

## Symposium: Switzerland's Immigration Challenge

# Till Immigration do us Part? Public Opinion and the Dilemma between Immigration Control and Bilateral Agreements

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**Abstract:** *As a result of the initiative against mass immigration (MEI) Switzerland faces a dilemma between control of immigration and the continuation of bilateral agreements. This contribution raises two questions: First, have Swiss citizens' perceptions regarding the incompatibility between immigration control and bilateral agreements evolved since the vote on the MEI in February 2014? Second, what would Swiss citizens decide if they had to choose between the implementation of the MEI and the continuation of the bilateral strategy? We ground our analysis on data from the VOX surveys regarding the MEI and the more recent vote of November 2014 (Ecopop initiative). While Swiss voters still seem to be uncertain about the issue of compatibility, they nevertheless show support for the continuation of the bilateral agreements. Our analyses highlight the importance of age, trust in government and left-right orientation for individual opinions towards the bilateral way.*

**KEYWORDS:** bilateral agreements, immigration, public opinion, European integration, Switzerland

### Introduction

While Switzerland is not a member of the European Union (EU), there have been more direct democratic votes on European integration in Switzerland than in any member state of the EU. After the rejection of the European Economic Area (EEA) in 1992, the Swiss Federal Council enjoyed consistent people's support for its strategy of bilateral agreements with the EU, winning eight direct democratic votes in a row between 1997 and 2009.<sup>1</sup> However, the Swiss government has suffered some major defeats during the most recent years. The most problematic outcome occurred on February 9, 2014, with the acceptance

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<sup>1</sup> Rejection of a popular initiative calling for a withdraw of the membership application in 1997, support to the first set of bilateral agreements in 2000, rejection of a popular initiative asking for a reactivation of the EU membership application in 2001, support to the agreement on Switzerland's participation in Schengen-Dublin, and to the extension of the agreement on the free movement of persons to the 10 new EU member states (both in 2005), support to Switzerland's contribution to EU's cohesion Fund in 2006, renewal of the agreement on the free movement of persons and extension to Romania and Bulgaria in 2009, support to the introduction of biometric passports and travel documents as part of Schengen regulations in 2009.

of the popular initiative ‘against mass immigration’ (MEI).<sup>2</sup> The initiative contradicts the bilateral agreement with the EU on the free movement of persons, since it aims to reintroduce control over immigration through quotas on foreign workers and preference for national workers in the labor market. As a result of the so-called “guillotine clause”, the termination of the agreement on the free movement of persons would put the whole first set of bilateral agreements to an end. The MEI further states that the Swiss government must renegotiate international commitments within three years, to put them in line with the initiative’s requirements. After the ‘no entry’ decision of the EU Commission on Switzerland’s demand to renegotiate the agreement on the free movement of persons,<sup>3</sup> there is hardly any doubt that the Swiss people will soon have to make a choice in a new direct democratic vote between the implementation of the initiative against mass immigration and the continuation of the bilateral strategy.

In the first round of this Symposium, Milic (2015) confirmed what we already knew from the VOX analysis (Sciarini et al. 2014), namely that voters were well aware of what the initiative was about and that yes-voters were ready to take the risk of termination of the bilateral agreements if that was the price to pay to control (and curb) immigration. However, this conclusion comes with a caveat. There is obviously a difference between being ready to “take the risk” of termination and being ready to “endorse” termination. More specifically, even though knowledge regarding the mass immigration initiative was high, voters were not fully aware of its consequences for Switzerland’s European policy. According to the VOX survey a majority of yes-voters did not agree with the argument that “willing to control immigration contradicts the agreement on the free movement of persons and will lead to the termination of the bilateral agreements with the EU” (Sciarini et al. 2014: 57). Had they witnessed in advance the tough reaction of the EU to the outcome of the popular vote, they would have perhaps been less confident about the compatibility between the initiative and the agreement on the free movement of persons.<sup>4</sup>

We are thus left with two crucial questions. First, have Swiss citizens’ perceptions regarding the incompatibility between control over immigration and the agreement on the free movement of persons evolved since the vote on the MEI? Second, what would Swiss citizens decide if they had to choose between the implementation of the MEI and the continuation of bilateral agreements with the EU? The purpose of our contribution is to provide some answers to these questions. To that end, we ground on data from the VOX survey on the initiative against mass immigration, and from the VOX survey on the more

<sup>2</sup> The support to the initiative asking for a ban of new Islamic minarets in November 2009 came as a first warning. However, it mainly caused reputational damages, as it did not directly affect Switzerland’s foreign policy. The acceptance, almost exactly one year later, of the popular initiative asking for the automatic deportation of foreigners who had committed various forms of criminal offenses was more consequential, since that initiative contradicts the European convention of human rights and some elements of the bilateral agreement on the free movement of persons.

