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on the move**

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**Do Spatial Political Focus, Feelings of  
Belonging, and Social Networks Affect  
the Intention to Apply for Citizenship?  
Evidence from Switzerland**

**Working Paper #38  
January, 2025**



# nccr on the move

National Center of Competence in Research –  
The Migration-Mobility Nexus  
nccr-onthemove.ch

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## **Do Spatial Political Focus, Feelings of Belonging, and Social Networks Affect the Intention to Apply for Citizenship? Evidence from Switzerland**

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## Abstract

Existing research highlights instrumental factors in intentions to apply for citizenship, specifically the security of status that prevents involuntary return. Although we acknowledge the relevance of instrumental factors such as status security, we focus on the importance of soft factors of belonging as predictors of intentions to naturalize. We argue that different (political, emotional, social) forms of belonging are associated with the desire to apply for citizenship. We analyze intentions to apply for Swiss citizenship using data from the 2022 Swiss Migration-Mobility Survey (N=5,510). As predictors, we use scales on spatial political focus, generic feelings of belonging, as well as an indicator comparing friendship networks as an indicator of social networks in the country of origin and those in Switzerland. For all three, we show a substantial positive association. Individuals who are more politically focused on Switzerland, i.e. state a higher interest in the politics of the host country, and who express a stronger generic feeling of belonging have greater desires to naturalize. This also applies to people with strong friendship networks in Switzerland. These subjective factors behind naturalization intentions probably go beyond instrumental reasons and material advantages such as visa-free travel and access to social security.

## Keywords

Citizenship, Migration, Naturalization, Belonging, Social Network

## Acknowledgments

Authors are listed in alphabetical order. We acknowledge funding by the nccr – on the move (grant number 51NF40\_205605). Author contributions: all authors contributed to the conception, VH and MS carried out the statistical analysis, all authors wrote and edited the paper. This paper was written within the framework of a nccr – on the move hackathon. For more information on the process, please consult this [webpage](#).

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# 1 Introduction

In a world of nation-states, media and political discourse often assume citizenship is the ultimate goal. Several studies have looked at the importance of citizenship for individuals in modern societies, as it underpins claims to belonging and entitlement to country-specific rights that are used to secure key allocative and authoritative resources. Acquisition of citizenship has traditionally been analyzed in relation to social integration, including feeling a sense of belonging, having social networks and being involved politically in the country of residence (Abu El-Haj & Bonet, 2011; Erdal et al., 2018; Goodman & Wright, 2015; Hainmueller et al., 2017; Pont, 2023; Simonsen, 2017). In these studies, citizenship and naturalization tend to be independent variables that affect subsequent social integration by enhancing a sense of belonging, potential social networks, as well as economic and political participation of immigrant minorities. However, a different strand of literature has explained intentions to naturalize as a dependent variable, using instrumental factors such as security of status, costs of naturalization proceedings, or how policies in place affect whether naturalization can be realized (Dronkers & Vink, 2012; Ellermann, 2020). When deciding whether to apply for citizenship, immigrants also look to others who have taken the path to naturalization with whom they share social, economic, educational or cultural similarities (Poole and Soehl, 2023). By the same token, immigrants who do not perceive themselves as ‘belonging’ – i.e. being a part of the country where they reside – may feel discouraged from applying for citizenship (Donnalaja & McAvay, 2022). Indeed, interest in naturalization has been linked to the importance that the host population attach to citizenship as a mark of national membership (Simonsen, 2017) and to the perceived value and meaning that individuals and their communities attribute to it (Barbiano di Belgiojoso & Ortensi, 2022). Instrumental factors, such as security of status or visa-free travel, are highlighted as increasing naturalization intentions (Birkvad, 2019).

Here, we argue that relying solely on the explanatory value of instrumental factors and material advantages leads to a partial understanding of naturalization intentions. To complement this perspective, we explore the role of different dimensions of belonging and how they are related to intentions to naturalize. In particular, we look at the following dimensions:

- (i) *Spatial political focus* (stated interest in the politics of host country vs. country of origin);
- (ii) *Feelings of belonging* (emotional attachment to host country vs. country of origin);
- (iii) *Social networks* (having more ‘good friends’ in host country vs. country of origin).

These three soft factors, which show, contrary to instrumental/material factors, an interest in culture, tradition and political values of the country, less tangible/material advantages, are positively associated with the intention to apply for citizenship. Analyzing representative data from the 2022 Migration-Mobility Survey in Switzerland, we capture intentions to naturalize that influence the behavior of immigrants in preparation for actual naturalization, such as their investment in social connections and skills development in the country of residence (Carling & Pettersen, 2014; Haas & Fokkema, 2011). This data identifies different dimensions of belonging with a sample of recently arrived immigrants. It demonstrates that soft factors play an important role in naturalization decisions beyond instrumental reasons that can be derived from citizenship and country of origin. In each case, we operationalize belonging in a way that considers attachment

and engagement in both country of destination and of origin. By emphasizing the role of soft factors, we complement studies that suggest immigrants may apply for citizenship without having an emotional attachment to their country of residence (Dronkers & Vink, 2012; Ellermann, 2020). We also question the widespread assumption – in politics and research alike – that citizenship is the ultimate goal of most immigrants solely due to instrumental factors and material advantages.

## 2 Theory: Why People Seek Naturalization

A paradox has emerged with respect to citizenship: how can it be both ‘back with a vengeance’ (Shachar, 2009: 2) and in ‘irreversible decline’ (Spiro, 2008: 30, 162)? Some authors argue that this apparent paradox in Western countries, being a matter of perspective (individual vs. structural), reflects the diminishing *subjective* value of national citizenship as its *objective* value increases (Joppke, 2010). According to this strand of the literature, instrumentalism and dissociation of citizenship from nationhood are significant features in ‘the inevitable lightening of citizenship.’ It is therefore possible to define citizenship on the basis of overlapping legal frameworks, free from citizenship identity. The link between citizenship and belonging is further weakened as contemporary societies become increasingly diverse (Koopmans et al., 2005) and migrants are given the opportunity to equally identify with and participate in the country of origin and destination due to the emergence of transnational communities and dual-citizenship rights (Bauböck, 2010). Citizenship becomes largely an individual project, where people seize instrumental opportunities that the state poses to obtaining citizenship – such as the selling of citizenship, the expanding provisions of external citizenship, and a rapidly evolving ‘citizenship without identity,’ such as the European Union citizenship (Joppke, 2019). Citizenship is a strategic device that enables immigrants to strengthen their legal status within a host country (Dimitriadis, 2018; Finotelli et al., 2018) and to further their access to better economic opportunities and welfare benefits (Della Puppa & King, 2019).

While we do not contest that instrumental factors inform the decision to acquire citizenship, soft factors, neglected or simply discarded by the instrumentalist ontology of citizenship, also play an important role in naturalization intentions. Citizenship can be more than a status or a set of rights: it is also an identity and a set of norms and competencies for social and political participation and integration (Dalton, 2013; Goodman, 2023). Therefore, decisions on citizenship acquisition are often not restricted to instrumental factors. Citizenship can be regarded as a symbol of belonging and a means to commit to the host country’s cultural values, an expression of ‘feeling at home’, and identifying with the nationals of the host country (Bloemraad & Sheares, 2017).

A feeling of belonging to the state is produced and reproduced through historical narratives, religion, and language. Studies on citizenship have found feelings of belonging to be closely related to security and stability (Erdal et al., 2018; Nordberg, 2006). This link between citizenship and secure belonging seems pertinent when considering the usage of ‘citizenship’ in the West from the nineteenth century onwards. With the emergence and consolidation of the modern nation state, “no longer were citizenship, patriotism, and nationhood separate ideas” (Heater, 1999: 97). In other words, the meaning of citizenship has expanded far beyond obligations and rights, to also encompass group belonging. Nation-states have instrumentalized citizenship to regulate access to rights and inclusion in ‘national communities’ (Castles, 2005; Soysal, 2000, 2001). The rules of

membership to the state and national community serve as an “instrument and objective of social closure” (Brubaker, 1992: 31), establishing and preserving social boundaries (Goodman, 2023). These boundaries are concurrently ‘hard’ (citizenship as a legal status within a state) and ‘soft’ (citizenship as belonging to a national community): this “hard-on-the-outside, soft-on-the-inside model ... is the prevailing and commonsense normative account” (Bosniak, 2006: 119).

