Discrimination driven by variation in local conservatism: evidence from a nationwide field experiment

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Abstract

We examine how contextual variation in aggregated political attitudes shapes ethnic discrimination. Using a field experiment with national coverage we identify ethnic discrimination in the Swiss housing market (N=7,533 queries for viewings from fictitious persons who vary by name to signal ethnic origin). We use referendums and popular initiatives to identify the aggregated political attitudes at the municipality level in two dimensions: social conservatism and economic conservatism. We show that although aggregated levels of discrimination are low, discrimination varies spatially – higher levels of discrimination are found in municipalities that are both socially and economically conservative. Municipalities that are economically conservative, but socially liberal also tend to exhibit ethnic discrimination. By contrast, we find no evidence of ethnic discrimination in municipalities that are socially conservative, but economically liberal. Considering how the literature highlights social conservatism when discussing the role of political ideology on attitudes and ethnic discrimination, this result highlights how differentiating different forms of conservatism helps better understand the relationship between ideology and behaviour – in this case ethnic discrimination.

Keywords: ethnic discrimination; housing; conservatism; field experiment; political context

Introduction

Like many other aspects of individual attitudes and behaviour, anti-immigrant attitudes and discrimination are thought to be greatly influenced by political ideology (Carlsson and Eriksson 2017; Dražanová 2020). Political ideology describes how we see the world, and refers both to individual characteristics – inherent or through socialization – and context that condones certain views and behaviour through norms (Hatemi and McDermott 2016; Álvarez-Benjumea 2020). Political scientists increasingly categorize the relevant ideology in multiple dimensions rather than relying on summary scales like left–right or liberal–conservative that continue to dominate party political discourse (Mair 2007; Otjes 2018; Lauderdale and Herzog 2016). However, we only have a vague understanding how the conception and measurement of ideology shapes what we can know about attitudes and behaviour, in the present case ethnic discrimination.

While contemporary studies of party politics increasingly make use of multidimensional approaches to analyze party competition (Budge 2001), less is known how these developments away from a simple understanding of political ideology affect ethnic discrimination and other domains of the social sciences. We know that norms and attitudes are important for sanctioning discrimination (Choi, Poertner, and Sambanis 2019; Blinder, Ford, and Ivarsflaten 2013), but several studies have also shown that pro-immigrant attitudes expressed in surveys do not automatically translate into behaviour thus pointing towards a social desirability issue that is inherent in the use of surveys to study anti-immigrant and discriminatory attitudes (LaPiere 1934; Pager and Quillian 2005; Creighton, Jamal, and Malancu 2015). Despite these findings on the individual level, aggregating local variation in ideology can help predict social phenomena such as discrimination of ethnic minorities including immigrants and their descendants: areas with more conservative attitudes have higher levels of discrimination (Carlsson and Eriksson 2017; Verhaeghe and De Coninck 2021; Charles and Guryan 2008). Using the case of Switzerland, we examine how aggregated political attitudes expressed by voters shape ethnic discrimination in the rental housing market. In addition to providing a larger sample and much finer geographical coverage than previous studies, we do not rely on attitudes surveys to measure anti-immigrant and discriminatory attitudes, but benefit from direct democracy in Switzerland to use the results from referendums and popular initiatives as an expression of attitudes. We expect that these behavioural data reflect individual interests, and because voting decisions cannot be traced back to individuals, to enable voters to express opinions that are socially undesirable (McGinnity, Creighton, and Fahey 2020). We also take into consideration conceptual and recent empirical work that suggests that conservatism in itself may consist of at least two dimensions (Crowson 2009; Everett 2013; Ford and Jennings 2020), which nevertheless correlate with one another (Everett 2013; Crowson 2009).

Existing studies on the influence of context on discrimination and attitudes focus on broad lines of ideology, including anti-racist norms which are themselves associated with liberal (rather than conservative) positions (Blinder, Ford, and Ivarsflaten 2013). We argue that a distinction between social and economic conservatism as proposed by Everett (2013) and Crowson (2009) helps understand discrimination by capturing two major mechanisms behind regional variation in discrimination (see also Malka, Lelkes, and Soto 2019). Social conservatism, on the one hand, is linked to fewer Green-alternative-liberal values if we follow the common GAL–TAN terminology (Budge 2001). It is a context that favours traditionalism, conformity, and authoritarianism (Crowson 2009), and thus a context that condones views of cultural threat which can legitimize discrimination. Economic conservatism, on the other hand, is concerned with what is regarded as undue government involvement in the regulation of private enterprise. The individual right to choose is highly regarded, differences in power are considered 'natural' and redistribution rejected (Crowson 2009). In these contexts, too, discrimination can be legitimized, but with reference to individual (economic) freedom to choose as one sees fit, which includes the 'right' to draw on group markers as purported signals of productivity or creditworthiness. In the absence of clear constraints, treating people differently does not need justification and even small tendencies to discriminate can have substantial influence on patterns of discrimination. Studying these associations in Switzerland, we can use referendums and popular initiatives as reliable indicators of social and economic conservatism (Everett 2013). As

predicted, we observe higher levels of discrimination in both cases, something missed if we do not differentiate between forms of conservatism. Furthermore, discrimination levels are highest in municipalities that score high on both social and economic conservatism. The effects are cumulative in nature, suggesting that studies using narrow measures of conservatism may miss important contextual drivers of discrimination. Calls to give up on economic concerns in the context of *attitudes* to immigrants literature may thus be premature when it comes to *behaviour*.

Conservatism and Discrimination

Many forms of individual behaviour are driven by contextual variation and ideology, where ideology provides an internally coherent worldview that consists of specific beliefs, attitudes and opinions that relate to one another (Caughey, O'Grady, and Warshaw 2019). Ideology shapes how individuals interact with their environment (Butler et al. 2017), and because of the tendency to associate and bond with similar others, ideology aggregates into communities and geographical areas, so that we can talk, for instance, of conservative regions (Guimond, de la Sablonnière, and Nugier 2014). One area where ideology plays a major role in contemporary politics is migration and the incorporation of immigrants and their descendants. As major topics in contemporary public debates across the Western world, migration and integration increasingly shape politics from voting to coalition-building and policies (Green-Pedersen and Otjes 2017; Van der Brug et al. 2015): Consider the rise of radical right parties, or the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union. In this debate, anti-immigrant positions are associated with conservatism (Dinesen and Hjorth 2020; Dražanová 2020). Indeed, *all* the studies considered in a systematic review by Dražanová (2020) that accounted for conservatism showed a clear association between conservatism and anti-immigrant attitudes. This association is used by many conservative parties that increasingly politicize immigration in an attempt to increase votes (Dennison and Geddes 2018; Hadj-Abdou and Ruedin 2021; Rudolph and Wagner 2021).

