Trade-offs of social democratic party strategies in a pluralized issue space: a conjoint analysis

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Abstract

In this article we provide a novel framework and empirical test of the strategic trade-offs of political parties' programmatic appeals. In a pluralized issue space, political positions have the potential to create severe strategic trade-offs for political parties, with gains among one group of voters off-set by losses among another. Existing research assumes that these trade-offs are especially prominent for Social Democratic parties, but does not directly test whether different sub-electorates indeed respond differently to particular programmatic appeals. To identify trade-offs for Social Democratic parties, we ran conjoint experiments in 6 Western European countries. Respondents could choose between programs that varied on a number of issue dimensions. We find that trade-offs among potential social democratic voters are less pronounced than expected in the literature, especially with regard to economic policies. Yet, our findings also establish two underrated challenges for Social Democrats: the existence of stronger trade-offs between age groups, and the potential longer-term consequences of salience trade-offs.

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1 Introduction

Political contestation in today's post-industrial societies revolves around different key issues than in previous decades. For one, cultural issues have become more salient and contribute to a second dimension of political contestation that complements the economic left-right dimension. In addition, both dimensions have changed due to the rise of newly salient issues such as climate change, migration, multiculturalism, childcare or housing costs. Together, these changes have deeply affected the ideological space of party competition.

These transformations, often exploited by political competitors, have also created new incentives and pressures for political parties to realign and reconfigure electoral alliances. These competitive pressures are particularly pronounced for the former catch-all parties of the mainstream left and mainstream right who had largely forged their electoral base around the economic (class) cleavage and thus around ideological positions opposing state interventionist programmatic positions to market liberalism (Kitschelt, 1994; Hooghe and Marks, 2018; Kriesi et al., 2008).

Scholars have analyzed party strategies in this challenging environment from several theoretical perspectives. Researchers emphasizing structural factors have amply documented group-based preference divides in the pluralizing issue space of post-industrial societies (Kriesi et al., 2008; Häusermann and Kriesi, 2015; Oesch and Rennwald, 2018). Issue-based accounts focus instead on the strategic decisions by new competitors to render new issues such as migration and the EU salient among voters (Hobolt and de Vries, 2020; Abou-Chadi, 2016).

What unites both perspectives is an emphasis on the strategic difficulties that previously dominant political parties face in supplying programmatic issue bundles that maximize their electoral appeal. The competitive landscape seems ripe with strategic trade-offs, with sub-electorates reacting in different ways to issue appeals, implying gains in popularity among one group being off-set by losses among another. Evidence in support of strategic trade-offs comes mainly from three strands of research: studies on the starkly diverging political preferences of key social groups based on, in particular, class, age and education (Caughey, O'Grady and

Warshaw, 2019; Beramendi et al., 2015; Oesch and Rennwald, 2018; Häusermann et al., 2021); studies on voter reactions to instances of programmatic moderation, especially on economic issues (Karreth, Polk and Allen, 2013; Schwander and Manow, 2017; Polk and Karreth, 2024); and, finally, contributions that emphasize the concomitance of programmatic policy reorientation of parties and massive voter realignment (Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015; Evans and Tilley, 2017; Rennwald, 2020)

In this article, we present and test a more direct framework for the analysis of parties' policy appeals and their electoral trade-offs. We argue that in order to gauge the strategic predicament of political parties in the multi-issue space of post-industrial societies, it is necessary to empirically identify *relevant* trade-offs in preferences for parties' programs. Even though there is ample evidence that political preferences diverge between important social groups (e.g. based on social class or education) in West European democracies, these diverging preferences do not necessarily translate into strategically relevant trade-offs for political parties. Specifically, there are two conditions that need to be taken into account: the existence of consideration sets among voters and the influence of issue salience.

First, a growing literature on consideration sets has demonstrated that voting should be understood as a multi-step process, in which voters first select a set of parties that they consider as potential choices and then – taking other factors into account – choose a party out of this consideration set (Oscarsson and Rosema, 2019). This understanding of electoral preference formation is very much in line with more structuralist accounts of segmented electorates emerging in the process of advanced cleavage formation (Bartolini and Mair, 1990; Bornschier, 2010; Bornschier et al., 2024). Consequently, we argue that programmatic competition will largely affect the electoral decisions of those voters who include the competing party in their consideration set, which is itself formed by more longstanding social and socio-psychological determinants. From a political party's perspective, this implies that not all voters should be regarded as belonging to the *electoral potential* of the party. In consequence, while there may be diametrical preference divides between potential voters and those who do not have a party in their consideration set, the trade-offs that are relevant for programmatic strategies are the

ones that occur among a party's potentials. In other words, if middle-class and working-class voters *on average* diverge in their policy preferences, this does not automatically create a strategic dilemma for political parties.

Second, from issue-based accounts, we incorporate the notion that voters differ in which issues are salient, i.e. relevant, when deciding which party to vote for (Bélanger and Meguid, 2008). Hence, even within a party's potential electorate, not all differences in preferences will create trade-offs in the same way. If two groups have diverging preferences but these preferences matter for the vote choice of one of the groups only, then these differences will translate into strategic dilemmas to a much lesser degree. Therefore, we distinguish *saliency trade-offs* from *zero-sum trade-offs*. What both types of trade-off have in common is that two groups prefer different policy positions on an issue. In the case of saliency trade-offs, these preferences are only salient for one of the groups. For instance, policy appeals on environmental protection may only affect the choice of younger potential social democratic voters, but not that of older ones. Zero-sum trade-offs, in contrast, occur when the issue on which the two groups on average disagree drives the programmatic-electoral choices of both groups. For example, a stance in favour of gender quotas may increase support among younger and well-educated potential party voters, while at the same time reducing support among older potential voters. Saliency trade-offs enable parties to devise overall positive-sum programmatic strategies, at least in the short run, while zero-sum trade-offs create actual, immediate dilemmas for parties.

We apply this framework to study electoral trade-offs for social democratic parties. The literature, here, has especially focused on class-based trade-offs. Social democrats have been faced with a structural numerical decline of their former traditional support base, the industrial working class (Benedetto, Hix and Mastrorocco, 2020; Rennwald and Pontusson, 2021). By adjusting their programmatic electoral appeals on both economic and cultural issues from the 1980s onwards, they have tried and managed to mobilize voters beyond the working class (Kitschelt, 1994; Evans and Tilley, 2017). However, each ideological repositioning implies a risk of alienating parts of the electorate (Karreth, Polk and Allen, 2013; Häusermann and Kitschelt, 2024). In a similar vein, wedge issues such as immigration can divide the main-

stream left electorate (van de Wardt, de Vries and Hobolt, 2014; Dancygier, 2017). Hence, some have suggested that social democracy may have arrived at an electoral impasse, ripe with strategic trade-offs. This is the point we focus on. Rather than providing a novel explanation for the electoral decline of social democratic parties over the past decades - which has been extensively studied and analyzed by researchers for many years (e.g. Kitschelt, 1994; Pontusson, 1995; Evans and Tilley, 2017; Benedetto, Hix and Mastrorocco, 2020; Rennwald and Pontusson, 2021) - we focus on the *current* segmented electoral landscape and pluralized issue space, and ask which policy appeals are more or less likely to generate strategic trade-offs for social democratic parties.

We implement this framework in our empirical analysis by conducting conjoint survey experiments in six Western European countries (Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland) (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2014; Horiuchi, Smith and Yamamoto, 2018). We ask respondents to evaluate stylized social democratic programs that vary randomly on nine issue dimensions. Estimating the extent to which particular issue stances increase or decrease the likelihood that respondents of selected social groups prefer a social democratic program over another allows us to identify trade-offs and gauge their importance. In contrast to previous analyses of social democratic parties' programmatic appeals that relied on observational data (e.g., Abou-Chadi and Wagner, 2019; Spoon and Klüver, 2021), this design makes it possible to identify a short-term causal effect of party programs on electoral support that does not run the risk of an endogenous relationship.

We find that within the large and heterogeneous group of potential social democratic voters, there are overall few immediate zero-sum trade-offs in response to particular programmatic appeals on either economic and cultural programmatic issues. On economic and social policy issues, potential social democratic voters throughout clearly prefer leftist policies on issues such as early retirement, childcare expansion, or housing. We find no evidence of zero-sum trade-offs when it comes to social policy, be it with regard to traditional social insurance policies, social investment, regulation, or taxation. On cultural issues, we find that potential social democratic voters throughout respond negatively to more conservative/nationalist positions

such as a strong reduction of immigration or a proposal not to have gender quotas for company boards. Looking at the choices of socio-economic groups differentiated along education, class, and age, we find evidence for zero-sum trade-offs with regard to strongly progressive positions, in particular very liberal immigration and multiculturalism policies, as well as strong environmental protection. Younger and more highly educated voters among the social-democratic electoral potential tend to respond positively to such positions, while elderly and less educated voters respond negatively. Most of the trade-offs on cultural policy proposals, however, are saliency trade-offs, i.e. the policy stances only have a clear effect on one of the comparison groups. In addition, we specifically investigate potential positive-sum strategies based on these trade-offs. We show that given an economically left program, voters with lower levels of education do not punish social democratic parties for a culturally progressive program in the short run. In contrast, highly-educated voters will strongly reduce their support for an economically left program when it is not also culturally progressive.

Overall, we not only contribute to understanding the general electoral challenges facing social democratic parties, but provide essential insights into the dynamics of electoral behavior in post-industrial societies. Our multidimensional, issue-based approach to trade-offs differs from existing work on the challenges of policy moderation, which has focused on the economic dimension, in particular (e.g., Karreth, Polk and Allen, 2013; Evans and Tilley, 2017; Polk and Karreth, 2024). Existing work on trade-offs between voter groups (e.g. Oesch and Rennwald, 2018; Benedetto, Hix and Mastrorocco, 2020; Abou-Chadi and Wagner, 2019) has not taken into account potentials and issue salience. By combining the insights of structural and issue-based contributions, our approach proposes a strategy for analyzing the electoral consequences of multidimensional policy positioning by political parties.

2 Programmatic appeals in a pluralized issue space

The literature on voting, elections and parties in Europe is consistent in portraying the issue space of parties as pluralized and multidimensional. Both structuralist and issue-based

approaches to voting and party competition emphasize that political parties have to define their programmatic offer in an increasingly fragmented space. Both approaches potentially help us to better understand the trade-offs inherent in party strategies. However, as we argue in this section, the focus of structuralist approaches on a reduced number of (cleavage) dimensions of competition runs the risk of obscuring issue-specific trade-offs, while the focus of issue-based approaches on individual voters tends to overlook existing trade-offs between identifiable sub-sets of party electorates. This is why we suggest an empirical strategy informed by contributions of both strands of research, conceptualizing voters as members of structural subgroups who are exposed to a pluralized and fragmented issue space.

By structuralist accounts of transforming party competition, we refer to contributions that understand changing party competition as a fundamental electoral realignment of identifiable voter groups along a limited number of competitive dimensions. Fully mobilized electoral cleavages, a key concept of structuralist theories of party competition, consist of a socio-structural social base with a collective identity, mobilized by a political party with a distinctive programmatic offer. All three elements of the cleavage contribute to stabilizing patterns of voting and competition in segmented electoral markets (Bartolini and Mair, 1990). In processes of cleavage formation, parties bundle issues into structured programmatic supply along competitive dimensions. And while the underlying key dimensions – economic and cultural – are still clearly discernible in voter preferences and party programs (Kriesi, 2012; Häusermann and Kriesi, 2015), this literature has emphasized that both the structural foundations of these divides and the issues and identities they entail have been transforming over the past decades (Bornschier, 2010; Oesch and Rennwald, 2018; Hooghe and Marks, 2018; Bornschier et al., 2024).

Issue-based accounts of evolving party competition, on the other hand, emphasize the strategic leeway of political parties in shaping the set and relative saliency of relevant issues. Compared to structuralist accounts, this approach starts from a fundamental diagnostic of generalized voter dealignment from previously salient cleavages, opening up new available electoral potentials, as well as room for challenger parties to appeal to dealigned voters across the entire

ideological spectrum in a more strategic and issue-based way (Wattenberg and Dalton, 2002; Hobolt and de Vries, 2020). In this context, mainstream or 'dominant' parties (Hobolt and de Vries, 2020), tied to legacies of issue ownership and the burdens of government, have a hard time adapting quickly enough to changing issue spaces and therefore try to block entry to challenger parties. These challenger parties, however, strategically raise new wedge issues to divide and conquer the traditional electorate of mainstream parties (van de Wardt, de Vries and Hobolt, 2014).

The debate between structuralist and issue-based accounts is ongoing, but both strands of literature converge on the observation that the issue space of party competition in the 21st century has become pluralized and that voters – and voter groups – differ in their preferences in ways that reconfigure former patterns of party competition, potentially leading to trade-offs for existing (mainstream) parties even within their potential electorates. Research indeed shows how voters in these transforming spaces are cross-pressured by their attitudes that do not align along one ideological dimension (Gidron, 2020) or by inconsistent social group identities (Dassonneville, 2023). These cross-pressures make it more difficult for political parties to build electoral coalitions and also make politics increasingly volatile.

The structuralist perspective on socio-structural sub-groups allows a conceptualization of trade-offs within voter segments, but the overarching programmatic dimensions often used by these researchers may be too aggregate to identify these trade-offs empirically. In contrast, the issue-based perspective sheds light on a multitude of potential policy-based trade-offs, but the emphasis these researchers place on the individual voter and top-down processes makes it hard to understand between which voter groups such trade-offs would most likely occur. For this reason, we combine both approaches to derive a novel framework and a set of expectations for the strategic trade-offs of social democratic parties.

3 Electoral trade-offs in post-industrial societies

In this section, we outline the structural and issue-based foundations of potential trade-offs in post-industrial societies and then apply them to social democratic parties. We conceptualize a trade-off as a situation in which a programmatic issue appeal yields a diverging reaction among different sub-electorates. As we outline below, diverging preferences in the overall electorate are a necessary but not a sufficient condition for trade-offs to occur. Trade-offs occur when preferences actually affect programmatic choice. We should see the strongest trade-offs for groups with the most diverging preferences when these issues are also salient for their choice.

3.1 Electoral groups and their preferences

The literature has identified several electoral subgroups with diverging preferences that should lead to potential trade-offs for political parties in post-industrial societies. First, we should expect a class- and education-based dividing line. The manufacturing working class has been in massive numerical decline over the past forty years (Boix, 2015; Benedetto, Hix and Mastrorocco, 2020). At the same time a new middle class, whose massive expansion is the product of the educational revolution, welfare state growth and occupational feminization (Oesch, 2006), has emerged as a distinctive electoral group within the broader middle classes: they are on average younger and more female, exhibiting economically left-wing and culturally progressive programmatic preferences (Häusermann and Kriesi, 2015).

However, these new parts of the electorate had been socialized into the 'left field' via distinctive programmatic issues and appeals, notably progressive cultural positions regarding gender equality, environmental protection or internationalism. The preference heterogeneity this created within the electorate remained rather latent as long as the particularistic-conservative pole of the second dimension was not fully mobilized by radical right parties. However, this mobilization took place across virtually all Western European democracies in the early 21st century and thus brought cultural issues to the forefront of electoral competition (Ignazi, 1992; Kriesi, 2012; Bornschier et al., 2024). It is likely that this shift in saliency has gener-

ally exacerbated the preference heterogeneity within the electorate, given that the traditional working class electorate increasingly sees these second dimension issues as salient. In sum, the socio-structural and programmatic realignment of the past few decades implies that parties of the mainstream left and right need to take positions on both economic and cultural policies. As the literature has identified strongly diverging preferences between electoral subgroups for these dimensions (e.g. Oesch and Rennwald, 2018), many have suggested that there may be no positive-sum strategy for social democratic parties.

Second, age-based differences have also become an increasingly relevant factor for diverging preferences in the electorate. Older and younger voters might weigh issues differently because of life-cycle reasons: When voters age, they are more likely to shift their policy positions to the right on some issues (Geys, Heggedal and Sørensen, 2022). Other issues, such as pension benefits or childcare facilities, also become more relevant at different stages in life and might be of different importance for individuals' electoral decisions. However, age differences also have a more stable and persistent generational component: Younger cohorts of voters have been socialized into a deeply transformed competitive partisan space, which yields strong cohort preference divides regarding the issues that are salient to voters, as well as their positions on them (van der Brug, 2010; Rekker, 2016; Mitteregger, 2024). The literature has also shown that more recent cohorts of voters have not only become more progressive on the cultural dimension, but that they also more strongly associate cultural issues with left-right self-positioning or party preference than older generations (van der Brug and Rekker, 2021; Steiner, 2023).

3.2 Programmatic appeals, group preferences and trade-offs

We argue that while diverging preferences are necessary conditions for relevant trade-offs they are not sufficient conditions. Based on the structural and issue-based theories of party competition, we need to take into account two main factors that condition the relationship between preferences of social groups and potential trade-offs for parties' policy appeals.

First, from structuralist and cleavage-based approaches we know that not all voters are available to programmatic competition. A more formal way of conceptualizing this can be found in the idea of consideration sets for vote choice (Oscarsson and Rosema, 2019). This approach regards voting as a two-stage (or multi-stage) process. In a first step, voters select a group of parties into a consideration set - a set of parties that they would potentially vote for. In a second step, voters select a party out of this consideration set for their actual vote choice. Crucially, the factors that determine which party makes it into a consideration set can differ from those that determine vote choice. While the factors determining the composition of the consideration set are more deep-seated, based on socialization and worldviews, the actual choice out of the consideration set is more dynamic and affected by more short-term factors. Karlsen and Aardal (2016), for example, show that long-standing political values have a stronger effect on who voters select into the consideration set, while issue ownership determines who people select from within the set. As consideration sets are relatively stable over time (Rekker and Rosema, 2019), programmatic competition between parties should largely play out around voters with similar consideration sets. From the perspective of a political party, we can describe voters that have this party in their consideration set as *potentials*. A significant share of voters will simply not be available to a political party no matter what programmatic appeals they make. Hence, while voters across different consideration sets may have diverging preferences, these do not create relevant trade-offs.

Second, even within the potential electorate of a political party, diverging preferences of social groups can create different kinds of trade-offs. We define a *zero-sum trade-off* as a situation where the reaction of one group is in the opposite direction of that of another group. A zero-sum trade-off occurs when the policy appeal of a party leads to increased support among one group and decreased support among another. We label as *saliency trade-off* the scenario where the divergence consists of one group reacting positively to an appeal while the other group is largely indifferent to this appeal. Diverging preferences on issues are less relevant as a trade-off when only one group responds to a party's policy appeal: in a world of saliency trade-offs, devising net-winning policy appeals is still potentially possible. In contrast, zero-sum trade-offs generate a hard strategic dilemma. It is important to note that this distinction focuses on a

short-term perspective within an electoral cycle or two. In the longer term, saliency trade-offs can turn into zero-sum trade-offs if voters react to programmatic shifts with a lag of one or several elections – as has been shown in reaction to centrist shifts (Karreth, Polk and Allen, 2013; Polk and Karreth, 2024) – or if over time those voters who are indifferent to an issue resent that the party does not focus on their priorities.

We apply this framework to the potential trade-offs of social democratic parties that have been prominently discussed in the political science literature as well as in the broader public debate. The strongest (zero-sum) trade-offs should occur where groups show the biggest divides in policy preferences and where these preferences are also salient for programmatic choice.

3.2.1 Relevant dimensions and issues

While political science commonly distinguishes between an economic (first) and a cultural (second) dimension, we want to observe potential trade-offs at a more detailed level. Empirically, the patterns we find may well align onto the economic and cultural dimensions, but a priori, we want to allow for issue-specific patterns. Scholars indeed regularly point to a more complex issue structure. For instance, questions of social investment versus social compensation – which relate to proactive or retroactive intervention by the welfare state – tend to divide social groups in ways that do not always neatly align on the first, economic dimension (Beramendi et al., 2015; Häusermann and Kriesi, 2015). In particular, questions of social investment also align with preferences on the cultural dimension by separating between culturally progressive, universalistic preferences and culturally conservative, particularistic preferences (Garritzmann, Busemeyer and Neimanns, 2018; Häusermann et al., 2021).

