables at their mean or at their reference value (Figure 1).

Several important findings emerge from Figure 1. First, party cues appear as a major determinant of the voting choice for integrative policies: for each type of party coalition and for each level of political competence, support for openness is systematically higher among left-leaning voters than it is among moderate-right voters or among non-partisans, and it is higher among the latter than it is among conservative right voters. Second, we see that the level of support for international openness also varies strongly according to a voter's level of political competence: in cases of both a centre-right and a centre-left coalition, support for openness *increases* with political competence among left voters whereas it *decreases* with competence among conservative right voters. Whereas the difference in support for openness between left voters and conservative right voters amounts to less than 20% among voters with low competence, it climbs to more than 50% among highly competent voters. The end result is a clear, Zaller-type polarization effect between the left and the conservative right and a clear confirmation of H4a that this polarization effect holds true, irrespective of the type of party coalition.

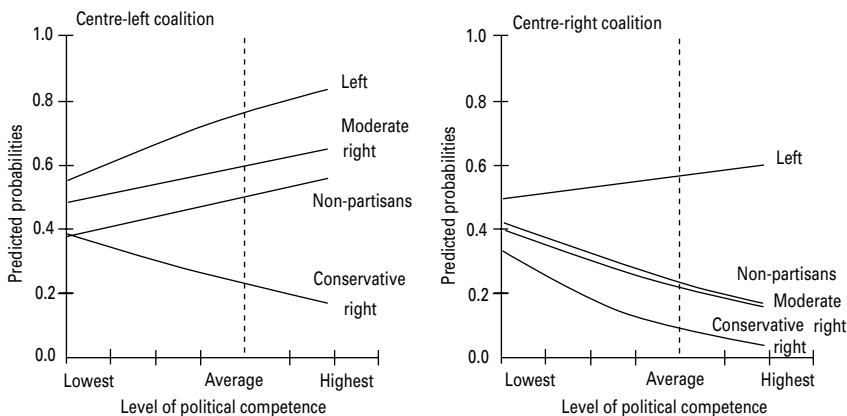


Figure 1 Predicted probabilities of voting for international openness according to political predispositions, level of political competence and type of party coalition.

Third, the voting patterns of moderate right voters and voters with no party identification are even more interesting, with substantial cross-level interactions being at work here. As we can see from Figure 1, the impact of political competence on support for international openness strongly differs between these two specific categories of voters and depends on the type of party coalition. Support for openness increases with political competence in the case of a centre-left coalition but decreases with political competence in the case of a centre-right coalition. This result validates H4b, which holds that the influence of issue-specific political competence on support for international openness is conditional on the type of coalition existing among the party elite, for both voters of the moderate right and non-partisans.

Finally, model 1 demonstrates that all but one of the sociodemographic factors included as control variables have a significant impact on voters' support for international openness. Support for integrative policies substantially increases with a voter's level of education, and it is also higher among French-speakers, women, Protestants and voters living in agglomerations and urban areas; only age fails to demonstrate statistical significance.

In model 2, we include our *subjective* measures of cultural and utilitarian considerations at the individual level and also consider two related, contextual measures of the extent to which the voting campaign is framed along cultural and utilitarian lines. It is important to note that these measures are based on the major identity-related and utilitarian arguments raised by the 'Yes' and 'No' camps during the voting campaign. It is no wonder, then, that these subjective assessments turn out to be strongly linked to voting choice: agreeing with the utilitarian or – even more so – with the cultural arguments in favour of international openness put forward during the campaign strongly correlates with support for openness. Besides, but still not unexpectedly, the inclusion of our cultural and utilitarian arguments reduces the impact of the other sets of determinants: occupation, income and competence are no longer significant, but party cues still matter, both directly and in interaction with competence. What is more interesting, though, is the fact that the impact of subjective cultural and – specifically – utilitarian arguments depends upon both policy domains and the framing of the referendum campaign. Figures 2 and 3 show the magnitude of these effects.