Existing studies that investigate the link between immigrants’ attachment (i.e., belonging) to imagined national communities and citizenship demonstrate that naturalization intentions are connected with an increased feeling of belonging in countries where citizenship is a marker of national membership (Simonsen, 2017). Studies also show that citizenship policy does not seem to affect the association between citizenship and belonging (Goodman & Wright, 2015; Simonsen, 2017). Goodman & Wright (2015), in particular, show that tighter citizenship laws do not foster trust or minimize discrimination perceptions. Existing literature predominantly focuses on how citizenship affects feelings of belonging and attachment to the country of residence, demonstrating the important role of the state in this process and the preponderance of instrumental factors transpiring from individual cost-benefit considerations (Barbiano di Belgiojoso & Ortensi, 2022).

In this paper, we expand on this perspective to explore to what extent feelings of belonging affect the desire to become citizens in the first place. Put differently, we shift the period under consideration forward and examine different dimensions of belonging. We investigate how spatial political focus, feelings of belonging, and friendship networks affect the intention to apply for citizenship. The role of such soft factors in the intentions to naturalize remains poorly understood. Indeed, existing literature either attributes a minor role to soft factors in naturalization intentions (Hochman, 2011; Leibold, 2007; Steiner, 2019) or provides contradictory results. For instance, some authors detect a positive correlation between homeownership – taken as an indicator of being invested in or feeling attached to the country of residence (Diehl & Blohm, 2003; Portes & Curtis, 1987) – and naturalization intentions. By contrast, Massey and Akresh (2006) demonstrate that, in the United States, naturalization intentions are less likely to be held by those with high incomes and property ownership. Contrary to studies by Portes and Curtis (1987) and Yang (1994), education does not seem to be a distinguishing factor, however that being married reduces the propensity to naturalize, not an irrelevant factor as others have suggested (Massey & Akresh, 2006). Friendship networks as a subset of a broader social network in host countries could not only explain the desire to naturalize but could also facilitate the process. They not only provide a sense of inclusion and security (Abascal, 2017; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2006) which motivates naturalization decisions, but they also facilitate information (Liu, 2013; Johnson et al., 1999; Abascal, 2017) and access to resources (Kim, 2001).

There is, however, a broader agreement on the importance of legal provisions and administrative practices (Wanner & Steiner, 2012), social-cultural integration (Mehrländer et al., 1996; Sauer & Goldberg, 2001), and emotional identification with the country of residence (Anil, 2007; Midtbøen et al., 2020), usually perceived as the manifestation of a desire to stay long-term, establish roots and create a legacy within the country (Poole & Soehl, 2023). Such commitment to integration may also raise the cost of return migration, thus potentially reinforcing the interest in naturalization (Aptekar, 2016; Ersanilli & Koopmans, 2011; Just & Anderson, 2012; Street, 2014). Political factors of engagement and focus have also been associated with the desire to naturalize: either on account of subjective feelings regarding the political system (Pantoja & Gershon, 2006), the centrality taken by



the political situation in the country of origin for decisions to migrate (Aguirre & Saenz, 2002; Portes & Mozo, 1985), or naturalization as a means to become more politically engaged in the country of residence (Pachon & DeSipio, 2019). Despite significant studies looking at the impact of citizenship on political integration (Hainmueller et al., 2015; Gathmann & Garbers 2023), less is known about interest in politics prior to naturalization. Such an interest matters because it implies subscribing to a democratic political belief system, further signaling an identity-development process and its outcomes (Rebenstorf, 2004). Therefore, it remains necessary to broaden our practical and contextual understanding of how the interest of non-citizens in the politics of the country of residence influences their desire to naturalize. Political interest differs from engagement or participation in the sense that it is more motivational than active, although it is generally perceived as a ‘powerful predictor of political behaviors’ (Prior 2018; Alkoç 2023), and hence an antecedent to any political activity. Drawing upon the notion of political interest, we define spatial political focus as an individual’s general interest in seeking information on politics, thus becoming emotionally invested and intellectually involved in political life within a specific national context (here distinguishing between country of residence and country of origin).

In sum, the literature tends to emphasize that obtaining citizenship in the country of residence is necessary or desirable mostly because of instrumental factors and material advantages, with other considerations primarily gaining attention either as grounds for social-cultural integration or upon citizenship acquisition. A considerable gap persists regarding the impact of soft factors on the intent to naturalize. We, therefore, expect that questions of spatial political focus (CH vs. Country of origin), feeling of belonging (CH vs. Country of origin), and friendship networks (Friends in CH or in another country) are associated with immigrants’ intention to apply for citizenship in their countries of residence, in this case, Switzerland (CH). Hence, we propose three interrelated hypotheses:

H1: The more the spatial political focus of an individual is on Switzerland, rather than in the country of origin, the higher the likelihood they intend to apply for naturalization.

H2: The stronger an individual’s feeling of belonging to Switzerland is, rather than in the country of origin, the higher the likelihood they intend to apply for naturalization.

H3: The stronger the friendship network of an individual is in Switzerland, rather than in another country, the higher the likelihood they intend to apply for naturalization.

### **3 Data and Methods**

#### **3.1 Context**

Switzerland offers two official pathways towards naturalization: ordinary naturalization and simplified naturalization. Ordinary naturalization is available to foreigners who have lived in Switzerland for at least 10 years, three of those years being within the five years preceding their citizenship application (State Secretariat for Migration, 2021). Applicants must also hold a permanent residence permit (C permit). Notably, the time spent in Switzerland between the ages of

8 and 18 is counted double, although a minimum total residency of six years is required. Furthermore, each canton and municipality mandate a residency period ranging from two to five years, typically within the years leading up to the application (State Secretariat for Migration, 2021). Simplified naturalization, on the other hand, applies not only to foreigners married to a Swiss, but also to children of naturalized Swiss citizens, third-generation foreign nationals, and stateless persons. A key requirement for all these categories of persons is that the applicant must have lived in Switzerland for at least five years (State Secretariat for Migration, 2021). This relatively stringent residency requirement implies that foreigners who aim to naturalize are likely those who already feel a strong sense of belonging and have established social networks within the country or are willing to build such connections actively. Despite these limitations, many migrants in Switzerland do express an interest in naturalization. In fact, almost 40,000 foreigners acquire Swiss citizenship every year through the naturalization procedure (Pont, 2023). It is therefore important to understand the extent to which their intentions to naturalize are influenced by soft factors.

### 3.2 Outcome

The outcome variable captures whether immigrants have the intention of naturalizing. The question asks, “Do you intend to apply for Swiss nationality in the future?”: we coded “Yes, certainly”, “Yes, probably” as 1, with the remainder coded as 0 (do not know, no answer, “No, probably not” and “No, certainly not”). Individuals who have already obtained Swiss citizenship are excluded from the sample.

### 3.3 Predictors

For the three hypotheses, we use three different predictors that capture different dimensions of belonging. They are united in that they measure relative concepts: positive values indicate an orientation towards Switzerland, while negative values indicate an orientation towards the country of origin (or any other country for the third hypothesis). If the values are close to zero, there is either no orientation or an indifferent/neutral one; higher values indicate a stronger sense of belonging to Switzerland and less orientation towards the country of origin, whereas low values indicate less sense of belonging to Switzerland and more sense of belonging to the country of origin. An illustration of the logic of the three main predictors can be found in Figure 1.