<sup>3</sup> Meeting between Mrs. Simonetta Sommaruga and the new President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker on February 2, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> In addition, a methodological problem may also be at work. In VOX-surveys questions about the main arguments for and against a ballot measure are submitted to respondents towards the end of the interview, that is, well after the question on the vote choice. One can thus not be completely sure that respondents express “true preferences” regarding arguments or, rather, evaluate arguments in light of – and in line with – their vote choice. In the present case, yes-voters were arguably induced to claim they were ready to run the risk of termination of the bilateral agreement for reasons of consistency with their vote choice. Whether all of them were indeed ready to run that risk is, however, questionable. Of course, such a bias possibly holds for all Yes and No arguments.

recent vote of November 30, 2014, on the Ecopop initiative (Sciarini et al. 2015).<sup>5</sup> VOX survey data are gathered after each direct democratic vote on the federal level since 1981. CATI interviews are conducted by the gfs.bern survey firm on a random three-stage sample (linguistic regions, households, persons within households) of 1500 respondents.<sup>6</sup> In the second survey, we introduced two additional questions regarding the MEI: a retrospective question asking our respondents what they voted on February 9, 2014; and a prospective question regarding the dilemma between immigration control and bilateral agreements with the EU.

### Perception of the compatibility between immigration control and bilateral agreements

In both VOX surveys, we asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with the argument that “willing to control immigration contradicts the agreement on the free movement of persons and will lead to the termination of the bilateral agreements with the EU”. Table 1 presents the results.

At first glance, responses are fairly similar in both surveys, which suggests that citizens’ perceptions regarding the compatibility between immigration control and bilateral agreements have remained stable between February and December 2014. Despite the clear messages sent by the EU in the aftermath of the vote on the MEI and the lively debate that has taken place since then domestically, the share of voters who agree that willing to control immigration contradicts the agreement on the free movement of persons and endangers the set of bilateral agreements was not higher in December than in February; in both surveys, only a small majority of voters agree that there is an incompatibility.

On closer inspection, however, there are some small but interesting differences between the two surveys. First, as indicated by the higher share of “don’t know” in the second survey, uncertainty regarding the likely effects of immigration control on bilateral agreements has slightly increased, and this among both yes- and no-voters. Second, among MEI yes-voters perceptions are more balanced in the second than in the first survey. While in February a majority of yes-voters (56%) saw no incompatibility between immigration

Table 1: Support to the argument that immigration control is not compatible will the bilateral agreements, in % (first survey, February 2014 / second survey, December 2014)

	Agree	Disagree	Don’t know	(N)
Total	55 / 53	36 / 33	9 / 14	(1052 / 882)
Yes voters	33 / 38	56 / 43	12 / 19	(522 / 432)
No voters	79 / 67	15 / 23	6 / 10	(530 / 450)

*Note:* Only voters who reported they voted on the MEI are included; data is weighted according to the outcome of the vote on that initiative in each survey<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Note that these are not panel data. Respondents are not the same in both surveys, and we can thus not measure opinion change on the individual level. What we report instead in this paper are aggregate differences between the two cross-section surveys, as well as differences between specific groups of voters.

<sup>6</sup> The response rate of the first survey amounted to 12.0%, or 17.6% if calculated out of the sub-sample of respondents with a valid phone number. For the second survey, the corresponding figures are 15.0% and 19.5%.

<sup>7</sup> In the February survey the share of voters who voted Yes to the MEI was very close to the actual outcome of the popular vote (47% against 50.6%). The corrective weight was – unsurprisingly – much larger for the second, December survey. According to the retrospective question included in that survey, the reported yes-vote to the MEI was 14% lower than the actual outcome of the vote (37% against 50.6%).

control and the agreement on the free movement of persons, the corresponding share has decreased to 43% in December. However, the evolution runs in the opposite direction among voters who rejected the MEI: the share of MEI no-voters who disagree with the argument of incompatibility has increased from 15% in February to 23% in December.<sup>8</sup>

These contrasted – and to some extent surprising – results call for a finer-grained analysis, one that tries to identify the groups of voters who made up their mind between the two surveys. In table 2, we present the results of a logistic regression that explains the support for the argument about incompatibility between control over immigration and bilateral agreements.<sup>9</sup> Estimations are based on a pooled dataset combining the first and second survey.

The first model (M1) assesses the effects of socioeconomic and political factors at the time of the first survey. Age (in years) has a significant, negative effect on argument support. However, this effect is rather weak: The predicted probability to support the argument decreases from 79% among respondents aged 18 to 64% among respondents aged 80 years.<sup>10</sup> Respondents with a higher education are more likely to agree that there is an incompatibility between immigration control and bilateral agreements. The same holds for French-speaking voters, for voters who trust the Federal Council and for those who self-locate on the left of the left-right scale.<sup>11</sup>

The marginal effect of left-right positioning on the predicted probability to support the argument is plotted in figure 1. The predicted probability to support the argument drops from about 85% for respondents leaning on the extreme left of the political chessboard to about 55% for those leaning on the extreme right.<sup>12</sup>

Model M1 also introduces a dummy variable that differentiates respondents from the first and second survey; the coefficient for this variable confirms the result of table 1 that the overall support to the argument regarding the incompatibility between immigration control and bilateral agreements has remained stable between the two surveys. In model M2, we go one step further and introduce interaction terms between the dummy variable for the second survey and all other independent variables. This enables us to evaluate the likely changes in effect of these variables from the February to the December survey and, therefore, to identify the groups of voters who made up their mind regarding the incompatibility argument during the nine months elapsed between the two surveys.

