

CONDITIONALLY ACCEPTED ARTICLE

Selectively (il)liberal: theory & evidence on nativist disidentification

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Abstract

Does group-based tribal thinking against ethnic out-groups condition support for *both* liberal *and* illiberal policies? Our thesis is that, irrespective of the direction of the policy (progressive or conservative), nativists express selective support for policies based on different signals of group-identity: descriptive markers, group-based substantive representation, in- and out-group norms, and group-based reasoning. We test this theoretical expectation using a novel AI-powered visual conjoint experiment in the Netherlands and Germany that asked individuals to select between hypothetical educational reform proposals presented by civic actors during a public consultation. Empirically, our results demonstrate that citizens, on average, are indeed selectively (il)liberal and that this instrumental policy support is greater among those with higher levels of underlying nativism. Specifically, we show that – among our multidimensional markers of group-based identities, norms, and reasoning – group-based *substantive representation* and in-group *norms* are the strongest determinants of support for diverse reform proposals. These findings have key implications on the malleable nature of citizens' support for the backsliding of the liberal tenets of democracy as well as the persuasive power of out-group *disidentification*.

Keywords: femonationalism, homonationalism, liberal values, nativism, selective liberalism, visual conjoint

1. Introduction

In January 2024, Elon Musk—tech billionaire, owner of social media platform X, and Trump administration advisor—published a series of posts about sexual abuse cases in the UK, exclusively highlighting crimes committed by Muslim men against women (Pearson 2025). Musk's sudden concern for women's rights stands in stark contrast to his prior record: Musk had previously shown no interest in women's rights issues, accepted a position in the administration of Donald Trump (a man found liable for sexual abuse) and donated \$20 million to groups defending restrictive abortion policies (Thadani et al. 2024). His social media posts, which amplified anti-Islam activists and demanded remedial political action, focused solely on cases with Muslim perpetrators while remaining silent about similar offences by other groups, including cases where Muslim women were victims.

This instrumental use of liberal values such as women's rights to target specific ethnic groups reflects a broader pattern in contemporary Western politics (Farris 2017). Nativist politicians fre-

quently claim that immigrants, often assumed to be Muslim, carry regressive and inimical cultures that threaten western values, suggesting that these immigrants aim to replace and impose what nativists describe as "their way of life" (Rahman 2014; Berntzen 2019; Turnbull-Dugarte and López Ortega 2024). While cultural superiority claims have long been used to justify exclusion, they now manifest through claims of civic nationalism (Halikiopoulou, Mock, and Vasilopoulou 2013) and the national appropriation of liberal values by Western countries (Lægaard 2007; Halikiopoulou, Mock, and Vasilopoulou 2013; Berntzen 2019; Lajeverdi 2020). To justify opposition to immigration, far-right actors frame liberal principles like women's rights, LGBTQ+ freedoms, and environmental concerns as inherently Western and incompatible with migrant populations (Farris 2017; Spierings 2021; Backlund and Jungar 2024; Camargo-Fernández and Polo-Artal 2024; Turnbull-Dugarte, López Ortega, and Hunklinger 2025). This strategy enables them to cloak exclusionary policies in a superficial commitment to inclusion (Hunklinger and Ajanović 2022).

A critical aspect of this strategy is its *selective* nature. Over the past two decades, the far-right has employed the defence of liberal principles as a rhetorical tool to oppose immigration, while simultaneously undermining those same values within their own societies (Möser, Ramme, and Takács 2022). Evidence of this can be seen in the policies far-right parties have pursued that undermine gender equality, environmental protections, and the rights of gender and sexual minorities across several countries. This erosion is evident in the revoking of reproductive rights and women's bodily autonomy (Möser, Ramme, and Takács 2022; Deckman et al. 2023), the increasing efforts to roll back provisions for same-sex parents and transgender rights (Cornejo-Valle and Ramme 2022; Velasco 2023), and as well as via the promotion of hate speech (Muniesa-Tomás et al. 2022; Stonewall 2023).

While this elite strategy is well-documented, our understanding of whether citizens' liberal attitudes are also selective on nativism is limited. The political tolerance literature has long established that citizens' support for democratic principles is conditional—people endorse civil liberties in the abstract but often withdraw support when these rights are extended to disliked groups (Stouffer 1955; Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus 1982; Gibson 1992). This foundational insight about the contingent nature of tolerance provides a crucial framework for understanding contemporary patterns of selective liberalism. As Gibson (1992) demonstrates, tolerance is not simply about supporting one's least-liked group, but rather reflects a complex interplay between abstract democratic commitments and group-specific applications. Peffley and Rohrschneider (2003) further show that this conditionality

is shaped by broader societal contexts and democratic learning processes, with citizens in more established democracies sometimes exhibiting greater—though still selective—tolerance. We know that socioculturally liberal attitudes have gained traction across time and generations (Caughey, O’grady, and Warshaw 2019; O’grady 2023) and citizens’ expressed tolerance toward sexual minorities and their rights has improved as a result of increasingly progressive social norms regarding sexuality (Oyamot et al. 2017), while attitudes toward immigration have stagnated if not become more negative (Lancaster 2022; Dancygier 2017), resulting in a growing constituency of so-called sexually modern nativists (Lancaster 2019; Spierings, Lubbers, and Zaslove 2017; Turnbull-Dugarte, López Ortega, and Hunklinger 2025). This divergent pattern echoes Duch and Gibson (1992)’s finding that tolerance levels vary dramatically across different target groups and contexts, with ethnic and religious minorities often facing the greatest intolerance. Building on their insight that perceived threat moderates tolerance judgments, there is also some evidence that citizens’ liberal attitudes are susceptible to identity cues. For example, nativist proposals tend to become more socially palatable when they are presented by women leaders (Ben-Shitrit, Elad-Strenger, and Hirsch-Hoefler 2022; Elad-Strenger, Ben-Shitrit, and Hirsch-Hoefler 2024). Similarly, when illiberal views are associated with an ethnic out-group norm, individuals often react by strategically expressing more liberal stances on these same issues (Turnbull-Dugarte and López Ortega 2024). This *instrumental* updating in expressed support for liberal values extends what Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus (1982) identified as "content-controlled" tolerance—where support for rights depends on who exercises them—to encompass not just procedural rights but substantive policy positions. We argue this occurs because of a desire among nativists to *disidentify* from ethnic out-groups, representing a novel mechanism through which the conditional nature of democratic support manifests. Should *disidentification* indeed explain selective endorsement of liberal values, we would anticipate similar shifts in preferences to be observed regardless of the (il)liberal direction of the policy. Is that indeed the case?

In this paper, we first analyse the themes often weaponized by – although not exclusively (Duyvendak et al. 2023)– far-right entrepreneurs, to contrast the idea of Western progress with stereotyped migrant populations and justify exclusionary positions. Second, considering the distinct evolution of sociocultural attitudes and drawing from social identity theory (Tajfel 1979), we theorize that group membership – specifically signals of out-group membership with Islam – affects the selective endorsement of *both* liberal and illiberal preferences. Finally, we categorize and examine the

effects of different ethnic identity-based strategies, emphasizing the role of individual identity cues, social norms, and identity-based narratives in shaping these attitudes.

Empirically, we test these expectations through an original pre-registered visual conjoint experiment conducted in the Netherlands and Germany, two contrasting cases regarding the nationalization of liberal norms, with the Netherlands being an early adopter (Lange and Mügge 2015) and Germany a more recent one (Ahrens and Lang 2022). In these experiments we asked respondents to select between fictional educational reform proposals presented by civic actors during a hypothetical public consultation. Our cross-national experimental design simultaneously manipulated multiple features of the proposed reform as well as the policy entrepreneurs associated with these proposals, allowing us to disentangle the persuasiveness of a diverse array of identity cues on respondents' support for (il)liberal education reforms. Our results indicate that citizens, on average, are selectively (il)liberal. Support for (opposition to) distinct and diverse educational reform proposals is significantly lower (higher) when reforms are associated with Muslims or rejected (endorsed) by majority Muslim countries. We also note that the selective rejection of policies associated with Muslims is observed among both those with high and low-levels of pre-treatment nativism if, however, the effects are significantly larger for the former.

Our study makes several key contributions. First, it advances the literature on conditionality of attitudes by demonstrating how multidimensional group identity cues play a pivotal role in shaping policy preferences on sociocultural issues, particularly in states where nativism is widespread. While our previous work has demonstrated selective liberalism using a uni-dimensional policy area and single form of manipulation (Turnbull-Dugarte and López Ortega 2024), in this paper we identify the presence of selective liberalism in a multidimensional set-up with diverse and simultaneous manipulations of identity markers. Empirically, we unpack ethnic identity cues, not only across the themes used to legitimize nativism but also in terms of the specific schemes that signal diverse group-based information. Our results demonstrate that selective liberalism is not limited to areas related only to superficial support for LGBTQ+ rights, as anticipated by the political psychology of homonationalism, but is observed when manipulating both the direction of preferences (pro- vs. anti-) as well as across distinct issue bundles including those related to gender equality and the environment. Second, it highlights the vulnerability of citizens' liberal values to illiberal strategies, showing that citizens are highly susceptible to group dynamics. This susceptibility underscores

the fragility of public commitment to liberal values such as gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, and environmentalism. Third, in times when the politicization of classroom content has seen a resurgence in several democracies (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017; Ayoub 2024), our findings contribute to ongoing debates about progressive and conservative proposals concerning educational content in schools.

Overall, our study provides novel demand-side evidence of an instrumental adherence to ideas of progress that echoes past elite strategies. Just as in the eighteenth century, when the rhetoric of progress was selectively invoked to justify colonial practices (Said 1977; Go 2017), our findings suggest that the rise in anti-immigration rhetoric, attitudes, and voting behaviour today rests on a fragile commitment to values such as gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, and environmentalism.

2. Liberal values as strategic tool for exclusion

To understand the main themes exploited to perpetuate the artificial dichotomy that portrays the west as inherently liberal and democratic, while positioning out-groups as threats to these values (Griffin 2000; Moffitt 2017; Lajeverti 2020), women's rights and LGBTQ+ inclusion have emerged as key areas.

The weaponization of women's rights and gender equality more broadly, often penned *femonationalism*, involves co-opting feminism to oppose Islam and other non-Western cultures. Far-right groups present themselves as defenders of women's rights, or speaking in the name of women, arguing that ethnic out-groups, with their stereotyped inherent misogyny, are in need of intervention by Western forces (Farris 2017). While Farris developed the concept in the context of the Netherlands, France, and Italy, it has been used to characterize the behavior of far-right parties in other politically diverse Western contexts such as Switzerland (Bader and Mottier 2020), Britain (Calderaro 2023), France (Calderaro 2025), Spain (Camargo-Fernández and Polo-Artal 2024) and the US (Bader 2023). While the essence of racial stereotyping remains in place, femonationalist strategies adapt to the context. In the US and Switzerland, otherwise anti-feminist politicians used debates around female circumcision to present themselves as defenders of women's rights while building a narrative of threat to the Swiss and American nation (Bader and Mottier 2020; Bader 2023). Similarly, the strategic use of women as leaders has been found to be used to make nativist arguments more palatable and convincing, often using "feminist" identity as a legitimising credential (Oost et al. 2023; Blee 2021). In Figure 1 (panel a), we illustrate an example of femonationalism in

Spain through a social media post by Rocío de Meer, a senior parliamentarian from the far-right party VOX. Her X post features a VOX campaign poster stating "You're in Spain. Here, men and women have the same rights". Not by chance, the poster is written in both Spanish and Arabic. This messaging exemplifies a femonationalist strategy that portrays Western (Spanish) gender equality as incompatible with non-Western, particularly Muslim, culture. The narrative is amplified by the descriptive identity of the sender: a woman politician sharing the social media post and featuring another woman putting up the poster. This frames ethnic out-groups as a threat to women's rights, using feminism selectively to justify exclusionary, anti-immigration policies. The strategic utility of gender equality is blatantly instrumental in this case given that VOX's own policy positions are often detrimental to the advancement of gender equality and the ambitions of the feminist movement (Calvo and Ferrín 2023; Rama et al. 2021; Anduiza and Rico 2024).

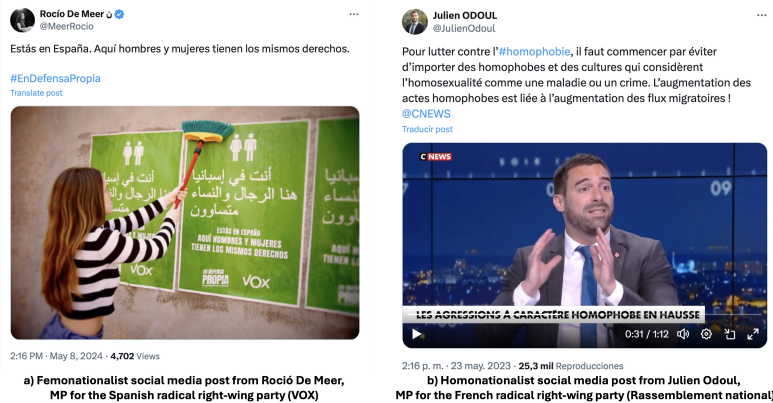


Figure 1. Instances of selectively liberal rhetoric from far-right politicians

Similarly to femonationalism, *homonationalism* involves rhetorically leveraging the protection of LGBTQ+ rights¹ to normalise nativist attitudes and justify exclusionary policies. Actors argue that protecting LGBTQ+ rights necessitates stringent immigration controls to prevent the influx of individuals from cultures perceived as homophobic (Puar 2018). While originally identified in the context of Israel (Gross 2014; Puar 2018, 2013), homonationalist rhetoric has extended throughout radical right forces in Europe (Akkerman 2005; Hunklinger and Ajanović 2022), the UK (Foster and Kirke 2022) and US (Murib 2018), who present immigrant populations as violent threats to the

1. Strictly speaking, homonationalist rhetoric as observed in contemporary politics today currently focuses on the protection of LGB rights *only* as opposed to LGBTQ+ rights more broadly. This is because such rhetoric selectively incorporates lesbian and gay identities that are seen as assimilable into dominant national norms while excluding or marginalising trans, non-binary, and queer individuals who are perceived as more disruptive to traditional gender and social structures.

security of non-heterosexual populations (Turnbull-Dugarte and López Ortega 2024). Consider the social media post from Julien Odoul, an openly gay MP for France's far-right party, *Rassemblement National* (RN), in Figure 1 (panel B) as another illustrative example. Odoul suggests in his post that the solution to combating homophobia is to "avoid importing homophobes and cultures that consider homosexuality an illness or a crime." By juxtaposing LGBTQ+ rights with immigration, Odoul frames ethnic out-groups as inherently homophobic, suggesting that immigration can only exist in contradiction to protection of in-group liberal (in this case LGBTQ-tolerant) norms. He concludes his tweet by linking immigration to recent homophobic attacks in France, reinforcing the stigmatization of ethnic out-groups as threats to national security and LGBTQ+ populations. This narrative exemplifies the way far-right politicians weaponize LGBTQ+ rights as a means to criminalize immigrants and justify restrictive immigration policies under the guise of protecting vulnerable groups. Odoul's identity as an openly gay politician reinforces this strategy, providing legitimacy and enabling him to embody the narrative he promotes. This embodiment serves to make the rhetoric more palatable to far-right audiences by presenting it as a defence of LGBTQ+ communities rather than outright bigotry. As in the case of VOX *faux* defence of gender equality, this rallying call to protect French LGBTQ+ citizens is not without hypocrisy given RN's explicit opposition to established LGBTQ+ rights in France (Geva 2024).