Overall, Figures 2 and 3 confirm the overriding importance of our subjective measures and, more specifically, emphasize the strength of our cultural measure: regardless of the policy domain at stake or the precise framing of the campaign, the higher the agreement with the cultural arguments in favour of international openness raised during the voting campaign, the higher the support for openness. The same holds true for utilitarian considerations, although to a lesser extent. In addition, Figure 2 reaffirms H3 that cultural

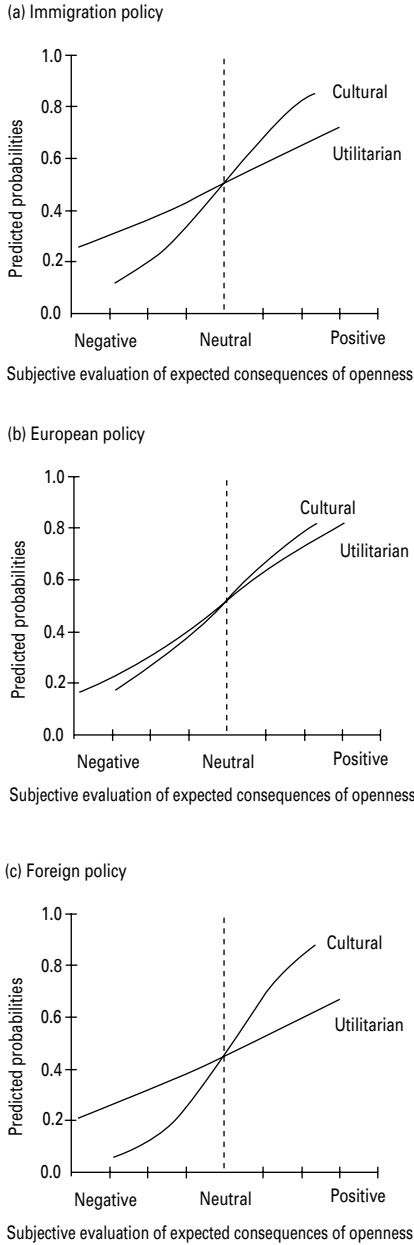


Figure 2 Predicted probabilities of voting for international openness according to the subjective evaluation of cultural and utilitarian arguments in various policy fields.

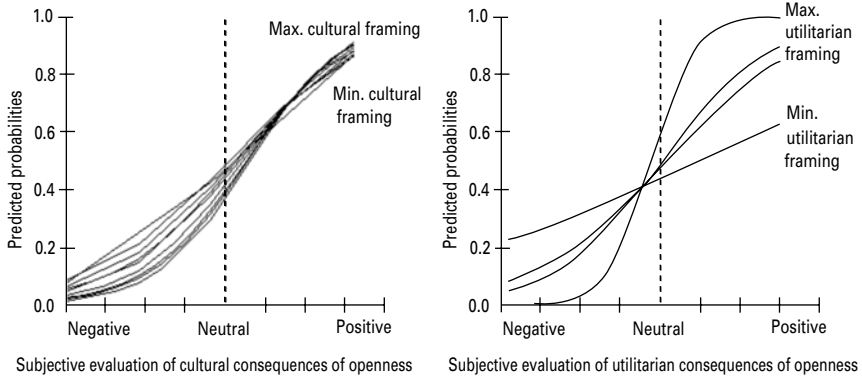


Figure 3 Predicted probabilities of voting for international openness according to the subjective evaluation of cultural and utilitarian arguments and the framing of the campaign.

factors play a greater role than utilitarian factors in immigration/asylum policy, whereas both cultural and utilitarian factors matter about equally in European policy. Contrary to our expectations, however, cultural considerations are also more influential than utilitarian considerations in foreign policy.