As it turns out, two important determinants of support to the argument (trust in government and left-right positioning) have a different effect in the first and in the second

<sup>8</sup> Changes in perception among both MEI yes- and no-voters are statistically significant according to a two sample test of proportions.

<sup>9</sup> Alternative ordinal logistic regression models based on the original variable (strongly agree, mildly agree, undecided, mildly disagree, strongly disagree) yield very similar results.

<sup>10</sup> Predicted probabilities are calculated for an average voter with the following characteristics: male, living in a big city, high education, employed, Swiss German, high trust in government; all continuous or scale variables (age, left-right, importance of the project) are set at their arithmetic mean.

<sup>11</sup> According to model M1, French-speaking voters are more likely to support the argument than their German-speaking voters (reference category). However, this difference is mostly due to the higher opposition to the MEI among French-speaking Swiss. As shown in Model M3, the effect of language disappears once we control for the vote choice on MEI.

<sup>12</sup> A very similar effect exists when we replace the variable on left-right positioning with a series of dummy variables measuring the preferred party. Additional analyses (not shown) highlight that those feeling close to the Socialist Party (SP) are significantly more likely to accept the argument than those feeling close to any other party, and, at the same time, those supporting the Swiss People's Party (SVP) are significantly less likely to accept the argument, all other things being held constant. This effect disappears however once we control for the vote decision on MEI.

Table 2: The determinants of support to the argument that immigration control is not compatible with the bilateral agreements (logistic regression coefficients and standard errors)

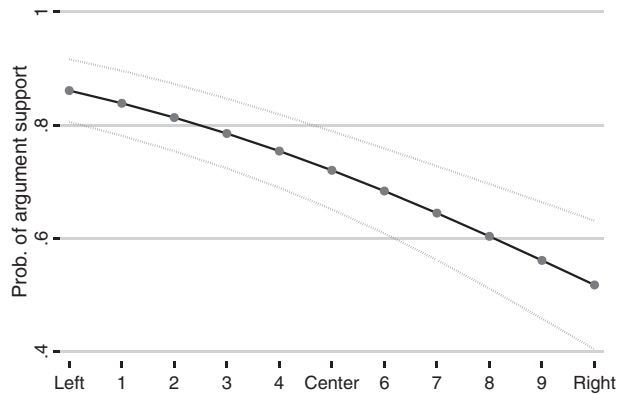
Support for argument	(M1)			(M2)			(M3)			(M4)		
	Coeff	Se	sig	Coeff	Se	sig	Coeff	Se	sig	Coeff	Se	sig
Age in years	-0.01	(0.01)	*	-0.01	(0.01)		-0.01	(0.01)	*	-0.02	(0.01)	*
Female	0.07	(0.14)		0.02	(0.19)		0.07	(0.15)		0.07	(0.21)	
Big city	-0.07	(0.15)		-0.25	(0.21)		-0.11	(0.16)		-0.21	(0.23)	
Education: medium	0.40	(0.34)		0.49	(0.43)		0.33	(0.36)		0.51	(0.60)	
Education: high	0.67	(0.34)	*	0.73	(0.43)		0.58	(0.37)		0.57	(0.60)	
Employed	-0.20	(0.16)		-0.09	(0.23)		-0.20	(0.17)		-0.04	(0.23)	
Italian	0.07	(0.20)		0.12	(0.27)		0.15	(0.19)		0.66	(0.32)	*
French	0.33	(0.15)	*	0.53	(0.22)	*	0.30	(0.16)		0.20	(0.21)	
Trust in government	1.12	(0.14)	***	1.40	(0.19)	***	0.72	(0.16)	***	0.57	(0.24)	*
Left-right scale	-0.18	(0.03)	***	-0.24	(0.05)	***	-0.08	(0.03)	*	-0.16	(0.05)	**
Interest in politics	0.18	(0.11)		0.28	(0.15)		0.10	(0.12)		0.18	(0.16)	
Importance for country	0.07	(0.04)		0.11	(0.06)		0.06	(0.04)		0.07	(0.05)	
Importance for myself	-0.02	(0.03)		-0.05	(0.05)		-0.04	(0.04)		0.04	(0.05)	
Second survey	0.03	(0.14)		1.45	(1.31)		-0.03	(0.15)		-0.17	(0.29)	
Second survey * Age in years	.	.	.	-0.01	(0.01)		.	.	.	.	.	.
Second survey * Female	.	.	.	0.08	(0.28)		.	.	.	.	.	.
Second survey * Big city	.	.	.	0.36	(0.30)		.	.	.	.	.	.
Second survey * Educ.: medium	.	.	.	-0.48	(0.81)		.	.	.	.	.	.
Second survey * Educ.: high	.	.	.	-0.45	(0.80)		.	.	.	.	.	.
Second survey * Employed	.	.	.	-0.25	(0.32)		.	.	.	.	.	.
Second survey * German	.	.	.	-0.18	(0.40)		.	.	.	.	.	.
Second survey * French	.	.	.	-0.38	(0.30)		.	.	.	.	.	.
Second survey * Trust in government	.	.	.	-0.59	(0.28)	*	.	.	.	.	.	.
Second survey * Left-right scale	.	.	.	0.12	(0.06)	*	.	.	.	.	.	.
Second survey * Interest in politics	.	.	.	-0.22	(0.23)		.	.	.	.	.	.
Second survey * Import for country	.	.	.	-0.07	(0.08)		.	.	.	.	.	.
Second survey * Import for myself	.	.	.	0.07	(0.07)		.	.	.	.	.	.
Yes on MEI	.	.	.	.	.	.	-1.27	(0.16)	***	-0.90	(1.34)	.
MEI * Second survey * Age in years	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	-0.01	(0.01)	.

