Fear of Small Numbers?

Immigrant population size and electoral support for the populist radical right in Switzerland

Introduction

Over the last three decades, populist radical right parties (PRR) have moved away from their post-Second World War marginalization and have reasserted their agencies in different forms and shapes in the European political landscape (Mudde 2007). Although mobilization of grievances over immigration has been the uniting factor of successful PRR parties (Ivarsflaten 2007; Van der Brug, Fennema, and Tillie 2000), the extent to which this trend is a response to the demographic realities associated with the proportion of migrant populations in receiving countries is still uncertain: some studies have uncovered negative or positive associations both across (Golder 2003; Knigge 1998; Lubbers, Gijsberts, and Scheepers 2002) as well as within (Coffé, Heyndels, and Vermeir 2007; Stein, Post, and Rinden 2000) countries, while others have failed to find significant patterns (Lubbers and Scheepers 2000). Seeking to reconcile these contradictory findings, we explore the impact of immigrant population size on PRR voting behavior in Switzerland. This context constitutes an interesting case for two reasons: firstly, the Swiss People's Party (SVP/UDC) is one of the most successful PRR parties in Europe, having gained 26.6% of the popular vote in the 2011 Swiss Federal Election; secondly, Switzerland is one of the leading immigration

countries with 22% of the country's total population in 2010 born abroad (Statistical Atlas of Switzerland 2010).

We use data procured from the Swiss Electoral Studies (Selects 2011) and the Statistical Atlas of Switzerland (2010), and draw on two established, yet contradictory, theories of ethnic hostility, group threat theory and intergroup contact theory. Group threat theory predicts a positive relationship between the proportion of migrants and PRR vote, while intergroup contact theory suggests that these factors are negatively associated. We test these theories and also go one step further in trying to reconcile them, by drawing on Appadurai's (2006) anthropological thesis of the 'fear of small numbers,' and explore whether the relationship of interest is nonlinear with the predictions of group threat theory and intergroup contact theory operating sequentially at different minority sizes. We also adopt various approaches to the definition of 'minority' and examine whether different minority groups elicit varying levels of support for the SVP/UDC. Finally, we explore the moderating role of 'perceived ethnic threat' on the relationship of immigrant population size and PRR voting.

Theoretical background

Group threat theory

Group threat theory originates from Blumer's (1958) examination of racial prejudice as a group position, where he supports that a necessary precondition for racial prejudice to emerge is that individuals perceive their agencies as 'belonging to a given racial group' (ibid, 3). This, however, necessitates a counter-identification, and it is this we/they dialectic that creates the basis of racial prejudice. Within this framework, Blumer (1958, 4) identifies four feelings that trigger this behavioral pattern: (1) a

feeling of superiority over the *other*; (2) a feeling of irreconcilable differences between the two groups; (3) a feeling of an inherent entitlement to certain privileges and advantages; and (4) a feeling that subordinate groups seek to claim these privileges. This theory therefore implies that racial prejudice arises when minority and majority groups are in proximal relations.

The dynamics of group threat theory can get in motion via two mechanisms: minority group relative size, and inauspicious economic conditions (Quillian 1995). First, a growing minority intensifies competition over scarce resources and increases the potential for political mobilization (Blalock 1967). This is why the size of the minority relative to that of the majority is suggested to be *positively* associated with the generation of anti-immigrant attitudes and PRR voting. A number of studies exploring this mechanism cross-nationally have found evidence for it (Golder 2003; Knigge 1998; Lubbers, Gijsberts, and Scheepers 2002), while others have failed to find such a pattern (Hjerm 2007). When examining the issue at the subnational level, findings are characterized by a similar degree of variation. For instance, evidence for a positive relationship between the size of the migrant population and support for PRR parties is found in the Netherlands (De Vos and Deurloo 1999) and Belgium (Coffé, Heyndels, and Vermeir 2007), but not in Germany (Lubbers and Scheepers 2000) or Sweden (Hjerm 2009)[1]. However, these studies adopt diverging definitions of 'minority': the former group of studies (cfr. De Vos and Deurloo 1999; Coffé, Heyndels, and Vermeir 2007) defines it more narrowly (e.g. people from Morocco, Turkey or the Maghreb), while the latter one (cfr. Lubbers and Scheepers 2000; Hjerm 2009) adopts broader definitional approaches (e.g. non-OECD and foreign-

[1] Note that Hjerm (2009) explores anti-immigrant attitudes rather than PRR voting behavior; his findings are of relevance as PRR parties have often been defined as 'anti-immigrant' (See Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart 2007; Van Der Brug 2005; Fennema 1997).

born populations). Interestingly, De Voss and Deurloo (1999) as well as Coffé, Heyndels, and Vermeir (2007) when conducting their analyses with similarly broad definitions of the minority, failed to find support for this proposition, implying that a differentiation between various out-groups could yield diverging results.

The second mechanism, inauspicious economic conditions, triggers racial prejudice either because the majority scapegoats the minority for the deteriorating circumstances, or because of the heightened competition over scarcer resources (Blalock 1967; Bobo 1983; Quillian 1995). This proposition has also garnered mixed evidence: Jackman and Volpert (1996), in their cross-national analysis of 103 elections in 16 Western European countries, find that higher levels of unemployment lead to greater support for PRR parties, while Golder (2003) and Quillian (1995) find evidence for this relationship only at high immigration levels. Contrary to the logic of group threat theory, Knigge (1998) and Arzheimer and Carter (2006) find that, at times of bad economic conditions support for PRR parties is lower; while Lubbers, Gijsberts, and Scheepers (2002) find no significant association between the variables of interest. Most studies conducted at the subnational level find no significant association between unemployment and support for PRR parties (Biggs and Knauss 2012; Coffé, Heyndels, and Vermeir 2007; Lubbers and Scheepers 2000; Rink, Phalet, and Swyngedouw 2009).