A second instance concerns the issue of immigration, which does not necessarily align well with the cultural dimension of ideological preferences. For example, Kitschelt and Rehm (2014) argue that cultural issues should in fact be divided into 'grid' issues relating to libertarian or authoritarian social and moral questions and 'group' issues relating to immigration and integration. Relatedly, anthropogenic climate change and policies aiming at combating

it constitute another issue dimension that has become salient in the last decade but does not necessarily fit a simple distinction between economic and cultural.

Because of these theoretically plausible arguments why distinctive issues may not neatly align on dimensions, we include a range of different aspects: social consumption, social investment and redistribution policies as well as market liberalism in terms of economic-distributive issues; and grid and group issues as issues reflecting various aspects of the cultural dimension. In addition, we include environmental protection.

3.2.2 Expected trade-offs based on class, education and age

We follow the literature and hypothesize electoral trade-offs based on class and education on cultural and investment policies, with age-based trade-offs primarily on cultural and environmental programmatic appeals. There are, of course, a number of other socio-structural groups that have been shown to have diverging preferences which could lead to trade-offs for social democratic strategies. These include gender, union membership and the urban-rural divide. We address these empirically, but focus our expectations on the most salient cleavage lines around education, class and gender that have been most prominently discussed for the fate of social democratic parties.

First, class- and education-based preference patterns (Kitschelt, 1994; Kitschelt and Rehm, 2014) imply that potential social democratic voters of the educated middle class will respond positively to progressive appeals regarding cultural and environmental issues. In contrast, potential social democratic voters of the working class may react negatively to such claims. Hence, zero-sum trade-offs should be most likely when it comes to policy appeals on immigration, multiculturalism, gender equality and environmental protection, a prediction in line with now-classic statements of the electoral dilemma of Social Democratic parties (Kitschelt, 1994). Turning toward social policies, we would expect trade-offs between working-class voters and middle-class voters when it comes to social investment policies (such as childcare or education policies), as middle-class voters support these policies more than working-class voters (Häusermann et al., 2020). The particular demand for social investment policies among the middle

class stems from both the fact that they benefit most strongly from these policies, and from the fact that these policies align with universalistic policy goals (Bonoli and van Lancker, 2017; Pavolini and Lancker, 2018; Beramendi et al., 2015). We expect weaker trade-offs between class or education groups for traditional consumption-oriented social policies (e.g. pensions, unemployment insurance) or matters of taxation and redistribution.

Second, age is expected to constitute another relevant category for potential trade-offs, as research has documented a generational value divide (Inglehart, 2008; O'Grady, 2022; Caughey, O'Grady and Warshaw, 2019). This divide is especially relevant for cultural issues such as gender equality, immigration, multiculturalism, and climate change. Hence, progressive second dimension positions should appeal more to younger voters, while they may alienate older ones. We expect weaker trade-offs based on age groups when it comes to economic and social policies. While age differences regularly arise in the type of social policy benefits that different age groups prioritize (Busemeyer, Goerres and Weschle, 2009), these divides are more likely to reflect needs than outright diverging ideological views on social policy, which is why we expect weaker trade-offs in terms of programmatic preferences here.

4 Research design and data

We use original survey data for six Western European countries with around 2,000 respondents each in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. The fieldwork was conducted in cooperation with a professional survey institute (Bilendi) using their online panels.[1] The survey targets a country's voting-age population (>18 years, in Austria >16 years) and relies on population quotas for age x education and age x gender. The total sample consists of 12,066 completed interviews conducted between October 2020 and March 2021.[2]

[1] Information on how our research adheres to APSA Council's Principles and Guidance for Human Subject Research can be found in Appendix A.

[2] Due to the COVID pandemic, the data was collected at different time points in different countries: October/November 2020: Austria and Germany; December/January 2020/2021: Denmark; January/February 2021: Sweden and Spain; March 2021: Switzerland.

We select these countries as we are interested in the trade-offs of social democratic strategies in multi-party systems in post-industrial societies. The selected countries cover a wide range of social democratic profiles from the more progressive Swiss social democrats to the more centrist Danish social democrats. The case selection includes countries where social democratic parties have been hegemonic (Sweden) as well as those where centre-right parties dominated politics for a large share of the post-war era (Switzerland, Germany).

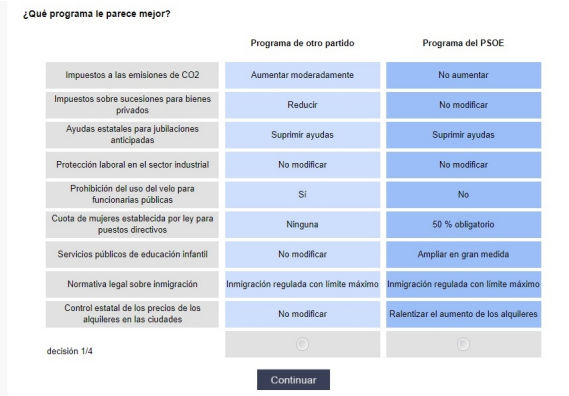
The survey contains a conjoint analysis design (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2014) aimed at eliciting attitudes towards different Social Democratic party programs.[3] Respondents were presented with the following scenario: 'In the following we will ask you to compare several party programs. Please imagine that two candidates are running for the leadership of the SPD [or equivalent in each country]. Both present their program for the party. Please compare the two programs and decide which you would rather support. Please give an answer even if the decision is difficult, and regardless of whether you generally support the SPD [or equivalent in each country].'

We made it explicit that respondents were evaluating a *Social Democratic* party and named the main Social Democratic party of the country in the question. Our aim was to ensure that respondents had a centre-left party in mind when evaluating the different programs. Of course, naming the party carries the risk of activating party affect, but this is less relevant for our design as we are comparing choices within individuals and within the same party family. Our question is what kind of social democratic party program appeals to voters. Moreover, real-world party programs are always necessarily attached to a party label, so our approach has greater external validity.

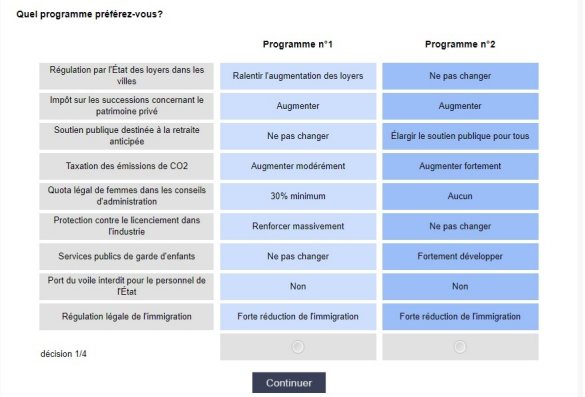
[3]There has been some recent criticism of using conjoint designs and particularly AMCE-based quantities to analyze electoral choice (Abramson, Koçak and Magazinnik, 2022). The main criticism brought forward by Abramson, Koçak and Magazinnik (2022) relates to the fact that AMCEs are based on a mix of quantity (how many people prefer a level of an attribute) and intensity (how strongly they prefer it). Thus, AMCEs do not lend themselves to straightforward majority-preference interpretations. For our question, however, we are precisely interested in this mix of quantity and intensity, which is at the heart of our trade-off approach. More technically, we are interested in what Bansak et al. (2023) call the expected Borda score, as we want to know how much better a random party program would do if it included one issue-position instead of another.

Figure 1: Screenshots, conjoint analysis

(a) Spain



(b) Switzerland (French)



The two programs, presented in tabular form, vary on nine attributes (see Table 1), with no restrictions on the combinations of positions. This is the key advantage of a conjoint analysis design, as it allows us to assess how respondents would react to hypothetical party programs with varying content. For example screens from Spain and Switzerland, see Figure 1.

Table 1: Vignette attributes

Dimension	Topic	Attribute levels
Cultural	**Regulation of immigration**	Controlled, without upper limit / Controlled, with upper limit / Strong reduction
Cultural	**Ban on head scarves for civil servants**	no / yes
Cultural	**Legal quota for women on executive boards**	50% minimum / 30% minimum / none
Cultural	**Taxation of CO2 emissions**	increase strongly / increase moderately / no increase
Economic	**Public childcare services**	expand strongly / leave unchanged
Economic	**Public subsidization of early retirement**	Expand for all / leave unchanged / abolish support
Economic	**Inheritance tax on private wealth**	increase / leave unchanged / reduce
Economic	**Employment protection in manufacturing**	expand / leave unchanged
Economic	**Public control of rent prices in urban areas**	ban rent increases / slow down rent increases / leave unchanged

Given that the choice was between social democratic programs, we limited the range and

breadth of positions to those a centre-left party could credibly choose. The positions displayed are both specific enough to be realistic and broad enough to relate to key ideological dimensions. Our aim was to capture both cultural and economic issues as well as different aspects within each of these dimensions. Moreover, we specifically chose topics that match typical Social Democratic policy priorities and that can be connected to key trade-offs identified in the literature. We also chose our dimensions so that any combination of attributes still reflects a plausible position of a social democratic party. No combination of bundles should be perceived as unrealistic or as not going together ideologically.

We selected our attributes based on the expectations formulated in the previous section. Public subsidization of early retirement and public childcare services relate to consumption and investment priorities, respectively. Inheritance tax is connected to traditional redistributive concerns, while employment protection in manufacturing addresses preferences concerning state involvement in business with a focus on the traditional constituency of Social Democratic parties. Rent price controls are a topic of salience in many contexts, and one that also relates to the role of the state in regulating economic exchanges. These issues can be broadly classified as belonging to the economic dimension.

The remaining attributes relate to the cultural dimension: the extent of immigration to be allowed, a headscarf ban, gender quotas in large firms, and taxes on CO_2 emissions. These attributes were chosen because they tap into different aspects of the cultural dimension. The attributes on immigration directly address what Kitschelt and Rehm (2014) term 'group'-related preferences. The headscarf ban is a topic that is also linked to issues of personal liberty, which Kitschelt and Rehm (2014) 'grid'-related preferences. The gender quota relates to gender equality concerns, but in a way that may conflict with economic preferences in the minds of some voters. Finally, taxes on CO_2 emissions tap into environmental preferences. While these are often seen as classically post-materialist concerns, they also relate to economic ideology – especially if linked to potential costs through tax rises.[4]

[4]We have chosen our issues so they reflect the most salient dimensions of political competition in post-industrial societies. We of course cannot rule out that a different issue in one or more of our countries would create more or different trade-offs. But we are confident that our issues reflect the salient conflict dimension

We presented respondents with four choices between two parties, so each respondent evaluated eight social democratic party profiles in total. For each choice, respondents are asked to indicate which party profile they preferred ('Which program is better?') as well as how they would rate the profile on a scale from 1 to 7, with higher values indicating higher support (e.g., 'How good is program 1?'). For our analysis, we use the choice of preferred program, modeled using linear regression with clustered standard errors by respondent (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2014), and present marginal means (Leeper, Hobolt and Tilley, 2020). We refrain from using AMCEs to display our results because the effects visible with AMCEs strongly depend on the chosen baseline. This a particularly problematic issue when comparing subgroups (Leeper, Hobolt and Tilley, 2020; Hobolt and de Vries, 2020). In that regard, displaying marginal means overcomes this problem to some extent, as the comparison of subgroups does not depend on the chosen reference category.[5]

In order to study electoral trade-offs between groups, our analysis examines differences in education, class, and age. We code respondents into three educational groups: low, middle and high; low contains all respondents with less than upper secondary education (ISCED 0-2), middle all respondents with upper secondary and post-secondary, non-tertiary education (ISCED 3-4), and high all respondents with tertiary education (ISCED 5-7). Education questions were taken from the most recent European Social Survey questionnaire. Class is coded using the now-standard scheme suggested by Oesch (2006). Occupation was asked in open questions in each survey, supported by an auto-fill list of jobs, supplemented with hand-coding of open responses to a follow-up question asking for a precise description of one's job. Finally, age is measured in years, which we for convenience group as under 35, 35-49, 50-64, and 65 and older. In Appendix B we show additional subgroup analyses based on gender (Figure B2a), union membership (Figure B2b), urban versus rural residence (Figure B3a), and income (Figure B3b). For none of these groups do we find zero-sum trade-offs. We discuss them in more

in current West European democracies.

[5]We show the analyses using marginal means for the 1-7 ratings in Appendix C (Figure C1, Figure C2, Figure C3 and Figure C4). However, even though the substantive findings regarding trade-offs are the same, these results are more difficult to interpret as group means differ across our sub-group based on class, education and age. For clarity of interpretation, we therefore present the results using choices.

detail in Appendix B.

5 The potential social democratic electorate

As outlined in the theory section, in order to identify relevant trade-offs for social democratic parties it is necessary to focus on social democratic potentials. In other words, we want to look at voters who are receptive to programmatic appeals and would at least consider choosing a social democratic party in an election. In focusing our analysis in this way, we follow recent work that shows that electoral choice is a two-stage process (Oscarsson and Rosema, 2019). This focus is an important one because many voters will react negatively to certain potential social democratic policy stances. For instance, staunch radical-right supporters will prefer a social democratic party that is centrist on migration issues to one that is more liberal; yet, this is unlikely to matter for the electoral success of social democratic parties as these voters are highly unlikely to ever vote for a social democratic party, no matter their policy offer. Hence, we would potentially observe trade-offs between appeals to these groups, but these trade-offs should not be considered relevant as one group of these voters might not be available to social democratic parties at all.

Using our survey data, we create a group of social democratic *potentials*: voters for whom social democrats are among the consideration set. We use two variables that feature prominently in the literature on consideration sets (Oscarsson and Rosema, 2019; Rekker and Rosema, 2019). We choose our criteria so potentials are not limited to current social democratic supporters or even party identifiers. At the same time, we want to take into account that not all voters are available to social democratic policy appeals. We have two criteria for inclusion in the set of potentials.

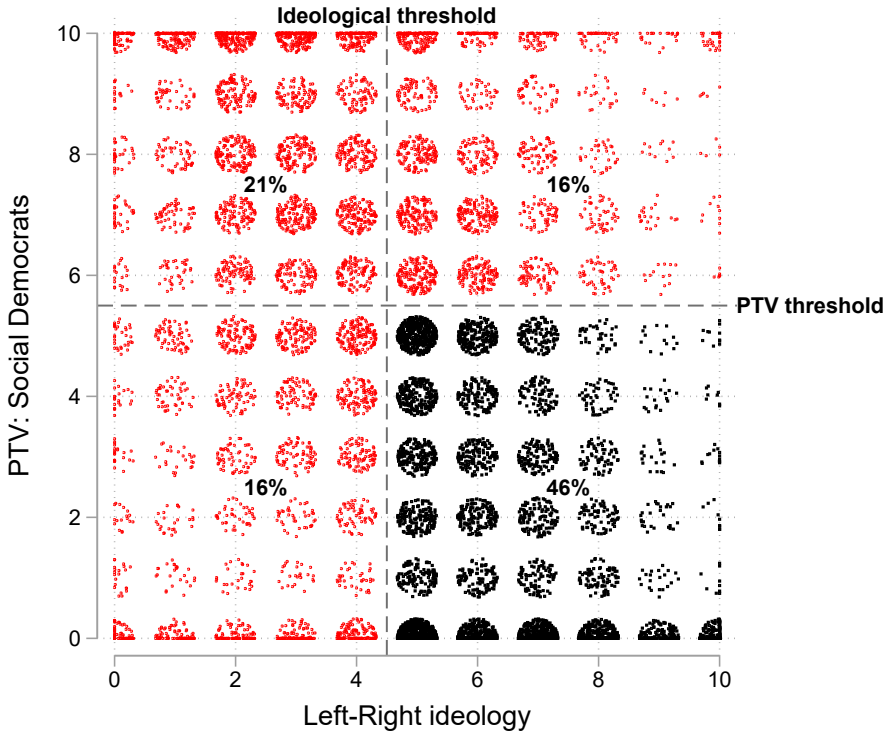
First, we select all respondents who think it is more likely than not that they will at some stage vote for the party. These are respondents who give a 6 or higher (on a scale of 0 to 10) when asked about the probability they will ever vote for the social democratic party in their

country; this is known as the propensity-to-vote (or PTV) score. PTVs are indeed explicitly mentioned in the literature as a valid way of operationalizing consideration sets (Oscarsson and Rosema, 2019). While this variable necessarily introduces a certain level of endogeneity to the analysis, the PTV score captures whether a voter would consider voting for the party or is simply unavailable for its appeals.

Second, we also include all voters who are on the left of the ideological spectrum, operationalized as all respondents below 5 on a 0-10 left-right scale. Based on cleavage segmentation, these voters are those who are the natural constituency of Social Democrats. The literature on consideration sets has, indeed, documented that left-right ideology is a strong determinant of selecting parties into a consideration set (Rekker and Rosema, 2019). We do not include those placing themselves at 5 as Social Democratic potentials because this group contains many respondents who are not necessarily centrist but rather do not have clear political views.

We summarize this procedure in Figure 2. It is important to emphasize that we define as social democratic potentials respondents that have a PTV of >5 OR self-identify as left-of-centre. Hence, as seen in Figure 2, people on the right are still included when they show a PTV of 6 or higher and people with lower PTV scores are still included when they identify as left-wing. Hence, the group that we exclude from the set of Social Democratic Potentials are voters who have a PTV of below 6 AND identify as centre-right. These are 46% of our sample. A large share of these respondents are people who give a value of 0 on the PTV question and thus are very convinced that they will never vote for the social democratic party in their country. We have run a number of analyses with different specifications of the potential social democratic electorate (i.e. only using PTV or the left-right scale; and a higher PTV threshold) to demonstrate that our findings are not the product of any idiosyncrasies of these coding decisions. The relevant plots can be found in Appendix D. These analyses show that the effects mostly hold over different PTV and left-right specifications, also when focusing on different subgroups. We see that when we define the potential social democratic electorate only with left-leaning respondents (and neglecting the PTV, see: Figure D3), these voters are slightly more culturally progressive and economically left-wing than if we define the

Figure 2: Distribution of potential SD voters



Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

potential only with a PTV variable, see: Figure D1. A different, more strict PTV threshold as applied in Figure D2 does not provide different results than the main analysis, neither for economic nor for cultural issues. The subgroup analyses for differently defined potentials show more pronounced salience trade-offs when we define the potential only depending on left-right placement. This is mainly because cultural professionals, young people, and highly educated people who define themselves as left-leaning are more strongly in favor of cultural progressive policies than if that potential is only defined via the likelihood of voting for a social democratic party. However, the different definitions of the potentials do not show different trade-offs for the economic issues.

Overall, 53 percent of our survey respondents include the Social Democrats in their consideration set as defined through these two criteria. Given that Social Democratic parties currently receive less than 30 percent of the vote in all of our selected countries, we have thus defined a relatively broad set of Social Democratic potentials. We thus do not bias our findings toward already existing supporters. Importantly, this set of potentials is extremely heterogeneous and does not differ markedly from the voting population in general. In Figure 3, we can see that potential and non-potential Social Democratic voters are similar in their distribution across age groups and class groups. In line with the literature, potential Social Democratic voters are somewhat younger and slightly more likely to be socio-cultural (semi-)professionals and production workers, but these differences are fairly small.