Table 2: Continued

Support for argument	(M1)			(M2)			(M3)			(M4)		
	Coeff	Se	sig	Coeff	Se	sig	Coeff	Se	sig	Coeff	Se	sig
MEI * Second survey * Female	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	-0.02	(0.40)	.
MEI * Second survey * Big city	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	0.22	(0.33)	.
MEI * Second survey * Educ.: medium	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	0.62	(1.13)	.
MEI * Second survey * Educ.: high	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	0.51	(1.13)	.
MEI * Second survey * Employed	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	-0.37	(0.31)	.
MEI * Second survey * German	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	-0.70	(0.54)	.
MEI * Second survey * French	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	0.04	(0.43)	.
MEI * Second survey * Trust in govt.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	0.30	(0.41)	.
MEI * Second survey * Left-right scale	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	0.22	(0.09)	**
MEI * Second survey * Interest in politics	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	-0.25	(0.32)	.
MEI * Second survey * Import for country	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	-0.03	(0.09)	.
MEI * Second survey * Import for myself	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	-0.13	(0.09)	.
Constant	0.12	(0.61)	.	-0.38	(0.85)	.	1.14	(0.69)	.	0.87	(0.93)	.
Log-likelihood	-883.4			-873.7			-783.5			-765.5		
Pseudo-R2	0.12			0.13			0.17			0.19		
Observations	1,482			1,482			1,385			1,385		

Notes: Dependent variable is the support to the argument regarding the incompatibility between control over immigration and bilateral agreements (0 'disagree', 1 'agree'). Data is weighted according to the outcome of the vote on the MEI in each survey  
 \*\*\*p < 0.001, \*\*p < 0.01, \*p < 0.5

Figure 1: Predicted probabilities to support the argument that immigration control is not compatible will the bilateral agreements by left-right self-positioning



survey. As interpreting coefficients for interactive effects is sometimes counterintuitive, we rely again on marginal effects to substantiate the trends (table 3).

On the one hand, among voters who trust the Federal Council, support to the incompatibility argument is fairly similar – and very high (70%) – in both surveys. On the other hand, among voters who do not trust the Federal Council support to the argument is lower in the first survey (40%) than in the second (52%). The difference shortly fails to reach statistical significance,<sup>13</sup> but points to an interesting increase in support to the argument of incompatibility between immigration control and bilateral agreements among voters who do not trust the Federal Council.

Differences between the two surveys are also at work with respect to the effect of left-right positioning (figure 2). Figure 2 shows that in both surveys the probability to support the argument decreases as one moves towards the extreme right of the scale. However, the effect is again stronger for the first survey. The difference between the two surveys is especially noteworthy among voters who self-locate on the extreme right of the scale: among them the probability to support the argument was below 50% in the first survey; the corresponding figures almost reached 60% in the second survey. By contrast, support to the argument is equally high (80 to 90%) in both surveys among voters who self-locate on the extreme left of the scale. In sum, the perception that controlling immigration is incompatible with the bilateral agreements is still higher among left-leaning voters, but it is now more evenly spread across the left-right scale than it was nine months earlier.

The results regarding trust in government and left-right ideological orientation suggest that support to the argument that immigration control contradicts the principle of free movement of persons and might lead to the termination of the bilateral agreements has evolved differently among specific group of voters. What is still missing in this picture, however, is how these differences in perceptions interact with the vote on the MEI. To test whether the determinants of support to the incompatibility argument differ between voters who supported the MEI and voters who rejected it, table 2 adds two additional models that control for voters' decision on the

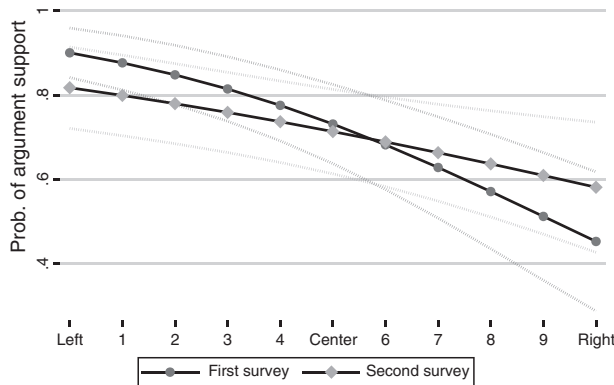
<sup>13</sup> The confidence interval (within parentheses in last column of table 3) shows the uncertainty associated with the first differences. The difference between two expected values is significant at the 95% level if the confidence interval does not include zero.