In short, following the insights from group threat theory we hypothesize that the higher the proportion of immigrants in one's municipality, the higher the likelihood of Swiss citizens casting a vote for the PRR party SVP/UDC (*Hypothesis 1a*).

Intergroup contact theory

Intergroup contact theory makes opposite predictions to those of group threat theory, suggesting that social interaction between groups acts as a means of eliminating racial prejudice. It is the absence of this interaction that allows for intergroup prejudice to emerge and grow (Allport 1979; Pettigrew 1998). According to this logic, an increase in the minority's relative size provides opportunities for interaction, which, in turn, unveils commonalities between groups and reduces racial prejudice. Several studies conducted within a European (Jolly and DiGiusto 2014; Teney 2012) as well as a US (Fox 2004; Hood and Morris 1997) context and at small geographical areas have provided evidence for this theory. These have underlined that individuals living in areas with higher proportions of migrants express lower levels of support for PRR parties, or hold less hostile attitudes towards migrants.

In short, following intergroup contact theory, we predict that the higher the proportion of immigrants in one's municipality, the lower the likelihood of Swiss citizens casting a vote for the PRR party SVP/UDC (*Hypothesis 1b*).

Fear of small numbers

A number of studies conducted (cfr. Biggs and Knauss 2012; Ha 2010; Oliver and Wong 2003; Stein, Post, and Rinden 2000) have sought to reconcile group threat and intergroup contact theories, suggesting that these operate simultaneously, but at different levels of analysis: group threat theory operates at the *macro* level (large geographical areas, across countries, etc.), while intergroup contact theory at the *micro* level (small geographical areas within countries: municipalities, neighborhoods, etc.). We propose a 'horizontal' reconciliation of these theories, at the same level of analysis. We suggest that the relationship of interest might be

nonlinear with the dynamics proposed by group threat and intergroup contact theories operating alternatively at varying sizes of the migrant population. To this end, we draw on Appadurai's (2006) thesis of the 'fear of small numbers'. Appadurai (2006) underlines that the notions of 'minority' and 'majority' are liberal inventions associated with the formation of modern nations and that majority identities are defined by 'an anxiety of incompleteness about their sovereignty' when these are not the only ones prevailing in society. This feeling drives the objectively larger group 'to strive to close the gap between the majority and the purity of the national whole' (ibid, 52).

> '[S]mall numbers represent a *tiny* [emphasis added] obstacle between majority and totality or total purity. […] The smaller the number and the weaker the minority, the deeper the rage about its capacity to make a majority feel like a whole and uncontested ethnos' (Appadurai 2006, 53).

In other words, the smaller the size of the minority, the more the dominant community retains fantasies of remaining a hundred percent 'pure'. As the minority starts growing in numbers however, the majority realizes that this ideal cannot be achieved with equal ease. In short, Appadurai (2006) suggests that it is contact with a small minority that increases tensions between the majority and minority, thus activating the dynamics proposed by group threat theory, whereas contact with a large minority decreases tensions, activating the dynamics proposed by intergroup contact theory.

Empirically, the fear of small numbers thesis could be represented with a curvilinear relationship between the size of the immigrant population and PRR voting. Such findings exist in the literature, but to the best of our knowledge these have not

been theoretically substantiated and explicitly tested. For instance, Rink, Phalet, and Swyngedouw (2009) in their analysis on the effect of immigrant group size on Vlaams Blok vote share find that the relationship starts as positive, reaches a maximum when the immigrant population is around 4.8%, and starts decreasing thereafter. Schneider (2008), in examining anti-immigrant attitudes in Europe, also finds a similar nonlinear effect (see also Savelkoul et al. 2011). Nevertheless, nonlinearity has not been extensively investigated within this literature. Aiming at filling this gap, we draw on the 'fear of small numbers' thesis and test whether the relationship between the proportion of immigrants in a municipality and SVP/UDC vote is nonlinear: when the number of immigrants is small (within levels to become publicly noticeable), group threat theory patterns are activated, whereas when the number of immigrants is large, intergroup contact theory dynamics are at play (*Hypothesis 2*).

Perceived ethnic threat

The three aforementioned theoretical propositions conceptualize the relationship between the *contextual* factor of the immigrant population size and the *individual* response of voting for a party that primarily opposes to immigration. This relationship however depends not only on the *objective* factor of the minority's actual size in an area, but also on how individuals *subjectively* interpret this contact. This subjective interpretation has been defined as perceived ethnic threat (Quillian 1995), and it operates in various realms. Perceptions of economic threat, for instance, are rooted in the majority's opinion that minorities intensify competition for scarce economic resources, including jobs, housing, and welfare benefits (Citrin et al. 1997; Dustmann and Preston 2004; Meuleman 2011); while these of a cultural nature underline that minorities pose a threat to the majority's values and traditions (Zárate et al. 2004;

Stephan, Ybarra, and Bachman 1999). Immigrants could also be perceived as threatening when the majority links their presence with violence and unsafety, or with the crowding of public services, or more generally the public space.

We conceptualize perceived ethnic threat as an individual-level moderator of the relationship between migrant population size and support for PRR parties. In other words, we hypothesize that the relationship between the proportion of immigrants in a municipality and SVP/UDC vote is moderated by the individual's level of perceived ethnic threat: those most likely to perceive migrants as threatening have the largest reaction to the presence of minority individuals in their municipality (*Hypothesis 3*).