While *femonationalism* and *homonationalism* are the most well-documented examples of selective liberalism, they are, however, just two concrete examples of how illiberal actors can co-opt liberal norms for their strategic utility. Indeed, a key element of selectively liberal strategies is their adaptability, allowing new issues to be instrumentalized in order to maintain and reinforce this division between the West and its perceived "others." For instance, *environmental nationalism* merges ecological and animal welfare concerns with nationalist rhetoric to argue against immigration. Politicians who follow this strategy frame animal rights and environmentalism within a nationalist context, suggesting that immigrants' behavior and traditions undermine the nation's environment and animal welfare standards (Lubarda and Forchtner 2023; Backlund and Jungar 2024).² Other recent examples include Judeonationalism (Van Oosten 2024), which uses anti-Semitic rhetoric to

2. An example of this is found in the social media post from Geert Wilders, leader of the Dutch far-right Party for Freedom (PVV), who equates the Islamic Festival of Sacrifice with "barbarism" and states it "really does not belong in the Netherlands." This is a striking example of environmental nationalism, where the cultural practices of immigrant communities are portrayed as incompatible with the nation's values and standards. The social media post, which includes a graphic image, is reproduced in the appendix.

promote anti-Islam or anti-immigration policies, and housing nationalism, which co-opts the fight for locals' housing rights to create resentment against foreigners (Lauster and Bergmann 2024).

While, as described above, this evolving rhetoric is most prominent on the far-right, centrist and progressive politicians have adopted a lighter version of this narrative (Hurenkamp, Tonkens, and Duyvendak 2012; Tinsley 2022; Duyvendak et al. 2023). Even when framed within pro-immigration platforms or with the intent of countering far-right nativism, they have reproduced narratives suggesting that "open" national values are under threat of "Arabization", arguing that immigrants – often perceived as inherently conservative – should or can adapt to these values (Duyvendak et al. 2023, 201). These various manifestations of selective liberalism – whether focused on gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, environmental protection, or anti-Semitism – share a common instrumental logic: they appropriate progressive values to draw boundaries between a purportedly enlightened in-group and a supposedly backward out-group. While the specific content of the progressive value being weaponized may vary, the underlying strategy remains consistent: position the in-group as the guardian of modern, liberal ideals while casting the out-group as an inherent threat to these values.

However, the evidence presented thus far focuses largely on elite-level discourse and party strategies. While this supply-side analysis illuminates how political actors deploy selective liberalism, it leaves open the crucial question of whether these strategies actually *influence* citizen attitudes and policy preferences. Do identity-based appeals succeed in shaping how citizens evaluate liberal policies when applied to different social groups? To address this question, we move beyond analyzing elite rhetoric to examine whether and how selective thinking manifests in mass opinion. Specifically, we investigate whether citizens' support for liberal policies varies systematically based on the target group, and explore how various mechanisms of ethnic identity, beyond pure rhetorical appeals, condition these attitudes. The following section develops our theoretical framework for understanding why citizens might engage in selective liberal thinking and identifies the broader set of identity-based tools that shape these dynamics.

3. Ethnic identity cues of value differentiation

Our study proposes an integrative model that categorizes four types of group identity markers that influence citizens' preferences and can sway them into selectively supporting liberal causes: individual descriptive characteristics, group associations, group-based reasonings, and group-based

norm perceptions. In the following, we provide theoretical grounding on why each of three identity-usages is set to make an impact citizens' preferences.

This integrative approach builds directly on tolerance research's core insight that group membership fundamentally shapes political attitudes. As Gibson and Duch (1991) argue, tolerance judgments involve a two-step process: first categorizing groups, then applying different standards based on that categorization. We extend this framework beyond civil liberties to examine how ethnic categorization affects support for diverse policy domains. While Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus (1982) focused on how citizens deny rights to disliked political groups (communists, fascists), we examine how ethnic identity markers trigger similar selective application of liberal principles across education, gender, and environmental policies.

Building on theories of political representation and motivated reasoning, we argue that both descriptive and substantive ethnic markers serve as powerful cues that shape how citizens evaluate policies—even those not explicitly related to ethnicity (Pitkin 1967; Mansbridge 1999). Just as political actors strategically deploy liberal values to construct boundaries between in-groups and out-groups, citizens rely on identity signals to determine their support for various policies.

Descriptive representation—visible characteristics that signal group membership—operates through automatic categorization processes that trigger immediate in-group/out-group distinctions (McDermott 1997). These visible markers activate what social identity theorists term "social categorization," where individuals rapidly sort others into in-group or out-group categories (Tajfel 1979). This categorization process mirrors the powerful tribal thinking documented in studies of partisan identity (Achen and Bartels 2016; Huddy 1998), where group attachments can shape information processing and even lead to tolerance of democratic norm violations (Graham and Svobik 2020). When policy entrepreneurs share visible ethnic characteristics with citizens, their proposals are likely to be viewed more favorably due to assumed value alignment and increased trust (Theiss-Morse 2009). A wide body of literature presents evidence that descriptive similarity maximises persuasion effects whereas descriptive distinctiveness can limit persuasion or even reverse it.³

However, descriptive characteristics alone may provide incomplete or even misleading information about a policy entrepreneur's substantive positions (Harrison and Michelson 2017). Recent research on far-right movements demonstrates that descriptive representatives (e.g., women or

3. See Broockman, Kaufman, and Lenz (2024), however, for an empirically robust challenge.

immigrant-origin leaders) can effectively legitimize illiberal platforms without explicitly advocating for traditionally associated in-group interests (Ben-Shitrit, Elad-Strenger, and Hirsch-Hoefler 2022; Wardt, Sobolewska, and English 2024; Porzycki, Oshri, and Shenhav 2025). Similarly, LGBTQ+ candidates in nationalist movements illustrate how identities can be strategically deployed to validate positions that may not align with typical in-group expectations.

Substantive representation – signalled through cultural, religious, or organizational affiliations – provides additional identity cues that can either reinforce or complicate these initial categorizations (Dovi 2002). Individuals often make inferences about the substantive political positions of others based on distinct socio-demographic characteristics (Jones and Brewer 2019; Sen 2017). The presence of information related to one's substantive political preferences may be at odds with these assumptions. As such, these affiliations serve as additional information proxies for broader value systems and trigger what psychologists call "categorical thinking," where individuals make sweeping inferences about an actor's positions across multiple policy domains (Brewer 2003). The potential misalignment between descriptive and substantive representation creates interesting dynamics: while Muslims might be stereotyped as holding certain positions (Van Oosten 2022; Turnbull-Dugarte, López Ortega, and Hunklinger 2025), individual Muslim advocates may explicitly support contrasting policies, creating tension between different identity signals.

The interaction between descriptive and substantive ethnic markers thus creates a complex framework for understanding how citizens evaluate policies. While descriptive representation operates through immediate visual recognition triggering group-based motivated reasoning (Huber, Meyer, and Wagner 2024), substantive markers can either reinforce, challenge or add one more layer to these initial categorizations. This becomes especially relevant in contexts where liberal values are selectively wielded as markers of group distinction—as seen in cases of femonationalism and homonationalism. The framework suggests that citizens, like political elites, may engage in selective evaluation of policies based on the ethnic identity of their promoters, both through descriptive and substantive lenses.

This leads us to hypothesize that **(H1)** *citizens will be more (less) favourable towards policies promoted by the ethnic (out-) in-group, both when ethnic identity is signalled descriptively (H1.a) substantively (H1.b).*

Group reasoning

Our second dimension focuses on how group-based reasoning—the explicit framing of policies through ethnic group narratives and interests—shapes policy preferences. While descriptive and substantive representation operate through identity cues, group reasoning works through more explicit cognitive pathways, where policy entrepreneurs actively frame issues using nativist narratives that position certain values and norms as inherent to national or ethnic identity (McClain et al. 2009).

Group reasoning influences policy preferences through three key psychological mechanisms that explain why nativist frames increase policy support. First, it activates what social psychologists term "group consciousness"—awareness of shared group interests and experiences that shapes how individuals process policy-relevant information (Miller et al. 1981). When policy entrepreneurs frame issues through nativist narratives (e.g., "this policy reflects our community's values" or "this protects our way of life"), they trigger collective identity considerations that can override policy-specific evaluations (Simon, Trötschel, and Dähne 2008). This effect is particularly potent when group boundaries are perceived as clearly defined and politically salient (Huddy 2001), transforming abstract policy issues into immediate matters of group identity and value preservation.

Second, group reasoning engages identity-protective cognition (Kahan 2017). This psychological mechanism leads individuals to process information in ways that defend their group's status, values, and worldview. When policies are presented through nativist frames that position them as either advancing or protecting group interests, individuals evaluate them not on their specific merits but on their perceived implications for group status and identity maintenance (Kahan et al. 2007). This protective cognition explains why citizens might selectively support liberal policies when they are framed as expressions of national values while opposing similar policies when perceived as advancing out-group interests (Schneider and Ingram 1993).

Third, group reasoning leverages collective memory and shared historical narratives. Policy entrepreneurs can frame current policy debates within broader narratives of national experience and value systems, making seemingly neutral policies resonate with deeper identity-based concerns. For instance, educational policies may be evaluated through the lens of protecting "our values" or "our way of life" rather than their immediate practical implications (Liu and Hilton 2005). This framing activates what social identity theorists identify as individuals' fundamental need for positive group distinctiveness (Tajfel 1979; Huddy, Sears, and Levy 2013).

Crucially, these reasoning mechanisms can operate independently of policy content. Just as political actors strategically deploy liberal values to draw boundaries between groups—as seen in phenomena like homo-, femo-, and environmental nationalism—citizens may evaluate policies based on how they are framed in relation to group interests and national values. When policies are presented through nativist frames, they trigger identity-protective cognition, activate group consciousness, and transform policy preferences into expressions of group identity and value preservation (Duyvendak *et al.* 2023).

This theoretical framework explains why citizens engage in selective liberalism at the mass level. When policy entrepreneurs frame liberal policies through nativist narratives that position them as expressions or protections of national values, citizens evaluate them through group-based psychological mechanisms rather than their liberal content alone. This creates a cognitive foundation for increased policy support when nativist reasonings are employed, mirroring the selective application of liberal values observed in elite discourse around femonationalism and homonationalism.

Building on this, we hypothesize that **(H2)** *citizens will be more favorable towards policies when they are associated with nativist reasonings.*

Group norm perceptions

Group norm perceptions—beliefs about what behaviors and attitudes are typical or acceptable within one's group versus others—fundamentally shape how individuals evaluate and support policies (Cialdini and Goldstein 2004; Bicchieri 2017). These perceptions operate through powerful social influence mechanisms that can either facilitate or inhibit policy support based on perceived group consensus patterns (Deutsch and Gerard 1955). The influence of these perceptions is particularly relevant in contemporary political contexts where liberal values are often positioned as markers of group distinction and cultural identity.

The psychological impact of group norms on policy preferences operates through multiple interconnected pathways. When individuals perceive a policy position as normative within their group, they face both cognitive and social pressure to align with this consensus (Spears 2021). This alignment stems from basic psychological needs for group belonging and positive distinctiveness—needs that shape not just explicit attitudes but also unconscious information processing and decision-making. Conversely, when policies are associated with out-group norms, individuals often distance

themselves from these positions to maintain clear group boundaries (Terry, Hogg, and McKimmie 2000; Brewer 2001; Turnbull-Dugarte and López Ortega 2024; Turnbull-Dugarte and Wagner 2025). This distancing effect can occur even when the policies might otherwise align with individual preferences, highlighting the powerful role of group norm perceptions in shaping policy support.

Research in political behavior demonstrates that norm perceptions shape policy preferences through robust social proof mechanisms (Schultz et al. 2007). These mechanisms help individuals navigate complex policy choices by referring to apparent group consensus, particularly in situations of uncertainty or when issues are multifaceted. Political actors can strategically deploy information about group support or opposition to make certain positions appear more or less normative (Prentice 2018). For instance, studies show that presenting environmental behaviors as common within one's national group significantly increases support for environmental policies (Vlasceanu et al. 2024), while framing them as characteristic of out-groups can trigger resistance.