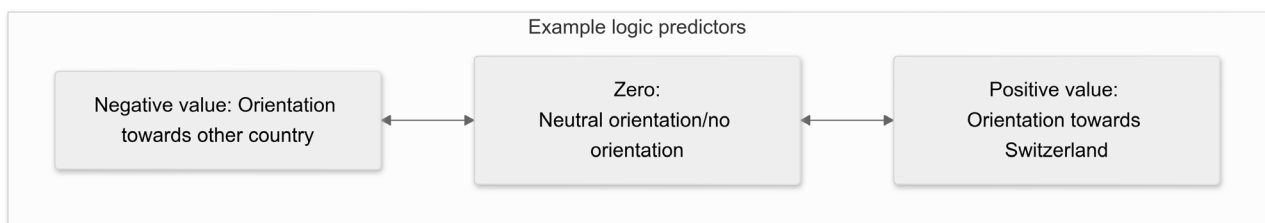


Figure 1. Construction of the predictors

The spatial political focus (H1) of immigrants is determined based on an index built with four variables, capturing focus towards news/current events and interest in politics (each in Switzerland, or the country of origin).<sup>1</sup> Next, to capture the general feeling of belonging (H2), we created a scale from six variables that capture various aspects of belonging and attachment.<sup>2</sup> Higher values measure a stronger attachment to Switzerland (as opposed to negative values, indicating orientation towards the country of origin). Friendship networks of immigrants (H3) are measured with a single variable: having more good friends in Switzerland or in another country (wording: “Where do your very good friends live”).<sup>3</sup> Again, positive values mean a stronger friendship network in Switzerland than in other countries.<sup>4</sup> Here, we thus ask if the good friends, both Swiss and non-Swiss citizens, live in Switzerland. Like for the political focus, the rationale behind our interest in friendship networks lies in their controllable nature: it is possible to form new friendships within a new context. Our three main predictors were then scaled to make the interpretation easier. We also control for age, gender, and number of years since arriving in Switzerland. We further control for socio-economics variables (see Appendix 1).

### 3.4 Data

The data used in the analysis come from the Swiss Migration-Mobility Survey (MMS), a multilingual large-scale register-based survey (Wanner et al., 2023). The survey was carried out at the end of 2022 and includes N=7,206 adult immigrants who have arrived in Switzerland after 2006. We are then looking at recently arrived immigrants (not including asylum seekers or temporarily admitted persons). The mean duration of stay is 7.8 years, and over 151 countries of origin are included. Participation was possible online or by telephone. We use a subset of N=5,510 immigrants who have not obtained Swiss nationality and do not have missing values in the chosen variables to have a consistent population across models.

### 3.5 Analytical Strategy

As already discussed in the theoretical section, instrumental factors were already isolated as central predictors for the intention to naturalize. Therefore, we added variables indicating the region of

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1 Question wording: “On a scale from 0 ‘not at all’ to 7 ‘to a very high extent’, to what extent are you interested in news and current events in [Switzerland/your country of origin]”; “How interested would you say you are in politics in [Switzerland/your country of origin]”. The variables on the country of origin were reversed, and then added to the variables on Switzerland to determine the orientation. For instance, a person with interest in Swiss politics but no interest in politics in the country of origin would score +7. The two variables correlate highly, and we combined the standardised versions into a single variable (Cronbach alpha = 0.79).

2 Question wording: “To what extent do you have a feeling of attachment to Switzerland”, “To what extent do you have a feeling of attachment to your country of origin”, “To what extent do you agree with the following statements? Globally, I feel myself belonging to the Swiss society”, “I feel myself totally accepted by the society in Switzerland”, “On a scale from 0 ‘not problematic at all’ to 7 ‘very problematic’, how problematic are the following aspects of your life in Switzerland?: Feeling homesick”, “Adapting oneself to the Swiss way of life”. Cronbach alpha = 0.72. Two questions on whether Covid-19 affected contact with the local population or the ability to maintain relationships with family abroad do not fit this scale (additional exploration).

3 Answers ranged from “All your good friends live in Switzerland” to “All your good friends live abroad” with 5 items in total, “Approximately the same number of friends live in Switzerland” being the middle. We reversed the scale so that higher values capture a stronger social network in Switzerland.

4 We attempted to create a scale based on different variables that may capture social networks in Switzerland, but failed to find an adequate solution. Instead, we use a separate variable as robustness check (“Among the following statements, which best describes your situation concerning your friends here in Switzerland” – “Most of my friends are from my country of origin” ... “Most of my friends are Swiss”; see Appendix 2).

origin, serving as a proxy for the instrumental/hard factors.<sup>5</sup> While our three main variables capture soft factors affecting naturalization intentions, the regions of origin capture policy-oriented and instrumental incentives in a summary, approximative, manner: an EU citizen has, given the smaller legal disadvantages of not being naturalized, less incentive than a third-country national to apply. We divided this variable in five categories: Bordering countries, EU/EFTA, OECD, Rest of Europe, Third countries. We argue that it is essential to distinguish between migrant from border countries and those from EU/EFTA nations in the context of Switzerland. Although both groups share identical rights and restrictions within Swiss territory, border country residents encounter a significantly different experience due to linguistic commonalities and geographical proximity to their countries of origin. This factor may influence our primary dependent variables, as they are inherently related to the connection with the country of origin (or other relevant nations) which is harder to break for migrant from bordering countries.

While we measure the soft factors (green in Figure 2) directly, we use origin (red in Figure 2) as a proxy for the instrumental factors, given that the legal regime largely depends on the country of origin. Figure 2 shows the causal diagram. Methodologically, we run logistic regressions and present predicted probabilities for scenarios of interest by varying the relevant predictors (belonging, and region of origin).

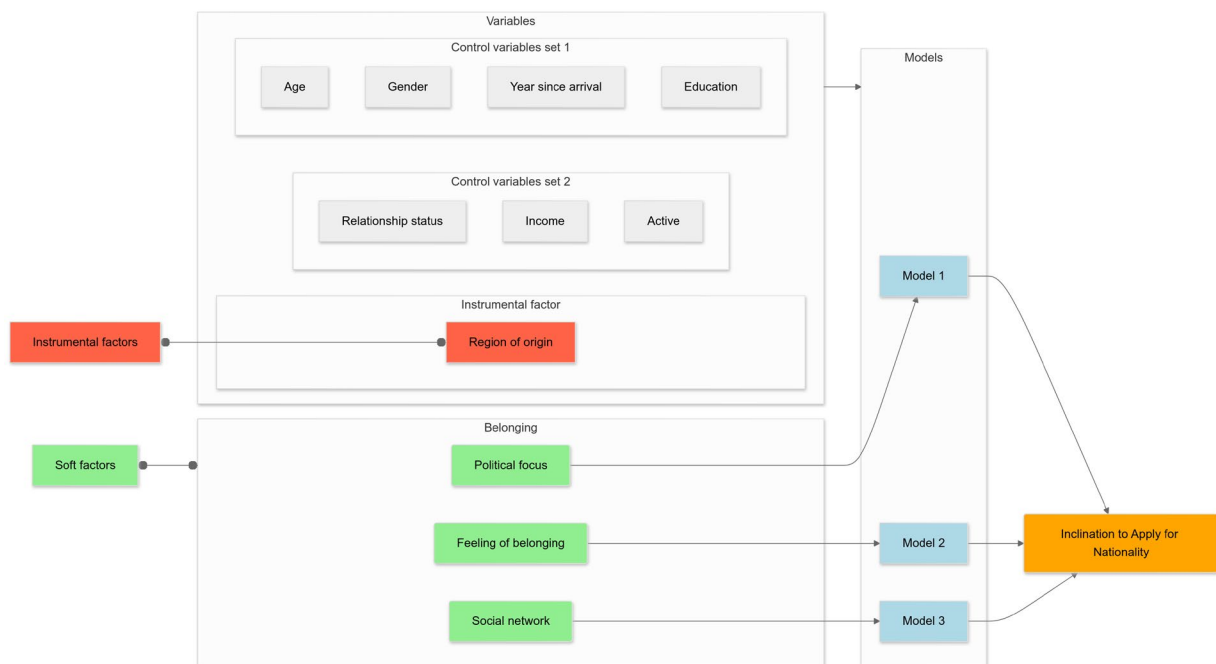


Figure 2: Causal diagram for the models, linking belonging to intentions to apply for nationality

<sup>5</sup> Coding decisions: the variable representing age was treated as a continuous measure. Similarly, the variable denoting sex was maintained in its original categorical format, with the designations “1” for male (reference category) and “2” for female. This categorisation facilitates the interpretation of regression coefficients as indicative of the relative change associated with being female compared to male. Additionally, the variable capturing the number of years since last arrival was also treated as a continuous variable. The variable pertaining to the country of origin was derived from the response to the query, “Which country do you consider to be your country of origin?”. Subsequently, this variable was stratified into five distinct regional categories, namely: “Bordering countries”, “EU/EFTA”, “OECD”, “Rest of Europe”, and “Third countries” to facilitate a more nuanced analysis of geographical influences. Countries that belong to more than one of these categories have been left in the first category. The decision to discriminate between the bordering countries and the other EU/EFTA countries is based on the reflection that people from bordering countries mostly already speak a national language of Switzerland, and also due to the lower spatial distance.