Our set of potentials is not only heterogeneous in terms of its socio-economic composition but also in its voting behavior. Figure 4 shows first that the vast majority of those who say they voted for the Social Democrats at the last election are classed as SD potentials. This is important for the face validity of our classification. The left panel of Figure 4 also shows that a substantial proportion of other voters are also classed as potentials. This again demonstrates that the set of potentials is significantly larger than the set of actual SD voters. The right panel then provides more detail of among which party supporters the SD potentials are to be found. These are the radical left and the greens, among whose voters around 80 percent are classed as potential SD voters. The set of potentials is much smaller among other parties, but we

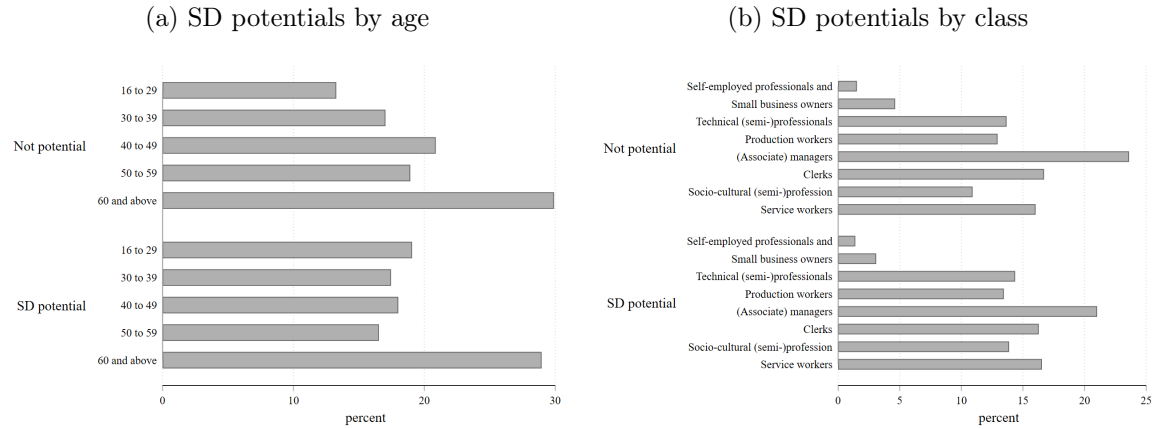


Figure 3: Distribution of potential and non-potential SD voters by age and class

Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Potentials are those with >5 in self-reported likelihood to ever vote for the Social Democratic party or <5 on a 0-10 left-right scale.

still find 20-30 percent potential social democratic voters among mainstream right and liberal party supporters. In line with much recent research that has shown that there is little direct competition between social democratic and radical right parties (Häusermann and Kitschelt, 2024), by far the least social democratic potential can be found in the electorate of the radical right.

Defining our sample of potential social-democratic voters in such a broad and heterogeneous way is also important to control for the fact that we study trade-offs in countries where electoral realignment had started several decades ago and may have solidified by now. Indeed, much of the literature theorizing trade-offs and studying the processes of realignment focuses on the years between the 1980s and early 2000s, i.e. the decades when new competitors emerged (Kitschelt, 1994; Kriesi et al., 2008; Bornschier, 2010). Hence, one might think that trade-offs have been resolved by now through segmentation and self-selection. However, both our very broad definition of the potential social-democratic electorate, as well as the fact that our findings on class and age groups also hold in very recently realigned countries - in particular, Germany and Spain - increase our trust in the findings for all countries.

(a) Vote choice by classification as SD potential (b) Classification as SD potential by vote choice

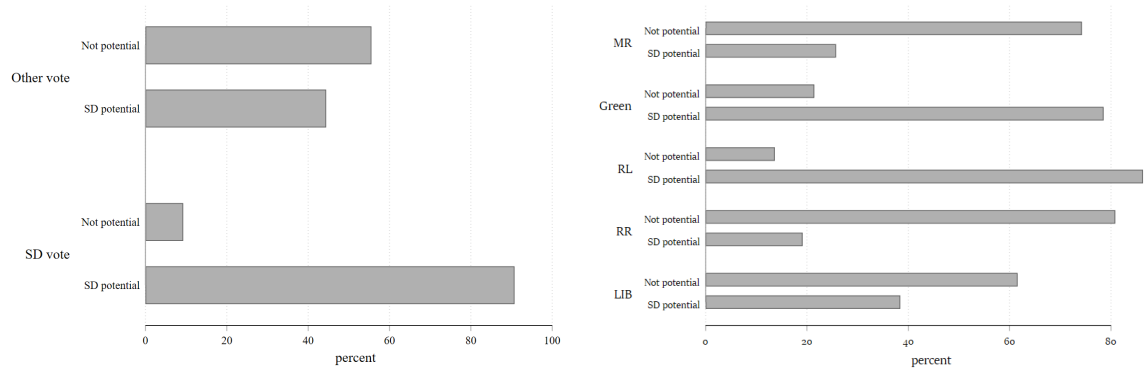


Figure 4: Distribution of vote preferences by classification as SD potential

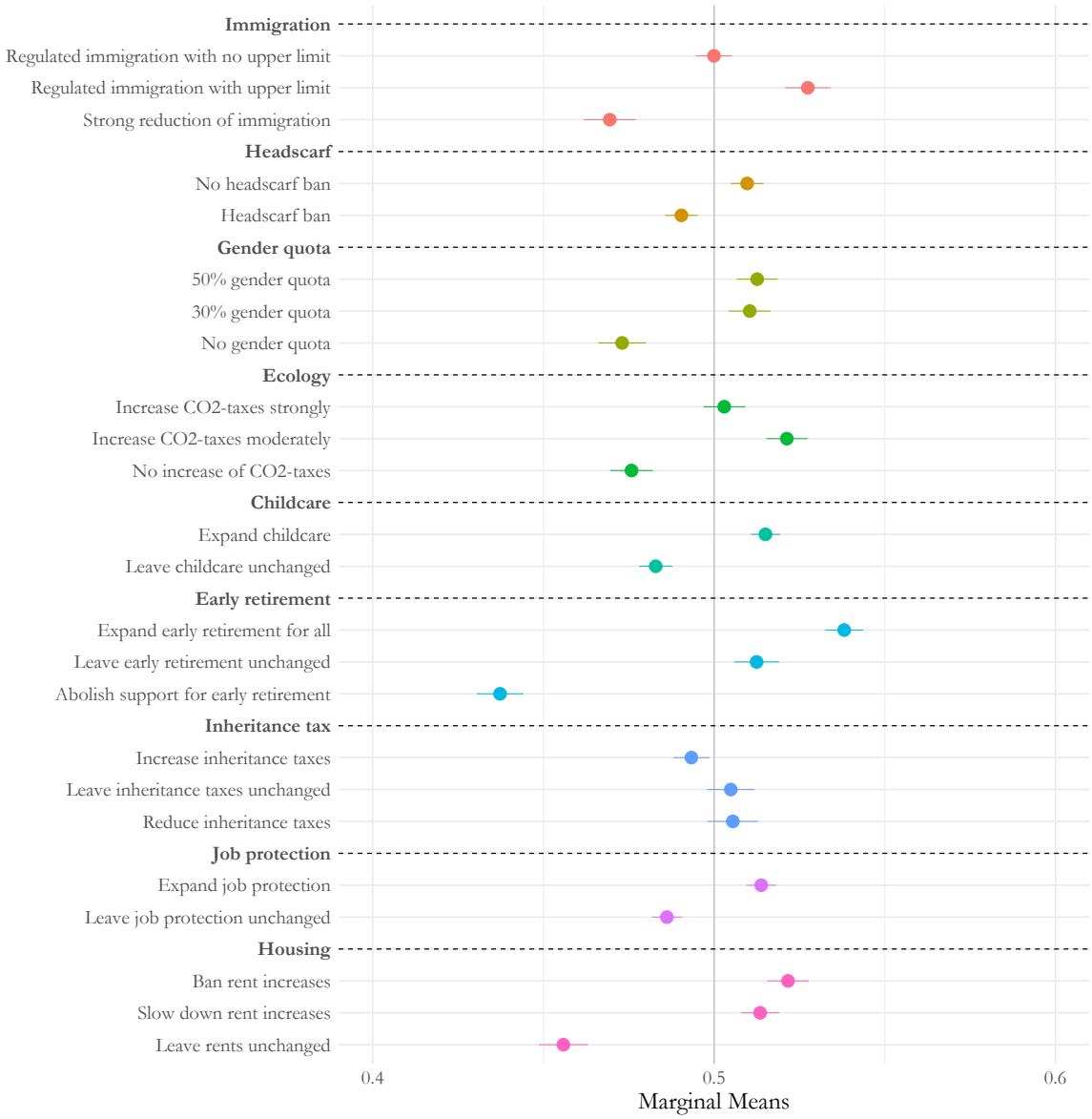
Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Potentials are those with >5 in self-reported likelihood to ever vote for the Social Democratic party or <5 on a 0-10 left-right scale. MR parties: OeVP (AT), CVP/BDP/CSP/EVP/EDU (CH), CDU/CSU (DE), DKF/KD (DK), PP (ES), M/KD (SE); Green parties: Gruene (AT), GPS (CH), B90/Gruene (DE), EL (DK), PACMA (ES), MG (SE); RL: KPOe/Wandl (AT), PdA/AL/Sol/EaG/MPS (CH), Linke (DE), SF (DK), Podemos/IU/En Comu Podem/Mas Pais/Compromis/Candidatura d'unitat opular (ES), V (SE); RR: FPOe/DAOe (AT), SVP/Lega dei Ticinesi (CH), AfD/NPD (DE), DF (DK), Vox (ES), SD (SE); LIB: Neos (AT), FDP/GLP (CH), FDP (DE), RV/V/LA (DK), Ciudadanos (ES), C/Lib (SE)

6 Results

6.1 Programmatic preferences among social democratic potentials and non-potentials

First, we examine the conjoint analysis results for all potential Social Democratic voters. This provides us with insight into the kinds of Social Democratic programs generally preferred by potential voters of the party.

Figure 5: Marginal means among potential SD voters



Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Potentials are those with >5 in self-reported likelihood to ever vote for the Social Democratic party or <5 on a 0-10 left-right scale.

Figure 5 shows the marginal means for each attribute in our conjoint experiment.[6] In the upper half of Figure 5, we see the marginal means for different positions on issues that are associated with a cultural dimension of political competition. We find that among social democratic potentials, culturally conservative positions are by far the least popular. If programs include demands for a strong reduction of immigration, a headscarf ban, no gender quota and no increase in CO_2 taxation, respondents in the potential social democratic electorate are much less likely to choose that program. For immigration and CO_2 taxation, we find that moderately progressive positions generate the highest level of support, while the most progressive position is the most popular one when it comes to gender quotas (although not significantly different from the more moderate position). These findings strongly speak against the idea that social democratic parties can increase their appeal with more culturally conservative positions.

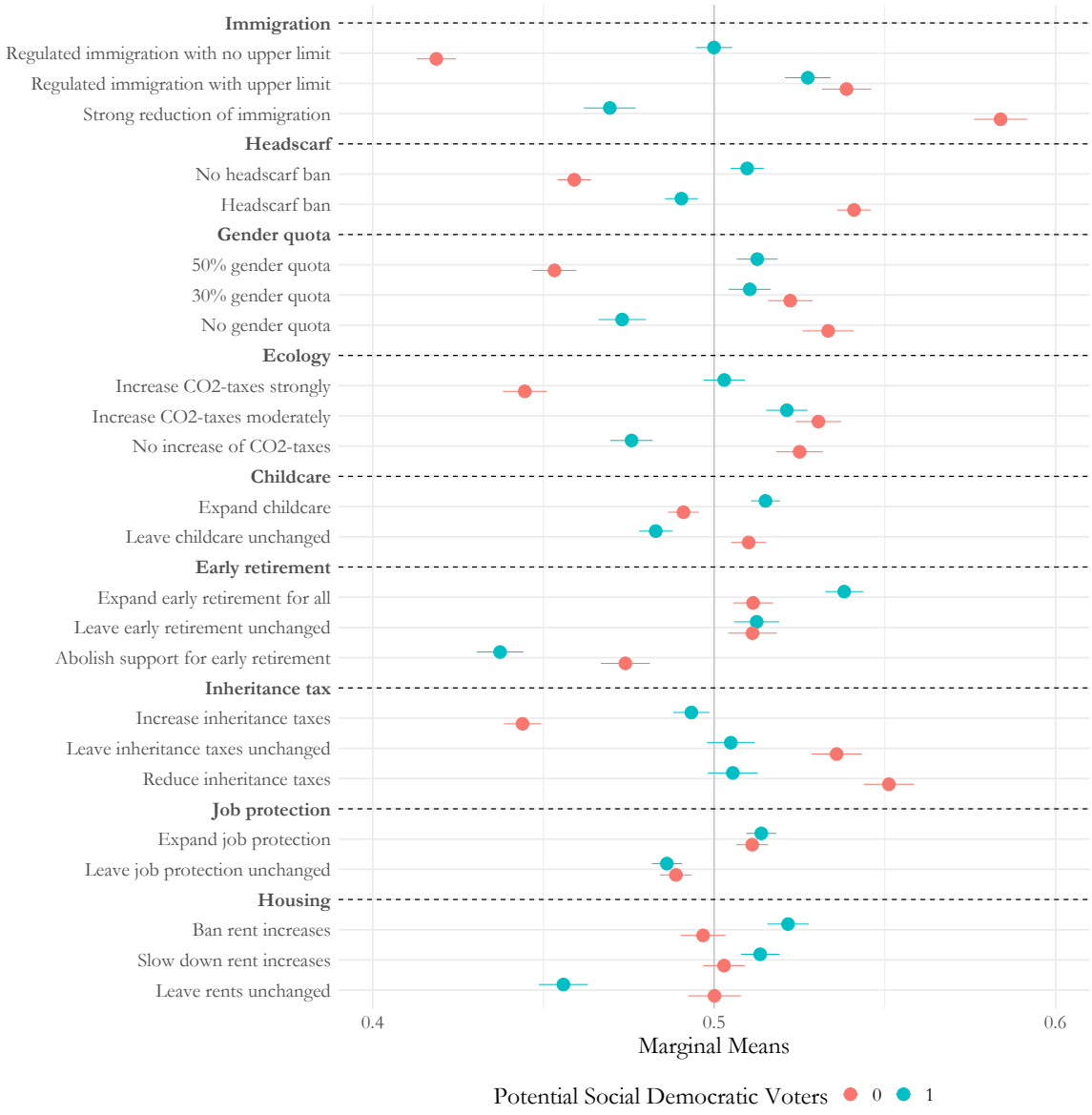
The bottom five attributes refer to topics with stronger economic implications. Here, SD potentials tend to favour the most left-wing option: expansive childcare, early retirement and job protection, as well as a ban on rent increases. We do not find strong effects of different positions on inheritance taxation.

It is also worth comparing the magnitude of the effects for each attribute. It is by no means the case that potential SD voters mainly respond to economic issues. The responsiveness to CO_2 taxes, immigration and the gender quota is of a similar magnitude to responsiveness to rent increases or childcare expansion. Early retirement elicits the strongest response among all issues.

If we compare the preferences for social democratic programs between potentials and non-potentials (see Figure 6) we find strong differences. Non-potentials are far more opposed to

[6] As people choose between two programs in a forced choice setting, a marginal mean of 0.5 (the so-called "grand mean" (Leeper, Hobolt and Tilley, 2020)) by definition implies that a specific level of an attribute does not significantly affect the choice of one program over the other. Values above 0.5 indicate that respondents are more likely to choose a program if this level of an attribute is included in it, whereas values below 0.5 indicate that they are less likely to choose a program when this level of an attribute is included. For example, a marginal mean of 0.54 for the attribute "Expand early retirement", implies that, out of the two social democratic programs presented, the one associated with this value is chosen 54 percent of the time by respondents, whereas a marginal mean of 0.46 for "Leaving rents unchanged" implies that such a program is chosen only 46 percent of the time by respondents when this value is part of a program

Figure 6: Marginal means among potential and non-potential SD voters



Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. Potentials are those with >5 in self-reported likelihood to ever vote for the Social Democratic party or <5 on a 0-10 left-right scale.

immigration and gender quotas and more supportive of a headscarf ban. They are also only moderately supportive of CO_2 taxes. Turning to economic issues, the non-potentials are opposed to expanded childcare and inheritance taxes and do not, on average, react to rent policy or early retirement. Only on job protection are issue stances between the two groups similar.[7] On all other issues, the contrast between potential and non-potential supporters is strong, with non-supporters often holding diametrically opposed preferences. These varying reactions also show that we successfully chose positional rather than valence issues for our experiment.

These findings show that potential Social Democratic voters on average prefer both (moderately) liberal cultural stances and left-wing economic policies. We also conduct an additional analysis to check if potential but not actual social democratic voters differ from those voters who have actually voted for social democratic parties (Appendix Figure B4). We find that the effects are mostly similar for potential voters who have voted for a social democratic party and for those potential voters who have not. If anything, potential but not mobilized social democratic voters are even slightly more likely to prefer a program with sociocultural progressive positions. Hence, on average, proposing liberal policies would mostly go against the preferences of non-potentials. However, since these voters are in any case unlikely to be persuaded to vote for the Social Democrats, it barely matters if these voters view the party *even more* unfavorably.

In Appendix F, we also present country differences in these results. Our findings hold when we exclude any of our six countries (see Figure F1). The effects are thus not driven by a specific country we include in the analysis. We also show our findings for the potentials in each of the six countries separately (Appendix F, Figure F2). There are some country differences regarding specific issues, also because of existing differences in the policy status quo. For example, the childcare attribute has few effects in Denmark and Sweden, countries where extensive childcare policies are already in place. Furthermore, country differences also reflect diverging structures of party competition: In Spain and Sweden, Green parties are

[7] One reason for this might be that respondents generally do not react very strongly to the issue and that those who do might think they are directly affected and choose out of self-interest. We could find these respondents among potentials and non-potentials.

much weaker than in the German-speaking countries Austria, Germany, and Switzerland, whereas radical-left parties have not been relevant competitors for social democratic parties in Switzerland and Austria. However, in general, country-specific estimates tend to cluster together, and we do not see a preference for centrist economic positions or more conservative cultural positions anywhere.

6.2 Trade-offs among key electoral groups

Next, we analyze trade-offs between electoral sub-groups among potential Social Democratic voters, focusing on education, class, and age. We investigate how much socio-demographic differences shape reactions to various policy appeals within the potential Social Democratic electorate. In doing so, we tackle the question of whether issue bundles indeed create electoral trade-offs for Social Democratic parties or not.[8]

6.2.1 Education

We start with education, which has been identified as one of the main dividing lines for political preferences in post-industrial societies. Figure 7 shows the marginal means for every attribute for three educational attainment levels (low, middle, and high). To investigate trade-offs, we look at whether policy positions create divergent reactions among different groups. We focus our discussion on zero-sum versus saliency trade-offs. Simply put, if the marginal means of all three groups are on the same side, we do not have a trade-off. A zero-sum trade-off occurs if a position makes support for the Social Democratic party from one group more likely while simultaneously making it less likely for any or both of the other educational groups. If a position leads to a reaction from one group without generating significant differences among the other groups, we speak of a saliency trade-off: one group has a strong reaction but the others show indifference to the policy appeal.

The main takeaway of Figure 7 is that we find only very few zero-sum trade-offs across ed-

[8] Analyses by countries are shown in Appendix F, Figure F4-Figure F14. The patterns do not differ systematically across countries.