The influence of group norms becomes especially pronounced in contexts of perceived intergroup competition or cultural distinctiveness (Brewer 2001). When policy positions are presented as markers of group differentiation—whether through explicit comparative information or implicit contrasts—their impact on individual preferences intensifies. This dynamic has been documented across various policy domains, from environmental behaviors to expressions of tolerance (Oyamot et al. 2017) and prejudice (Álvarez-Benjumea 2023). The effect is particularly strong when policies touch on values or practices that are seen as culturally distinctive or identity-defining.

Moreover, norm perceptions interact dynamically with broader societal contexts and political discourse. When political actors frame certain positions as reflecting broader societal consensus or dissensus, they activate both identity-protective motivations and desires for social approval. These motivations can lead individuals to support policies they perceive as normative within their group while rejecting similar policies when they are associated with out-group standards (Newth and Scopelliti 2023). This pattern helps explain why public opinion on various issues—from gender equality to environmental protection—often shows marked differences between groups, even when controlling for individual-level factors.

The power of norm perceptions extends beyond simple conformity effects. Research shows that individuals actively use information about group norms to construct and maintain social identities (Tankard and Paluck 2016; Heider 1958; Turnbull-Dugarte and López Ortega 2024). When policies

are framed in terms of group norm adherence or deviation, they become tools for identity expression and maintenance. This process can lead to what appears as inconsistent policy preferences—supporting liberal policies when they are perceived as in-group norms while opposing similar policies when they are associated with out-group standards.

Political entrepreneurs often leverage these dynamics by strategically presenting information about group consensus and disagreement. By highlighting patterns of support or opposition among different groups, they can effectively shape policy preferences through norm-based influence. This influence is particularly effective when it emphasizes clear contrasts between in-group and out-group positions, as such contrasts activate both identity-protective motivations and desires for positive group distinction.

This theoretical framework suggests that the relationship between norm perceptions and policy preferences is inherently comparative and context-dependent. Individuals evaluate policies not just based on absolute levels of group support, but through an understanding of how these positions differentiate their group from others. This comparative dimension helps explain why citizens might selectively support or oppose policies based on their perceived association with in-group versus out-group norms, even when the policies themselves remain constant. The framework also highlights how norm perceptions can serve as powerful tools for political mobilization, particularly when deployed in ways that emphasize group distinctiveness and identity maintenance.

This leads us to hypothesize that **(H3)** *citizens will be more (less) favorable towards policies when the support for that policy is the in-group (out-group) norm.*

Of course, there are reasons to assume that the efficacy of in-group and out-group norms should be asymmetric among citizens. The theoretical propositions of femonationalism, homonationalism, and environmental nationalism rely on a similar assumption: that the strategic support for liberal policies benefiting women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and the environment is driven by nativists complying with a nationalized in-group norm while disidentifying from ethnic out-groups. Consequently, one would expect the preferences of non-nativists—those not negatively predisposed to immigration and ethnic out-groups—to be more stable and resilient against the selective updating anticipated among nativists. This assumption aligns with the expectations of balance theory (Heider 1958): if individuals are expected to update their preferences for certain policies selectively to enhance their social distinctiveness from an undesirable out-group, a precondition for this behavior is the existence

of that undesirability. Essentially, the rejection of out-group identity markers is likely to be greater among those who are already negatively predisposed to the out-group. It is important to note, however, that this hypothesized asymmetry applies only to out-group markers; selective preferences signalling compliance with in-group norms should not be conditioned by respondents' nativism.

(H4) *Nativists will be less favorable toward policies associated with out-group ethnic cues.*

4. Empirical strategy

To test our theoretical expectations, we utilize an original visual conjoint experiment embedded in a survey conducted in the Netherlands and Germany administered by Kieskompas. Quota-based recruitment rendered a sample that reflects the gender, age, and educational distribution of the Dutch and German electorate.⁴ The original data collection took place over two rounds. We fielded our survey in the Netherlands in August 2022 (N=1169) and subsequently fielded in Germany in April 2023 (N=1358). Our visual conjoint design (detailed below) produced a resulting sample of 25,270 observations based on an individual comparing two randomly assigned proposal profiles via five different tasks ($2527 \times 2 \times 5$). The experiment was pre-registered, and any deviations from the original plan are explained in Appendix 4.

Case selection

Our empirical test relies on original data sourced from the Netherlands and Germany. The usefulness of these cases for our empirical assessment is based on several factors. First, the countries are, on several institutional variables, comparable. They are two neighboring western European countries with a similar religious heritage and both have multiparty systems. Importantly, both countries currently host electorally successful and influential radical right-wing parties: Germany's *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) and the Netherlands' multiple radical right-wing parties, namely *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV), *Forum voor Democratie* (FVD), and *Juiste Antwoord 2021* (JA21). Secondly, the politics of immigration and ethnocultural diversity is salient in both cases. As both cause (Arzheimer

4. Kieskompas is a Dutch political research institute that acts in accordance with the GDPR and the Dutch Authority for the Protection of Personal Information. Kieskompas coordinates large research panels of emails in multiple countries. These panels were acquired through online voting advice applications (VAAs) prior to elections – VAA users have voluntarily agreed to join the panel and to be contacted with additional surveys. The respondents received an email invitation with an online link to participate in this study. Kieskompas has been used in numerous political science studies (Van Prooijen et al. 2022; Abts et al. 2023; Buchmayr and Krouwel 2025). Analysis reported throughout applies post-stratification weights. The weights applied were compiled and provided by Kieskompas. Analyses without weights are reported in the Appendix for reference. The results are not conditioned by their use.

2018) and consequence of radical right-wing party success (Abou-Chadi and Krause 2020; Krause, Cohen, and Abou-Chadi 2023), political debate of migration has become a staple in mainstream political discourse. Thirdly, and of core interest for our assessment of selective (il)liberalism, both the Netherlands and Germany have long played host to femonationalist and homonationalist political rhetoric. An illustrative example of this is how the Netherlands pioneered political homonationalism with the first-ever openly gay far-right politician, Pim Fortuyn, who used his identity to draw a line with Muslim immigrants in the early 2000s (Boehmer and Mul 2012). Nativist identity instrumentalizations took some time to reach Germany, but have been widespread since 2017 when the AfD focused their campaign both on femonationalism and homonationalism (Doerr 2021), the same year in which they selected an openly lesbian politician as leader of the party in the Bundestag. As such, selecting these cases allows us to analyse the expectations of selective liberalism in two political contexts where respondents are likely to encounter the femonationalist, homonationalist and environmental nationalist trade-off. Given each country's context and the prevalence of selectively liberal rhetoric in Germany and the Netherlands, we view these countries as *most-likely* cases for observing the theoretical dynamics we propose. According to George and Bennett (2005), selecting most-likely cases is particularly appropriate when testing new hypotheses under favorable conditions, as the presence of the theorised empirical relationship in such cases lends initial support to the validity of the theory.

Conjoint design: dependent variable

The conjoint scenario we presented to respondents was political but one strategically devoid of partisanship. Respondents were told that policy-makers in their respective countries were considering reforms to the national curriculum in schools and that, in preparation of any formal proposals, they had opened a public consultation in which different civic actors were invited to advocate for alternative additions related to the potential reform. These public responses from civic actors could propose specific additions to the curriculum or indeed lobby *against* the addition of certain components. Our outcome of interest is expressed support for individual proposals that randomize different features of the proposal's substantive focus as well as additional information around the proponents themselves and other signals of in-group and out-group support.

Our targeted focus on education policy reforms is based on both its external validity as a relevant

area to test our thesis as well as its methodological advantages. First, education in schools is a policy domain where "identity politics" debates frequently take place, as demonstrated across several countries including Hungary (Rankin 2021), the Netherlands (Middleton 2023), Spain (Payo 2023), or the US (Goldstein 2022; Phillips 2022), and indeed wider transnational efforts (Ayoub 2024). As Kuhar and Paternotte (2017) explain, anti-gender entrepreneurs view liberal sexual education policies as a threat towards conservative values such as "traditional family" and "natural masculinity and femininity". This has converted school education into a political battlefield where liberal policy proposals that promote diversity and equality coexist with backlash proposals that promote reinstating traditional values (Ayoub 2024). Second, and from a methodological standpoint, relying on curriculum-based educational reforms is strategic and provides us with an empty vessel within which we can manipulate substance while keeping the policy setting constant. Comparing policy proposals in distinct policy arenas altogether would reduce comparability given the multidimensional nature of determinants of support for diverging policies like, for example, pro-environmental reforms (Devine, Stoker, and Jennings 2024; Kollberg et al. 2025), welfare policies (Rincon 2023), or economic protectionism (Grahm et al. 2025).

Empirically, we adopt a conjoint design that allows us to demonstrate that selective identity-based support for policies can result in both selective liberalism *and* illiberalism. As such, our conjoint tasks include proposals that are in favour and against a diverse catalogue of substantive issues for consideration in educational proposals. We summarize these diverse issues in 1. For our purposes, we categorise proposals parsimoniously as progressive or conservative; note, however, that the civic actors' position could be favourable (e.g., advancing education on toxic masculinity) or unfavourable (e.g., opposing education on toxic masculinity) within each of these areas.

Table 1. Education policy reforms

Policy type	Education to promote:
Progressive	LGBTQ+ inclusion
Progressive	Issues related to gender identity & diversity
Progressive	Anti-toxic masculinity
Progressive	Environmental adaptation
Conservative	Christian values
Conservative	Sacrifice & hard work

Conjoint design: independent variables

First, to test *H1* on individuals' descriptive characteristics, we rely on AI-generated faces that signalled information concerning the ethnicity (descriptive identity marker), age, and gender of the policy proponent. The two latter, as well as LGBTQ+ status which is also conveyed visually (flag emoji), are used as simultaneously randomised controls in the experiment.

We included visual cues within our set of simultaneously manipulated conjoint attributes in an effort to maximise external validity, in step with recent developments in conjoint applications. While political scientists have used pictures to convey one experimental attribute visually (Abrajano 2005), it is only recently that multidimensional visual conjoint experiments have started to be implemented (López Ortega and Radojevic 2024; Vecchiato and Munger 2024; Turnbull-Dugarte and López Ortega 2025). Importantly, and beyond issues of external validity, leveraging visual manipulations has the added benefit of reducing the potential for social desirability bias.⁵

However, we do not restrict our test to descriptive identities, but also look at the effect of a more substantive version of individual identity. More concretely, we differentiate associations that cue ethnic in- or out-group membership. Substantive identity markers were signalled through fictitious names of associations that clearly cue whether these organizations are Muslim or not.

Second, and to test *H2* on group reasonings, we rely on ethnic framings of the policy being proposed. These reasonings vary in the extent to which they are nativist or not, but also the type of nativism. Following previous research differentiating between hostile and benevolent forms of nativism (Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov 2004; Greenfeld 1992), we distinguish reasonings that essentialise in-group identity and liberalism—alluding to the need for a certain policy to "protect domestic freedoms and Western lifestyles"—from policies that target the out-group (e.g., alluding to the need to "counter backward Islamic intolerance") (Duyvendak et al. 2023).

Lastly, to test *H3*, on in- and out-group norms, we manipulate national and international public endorsements or rejections for the proposal. For in-group norms, we follow previous research on threshold models (Andreoni, Nikiforakis, and Siegenthaler 2021). These models suggest that the likelihood of an individual diverging from a social norm increases as more people in society have already done so. When the number of individuals who deviate reaches a critical 'tipping point,' it

5. For a discussion, see López Ortega and Radojevic (2024), which compares text-based and image-based conjoint manipulations to demonstrate, among other features, that the widely observed gender premium experienced by female candidates in text-based conjoints (Schwarz and Coppock 2020) is not observed in image-based manipulations.

Table 2. Conjoint attributes, values and manipulation

Attribute	Identity marker	Levels	Manipulation
Ethnicity	Descriptive	White, Non-white	Visual face cues
Group name	Substantive	Muslim vs. Non-Muslim	Text cues
National support	In-group norm	80%, 60%, 40%, 20%	Text cues
International rejection	Out-group norm	Arab vs. Non-Arab countries	Text cues
Reasoning	Group reasoning	Non-nativist, soft nativist, hard nativist	Text cues
Age	Descriptive	Young, Old	Visual face cues
Gender	Descriptive	Man, Woman	Visual face cues
LGBTQ+ status	Descriptive	LGBTQ+, Trans, None	Visual emoji cues

creates a situation where even those who are typically risk-averse, conformist, or hold pessimistic views about change are encouraged to join in the deviation (Granovetter 1978; Efferson, Vogt, and Fehr 2020). In line with research on norm manipulation (Bicchieri 2017; Masser and Phillips 2003), we manipulate ethnic in- and out-group norms by revealing the extent to which each group is in favour or against a given policy, thus ruling out incorrect beliefs about others' preferences as a reason for detrimental norm persistence (Smerdon, Offerman, and Gneezy 2020).

To test our *H4* on the moderating effect of nativism, we utilize an index of anti-immigration attitudes derived from the three questions related to immigration attitudes in the European Social Survey (ESS).⁶ Theoretically, nativists are those who prioritise the interests of native-born or established inhabitants over those of immigrants or perceived outsiders, often framing national belonging in exclusionary terms (based on ascriptive characteristics) irrespective of whether that exclusion is justified through ethnic, cultural, or civic criteria (Halikiopoulou, Mock, and Vasilopoulou 2013; Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou 2024). The index we rely combines responses to questions assessing perceptions of immigration in terms of its cultural, economic, and social implications, including aspects such as preferences for living in a diverse society and attitudes toward the integration of immigrants (see Appendix 2 for more details). As pre-registered, our moderating variable reflects pre-treatment attitudes toward immigration and is categorized based on respondent scores relative to the mean. Specifically, individuals will be classified into dichotomous groups: those with below-mean attitudes will be considered less favorable toward immigration (nativists), while those above the mean will be viewed as more supportive (non-nativists). Analyses relying on an alternative

6. These questions are frequently used as both determinants (Halikiopoulou and Vlandas 2020; Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou 2024) and outcome (Dennison and Geddes 2021) comparative opinion research related to anti-immigration attitudes in Europe.

operationalization based on terciles of the nativism score and a distinct (affect-based) measure of nativism are applied in robustness tests reported in the Appendix 2.