Whether mobilized and reinforced by parties or not, the aggregation of anti-immigrant attitudes forms a context – sometimes referred to as political culture or an *ideological climate–* in which anti-immigrant attitudes are legitimized. Sarrasin et. al (2012) emphasize, that even though some individuals in a community may not agree with or be aware of a dominant ideological position e.g. in their municipality, they are still embedded in such a local political culture and are influenced by the level of conservatism or the anti-immigrant attitudes displayed. While anti-immigrant attitudes do not necessarily translate into anti-immigrant behaviour at the individual level (LaPiere 1934; Pager and Quillian 2005; Verhaeghe and De Coninck 2021), studies have shown that attitudes can be used as a predictor for behaviour at the aggregate level. For instance, Carlsson and Eriksson (2017) show that discrimination against immigrants in Sweden is higher in those areas, where attitudes towards immigrants are more restrictive (see also Carlsson and Rooth 2012; Gallego and Pardos-Prado 2014; Verhaeghe and De Coninck 2021). At a more local level, Enos (2016) demonstrates the influence of the context on behaviour by showing that when the demolition of public housing in the US led to fewer Black neighbours, votes for Republican candidates declined.

The causal influence of context on individual attitudes can also be established in priming experiments that study the impact of media portrayal on attitudes towards immigrants. Liberal and conservative participants in lab experiments react differently to media messages about immigration (Lahav and Courtemanche 2012). This influence of the media on individual attitudes was also demonstrated outside the lab by Czymara and Dochow (2018), who reported that media effects are particularly strong for people who live in regions with low shares of immigrants, for lower educated people and for more conservative people (see also Weber 2019). Put differently, we know that context affects attitudes, attitudes can shape behaviour, and that effects vary across conservative and liberal individuals and regions.

Focusing on the individual level, recent work highlights that different kinds of conservatism can be differentiated, notably an economic and a social (or cultural) dimension (Everett 2013; Crowson 2009). To some extent, these sub-dimensions reflect the distinction between economic left–right and GAL–TAN used in the study of party politics (Budge 2001): Social conservatism as described by

Crowson (2009) includes a preference for traditional values and traditional social roles, (social) conformity, and adherence to authoritarianism. This preference for traditions often has a religious or moral foundation (Everett 2013). Applied to concerns over discrimination, social conservatism aligns with threat theories that highlight how perceived threat from immigrants with different culture evoke feelings of threat (Blumer 1958; Ruedin 2020) – and this feeling of threat can legitimize the exclusion of and discrimination against immigrants to protect one's own traditions and 'way of life'.

Economic conservatism as described by Crowson (2009), by contrast, aligns more with the economic left–right dimension, although with a clear focus on private enterprise, freedom of contract, and the relationship with the state: Economic conservative positions regard government involvement in the regulation of private enterprise as inappropriate. Individual responsibility and freedom are emphasized, and with that the individual right to choose freely. Differences in power are considered 'natural' and for that reason any attempts to 'correct' them through redistribution are rejected. While economic conservatism as such does not suggest discrimination, small and latent tendencies to discriminate will have a much larger influence because in a context influenced by economic conservatism there are few constraints: Treating people differently does not need justification.

In this sense, the mechanism we explore in this article is different from the established distinction between (perceived) cultural and economic threat as a reason behind anti-immigrant sentiments (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014; Quillian 1995; Bobo and Hutchings 1996). While economic threat revolves around a perception of unwanted competition in the labour market, economic conservatism describes a position against redistribution preferences and the involvement of the government in regulating the economy and private enterprise. Put differently, we expect more discrimination in more economic conservative areas not because threat perceptions were higher, but because of lower restraint in excluding and discriminating against minority groups such as immigrants. In this sense, our contribution is independent of the origin of anti-immigrant sentiments, a rejection of all things new and foreign, or concerns about the impact of immigration on society – rather than individuals. In sum, we expect more discrimination in social conservative areas because of perceived cultural threat. We also expect more discrimination in economic conservative areas because those individuals with an inclination to discriminate feel less restraint and are more likely to do so. As a consequence, areas defined by both high levels of economic and social conservatism should see the highest levels of discrimination.

Experimental Design and Identification

We draw on two data sources to estimate the effect of local political attitudes on discriminatory behaviour. First, we characterize the political context in which landlords operate using voting results from referendums and popular initiatives at the municipality level in Switzerland. Second, we use a nation-wide field experiment on the housing market to assess variation in discriminatory behaviour against foreign named apartment seekers across Swiss municipalities (Auer et al. 2019). The correspondence test used inquiries in matched pairs sent to landlords and professional agencies advertising vacant apartments online. The name of the apartment seeker serves as a marker of ethnicity for fictitious and comparable profiles, and discrimination is based on the variation in callback rates (i.e. invitation to a visit) between ethnic groups. Some of the ethnic minority profiles also indicated a permanent residence permit or naturalization, both of which signal ethnic minority status. Stimulus sampling was used to reduce the impact of non-measured characteristics of specific names. In a final step, we examine landlord characteristics, namely whether they are private landlords or real estate agencies. Since they have varying attachments to the properties and are involved in transactions in different ways, these two groups of gatekeepers are expected to respond differently to variations in local contexts and adopt distinct discriminatory behaviors.

Assessing local political climates: Referendums and popular initiatives

While previous research that linked attitudes towards immigrants with field experimental data relied on surveys (Carlsson and Eriksson 2017; Verhaeghe and De Coninck 2021), we use voting results from Swiss referendums and popular initiatives as a measure of public attitudes. As Carlsson and Eriksson (2017) point out, "surveys might *not* be a good predictor of discrimination" (p.1740), first, because respondents may not answer truthfully due to social desirability bias, second, because attitudes may be implicit rather than explicit, or, third, because of situational factors, that may impact attitudes but not discriminatory behavior (or vice versa). Finally they point towards problems with the external validity of attitudes expressed in surveys, as these are rarely conducted in realistic social situations. Similarly, McGinnity, Creighton, and Fahey show that attitudes expressed in surveys do not necessarily conform with behaviour such as voting, as survey respondents are likely to try to hide socially undesirable attitudes (2020 p.13). While they used a list experiment, we rely on Swiss referendum and popular initiative data, which address all the problems identified: social desirability bias should be minimal since voting decisions are anonymous (McGinnity, Creighton, and Fahey 2020); because voting data capture explicit and implicit attitudes (Friese et al. 2012); and because the situational factors that influence voting behaviour and discriminatory behaviour are held constant within municipalities. Moreover, attitudes expressed in referendums and public initiatives have real world implications, therefore also addressing external validity.