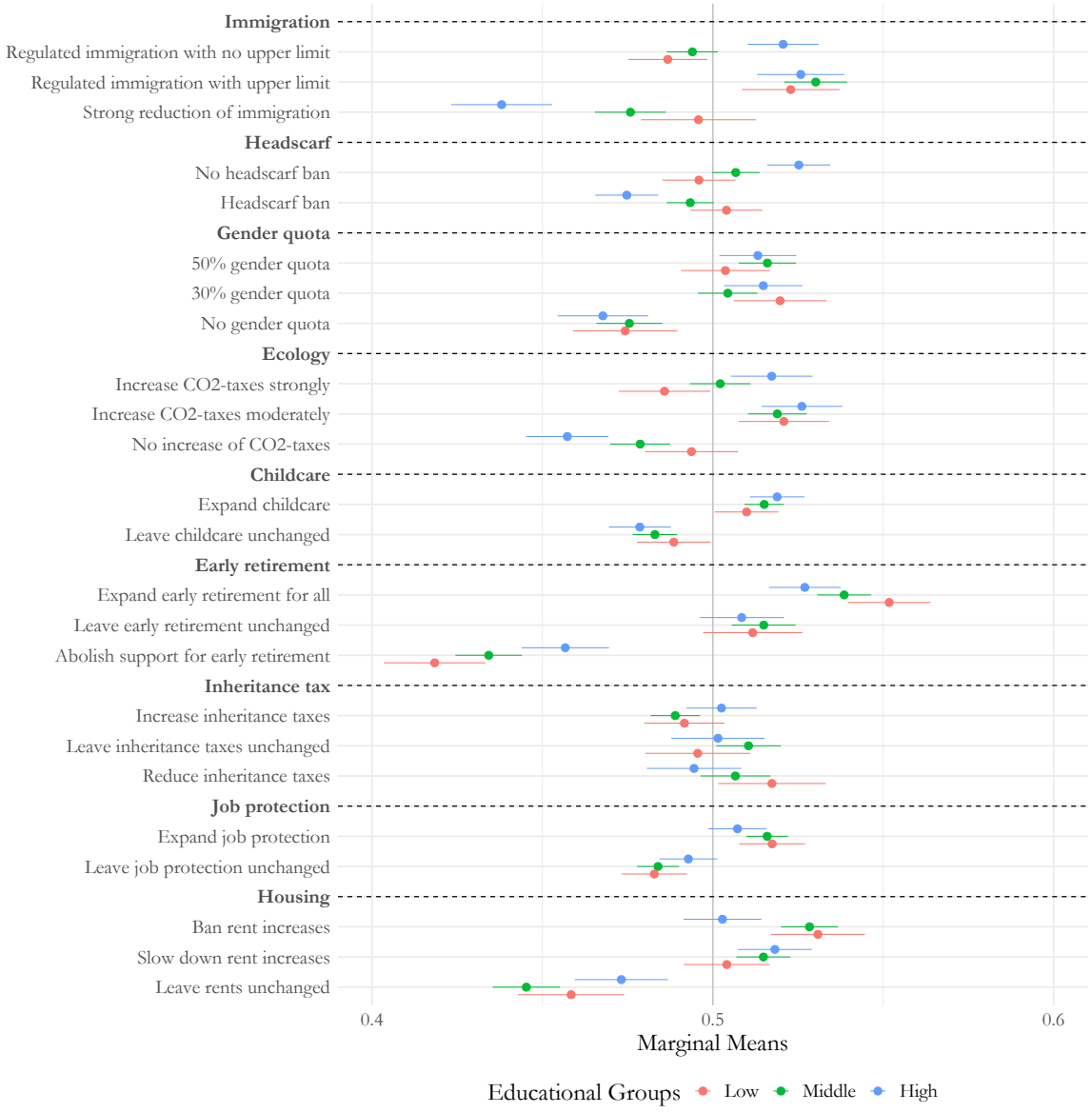


Figure 7: Marginal means by education

Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. Potentials are those with >5 in self-reported likelihood to ever vote for the Social Democratic party or <5 on a 0-10 left-right scale.

ucational groups. First, we hardly see any trade-offs at all for the economic issues and observe a strong preference for economically left policy positions across all educational groups in the potential social democratic electorate. While people with lower and middle education strongly prefer more left-wing economic stances, the patterns of preferences among people with higher education are only less pronounced, but not in the opposite direction. Only for a ban in rent increases do we find a saliency trade-off. This issue yields a positive reaction among those with lower and middle education but none among those with higher education.

Second, and in line with the literature and our expectations, we find stronger trade-offs for cultural policy positions. However, culturally *conservative* positions are largely unpopular across educational groups. On the one hand, positions such as a strong reduction of immigration or the absence of gender quotas for corporate boards make it a lot less likely that highly educated voters support a Social Democratic program. On the other hand, for the less educated groups, culturally conservative positions do not generate an increase in support either. We do not find any (positive or negative) significant effects of culturally conservative attributes on support from voters with low levels of education except when it comes to the absence of a gender quota, which even has a negative effect on program choice among this group of voters. We do, however, find stronger evidence of trade-offs with regard to the most pronounced culturally *progressive* positions: immigration without upper limit and a strong increase in CO_2 taxation yield significant positive support among the highly educated but lead to a negative evaluation among the low-educated. The potential SD electorate broadly agrees upon progressive economic and moderately progressive cultural programmatic appeals, but it is somewhat more divided when it comes to culturally progressive positions.

We also find that the less educated react overall less to cultural appeals than highly educated voters who support culturally progressive and punish culturally conservative positions. This observation supports our assumption that highly educated groups *care* particularly about cultural issues, while middle- and low-educated voters care less about these policies (but also do not show an explicit demand for conservative policies).

6.2.2 Class

In Figure 8 we investigate potential trade-offs for class groups[9]. For presentational reasons, we only show three of these groups: socio-cultural professionals, service workers and production workers. The left panel of Figure 8 shows how preferences for cultural issues vary by class. Similarly to education, we find few zero-sum trade-offs. Even for socio-cultural professionals and production workers – the two class groups that usually show the strongest differences in cultural attitudes – we only find one clear-cut zero-sum trade-off: when Social Democratic parties take a very progressive position on immigration this increases support among socio-cultural professionals but decreases support among production workers. These findings are largely driven by the fact that production workers do not react strongly to cultural policy positions. While production workers overall have been identified as holding the most culturally conservative attitudes and have thus been suggested to drive second-dimension trade-offs for Social Democratic parties, Social Democratic program choice is not determined by conservative cultural attitudes among those production workers who belong to the Social Democratic electoral potential. For economic issues, again, we find very little evidence of trade-offs. Only for childcare expansion do we see a saliency trade-off: service workers react positively to childcare expansion and negatively to a lack of expansion while both other class groups show no reaction at all. The full graph for all class groups is included in Appendix Figure B1; this shows similar patterns, with only few zero-sum trade-offs between different classes, especially regarding economic issues.

Interestingly, service workers markedly diverge in their preferences from production workers on several occasions. Service workers are visibly more progressive than production workers on the issue of a headscarf ban; on childcare and especially gender quotas they even react more positively to progressive positions than socio-cultural professionals. We can assume that this is partly driven by the high share of women among service workers (especially in comparison with production workers). Indeed, if we analyze the reactions to different policy positions for men and women, we find that women are more progressive regarding a headscarf ban, childcare

[9]We conduct an additional subgroup analysis for different income groups. Here, we find barely any differences between subgroups, except for the inheritance taxes and rent prices. See Appendix Figure B3b

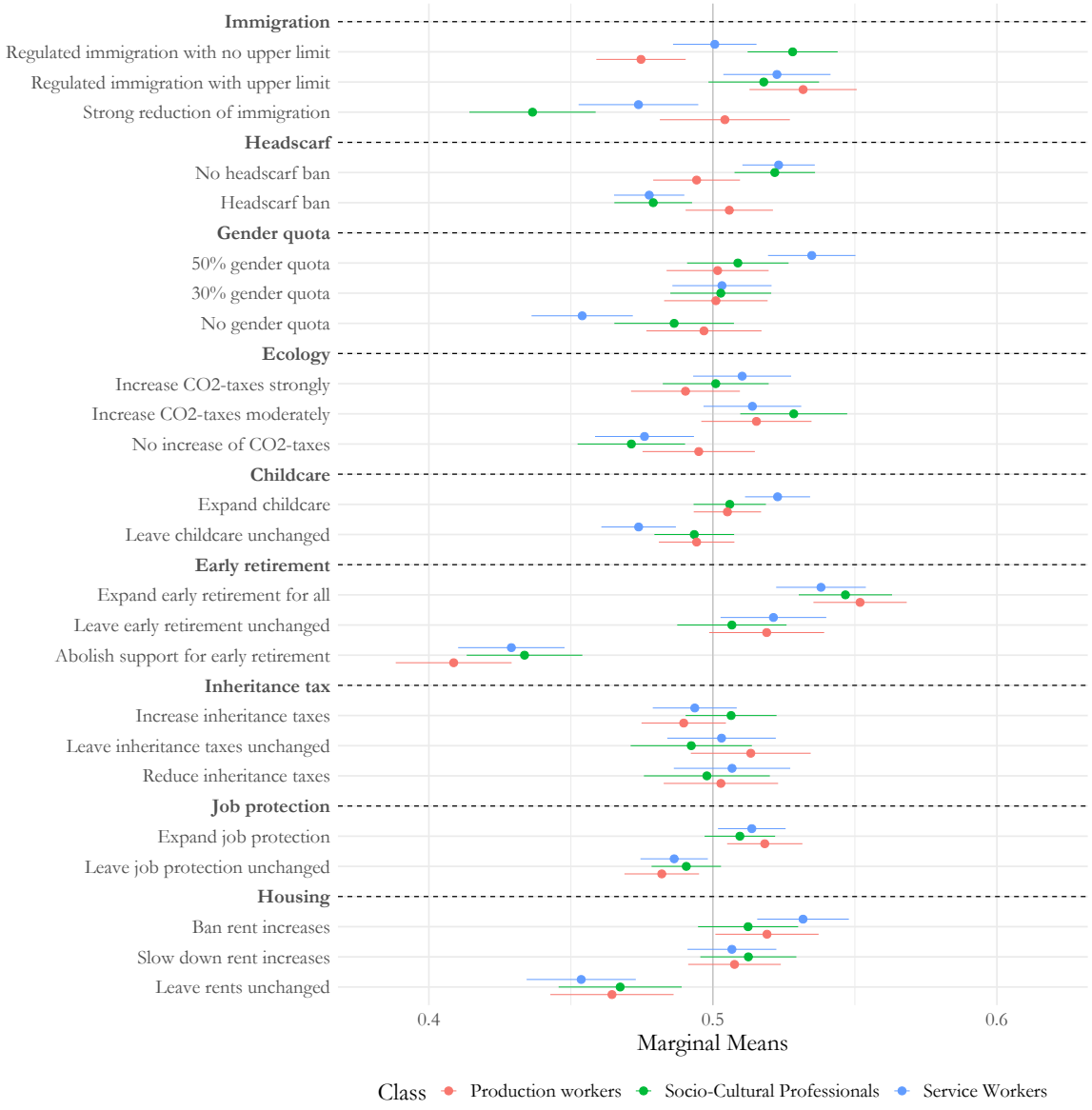


Figure 8: Marginal means by class

Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Potentials are those with >5 in self-reported likelihood to ever vote for the Social Democratic party or <5 on a 0-10 left-right scale.

and especially gender quotas (see Appendix Figure B2a).

6.2.3 Age

Finally, we turn to differences in age groups shown in Figure 9. Here, the findings are more varied. We again do not find any zero-sum trade-offs for economic issues between potential SD voters of various ages. Yet, we find some saliency trade-offs in line with what one would expect based on where voters find themselves in their work- and life cycle. For example, the expansion of job protection and early retirement are most important to voters aged 50-65, while inheritance taxes elicit the strongest reaction from those aged 65 and more. On cultural issues, however, there are indeed clearer differences between age groups, and these differences are on average stronger than they are across classes or educational groups. On immigration, headscarves, and CO_2 taxes, we do find clear zero-sum trade-offs: Young respondents react positively to very liberal stances (immigration without an upper limit, allowing headscarves and taxing CO_2 emissions strongly), while respondents over 50 respond negatively to very progressive appeals on immigration and multiculturalism and respondents over 65 also respond negatively to strong environmental protection. For gender quotas, we find saliency trade-offs, indicating that young voters seem to care more about a progressive stance in that policy area. Importantly, however, all age groups support moderately progressive stances on these issues. Our findings point to a potential dilemma for social democratic parties. As older voters are more likely to turn out to vote, alienating these voters can have strong electoral consequences in the short run. In the mid to long run, however, social democratic parties may need to generate attachments among younger voters.

In sum, our findings do not support the idea that Social Democratic parties have arrived at an inescapable impasse, where programmatic bundles will necessarily lead to strong electoral trade-offs. Within the social democratic electoral potential, socio-economic groups at the heart of the "Social Democratic dilemma" today exhibit overall only few zero-sum trade-offs, and if so exclusively with regard to socially very progressive policy appeals. Economically left policy positions find strong support across all groups. Beyond the trade-offs regarding strongly progressive cultural appeals, we find a broad agreement on moderately progressive positions among the potential SD electorate across all education, class, and age groups.

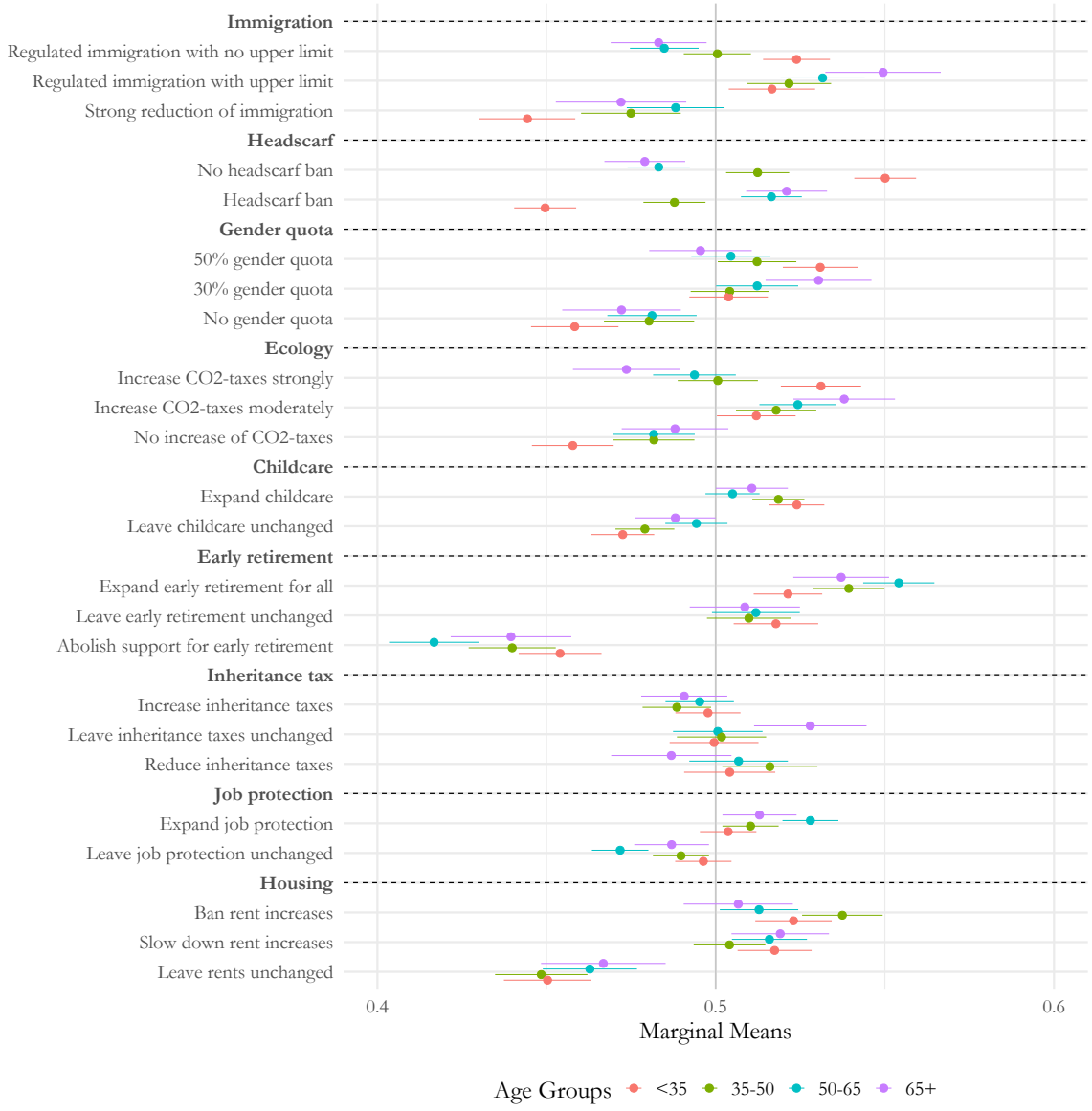


Figure 9: Marginal means by age

Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Potentials are those with >5 in self-reported likelihood to ever vote for the Social Democratic party or <5 on a 0-10 left-right scale.

In the next section, we further explore how Social Democratic parties might bundle issues into overall more attractive programs.

6.2.4 Which programmatic strategies increase the appeal of social democratic parties?

In this final section, we examine whether the trade-offs we found enable us to identify what kinds of short-term strategies may increase the overall programmatic appeal of social democratic parties. We do not claim that these strategies will necessarily increase social democratic vote shares: the effect of policy programs is always probabilistic, and at any election, other factors such as incumbency, economic conditions, or short-term valence shocks can intervene. Nevertheless, this analysis can show – ceteris paribus – which programs should appeal to more potential voters.

For this analysis, we turn to a simplified illustration of the effect of issue bundles on voter preferences. Specifically, we examine how left-wing economic and progressive cultural positions affect social democratic party support, and how these effects differ for two specific key groups, namely class and age groups; results for education are largely similar to those for class and are included in Appendix (Figure E3. While our conjoint design allowed for more complex, multidimensional responses to party programs, the results showed a clear clustering into the familiar economic and cultural ideological dimensions, which is why we adopt these in this section. Our results above showed that middle class voters generally respond more positively to progressive cultural positions than working class voters. We also found cross-class agreement on economic issues as well as greater support for progressive cultural positions on immigration, gender equality and climate change among younger cohorts of voters. Building on the detailed results in the previous section, we now turn to an illustration of the consequences of these patterns.

We first assign the nine issues to an economic and a cultural dimension (see Table 1 above). We then add up the positions on the five cultural issues and the four economic issues, respectively, treating the conjoint design as varying in the number of left-wing or moderate positions

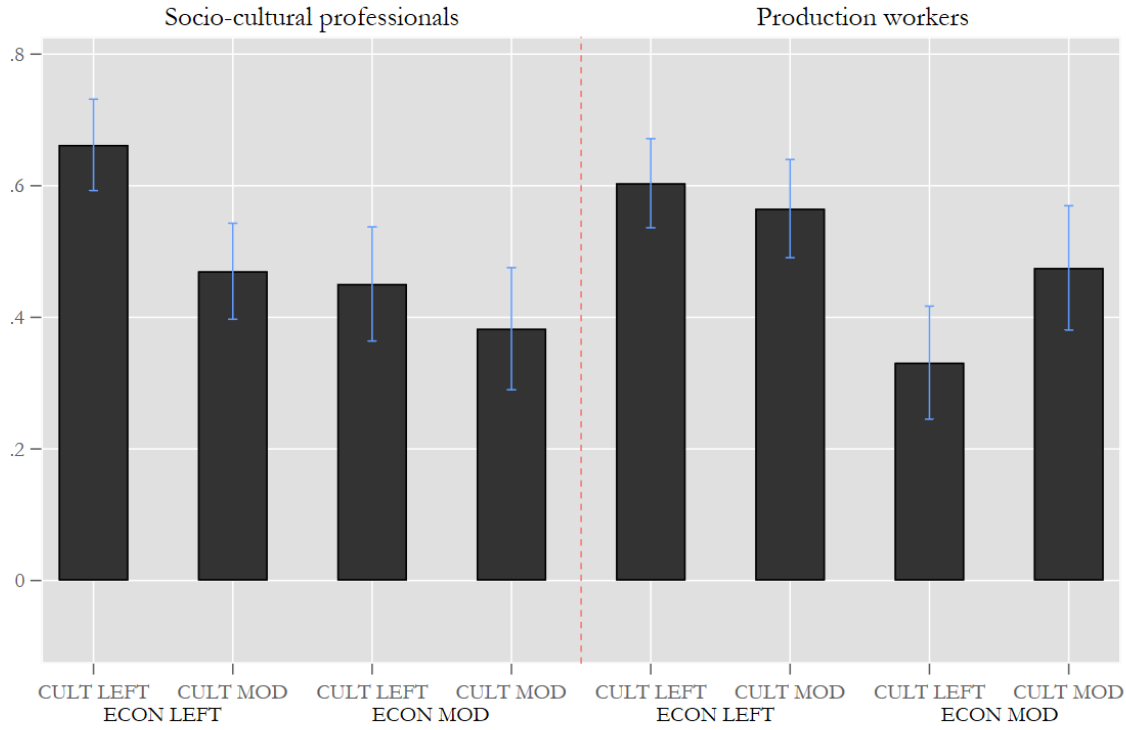
shown for the two summary dimensions. We then interact these two dimensions to predict the choice of policy program. This means that voters can react differently to a culturally left-wing program depending on the parties' economic program. This makes sense if, for example, voters might not care about a party's economic position as long as there is a match on the cultural position.