## 4 Results

In Figure 3, we show the bivariate association between the three variables capturing our independent variables and the intention to apply for citizenship. As we can see, for each of the variables, there is a positive association. For all three dimensions of belonging, individuals intending to apply – highlighted in green – score on average higher than their counterparts who do not intend to do so. However, descriptively speaking, the relation appears to be weak. For instance, individuals with a political focus on Switzerland, rather than their country of origin, are more likely to state that they have the intention to apply for citizenship (top graph).

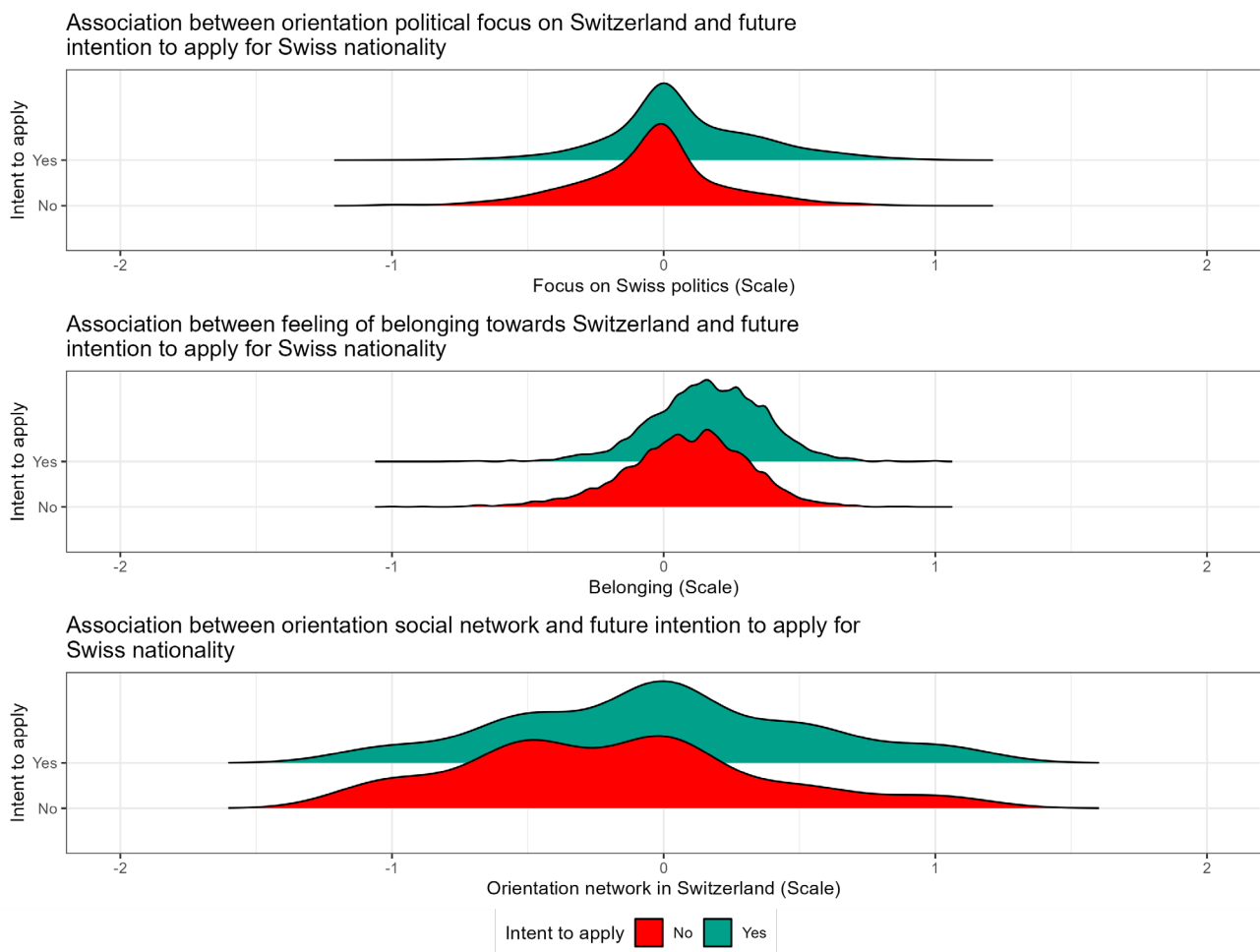


Figure 3: Bivariate association between independent variables and the intention to apply for Swiss nationality, Switzerland, MMS 2022

In a similar vein, for the other two variables, we also see that those who want to apply (in green) indicate on average higher values, hence the area of the distributions in the figure tends to be pushed towards the right. For all our three main predictors, as the values increase, the likelihood of intending to apply for a permit also tends to rise.

Leaving the descriptive statistics, we run our logistic regression models. In Figure 4, we show the odds ratio of the associations between the three predictors in a multivariate regression model that accounts inter alia for groups of countries of origin to capture instrumental incentives to apply for



citizenship (for the table and the other estimates, see Appendix 1). As in the previous figure, we find the positive association predicted by the theoretical argument for all three models, suggesting that the associations in Figure 4 can also be expected to be found in the full population of interest. An individual with an overall stronger sense of belonging towards Switzerland, as opposed to their country of origin, is more inclined to express an intention to apply for citizenship.

## Main predictors

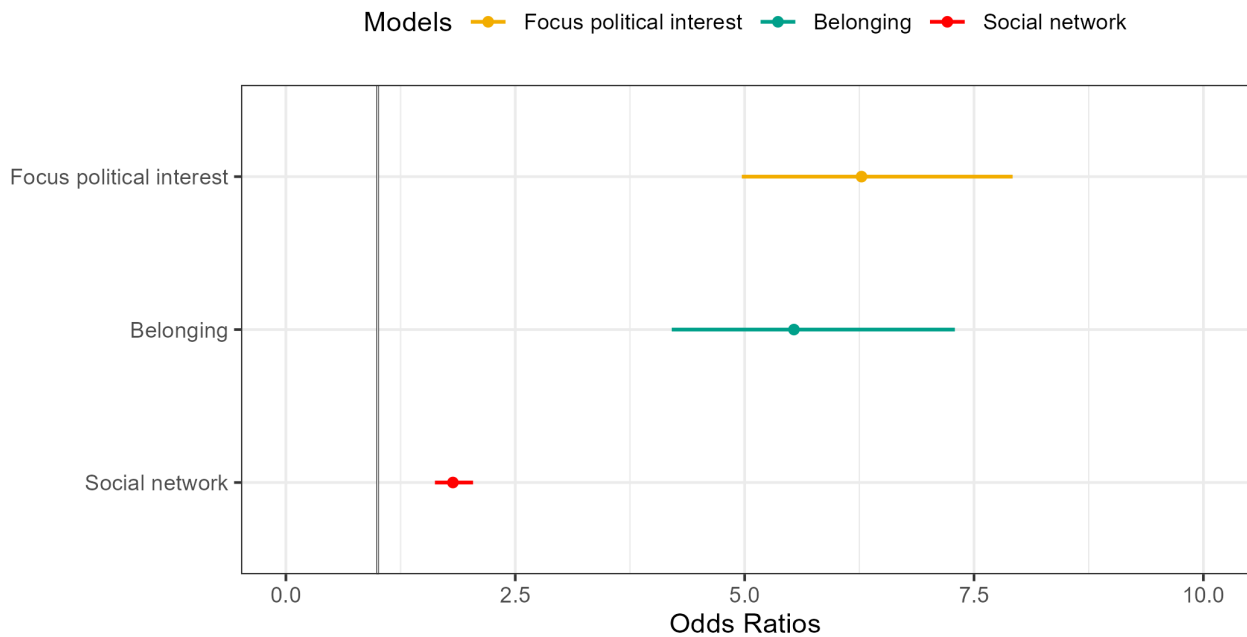


Figure 4: Regression model predicting the intention to apply for Swiss citizenship, odds ratios independent variables, Switzerland, MMS 2022.

