



Integration for whom? The migration bias in social norms

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ABSTRACT

Integration has become a dominant framework in the governance of immigration, indicating what states and ‘host societies’ expect immigrants to do and how to behave to become accepted members of the receiving country. Critical scholarship has argued that this creates an unequal normative burden: ‘immigrants’ are subject to integration demands, while ‘native citizens’ are exempt. Despite this widely acknowledged ‘integration dispensation’, the asymmetry of expectations has not been empirically tested. In this article, we conceptualize immigrant integration in terms of social norms—expectations regarding the social, economic, cultural, and political participation—and develop a theory of a migration bias: the idea that these norms are stronger for immigrants than for society at large. We test this hypothesis using a population-based survey experiment in Switzerland. Our results provide evidence for a migration bias, particularly in the social dimension of integration and expectations concerning respect for laws and constitutional values. However, this bias is context dependent, appearing in the German-speaking part of Switzerland but not in the French-speaking counterpart. These findings provide novel insights into the popular understanding of immigrant integration and the nature of social norms and citizenship in diverse societies.

KEYWORDS Integration; social norms; migration bias; survey experiment; integration dispensation; citizenship

Introduction

‘Suppose you spill someone’s pint in the pub. What usually happens next?’ (Orgad, 2015, 6). Such questions are often used in administrative procedures to assess the ‘integration’ of immigrants into ‘host societies’. Integration has

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become the dominant framework for the governance of immigrants in European societies (Favell, 2022). Typically, the concept signals what states and ‘natives’ expect immigrants to do to be recognized as full members of the receiving country (Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016). These expectations are rooted in ideals and imaginaries of nationhood and society (Schinkel, 2017). Thus, integration can be understood as a set of social norms directed at individuals constructed as ‘subjects of integration’ (Dodevska, 2024). Although these integration expectations dominate public discourse and have been critically examined in academic literature (Korteweg, 2017; Bonjour and Duyvendak, 2018; Rytter, 2019), we still know surprisingly little about the nature and societal significance of these norms—or how they relate to broader social expectations in immigrant-receiving societies.

Debates about immigrant integration reflect contrasting views on the nature of integration expectations. On the one hand, a prevalent understanding among both scholars and policymakers views immigrant integration as a two-way process, involving efforts by migrants and society alike (Klarenbeek, 2021; Spencer and Charsley, 2021). According to this whole-society approach, integration concerns any ‘processes of interaction, personal and social change among individuals and institutions across structural, social, cultural and civic spheres’ (Spencer and Charsley, 2021, 16). On the other hand, some scholars argue that integration in practice often functions as a one-way process (Kostakopoulou, 2010; Anthias, 2013), emphasizing the responsibility of migrants to integrate while imagining the ‘host society’ as already integrated (Korteweg, 2017). In this perspective, the nation is imagined as a community of value(s) (Anderson, 2013; Manser-Egli, 2023) and always already belonging (Korteweg and Yurdakul, 2024), dispensing ‘native citizens’ from integration expectations (Schinkel, 2018). These two perspectives have different implications for social norms on integration. Under the two-way view, integration addresses both ‘immigrants’ and ‘natives’. In contrast, under the one-way view, it concerns primarily—or even exclusively—immigrants, subjecting them to stronger social expectations than ‘native’ members of society.

While the theoretical debate reveals conflicting understandings of whom integration should concern, the practical implications depend on how societies actually perceive and apply integration norms. So far, research has largely focused on the conceptual and normative aspects of immigrant integration in policy and theory, neglecting the normative understandings that exist among the public. From a liberal democratic standpoint, social norms should apply equally to all members of society, regardless of migratory background. That is, the social norms promoted under the banner of integration should not impose different expectations on migrants compared to non-migrants. Yet, to what extent this is actually the

case is not only contested but also lacking the empirical evidence to inform this debate.

In this article, we seek to fill this gap by empirically investigating the nature of integration expectations within society. Integration expectations, we argue, are broader social norms that may be directed at both ‘immigrants’ and ‘natives’. Based on the two understandings of immigrant integration introduced, we derive a testable empirical implication in the form of a *migration bias* in social norms: social norms of integration are stronger for migrants than for society at large if immigrant integration is understood as a one-way process. This expectation is in line with literature on integration that has put forth (but not empirically tested) the idea that migrants are expected to perform *better* than members of the ‘host society’ (Rytter, 2019). In contrast, if integration is understood as a two-way process addressing society as a whole, then we should not find a migration bias in social norms. We can thus test these arguments: how do social norms differ for immigrants and the ‘host society’? With this, our research constitutes a rare but important attempt to bring together critical integration research with quantitative and experimental approaches to advance our understanding of integration.