We use referendums and popular initiatives to measure political climates in municipalities on two dimensions: economic conservatism, and social conservatism. A conservatism score is attributed to each municipality based on the average vote share in favour of socially (economically) conservative issues. This is possible in Switzerland, because Swiss direct democracy means that national referendums are required for constitutional amendments by the federal parliament, and popular initiatives come directly from citizens who can amend the constitution, though typically popular initiatives are launched by political parties or large organizations. Since 1972, the Swiss people have been called to vote on 8.5 different constitutional issues on average a year, which yields rich data on many different political issues.

A coding of referendums by political domains was originally produced by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office. It was later significantly refined and expanded as part of the Swissvotes project (Swissvotes 2021). The project monitors all initiatives and referendums from their launch to a possible popular decision and implementation. The information is gathered in a database publicly available online. Referendums and popular initiatives were grouped together into twelve political domains: (1) State order (2) Foreign policy (3) Security policy (4) Economy (5) Agriculture (6) Public finances (7) Energy (8) Transport and infrastructure (9) Environment and habitat (10) Social issues and social policy (11) Education and research, and (12) Culture, religion and media (see detailed classification by political domains in Appendix A.1). Based on this authoritative classification, we extracted referendums and initiatives conducted between 2000 and 2018 that capture economic conservatism or social conservatism.[1]

The economic dimension captures the classic left-right divide and is concerned with private enterprises and their relationship to the state. It opposes government involvement in the regulation of private enterprise, puts emphasis on the responsibility and freedom of individuals, and rejects redistribution as a means to mitigate inequality (Crowson 2009, Kossowska 2007, Caughey et al. 2019). We built this dimension using 23 referendums that belong to the "Economic" and "Public finances" categories in Swissvotes (2021). They include voting issues addressing financial

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[1] We included all voting issues from the corresponding categories, with the exception of three referendums (Federal law on the amendment of acts concerning the taxation of couples and families, the taxation of housing and stamp duties; Federal decree on a debt brake; Help families! For tax-exempt child benefits and vocational training allowances). Albeit in principle related to the dimension of interest, empirically the three referendums could not properly be positioned on the progressive-conservative continuum, because they appealed to both liberal and conservative voters, albeit for different reasons. The exclusion of the referendums was guided by their content, lack of correlation with other referendums, and voting recommendation from major political parties.

regulations, tax reforms, federal budget, employment regulations (wages, vacation, opening hours), etc. More concretely, this includes voting issues such as "limiting a company's highest salary to twelve times the lowest salary" (vote in 2013) or for the "improvement of fiscal conditions to strengthen the competitiveness of Switzerland as a business location" (vote in 2017). The economic dimension also includes 23 additional referendums from the category "Social insurance" (a sub-category from the "Social issues and social policy" domain), which capture attitudes towards redistribution. They comprise referendums related to unemployment benefits, pension reforms, health and disability insurance and universal basic income (full list of voting issues in appendix A.2.a).

The social dimension relates to a commitment to (or preservation of) traditional values and social roles and places emphasis on traditional power structures and social identity (Crowson 2009; Everett 2013). Its strong moral and religious foundation (Everett 2013) aligns with a perception of immigrants as a (cultural) threat to established traditions and 'way of life'. To capture this, we gathered 17 referendums from the category "Social groups" (a sub-category from the "Social issues and social policy" domain). This includes voting issues concerned with family and immigration policies, as well as the rights towards foreigners, asylum seekers, women, homosexuals, disabled persons, children and youth, and senior citizens. As part of this category we find for instance popular initiatives in favor of "an equitable representation of women in federal authorities" (voted in 2000) or "for the effective expulsion of foreign criminals" (voted in 2016). Two voting issues from the category "Religion, churches" (a sub-category from the "Culture, religion and media" domain) complete the social dimension. We find in this category a popular initiative "against the construction of minarets" (voted in 2009); a political issue that relates directly to the notion of cultural threat (full list of voting issues in appendix A.2.b).

Figure 1: Municipalities according to their levels of social and economic conservatism
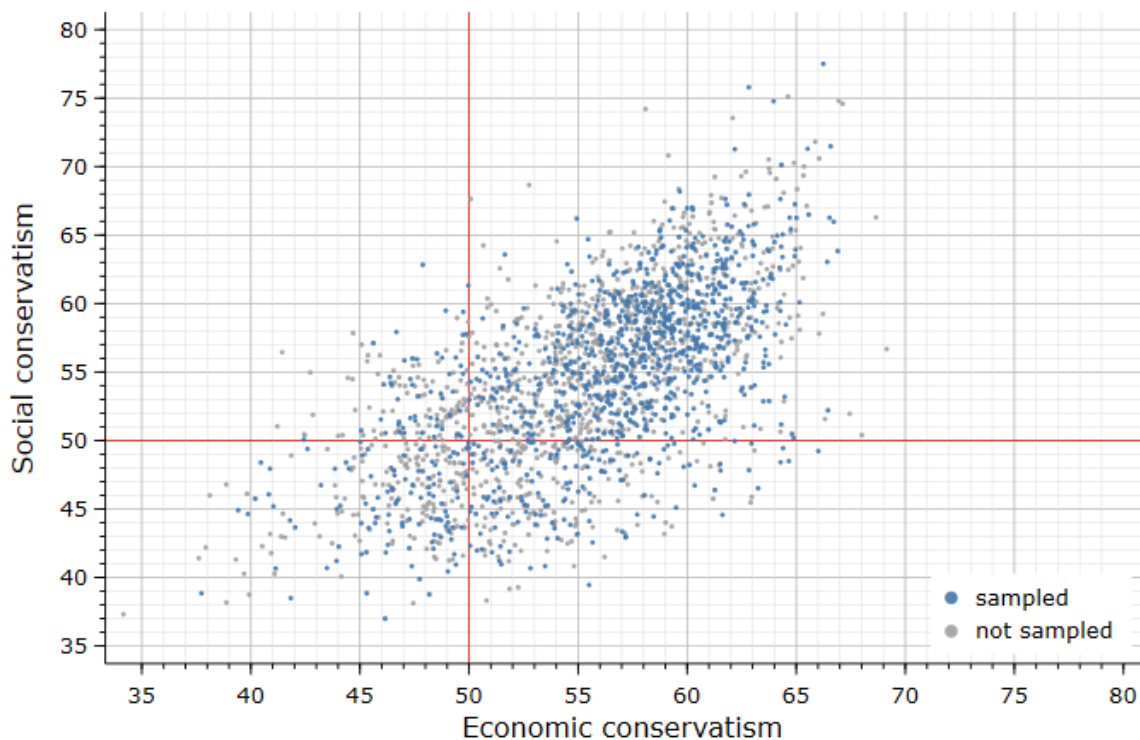
Note: Scales based on average vote share in favour of economic and social conservative issues. Period: 2000-2018, N=46 referendums and popular initiatives for economic conservatism, N=19 referendums and popular initiatives for social conservatism. Municipalities indicated as "sampled" were included in the field experiment.