We then calculate centrist and left-wing summary positions on each dimension, giving us four possible programmatic scenarios, one for each combination of the two possible stances on the two dimensions. For the economy, the left-wing position is to expand childcare, subsidies for early retirement, employment protection in manufacturing, increase inheritance taxes and ban rent increases, while the moderate position is to leave childcare support, employment protection and control of rent prices unchanged, abolish subsidies for early retirement and reduce inheritance taxes. On cultural issues, we set the left-wing position as follows: strongly increase CO_2 taxes, establish a 50 percent quota for women on executive boards, allow headscarves for civil servants, and control immigration but without an upper limit, while the moderate position is: maintain the current level of CO_2 taxes, no gender quota, a headscarf ban and reduce immigration strongly.

With this approach, we can examine all four possible combinations of ideal-typical left-wing and centrist economic and cultural positions. To do so, we calculate the predicted support for these four different combinations of positions for the class and age groups analyzed in the previous section. Methodologically, we run the same linear regression model predicting program choice, but with the two dimensions rather than individual attributes, as well as an interaction between the two dimensions. We run different models by age and class subgroup. We then calculate the predicted linear probability of choosing a program, setting the program attributes to one of the four possible combinations of left-wing and moderate positions on the two dimensions. This exercise provides a summary assessment of how positional choices on the two dimensions affect the attractiveness of social democratic programs.

For class, we focus on production workers and socio-cultural professionals, that is, on those

Figure 10: Preferences for different programs by class groups



Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. Potentials only. Country-level results in Appendix E.

classes among the Social Democratic constituencies assumed to have to most divergence in their cultural preferences. Both groups of potential social democratic voters are of a similar size in our survey, at about 14 percent. Figure 10 shows the popularity of the four types of programs for these two groups. Appendix Figure E1 shows the patterns by country.

First, Figure 10 shows that socio-cultural professionals are much less likely to support a program when it is less culturally progressive, but only if the economic position is on the left ($p<0.01$). The cultural content of the program has no statistically significant effect when the program is on the economic right.

Turning to production workers, Figure 10 confirms our finding above that cultural bundles can sometimes lead to a reduction in support among this group. However, and this is the advantage of this additional analysis, we can see that this is only the case when the proposed program is economically moderate. For economically left-wing programs, no penalty for culturally progressive positions exists among production workers ($p=0.562$). For economically moderate programs, this penalty for a cultural left program is statistically significant at the 0.1 level.

At the same time, both production workers and socio-cultural professionals prefer the economically left program to an economically moderate program. However, the effect of an economically left-wing program is only statistically significant at a conventional level when the program is also on the cultural left.

Overall, then, this analysis means that, ceteris paribus, Social Democratic parties should in the short term be most likely to maximize their appeal among both class groups by offering a bundle of economically left and progressive cultural positions. The country-level analyses in Appendix E largely confirm this, even with the small samples we have in each country. Among socio-cultural professionals, the combination of economically and culturally left positions is the most popular option in all six countries, while among production workers this combination is one of the two most popular combinations in all six countries as well.

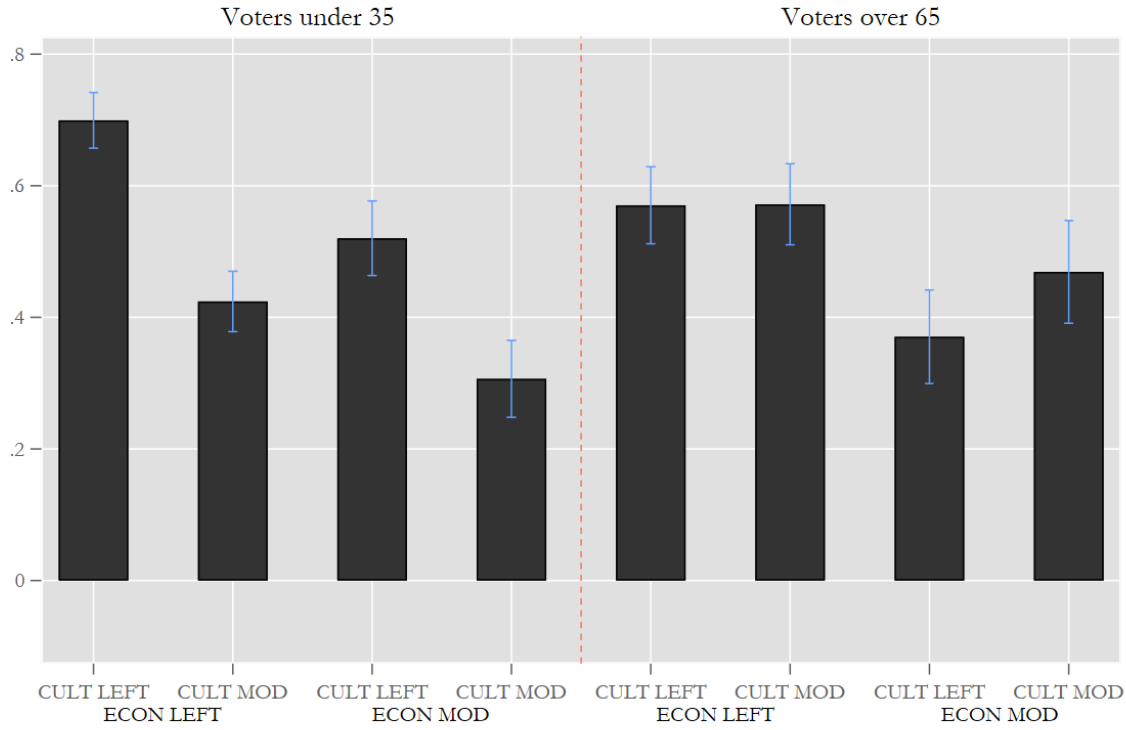
Comparing the youngest to the oldest age group, we see a very similar pattern (Figure 11).[10] Across age groups, there is unanimous support for economically more left-wing programs; the difference to economically moderate positions is statistically significant (at $p<0.05$) for almost all subgroups and cultural positions. As Appendix E shows, this pattern largely applies across all countries, with Denmark as the country where responses diverge most clearly.

For cultural positions, we find a similar pattern for age as for class. Among younger potential SD voters, culturally more left-wing progressive positions receive stronger support than more moderate ones, irrespective of the economic policy proposals. For voters over 65, as with production workers, there is no indication of a reduction in support for a culturally progressive program, as long as the economic position is on the left; note, however, that even the negative effect of a left-wing cultural position for older voters is not statistically significant ($p=0.15$), and is only really found in Austria (Appendix E). Overall, the patterns for age and class provide evidence of a near-universal appeal of an economically left program, irrespective of the cultural policy position. Moreover, as long as the party is on the economic left, a culturally left program is either irrelevant (older voters and production workers) or popular (young voters and socio-cultural professionals). The latter finding underlines that young voters and socio-cultural professionals are not only more progressive regarding cultural issues but that they also put more salience on these issues.

Importantly, our results are in line along several lines with the findings by Karreth, Polk and Allen (2013) and Polk and Karreth (2024), who examine the effects of economic and cultural programmatic moderation on the likelihood of voters turning away from social democratic parties. While these studies go beyond our design in analyzing voter reactions over two electoral cycles, they also find clear negative effects of economic right-shifts, in line with the broad agreement – across classes, education and age groups – that we find regarding economically progressive issue positions. Our findings are also consistent with the observation of Polk and

[10] In our survey, 28 percent of potential social democratic voters are under 35 and 16 percent over 65. This may partly be due to the skewed nature of online access panels; in reality, the age groups are about equal in size in our six countries, at both about 20 percent of the population, and this is also likely to apply to the set of potential social democratic voters.

Figure 11: Preferences for different programs by age groups



Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Potentials only. Country-level results in Appendix E.

Karreth (2024) that reactions are more ambivalent when it comes to cultural issues. A move towards moderate cultural appeals is not linked to strong losses, consistent with our finding of broad agreement to moderate culturally progressive stances and more divisive patterns when it comes to pronounced culturally liberal stances.

7 Conclusion

In this paper, we examine the popularity of different programmatic appeals that social democratic parties could make, aiming to establish a better understanding of how the ideological stances of these parties might impact their electoral success within a fragmented issue space. We suggest that two key aspects are important in order to correctly assess the impact of programmatic choices. First, a proper test has to take the segmentation of electoral markets into account. This means that we need to focus on potential party supporters rather than on all voters. Second, for these social democratic potentials, we suggest that it is necessary to distinguish between zero-sum and saliency trade-offs.

Empirically, our conjoint analysis survey experiment examines the reactions of different voter groups to potential social democratic party programs in six Western European countries. In a first step, we compare the potential social democratic electorate with all other voters. This analysis shows that left-wing economic and (moderately) progressive cultural positions generally appeal to the potential social democratic electorate, and this differs quite markedly from the preferences of the electorate as a whole. On economic and social policy issues, potential social democratic voters in the six countries that we study prefer leftist policies on issues such as early retirement, childcare expansion, or rental market regulations. On cultural issues, they prefer a moderate to progressive stance on issues such as immigration, gender quotas, and climate change.

In a second step, we focus on three socio-demographic subgroups for which the existence of trade-offs has been suggested, namely class, education-, and age groups. Between these subgroups of the social democratic electoral potential, we find little evidence of zero-sum trade-offs. Those we find consistently refer to cultural issues. In general, our findings much more often point to saliency trade-offs rather than zero-sum trade-offs. We also find a generally

positive reaction to a combination of left-wing positions on economic and cultural positions. While this reaction is more positive among younger voters and socio-cultural professionals, it is not the case that other voter groups react negatively to such positions, at least in the short term.

Our results demonstrate the relevance of our theoretical starting points. First, we show that it is important to distinguish between the electorate in general and a party's potential voters. We argue that in today's strongly segmented electorates, it makes little sense to infer dilemmas based on general attitudinal divides across the entire electorate. Instead, we may focus on attitudes and reactions within the group of potentials, who are in reach of party strategies. Empirically, we show that the patterns of issue attitudes in the electorate as a whole indeed differ from those within a party's potential electorate. The differences we find between the overall electorate and potential voters mean that not taking into account the segmentation of electoral markets into particular consideration sets would lead us to overestimate the electoral trade-offs and strategic dilemmas social democratic parties face. This segmentation of electorates that constitutes the basis of much literature on political cleavages should thus be more strongly integrated into behavioral accounts of the transformation of party systems in post-industrial societies.

Second, our results demonstrate the importance of distinguishing saliency from zero-sum trade-offs and provide empirical evidence on the prevalence of these trade-offs. We find no evidence of zero-sum trade-offs when it comes to social policy, be it regarding traditional social insurance policies, social investment, regulation, or taxation. On cultural issues, we find evidence for zero-sum trade-offs regarding strongly progressive cultural positions to which younger and more highly educated voters tend to respond positively, while elderly and less educated voters tend to respond negatively. However, on gender quotas and childcare – which, to some extent, can also be regarded as a cultural issue –, trade-offs are merely saliency trade-offs, in that they affect the programmatic preference of only one of the comparison groups, leaving the reference group indifferent, at least in the short term.

In addition to proposing a new way how we may think about the programmatic choices of political parties, this article has implications for how to think about the concrete challenges party families are facing in Europe. Before turning to these lessons, we should emphasize that

our findings can only provide a building block in understanding successful party strategies. Hence, we do not think analyses such as ours can provide foolproof programmatic solutions for the malaise of mainstream parties in Europe. Here, we analyze the popularity of different social democratic programs within a potential social democratic electorate. While we provide novel evidence on the support for different programs in this electorate, the real world of party competition is, of course, more complex, and voters' decisions will depend on the offers of several different parties and their relation to each other. Hence, a more popular program does not make a successful strategy, yet. Successful strategies depend on competition with other parties - something we do not test here. We do, however, show that popularity and trade-offs are relatively similar in six very different contexts in terms of party competition.

Another limitation of our study is that we focus on the programmatic aspect of political competition. Yet, social democrats may have lost and may be losing votes because of factors that are not primarily related to their policy programs. Some authors emphasize more structural changes, such as the numerical decline in the working class (Benedetto, Hix and Mastrorocco, 2020), changes to the labour market (Rueda, 2005), the weakening influence of unions (Pontusson, 1995), the lower relevance of welfare state policy (Loxbo et al., 2021), and the cumulative effect of crises (Hernández and Kriesi, 2016; Hobolt and Tilley, 2016). Relatedly, other research, such as Dassonneville (2023), points to increasing cross-pressures among voters due to diverging social group identities. Social democratic parties may have lost their ability to mobilize those identities that make voters more likely to support them – an argument similar to the one already made by Przeworski and Sprague (1986). Similarly, Rennwald (2020) and Bremer and Rennwald (2023) emphasize the role of turnout. Finally, voters also care about reputation, leadership, or past performance (Green and Jennings, 2017), factors difficult to include in survey experimental designs. In any case, our study only provides insight into the current challenges facing parties, and does not empirically explain why social democratic parties lost votes in past decades, or why sections of the electorate are no longer part of their potential electorate.

Despite these caveats, we believe that our framework is useful for understanding programmatic trade-offs for many political parties in post-industrial societies, not just social democratic parties. For example, similar issues and groups may create trade-offs for mainstream

right parties. On immigration, for instance, we know that the business-oriented managerial professionals that make up a core part of the electorate of the mainstream right have more progressive preferences than the small business owners or working-class voters that the mainstream right also needs to appeal to. The question then would be if these different preferences indeed lead to trade-offs in programmatic choice for the mainstream right.

However, the most obvious implications of our study are for understanding the current programmatic options open to social democratic parties. Hence, our findings speak to the broader debate about what social democratic parties can do strategically to appeal to potential voters. On the one hand, our findings support Kitschelt's (1994) argument that many of the strategic dilemmas of social democratic parties in post-industrial societies are driven by the politicization of more cultural issues. On the other hand, however, as we largely find saliency trade-offs for these issues as well, social democratic parties might be at less of a strategic impasse than the literature so far has assumed. As long as social democratic parties provide economically left policy programs, taking moderately culturally progressive positions is unlikely to alienate those working-class and lower-educated voters who today are part of the SD potential electorate. One caveat concerns the short-term nature of our findings, as related studies have found that electoral punishment may occur only with a delay of at least one electoral turn (Karreth, Polk and Allen, 2013; Polk and Karreth, 2024). However, it is an open question why and to what extent the relative indifference of working-class and lower-educated voters in the SD electorate towards culturally progressive stances would translate into antagonizing them over the longer run. Moreover, the most skeptical groups towards culturally progressive stances are found among the elderly potential SD voters. If these age-based differences reflect cohort effects, one would expect even fewer trade-offs over time, because newer cohorts increasingly replace older generations of voters.

At the same time, parties should not take saliency trade-offs too lightly. Such trade-offs might still provide obstacles to forming broader electoral coalitions that we have not analyzed in this article. If political parties largely focus for a longer time on issues that some of their potential voter groups do not care about, this might in itself alienate these voters. Future research should investigate this relationship between supply-side salience and electoral trade-offs in more detail. This article provides a framework for doing so.

Another finding relevant to current challenges facing social democratic parties is that we find stronger trade-offs for age groups than for class groups. This pattern is surprising given the focus of much of the literature. We find that younger cohorts are much more progressive than older ones and that they also care more than older voters about cultural policies, especially for issues such as immigration, gender equality, and tackling climate change. While these diverging attitudes between generations should not be surprising, we demonstrate how strongly they translate into trade-offs for social democratic parties. This indeed creates a strategic dilemma for social democratic parties in balancing their short-term with their more long-term goals. In the short run, social democratic parties cannot win elections without appealing to older voters who are more numerous and are also more likely to vote. However, by focusing their appeal too strongly on older cohorts, social democratic parties risk losing younger voters to green and radical left parties. Given the importance of party support in impressionable years for vote choice over the life cycle, it would become much more difficult to win these voters back in the long run.

Finally, our paper provides key insights into the broader debate about the current electoral challenges facing social democratic parties. Our findings show that more authoritarian and nationalist programmatic appeals are unlikely to help social democratic parties regain electoral strength: such positions are not popular among potential voters who are lower educated and working class, and they would most certainly alienate the educated middle-class as well as younger potential voters. So, there is no evidence that right-wing appeals are promising. In contrast, our findings show that left-wing appeals are more popular than one might have expected: a combination of economically left and culturally progressive positions is popular among the potential social democratic electorate, without creating strong zero-sum or saliency trade-offs. Of course, our analysis does not account for the complexities of party competition and party reputations. For instance, these positions might also be taken up by competitors on the left (such as Green parties), who are also gaining government experience in many settings. However, it should be uncontroversial that formulating a program that is popular among potential voters is likely to be, ceteris paribus, more electorally promising than taking more unpopular positions.

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Appendix

7.1 Appendix A: Principles and Guidance for Human Subjects Research

In 2020, the APSA Council approved a Principles and Guidance document for Human Subjects Research. Relying on original survey data from six West European countries that we have gathered in cooperation with a professional research institute named Bilendi as described in the research design and data section, our article adheres to these principles in the following ways:

Informed and voluntary consent was obtained from each participant by informing participants about our study and by whom it was compiled as well as financed on a first screen of the online surveys we have conducted. Participants were asked to state whether they understood all information given on that first screen and whether they agreed participating in our study by clicking a specific button on the first screen of the survey.

On that same screen participants were also informed about the implications of their participation (exclusive use of their answers in a completely anonymous form for scientific research purposes only) and the option to refrain from answering questions or to stop the survey at any moment without repercussions. Still on that same first screen, we have also briefed participants on how their data would be handled and protected and how they could contact us should any further questions arise.

On the notion of data protection, we moreover contractually obliged the professional survey institute, Bilendi, we have cooperated with to respect our requirements regarding informed consent and data protection regulations at all times. Participants were compensated by Bilendi.

The survey contained no deception, priming or manipulation of participants. The survey is part of a larger number of surveys that the authors conducted with the same company. They are identical in their structure (no deception or manipulation; conjoint and batteries on political attitudes and socio-demographics). The ethics committee of our university has approved a bundle application for this type of survey for an ERC project. The ethics approval did not specifically refer to the survey conducted for this article. Given the identical structure of this survey to the approved surveys, we did not seek additional ethics approval.