The remainder of this article proceeds as follows. First, we conceptualize the concept of integration as a bundle of social norms and develop the argument that these norms are characterized by a migration bias—they are stronger for migrants than for society at large. Second, we discuss contextual and individual drivers of such a migration bias in social norms to develop our theoretical understanding of the phenomenon. Third, we test the idea of a migration bias and its expected drivers empirically with a population-based survey experiment in Switzerland—a country with a high share of immigrants and divisive political debates around immigrant integration. Finally, we discuss the implications of our results for the theoretical and public understandings of immigrant integration.

Integration as social norms and the migration bias

According to the one-way perspective, integration is typically understood as a set of norms and values defined by the dominant majority, to which immigrants are expected to conform to gain acceptance. The cultural model of this dominant majority ‘expresses the normative standard towards which immigrants should aspire and by which their deservingness of membership should continuously be assessed’ (Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016, 12). These norms cover a wide range of issues, including how to behave, what values to uphold, and what beliefs to adopt. Such normative expectations tend to be relatively stable over time and slow to change (see Bicchieri, 2006, for an overview).

This understanding of integration rests on the assumption that ‘native citizens’ as the dominant majority *already* adhere to these norms and values and are therefore *integrated by default*. This assumption produces the imaginaries of the *ideal citizen* at the individual level (Merolli, 2016; Blankvoort et al., 2021) and of society as a *community of values* at the collective level (Anderson, 2013; Manser-Egli, 2023). Integration expectations such as those found in naturalization exam questions often assume the existence of specific social norms that reflect the behaviour of the average or ideal citizen. For example, a question from a German naturalization test is ‘What should parents of a 22-year-old girl do if they do not like her boyfriend?’ (Orgad, 2015, 6), while a British exam includes a question about appropriate behaviour in a pub, as cited in the beginning of this article. Similarly, when an immigrant is deemed ‘not integrated’ into Swiss society for wearing training pants in public (Manser-Egli, 2023), this reflects the idea that there is a general social norm prescribing appropriate dress in public. Often, these norms are constructed *ex negativo*, by defining what is considered to *not* align with dominant norms and values. Only in rare instances are the attributes of the ideal citizen, against whom integration expectations are explicitly defined, depicted and characterized in detail.¹ In this way, integration expectations implicitly invoke unwritten rules that members of the national society are assumed to follow and to which immigrants are expected to conform in order to be seen as legitimate members of the community.

These integration imaginaries of the ideal citizen and of the community of values point to a central critique of integration discourse: the ‘mainstream’ into which immigrants are expected to integrate is rarely clearly defined and thus cannot provide an objective benchmark for integration. Nevertheless, integration continues to reflect an essentially functionalist vision of society (see Schinkel, 2017), wherein immigrant success is ‘charted against a set of taken-for-granted mainstream norms’ (Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas, 2016, 12). Thus, at face value, integration expectations are general social norms applicable to all members of society. These norms become integration specific when they are selectively directed at immigrants—or, more precisely, at those constructed as

¹ A notable and somewhat comical exception to the otherwise vague portrayal of the ideal citizen can be found in the *Integrationsleitbild* of the city of Zürich from 1997. It offers an unusually detailed depiction of the (Swiss) ideal citizen, drawing on what is considered to be the traditional image of the *Citoyen*: emotional self-control and civic discipline to respect the state’s monopoly on the use of force; a work ethic that feeds the solidarity networks on the basis of supra-familial reliability; supra-familial honesty and solidarity; an ethos of gender equality that enables a satisfactory combination of family, professional, and gender roles for men and women; an intergenerational ethos that refrains from consuming the resources of future generations; and a culture of conflict that allows for fruitful debates, withstands contradictions in thinking and feeling, and is able to negotiate conflicting values and interests through discourse rather than violence (Müller, 1997).

‘subjects of integration’ (Dodevska, 2024). Who is constructed as a subject of integration and the particular norms they are expected to conform to, varies across times and contexts. With this in mind, we now turn to our core argument of a *migration bias* in social norms.

Despite the widespread framing and theoretical conceptualization of integration as a two-way process involving both ‘natives’ and immigrants, in practice, the integration of ‘natives’ is neither required nor assessed—unlike that of immigrants. Citizens are typically considered to be ‘already integrated’ (Korteweg, 2017) and thus ‘dispensed from integration’ altogether; they are not studied, evaluated, or described in terms of their integration (Schinkel, 2018). As Schinkel aptly observes, the key distinction is therefore not ‘the difference between the “well integrated” and the “less integrated”; it is *the difference between those for whom integration is not an issue at all, and those for whom it is*’ (Schinkel, 2018, emphasis in the original). While migrantized subjects are monitored and tested for their integration, the ‘host society’ remains exempt from such scrutiny. In this process, ‘society’ is discursively unified and homogenized (Schinkel, 2017). For instance, the integration requirement to ‘respect the values of the constitution’ produces the social imaginary of society as a community of value(s), while, in reality, these ‘values’ are perpetually contested and renegotiated within the pluralist framework of liberal democracy (Manser-Egli, 2023, 2025).