Other predictors of PRR voting

Specific socio-economic traits are correlated with voting for PRR parties. In terms of class, the *petit bourgeoisie* and blue-collar workers are significantly overrepresented among PRR supporters (Ivarsflaten 2005). In Switzerland, more specifically, the electoral basis of the SVP/UDC is formed primarily by the lower middle class, followed by blue-collar workers and retirees, while managers and white collar workers are underrepresented (McGann and Kitschelt 2005). Unemployed individuals are more likely to support PRR parties (Ford and Goodwin 2010; Lucassen and Lubbers 2012), whereas more educated individuals exhibit less support for this political discourse (Kessler and Freeman 2005; Rink, Phalet, and Swyngedouw 2009). A significant gender gap characterizes the electoral basis of these parties, with men being significantly overrepresented (Givens 2004). Age is also shown to be an important predictor. Its exact relationship with PRR voting, however, is contested: some analyses support a linearly negative relationship (Lubbers, Gijsberts, and Scheepers 2002; Lucassen and Lubbers 2012), while others suggest a U-shaped

pattern, with the youth and the elderly being more likely to cast such a vote compared to the middle-aged (Arzheimer and Carter 2006; Arzheimer 2011). Finally, religious practice seems to be associated with weaker support for PRR politics (Billiet 1995; Van der Brug, Fennema, and Tillie 2000; Werts, Scheepers, and Lubbers 2013). People residing in rural areas are more receptive to anti-immigrant messages than those living in urban ones with the greatest rural/urban disparity being found in Switzerland (Norris 2005, 143). In short, the portrait of the 'typical PRR voter' that emerges from the existing literature is that of a young, non-religious man, of lower social class and education, living in rural settings.

Data and methods

To test the above hypotheses, we combine contextual-level data from the Statistical Atlas of Switzerland (2010) and individual-level data the Swiss Electoral Studies (Selects 2011)[2]. The Swiss Electoral Studies (Selects 2011) contains 4,391 respondents located in 1,161municipalities: 2,000 of them were recruited on the basis of random sampling, while the remaining 2,391 were selected so as to ensure that a sample of at least 100 people from each of the 26 Swiss cantons and at least 600 from the cantons of Zurich, Geneva and Ticino were included. Apart from this cantonal over-sampling, two further biases characterize our dataset. Firstly, voters are overrepresented: participation in the 2011 Swiss Federal Election amounted to 49% of the total Swiss population, while 74% of the respondents report voting participation. Secondly, reported voting choice does not correspond to that of the 2011 Swiss

[2] Due to data availability, there is a one-year difference between contextual- and individual-level variables. Given the low year-to-year variation of context-level variables, this discrepancy should be of greater concern.

Federal Election: the difference between actual and reported SVP/UDC vote is 6.4%. Provided weights are used in parts of the analysis to correct for sampling bias.

As we are interested in how natives respond to the presence of migrants, we limit our analysis to Swiss-born individuals whose both parents were also born in Switzerland. This reduces our sample to 3,061 individuals. Of these, 381 did not respond to the raw question from which we created our dependent variable, further reducing our analytical sample to 2,680 respondents, nested within 940 municipalities.

Measurement

Dependent variable (level-1)

Our dependent variable is a dummy indicating whether a respondent voted for SVP/UDC in the 2011 Swiss Federal Election held on October 23, based on his/her recollection at the time the Swiss Electoral Studies was conducted, that being from October 24 to November 25, 2011.

Main independent variable (level-2)

Our key independent variable is the proportion of immigrant population in the respondent's municipality, namely the smallest geographical unit available in our dataset. Minority is defined by the place of birth, as shown in *Table 1*. In some models we define minority broadly, as all foreign-born permanent residents of Switzerland, while in others we disaggregate minorities in two groups, which are large enough to be both visible and substantially informative: Western Europeans excluding the Swiss (13% of the total population), and those born in Eastern Europe and the Balkans (5%). These two largest minorities have an added analytical

advantage: they represent extremes in the Swiss social imaginary, with attitudes being mostly positive towards Western Europeans and quite negative and stigmatic towards people from Eastern Europe and the Balkans. We do not test effects for smaller minorities (4% in total).

[Table 1 about here]

Other independent variables (level-1)

We control for a number of individual-level predictors of PRR vote, including education, income, class, religiosity, sex, age, and location of dwelling. Education is categorized as follows: *low qualifications*, including individuals with no educational qualification, or having completed primary or middle-school education, as well as basic vocational training; *low moderate qualifications*, including individuals with vocational training, or school trading, or secondary school vocational diplomas; *high moderate qualifications*, including individuals with high school diplomas or higher vocational education; and *higher qualifications*, including graduates of vocational colleges or universities. Income is measured in relative terms, reflecting whether respondents 'can manage living with their earned income'. We allocate respondents into three categories depending on whether they say they can manage living on their current income, they can 'more or less' manage, and they cannot manage. We divide class according to Oesch's (2006) schema and for simplicity's sake merge the dataset's extant eight categories into four, according to the skills required to perform the respective occupation in the following categories: *low/unskilled*, including production workers; *general/vocational*, including service workers, clerks, and small

business owners; *associate professional and managerial*, including socio-cultural specialists, managers and administrators; and *professional and managerial*, including technical specialists, liberal professions, and employers of large companies. We also control for respondents' work status and divide them into *unemployed or out of the labor force* (note that only 1.26% of respondents were unemployed in our sample), *full-time employed*, and *part-time employed*. Religiosity is measured as frequency of church attendance with *churchgoers* reporting religious services attendance at least once per month, and *non-churchgoers* less than this. Respondents' sex and age, in years, both linear and squared, are included. Lastly, the location of the individual's dwelling is measured with a dummy for *urban*.

Moderator: perceived ethnic threat (level-1)

We conceptualize the effect of perceived ethnic threat as a moderator of the relationship between the variables of interest, testing it with an interaction. Perceived ethnic threat is measured using respondent's answer the following four statements, which denote the economic, cultural, safety and ecological dimension of threat, respectively: 'The growing number of migrants exacerbates the job market situation'; 'Due to the increase in immigration, important features of Swiss culture are all but disappearing'; 'Young immigrants increase the levels of violence and vandalism in Switzerland'; 'Because of the increase in immigration, highways, public transportation and public space in general are overcrowded, which also harms the environment'. Answers are given on a five-item Likert scale, ranging from 'totally agree' to 'totally disagree' with higher values indicating heightened perceptions of threat. We add each respondent's answer to create a summary index[3] and rescale it from 0 to 10. Finally, we divide this distribution of respondents according to their

[3] This measure's reliability is high, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.76.

relative level of perceived threat into a dummy variable flagging those with *low* (below the median) level of perceived ethnic threat[4].