Table 3: Predicted probabilities to support the argument that immigration control is not compatible will the bilateral agreements by trust in government and survey

	First survey	Second survey	$\Delta$ (CI)
Trust	71%	70%	1 (-14/13)
No trust	40%	52%	12 (-5/29)

Note: Probabilities are calculated from coefficients appearing in table 2

Figure 2: Predicted probabilities to support the argument that immigration control is not compatible will the bilateral agreements by left-right positioning and survey



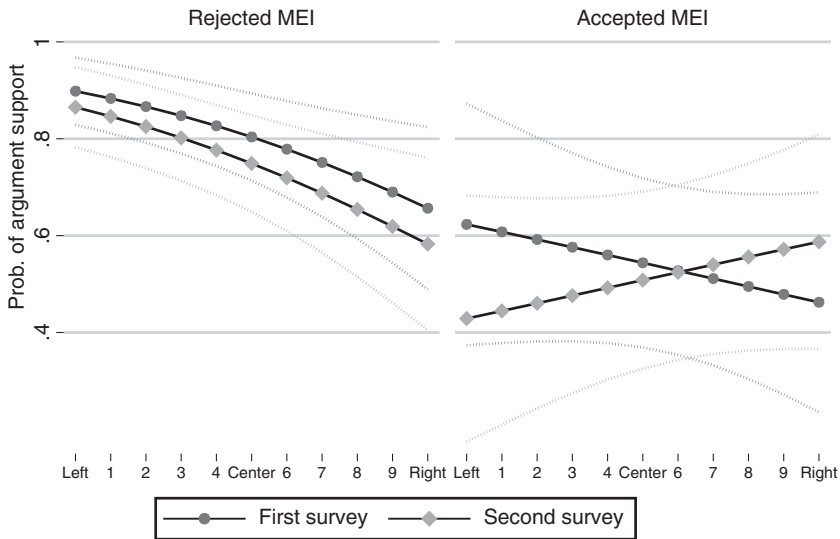
MEI.<sup>14</sup> Model M3 introduces a dummy variable for the vote on the MEI. Unsurprisingly, model 3 shows that having supported the initiative substantially lowers the likelihood to support the argument regarding the compatibility between immigration control and bilateral agreements. More interestingly, model M4 introduces a set of three-way interaction terms between the vote decision on the MEI, the survey, and all other determinants.

We first find a significant interaction between the survey and the positioning on the left-right scale (figure 3). Among voters who rejected the MEI (figure on the left hand-side), self-location on the left-right scale has a similar, negative effect on support to the argument in both surveys. By contrast, among MEI yes-voters (figure on the right hand-side), the effect of left-right positioning on support to the argument differs between the two surveys. In the first survey, moving towards the right decreases the probability to support the argument – as found also in general (see figure 1 above). In the second survey, the plot shows a slight positive effect of left-right positioning on support to the argument. In other words, respondents who voted in favour of the MEI in the second survey and who self-locate on the right-side of the political scale are more likely to point to an inconsistency between immigration control and bilateral agreements than those self-locating on the left-side. Even if the confidence intervals are sizeable, the overall effect is statistically significant according to table 2.

<sup>14</sup> Alternatively, one could investigate whether and to what extent support (or rejection) to campaign arguments influences the vote choice. Previous studies show that support to arguments is indeed a strong determinant of the vote choice (e.g., Milic 2012; Lanz and Nai 2015).



Figure 3: Predicted probabilities to support the argument that immigration control is not compatible will the bilateral agreements by left-right positioning, survey and decision vote on the MEI



To summarize, while on the aggregate level perceptions regarding the incompatibility between control over immigration and bilateral agreements have remained fairly stable between the two surveys our results show some – not too strong but politically relevant – changes in perception among specific groups. Voters who do not trust the government and right-leaning citizens tend to agree more with the argument that immigration control threatens the bilateral agreements in the second survey, than in the first survey. In other words, our results suggest that a sort of rebalancing has occurred, presumably as a result of the lively debate prompted by the outcome of the vote on the MEI, and of the clear messages sent by the EU. Interestingly enough, this update in perceptions also holds for right-leaning voters who supported the initiative against mass immigration. This being said, increased awareness of the incompatibility between immigration control and bilateral agreement does not yet mean increased support for the bilateral way. The choice between implementation of the MEI and bilateral agreements is another issue, to which we now turn.

### MEI implementation versus bilateral agreements

In the second VOX survey we asked respondents about the dilemma existing between the implementation of the MEI and the continuation of the bilateral agreements (Sciarini et al. 2015). The exact wording of the prospective question was: “The Federal Council is attempting to respect the willingness of the Swiss people and to implement the initiative against mass immigration and, in parallel, to maintain the bilateral agreements concluded with the EU. If both goals are impossible to achieve, which one is most important for you? The implementation of the initiative against mass immigration or the continuation of the bilateral agreements?”