Accordingly, major criticism of the notion of integration targets its essentially *migrantized* nature (Dahinden, 2016; Spencer and Charsley, 2021). Although the concept originates in Durkheimian sociology long before the emergence of ‘migration studies’, it has become almost exclusively associated with migrants, in research, policy, and public discourse. However, as Banton has argued, integration can only be a ‘viable sociological concept’ (again) if it measures ‘the degree to which *all* individuals, whatever their ethnic origin, are integrated’ (Banton, 2008, 1281, emphasis in the original). Unless this is the case, that is, as long as only one group is evaluated in terms of ‘integration’ (migrants) against the benchmark of an allegedly always already integrated ‘host society’, integration is a game that cannot be won. As scholars have argued, it is a game of snakes and ladders (Horner and Weber, 2011), a labyrinth without an exit (Waerniers and Hustinx, 2019), or an asymptote—a curve that can be extended to infinity but never touches the abscissa (i.e., ‘society’) (Sayad, 1994).

The central question, then, is whether integration is understood as a set of social norms that apply universally to all members of society or primarily serves as a mechanism for conditioning immigrants—who are subjected to stronger normative expectations due to their assigned outgroup status. If being integrated means having a job, maintaining contact with neighbours, and participating in

politics, is this expected, monitored, and evaluated equally for everyone, or for migrants exclusively? If these social norms are applied exclusively—or, at least, more strongly so—to immigrants than to society at large, we refer to this as a *migration bias* in social norms: the *same* social norms and expectations are *stronger* when addressed to immigrants. This conditionality where the strength of social norms depends on the migration status constitutes a crucial empirical implication of conflicting understandings of integration. If a migration bias exists, it indicates the presence of differentiated social norms, which means that the ‘host society’ is effectively dispensed from certain expectations while immigrants are held to a higher standard and expected to be ‘better citizens’. To investigate this, we test the following hypothesis:

H1: Social norms of integration are stronger for immigrants than for society at large.

In the following, we discuss potential explanatory factors behind the migration bias in social norms. What may explain why individuals with an assigned outgroup membership (i.e., immigrants or migrantized others) are subjected to stronger social norms? We propose two theoretical perspectives: the first attributes the bias to contextual factors, particularly integration regimes; the second emphasizes individual-level integration expectations as the main driver.

The contextual explanation builds on the idea that public understandings of integration are shaped by the broader cultural and political context. A number of case studies, such as Brubaker’s (1992) analysis of citizenship and nationhood in France and Germany or Favell’s (1998) comparative study on philosophies of integration in France and Britain, demonstrate how national contexts differ with regards to conceptions of citizenship and belonging. These different philosophies of what it means to become a full member of the nation have shaped immigrant integration policies, which in turn institutionalize and reinforce prevailing social norms of integration.

Scholars have identified distinct types of integration regimes (Manatschal, 2011): the assimilationist model, based on an ethnic understanding of citizenship and cultural monism, and the multiculturalist model based on a civic understanding of citizenship and cultural pluralism. These models resonate with the two understandings of integration: the assimilationist regime with the one-way process and the multiculturalist regime with the two-way process. Empirical studies have shown that such policy frameworks shape how the public perceives immigrants and their integration (De Coninck et al., 2021; Green et al., 2019; Neureiter, 2022). It is therefore plausible to assume that integration-specific social norms that people adopt are shaped by the dominant philosophies of the relationship between states and (non-)citizens. These philosophies are reflected and stabilized through integration policy regimes. Accordingly, the migration

bias should thus vary primarily between different historical and political contexts, leading us to the following hypothesis:

H2: The migration bias in social norms is larger in integration regimes characterized by an ethnic understanding of citizenship and cultural assimilation.

A second perspective focuses on the individual-level understandings of integration that result from people's differing values and political orientations. This builds on the observation that immigration is a deeply contested issue, often structured along a broader political divide between cosmopolitans and nativists (De Wilde et al., 2019; Duyvendak and Kešić, 2023; Lancaster, 2022). Cosmopolitans emphasize cultural openness, universal human rights, and the value of diversity. They tend to view national identity as inclusive and reject the idea that immigrants must assimilate to a fixed set of cultural norms. For them, integration is either unnecessary or understood as a mutual process of adaptation within a pluralistic society. Demands that immigrants conform to 'majority values' are often seen as illiberal and exclusionary, especially when these values are themselves contested (cf. Kymlicka, 1995; Manser-Egli, 2025). In contrast, nativists hold that 'states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (the nation) and those non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogeneous nation-state' (Mudde, 2007, 19). In nativism, the immigrant is constructed in cultural terms as 'the opposite of the "real," "authentic," "rooted" citizen' (Duyvendak, 2012, 2).