Missing data

Missing rates are below 1% for all independent variables with the only exceptions of religiosity (21% missing), class (9% missing), and threat (5% –see footnote 6). We explored two alternatives for missing data: nominal variables (code missing data as another category), and multiple imputation (by chained equations). Both methods yield similar results and are available upon request. In the reported models, we do not impute data but treat missing values as another nominal category. Independent variables are already categorical; therefore, this method makes fewer assumptions about the data and is less computationally intensive for our multilevel models.

Analytic Strategy

Data are structured hierarchically in two levels: individuals (level-1) nested within municipalities (level-2). We reflect this hierarchical structure in both the descriptive and multivariate results. Summary statistics are given at both the geographical (municipalities) and individual levels (respondents). Similarly, bivariate statistics show the gross, uncontrolled, association between the dependent variable and all

[4] We also tested models coding threat as a continuous variable. Results were similar for the main multilevel models (see Table 4), but generated problems with convergence when adding random effects and cross-level interactions between threat and proportion of migrants. Thus we used threat as a dummy variable for high threat, as described in text. This variable had 139 missing cases (5% of the sample); instead of creating an additional category for these cases as with other variables, we dropped them. Hence, the sample size of models including 'perceived threat' is reduced to 2,541 individuals in 916 municipalities.

independent variables. Descriptive and bivariate statistics are weighted using sampling weights provided in the Swiss Electoral Studies (Selects 2011). Multivariate analyses are conducted using mixed-effects multilevel modeling with a logistic link function.

We proceed as follows: we test group threat theory (*hypothesis 1a*) and intergroup contact theory (*hypothesis 1b*) by including the linear form of the proportion of the minority in a municipality together with all relevant controls. Next, we test the 'fear of small numbers' thesis (*hypothesis 2*) by adding the squared term of the proportion of the minority. Finally, we explore the moderating effect of 'perceived ethnic threat' on the above relationships. We therefore add random slopes for this variable, and cross-level interactions between individuals' perceived ethnic threat and the proportion of immigrants in a municipality (*hypothesis 3*). We test each hypothesis using three alternative definitions of 'minority', to account for heterogeneity of origin among foreign-born individuals. More specifically, we compare results from models that use a broad definition of immigrant (all-foreign born individuals) with those that focus on the two largest groups of immigrants in Switzerland: Western Europeans, and individuals born in Eastern European and Balkan countries.

Results

Summary statistics

Figure 1 plots the bivariate association between the proportion of foreigners in each municipality (horizontal axis; sorted in quintiles, from bottom to top) with SVP/UDC vote (left-hand vertical axis), and perceived ethnic threat (right-hand vertical axis). The gross relationship is inverse for both variables, perhaps slightly nonlinear. In

municipalities with the lowest proportion of foreigners (5.4%; quintile 1), 26.5% of respondents support SVP/UDC and the average level of perceived ethnic threat is 5.83 (in our 0 to 10 scale). On the opposite end, where the proportion of foreigners is high (33.2%; quintile 5), only 15.5% vote SVP/UDC while average perceived ethnic threat is low, 4.91. In between, as the proportion of immigrants increases, both vote for SVP/UDC and average perceived ethnic threat first increases (to maximum levels of 27% and 5.95, respectively, both for quintile 2 –10.3% of foreigners) and then decreases.

[Figure 1 about here]

Table 2 presents means and proportions of variables used in the statistical analysis, together with the bivariate relationship between these and SVP/UDC vote. Our sample is mostly middle aged, with this age group being the least likely to vote for the party under examination. Females and males are almost equally represented in the sample, but males are more likely to vote for SVP/UDC. Nine percent of the respondents hold low-level educational qualifications, 53.1% lower moderate, 15.2% higher moderate, and the remaining 22.3% higher-level educational qualifications: vote for the SVP/UDC decreases almost linearly as education increases. Most respondents, approximately three quarters, express that they manage well with their earned income, with the rest stating they have some difficulty to make ends meet, eliciting much higher levels of support for SVP/UDC. The most prevalent class in our sample is this of associate professionals and managers, followed by vocational workers, the unskilled, and professionals and managers: support for the PRR is higher

among lower class individuals. Almost forty percent of the respondents are not employed (unemployed or out of the labor force), 36.6% full-time employed, while the remaining 23.6% work part-time: those employed full-time are the least likely to support SVP/UDC. Slightly over one fifth of respondents are churchgoers, who are less likely to vote for a PRR party than those not attending church. 68.7% of respondents reside in an urban municipality and the remaining 31.3% in rural areas, with the latter being more likely to vote SVP/UDC.

[Table 2 about here]

Multilevel analysis

Group threat, intergroup contact, and fear of small numbers

Table 3 shows results from multilevel analyses of the relationship between vote for PRR parties and the proportion of immigrants in a municipality, controlling for a host of covariates. Panel A includes the linear effect of proportion of foreigners on SVP/UDC vote (*hypotheses 1a, 1b*: group threat theory and intergroup contact theory), while panel B explores nonlinear effects with a squared of the main independent variable (*hypothesis 2*: fear of small numbers thesis). Each panel explores these relationships using three definitions of minority: all foreign-born individuals (models A1, B1), individuals born in a Western European country other than Switzerland (models A2, B2), and individuals of Eastern European or Balkan origin (models A3, B2).

[Table 3 about here]

When modeling the linear relationship between the presence of immigrants and support for SVP/UDC, we find that this greatly depends on the type of migrant under scrutiny: whereas the overall relationship is negative with higher proportions of immigrant populations reducing support for the SVP/UDC, giving precedence to intergroup contact theory, this mostly occurs because of the Western European minority. The presence of individuals from Eastern Europe and Balkan countries increases SVP/UDC electoral choice, as predicted by group threat theory. These results, which are strong but opposed in sign, highlight the importance of definitional considerations in this field of inquiry.

