Attitudes to Immigrants of the Moderate Left in Switzerland

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3 February 2017

Objective: Describe the attitudes of the moderate left in Switzerland.
Methods: Descriptive statistics from the 2015 Swiss Electoral Study (SELECTS). *Results:* The moderate left is more open to foreigners than other respondents on all measures of attitudes and for all definitions of the moderate left used. *Conclusion:* Attitudes of the moderate left on immigration are distinctive from everyone else.

Keywords: attitudes to foreigners, Switzerland, left-wing

Data

Here I use data from the Swiss Electoral Study 2015 (Selects 2015). In particular, I use the post-electoral survey carried out in October 2015. There are 5,337 respondents in this representative survey. It contains up-to-date questions on attitudes to foreigners and immigrants, as well as specific questions that reflect the current political debate. The data are weighed using 'weight_total': by design, by turnout, and by vote choice. This is done so that the reported figures are representative of the population.

Variables

I have four outcome variables capturing attitudes to foreigners in different ways: whether the most important problem in Switzerland is considered to be immigration, whether respondents support equal opportunities for foreigners and Swiss, support for facilitated naturalization of third generation foreigners, and whether respondents think Switzerland should accept more refugees from crisis areas.

- most important problem in Switzerland [f12700r == 8]
- equal opportunities for foreigners and Swiss [f15440 equal opportunities 1:5 preference for Swiss]
- facilitation of the naturalization of third generation foreigners [f15852 1 yes, 2 rather yes, 3 4 no]
- Switzerland should accept more refugees from crisis areas [f15853 1 yes, 2 rather yes, 3 4 no]

I have six different ways to identify respondents from the moderate left: voted for SPS or GPS in 2015, voted for SPS or GPS or would have voted for them, the stated probability to voted for SPS or GPS is greater than 6 (on a scale from 1 to 10), whether

respondents feel close to the SPS or GPS, whether they are party members of the SPS or GPS, and on the basis of their self-placement on a left–right scale (positions 2 to 4 on a scale from 1 to 10).

- voted for SPS or GPS [f11800main7 == 6 or 7] → recoded into ‘partyvote_moderate’
- voted or would have voted for SPS or GPS [f11400main7 or f11800main7 == 6 or 7] → recoded into ‘partyvote_would_moderate’
- probability to vote SPS or GPS [f14402 or f14404 >= 6 (“of 10”)] → recoded into ‘ptv_moderate’
- feels close to SPS or GPS [f14010main7 == 6 or 7] → recoded into ‘party_close_moderate’
- party membership of SPS or GPS [f14081main7 == 6 or 7 (“N=63”)] → recoded into ‘party_member_moderate’
- left-right placement (self) [f15200 == 2:4] → recoded into ‘LR_moderate’

Note that the number of party members in the survey is relatively small, and I do not interpret differences between party members and other members of the moderate left, nor do I report the percentages for party members on their own.

Results

Here I present cross tables comparing the position of the moderate left with everyone else. For each of the four outcome variables, there are six values because I have six ways to identify the moderate left. This yields robust results (because they tend to agree).

Immigration and Asylum as Most Important Problem in Switzerland

Respondents are asked what the most important problem is facing Switzerland. Immigration and asylum is the most commonly mentioned problem.

Table 1: Most Important Problem

<i>Definition of Moderate Left</i>	<i>Moderate Left</i>	<i>Everyone Else</i>
Voted for moderate left in 2015	32%	52%
Voted or would have voted for moderate left in 2015	42%	51%
High probability to vote for moderate left	46%	53%
Feels close to moderate left	39%	52%
Party member of moderate left	24%	50%
Moderate left self-placement	38%	52%

Notes: data from SELECTS 2015

The moderate left consistently considers immigration and asylum as one of the most important problems in Switzerland. The figure, however, is consistently less than half of the moderate left (i.e. not the majority), and substantively smaller than for other respondents.

Position on Equal Opportunities for Foreigners and Swiss

Respondents are asked whether they are in favour of equal opportunities for foreigners and Swiss, or whether they are in favour of better chances for Swiss. There are 5 response categories, and given in the table is the share being in favour or being rather in favour of better chances for Swiss. This variable is commonly used as a measure of negative attitudes to foreigners (e.g. Pecoraro and Ruedin 2016).

Table 2: Equal Opportunities for Foreigners

<i>Definition of Moderate Left</i>	<i>Moderate Left</i>	<i>Everyone Else</i>
Voted for moderate left in 2015	17%	48%
Voted or would have voted for moderate left in 2015	21%	50%
High probability to vote for moderate left	32%	56%
Feels close to moderate left	17%	49%
Party member of moderate left	12%	44%
Moderate left self-placement	25%	49%

Notes: data from SELECTS 2015

The moderate left have consistently more positive attitudes to foreigners in the sense that they are much less likely to support preferential treatment for Swiss.

Position on Facilitation of the Naturalization of Third Generation Foreigners

In October 2015, respondents were asked whether they were in favour of facilitated naturalization of third-generation foreigners – an issue that comes to the vote on 12 February 2017. Given is the percentage in favour of the initiative, as opposed to ‘rather in favour’, ‘rather against’, and ‘against’.

Table 3: Facilitation of the Naturalization of Third Generation

<i>Definition of Moderate Left</i>	<i>Moderate Left</i>	<i>Everyone Else</i>
Voted for moderate left in 2015	66%	32%
Voted or would have voted for moderate left in 2015	61%	29%
High probability to vote for moderate left	45%	26%
Feels close to moderate left	61%	30%
Party member of moderate left	72%	35%
Moderate left self-placement	52%	31%

Notes: data from SELECTS 2015

Members of the moderate left are consistently more favourable of facilitated naturalization of third-generation foreigners. Typically, their level of support is well above 50% (majority), and around twice that of other respondents.

Position on Switzerland Should Accept More Refugees from Crisis Areas

Here respondents were asked whether Switzerland should accept more refugees from crisis areas. There were 4 response categories like in the previous question on

naturalization, and I report the percentage ‘agreeing’ – as opposed to ‘rather agreeing’, ‘rather disagreeing’ and ‘disagreeing’.

Table 4: Switzerland Should Accept More Refugees

<i>Definition of Moderate Left</i>	<i>Moderate Left</i>	<i>Everyone Else</i>
Voted for moderate left in 2015	45%	16%
Voted or would have voted for moderate left in 2015	42%	14%
High probability to vote for moderate left	29%	11%
Feels close to moderate left	44%	15%
Party member of moderate left	63%	20%
Moderate left self-placement	33%	17%

Notes: data from SELECTS 2015

The moderate left is consistently more open to accepting more refugees from crisis areas, typically around twice as likely to agree with this proposition than everyone else. For most definitions of the moderate left, however, support for accepting more refugees is below 50 per cent.

Conclusion

The moderate left clearly more ‘pro-immigrant’ than the rest of the population; irrespective of the measure of attitudes and irrespective on the basis on which the moderate left was identified. Of interest may also be the party positions on immigration in Switzerland (Ruedin 2013).

References

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