These clashing ideologies imply different understandings of immigrant integration and, crucially, different applications of social norms. Cosmopolitans should be more likely to see norms as universal and symmetrical—applying equally to all residents. Nativists, by contrast, are expected to apply norms asymmetrically, with stricter demands placed on immigrants. Therefore, the extent of the migration bias in social norms (i.e., the degree to which the same expectations are more strongly applied to immigrants) should vary systematically across individuals with different political ideologies, value orientations, and attitudes towards diversity.

Hypothesis H3: The migration bias in social norms is larger the more individuals expect immigrants to integrate.

Data and method

We test our hypotheses with an original survey experiment conducted in Switzerland. The Swiss case is particularly well suited for this study, as it combines a high share of immigrants and noncitizens with a public discourse in which the issue of immigration is particularly salient and polarizing. As of 2024, 27.4% of the

permanent resident population did not hold Swiss citizenship. Migration policy and discourse have been shaped by nativist fears of ‘over-foreignization’ (*Überfremdung*) for decades, targeting Italians in the 1960s, non-EU migrants since the 1990s, and Muslims more recently (Dahinden and Manser-Egli, 2023). In this respect, Switzerland represents a typical case of a reluctant immigration country within the European context (Freeman, 2006).

Beyond its national characteristics, Switzerland also offers theoretically relevant subnational variation. Its different language regions differ in integration philosophies, and its federalist political system allows for significant regional variation in policy and practice. While Switzerland as a whole is generally classified as a strongly assimilationist regime (Skenderovic, 2009), research shows considerable divergence across cantons. Manatschal (2012) demonstrates that integration philosophies often align with linguistic regions: French-speaking cantons tend to adopt more liberal and inclusive approaches, resembling the French *ius soli* tradition, whereas German-speaking cantons tend to follow more restrictive approaches, closer to the German *ius sanguinis* model. This is reflected in concrete policies: voting rights for noncitizens, for example, are common in the French-speaking part of Switzerland but largely absent in the German-speaking part. More broadly, the French-speaking region aligns more closely with cosmopolitan values and international openness, while its German-speaking counterpart leans more towards national closure (Kriesi et al., 1996; Vatter, 2018). For these reasons, Switzerland provides a most-likely case for a migration bias in social norms, while also offering a setting that allows us to examine how individual predispositions and cultural-political contexts shape integration expectations.

The empirical analysis is based on a preregistered population survey fielded in February and March 2022,² with a sample of $N = 1,000$. The survey includes participants from both the German-speaking ($N = 730$) and French-speaking ($N = 270$)³ parts and employs quota sampling based on gender and education.⁴

² The field period of the survey overlaps with the onset of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, with approximately 10% of responses collected prior to this date (71 German speaking and 30 French speaking). To assess whether this unexpected geopolitical event influenced responses, we conducted a Welch two-sample t-test comparing social norm scores before and after 24 February. The mean score was 78.83 before the invasion and 76.07 afterward. This difference was not statistically significant ($t = 1.26$, $p = 0.211$, 95% CI: -1.58 – 7.10), suggesting that the invasion did not produce a measurable shift in normative expectations during the survey period, at least as captured by our primary outcome variable.

³ The other language regions, Italian and Romansh, make up less than 10% of the Swiss population.

⁴ The survey sample is not perfectly representative of the Swiss population. As we use an experimental design, we can assess effect heterogeneity across different segments of the Swiss population.

Respondents were asked about the extent to which they agree or disagree with a set of twelve items, grouped into four thematic categories of integration-related norms: social, cultural, economic, and political-legal (see Appendix for full question wording). These categories are drawn from the dominant dimensions of integration used in both academic and policy contexts (e.g., Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016; Spencer and Charsley, 2021) and correspond to formal integration requirements in Swiss immigration and naturalization law.⁵

The twelve items cover a range of behaviours and values. *Social* norms include having contact with neighbours, participating in local clubs or associations, and engaging in the public life of the local community. *Cultural* norms concern participation in local customs and traditions, the expectation that religion be practiced privately, and respect for constitutional values. *Economic* norms include being economically active, demonstrating ambition at work, and avoiding reliance on public assistance and welfare benefits. *Political-legal* norms cover support for gender equality, respect for laws, and participation in political life.⁶ Responses were recorded on a scale from 0 ('do not agree at all') to 10 ('fully agree'). The items are analyzed both individually and as an aggregated index, constructed as the sum of all items, to capture overall support for social norms of integration. Following previous research (e.g., Tankard and Paluck, 2016), we interpret higher levels of agreement as indicating stronger normative expectations—that is, a greater degree of societal consensus on what behaviours or values should be upheld.⁷ While this measure does not directly capture enforcement or sanctions, it serves as a valid proxy for norm strength in survey-based attitudinal research. This allows us to test not only whether norms differ in strength across dimensions but also whether the same norms are stronger for immigrants than for society at large.