Other covariates perform as expected from previous literature and our descriptive results: SPV/UDC vote is negatively and linearly associated with age, positively associated with being male, having lower education, belonging to the lower classes, and living in rural areas. Slightly more surprising, though consistent across models, is to find that full-time workers are more likely to vote for SVP/UDC than those out of the labor force or unemployed, and working part-time. Church attendance has no effect. Notably, when adopting different definitions to the minority, these control variables operate in similar ways with the exception of rural residence, which is associated with SVP/UDC voting only when focusing on the Eastern European and Balkan minority. Given the overall stability of the results for other covariates across models, we do not repeat these below.

Panel B in *Table 3* presents models that add the squared term of the proportion of foreign-born individuals. We find that, for the overall (model B1), and Western

European (model B2) minorities, linear effects are positive and marginally significant, while squared terms are negative and significant; for the Eastern European and Balkan minority none of these effects are significant. *Figure 2* illustrates graphically the two significant outcomes (B1 and B2). These are consistent with fear of small numbers thesis: as the minority grows but remains sufficiently small, group threat logics are activated; surpassing a certain threshold, which here is close to 10% for the overall minority, and 20% for the Western European one, a further increase in the minority's size activates contact theory logics, reducing PRR electoral support.

[Figure 2 about here]

Perceived ethnic threat

We now turn to the moderating effect of perceived ethnic threat. Statistically, our goal is to build a random-intercept, random-slope model with cross-level interactions between the proportion of migrants in a municipality (level-2) and individual perceptions of threat (level-1). We create this model sequentially, starting from the 'fear of small numbers' models developed in panel B of the previous table. *Table 4* presents a sequence of models: panel A adds 'perceived ethnic threat' as a covariate, testing its relevance on individual level voting; panel B adds a random slope for perceived threat, examining whether there is variation between municipalities in the effect of perceived ethnic threat on SPV/UDC vote, depending on the size of the migrant minority; and panel C interacts individual-level perceptions of ethnic threat with municipality-level proportion of migrants, seeking to explore whether the effect of interest varies between individuals with a high or low baseline level of threat. As

previously, models A1, B2 and C1 define minority as all foreign-born individuals, while other models narrow the definition to Western Europeans (A2, B2, C2), and Eastern Europeans and Balkan (A3, B3, C3).

[Table 4 about here]

Table 4 confirms some of the previous section's main findings: adding perceived ethnic threat changes very little the curvilinear relationship between proportion of immigrants and SVP/UDC vote, at least for the case of all foreigners and Western Europeans. Our main conclusions are substantially the same, although there is some variation regarding the significance of these effects. We cannot state the same for other covariates however, as these are highly affected by the introduction of perceived ethnic threat as a control. This is particularly for income and class that lose significance, suggesting (even though this is not explicitly tested here) that the way in which these variables affect electoral choice is by altering perceptions of threat.

Additionally, *Table 4* reveals some features about the role of perceived ethnic threat as a moderator in the relationship between proportion of migrants and SVP/UDC vote. First (panel A), we find that perceived ethnic threat is a relevant factor increasing the likelihood of voting for the party of interest. Second (panel B), part of the effect of perceived ethnic threat on SVP/UDC vote varies by municipality (with variances between 0.49 and 0.57 depending on the definition of minority). Third (panel C), we find preliminary evidence that the influence of the proportion of all immigrants on PRR electoral choice is moderated by whether an individual has low (below the sample median) or high (above the median) subjective perceptions of

threat. This evidence is 'preliminary' because our estimate applies only to the broader definition of minority and is only marginally significant.

Total effects of the different relationships in *Table 4* are difficult to summarize. We therefore calculate predicted probabilities of SVP/UDC voting behavior, depending on the individual's level of perceived ethnic threat (below or above the median) and the proportion of foreigners in one's municipality. Other covariates are held constant at their means. *Figure 3* plots these predicted probabilities, and nicely illustrates some of our study's main findings: (1) the relationship between the prevalence of foreign-born individuals in a municipality and individual support for PRR parties is nonlinear, increasing first (as predicted by group threat theory) and decreasing after a point (as predicted by contact theory); (2) this contextual effect is moderated by individual perceptions of threat, with people less inclined to interpret the presence of immigrants as a menace also being less likely to be affected by the presence of foreigners in their municipality (a maximum of 10% of these people are predicted to vote SVP/UDC in our models), compared to those with high levels of perceived ethnic threat, whose support for the PRR party varies between 30% and 35% .

[Figure 3 about here]

Discussion and Conclusions

Building on the contradictory findings from previous literature, we explore the role of immigration demographics on the rise of PRR parties, using the case of electoral support for the SVP/UDC in Switzerland in the 2011 Federal Elections. We combine municipality-level information from the Statistical Atlas of Switzerland (2010) with individual-level survey data from the Swiss Electoral Studies (Selects

2011) and build a series of mixed-effects multilevel models with cross-level interactions, in order to test three theory-motivated hypotheses.

With *Hypothesis 1* we explore the linear relationship between the proportion of immigrants in one's municipality and the likelihood that Swiss-born citizens casting a vote for the PRR party SVP/UDC. We find support for both group threat (*hypothesis 1a*) and intergroup contact theories (*hypothesis 1b*), depending on the definition of 'foreigner'. In the case of a minority socially not very distant to the majority, here being the Western Europeans, intergroup contact theory prevails: an increase in its size decreases the likelihood of voting for this PRR party. However, when a socially more distant minority grows in number, in our case composed of Eastern Europeans and Balkan people, group threat theory prevails, activating PRR electoral choice. With *hypothesis 2* we test a new proposition to reconcile the theories above, based on Appadurai's (2006) 'fear of small numbers' thesis, stating that small minorities generate the most fear and anti-immigrant reactions since their size allows the majority to retain fantasies of achieving full national purity. We find support for it, as electoral support for the SVP/UDC increases as the proportion of foreigners rises, but after a threshold is crossed, which according to our model-based predictions is situated between 10% and 20%, starts decreasing. Finally, with *hypothesis 3* we anticipate that the curvilinear relationship between proportion of foreigners and support for SVP/UDC is moderated by individual's subjective perception of immigrant threat. We find preliminary support for this hypothesis, since subjective assessments make a difference in: the activation of fear from immigrants, the threshold at which contact with foreigners reduces anti-immigrant sentiment, and more generally the levels of electoral response to the presence of foreigners in one's municipality.