To make the experiment as realistic as possible, we programmed the conjoint so that no individual profile pictures, group name, country, reasonings, nor proposals could appear more than once across the five rounds. For example, were a reform proposed by the "German Muslim Association" in the first forced comparison, the respondent would not be exposed to another proposal from the same organisation, though they may be exposed to a proposal from another equivalent Muslim-based organisation. In real terms, this means that presented profile attributes were randomly sampled from a much larger universe of attribute values that could be harvested to generate the randomly compiled proposals. The rest of the information is manipulated via text. Table 2 displays the attributes included in the conjoint tasks, and Figure 2 shows an example of a conjoint task with two random proposals that respondents had to choose from (the appendix contains a more detailed explanation of each attribute).

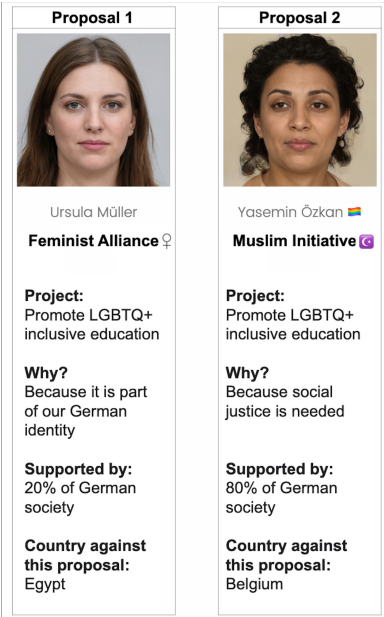


Figure 2. Visual conjoint example in the German survey

5. Results

We begin by exploring our results among the full sample. While a core component of our expectations around selective (il)liberalism assumes that the strategic out-group-oriented nature of selective support

for policies is conditioned by nativist predispositions, we also wish to assess the extent to which citizens as a whole engage in this behavior. Figure 3 reports the general results via two estimands: the marginal mean (MM) and the average marginal component effect (AMCE). The MM indicates the favourability toward policy proposals with a given attribute value, marginalizing across all other simultaneously randomized attributes and their corresponding values.⁷ Note that the reference line for the plot reporting the MM is 0.5, which indicates the mean level of positive selection. Given the forced choice nature of the outcome, MMs indistinguishable from 0.5 indicate those which should be considered as-good-as-random. The AMCE indicates the change in the probability that a profile is evaluated positively based on a change from the baseline category when the proposal is i) from a white proponent, ii) solicited by a non-Muslim association, iii) only supported by 20% of the nation, iv) opposed by a non-Arab nation, and v) not accompanied by nativist reasoning.⁸

The first two rows of Figure 3 explore the effect of ethnic out-group cues on policy favorability. The findings are mixed depending on whether the cue is descriptive or substantive. Considering all the simultaneously randomized attributes, respondents are *more* inclined, on average, to support proposals advocated for by non-white individuals. The difference, four percentage-points, is significant. The reverse pattern is observed when out-group status is manipulated via substantive association with different identity groups. Proposals advocated for by bodies associated with Muslims are supported only 46% of the time. This support is five percentage-points lower than the median preferability enjoyed by all other proposing bodies. These effects are striking. In both the Netherlands and Germany, respondents' policy preferences, across a vast array of substantive policy objectives, discriminate significantly and substantively based on associations with Islam.

On first reading, the results of the descriptive ethnicity outcome might be perceived as counter-intuitive, given it is contrary to expectations and to evidence from previous conjoint experiments that show no conclusive effect of ethnicity on people's preferences—at least in candidate choice scenarios (Van Oosten, Mügge, and Pas 2024). Our interpretation of this result is that, in the presence of information related to the *substantive* representation of ethnically coded groups (Muslims), the potential bias against non-white individuals cancels out. In essence, while respondents might infer a

7. We limit our reporting to our core attributes of interest, those that are linked to ethnicity, but the effects of all simultaneously randomized attributes are reported in Appendix II.

8. Throughout the text, we report the choice-based results, but as a robustness check we also asked respondents to evaluate each of the policy proposals on a 0–10 scale. These results are reported in Appendix III and show an overall fairly similar pattern.

Policy proposal identity markers and support for policy reforms

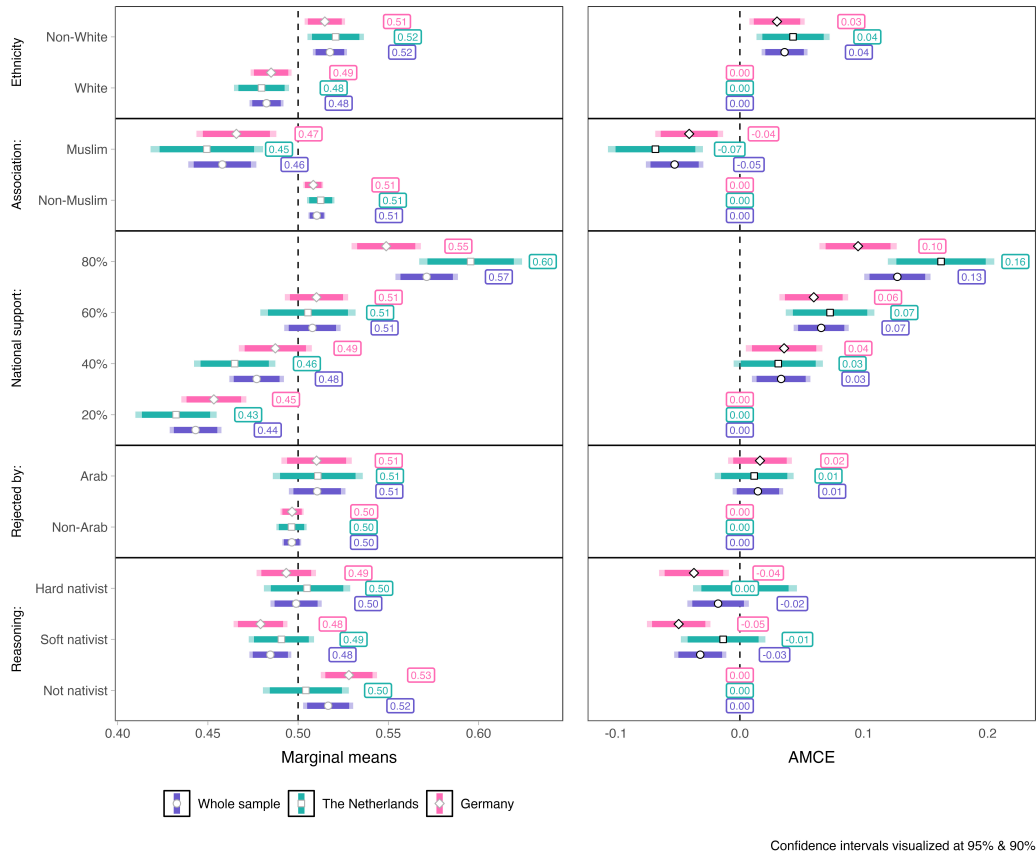


Figure 3. Identity markers and policy support

religious affiliation with Islam in the absence of specific interest-group information, these inferences are depressed in the presence of these multidimensional features. This interpretation is congruent with the effect of substantive cues on candidate preferences (Sen 2017).

What the third row shows, however, is that the identity marker that clearly exerts the greatest influence in choosing a given policy is national support for that policy, which we take to be an instrument for the nationalisation of in-group norms (Schultz et al. 2007; Prentice 2018; Bicchieri 2017). Despite some variations between the two countries—with the effect being stronger for respondents in the Netherlands—it is evident that the higher the perceived support of the national in-group for the policy, the higher the level of individual support. On average, policies that boast the strongest national-level support (80%) are thirteen percentage-points more likely to be backed by individuals vis-à-vis those which enjoy support from only 20% of the population.

Our interpretation of the amenability of support for policies to signals of in-group support is one of tension. A positive interpretation of this finding is that it signals good news regarding tolerance for the democratic majority: "if the majority support it, I do too." A negative interpretation, however, is that strong signals of national in-group preferences may lead to endorsements of illiberal turns. "If the majority support it, I do too" can fast become problematic when the majority's view is one that is detrimental to the welfare of the minority. Indeed, it is for this reason that many liberal activists and civil rights campaigns have been uncomfortable resolving salient issues around minority rights via plebiscites (Lewis 2011). Such scenarios illustrate the inherent tension between majoritarianism and the potential threat of illiberal turns in democracies.

Among our randomised attributes, we also manipulated which out-country opposed the policy. As mentioned in the description of our design, no country was presented more than once to an individual respondent. We categorized countries into two types, depending on whether Islam is the predominant religion.⁹ Perhaps unsurprisingly, policies that are opposed by Muslim-majority countries are, on average, more likely to be supported, consistent with the theoretical expectation of disidentification and previous evidence showing that individuals often react asymmetrically to the actions of the out-group (Turnbull-Dugarte and López Ortega 2024). These effects, while positive, are *not*, however, statistically distinguishable from zero and are, comparatively, small when considered alongside the in-group norm attribute.

The efficacy of nativist reasoning exhibits mixed evidence regarding policy support among the full sample of respondents. In the Netherlands, preferences appear to be as-good-as-random regardless of the reasoning applied. In Germany, there is a clear preference for non-nativist reasoning, with proposals framed in strong nativist terms being four percentage-points less likely to receive support than those employing a non-nativist approach. The negative effects of explicit nativist reasoning in Germany may be a reflection of the heightened level of social stigma against the endorsement of such preferences, given the stigmatised nature of explicit nativism in the country.

Two notable findings emerge when examining citizens as a whole. First, a clear anti-Muslim prejudice shapes support for policy preferences. This effect is evident when substantive associations with Islam are manipulated through civic actor associations, though it is not observed when ethnicity

9. Recall that countries were not presented more than once to an individual respondent but from a wider population of countries categorized with distinct attribute values. We can, as a result, be confident that the results for this attribute are not a function of country-specific familiarity, likability, or variations in cultural hegemony.

is manipulated via visual stimuli. Across a range of policies addressing various issues—such as gender, LGBTQ+ rights, and environmental concerns—citizens tend to update their preferences in a manner that contradicts positions advocated by Muslims. Second, consistent with existing literature on the influence of majority opinions (Schultz et al. 2007; Prentice 2018), signals of nationalized in-group support condition policy support in substantive ways.

Does underlying nativism matter?

A core expectation of our theory is that the effects of out-group signals will be significantly greater among nativists than non-nativists. We turn to test this now. In Figure 4, we report the marginal means (left-hand panel) for our core attribute values of interest conditioned by whether respondents express pro- or anti-immigration attitudes. The pairwise difference in the marginal mean is also reported (right-hand panel). This estimand represents the appropriate statistical text of subgroup heterogeneity (Leeper, Hobolt, and Tilley 2020). This subgroup variation demonstrates some significant differences in the effect of different features. While nativists' and non-nativists' preferences are *equally* influenced by the (non)-white descriptive identity of the policy proponent, the level of national in-group support, and signals of international endorsement, they react to a different degree when it comes to Muslim-based organisations and asymmetrically to reasoning.

Consistent with the overall rejection of proposals advocated by Muslims among respondents as a whole demonstrated in Figure 3, the results of Figure 4 clearly show that both nativists *and* non-nativists reject proposals advocated by organisations associated with Muslims. There is, however, variation in the magnitude of this prejudice. The penalty on such proposals among nativists is equal to eight percentage-points, which is double that exhibited by non-nativists (four percentage-points). The difference is significant ($p < .1$).

When it comes to assessing whether the efficacy of nativist-based reasoning is likely to move citizens, the results from voters on average showed that manipulating reasoning had little effect. This, on average, null effect is a product of asymmetric responses to these signals between the nativist and non-nativist respondents in the sample. Perhaps unsurprisingly, nativists are five percentage-points more inclined to support policies that are accompanied by strong nativist reasoning like “To counter backward Islamic intolerance” compared to non-nativist frames. Similar rhetorical devices, however, move non-nativists in the opposite direction, with strong nativist reasoning reducing policy support

Subgroup variation based on nativism

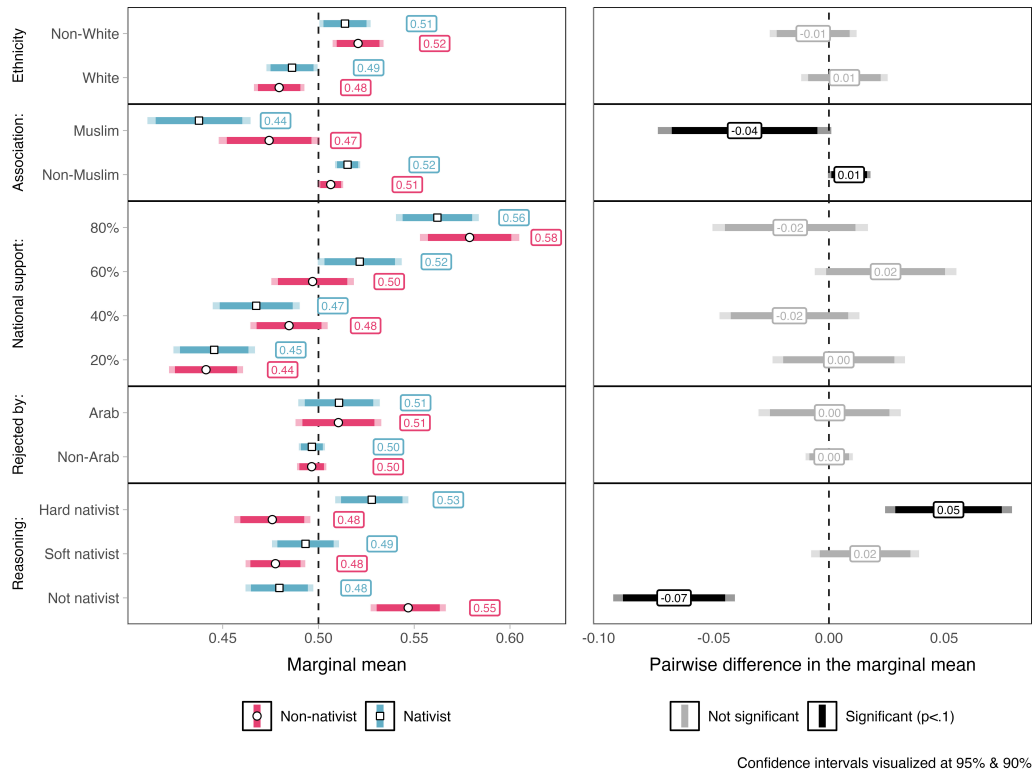


Figure 4. Identity markers and policy support conditional on respondent nativism

by seven percentage-points.