Table 4 shows the preferences of MEI voters (first line), MEI yes-voters (second line) and MEI no-voters (third line). The results indicate strong support for the bilateral treaties: about 60% of Swiss voters prefer the continuation of the bilateral treaties with

the EU over the implementation of the initiative against mass immigration. These preferences vary, however, substantially with the decision on the MEI. Voters who rejected the initiative are almost unanimously (88%) for the continuation of the bilateral treaties. By contrast, almost two thirds of MEI supporters favor the implementation of the initiative. These are the two hardliners groups of ardent supporters of bilateral agreements and ardent supporters of immigration control, respectively. A third group includes voters who said yes to the MEI but would nevertheless choose the bilateral agreements over the implementation of the initiative is smaller in size (it includes 30% of MEI yes-voter). This group accounts for the overall preference for bilateral agreements over immigration control mentioned above (first line of table 4), and it will play a decisive role in case of a new direct democratic vote.

In a next step we analyse the opinion on the bilateral treaties more thoroughly. We focus on voters who either prefer the continuation of the treaties or a strict implementation of the initiative, and we estimate logistic regression models (table 5). Positive coefficients indicate preference for the bilateral treaties over the implementation of the MEI, whereas negative values mean preference for MEI implementation. The first model (M1) is a basic model with a set of socio-demographic and political variables. Support of the bilateral agreements increases significantly with age, trust in government and decreases the further right respondents position themselves on the left-right scale.

Figure 4 shows the marginal effects of age. The probability to prefer the bilateral agreements over the implementation of the MEI strongly increases with age (from 60% among voters aged 18 to 81% among voters aged 80).

Turning to the effects of trust in government, table 6 shows that voters who do not trust the government are more likely to prefer the implementation of the MEI over the continuation of the bilateral agreements. The difference in predicted probability is 28 percentage points.

Finally, we see from figure 5 that left-leaning voters are more likely to favour the bilateral treaties than right-leaning voters. The difference between voters at both poles of the left-right scale is more than 20 percentage points.

In sum, our analysis gives us a fairly good sense of the socio-demographic and political profile of a typical bilateral agreements supporter, on the one hand, and of a typical MEI implementation supporter, on the other. Older, left-wing voters and citizens who trust the government tend to favor the bilateral way. Young, right-wing voters and citizens who do not trust the Federal Council are prone to opt for the implementation of the initiative against mass immigration.

With the exception of age, these results are in line with the profile of MEI supporters and MEI opponents reported in the VOX-survey (Sciarini et al. 2014). It is thus not surprising that the effects of socio-demographic and political variables decrease once we introduce the dummy variable “decision on the MEI” in our model (table 5, model M2).

Table 4: Choice between the implementation of the MEI and the continuation of the bilateral agreements (BA), descriptive statistics (in %, N in parentheses)

	Prefer MEI	Prefer BAs	Don't know	Total
Total	34% (385)	59% (653)	7% (78)	100% (1116)
Yes to MEI	61% (339)	30% (168)	9% (51)	100% (557)
No to MEI	8% (42)	88% (479)	5% (26)	100% (547)

*Note:* Data is weighted according to the outcome of the vote on the MEI

Table 5: The determinants of preference for the bilateral agreements over the MEI implementation (logistic regression coefficients and standard errors)

Support for argument	(M1)			(M2)			(M3)		
	coef.	Se	sig.	coef.	Se	sig.	coef.	Se	sig.
Age in years	0.02	0.01	***	0.02	0.01	*	-0.02	0.01	**
Female	0.31	0.16	.	0.02	0.24	.	0.12	0.39	.
Education: medium	-0.59	0.46	.	-0.02	0.64	.	0.32	1.03	.
Education: high	0.01	0.46	.	0.42	0.62	.	0.80	1.00	.
Employed	0.17	0.18	.	0.03	0.26	.	-0.76	0.45	.
French	0.21	0.18	.	0.01	0.26	.	-0.10	0.41	.
Italian	-0.21	0.20	.	0.25	0.30	.	-0.68	0.43	.
Big city	0.25	0.18	.	-0.16	0.25	.	0.34	0.44	.
Interest in politics	-0.08	0.11	.	-0.17	0.17	.	0.59	0.30	.
Trust in government	1.28	0.17	***	0.74	0.25	**	0.13	0.49	.
Left-right scale	-0.14	0.04	***	-0.13	0.05	**	-0.25	0.10	*
Yes to MEI	.	.	.	-3.13	0.24	***	-4.72	1.90	*
Yes to MEI * Age in years	.	.	.	.	.	.	0.05	0.02	*
Yes to MEI * Female	.	.	.	.	.	.	-0.17	0.49	.
Yes to MEI * Educ.: medium	.	.	.	.	.	.	-0.42	1.23	.
Yes to MEI * Educ.: high	.	.	.	.	.	.	-0.51	1.19	.
Yes to MEI * Employed	.	.	.	.	.	.	0.95	0.56	.
Yes to MEI * French	.	.	.	.	.	.	0.19	0.54	.
Yes to MEI * Italian	.	.	.	.	.	.	1.06	0.55	.
Yes to MEI * Big city	.	.	.	.	.	.	-0.84	0.57	.
Yes to MEI * Interest in politics	.	.	.	.	.	.	-1.02	0.37	**
Yes to MEI * Trust in government	.	.	.	.	.	.	0.75	0.58	.
Yes to MEI * Left-right scale	.	.	.	.	.	.	0.15	0.11	.
Constant	-0.49	0.60	.	-1.44	0.93	.	3.07	1.15	*
Log-likelihood	-658.9			-363.3			-352.4		
Pseudo-R2	0.11			0.38			39.4		
Observations	1,082			862			862		

*Notes:* Dependent variable is favoring the bilateral treaties over the implementation of the MEI (0 'implementation of MEI', 1 'bilateral treaties'). Data is weighted according to the outcome of the vote on the MEI

\*\*\*p < 0.001, \*\*p < 0.01, \*p < 0.5

As expected, that variable has a strong impact on the likelihood to favour the bilateral agreements or MEI implementation: The probability to prefer the bilateral agreements amounts to 44% among voters who supported the MEI, and 94% among voters who rejected the MEI.