Our contribution to this literature is therefore three-fold. First, we show that changes in the definition of the 'minority' lead to opposing conclusions. Defining the minority too broadly might yield misleading results, especially in countries like Switzerland in which this is composed by a plurality of *others*. This is in keeping with Biggs and Knauss' (2012) exploration of membership in the British National Party and spatial proximity to differently defined migrant groups, as well as Ha's (2010) analysis on public attitudes towards immigration in the US. Nevertheless, further research is needed to explore whether these conceptual discrepancies could lay beneath diverging results in the literature. Second, we show that group threat theory and intergroup contact theory can be reconciled in a horizontal manner, as suggested by the 'far of small numbers' thesis. In the case of all foreign-born, as well as with Western Europeans, our analyses show that Swiss voters fear small numbers of migrants; a fear that diminishes as the size of those minorities increases with the threshold in our models being 10% for the overall proportion of migrants and 20% for the Western European minority. Although similar results for Eastern European and Balkan born individuals are not found, we do not interpret this as evidence against Appadurai's (2006) thesis: the Eastern European and Balkan minority is still small in Appadurai's terms, as it constitutes approximately 5% of the total population. Therefore, it is expected not to observe the full curvilinear effect. In any case, the sign of the coefficients indicates that the Eastern European and Balkan minority might still be in the upward side of the curve. Third, we expand the literature by illustrating how perceived ethnic threat could moderate the above relationship. Our results are weak and partial, as they are only marginally significant, in regards only to the broader definition of immigrants. However, the idea that different behavioral responses follow from diverging beliefs and attitudes enjoys a long-standing relevance in the social

sciences (Ajzen and Fishbein 1977; Ajzen and Fishbein 2005), including the literature on anti-immigrant political mobilization in Europe (McLaren 2003; Schneider 2008; Meuleman 2011), and is thus of analytical relevance.

Lastly, we should acknowledge the paper's limitations. Firstly, we cannot rule out reverse causation. Migrants' settlement decisions could follow an assessment of the levels of prejudice in different locations and they might decide to settle in areas with low levels of prejudice, leading to a self-selection bias. Previous studies have sought to evaluate this bias; concluding that with regard to intergroup contact theory, self-selection should not be a reason of concern (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). Furthermore, a similar process of self-selection bias could arise from the Swiss natives' perspective, as those with high levels of prejudice might decide to migrate to a less-diverse municipality if their personal threshold of acceptable diversity is surpassed. Future research, using longitudinal data is needed to further examine these mechanisms. Secondly, the degree of spatial segregation between minorities and the majority is not explored. We assumed that foreigners are evenly distributed across municipalities, and opportunities for contact between the minority and majority increase linearly with the proportion of immigrants. However, this should depend on the degree of segregation between groups: if immigrants are geographically concentrated in a neighborhood, chances for interaction with the majority might be scarcer and each interaction might be more intense and threat more visible. Thus, segregation might constitute an important factor when testing the predictions of group threat theory and intergroup contact theory. Additional research using geo-data and appropriate segregation measures are needed for this.

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Table 1. Swiss and non-Swiss Permanent Residents

	N	Proportion
Swiss Majority	6,103,857	0.78
Overall Minority	1,766,277	0.22
Western European Minority	1,058,010	0.13
Eastern European and Balkan Minority	375,098	0.05
Muslim Minority	196,008	0.02
Black Minority	66,960	0.01
Other minorities	70,201	0.01
Total Population	7,870,134	1.00

Source: Statistical Atlas of Switzerland (2010)

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and bivariate analysis of SVP/UDC vote.
Swiss-born citizens of Swiss-born parents.

	Proportions	% voted SVP/UDC
Totals (N, general SVP vote)	2,680	28.2
Age		
18 to 34	22.4	32.8
35 to 64	55.6	26.7
65 and older	22.0	27.0
Sex		
Male	50.5	31.6
Female	49.5	24.7
Education		
Low (primary and some secondary school)	9.3	44.0
Lower moderate (secondary school completed)	53.1	33.9
Higher moderate (vocational tertiary education)	15.2	24.7
Higher (tertiary education or more)	22.3	10.6
Income (*Manages well with current income?*)		
Yes	75.3	25.0
More or less	19.9	37.3
No	4.8	39.9
Class, occupation		
Low/unskilled	15.7	41.7
General/vocational	31.8	34.8
Associate professional and managerial	39.9	21.9
Professional and managerial	12.6	18.2
Work status		
Not employed or Out of labor force	39.8	28.6
Full-time employed	36.6	24.7
Part-time employed	23.6	27.4
Religiosity		
Non-churchgoers (less than once a month)	78.7	28.2
Churchgoers (at least once a mont)	21.3	24.7
Geographical location of dwelling		
Rural	31.3	34.7
Urban	68.7	25.1

Source: Swiss Electoral Studies (2011)

Table 3. Mixed-effects logistic coefficients predicting SVP/UDC vote in the 2011 Federal Elections.