Figure 1 displays the municipality score on the social conservatism and economic conservatism for each municipality in Switzerland. In 2018, Switzerland counted 2,222 municipalities; 1,099 of these are included in the data analysed because for those municipalities we have data on discrimination from our field experiment. Municipalities included in the data are indicated in blue ("sampled"), while municipalities not included in the field experiment are indicated in black ("not sampled"). We can see that the 1,099 sampled municipalities are a good representation of all the municipalities, and that there is variance across both dimensions. A large share of the municipalities (72%) are in the upper right corner of the graph, indicating that a majority of voters in these areas were in favor of conservative issues. Nevertheless, in 10% of the municipalities the majority of voters favour liberal issues on both dimensions; 13% show a preference for economic conservative but socially liberal issues; and 5% present a preference for socially conservative but economically liberal issues.[2]

Detecting ethnic discrimination: A nationwide field experiment on the Swiss housing market

To study ethnic discrimination in the Swiss rental housing market, we conducted a nationwide field experiment (Auer et al. 2019). This paired correspondence test was conducted between March and October 2018 with 5,730 paired inquiries and covered 1,289 municipalities. Here we focus on a subset of tests involving people with Kosovar and Turkish sounding names, because they are distributed across the country and their names are easier to identify as having an 'immigrant background'. Excluded are people from neighbouring countries (Germany, Italy, France), because they were only included in the respective linguistic areas of the country, and because their names are not as distinct as for people from Kosovo and Turkey. The subset covers 1,099 municipalities in which about 75% of the Swiss residents live (map with the geographical coverage in Appendix A.5), and responses to 3,767 advertisements for vacant apartments that were posted on the online platform www.comparis.ch, one of the largest online housing platforms in Switzerland. For each apartment, we submitted paired inquiries (i.e., 7,534 applications) of fictitious apartment seekers (one with a Swiss sounding name and one with an ethnic minority sounding name) within a short time frame of approximately three hours to both professional and private landlords. In both inquiries the fictitious apartment seekers asked whether they could visit the apartment. Each pair of apartment seekers provided the same amount of (randomly assigned) additional information (e.g. information on occupation, family composition, age, gender, or residence permit).[3]

To signal ethnicity, the field experiment relied on first and last names that had a typical ethnic connotation and could easily be identified as belonging to a person with an assumed native Swiss or ethnic minority background (list of names in Appendix A.4). The non-native ethnic minority groups tested were people with Kosovar or Turkish names. Both groups represent traditional countries of origin for immigrants in Switzerland, with the first Turkish migrants arriving already in the 1960s as guestworkers (albeit in very small numbers), followed by Turkish refugee flows in the 1980s and Kosovar immigrants coming to Switzerland mostly as refugees during the war in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s (Ruedin, Alberti, and D'Amato 2015). In attitude surveys, particularly immigrants from Albania, the Balkans and former Yugoslavia are consistently identified among the most problematic

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[2] Other policy domains could arguably be included in the social dimension: The category "Energy" deals with environmentalism issues; the category "State order" comprises different items on the naturalization and civil rights of 2nd/3rd generations. On closer inspection, however, these two categories also cover issues that are completely unrelated to the dimension of interest. Excluding a handful of items that relate to our dimensions (but classified in another policy domain) is not an issue, as long as the selected categories clearly capture conservative (progressive) ideologies along the social and economic dimensions.

[3] While the sample of rental housing objects has been as good as random in the first phase of the experiment to resemble a representative picture of the country's housing market across regions, we over-sampled not yet covered municipalities in the last month of the experiment to increase spatial coverage. The remaining municipalities without inquiries are usually smaller in terms of population size, and most of them lacked vacant rental objects during our observation period. We cannot rule out completely that some regions tend to use different online platforms or refrain from online advertisements. However, we checked for spatial patterns, and the non-coverage seems to be random. In terms of politics, the average vote share on referendums among our quasi-random sample of municipalities closely resembles the national results, which provides further indication that non-coverage is not decisively biased (see Tables A.2.a-b).

groups (e.g. Longchamp et al. 2014; Ruedin 2020). Furthermore, Muslim minorities have increasingly been targeted in the debate on the role of Islam in Europe, which has also manifested itself in some of the popular initiatives such as the ban of minarets in 2009, or the 2021 initiative to ban veils, both of which were accepted by the voters. By focusing on apartment seekers with Kosovar and Turkish ethnic minority sounding names, we look at two ethnic minority groups which are well-established in Switzerland, constitute the fifth and seventh largest immigrant groups respectively (BFS 2021), are predominantly Muslim, and are perceived as a threat to society.

We first estimate the degree of ethnic discrimination at the national level. The outcome of interest is an invitation to a viewing; negative answers and non-responses are considered as negative outcomes (as is common in the literature, Gaddis 2018). Given the pairwise design of the experiment, discrimination is measured by the difference in the probability of an invitation between Swiss and ethnic minority apartment seekers. The predictor is the ethnic minority name, while we control for characteristics of the property, the template used in the email inquiry, as well as canton and month fixed effects[4]. We allocated names and all other information on the apartment seekers randomly to each application, so the results are not affected by unobserved heterogeneity.

Compared to existing literature on ethnic discrimination in the housing market, we find a relatively high response rate for apartment seekers: 72% of all apartment seekers received an invitation for a viewing. As expected, the callback rate differs for prospective tenants with Swiss-sounding names and those with ethnic minority names. All other things being equal, Swiss apartment seekers are 3% more likely than minority apartment seekers to receive a positive response from private landlords or agencies when they request to view an apartment – a low but significant effect size that is comparable to other housing markets (Auspurg et al. 2019). While discrimination against minority apartment seekers seems to be quite low at the aggregate level, further analysis shows that regional differences exist between municipalities based on variations in local levels of conservatism.

Table 1: Discrimination against ethnic minority apartment seekers

	Model 1	Model 2
Migrant name	-0.03***	-0.03***
	(0.01)	(0.01)
Female		0.01
		(0.01)
Appartement rent (1000CHF)		0.03***
		(0.01)
No. of rooms		-0.01
		(0.01)
Agency landlord		0.06***
		(0.01)
Constant	0.79***	0.63***
	(0.03)	(0.04)
Observation	7533	7533
R2	0.032	0.043
Canton FE	X	X
Month FE	X	X
Template FE		X

*Note: Outcome: invitation for a viewing. OLS coefficients with robust standard errors clustered at the property level in parentheses. * < 0.05, ** < 0.01, *** <0.001. Template fixed effects provide the style and levels of details of the randomized application (predefined online form, brief text, standard text, detailed text).*

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[4] Because a single experiment does not always create balanced groups, we use control variables in a regression framework (Ariel et al. 2022).