To validly measure the theorized migration bias in social norms, we employ a question wording experiment. Respondents are randomly assigned to one of two versions of the norm items. One treatment group was asked whether *people in general should follow* a set of social norms, and in the other treatment group, the same items are phrased to ask whether *foreigners should follow* these norms

⁵ These integration requirements include familiarity with the Swiss way of life, respect for public security and order and the values enshrined in the federal constitution, language skills and participation in economic life (see articles 11 and 12 of the Swiss Citizenship Act and, for the more detailed requirements, the respective ordinance on Swiss citizenship).

⁶ Note that we have chosen typical social norms directed at migrants that are reasonably generalizable (applicable to society as a whole). This is why, for example, 'speaking a national language' has not been selected, as it would not make sense to ask about this integration-specific norm as a general norm for society at large (as any 'host society' in the national container matter-of-factly speaks a/the national language; it is not a social norm in the relevant sense).

⁷ We aim to measure social expectations—what people *should* do—rather than formal norms—what people *must* do in terms of (legally) binding obligations.

as a specific demographic group. The questionnaire employs the term ‘foreigners’ (German: *Ausländer*) rather than ‘immigrants’, as the former is more prevalent in Swiss legal, political, and public discourse (cf. Lutz and Lavenex, 2024). Each respondent sees only one version of the question wording, which helps to mitigate social desirability bias: respondents are not explicitly forced to choose whether immigrants should be held to higher standards than members of society at large. Instead, the treatment effect is inferred from between-group differences. The condition referring to ‘people in general’ serves as the reference category, allowing us to estimate the extent to which support for integration-related social norms is stronger when applied to immigrants—that is, the degree of migration bias.

We begin our analysis by presenting descriptive statistics on the strength of social norms, examining variation across both society as a whole and the four normative dimensions. To test the hypothesis of a migration bias, we estimate a linear regression model with the strength of social norms as dependent variable and the treatment condition (immigrant vs. society at large) as the independent variable. To assess the nature of the migration bias, we then investigate to what extent the treatment effect differs across key contextual and individual-level factors: between the German- and French-speaking regions and between respondents with different integration expectations, as a proxy for their individual understanding of integration. Finally, we conduct a series of robustness checks and supplementary analyses to assess the consistency of the observed patterns and the reliability of our main findings.

Results

We begin by presenting descriptive evidence on the strength of integration-specific social norms in Switzerland. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the overall norm strength using the aggregated index from the full sample. The histogram is skewed towards high levels of agreement, indicating that the norms in question are broadly endorsed by the Swiss population, with very few respondents expressing consistent disagreement. The accompanying bar plot breaks down average support for each of the twelve norms grouped into social, cultural, economic, and political-legal dimensions. Despite variation both within and across these categories, mean levels of support range from just above 5 (participating in associations) to nearly 8 (respecting the values of the constitution). On average, norms in the social dimension receive the lowest agreement, whereas political-legal norms receive the highest. A correlation analysis further reveals that the agreement across the twelve norms is positively correlated but to a varying degree (see Figure A1 in the Appendix). This suggests that while the norms are

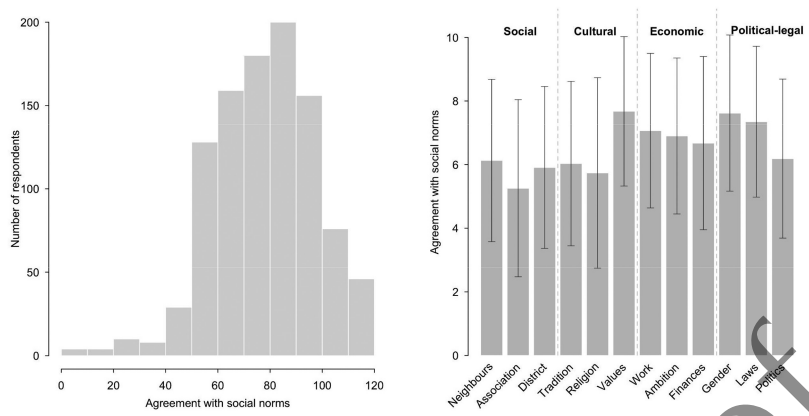


Figure 1. Strength of social norms in Switzerland.

Note: The histogram on the left shows the distribution of the overall strength of social norms in the Swiss population (aggregate of twelve norms). The bar plot on the right displays the mean values and standard deviations of the strength of twelve norms across four dimensions.

generally supported, they are interpreted and prioritized differently by respondents. Overall, these results indicate that while the social norms under study are widely shared, they are far from representing a societal consensus. This is evidenced by the consistently large standard deviations across items, pointing to meaningful variation in public attitudes.