	Panel A Linear effects: Contact v. Threat			Panel B Non-linear effects: Fear of Small Numbers		
	All foreigners (A1)	Western European (A2)	East Euro & Balkan (A3)	All foreigners (B1)	Western European (B2)	East Euro & Balkan (B3)
Proportion of foreigners in municipality						
Foreigners (see heading)	-1.38 ^	-3.86 ***	4.79 *	4.11 ^	6.69 ^	3.92
Foreigners squared				-12.7 *	-37.8 **	6.21
Age	-0.01	-0.03 ^	-0.03 ^	-0.04 ^	-0.03 ^	-0.03 ^
Age squared	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Female (ref. male)	-0.42 **	-0.39 **	-0.40 **	-0.39 **	-0.40 **	-0.40 **
Education (ref. *Low*)						
Lower Moderate	-0.38 *	-0.34 ^	-0.34 ^	-0.35 *	-0.35 *	-0.34 ^
Higher Moderate	-0.64 **	-0.60 **	-0.60 **	-0.62 **	-0.61 **	-0.60 **
Higher	-1.60 ***	-1.52 ***	-1.57 ***	-1.55 ***	-1.53 ***	-1.56 ***
Income (ref. *Manages well with current*)						
More or less	0.32 *	0.33 *	0.36 **	0.34 *	0.34 **	0.36 **
No	0.36	0.39	0.40	0.38	0.40	0.40
Class (ref. *Low/unskilled*)						
General/vocational	0.10	0.14	0.13	0.13	0.15	0.13
Associate professional & managerial	-0.31 ^	-0.27	-0.29	-0.29	-0.28	-0.29
Professional & managerial	-0.54 *	-0.52 *	-0.53 *	-0.53 *	-0.52 *	-0.54 *
Employment (ref. *Unemployed/OLF*)						
Full-time employed	0.30 *	0.40 *	0.40 *	0.43 **	0.40 *	0.40 *
Part-time employed	-0.51 **	-0.43 *	-0.39 *	-0.39 *	-0.41 *	-0.39 *
Religious (ref. Non-religious)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Urban (ref. Rural)	-0.12	-0.03	-0.31 *	-0.19	-0.14	-0.30 *
Random Intercepts	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Random Slopes	no	no	no	no	no	no
N municipalities	940	940	940	940	940	940
N individuals	2680	2680	2680	2680	2680	2680

^p<.10. *p<.05. **p<.10. ***p<.001.

Table 4. Mixed-effects multilevel logistic regression exploring the mediation of "Perceived level of immigrant threat" on the likelihood of voting SVP in 2011. Swiss-born citizens of Swiss-born parents.

	Panel A: Adding perceived threat [1]			Panel B: Random slopes for threat			Panel C: Cross-level interactions		
	Does individual's perceived threat matter for their vote?			*Is there variation between municipalities in the effect of threat on SVP vote?*			*Does the effect of number of foreigners on vote vary by perceived threat?*		
	All	Western Europe	East Eur + Balkan	All	Western Europe	East Eur + Balkan	All	Western Europe	East Eur + Balkan
	(A1)	(A2)	(A3)	(B1)	(B2)	(B3)	(C1)	(C2)	(C3)
Proportion of foreigners in municipality									
Foreigners (see heading)	4.34 ^	8.81 *	3.93	4.52 ^	9.04 *	4.37	2.94	7.77 ^	1.59
Foreigners squared	-12.2 *	-41.8 *	-3.82	-13.1 *	-44.4 **	-2.91	-13.2 *	-44.4 **	-6.97
Perceived threat									
Continuous (0:low to 10:high)	0.43 ***	0.43 ***	0.43 ***						
High threat: above median (ref. *Below*)				1.83 ***	1.83 ***	1.90 ***	1.35 ***	1.61 ***	1.69 ***
High threat * Proportion of foreigners							2.34 ^	1.82	4.50
Age	-0.06 **	-0.06 **	-0.06 *	-0.06 **	-0.06 **	-0.06 **	-0.06 **	-0.06 **	-0.06 **
Age squared	0.00 *	0.00 *	0.00 ^	0.00 *	0.00 *	0.00 *	0.00 *	0.00 *	0.00 *
Female (ref. male)	-0.36 **	-0.37 **	-0.36 **	-0.35 *	-0.36 **	-0.35 *	-0.35 *	-0.36 **	-0.35 *
Education (ref. *Lower*)									
Lower Moderate	-0.47 *	-0.47 *	-0.47 **	-0.43 *	-0.43 *	-0.42 *	-0.43 *	-0.43 *	-0.42 *
Higher Moderate	-0.57 *	-0.57 *	-0.56 *	-0.59 *	-0.59 *	-0.58 *	-0.59 *	-0.59 *	-0.58 *
Higher	-1.17 ***	-1.17 ***	-1.19 ***	-1.35 ***	-1.35 ***	-1.37 ***	-1.33 ***	-1.34 ***	-1.37 ***
Income (ref. *Manages well with current*)									
More or less	0.17	0.18	0.18	0.19	0.20	0.20	0.19	0.20	0.20
No	0.32	0.35	0.33	0.38	0.41	0.40	0.37	0.40	0.40
Class (ref. *Low/unskilled*)									
General/vocational	0.26	0.28	0.25	0.27	0.29	0.26	0.26	0.28	0.26
Associate professional & managerial	0.03	0.04	0.03	0.00	0.02	0.01	-0.01	0.02	0.00
Professional & managerial	-0.34	-0.33	-0.34	-0.31	-0.30	-0.31	-0.32	-0.30	-0.31
Employment (ref. *Unemployed/OLF*)									
Full-time employed	0.50 **	0.48 **	0.48 **	0.56 **	0.53 **	0.53 **	0.55 **	0.52 **	0.54 **
Part-time employed	-0.32 ^	-0.34 ^	-0.33 ^	-0.32	-0.33 ^	-0.32 ^	-0.32 ^	-0.34 ^	-0.32
Religious (ref. Non-religious)	0.00 ^	0.00 *	0.00 *	0.00 ^	0.00 ^	0.00	0.00 ^	0.00 ^	0.00
Urban (ref. Rural)	-0.20	-0.18	-0.27 ^	-0.20	-0.17	-0.28 ^	-0.20	-0.17	-0.29 ^
Random Intercepts	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Random slope for Perceived threat	no	no	no	threat	threat	threat	threat	threat	threat
var(high threat)				0.49	0.49	0.57	0.40	0.44	0.56
Cross-level interaction (threat*foreigners	no	no	no	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes
N municipalities	916	916	916	916	916	916	916	916	916
N individuals	2,541	2,541	2,541	2,541	2,541	2,541	2,541	2,541	2,541

^p<.10. *p<.05. **p<.10. ***p<.001.