Finally, Figure 3 presents the interaction between the framing of the voting campaign and the role of cultural and utilitarian considerations at the individual level for a selection of values of the framing variable (maximal, average, minimal). The figure on the left-hand side reveals that the impact of identity-related considerations is scarcely conditioned by the cultural framing of the voting campaign. Regardless of the number of cultural arguments raised during the campaign, citizens' agreement with cultural arguments strongly influences their support for international openness. By contrast, the figure on the right-hand side shows that the impact of subjective utilitarian assessments varies greatly as a function of the visibility of the utilitarian frames. Differences in support for international openness between individuals who completely disagree with utilitarian arguments in favour of openness and individuals who completely agree amount to only 40% when utilitarian framing is minimal, and reach a high (almost 100%) when utilitarian framing is maximal.

In sum, cultural considerations are both more influential and less dependent on the project-related context (the content of the policy proposal and the framing of the referendum campaign) than utilitarian considerations. This finding suggests that cultural considerations are more regularly present in citizens' minds than utilitarian concerns, which must be activated by party

elites during a voting campaign in order to play a role – a role that, in such circumstances, indeed turns out to be crucial.

Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to put the analysis of the utilitarian, cultural, political and cognitive determinants of support for international openness in its project-related context. Elaborating on recent work on public support for EU integration and on public attitudes to immigration, we have investigated how context-related characteristics condition the impact of individual-level determinants of direct democratic choices on European, immigration and foreign policy in Switzerland.

Our empirical tests have confirmed the finding of the existing literature that all sets of factors contribute to the explanation of individual voting choices. More importantly, though, the act of bringing context into our theoretical and empirical specifications has helped us to highlight subtle patterns of cross-level interactions between individual factors and project-related characteristics.

First, and in agreement with Zaller's (1992) work, we found that party cues and political competence jointly influenced support for integrative policies and that this influence varied with the context. In all cases, support for openness displayed the expected polarization effect between left and conservative right voters: regardless of the type of coalition between the party elites, support increased with the level of political competence among left voters and decreased as a function of competence among conservative right voters. On the other hand – but also as expected – the structure of party competition substantially increased our understanding of the voting pattern of both moderate right voters and non-partisans. In these two categories of voters, support for integrative policies increased with political competence in votes with a centre-left coalition but decreased with political competence in cases of a centre-right coalition.

Second, our findings corroborated microeconomic theories positing that citizens who expect a loss from market liberalization (farmers, workers, old middle class, people with a low income) generally oppose international openness, whereas potential winners (liberal academics, teachers, people with a high income) are more favourable to integrative policies. However, our findings did not validate the assumption that the impact of these objective utilitarian factors is conditional on the health of the national economy. By contrast, subjective utilitarian considerations proved to be highly context sensitive. In fact, their impact varied with the policy domain at stake and,

even more so, with the framing of the voting campaign. More specifically, they mattered more in votes on European policy than in votes on foreign or immigration policy, and their impact increased steeply when the voting campaign was framed in utilitarian terms.

Third, subjective cultural considerations proved both more influential and less dependent on the policy domain or the framing of the campaign than utilitarian considerations. Subjective cultural arguments seem to play a role in voters' choices, almost as if they were an intrinsic part of the proposals submitted to the voters – even if they are hardly addressed during the campaign. Utilitarian arguments, by contrast, must be activated by the campaign in order to influence the voters' decision. As an explanation for this difference between cultural and utilitarian considerations, one can point to the fact that many cultural considerations pertaining to questions of national sovereignty, independence and the traditional way of life refer to well-known myths of the founding fathers (e.g. Wilhelm Tell) and historic achievements (e.g. resistance during World War II). Consequently, these factors are both more deeply rooted in people's minds and more likely to manifest themselves in popular votes, whatever the context of the voting campaign.

The transforming effects of the framing of the voting campaign and the type of party coalition illuminate the importance of the project-related context. In future work, we therefore wish to deepen our understanding of the role played by this context and to further investigate how it conditions the impact of individual-level determinants of voting choice. To this end, we plan to incorporate additional measures of the intrinsic characteristics of proposals submitted to voters (e.g. their familiarity) and to shed new light on the mediating influence of voting campaigns, by developing a measure of their intensity and direction and by testing the effect of campaign exposure and motivation among individuals.