Finally, in model 3 we introduce interaction terms between each independent variable and the vote choice on the MEI. This helps us to test if the profile of voters who favour bilateral agreements is different between MEI supporters and MEI opponents. Take for example age. Its separate effect is now negative, but the interaction between age and MEI support is positive. This means that age has a different effect on favoring the bilateral treaties over MEI implementation among voters who rejected the initiative and among voters who supported the initiative (figure 6).

Figure 4: Predicted probabilities to prefer the bilateral treaties over MEI implementation by age

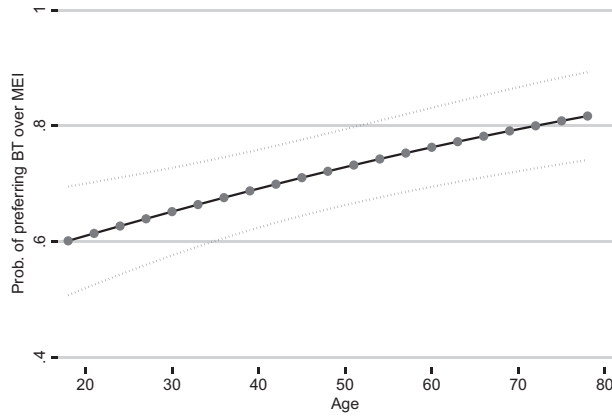
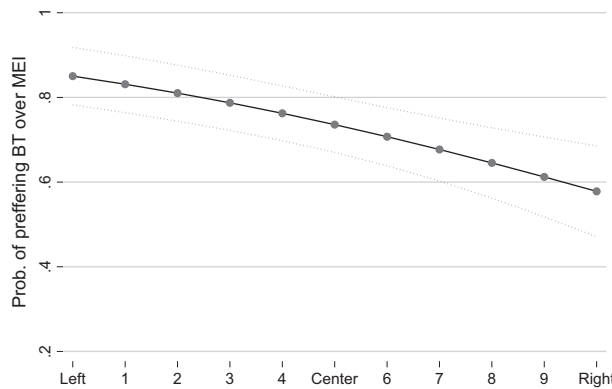


Table 6: Predicted probabilities to prefer the bilateral treaties over MEI implementation by trust in government

No trust	Trust	$\Delta$ (CI)
44%	72%	28 (22 / 36)

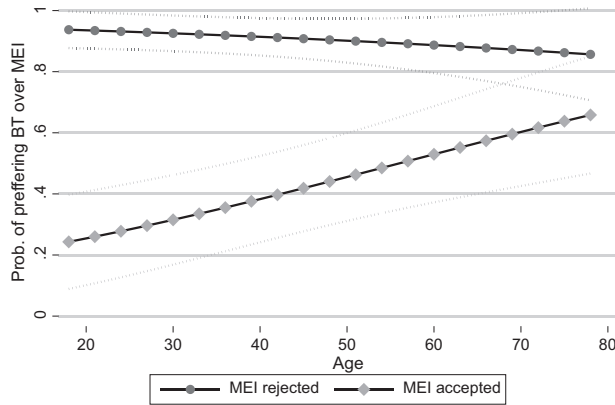
Note: Probabilities are calculated from coefficients appearing in table 5

Figure 5: Predicted probabilities to prefer the bilateral treaties over MEI implementation by left-right self-location



Among voters who voted against the MEI, support for the bilateral agreements is high regardless of age. Among voters who supported the MEI, by contrast, age matters substantially for preference for the bilateral agreements over MEI implementation. Old MEI supporters are much more likely to favour the bilateral treaties, than younger MEI supporters. This result suggests that older voters are likely to make up their mind in favour of the bilateral agreements, whereas young MEI supporters want it implemented at any price. A possible explanation for this result relates to citizens' experience with previous votes on the bilateral agreements. Younger voters, in particular those aged 18 to

Figure 6: Predicted probabilities to prefer the bilateral treaties over MEI implementation by age and MEI vote



30 have had less opportunities to decide in a popular vote on the relationships between Switzerland and the EU, than older voters. Moreover, when the Swiss people rejected the EEA in 1992 even voters who are now 40 were not eligible to vote yet. As a result, older voters are perhaps more aware of the economic importance of the bilateral agreements than young voters.