[1] Perceived threat: index based on four Likert-scale questions on attitudes towards immigrants, recoded from 0 (minimum score) to 10 (maximum score). No data was imputed for people missing any of the four indicators (139 individuals dropped, compared to Table 3), yielding a smaller sample of 2,541 individuals in 916 municipalities (see text for details)

Figure 1. SVP vote (left) and Perceived threat (right), by proportion of foreigners in municipality (quintiles*)

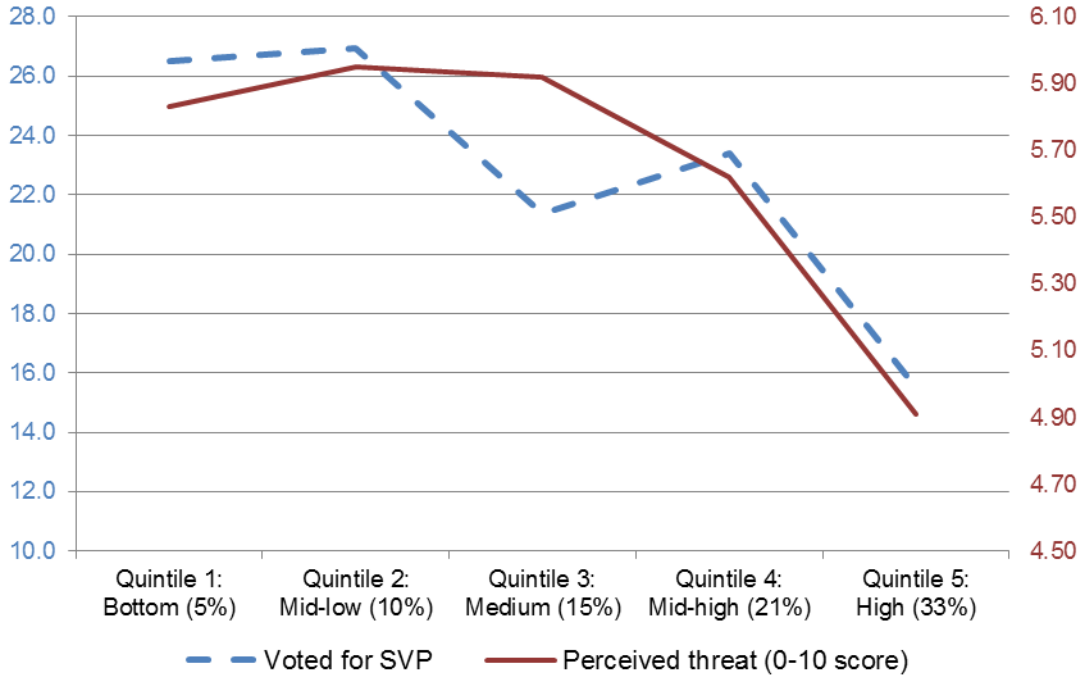

Figure 2: Graphical illustration of the model-predicted nonlinear relationship between proportion of all foreigners and the likelihood of voting SVP/UDC in the 2011 Swiss Federal Elections.

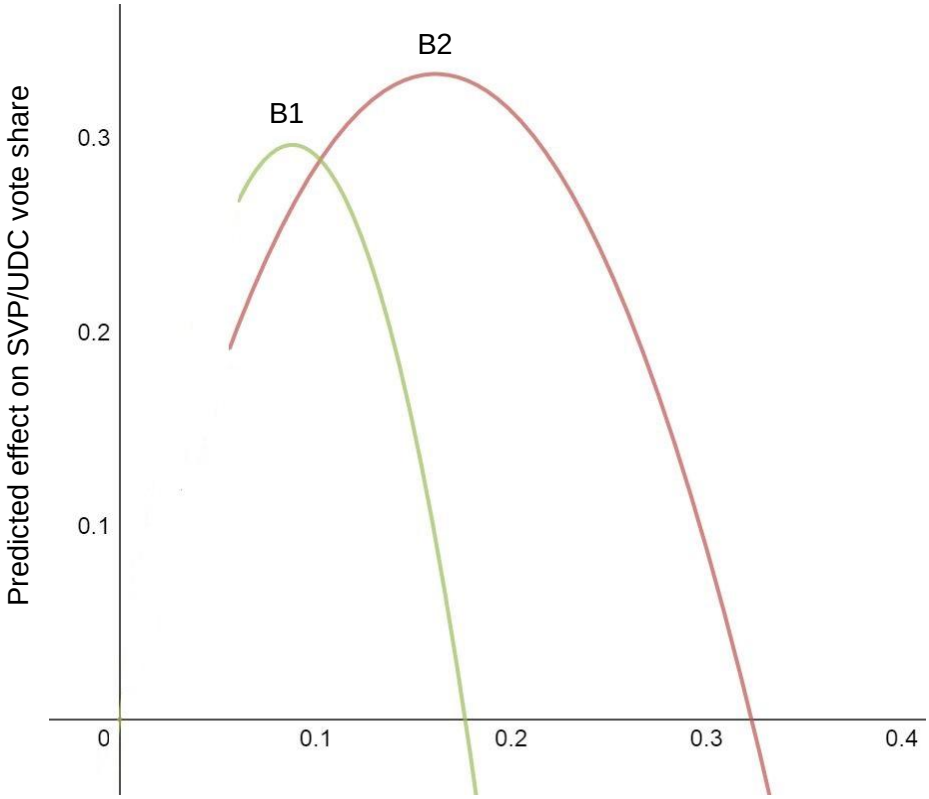

Figure 3. Predicted probabilities of voting SVP as proportion of foreigners in municipality increases, by level of perceived threat