Notes

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- 1 Another interesting hypothesis elaborates on the Heckscher–Ohlin model, stating that the impact of cost/benefit calculations varies depending on the

factor endowment of the national economy: in capital-rich countries, unskilled workers are more reluctant towards the opening-up of the country than are managers and professional specialists, whereas the relationship trends in the opposite direction in labour-rich countries (Brinegar and Jolly, 2005: 168; Hooghe and Marks, 2005: 421–2). Given our focus on a single country, we are, unfortunately, not able to test this hypothesis.

- 2 The degree of elite consensus also modifies cultural factors. According to Hooghe and Marks (2005: 437), exclusive national identity mainly drives Euroscepticism where national elites are divided. This hypothesis cannot be tested here, however, since the 25 votes included in our analysis are all cases of elite division.
- 3 Although our theoretical argument posits an effect of elite communication on individual opinion formation, we acknowledge that political elites might sometimes adjust their messages to the public's expectations. For an extensive methodological discussion of this endogeneity problem, see Gabel and Scheve (2007).
- 4 Our data set includes several votes on asylum policy where the perceived threat can hardly be of an economic nature (asylum seekers are not entitled to work) and is more likely to be cultural (a threat to the nation's identity). Similarly, most popular votes on immigration in our data set relate not to the regulation of the inflow of foreign workers but to their rights and duties or to the acquisition of Swiss citizenship.
- 5 Among these popular votes, there are 4 compulsory referendums, 15 facultative referendums and 6 popular initiatives. We do not account for this institutional distinction because we have no compelling theoretical reason to do so and also because initial empirical tests have shown that this distinction is not relevant.
- 6 Of course, in many cases we were not able to assign the argument to either the utilitarian or the cultural category. Thus, whereas the standard number of arguments submitted to respondents in the VOX surveys is six, the average number of cultural arguments per project is only 1.3 (with a maximum of 3) and the average number of utilitarian arguments is 1.1 (with a maximum of 4).
- 7 Ideally, we would have preferred a more direct measure of framing based on political ads or newspaper articles. But, to the extent that the researchers who design the VOX questionnaire are advised to rely on the media and other campaign material when identifying the main arguments put forward by the elite during the voting campaign, we are confident that our indicator constitutes an acceptable proxy.
- 8 Alternative indicators, such as economic growth or the national consumption climate, yield very similar results but are correlated with unemployment and therefore cannot be added to our model. Several tests (pairwise associations and correlations, multicollinearity diagnostic statistics for single-level linear regression analysis, sequential modelling) show no signs of collinearity between the variables included in our model.
- 9 In the case of binary response models, there is no single variance partition coefficient to estimate the proportion of total residual variance that is attributable to the context level. However, an approximation can be computed

as $\sigma_{u0}^2/(\sigma_{u0}^2 + 3.29)$ (Snijders and Bosker 1999: 224), that is in our case $0.401/(0.401 + 3.29) = 0.108$. A chi-square test shows that this variance is significant at the 1% level ($p = .0013$). We also tested random slopes on those variables where we postulated a conditional impact depending on the context, but this did not yield significant results. Following Snijders and Bosker (1999: 75, 96), we excluded the non-significant slopes but kept cross-level interactions in our model for theoretical reasons. Given that the power of the test for these fixed effects is higher than the test for corresponding random slopes, it is the significant result of the hypothesized cross-level interactions that counts, and not the lack of significance for the random slopes.

- 10 We tested the robustness and sensitivity of our parameter estimates to particular votes or particular combinations of (control) variables by sequential modelling, e.g. by adding the sets of utilitarian, cultural, political and cognitive variables step by step, and by re-estimating our models after having removed selected votes. Although the magnitude of some coefficients occasionally changed slightly, the overall picture remained remarkably stable. To assess convergence, we carefully observed trace plots and monitored chain length based on the Raftery–Lewis diagnostic (see the Online Appendix).

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