The results of the model M3 further suggest that the effect of trust in government is no longer significant. However, the corresponding coefficient shows the effect of trust in government for voters who voted against the MEI, who show high support for the bilateral treaties regardless of whether they trust the Federal Council or not. By contrast, among voters who accepted the MEI the effect of trust in government is considerable (table 7). Those who trust the government are 19 percentage points more likely to favour the bilateral agreements than those who distrust the government.

Finally, figure 7 shows that interest in politics also affects MEI yes-voters and MEI no-voters in different ways. MEI supporters who are politically interested are more likely to favour its implementation than MEI supporters who have a low interest in politics. The reverse holds for those who rejected the initiative. This means that in both camps politically interested voters are more likely to stick to the vote they casted at the ballot on February 9, 2014.

**Conclusion**

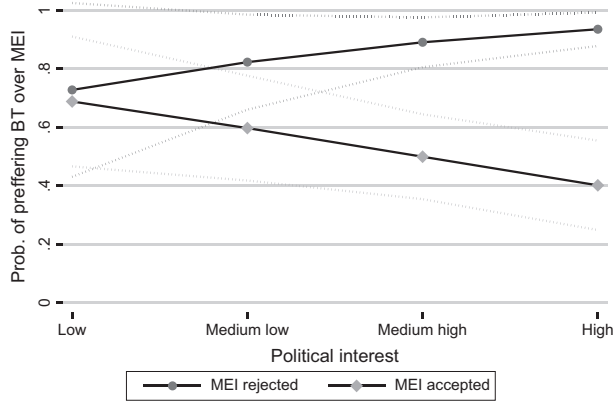
Switzerland’s European policy is at a crossroad. To overcome the dilemma between the implementation of the MEI and the continuation of the bilateral agreements, a new direct

Table 7: Predicted probabilities to prefer the bilateral treaties over MEI implementation by trust in government and MEI vote

	No trust	Trust	Δ (CI)
Rejected MEI	88%	89%	1 (-8 / 10)
Accepted MEI	29%	48%	19 (1/32)

Note: Probabilities are calculated from coefficients appearing in table 5

Figure 7: Predicted probabilities to prefer the bilateral treaties over MEI implementation by political interest and MEI vote



democratic vote will presumably be necessary. Our contribution helps to evaluate the perceptions and preferences of Swiss citizens regarding control over immigration and bilateral agreements.

On the aggregate level, we find that the perceptions regarding the compatibility between immigration control and bilateral agreements have hardly evolved since the vote on the MEI. In December 2014, as in February 2014, only a small majority of Swiss citizens agrees that willing to control immigration contradicts the agreement on the free movement of persons and will lead to the termination of the first set of bilateral agreements. On closer inspection, however, there are some interesting differences between the two surveys. First, perceptions have evolved in opposite directions among yes-voters and no-voters. While the perception of incompatibility has increased among yes-voters, it has decreased among no-voters. Second, our finer-grained analysis reveals some differences between the first and the second survey. More specifically, both voters who do not trust the Federal Council and right-leaning voters are more aware of the contradiction between immigration control, on the one hand, and free movement of persons and bilateral agreements, on the other, in the second survey than in the first. This holds even for right-leaning voters who supported the MEI initiative. This perception update was presumably favored by the public debate that took place in the aftermath of the vote on the MEI.

Next, our results show a clear preference for the continuation of the bilateral agreements over the implementation of the MEI. In that sense, predispositions among the Swiss public are in line with the Federal Council’s bilateral strategy. This said, it is important to keep in mind that the question we asked in the second survey is prospective and hypothetical. Even if a future vote is likely, a true public debate has not started yet. Attitudes will evolve once this debate takes place. In addition, we do not know yet how the choice submitted to the Swiss people will be framed. That is, we do not know the exact content of the “MEI implementation” and of the “bilateral treaties” that will be submitted to voters.

Finally, our results highlight the importance of three variables (age, trust in government, left-right orientation) for the evaluation of the choice between MEI implementation and continuation of the bilateral strategy. In addition, two of these variables influence attitudes both directly and indirectly, that is, depending on whether

voters accepted or rejected the MEI. First, preference for the bilateral agreements over MEI implementation increases with age. More specifically, age is a critical factor to distinguish MEI supporters who would support its implementation at any price, from those who would favor the bilateral agreements, should they choose between the two goals. As it turns out, young MEI supporters appear more intransigent in their support to the initiative than old MEI supporters, possibly because the latter are more aware of the economic importance of the bilateral treaties. More generally, the group of voters who said yes to the MEI but would nevertheless prefer the bilateral agreements is obviously crucial in the perspective of a direct democratic vote, since it is the group that will make the difference.

Second, voters who trust the government are more likely to favor the bilateral treaties over the implementation of the MEI. The vote decision on the MEI again adds to the effect of government trust. More specifically, voters who supported the MEI are far more likely to favour bilateral agreements over immigration control if they trust the Federal Council. This results underlines the important role of the Federal Council, whose leadership, unity and credibility may play a central role in the forthcoming vote. Finally, right-wing voters are more in favor of the implementation of the MEI, than left-wing voters. This result is not surprising, but suggests that an erosion of the left camp would be problematic for the continuation of the bilateral treaties.

Whether immigration does part Switzerland and the EU has yet to be decided. An unknown but interesting future clearly rolls toward us.

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