Notes: Outcome variable: intention to apply for citizenship; logistic regression model,  $N=6,540$ . Full regression table in Appendix 1. CI: 95%

A substantial difference in the likelihood of applying for citizenship between two otherwise equivalent immigrants can be observed when considering their political focus. To understand these odds ratios, recall that the variables were scaled between -1 and 1. The coefficients in the figure correspond to an increase of one unit on this scale. We can see that a greater political focus towards Switzerland is associated with approximately a five-and-a-half-fold increase (OR: 6.3) in the odds of intending to apply for citizenship: The higher the orientation of the political focus towards Switzerland, the more likely to apply. Similarly, if we compare two otherwise equivalent immigrants who differ in their sense of belonging by 1 unit, the odds of wanting to apply for citizenship of the one with a higher sense of belonging toward Switzerland rather than towards the country of origin are approximately fourfold (OR: 5.5). The higher the sense of belonging, the more likely to apply. The same substantive pattern can be found in friendship networks. Two otherwise equivalent immigrants differing by one unit in the prevalence of ‘very good’ friends they have in Switzerland as opposed to their country of origin exhibit a 1.8-fold increase (OR: 1.8) in the odds of intending to apply for citizenship.

For a better understanding of these relationships, we have calculated predicted probabilities, faceted into the region of origin. The probabilities vary depending on the region of origin, so we present results accordingly. We present the distribution of predicted probabilities of wanting to apply for citizenship by computing several scenarios. More precisely, we used the above-presented models and predicted the probability of the intention to apply for three different regions of origin: bordering countries, EU/EFTA, and third countries<sup>6</sup> for the other categories, see the regression Table 1 in Appendix 1). We kept the other control factors at their mode or mean.<sup>7</sup> For the variables of interest (political focus, belonging, friendships), we specified three levels to predict: the mean, and the mean +/- one standard-deviation. The plots allow us to examine how a one standard-deviation difference of the independent variable affects the estimated probability of having an intention to apply for citizenship. Figure 4 depicts the influence of political focus on the likelihood of an individual's inclination to acquire nationality. The predicted probabilities are represented in red (for scenarios with political focus = mean - SD), green (for scenarios with political focus = mean), and yellow (for scenarios with political focus = mean + SD). The differences between the probabilities (hence to colors) within one facet represent the impact of the strength of belonging, while the differences of one color between facets represent the effect of the region of origin, hence the instrumental incentive.

A heightened interest in Swiss politics is associated with a larger probability of opting for naturalization. For instance, an individual with a neutral political focus from a third country exhibits a baseline probability of 70% for interest in naturalization, assuming all other variables are held constant. However, an increase in orientation of political focus towards Switzerland equivalent of one standard deviation corresponded to a probability of 86%, representing a substantial increase of 16 percentage points: The spatial political focus is a substantial driver of the intention to apply. Similar patterns can also be found for the other regions of origin, the differences in the predicted probabilities between the facets, however, indicate the importance of instrumental factors, in the sense of policy framework, beyond the soft factor of the spatial orientation of the political focus. The region of origin is a significant and theoretically important determinant of naturalization intentions, too. With political focus at the mean, the predicted probability of the outcome is 52% when coming from a bordering country, 48% for EU/EFTA countries, and 70% for countries outside the EU/EFTA.

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<sup>6</sup> These origins present enough variability in the model and are of interest because they represent a gradient of incentive to apply for nationality. Indeed, the bordering countries expose the least incentive whereas the third countries have more incentive, the EU/EFTA countries being in the middle.

<sup>7</sup> Here are specific values for the control variables: Sex (Female), Age (42), time since the last arrival in year (6.8).

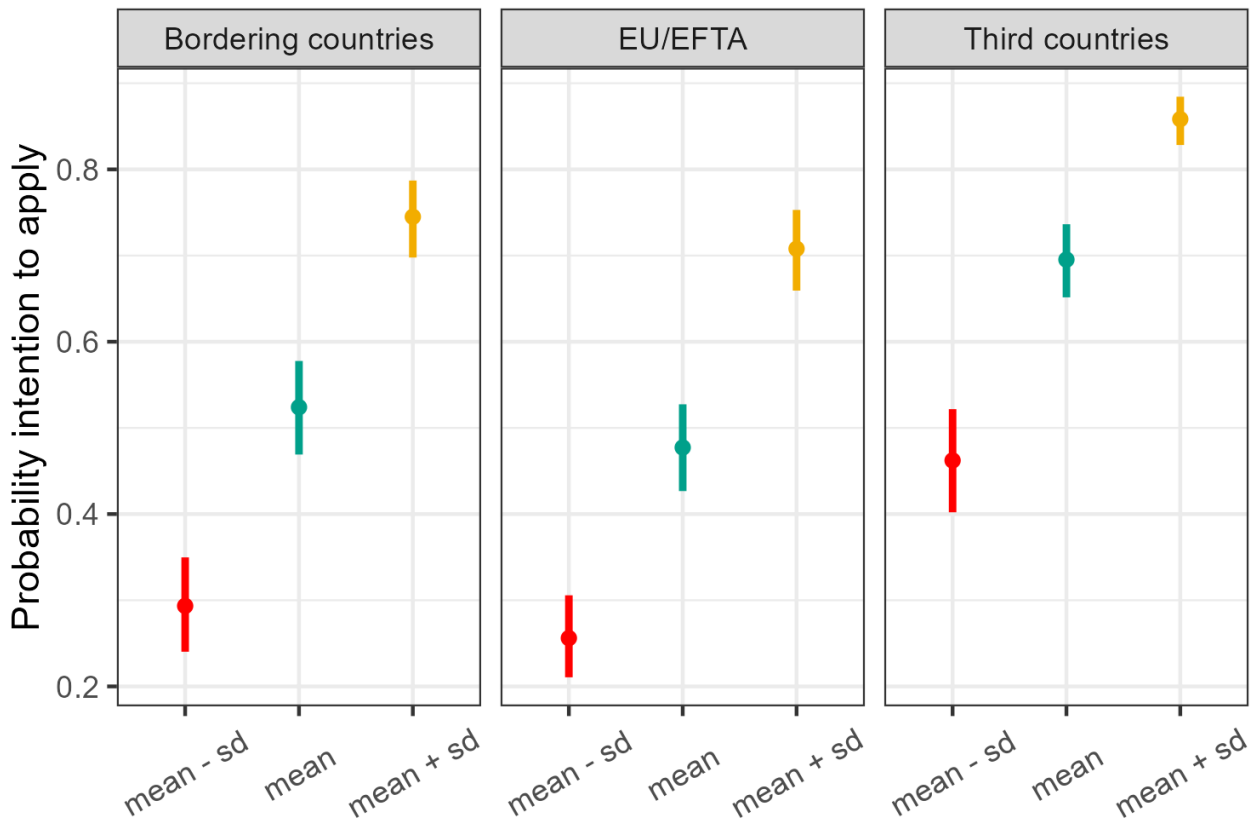


Figure 5: Predicted probability of the intention to apply for Swiss nationality, political focus model, Switzerland, MMS 2022 (CI: 95%)

Figure 6 replicates the analytic approach of Figure 5, this time focusing on the generic belonging variable. Within this framework, being a member of a third country and having an average feeling of belonging equals a 72% probability of interest in naturalization. A one-standard-deviation decrease in the belonging dimension reduces this likelihood by 7 percentage points. A one-standard-deviation increase in the belonging dimension increases this probability by 8 percentage points. We note that for all levels of belonging used, the chances are highest for third-country nationals, indicating again how, besides the ‘soft’ aspect of belonging, instrumental factors are a driver, too. With the variable of the orientation of belonging at the mean, the predicted probability is 58% when coming from a bordering country, 52% for EU/EFTA countries, and 72% for third countries.