Discrimination driven by variation in local conservatism

We estimate the difference in the probability of an invitation between Swiss and ethnic minority apartment seekers at different levels of (social and economic) conservatism. The level of conservatism, as measured by the municipality score on the economic and social dimensions, is defined as the average vote share in favor of social (economic) conservative issues in the municipality, as outlined above. We extend the main model by including an interaction term between the apartment seeker's *ethnic minority* name and the social and economic conservatism scores (model 3 in Appendix A.7). The results are robust to a number of alternative conservatism measures and models (see Appendix A.7, and robustness checks in Section 4.2 and Section 4.3).

Figure 2a shows the magnitude of discrimination along the social-economic conservative dimensions using a hexagon plot; Figure 2b highlights the level of statistical significance of the results. A two-dimensional approach recognizes that people may be socially conservative and economically liberal, as with some populists (upper left corner on the graph), or socially liberal and economically conservative, as with some libertarians (lower right corner) (Everett 2013). We can see that discrimination against ethnic minorities is higher in those municipalities where conservative issues find higher approval among voters. In the figure, darker shades of red indicate greater ethnic discrimination, while shades of blue indicate a tendency to invite ethnic minority apartment seekers more often. Overall, we observe a discrimination gradient with most red dots concentrated in the top right-hand corner of Figure 2a: These are municipalities that are both socially and economically conservative. In these municipalities, the callback difference between ethnic minority and Swiss candidates is as high as 10% - a significant variation from the national level of 3%. By contrast, we find that municipalities that are both socially and economically liberal (bottom left-hand corner of Figure 2a) typically come with equal treatment (or even positive discrimination). Municipalities with positive discrimination are mainly in urban areas with large concentration of foreign-born residents. In this regard, Auspurg, Hinz, and Schmid (2017) have noted a preference for 'migrants' for some higher priced objects, while Gherkiere and Verhaeghe (2022) suggest that the ethnic composition of the city neighbourhood plays a role. In our view, these mechanisms are best tested at a lower geographical unit, notably within cities.

Figure 2. Ethnic discrimination by social and economic conservatism

A. Callback differences between ethnic minority and Swiss apartment seekers
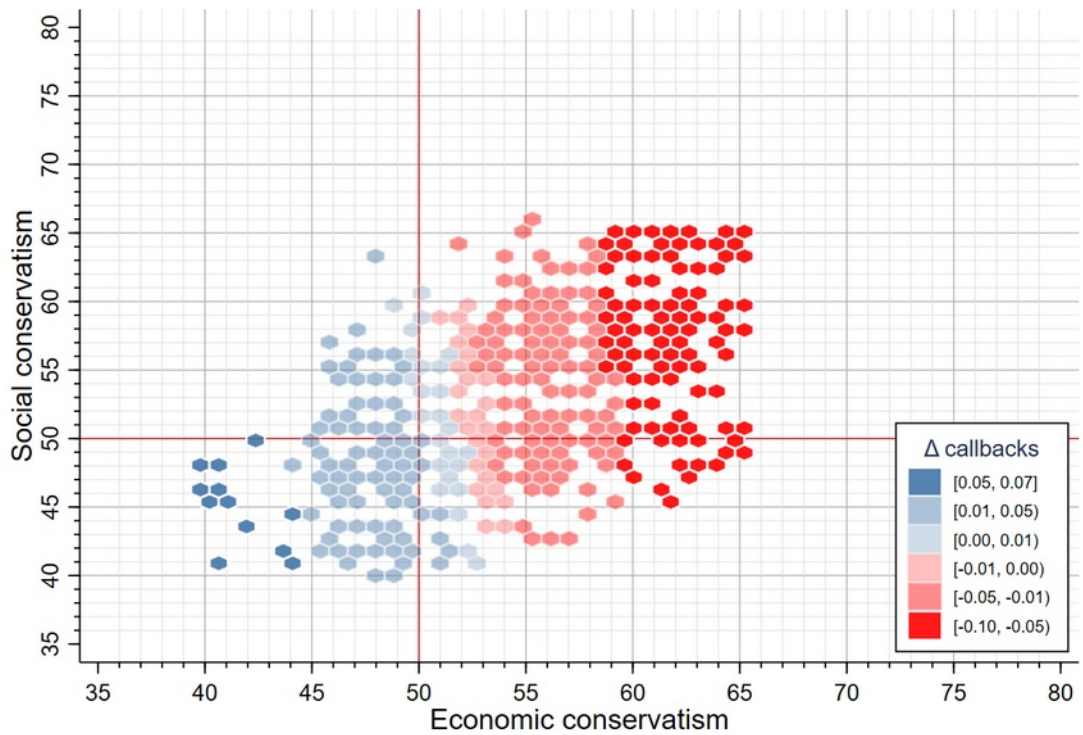
B. Regions with statistically significant discrimination
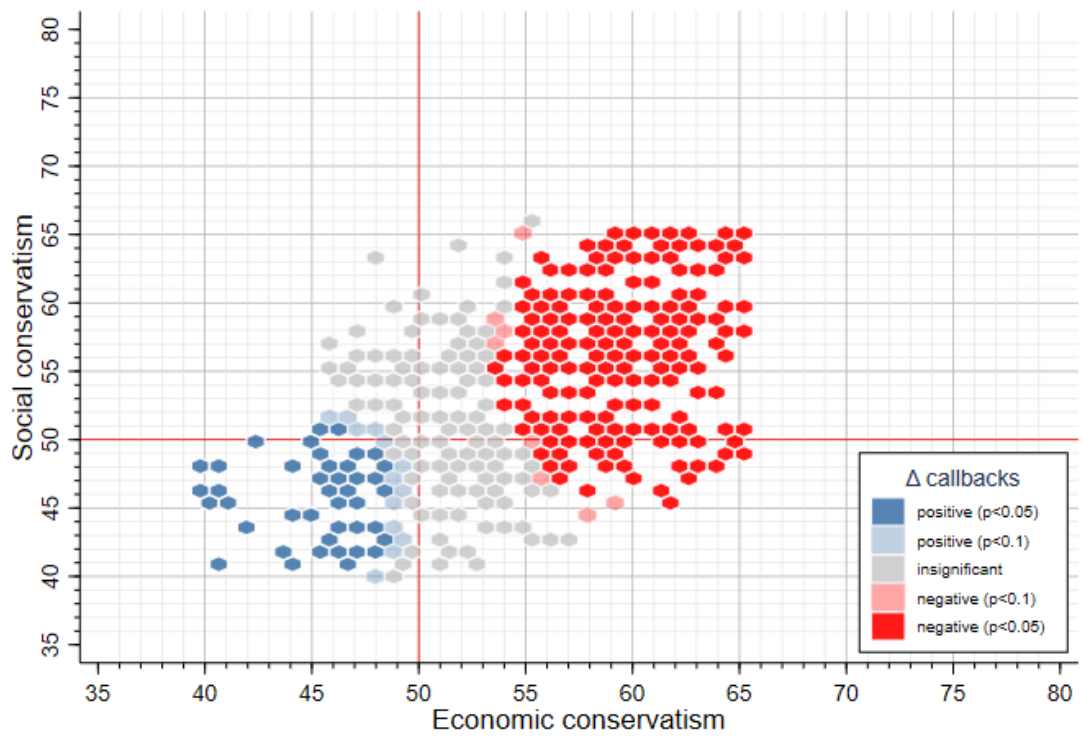
Note: We restrict the predicted values (but not the model) to between the 10th and 90th percentile of the score distribution and focus on areas with many observations.