Finally, in Figure 5, we consider whether the effects of substantive group markers and in-group national support are conditioned by the type of reform being proposed by the policy entrepreneur. Doing so allows us to assess whether the influence of the core attributes we identify *on average* is also conditioned by whether the proposal advances a liberal or illiberal position. These policies, as summarized in Table 1, are categorized based on their ideological roots as progressive or conservative, and whether the proposal is positive or negative. As in the case of Figure 4, the results are further stratified according to respondents' immigration attitudes.

The findings highlight several key observations regarding the impact of ethnic identity cues on policy preferences. Notably, there is a significant distinction between the effects of substantive group markers and national support. National support appears to draw both anti- and pro-immigration respondents toward endorsing various policies, while the influence of substantive Muslim cues is

Subgroup variation in effect of out- & in-group cues conditional on proposal type

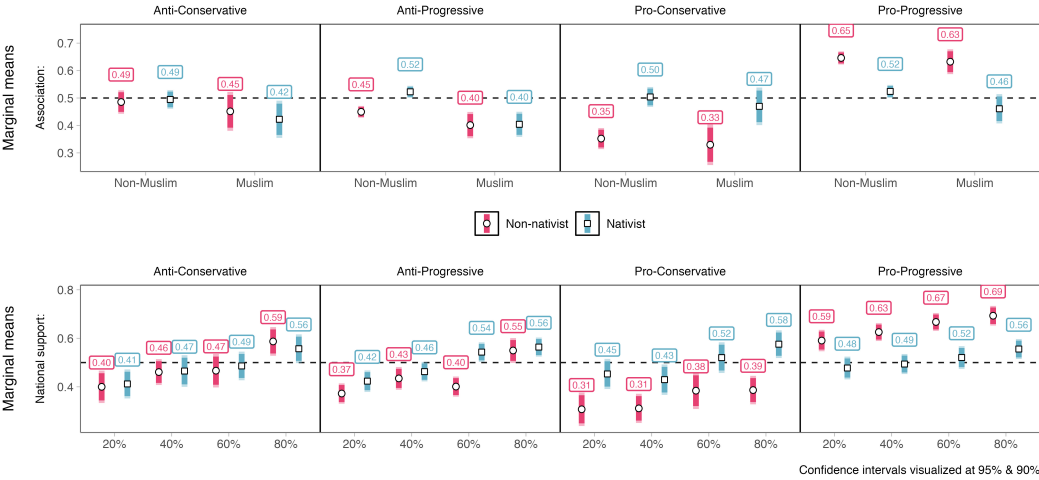


Figure 5. The effect of identity markers on policy support across liberal & illiberal proposals

primarily observed among anti-immigration respondents. Consider the anti- and pro-progressive policies and the difference between those advocated by Muslims and non-Muslims. Among *both* nativists and non-nativists support for the policies, regardless of their (il)liberal direction, lower for those proposed by Muslims. Among nativists the effect of disidentification on driving support is larger. Nativists are twelve percentage-points less inclined to favour an anti-progressive policy (e.g., opposition to lessons on gender equality) when opposition is advocated by an organisation associated with Islam. The same nativists are also six percentage-points less inclined to favour a pro-progressive policy (e.g., support for lessons on gender equality) when support is advocated by an organisation associated with Islam. Support for (il)liberal policies is selective and driven by out-group disidentification.

These results are noteworthy. They demonstrate that while some identity markers only depress support among nativist respondents, especially for progressive policies, others can make practically any policy – be that progressive or conservative – more attractive to respondents across the board. This is the case, for example, of in-group ethnic endorsements. When respondents are informed that a majority of the population is in favor of any type of policy, a majority of both nativists and non-nativists adopt a more favorable view of that policy. The exception remains those policies that are pro-conservative in which case those will more liberal views on migration (the non-nativists) are still more inclined to oppose than endorse the policy.

6. Discussion

Identities and tribal thinking play a central role in shaping political attitudes, especially amid the rise of illiberal movements. Historically, Western powers framed cultural and racial hierarchies to justify exclusion, portraying themselves as modern and superior (Said 1977; Go 2017; Seamster and Ray 2018). Today, these narratives have evolved to target immigration and marginalize ethnic minorities within Western societies (Akkerman 2005, 2015; Meret and Siim 2013; Lange and Mügge 2015). Nativist actors have weaponized liberal values—such as women’s rights, LGBTQ+ freedoms, and environmental concerns—framing them as inherently Western and incompatible with immigrant cultures (Farris 2012; Lægaard 2007; Spierings 2021; Camargo-Fernández and Polo-Artal 2024; Turnbull-Dugarte, López Ortega, and Hunklinger 2025). This allows exclusionary policies to be cloaked in a superficial commitment to liberalism, raising concerns about the fragility of democratic norms (Möser, Ramme, and Takács 2022; Deckman et al. 2023; Cornejo-Valle and Ramme 2022; Velasco 2023). In our paper, we aim to expand our understanding of how citizens respond to these shifting identity-based cues.

We demonstrate that while descriptive identity markers, group reasonings, and out-group norms exert influence on respondents’ policy positions, it is substantive identities and in-group norms that primarily determine the stances on both progressive and conservative proposals. Furthermore, we observe that although more nativist respondents are not any more influenced by in-group norms than their less nativist counterparts, they exhibit a pronounced sensitivity to nativist frames and associations with ethnic out-groups. Delving deeper into various policy proposals, we find that nativist respondents are, on average, the most susceptible to transitioning from opposing to supporting a policy based on multidimensional identity markers. Empirically, we demonstrate that – as theorized – *disidentification* of ethnic out-groups results in selectively (il)liberal shifts in expressed preferences. While our experimental evidence is observed in Germany and the Netherlands, two countries that we categorise as *most-likely* cases of selectively (il)liberalism, our expectation is that these results would be replicated in other Western democracies (in Europe or elsewhere) where the strategic issue-bundling of exclusionary nativism and liberal value frames are present. As highlighted in the review of the existing literature, these practices are not unique to Germany and the Netherlands and have been observed in diverse contexts including, among others, France (Calderaro 2025), Spain (Turnbull-Dugarte and López Ortega 2024) and the USA (Murib 2018). Whether our results are

observed in contexts where liberal values are not yet part of the national identity (Lægaard 2007) is, of course, an empirical question and we encourage future research to engage in replications and advancements that expand on the geographical scope of this and other work on the selective liberalism.

Our findings provide strong empirical support for extending the political tolerance framework to contemporary forms of selective liberalism. Just as Stouffer (1955) found that Americans supported free speech in principle but not for communists, and Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus (1982) demonstrated this pattern persisted across different target groups, we show that citizens support progressive educational policies in principle but withdraw support when these are associated with Muslims. The magnitude of our effects—with proposals from Muslim organizations facing a 5.4 percentage-point penalty—parallels the substantial gaps in tolerance documented in the classic literature. Moreover, our finding that this penalty is nearly doubled among nativists (8 percentage points) aligns with Duch and Gibson (1992)'s argument that authoritarian predispositions and perceived threat amplify intolerance.

The implications of these heterogeneous effects, or lack thereof, are twofold. First, and consistent with evidence presented elsewhere (Turnbull-Dugarte and López Ortega 2024), the anti-Muslim rejection of proposals among citizens is not limited to the usual (nativist) suspects, even if it is greater for this group. The implications for policy proponents are somewhat discouraging: regardless of the issue, campaigns that are explicitly identified with groups associated with Islam are likely to suffer a sizeable penalty in public support, even among those predisposed toward culturally liberal values. Secondly, and somewhat more positively, the heterogeneous responsiveness to nativist reasoning signals that the reach of far-right actors who leverage this rhetoric may well be constrained. While this rhetoric works for those positively predisposed to nativism, it is likely to repel others.

Our findings contribute new evidence to the discourse on the fragility of liberal democratic attitudes, suggesting that not only do strong substantive identities—such as partisanship—influence citizens' liberal democratic attitudes, but that descriptive markers, perceptions of group norms, and group reasoning can also sway citizens toward more (il)liberal opinions (Graham and Svobik 2020; Simonovits, McCoy, and Littvay 2022; Dyck and Pearson-Merkowitz 2023).

This is particularly alarming in an era of issue entrepreneurship and political diversification. Homonationalists (Siegel 2017; Dudink 2017; Akkerman 2005; Hunklinger and Ajanović 2022),

femonationalists (Farris 2012; Camargo-Fernández and Polo-Artal 2024; Calderaro 2025), and environmental nationalists (Conversi and Friis Hau 2021; Backlund and Jungar 2024) incorporate progressive elements to position them as incompatible with immigrants. However, nativist leaders are not the only ones utilizing minority group rights reasoning to legitimize their agendas. Besides traditional anti-LGBTQ+ groups, which campaign on morality and religious justifications, the last decade has seen a proliferation of anti-transgender discourses. These discourses often frame transgender rights as conflicting with women's rights and the rights of LGB individuals, gaining traction in the discourse of both radical and mainstream parties in the UK and Spain (Turnbull-Dugarte and McMillan 2023). This dynamic not only has the potential to deepen the fragmentation and decoupling of sociocultural attitudes from attitudes toward immigration, creating a growing group of "sexually modern nativists" (Spierings, Lubbers, and Zaslove 2017; Lancaster 2019, 2022), but it could also presage new dynamics of issue rebundling and a trend toward creating new attitudinal identity subgroups. Such shifts have the potential to erode solidarity among minority groups and to degrade the well-established GAL-TAN opinion structure (Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson 2002; De Vries 2018).

Our results provide confirmatory evidence that illiberal entrepreneurs and parties exploiting group identity markers to legitimize and broaden the appeal of their agenda may be successful in their objectives. Previous research has indicated that gender attributes can render illiberal policies more palatable (Ben-Shitrit, Elad-Strenger, and Hirsch-Hoefler 2022; Elad-Strenger, Ben-Shitrit, and Hirsch-Hoefler 2024; Weeks et al. 2023). We extend these findings to include other descriptive traits, such as ethnicity and LGBTQ+ status, as well as substantive identities like being feminist, ecologist, or a member of a religious organization. While liberal actors could also strategically leverage group identities to enhance their messaging, evidence suggests this approach can backfire. For instance, highlighting conservative group identities—like being a veteran—reduced homophobic bias against openly gay 2020 Democratic primary candidate Pete Buttigieg (Magni and Reynolds 2024). However, this strategic employment of group identities could also lead to strategic discrimination – namely, the avoidance of selecting minority candidates due to the perception that white male candidates might have broader appeal (Bateson 2020).

Our study advances political tolerance research in three key ways. First, while traditional tolerance studies focus on support for procedural rights (Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus 1982; Gibson 1992),

we demonstrate that conditional support extends to substantive policy positions across multiple issue domains. Second, we identify *disidentification* (Turnbull-Dugarte and McMillan 2023; Turnbull-Dugarte and Wagner 2025) as a novel mechanism driving selective support, complementing the threat-based explanations emphasized by Duch and Gibson (1992). Third, our experimental approach allows us to isolate the causal effect of ethnic identity cues, addressing the measurement challenges that have long plagued tolerance research (Gibson 1992). These contributions suggest that the "paradox of tolerance" identified by early scholars—whereby democratic citizens hold undemocratic attitudes toward certain groups—may be even more pervasive than previously recognized, extending beyond civil liberties to encompass the full spectrum of policies that embody liberal democratic values.

Our study also furthers the understanding of the role of group norms and reasoning in shaping policy preferences. First, we demonstrate that simple manipulations of in-group norms can significantly sway citizens' support toward both liberal *and* illiberal policies. This aligns with previous social psychological research, which has shown that communications emphasizing widespread engagement in a behavior can promote strong conformity in attitudes and behaviors (Stollberg, Fritsche, and Jonas 2017; Levitan and Verhulst 2016). This helps explain why illiberal entrepreneurs focus on redefining the meanings and norms of social and political in-groups. Second, we introduce and operationalize the concept of group reasoning, arguing that policy proposals are often framed not in terms of the direct beneficiaries, but with reasoning that significantly affects how respondents perceive these policies as (il)liberal.

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Data Availability Statement Replication data and code can be found in Harvard Dataverse: **LINK ADDED FROM PSRM DATAVERSE ONCE APPROVED BY REPLICATOR.**

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Appendix 1. Data collection & sample

Ethical approval for the original data collection and experimental manipulations presented in this study was provided by the Faculty of Social Science Ethical Review Board at the University of Southampton. Approval No. #93762.