Next, we present the results of the question wording experiment, which estimates the causal effects of the ‘immigrant’ treatment on the support of social norms (Figure 2). The overall treatment effect is a small but statistically significant increase of 2.9 points on a 0–120 scale (see Table A1 in the Appendix for the full model output), providing the first empirical support for the presence of a migration bias. The coefficient plots show the treatment effects for each of the twelve specific social norms. The effects vary considerably across items, with both statistically significant and nonsignificant effects appearing in both positive and negative directions. The most pronounced and consistent effects emerge within the social dimension, where support for these norms is systematically higher when applied to immigrants than to society at large. Findings are more mixed for cultural norms: stronger norms are observed for immigrants in terms of participating in local customs and traditions and respecting constitutional values, but the norm of practicing religion privately is endorsed more strongly for society at large. In contrast, we find no significant treatment effects for economic or political-legal norms, with small, inconsistent effects in both directions. In sum, while the overall effect supports H1 that social norms of integration are applied more strongly to immigrants, the findings also reveal that this migration

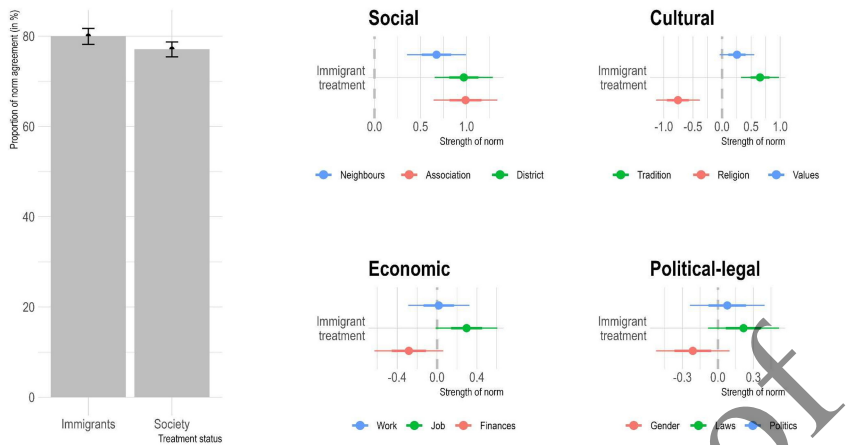


Figure 2. Estimation of the migration bias in social norms.

Note: The bar plot on the left shows the mean difference between the two treatment groups. The coefficient plots displayed on the right show the effect of the immigrant treatment on the strength of different social norms, with point estimate and inner/outer confidence intervals.

bias is norm-specific rather than universal. The extent and direction of the bias vary depending on the norm in question.

To delve deeper into this pattern and assess the robustness of the findings, we conduct a number of additional analyses. First, instead of focusing solely on mean differences, we compare the distribution of responses across the two treatment groups (see Figure 3). This visual display reveals that, for those norms where a migration bias is observed, the largest difference between groups occurs at the maximum value (10)—representing full agreement with the norm. This pattern is again most pronounced in the social dimension and for respecting traditions, laws, and constitutional values. The treatment effect thus appears to be concentrated among respondents expressing the strongest normative expectations.

Second, when we re-estimate the baseline model using a binary indicator for maximum support (i.e., full agreement) as the dependent variable, the treatment effect increases substantively to 4.7 points and reaches a higher level of statistical significance (see Table A1 in the Appendix for the model output). These findings suggest that the treatment effect is driven by respondents who demand strict norm fulfilment from immigrants in particular.

Third, to assess whether respondents interpreted the norm items similarly across groups, we conducted a multiple-group confirmatory factor analysis. The results indicate metric invariance ($\Delta\chi^2 = 18.72$, $df = 11$, $p = 0.066$), confirming that the same latent construct of social norms is being measured across conditions. At the same time, we find no scalar invariance ($\Delta\chi^2 = 135.43$, $df = 11$,