Although local contexts where individuals vote conservative on one dimension and liberal on the other are less common (the two dimensions are distinct, but also correlated; Malka, Lelkes, and Soto 2019), we can observe 53 municipalities in the top left-hand corner (economically liberal, but socially conservative; N=284 applications) and 144 municipalities in the bottom right-hand corner (economically conservative, but socially liberal; N=1,002 applications): a sufficient number of observations to warrant analysis. The municipalities in the bottom right-hand corner – municipalities that are economically conservative but socially liberal – tend to exhibit ethnic discrimination, especially if we only consider those associations that are statistically significant. By contrast, we find no evidence of ethnic discrimination in the top left-hand corner – municipalities that are socially conservative, but economically liberal. Once we only consider differences that are statistically significant, no conclusive differences from zero remain. Considering how the literature highlights social conservatism when discussing the role of political ideology on attitudes and ethnic discrimination, this result is surprising and highlights how differentiating different forms of conservatism helps better understand the relationship between ideology and behaviour – in this case ethnic discrimination.[5]

Private landlords vs. agencies

To better understand how social and economic conservatism influence ethnic discrimination, we distinguish invitation outcomes by type of landlords in Figure 3a and 3b. In particular, we differentiate between private landlords who own the property they rent out and agencies who rent out property on behalf of the owners (which may include institutional owners like insurance companies or pension funds). Looking at their likely behaviour, we note important differences between private landlords and agencies. First, private landlords tend to be resident in the municipality of the property, may even live in the same building and rent out apartments. If they are not residents of the municipality, private owners are likely to have strong social ties to the community where they have invested. With this, private landlords are more likely part of the local community and share its attitudes. By contrast, agencies are run by professionals who typically manage several properties and tend to be less locally anchored. Nevertheless, agencies are generally aware of the (political) context on the ground and are interested in smooth transactions and a sustainable friction-free climate among tenants. As a result, agencies are likely to be willing to reflect or even anticipate preferences by existing tenants, or preferences by landlords when renting on their behalf, and adapt their invitation strategies accordingly (Verhaeghe and De Coninck 2021; Bonnet and Pollard 2020; Verstraete and Verhaeghe 2020). Agencies have a higher callback rate than private landlords, that is they tend to invite more potential tenants for a viewing (+5.5% see Table 1).

The results show distinct patterns of discrimination across local political contexts for private landlords and agencies. Consistent with the results in the preceding section, we find that private landlords discriminate against ethnic minorities in municipalities that are both socially and economically conservative (top right-hand corner). The results are statistically significant in local contexts where at least 55% of the voters support economic conservative issues and 50% support social conservative issues – municipalities that are clearly conservative on both dimensions. On the other side of the political spectrum, we find that ethnic minority applicants are more often invited compared to Swiss candidates. Differential invitation rates by applicants' name only occur in contexts that are liberal on both dimensions. Again, we do not find evidence of ethnic discrimination by private landlords in municipalities that are social conservative but economically liberal (top left-hand corner) nor in contexts that are economically conservative but socially liberal (bottom right-hand corner) – a clear distinction from what is observed for agencies. The extent of discrimination among private landlords ranges between +13% in liberal contexts and -13% in conservative contexts (Appendix A.6). The ethnic minority gap is larger than that described in Figure 2a (from -10% to +7%) meaning that differential treatment is more pronounced when private landlords are involved in the transaction.

[5] In this analysis, we used a 50% threshold to mark the distinction between local political climates, but conceptually political preferences and their impact on discrimination behaviours should be viewed as a continuum. This simplification did not prevent us from identifying the importance of economic conservatism, as well as the cumulative incidence of the economic and social dimension on discriminatory behaviour.

Figure 3. Ethnic discrimination by social and economic conservatism, and type of landlord