The original survey was designed by the authors via Qualtrics. The survey questionnaire, including ordering and individual survey items, is stored on the same OSF project as the pre-registration and is available here: <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/ACWHE>

Survey respondents were sourced from Kieskompas, an online panel vendor that provided quota-based samples designed to reflect population parameters. The target sample for each country was as follows: Netherlands (1,200), and Germany (1,400). Fieldwork took place during the following dates:

Netherlands – August 5th – 23rd August, 2022 (N=1,169)

Germany – April 20th – May 3rd, 2023 (N=1,358)

Descriptive statistics

Table A.1. Sample summary statistics

Characteristic	Germany, N = 1,266	Netherlands, N = 1,146
Gender		
Man	610 (48%)	567 (49%)
Woman	656 (52%)	579 (51%)
Education		
Primary studies	265 (21%)	274 (24%)
Secondary studies	673 (53%)	528 (46%)
Tertiary studies	328 (26%)	344 (30%)
Sexuality		
Heterosexual	1,077 (89%)	1,003 (90%)
LGB	135 (11%)	107 (9.6%)
Unknown	54	36
Left-right	4.00 (2.00, 5.00)	5.00 (4.00, 7.00)
Unknown	37	68
Age		
[17,42]	503 (40%)	433 (38%)
(42,54]	304 (24%)	238 (21%)
(54,65]	182 (14%)	242 (21%)
(65,95]	277 (22%)	233 (20%)
attitudes_immigration	7.67 (5.67, 9.33)	5.67 (3.67, 7.67)
Unknown	2	2
immigration_economy	9.0 (7.0, 10.0)	6.0 (3.0, 8.0)
Unknown	28	63
immigration_culture	8.0 (5.0, 10.0)	7.0 (4.0, 8.0)
Unknown	15	24
immigration_placetolive	6.0 (4.0, 9.0)	5.0 (3.0, 7.0)
Unknown	44	53

¹ n (%); Median (IQR)

Appendix 2. Supplementary results & robustness tests

Main model output

Table A.2. Marginal means (full sample)

Feature	Level	Estimate	Std. Error	95% CI
Age	Junior	0.506	0.004	0.497 to 0.515
Age	Senior	0.494	0.004	0.485 to 0.503
Gender	Man	0.493	0.005	0.484 to 0.502
Gender	Woman	0.507	0.005	0.498 to 0.516
LGBT	No marker	0.506	0.004	0.498 to 0.514
LGBT	LGBT+ marker	0.493	0.009	0.475 to 0.511
LGBT	Trans marker	0.490	0.009	0.472 to 0.507
Ethnicity	White	0.482	0.005	0.473 to 0.492
Ethnicity	Non-White	0.518	0.005	0.508 to 0.527
Reasoning:	Not nativist	0.517	0.007	0.503 to 0.531
Reasoning:	Soft nativist	0.485	0.006	0.473 to 0.496
Reasoning:	Hard nativist	0.499	0.007	0.485 to 0.513
Association	Non-Muslim	0.510	0.002	0.506 to 0.515
Association	Muslim	0.458	0.010	0.439 to 0.477
National support:	20%	0.443	0.007	0.429 to 0.458
National support:	40%	0.477	0.008	0.462 to 0.492
National support:	60%	0.508	0.008	0.492 to 0.524
National support:	80%	0.571	0.009	0.554 to 0.589
Rejected by:	Non-Arab	0.496	0.003	0.491 to 0.502
Rejected by:	Arab	0.511	0.008	0.495 to 0.526

Table A.3. Marginal means (Germany)

Feature	Level	Estimate	Std. Error	95% CI
Age	Junior	0.509	0.005	0.499 to 0.520
Age	Senior	0.490	0.006	0.480 to 0.501
Gender	Man	0.492	0.005	0.482 to 0.503
Gender	Woman	0.508	0.005	0.497 to 0.518
LGBT	No marker	0.496	0.004	0.487 to 0.505
LGBT	LGBT+ marker	0.501	0.011	0.480 to 0.522
LGBT	Trans marker	0.510	0.011	0.489 to 0.532
Ethnicity	White	0.485	0.006	0.474 to 0.496
Ethnicity	Non-White	0.515	0.006	0.504 to 0.526
Reasoning:	Not nativist	0.528	0.008	0.513 to 0.544
Reasoning:	Soft nativist	0.479	0.008	0.464 to 0.494
Reasoning:	Hard nativist	0.493	0.008	0.477 to 0.510
Association	Non-Muslim	0.508	0.003	0.503 to 0.514
Association	Muslim	0.466	0.011	0.444 to 0.488
National support:	20%	0.453	0.009	0.435 to 0.471
National support:	40%	0.487	0.010	0.467 to 0.508
National support:	60%	0.510	0.009	0.493 to 0.528
National support:	80%	0.549	0.010	0.530 to 0.568
Rejected by:	Non-Arab	0.497	0.003	0.490 to 0.503
Rejected by:	Arab	0.510	0.010	0.491 to 0.530

Table A.4. Marginal means (Netherlands)

Feature	Level	Estimate	Std. Error	95% CI
Age	Junior	0.502	0.007	0.488 to 0.516
Age	Senior	0.498	0.007	0.484 to 0.512
Gender	Man	0.493	0.008	0.477 to 0.508
Gender	Woman	0.507	0.008	0.492 to 0.522
LGBT	No marker	0.516	0.007	0.503 to 0.530
LGBT	LGBT+ marker	0.484	0.015	0.454 to 0.514
LGBT	Trans marker	0.468	0.014	0.440 to 0.496
Ethnicity	White	0.480	0.008	0.464 to 0.495
Ethnicity	Non-White	0.521	0.008	0.505 to 0.536
Reasoning:	Not nativist	0.504	0.012	0.480 to 0.528
Reasoning:	Soft nativist	0.491	0.009	0.473 to 0.509
Reasoning:	Hard nativist	0.505	0.012	0.481 to 0.529
Association	Non-Muslim	0.513	0.004	0.505 to 0.520
Association	Muslim	0.449	0.016	0.418 to 0.481
National support:	20%	0.432	0.011	0.410 to 0.455
National support:	40%	0.465	0.011	0.442 to 0.487
National support:	60%	0.505	0.013	0.479 to 0.532
National support:	80%	0.596	0.015	0.567 to 0.624
Rejected by:	Non-Arab	0.496	0.004	0.488 to 0.505
Rejected by:	Arab	0.511	0.013	0.486 to 0.536

Table A.5. Marginal means of nativists only

Feature	Level	Estimate	Std. Error	95% CI
Age	Junior	0.504	0.007	0.491 to 0.518
Age	Senior	0.496	0.007	0.482 to 0.509
Gender	Man	0.489	0.007	0.475 to 0.504
Gender	Woman	0.511	0.007	0.496 to 0.525
LGBT	No marker	0.509	0.005	0.499 to 0.519
LGBT	LGBT+ marker	0.498	0.012	0.474 to 0.522
LGBT	Trans marker	0.476	0.013	0.451 to 0.501
Ethnicity	White	0.486	0.007	0.473 to 0.500
Ethnicity	Non-White	0.514	0.007	0.500 to 0.527
Reasoning:	Not nativist	0.480	0.009	0.462 to 0.497
Reasoning:	Soft nativist	0.493	0.009	0.476 to 0.511
Reasoning:	Hard nativist	0.528	0.010	0.509 to 0.547
Association	Non-Muslim	0.515	0.003	0.509 to 0.522
Association	Muslim	0.438	0.014	0.411 to 0.465
National support:	20%	0.446	0.011	0.424 to 0.467
National support:	40%	0.468	0.012	0.445 to 0.490
National support:	60%	0.522	0.011	0.500 to 0.543
National support:	80%	0.562	0.011	0.540 to 0.584
Rejected by:	Non-Arab	0.497	0.003	0.490 to 0.503
Rejected by:	Arab	0.511	0.011	0.489 to 0.532

Table A.6. Marginal means of non-nativists only

Feature	Level	Estimate	Std. Error	95% CI
Age	Junior	0.507	0.006	0.496 to 0.519
Age	Senior	0.493	0.006	0.481 to 0.504
Gender	Man	0.495	0.006	0.484 to 0.507
Gender	Woman	0.505	0.006	0.493 to 0.516
LGBT	No marker	0.503	0.006	0.491 to 0.515
LGBT	LGBT+ marker	0.489	0.013	0.463 to 0.516
LGBT	Trans marker	0.501	0.013	0.476 to 0.527
Ethnicity	White	0.479	0.007	0.466 to 0.493
Ethnicity	Non-White	0.521	0.007	0.507 to 0.534
Reasoning:	Not nativist	0.547	0.010	0.527 to 0.566
Reasoning:	Soft nativist	0.478	0.008	0.462 to 0.493
Reasoning:	Hard nativist	0.476	0.010	0.456 to 0.496
Association	Non-Muslim	0.506	0.003	0.500 to 0.513
Association	Muslim	0.474	0.013	0.448 to 0.501
National support:	20%	0.441	0.010	0.422 to 0.461
National support:	40%	0.485	0.010	0.464 to 0.505
National support:	60%	0.497	0.011	0.475 to 0.519
National support:	80%	0.579	0.013	0.553 to 0.605
Rejected by:	Non-Arab	0.496	0.004	0.489 to 0.504
Rejected by:	Arab	0.510	0.011	0.488 to 0.533

Table A.7. Interaction models (Muslim associations)

Policy Type	Level	Estimate	Std. Error	95% CI	Sample
Anti-Conservative	Non-Muslim	0.485	0.022	0.443 to 0.528	Non-nativist
Anti-Conservative	Muslim	0.451	0.036	0.380 to 0.522	Non-nativist
Anti-Conservative	Non-Muslim	0.495	0.017	0.461 to 0.529	Nativist
Anti-Conservative	Muslim	0.422	0.035	0.355 to 0.490	Nativist
Anti-Progressive	Non-Muslim	0.450	0.011	0.428 to 0.471	Non-nativist
Anti-Progressive	Muslim	0.401	0.024	0.353 to 0.449	Non-nativist
Anti-Progressive	Non-Muslim	0.523	0.011	0.501 to 0.544	Nativist
Anti-Progressive	Muslim	0.404	0.023	0.358 to 0.450	Nativist
Pro-Conservative	Non-Muslim	0.352	0.020	0.314 to 0.391	Non-nativist
Pro-Conservative	Muslim	0.330	0.038	0.256 to 0.404	Non-nativist
Pro-Conservative	Non-Muslim	0.504	0.018	0.468 to 0.540	Nativist
Pro-Conservative	Muslim	0.470	0.035	0.401 to 0.538	Nativist
Pro-Progressive	Non-Muslim	0.646	0.012	0.622 to 0.670	Non-nativist
Pro-Progressive	Muslim	0.632	0.023	0.587 to 0.678	Non-nativist
Pro-Progressive	Non-Muslim	0.524	0.012	0.500 to 0.548	Nativist
Pro-Progressive	Muslim	0.461	0.027	0.407 to 0.514	Nativist

Table A.8. Interaction models (in-group support)

Policy Type	Level	Estimate	Std. Error	95% CI	Sample
Anti-Conservative	20%	0.400	0.034	0.333 to 0.467	Non-nativist
Anti-Conservative	40%	0.461	0.027	0.408 to 0.514	Non-nativist
Anti-Conservative	60%	0.467	0.035	0.397 to 0.536	Non-nativist
Anti-Conservative	80%	0.587	0.030	0.528 to 0.646	Non-nativist
Anti-Conservative	20%	0.412	0.031	0.352 to 0.472	Nativist
Anti-Conservative	40%	0.465	0.033	0.400 to 0.530	Nativist
Anti-Conservative	60%	0.486	0.030	0.427 to 0.545	Nativist
Anti-Conservative	80%	0.557	0.030	0.498 to 0.616	Nativist
Anti-Progressive	20%	0.372	0.021	0.330 to 0.414	Non-nativist
Anti-Progressive	40%	0.435	0.024	0.388 to 0.481	Non-nativist
Anti-Progressive	60%	0.401	0.021	0.360 to 0.442	Non-nativist
Anti-Progressive	80%	0.550	0.026	0.499 to 0.601	Non-nativist
Anti-Progressive	20%	0.423	0.023	0.379 to 0.468	Nativist
Anti-Progressive	40%	0.463	0.020	0.422 to 0.503	Nativist
Anti-Progressive	60%	0.543	0.021	0.503 to 0.583	Nativist
Anti-Progressive	80%	0.564	0.020	0.524 to 0.603	Nativist
Pro-Conservative	20%	0.307	0.035	0.238 to 0.376	Non-nativist
Pro-Conservative	40%	0.311	0.031	0.251 to 0.371	Non-nativist
Pro-Conservative	60%	0.384	0.038	0.309 to 0.460	Non-nativist
Pro-Conservative	80%	0.387	0.030	0.328 to 0.445	Non-nativist
Pro-Conservative	20%	0.453	0.032	0.391 to 0.515	Nativist
Pro-Conservative	40%	0.430	0.032	0.367 to 0.492	Nativist
Pro-Conservative	60%	0.520	0.032	0.457 to 0.584	Nativist
Pro-Conservative	80%	0.576	0.029	0.519 to 0.633	Nativist
Pro-Progressive	20%	0.591	0.023	0.547 to 0.635	Non-nativist
Pro-Progressive	40%	0.626	0.019	0.589 to 0.662	Non-nativist
Pro-Progressive	60%	0.667	0.019	0.631 to 0.704	Non-nativist
Pro-Progressive	80%	0.693	0.021	0.653 to 0.734	Non-nativist
Pro-Progressive	20%	0.478	0.024	0.431 to 0.524	Nativist
Pro-Progressive	40%	0.494	0.021	0.453 to 0.535	Nativist
Pro-Progressive	60%	0.521	0.024	0.474 to 0.568	Nativist
Pro-Progressive	80%	0.556	0.021	0.515 to 0.597	Nativist

Operationalizing nativism (and alternatives)

The full survey flow and questionnaire is available via the OSF project where our pre-registration is hosted. Here we produce the three survey items that we rely on to create out nativism item. The items replicate the immigration attitude questions as used in the European Social Survey.

1. immigration_economy

English: Do you think it is generally bad or good for the German economy that people come from other countries to live here?

Response Scale: 0 = Bad for the economy, 10 = Good for the economy, 9999 = Don't know

2. immigration_culture

English: Would you say that Germany's cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?

Response Scale: 0 = Cultural life is undermined, 10 = Cultural life is enriched, 9999 = Don't know

3. immigration_placetolive

English: Has Germany become a worse or better place to live because people have come to live here from other countries?