7.2 Appendix B: Marginal means by groups

This section presents the marginal means from our conjoint experiment for additional subgroups. Figure B1a and Figure B1b show marginal means for all class groups defined by Oesch instead of the 3 groups we focus on in the main text. We find no additional trade-offs except for the ones already highlighted in the main text. In Figure B2a, we present the marginal means for different attributes based on a respondent's gender. Women are generally more progressive. However, these differences are only significant for issues that have an explicit gender component. Women are significantly more likely to choose a program if it includes a 50% gender quota, they are very likely to reject if it does not and they are more likely to choose a program if it does not include a headscarf ban. All trade-offs based on gender are saliency trade-offs. As Figure B2b shows, for union membership, too, we only find saliency trade-offs. We find the strongest differences between union members and those who are not for gender quotas and childcare expansion. Against the idea of an urban/rural divide, We do not find any significant differences based on place of residency (Figure B3a). We also run an additional subgroup analysis splitting the sample into three groups based on their income adjusted to the country (low, middle, high). We find barely any differences here. The few differences we find are regarding inheritance taxes (not surprisingly, respondents with higher income are less in favour of increasing these taxes) and housing prices (with the low income groups being strongly favour of banning rent increases). For sociocultural issues, different income groups show almost no differences. Finally, we also employ a conjoint where we split the potential electorate into actual social democratic voters and those who, despite being defined as potential voters, did not vote for a social democratic party (Figure 4). Here, we see that potential non-voters are mostly similar to the actual voters among the potential. If anything, the potential non-voters are more progressive on sociocultural issues than those who did vote for social democrats. It is important to note here that the potential non-mobilized group also contains all newly eligible (very young) voters.

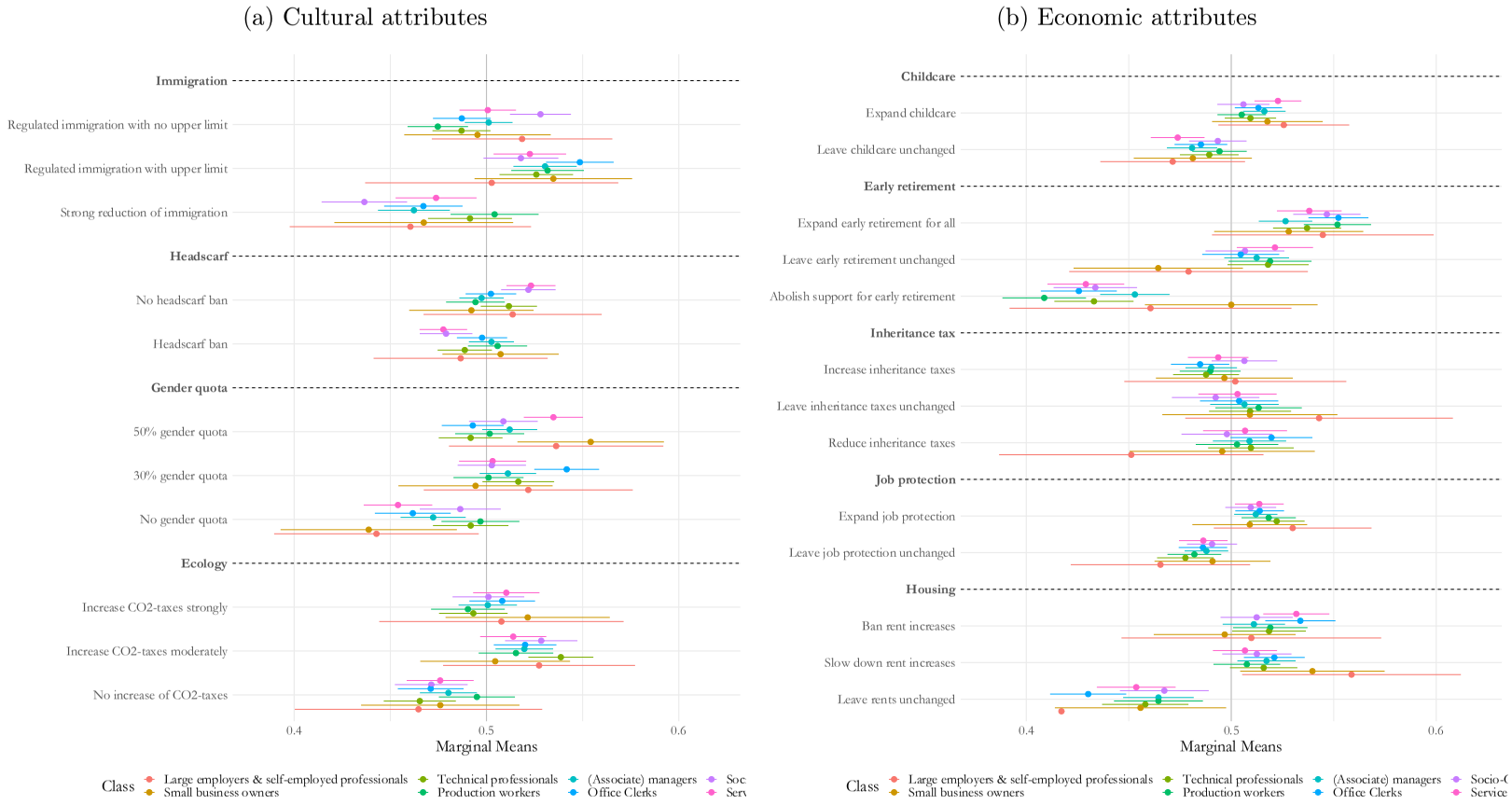
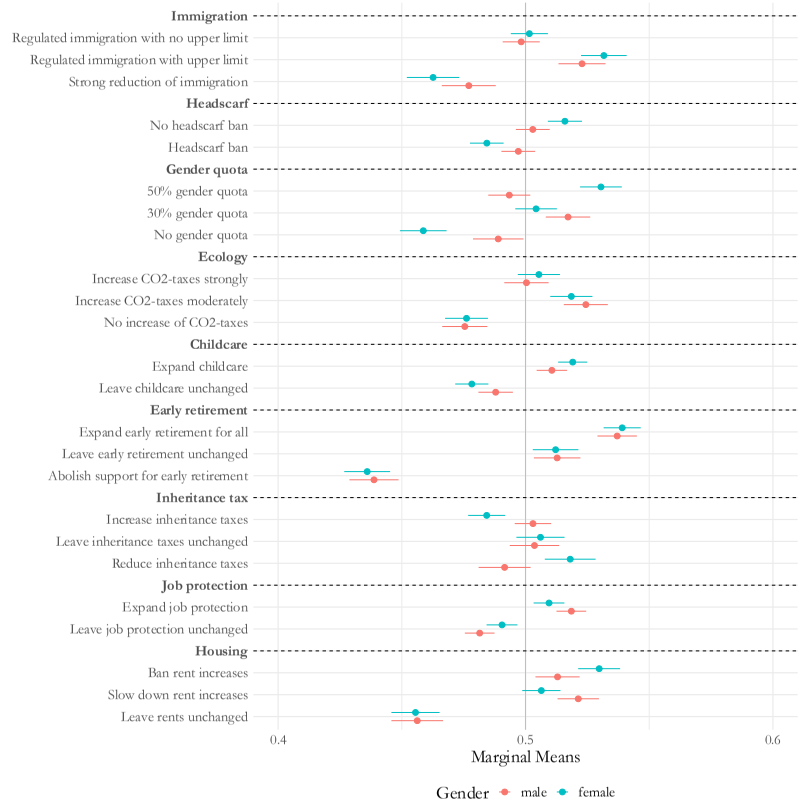
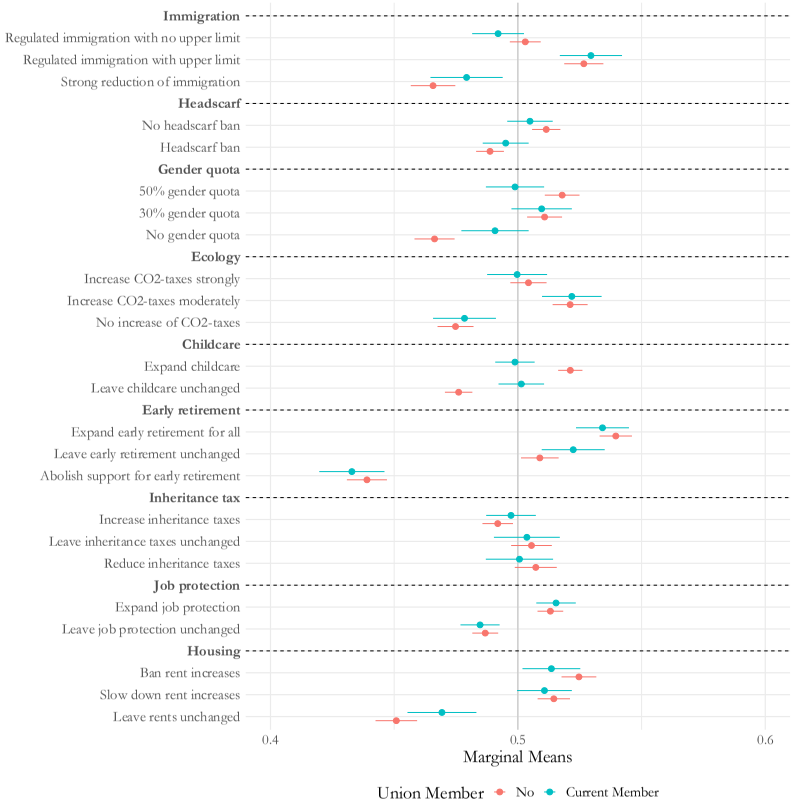


Figure B1: Marginal means by class

Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Potentials are those with >5 in self-reported likelihood to ever vote for the Social Democratic party or <5 on a 0-10 left-right scale.

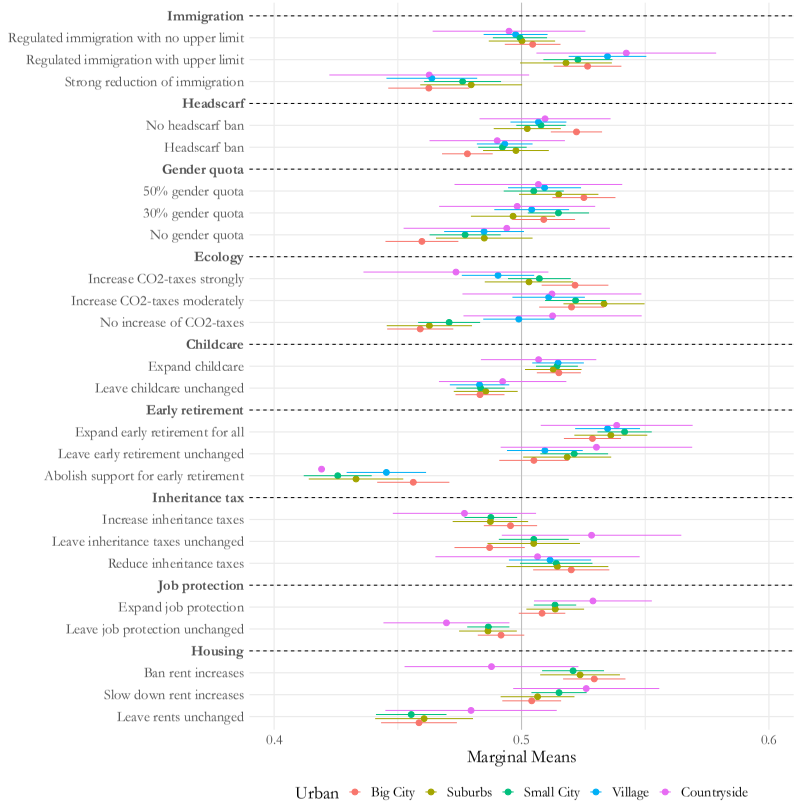


(a) Marginal means by gender (only potentials)

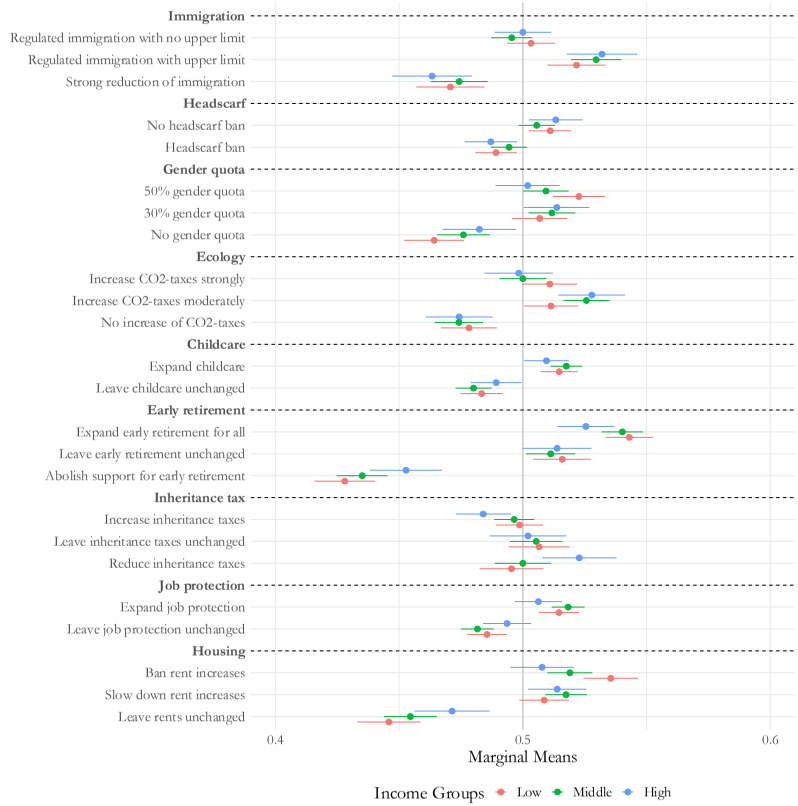


(b) Marginal means by union membership (only potentials)

Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Potentials are those with >5 in self-reported likelihood to ever vote for the Social Democratic party or <5 on a 0-10 left-right scale.



(a) Marginal means by urban rural residence (only potentials)



(b) Marginal means by income (only potentials)

Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Potentials are those with >5 in self-reported likelihood to ever vote for the Social Democratic party or <5 on a 0-10 left-right scale.

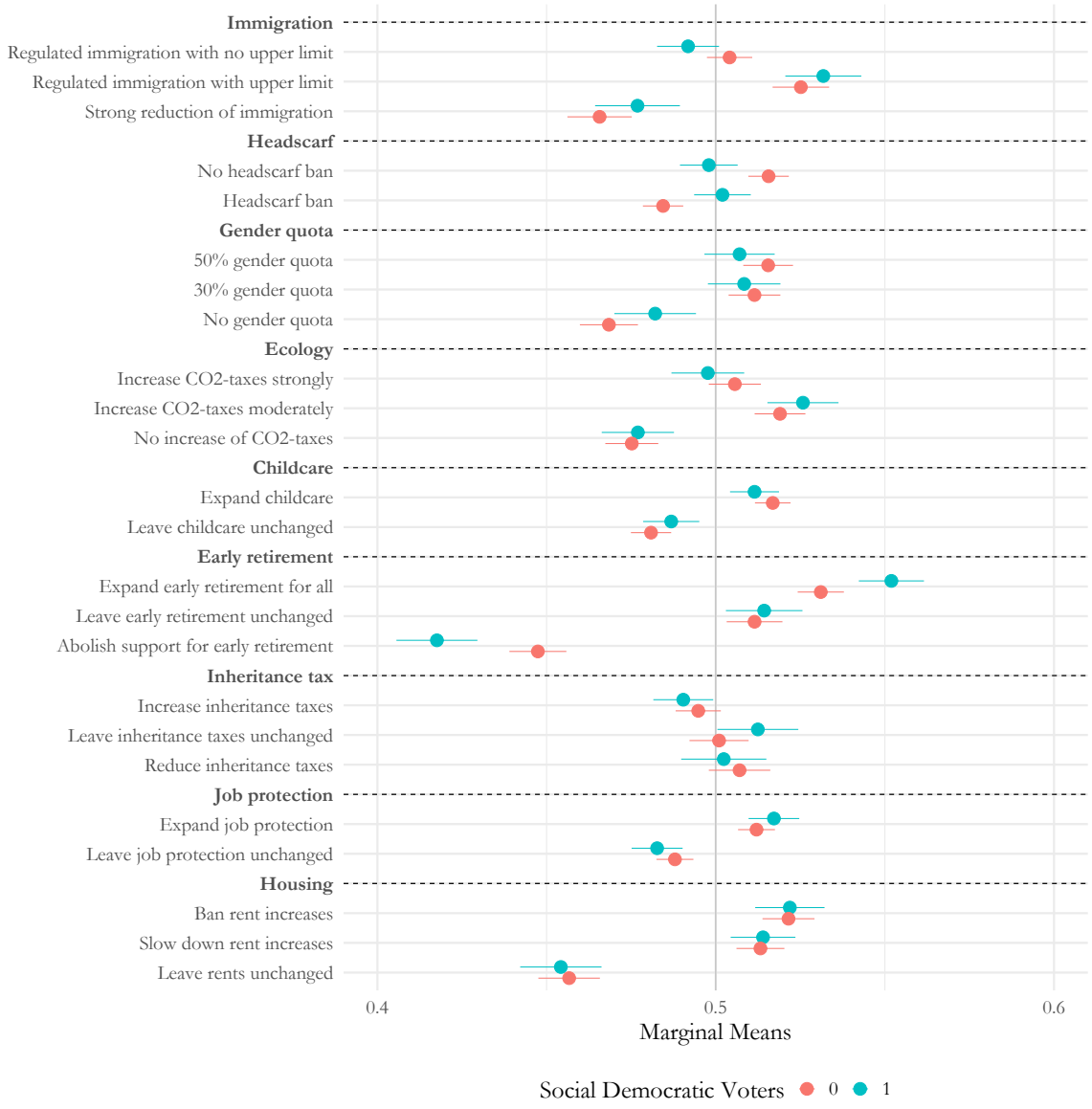


Figure B4: Marginal means among SD voters and non SD voters (only potentials)

Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Potentials are those with >5 in self-reported likelihood to ever vote for the Social Democratic party or <5 on a 0-10 left-right scale.

7.3 Appendix C: Using ratings instead of choices as conjoint analysis outcomes

The following figures use program ratings instead of the choice between programs as the dependent variable. Generally, ratings of programs are more strongly dependent on subgroup characteristic baselines and country contexts, which is why the results should be interpreted carefully. Turning to the results, the patterns of the rating results are in line with our expectations for the choice setting. Not surprisingly, potential social democratic voters rate the programs almost always better - no matter the attributes of a program. There is one exception, however: When a program contains a restrictive policy regarding immigration, non-potentials and potentials rate a program equally. This is more strongly because non-potentials rate it strongly better than programs containing progressive immigration proposals. However, there is a striking difference in the rating when a program contains a progressive policy on immigration. As becomes clear, the average popularity of a program varies over groups. Looking at subgroups more specifically, we see that low-educated voters rate the programs significantly better than high-educated voters. The same patterns are visible when looking at class, where production and service workers are more likely to rate programs slightly better than socio-cultural professionals. However, the different classes and education groups show almost no variation in rating the programs depending on a specific attribute. When focusing on age groups, 50-65-year-old voters rate a program significantly worse when it proposes to abolish support for early retirement, whereas the youngest voters rate a program significantly worse when it proposes more conservative sociocultural policies. These findings are in line with the findings from the force-choice setting. Interestingly, the 35-50-year-old voters and the pensioners rate almost every program equally, no matter the attributes it contains. Overall, the patterns of how attributes change the popularity of a program, however, correspond to the findings with choice as the dependent variable that we discuss in the main text. In general, we conclude that choice shows differences clearer than rating.