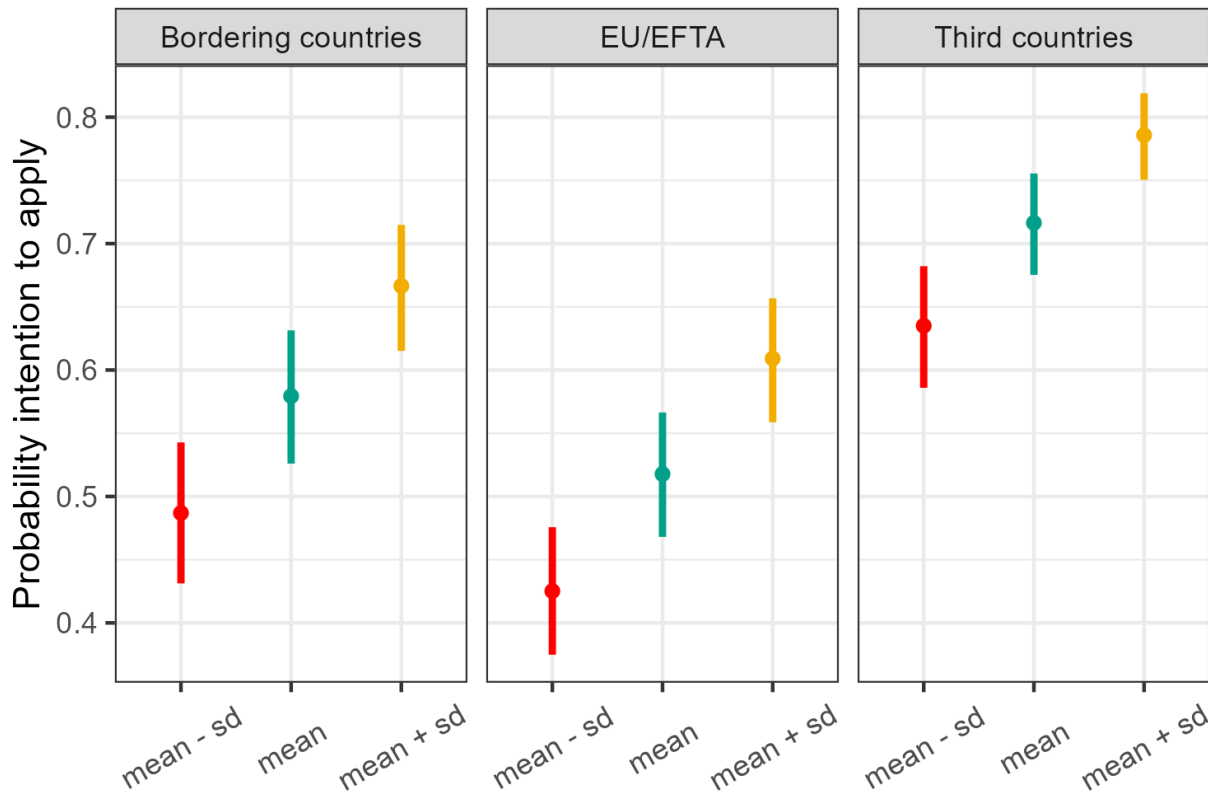


Figure 6: Predicted probability of the intention to apply for Swiss nationality, belonging model, Switzerland, MMS 2022 (CI: 95%)

Figure 7 shows comparable trends for friendship networks. For individuals from third countries, the baseline predicted probability of intending to naturalize at the mean of the friendship scale stands at 73%. An elevation by one standard deviation above the mean in this context reduces the predicted probability by 6 percentage points. With the variable of the orientation of the social network at the mean, the predicted probability is 58% for a bordering country, 53% when coming from the EU/EFTA, and 73% when coming from a third country. Clearly, having a stronger social network of friends in Switzerland, compared to having a social network of friends in another country, increases the probability of intending to apply for naturalization.

It is crucial to emphasize that the addition of the variable indicating that most friends are Swiss did not alter the significance and strength of the friendship network variable in Switzerland (see appendix 2). This implies that the spatial concentration of a friendship network (in Switzerland or abroad) plays a role in the willingness to obtain Swiss citizenship which is independent from the composition of this network in Switzerland (majority Swiss or non-Swiss). These results seem to contrast with the assimilation perspective, which only considers the importance of networks linked to the host population in shaping the naturalization desire. However, this does not imply that the composition of the network plays no role, as having more Swiss friends is positively correlated with the willingness to naturalize. Yet, the fact that our results show that having more friends in Switzerland has a more significant impact on the willingness to naturalize compared to the

composition of the network merits further exploration in future research. This finding carries important theoretical implications and requires detailed examination.<sup>8</sup>

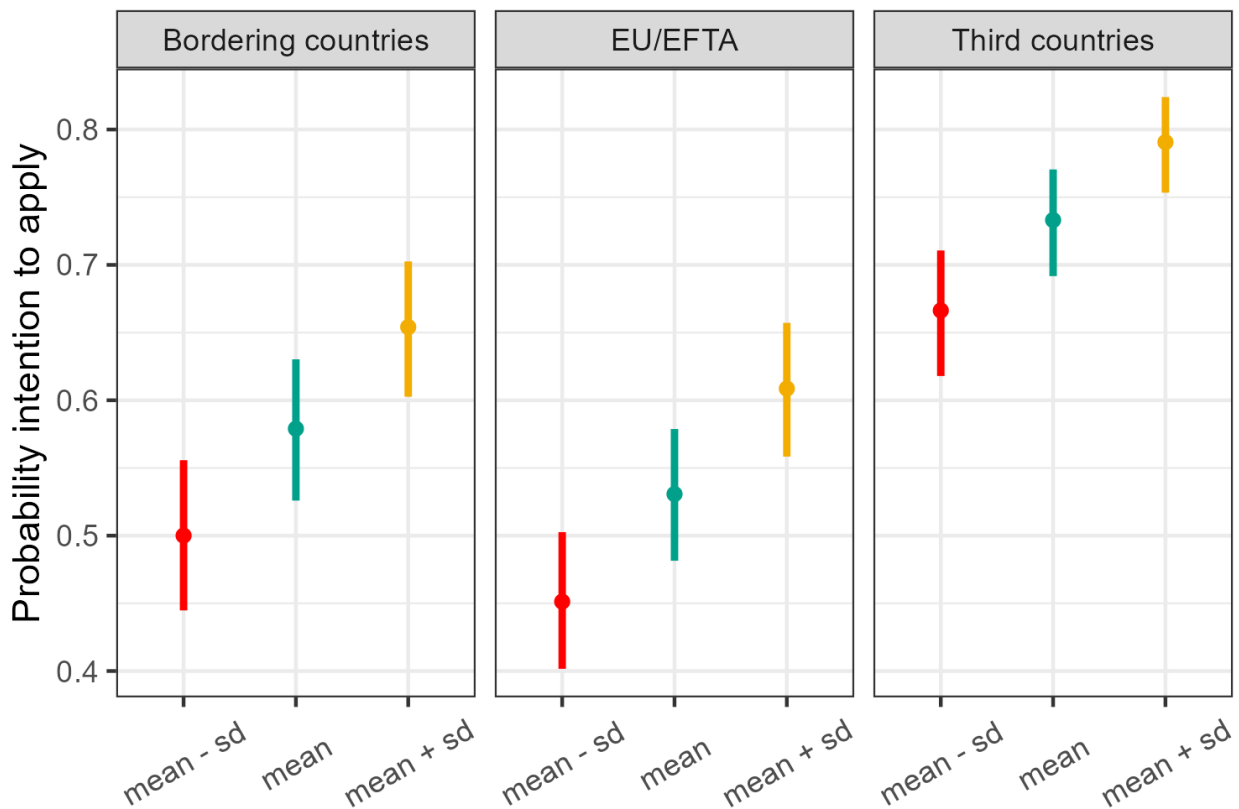


Figure 7: Regression model predicting the intention to apply for Swiss nationality, friendship network model, Switzerland, MMS 2022 (CI: 95%)