Response Scale: 0 = Place has become worse, 10 = Place has become better, 9999 = Don't know

As demonstrated in Figure A.1, responses to these items are highly correlated and, as a result, our measure of nativism is based on an additive index of these three items. Importantly, as shown in the factor analysis reported below, these measures load reliably (Cronbach alpha = 0.872) into a single factor.

Table A.9. Exploratory factor analysis (1-factor solution) of attitudes toward immigration

	Variable	Loading
immigration_economy	immigration_economy	0.795
immigration_culture	immigration_culture	0.884
immigration_placetolive	immigration_placetolive	0.822
	SS loadings	2.090
	Proportion Var	0.697
	Cumulative Var	0.697

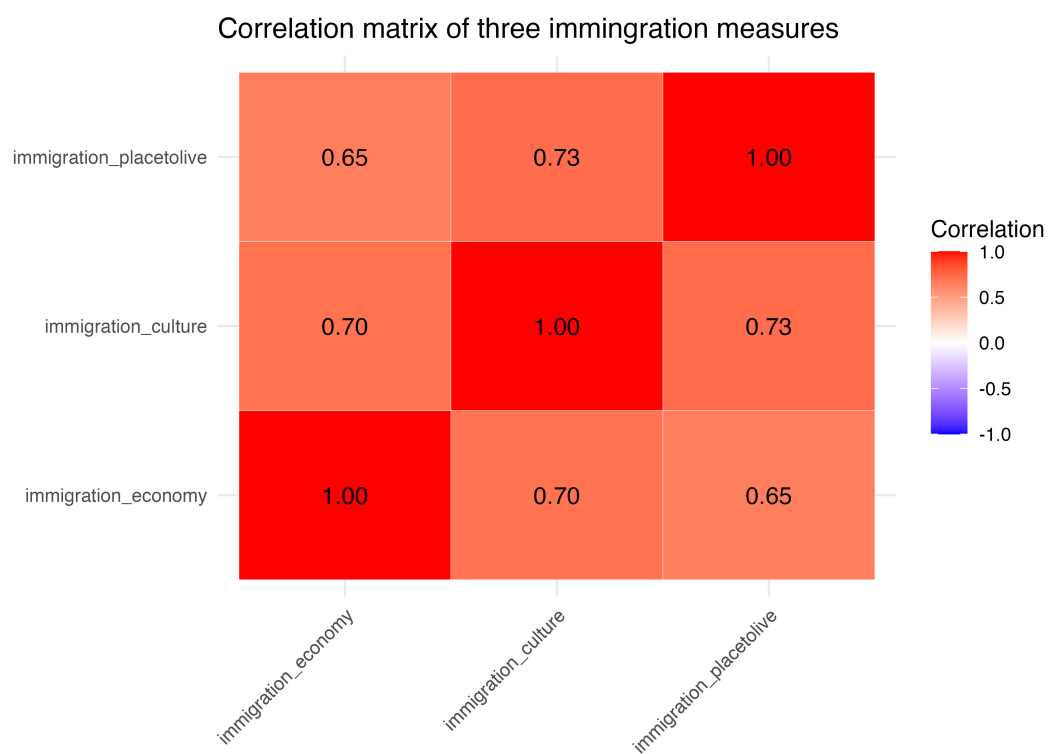


Figure A.1. Correlation between distinct immigration questions

Table A.10. Internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha) for immigration attitude scale

Metric	Value
Cronbach’s alpha	0.872

As reported in the main paper, our identification of respondents as nativists or not-nativists is based on respondent’s levels of nativism being above or below the sample mean. This is the operationalizaion pre-specified in our analysis plan. Below, however, we demonstrate resulted based on an alternative categorisation based on low, middle and high that stems from the tercile distribution of our nativism measure. The distribution of respondents across these two means of categorising nativism is summarised in Table A.11.

Table A.11. Cross-tabulation of immigration terciles by nativism dichotomous groups

Immigration Tercile	Non-nativist	Nativist
Bottom (negative) tercile	0	8010
Mid tercile	5370	2640
Top (positive) tercile	8010	0

In Figure A.2 and A.3 we replicate the subgroup analysis reported in the main paper relying on this alternative operationalisation. The primary conclusions remain unchanged.

Replicating Figure 4 based on nativism terciles instead of above-below mean

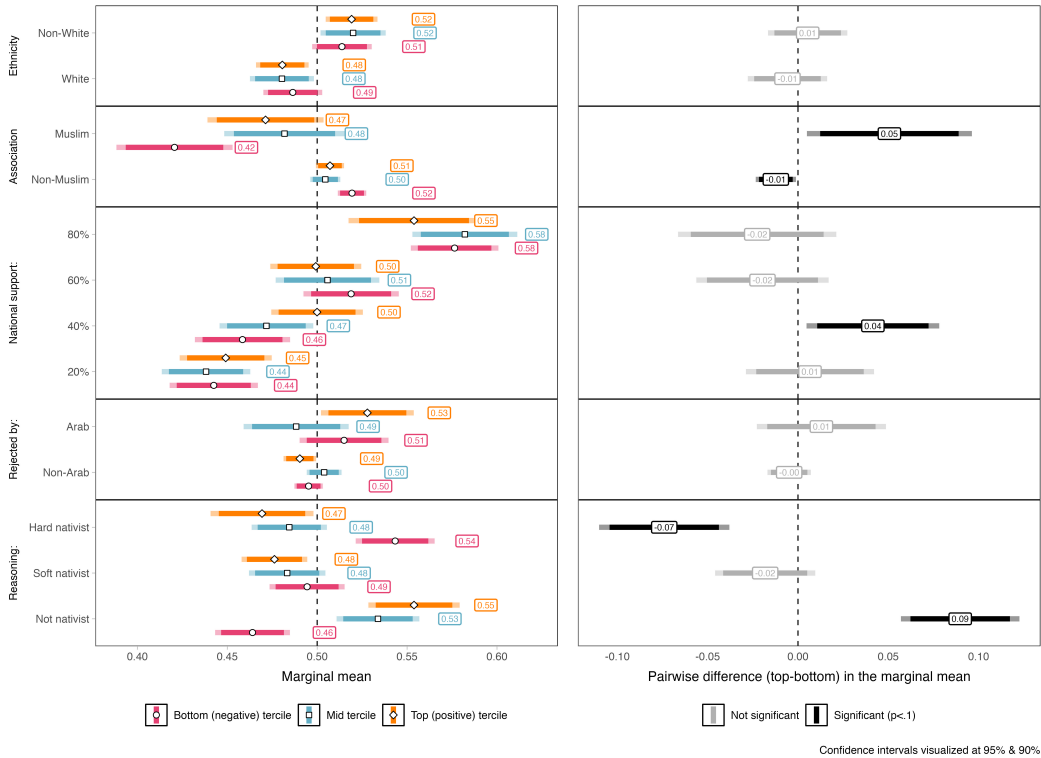


Figure A.2. Subgroup variation based on nativism measures via terciles (I)

Alternative based on affect

As part of our survey, we also included a battery of questions that solicited self-reported levels of affect towards different groups, including Muslims. The question read: *On a scale of 0-10, we would like you to indicate how you feel about the following groups of people. On this scale, 0 means very unfavorable, 5 means you are neutral about it, and 10 means very favorable. [Muslims].* Unlike the main moderator variable presented above, however, this question on affect was measured *post-treatment*. In the analysis below, we report the results relying on this measure of anti-Islamic nativism specifically as an alternative means of operationalising nativism. We wish to reiterate that this exploratory analysis was *not* pre-registered and should be interpreted with caution regarding the potential for post-treatment bias. That said, we have included this analysis during the revision process in order to ameliorate

Replicating Figure 5 based on nativism terciles instead of above-below mean



Figure A.3. Subgroup variation based on nativism measures via terciles (II)

reviewer concerns regarding the conceptual utility of relying on anti-immigration attitudes as the main moderator. As demonstrated in Figure A.4, this alternative measure produces results that are symmetrical in both magnitude and significance to those reported in the primary analysis.

Subgroup variation based on nativism (measure via anti-Muslim affect)

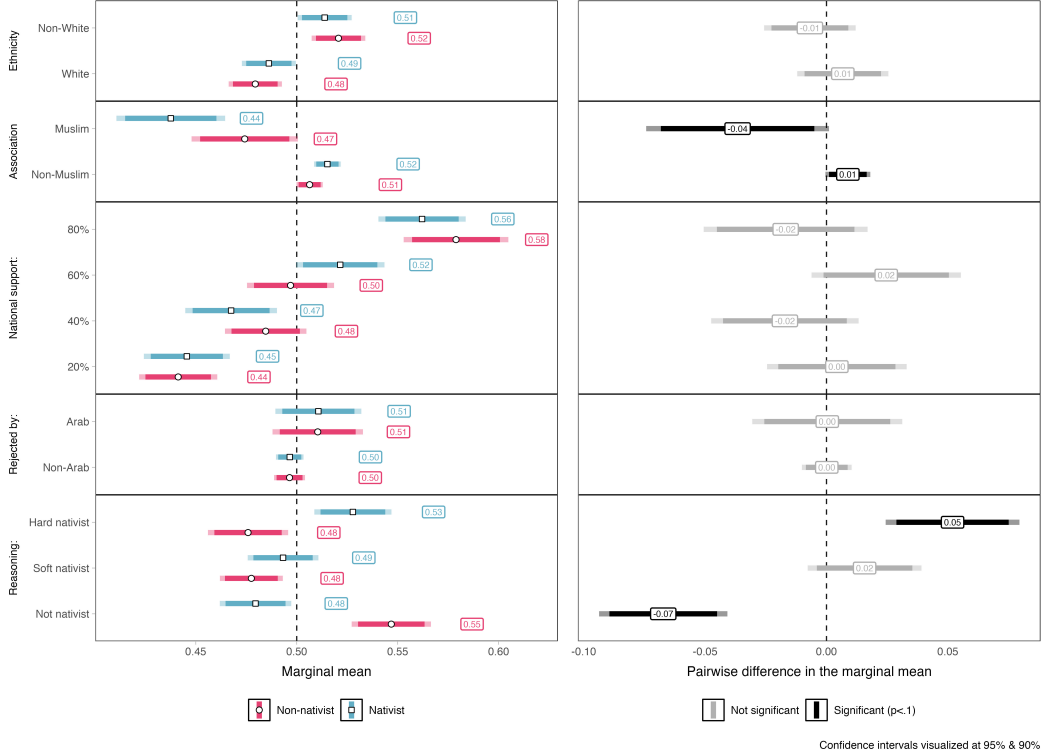


Figure A.4. Subgroup variation using on negative affect towards Muslims

Conjoint diagnostics

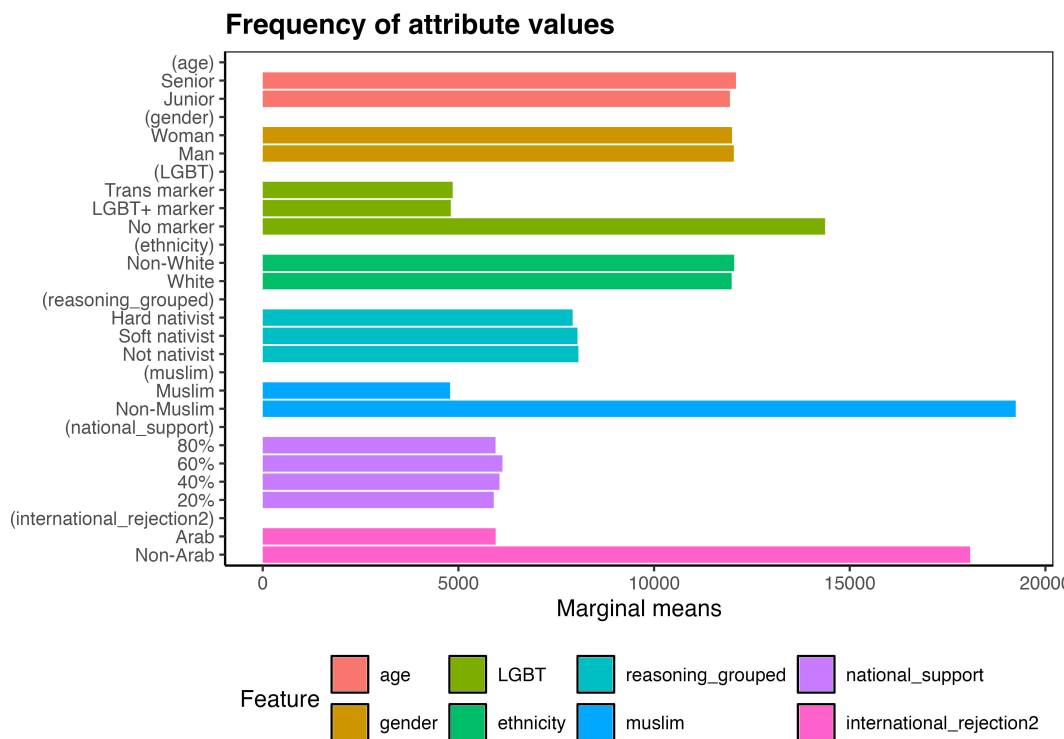


Figure A.5. Conjoint attribute frequency

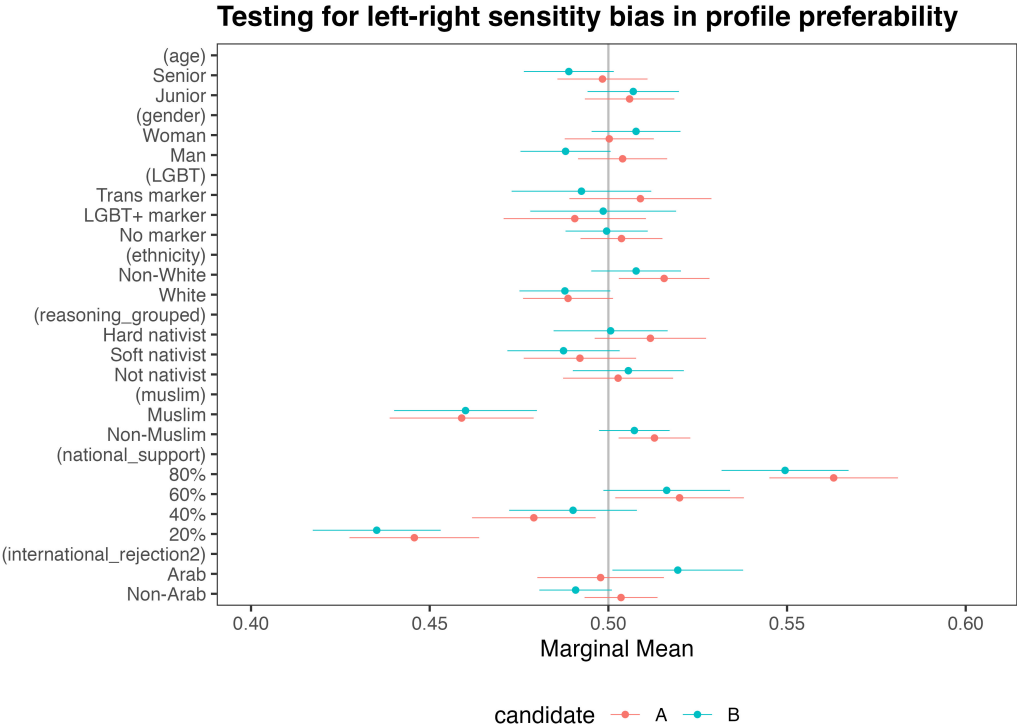


Figure A.6. Diagnostics test (I)