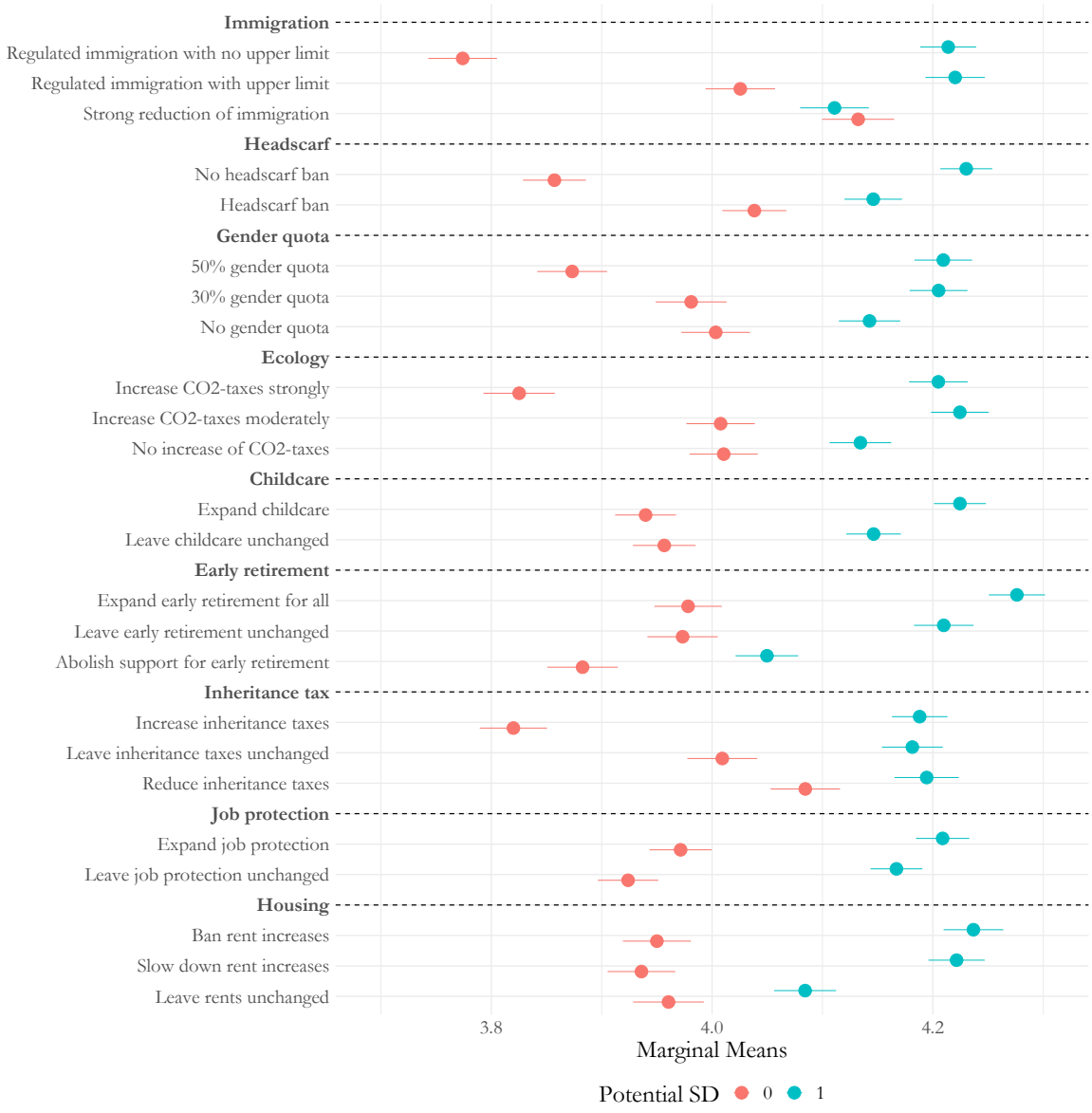


Figure C1: Rating: Marginal means by SD-Ptv

Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

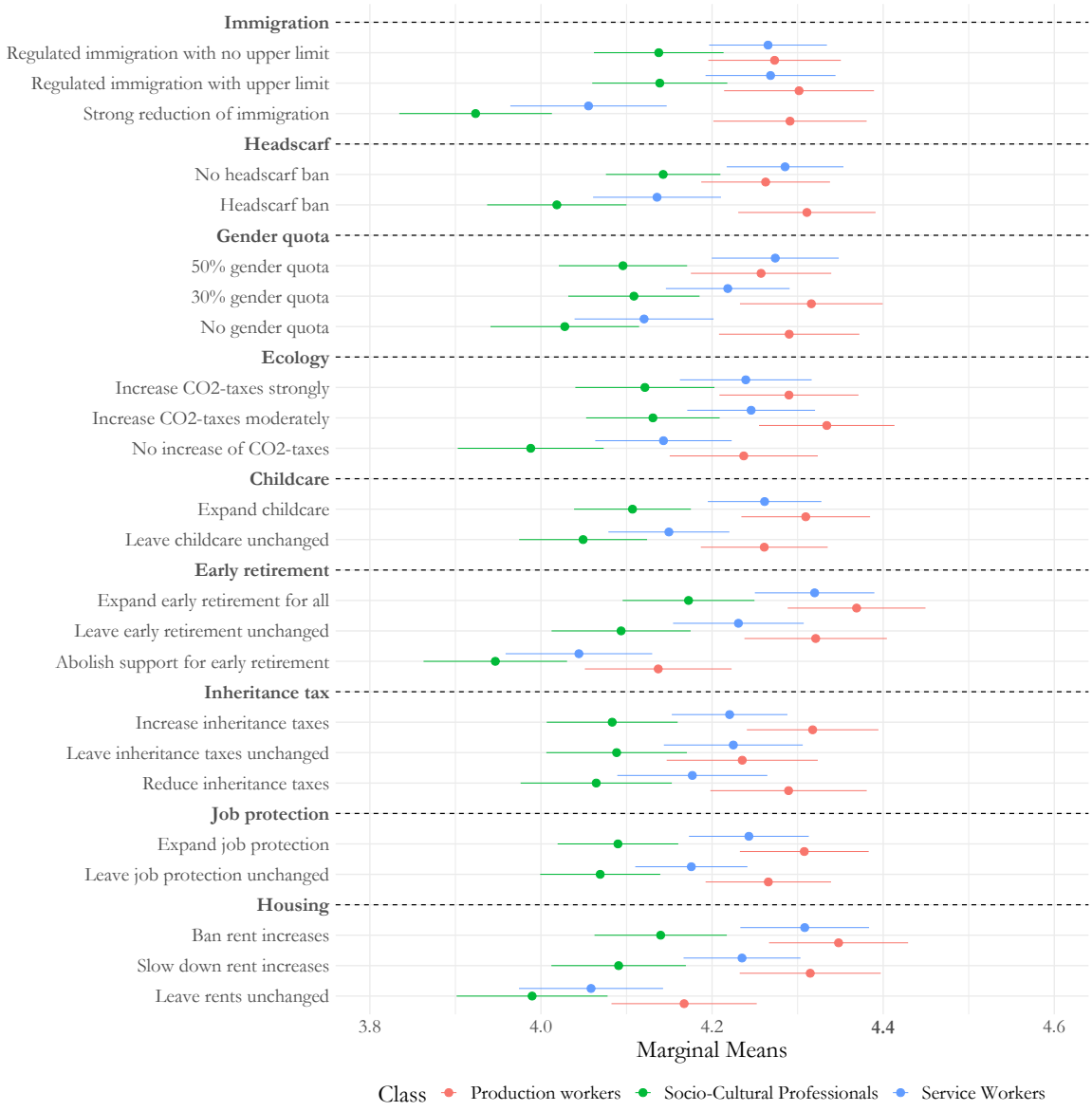


Figure C2: Rating: Marginal means by class (only potentials)

Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

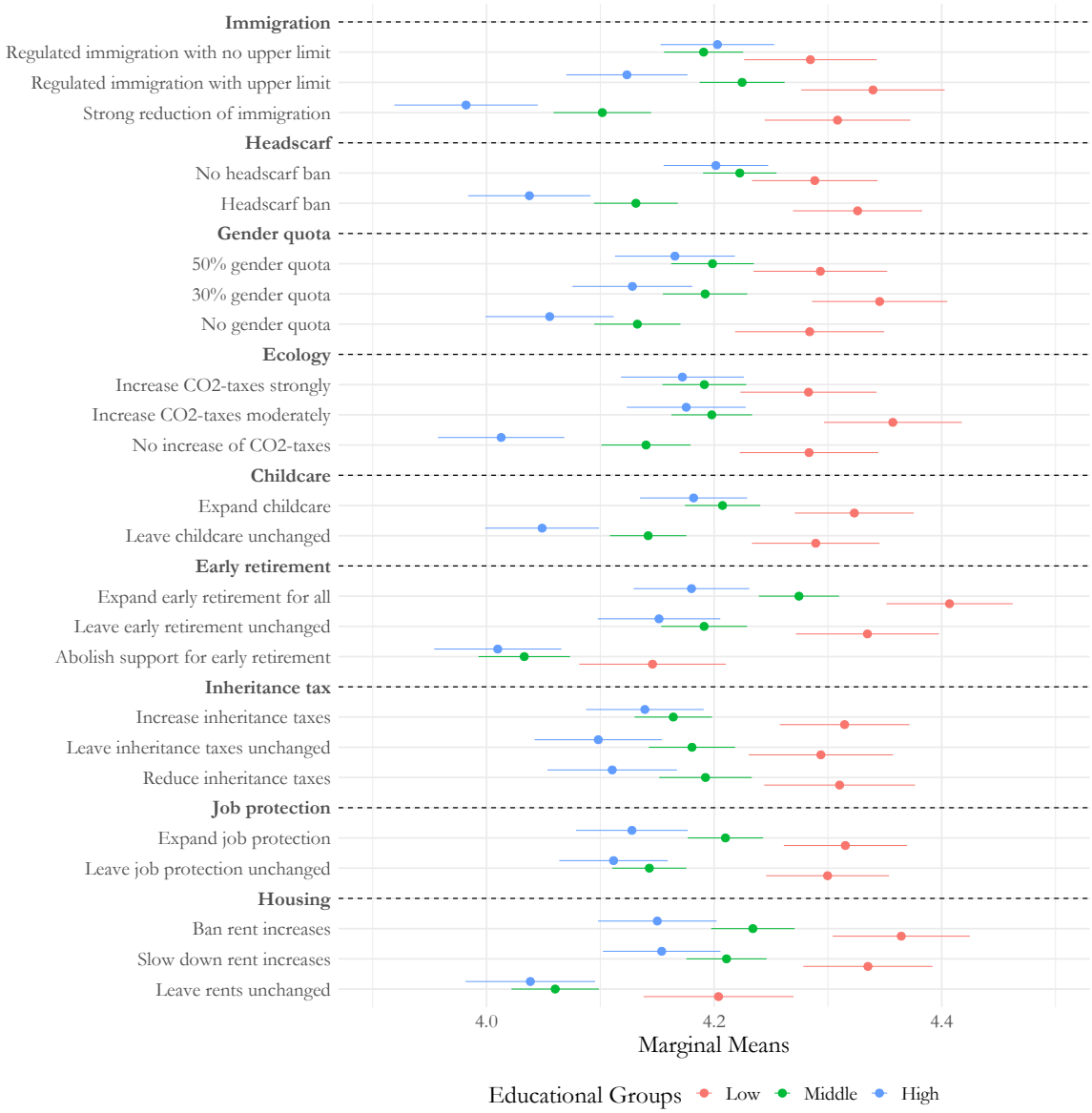


Figure C3: Rating: Marginal means by education (only potentials)

Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

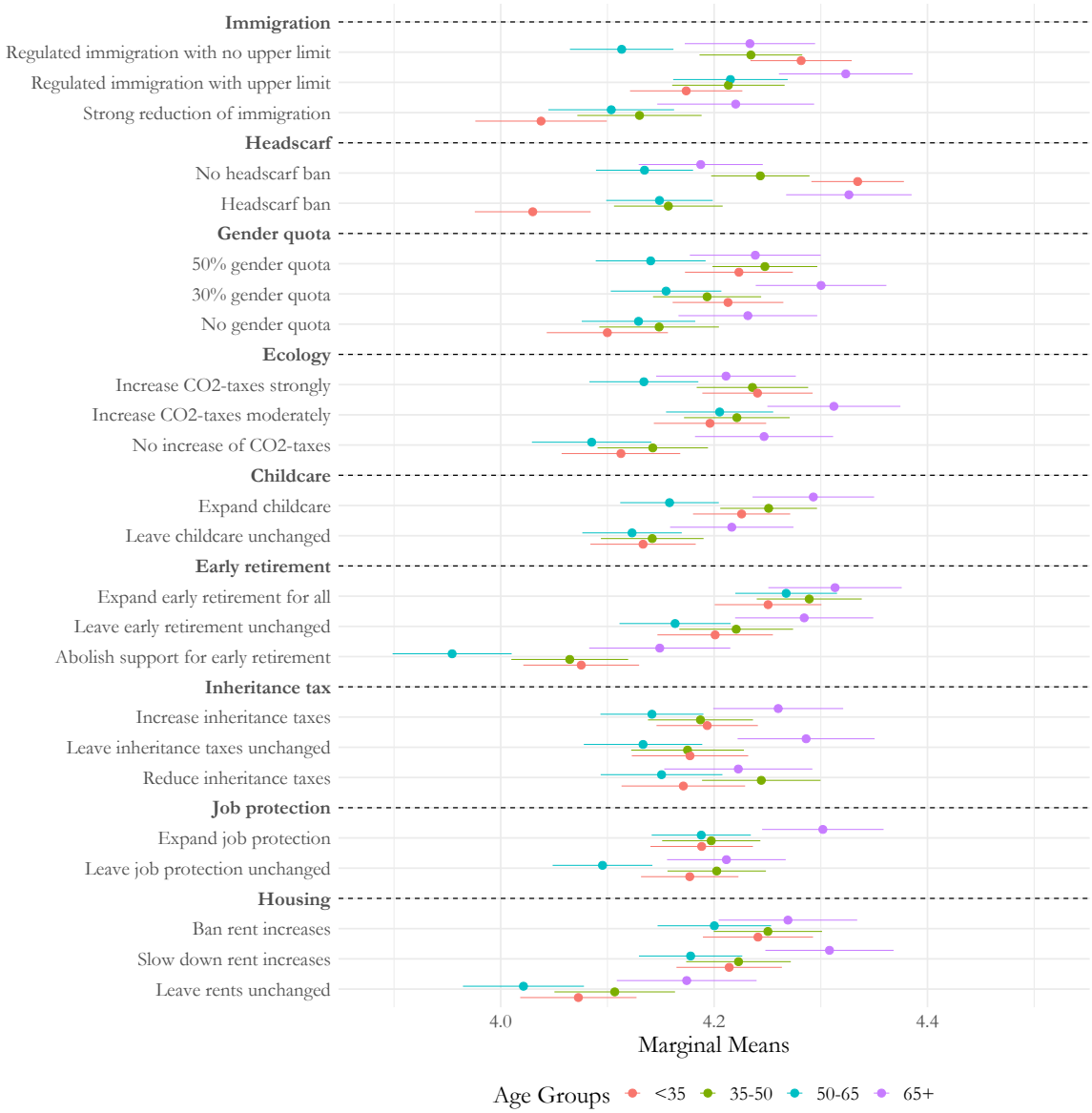


Figure C4: Rating: Marginal means by age (only potentials)

Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

7.4 Appendix D: Different coding of potential Social Democratic voters

The following figures show our main results based on a different coding of potentials. Figure D1 use just a PTV of >5, Figure D2 of a PTV>6 OR a left-right selfplacement of <5, and Figure D3 of just a left-right selfplacement of <5. These analyses show that the effects mostly hold over different PTV and left-right specifications, also when focusing on different subgroups. We see that when we define the potential social democratic electorate only with left-leaning respondents (and neglecting the PTV, see: Figure D3), these voters are slightly more sociocultural progressive and economically left-wing than if we define the potential only with a PTV variable, see: Figure D1. A different, more strict PTV threshold as applied in Figure D2 does not provide different results than the main analysis, neither for economic nor for sociocultural issues, also when we look at the different subgroup analyses.

The subgroup analyses for differently defined potentials (with only one criterion, respectively) show more pronounced salience trade-offs when we define the potential only depending on left-right placement. This is mainly because socio-cultural professionals, young people, and highly educated people who define themselves as left-leaning are more strongly in favor of sociocultural progressive policies than if that potential is only defined via the likelihood of voting for a social democratic party. However, the different definitions of the potentials do not show different trade-offs for the economic issues.