Overall, the above scenarios indicate how higher values in the three variables are associated with greater intention to apply for citizenship: The more the political focus, sense of belonging and friendship network are oriented towards Switzerland, the higher the probability that an individual intends to apply for naturalization. These models account for the region of origin, hence instrumental incentives to apply for citizenship, for instance to ensure stable residence or access to visa-free travel. In all three models, at all levels of the variables capturing the orientations of belonging, the third-country nationals have the highest probability of intending to apply: An otherwise identical person from a bordering country is less likely to intend to apply.

With that, the models show that soft (non-instrumental) reasons – i.e. belonging, political focus and social networks – predict the intention to apply for citizenship. The regions of origin also demonstrate that the model works as expected for instrumental aspects. For instance, immigrants from EU/EFTA countries – who have comparatively less to gain from the acquisition of Swiss citizenship – are less likely to state that they intend to naturalize than those from non-European countries.

<sup>8</sup> To ensure the robustness of said results, we finally also double-checked said hypothesis. Instead of the question where the friend's life, we measured it with the question if the friends are Swiss (Figure 8). Importantly, no relevant differences were found.



Overall, the results are in line with our three hypotheses: A stronger political focus on Switzerland, a stronger feeling of belonging in Switzerland rather than in the country of origin as well as a larger number of very good friends in Switzerland than in the country of origin are associated with a higher chance of intending to apply for citizenship. Put differently, a stronger sense of political, individual, and social belonging typically means more inclination to apply for citizenship. Notably, the overall probability of application intent is a function of both soft and instrumental factors.

## 5 Discussion and Conclusion

Adding to the existing literature on citizenship and naturalization, our paper examines to what extent soft factors and more specifically questions of spatial political focus, belonging, and friendship networks are associated with immigrants' intention to apply for citizenship in Switzerland. We demonstrate how these soft factors of political, individual, and social belonging are associated with a higher probability of intent to naturalize. Our data analysis reports that an immigrant's focus on Swiss politics and a strong friendship network in Switzerland are predicted to have a higher probability of intending to apply for citizenship. Results confirm the three hypotheses: (H1) The more the spatial political focus of an individual is on Switzerland, as opposed to country of origin, the higher the odds of intent to apply for naturalization; (H2) the greater the feeling of belonging to Switzerland, rather than to country of origin, the higher the odds of intent to apply for naturalization; (H3) the stronger the friendship network in Switzerland, than in another country, the higher the odds of intent to apply for naturalization. Our study is limited in the sense as we do not analyze instrumental factors directly. However, future research could delve deeper into the nexus between soft factors and instrumental factors, related to material advantages of citizenship such as security of status and visa-free travel.

This paper's aim is to highlight the importance of soft factors, often overlooked in citizenship studies. Some immigrants are influenced more by feelings of belonging than by material advantages granted in acquiring citizenship (Dronkers & Vink, 2012; Ellermann, 2020). It follows that citizenship is not necessarily the goal of all immigrants because of its practical advantages (hard/instrumental factors), and we should not assume a universal path to integration or focus exclusively on 'objective' instrumental factors. In other words, citizenship acquisition is not the only pathway to political and social cohesion. Naturalization may not be deemed the highest form of belonging: immigrants may seek integration and belonging without necessarily having the intention or seeing the need for naturalizing. However, we show that soft factors – spatial political focus, belonging, and social networks – play a role in the intent to naturalize. As a result, focusing solely on instrumental factors in measuring the intent to naturalize may only reveal a partial reality and produce integration policies that fail to provide incentives influencing political, emotional, and social attachment to the country of residence or corresponding behavior.

We do not challenge the importance of instrumental factors but complement the prevalent focus on instrumental factors with soft variables that allow us to suggest that the relationship between citizenship of the country of residence and belonging is more nuanced in the sense that soft (non-instrumental) factors also matter to naturalization intentions (or lack thereof). The link between hard and soft factors is a question that remains to be explored in further detail. As a proxy for the instrumental factors, we introduced the region of origin of the individuals, indicating how, while we

keep the rest constant, substantial parts of the variation in the willingness to naturalize can be explained by the origin. For instance, we can imagine that people from a bordering country may have more incentive to stay connected to their country of origin than other migrants because of the closeness. They might also find it easier to get connected to the country by often returning to it. Importantly, different legal frameworks apply, depending on the origin of the individuals, which of course also alter the incentive to naturalize. Such instrumental factors could be addressed more profoundly in a future research endeavor. In addition, future, more extensive studies are needed to test our results concerning the importance of network focus in Switzerland over the national composition of the network (mostly Swiss or not). Furthermore, future research could investigate the role of democracy in strengthening soft factors for naturalization such as spatial-political focus. This will clarify how much a host country's democratic nature influences the socio-political focus, particularly concerning migrants from non-democratic nations.

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## Appendix

### *Appendix 1: Logistic regression*

*Table 1: Regression model predicting the intention to apply for Swiss nationality, changes log odds, Switzerland, MMS 2022.*

	<b>Model 1 IV: Political focus</b>	<b>Model 2 IV: Feeling of belonging</b>	<b>Model 3 IV: Friendship network</b>
Political focus	1.84 *** (0.12)		
Feeling of belonging		1.71 *** (0.14)	
Friendship network			0.60 *** (0.06)
Female	-0.07 (0.06)	-0.10 (0.06)	-0.07 (0.06)
Age	0.03 *** (0.00)	0.02 *** (0.00)	0.02 *** (0.00)
Years in Switzerland	0.05 *** (0.01)	0.04 *** (0.01)	0.03 *** (0.01)
EU/EFTA	-0.19 * (0.08)	-0.25 ** (0.08)	-0.20 * (0.08)
OECD	0.24 * (0.09)	0.13 (0.09)	0.10 (0.09)
Rest of Europe	1.17 *** (0.14)	1.03 *** (0.14)	0.96 *** (0.14)
Third countries	0.73 *** (0.09)	0.61 *** (0.09)	0.69 *** (0.09)
Secondary education	0.04 (0.12)	0.18 (0.12)	0.19 (0.12)
Tertiary education	0.31 ** (0.12)	0.39 ** (0.12)	0.41 *** (0.12)
Separated, divorced or widowed	0.22 * (0.11)	0.29 ** (0.10)	0.19 (0.10)
Single	-0.18 * (0.08)	-0.16 * (0.07)	-0.23 ** (0.07)
Active	0.14 * (0.07)	0.17 ** (0.07)	0.15 * (0.07)
CHF 3,000 - 6,000	-0.16 (0.15)	-0.16 (0.15)	-0.15 (0.15)
CHF 6,000 - 9,000	-0.10 (0.16)	-0.06 (0.16)	-0.06 (0.16)
CHF 9,000 - 12,000	0.05 (0.16)	0.09 (0.16)	0.08 (0.16)
CHF 12,000 - 15,000	0.15	0.21	0.21