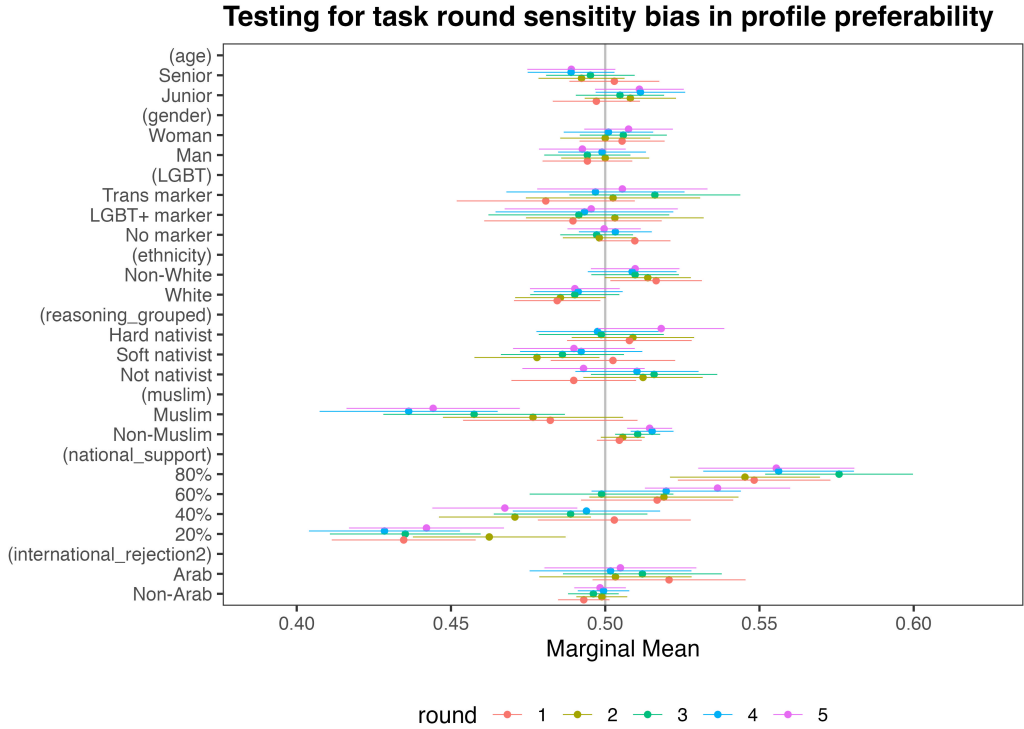


Figure A.7. Diagnostics test (II)

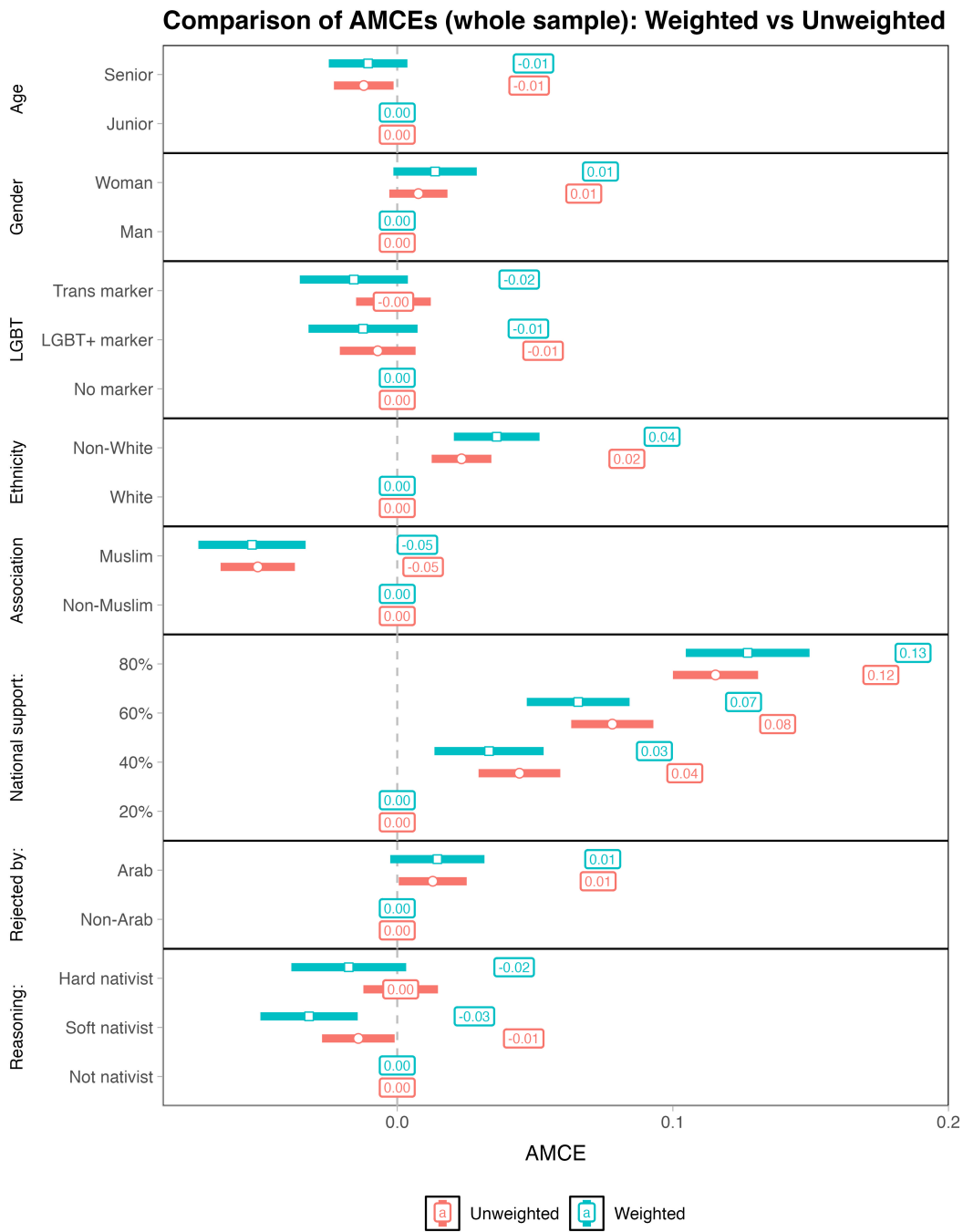


Figure A.8. Test of sensitivity to weighting

Appendix 3. Conjoint design elements

Survey presentation

German: Kommen wir nun zum wichtigsten Teil der Umfrage. Hier würden wir gerne wissen, welche Reform des Bildungsprogramms Sie unterstützen würden. Wir zeigen Ihnen verschiedene Kombinationen möglicher Lehrplanreformen für die Bildung. Die folgenden Vorschläge enthalten Informationen über die Befürworter des Vorschlags, ihre Argumentation, den Grad der nationalen und internationalen Unterstützung und den Vorschlag selbst. Lesen Sie die Vorschläge sorgfältig durch.

English: Now we come to the most important part of the survey. Here we would like to know which education program reform you would support. We will show you different combinations of possible curriculum reforms for education. The following proposals contain information about the supporters of the proposal, their reasoning, the degree of national and international support, and the proposal itself. Please read the proposals carefully.

For Each Round (1–5)

For each pair of proposals (A and B), respondents were asked:

1. Choice Question

German: Welchen der beiden Vorschläge bevorzugen Sie?

English: Which of the two proposals do you prefer?

Options:

- Vorschlag A / Proposal A
- Vorschlag B / Proposal B

2. Rating Questions

German: Inwieweit sind Sie gegen oder für Vorschlag A/B?

English: To what extent are you against or in favor of Proposal A/B?

Response Scale: 0 = Strongly against, 10 = Strongly in favor

Note: This experiment was repeated five times with different combinations of proposals.

Descriptive Identity Markers: Age, Gender, and Ethnicity

The first three categories—age, gender, and ethnicity—are represented visually through AI-generated images of faces. The source of these photos is *Generated.Photos*, which shares its creations altruistically for research purposes. Based on their pre-categorizations, we selected five images for each combination of characteristics. The rationale behind this choice is that respondents cannot be exposed to the same image more than once. By having five images for each combination of characteristics, we ensure that respondents can face the same combination with different (but interchangeable) images. Once a face is shown in the experiment, that face cannot reappear (but the remaining four faces of its interchangeable category can). We ensured the images were interchangeable by adhering to *Generated.Photos* criteria for ethnicity, gender, and age, while keeping them consistent (unsmiling, front-facing faces).

Substantive Identity Markers

In a similar way to the faces, group names were designed to avoid repetition. Respondents should not be confronted with the same name more than once, to maximize the credibility and external validity of the experiment. For each category within *group name*, we selected five similar items with varied wording. Once a certain association name appears, it is not reused.

Table A.12. Group Names by Category

Category	Group Name 1	Group Name 2	Group Name 3	Group Name 4	Group Name 5
Ecologist	Recycle Now!	Green Planet Alliance	Friends of the Planet	Green World Initiative	Network for Environmental Protection
Queer Alliance	Love is Love	LGBTQ+ Equality Network	Dutch LGBTQ+ Alliance	Rainbow Sexuality Group	LGBTQ+ Rights Movement
Feminist	Women First	Women's Equality Network	Dutch Alliance for Women's Rights	Platform for Women's Rights	

Group Reasonings

This variable functions as a classical conjoint attribute, with six values:

Table A.13. Group Reasoning Types

Hard Nativist	Soft Nativist	Non-Nativist
To make sure incoming migrants learn Dutch values	Because it is part of our Dutch identity	Because social justice is needed
To counter backward Islamic intolerance	To protect our domestic freedoms and western lifestyle	To make a better world

Group Norms Markers: National Support

This variable also functions as a classical conjoint attribute, with four levels:

- 20% of Dutch/German society
- 40% of Dutch/German society
- 60% of Dutch/German society
- 80% of Dutch/German society

Group Norms Markers: International Support

Like faces and group names, each value in this variable appears only once per respondent. The values are categorized below:

Table A.14. International Support by Region

Category	Country 1	Country 2	Country 3	Country 4	Country 5
Islamic	Morocco	Iran	Egypt	Saudi Arabia	Libya
Western	Norway	Denmark	Switzerland	Belgium	Ireland
Eastern	Poland	Hungary	Serbia	Romania	Czech Republic
Southern	Portugal	Spain	Greece	Italy	Malta

Appendix 4. Deviations from Pre-analysis Plan

Our implemented study followed the pre-registered design closely, but some modifications were made to improve theoretical clarity and analytical rigor. We document these deviations below. The pre-analysis plan is available at: <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/ACWHE>

Theoretical Focus and Variable Operationalization

1. While the pre-analysis plan encompassed analyses of different policy domains (LGBT+, feminist, environmental, and transinclusive education) and their interaction with progressive/conservative attitudes alongside our main focus on nativism, we streamlined our analysis to focus exclusively on how nativist attitudes condition support for liberal policies. This refinement allowed us to concentrate on our core theoretical interest in how ethnic-based group identities drive selective liberalism, which aligns directly with theories of homonationalism, femonationalism, and environmental nationalism.
2. Following this theoretical refinement, we modified how we grouped and analyzed variables:
 - Association and ethnicity variables were categorized based on whether they represented ethnic in-group or out-group markers, rather than analyzing them separately.

- The heterogeneous effects analysis focused primarily on nativism as the key moderator, rather than examining multiple ideological dimensions.

Analysis Approach

While the pre-analysis plan specified analyzing both binary choice and 11-point rating outcomes, we focused primarily on choice outcomes in the main text, with rating analyses reported in the supplementary materials for transparency. None of these deviations were contingent on observed results, and all major analytical decisions were made prior to examining the outcome data. These modifications were made to strengthen the theoretical contribution and analytical clarity of the study while maintaining fidelity to the core pre-registered design.

Appendix 5. Example of econationalism



Geert Wilders ✓

@geertwilderspvv

...

Vandaag islamitisch Offerfeest.

Walgelijk. Pure horror.

Wat een barbarisme.

Dit hoort echt niet bij Nederland.

Verbieden dat [#Offerfeest!](#)

[Traducir post](#)



7:39 a. m. · 11 ago. 2019

Figure A.9. Post of X from Geert Wilders