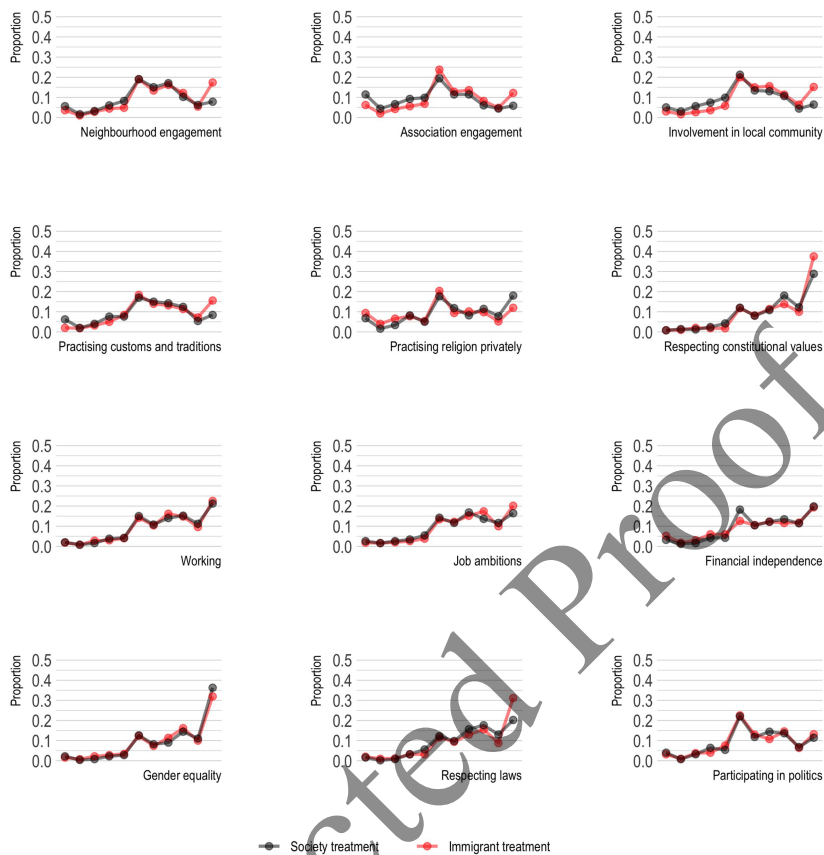


Figure 3. Distribution of norm support by treatment status.

Note: Multiple line plots showing the proportions of the different values of norm support separated by treatment status. See also the cumulative display of the distribution in Figure A4 in the Appendix.

$p < 0.001$), meaning that the level of endorsement differs systematically between groups, supporting our theoretical expectation: the same social norms are more strongly endorsed when applied to immigrants, confirming the presence of a migration bias.

In addition, given that a significant share of the Swiss population are immigrants themselves or have a migration background, it is plausible that members of this group may perceive themselves as the target of the integration expectations in both treatment conditions. To test whether this demographic context affects the results, we re-estimate the treatment effects separately for citizens ($N = 808$) and noncitizens ($N = 192$). The results for the citizen sample show a largely similar pattern (see Figure A2 in the Appendix). While two norms, gender equality and financial independence, reach statistical significance only within the

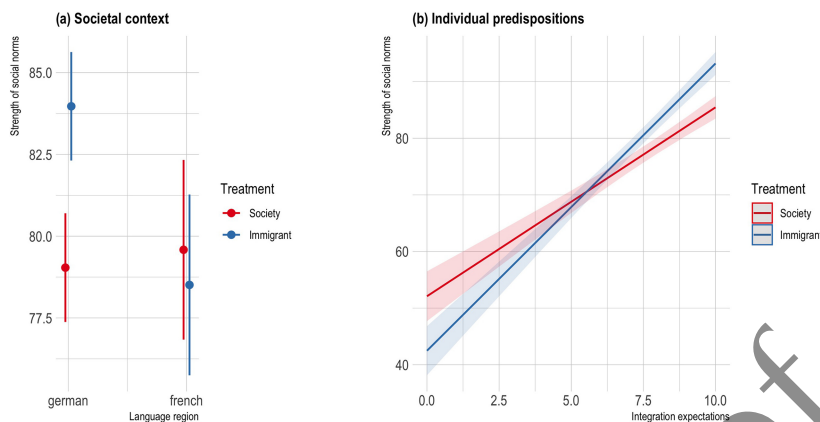


Figure 4. Heterogeneity of the migration bias across context and individuals.

Note: The two figures display predicted probabilities for the interaction effect of treatment status with contextual and individual moderators, showing the 95% confidence intervals.

citizen sample, the overall effect sizes differ only slightly and not in a systematic direction. In the noncitizen sample, we again find significant treatment effects for norms in the social dimension, along with an additional significant effect for political participation, which is not observed among citizens (see Figure A3 in the Appendix). The overall treatment effect is larger for noncitizens. This is mainly because, unlike the citizen group, their responses show no significant negative treatment effects that offset the positive ones (see Table A1 in the Appendix). While the overall result pattern of a migration bias is confirmed, the comparison between the two subsamples provides nuance on the strength and nature of integration-specific norms depending on citizenship status.

In the next step, we examine treatment effect heterogeneity across language regions and individual integration expectations to test the hypotheses regarding the drivers of the migration bias in social norms. First, we estimate separate models for the German- and French-speaking subsamples (see Table A1 in the Appendix). The results differ markedly: in the French-speaking sample, the effect of the immigrant treatment is smaller and not statistically significant, whereas in the German-speaking sample, it is both larger and statistically significant. This regional divergence is confirmed through additional analyses. Visual comparisons of the treatment effect on the distribution of responses (see Figure A5 and A6 in the Appendix) and an interaction model (see Figure 4), show that the non-effect in the French-speaking sample is not due to insufficient statistical power resulting from the small sample size but reflects a genuine lack of migration bias. While support for norms addressed to society at large is similar across both language regions, norms directed at immigrants are significantly stronger in

the German-speaking part (Figure 4a). This regional pattern holds for both citizens and noncitizens, indicating that the larger migration bias observed among noncitizens is confined to the German-speaking region, which aligns with a more assimilationist integration regime (see Table A2 in the Appendix). Overall, the migration bias appears to be a Swiss-German phenomenon, absent in the more inclusive French-speaking context. These results provide support for H2, which posits that historical and political context, as reflected in subnational integration regimes, shapes how social norms are socially constructed and whether they are applied asymmetrically to immigrants.