	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)
CHF 15000 >	0.24	0.35 *	0.32
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.16)
Constant	-50.56 ***	-45.15 ***	-46.04 ***
	(7.12)	(7.07)	(7.04)
AIC	6767.79	6875.32	6921.57
BIC	6893.47	7000.99	7047.25
Log Likelihood	-3364.90	-3418.66	-3441.79
Deviance	6729.79	6837.32	6883.57
Num. obs.	5510	5510	5510

### Control predictors

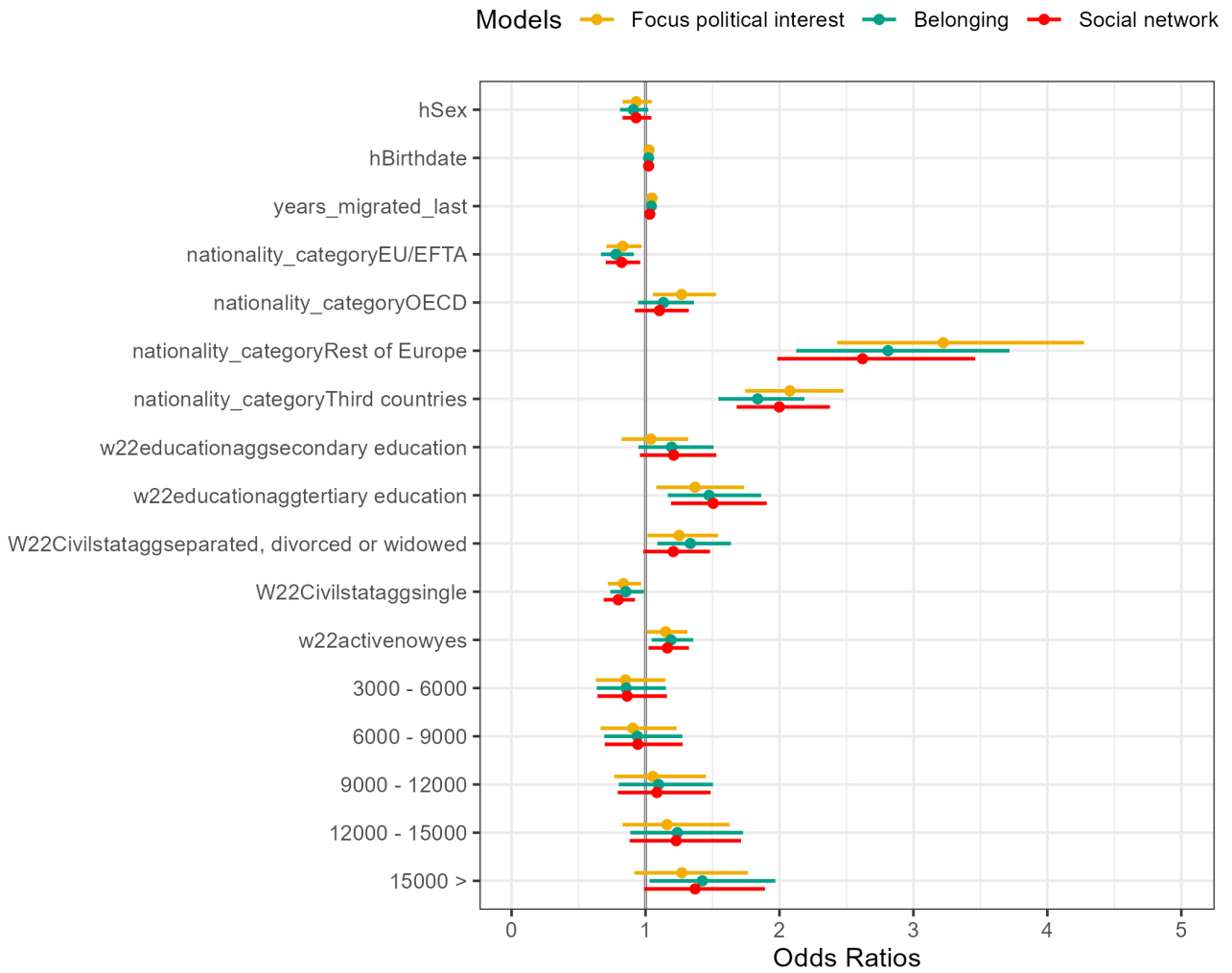
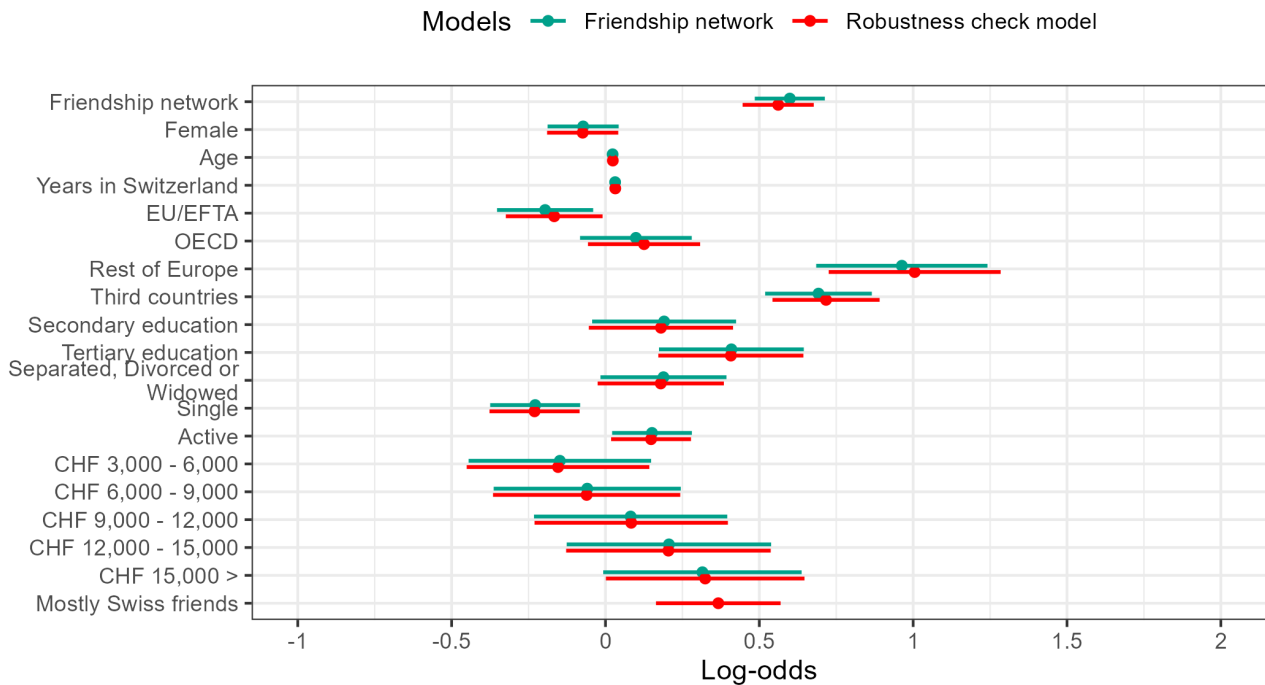


Figure 8: Regression model predicting the future intention to apply for Swiss nationality, odds ratios control variables, Switzerland, MMS 2022

*Appendix 2: Robustness check*

After integrating the variable indicating the quantity of Swiss friends within an individual’s social circle, a comprehensive analysis of the resultant coefficients reveals that there are no substantial alterations in their values, with the notable exception of the coefficient for the EU/EFTA region, which is not statistically significant in this alternative specification. Our main predictor in the model is only marginally different, changing from -0.69 to -0.58. This minimal fluctuation in coefficient value gives credibility to the robustness and reliability of our results, suggesting that the incorporation of this additional social variable does not significantly affect the overall findings of our study.

**Robustness check by adding the variable "most friends are Swiss"**



*Figure 9: Robustness check on the variable “Most friends live in Switzerland” by adding the variable “Most friends are Swiss”, Switzerland, MMS 2022*