A. Discrimination by private landlords
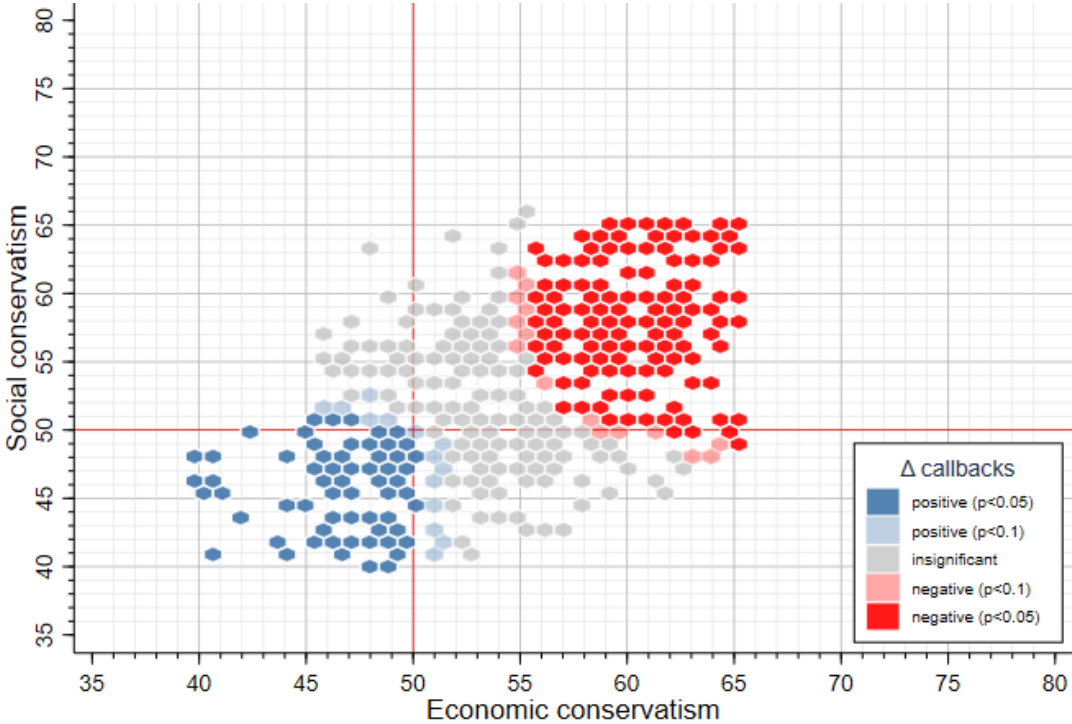
B. Discrimination by agencies
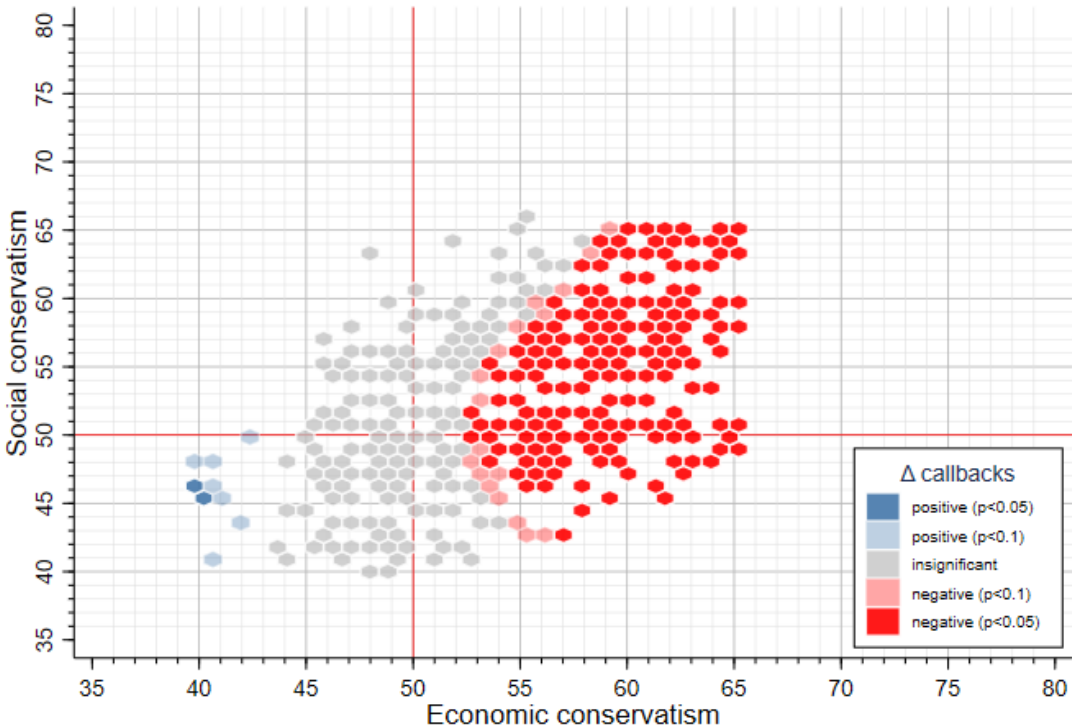
The picture is different for agencies, by contrast. As we can see in Figure 3b, ethnic discrimination by agencies is more likely in economically conservative areas: the right-hand side of the figure, irrespective of levels of social conservatism. In economically liberal municipalities on the left-hand side of the figure, we tend to find no difference – with a preference for minority apartment seekers only at the very end of the conservative-liberal continuum. The magnitude of discrimination ranges from +6% in liberal contexts to -10% in conservative contexts (Appendix A.6). The finding that agencies are more likely to discriminate against ethnic minority apartment seekers in economically conservative areas aligns with our theoretical expectations: First, as private enterprises they are more likely to oppose government intervention or redistribution to correct existing inequalities, and second, they are more likely to emphasize their individual right to choose freely. We therefore expected more discrimination in economic conservative areas, because of lower restraint to exclude (ethnic) minority groups.

In sum, the distinction between private landlords and agencies confirmed that behavioural patterns vary (Verhaeghe and De Coninck 2021): Private landlords are more likely to discriminate against ethnic minorities in areas that find higher support for socially and economically conservative issues (above the red horizontal and vertical lines), while discrimination by agencies is concentrated in economically conservative areas (to the right of the red vertical line). Even though we cannot identify the social mechanisms at play here, these results suggest clearly that private landlords and professional agencies react differently to variation in local contexts. If we plan to develop policies to reduce or even overcome ethnic discrimination, we need a clearer understanding of these mechanisms, and our results indicate that there are likely different mechanisms at work – calling for different interventions.

Robustness: Alternative conservatism measures

We demonstrate the robustness of our findings with alternative measures of economic and social conservatism (Figures in Appendix A.12). In Figure A.12a and A.12b we add weights to specify alternative conservatism scales. In Figure A.12a, weights emphasize recent referendums and popular initiatives:

$$year_{weight} = 19 - (2019 - year\ of\ referendum) \Big/ 18$$

The figure resembles that of Figure 2b where an unweighted scale of social and economic conservatism was used. The results confirm that ethnic discrimination mainly concerns municipalities where issues of economic (and social) conservatism are more accepted by voters. Nevertheless, there is a shift in the discrimination towards the lower right part of the graph. This shift appears to reflect a move toward more economically conservative and socially liberal preferences among Swiss voters in recent years (see Figure A.13a). Consistent with the main model, preferences for ethnic minority apartment seekers are limited the lower left-hand corner of the graph, although there is a slight shift to the right of the 50% threshold. Emphasizing recent voting issues accentuate the result that municipalities that are economically conservative but socially liberal tend to exhibit discrimination.

In Figure A.12b, we use parties' voting recommendations and local election results for the five major political parties[6] as an alternative specification to measure social and economic conservatism. Before each referendum or popular initiative, all parties publicly endorse a particular vote (yes or no, rarely no recommendation). The election weight is the sum of the election party vote shares conditional on their support in the referendum[7]. As such, we emphasize referendums when the political parties that received the highest support in the last election endorsed the referendum in question. This alternative

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[6]The five major parties are the Swiss People's Party (SVP), the Social Democratic Party (SPS), the Liberals (FDP), the Center (CVP) and the Green Party (GPS).