Finally, we investigate the moderating role of individual attitudes towards immigrant integration (Figure 4b). The predicted probabilities show a strong positive association between respondents' integration expectations towards immigrants and their agreement with social norms. However, this relationship is significantly stronger under the immigrant treatment condition, suggesting that integration expectations moderate the treatment effect. Specifically, the immigrant treatment decreases support for social norms among respondents who do not expect immigrants to integrate but increases support among those who do. This moderation effect provides confirming evidence for both H2 and H3: the migration bias in social norms appears to be shaped by both contextual and individual understandings of integration. A closer inspection reveals that the moderating effect of individual integration expectations is substantially smaller and not statistically significant in the French-speaking sample. This suggests that in addition to the absence of an overall migration bias in the French-speaking region, individual integration expectations also play a less decisive role in shaping attitudes there. Taken together, these findings indicate that the migration bias in social norms is primarily a result of the assimilationist integration regime in the German-speaking region, where the issue of integration is also more politically and socially polarized.

Conclusion

The concept of 'immigrant integration' is essentially contested (Magazzini, 2020). In this article, we have argued that much of this contestation stems from how social norms of integration are understood and, importantly, whom they target. To investigate this empirically, we conducted a survey experiment in Switzerland that tested whether integration-related social norms are stronger for immigrants than for society at large. Our analysis confirms the existence of a migration bias in social norms: on average, integration-related norms are more strongly endorsed when directed at immigrants. However, this bias is not uniform across all domains. It is particularly pronounced in the social dimension (e.g.,

community involvement) and norms related to respecting authorities, namely, traditions, constitutional values, and the law. These two aspects are thus crucial in the Swiss integration context, as immigrants are expected to be *more integrated* at the local level than citizens and not supposed to question traditional authorities to the same extent as citizens. The analysis of heterogeneous treatment effects reveals what drives this bias. The migration bias emerges only in the German-speaking region, which aligns with a more assimilationist integration regime. In contrast, the French-speaking region, characterized by more liberal integration traditions, shows no significant bias. Furthermore, individual integration expectations moderate the treatment effect: for some, immigration prompts a relaxation of norms in the name of cultural tolerance, while for others, it prompts a tightening of norms to reinforce social cohesion.

What do these findings reveal about the public understanding of immigrant integration? The prevalence of the migration bias with regards to *local* integration is particularly noteworthy in light of Anderson's (2023) observation that UK integration policy has attempted to respond to critiques of integration (e.g., methodological nationalism) by shifting its focus to the local level. As she points out, talking about integration turns neighbourhoods into *communities* (Anderson, 2023). Integration regimes often focus on the local level and tend to *romanticize* integration imaginaries of local community life and the extent to which immigrants are supposed to get involved (see Meissner and Heil, 2021)—just as the migration bias in social norms does. Our findings suggest that this romanticization is mirrored in public attitudes: social norms around neighbourhood engagement are not only widely endorsed but also disproportionately applied to immigrants.

Unlike citizens, who are largely free to decide whether to engage with neighbours, join local associations, or cultivate social ties, immigrants face heightened expectations in precisely these areas. Their level of local participation is monitored and evaluated, reflecting the unequal distribution of normative expectations. In this sense, the migration bias in social norms reinforces what scholars have described as the 'integration dispensation': the political, legal, and social asymmetry between those who are presumed already integrated and thus exempt from scrutiny and those who are constructed as subjects of integration. The former are not only spared from formal monitoring but also held to lower informal standards, while immigrants are expected to meet stricter normative thresholds.

This article contributes to ongoing debates about immigrant integration by providing novel empirical evidence for a phenomenon prominently discussed in the critical and normative literature. We have sought to demonstrate the value of bridging critical integration scholarship with quantitative and experimental research methods to advance our understanding of integration as an essentially

contested concept. Our results provide initial evidence of a migration bias in social norms and highlight the importance of further research into the mechanisms that shape these expectations, their malleability, and the conditions under which such a bias intensifies or diminishes. Future work may also examine how contextual shifts—such as geopolitical crises or large-scale refugee arrivals—recalibrate public perceptions and normative expectations. In addition, replicating this study in other contextual settings seems essential to assess both the generalizability and context dependence of the migration bias in social norms. Finally, it is crucial to examine the implications of normative asymmetries for the liberal democratic promise of equal citizenship in diverse societies.

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AI use disclosure

AI tools (GPT-4) were used to assist with language editing and statistical coding.

Data and code availability

The data and replication code are available online (see Supplements).

Conflict of interest

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

Ethics statement

This research was conducted according to the principles expressed in the Declaration of Helsinki.

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Supplements

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