[7] For example, in a municipality where the SVP obtained 40% of the votes in the last election, the SPS 10%, the GPS 15%, the FDP 25% and the CVP 10%, the electoral weight is: (0.4+0.25) = 0.65 if the SVP and FDP supported the referendum and the SPS, GPS and CVP opposed it.

specification can be seen as a measure of conformity, that is, whether voters align their behaviour with the recommendation of the party they voted for. If these votes align, voting results could serve as an indicator to predict discrimination, which is in line with Carlsson and Eriksson (2017), who find that reported attitudes can predict discrimination in the Swedish housing market.

The results confirm the general pattern of discrimination with the red dots concentrated in the upper right part of the distribution and the blue dots concentrated in the lower left part. The difference between this measure of conservatism and previous ones lies mainly in the threshold at which we observe differential treatments between Swiss and ethnic minority apartment seekers. As mentioned above, the 50% threshold used to mark the distinction between local political climate is arbitrary. Overall, the results from the main and alternative specifications reiterate the continuous nature of these measures with a consistent pattern of discrimination across the different conservatism scales.

Robustness: Alternative models

In addition to the alternative conservatism scores, we present two models that relax the linearity assumption. First, we built a group measure that captures both dimensions of conservatism using score intervals of 5 (the 1099 municipalities are grouped into 35 categories) to categorize municipalities. For instance, all municipalities that score between 45 and 50 on the social dimension and between 55 and 60 on the economic one are grouped together. In this model we include an interaction term between the apartment seeker's ethnic minority name and the conservatism group. The findings are consistent with the main findings (especially if we focus on the results that are statistically significant): higher levels of discrimination are found in municipalities that are both socially and economically conservative, and in municipalities that are economically conservative, but socially liberal (Appendix A.11). One exception appears, however, when we estimate the effect separately for private landlords and agencies (Appendix A.11c and A.11d). The non-linear model shows ethnic discrimination by private landlords in municipalities that are social conservative but economically liberal (top left-hand corner). We suspect that the linear model may have reduced too much of the complexity in the data. We discuss the implication of this result in conclusion.

Second, we present the probability of an invitation for Swiss and ethnic minority applicants at different values of social and economic conservatism using a logistic model with cubic splines (Appendix A.10). The results are no different from the linear specification presented in Appendix A.9.

Discussion and Conclusion

There is a well-established literature in political science that focuses on the link between political ideology and individual attitudes and behaviour. Yet, the link between political ideology, individual attitudes and eventually individual behaviour is still unclear. Here we focus on ethnic discrimination as an example where previous research has found conflicting results when it comes to translating individual attitudes into behaviour. While some studies have shown that anti-immigrant attitudes do not necessarily translate into discriminatory behaviour at the individual level (e.g. LaPiere 1934; Pager and Quillian 2005), other studies find that on at the aggregated level anti-immigrant attitudes can be used as a predictor for discriminatory behaviour (e.g. Carlsson and Ericsson 2017). Using the case of Switzerland, we combined political attitudes on two dimensions, that is social and economic conservatism – as expressed in referendums and popular initiatives and thus less prone to social desirably concerns as previously used attitude surveys – with a behavioural measure – ethnic discrimination in the rental housing market measured by a nationwide field experiment. While the field experiment shows that discrimination against ethnic minority apartment seekers exists in the Swiss rental housing market, adding the attitude data allows us to analyse in more detail in which context discrimination is more likely to occur, thus getting closer to the question *why* ethnic discrimination occurs.

Looking at conservatism as underlying ideology, which previous studies have shown to be closely linked to anti-immigrant attitudes (see review by Dražanová, 2020), we argue that studies of conservatism should differentiate between economic and social conservatism, even though there seems to be a clear tendency to give up economic concerns in the context of attitudes to immigrants literature (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010). We find that attitudes expressed in referendums and popular initiatives are indeed correlated with behaviour, i.e. ethnic discrimination in the rental housing market: Discrimination is most likely to occur in municipalities that score high on both economic and social conservatism, thus showing that economic and social conservatism are cumulative. However, we also show that municipalities that are economically conservative and socially liberal tend to exhibit ethnic discrimination, while we find no evidence of ethnic discrimination in municipalities that are socially conservative, but economically liberal. Given the focus on social conservatism in the existing literature, this finding is surprising and emphasizes why differentiating between different forms of conservatism contributes to a better understanding of the relationship between ideology and behaviour, in this case conservative attitudes and ethnic discrimination in the rental housing market. Studies that focus only on one form of conservatism (e.g. social conservatism) would miss part of this association (e.g. the lower right quadrant in our Figures 2-4).

Separating results by private landlords and agencies also highlights why it is important to differentiate between social and economic conservatism. Private landlords and agencies have different motivations to discriminate against ethnic minority apartment seekers and in Switzerland agencies play an important part in the rental market (Bonnet and Pollard, 2020). While private landlords are more likely to be part of the municipality and have stronger social ties to it, agencies are usually larger, more profit oriented and are likely to discriminate in anticipation of neighbours' or owners' preferences (Verhaeghe, de Coninck, 2021; Verstraete and Verhaeghe, 2020). Our findings show distinct patterns of discrimination by the form of conservatism and type of landlord: Private landlords discriminate in municipalities that score high on the two conservatism dimensions while agencies are more likely to discriminate in areas that find higher approval for economic conservatism issues among voters. We also find evidence of discrimination by private landlords in socially conservative and economically liberal areas. Although this result is only valid in the non-linear model, it aligns with our theoretical expectation: Because they are part of the local community, private landlords exhibit higher level of discrimination in socially conservative areas where people with an immigration background are more likely to be perceived as a cultural threat. According to the theory, this feeling of threat in turn legitimizes discrimination as a way of preserving one's traditions and 'way of life'. Also in line with our theoretical expectations, we find that discrimination by agencies is higher in areas that scored high on economic conservatism, as agencies are more likely to oppose government interventions and are more likely to emphasize the individual right to choose freely – in this case who should be able to view and ultimately get an apartment. Again, studies that only look at one form of conservatism will miss this distinction.

While field experimental data are typically limited to showing *that* discrimination occurs (Neumark 2018), combining experimental findings with other methodological approaches, such as attitude research, enables us to move closer to the questions of *why* or *how* discrimination occurs, thus focusing more on the mechanisms. Future field experiments (such as correspondence tests) and by implication other experimenters that capture behaviour should make sure to sample a wide variety of local contexts, as we have done in this nationwide correspondence test, and exploit contextual variation. An alternative is to focus on homogeneity (e.g. on specific cities or urban areas), while clearly acknowledging that this lack of variation will result in forgoing conclusions on behaviour (in this case housing discrimination) more generally. Both approaches are certainly valid – particularly with the rise of systematic reviews and meta-analyses in these fields, well-designed studies that focus either on larger scale heterogeneous designs or on clearly defined homogenous settings provide valuable data points, especially when analysed in an systematic aggregated meta-analytical form.

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