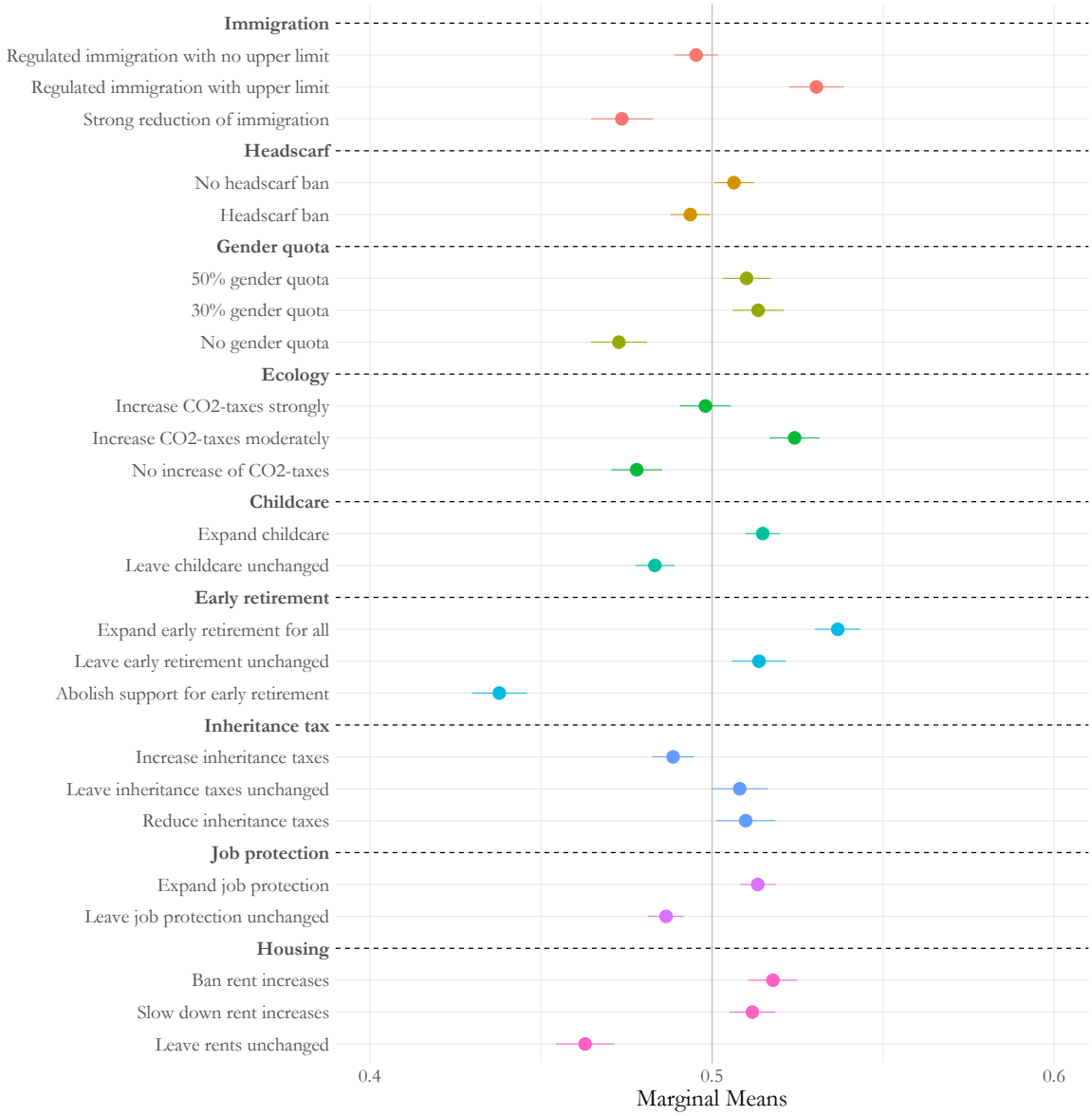


Figure D1: Marginal means: Potential defined with PTV $>$ 5 only

Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

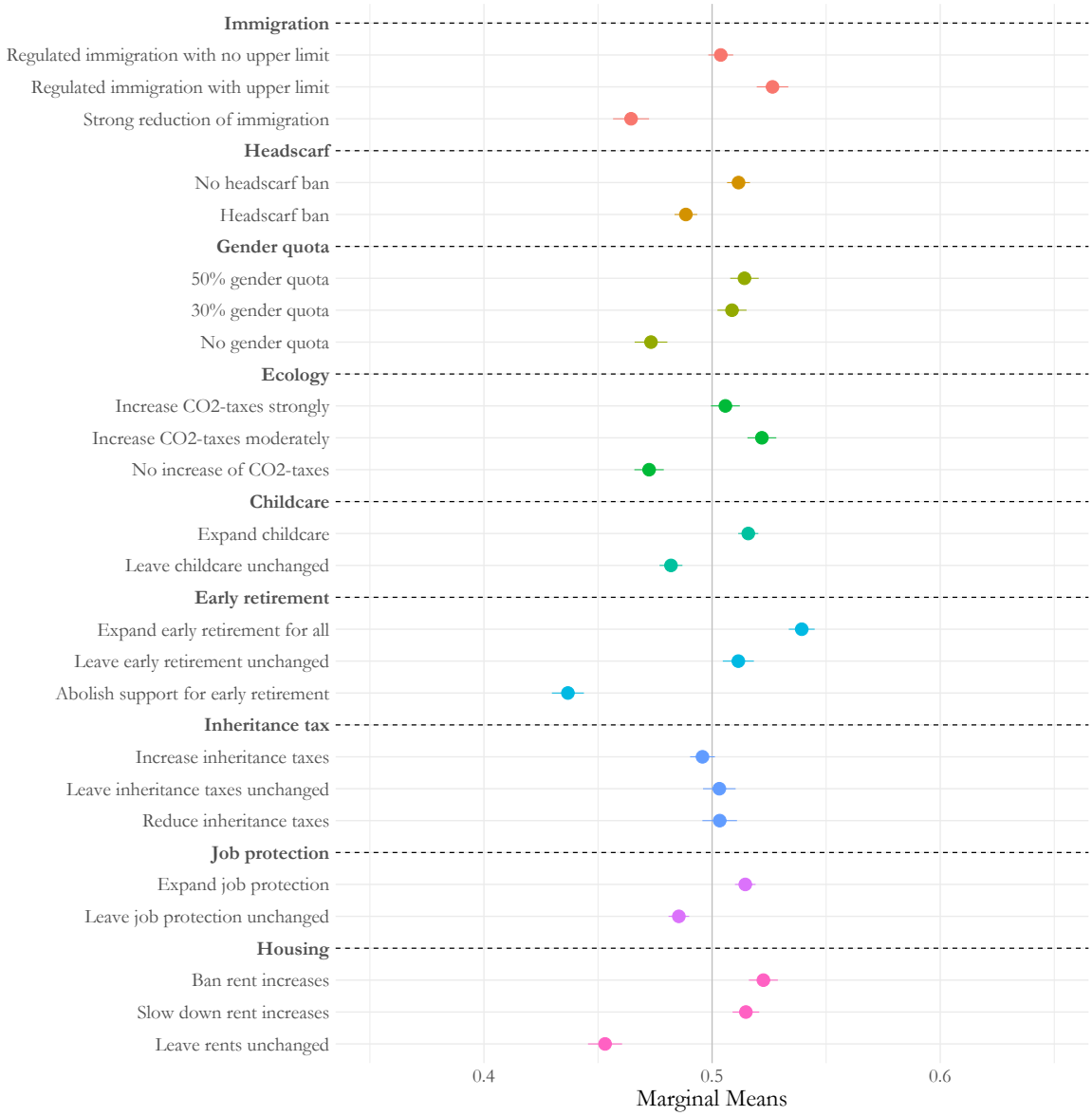


Figure D2: Marginal means: Potential defined with PTV>6 OR a left-right self placement of <5

Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

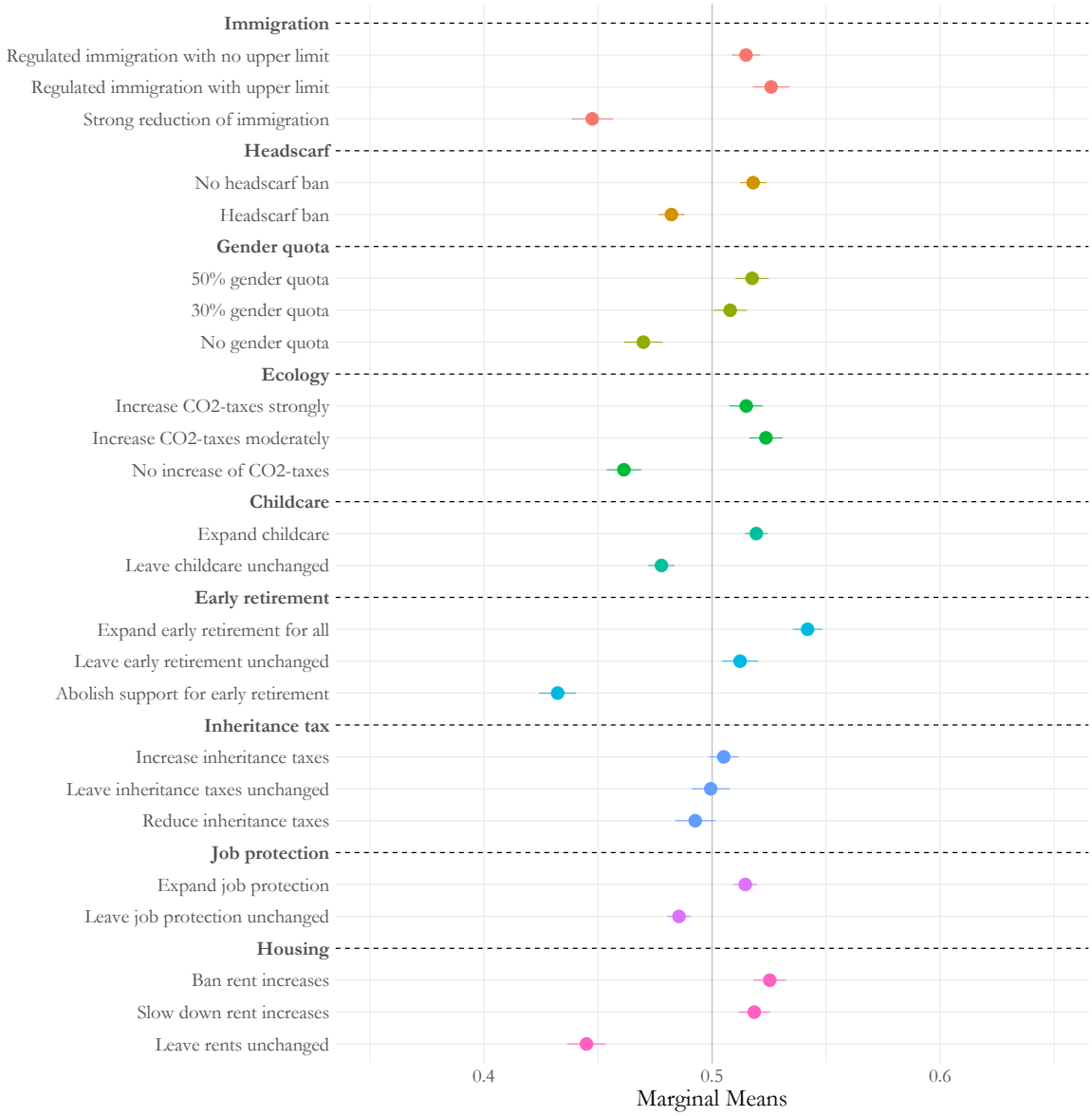


Figure D3: Marginal means: Potential defined with left-right self placement of <5 only

Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

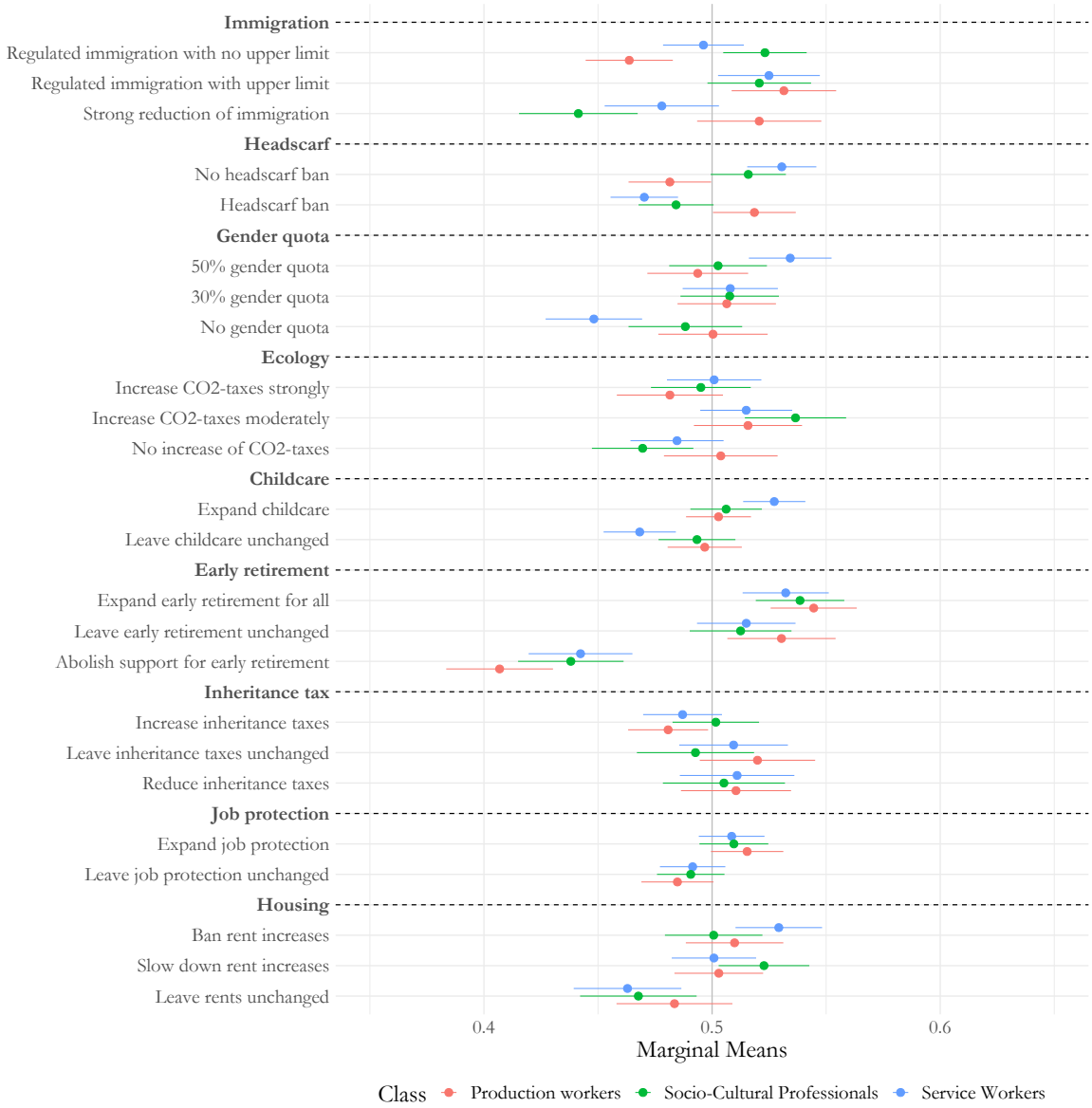


Figure D4: Marginal means (only potentials); Potential defined with PTV $>$ 5 only

Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

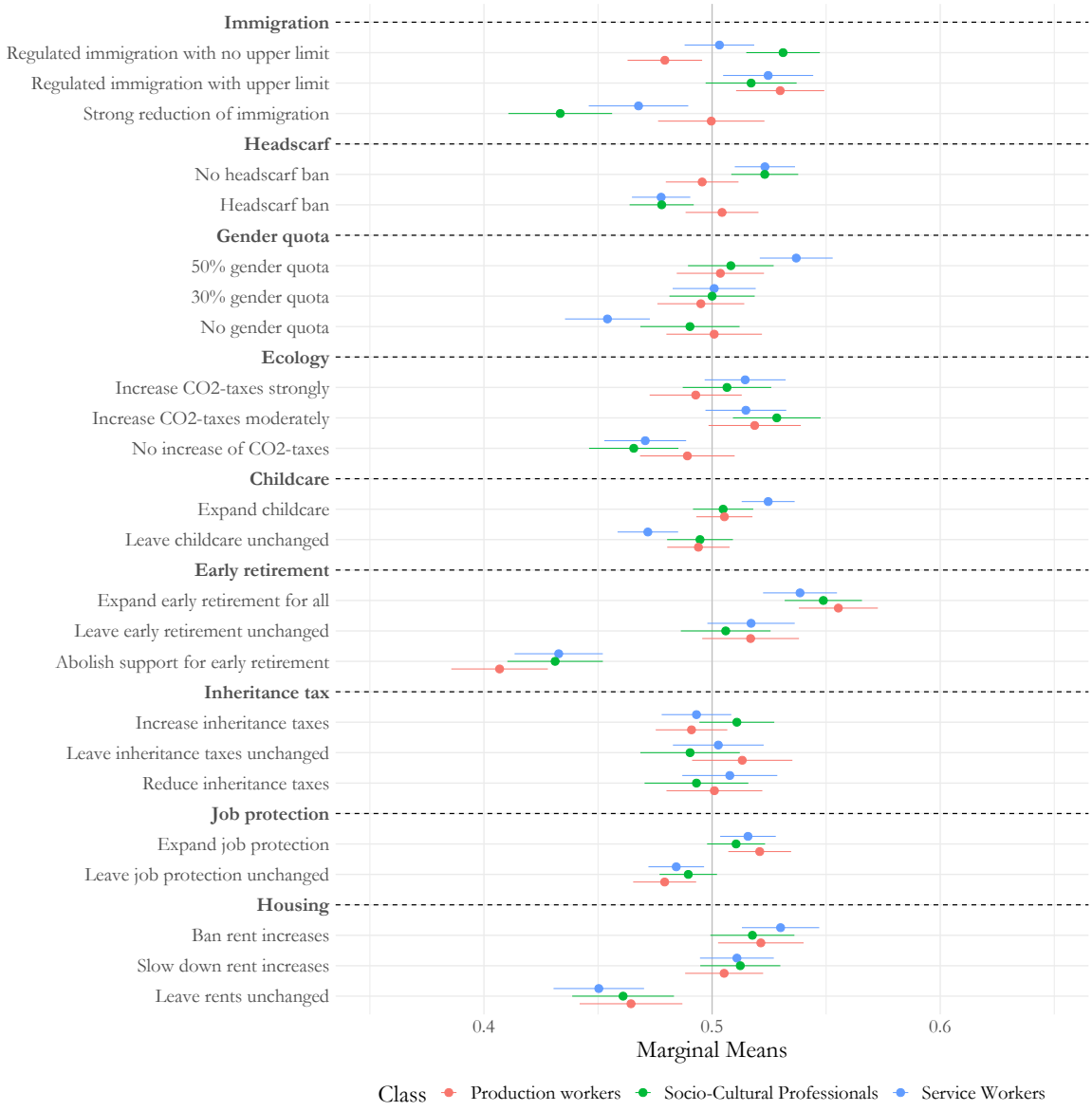


Figure D5: Marginal means by class (only potentials); Potential defined with PTV>6 OR a left-right self placement of <5

Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

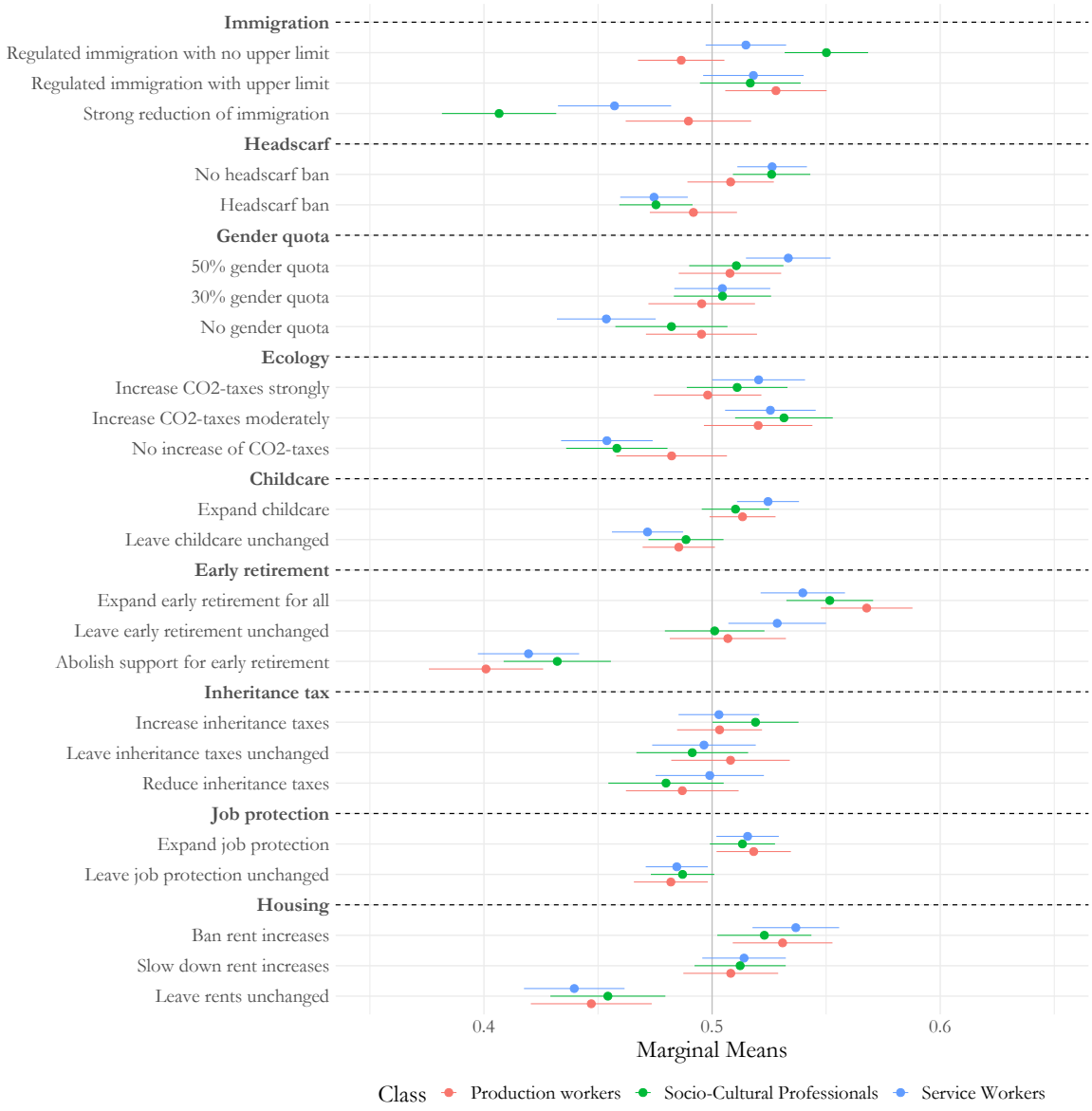


Figure D6: Marginal means by class (only potentials); Potential defined with left-right self placement of <5 only

Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

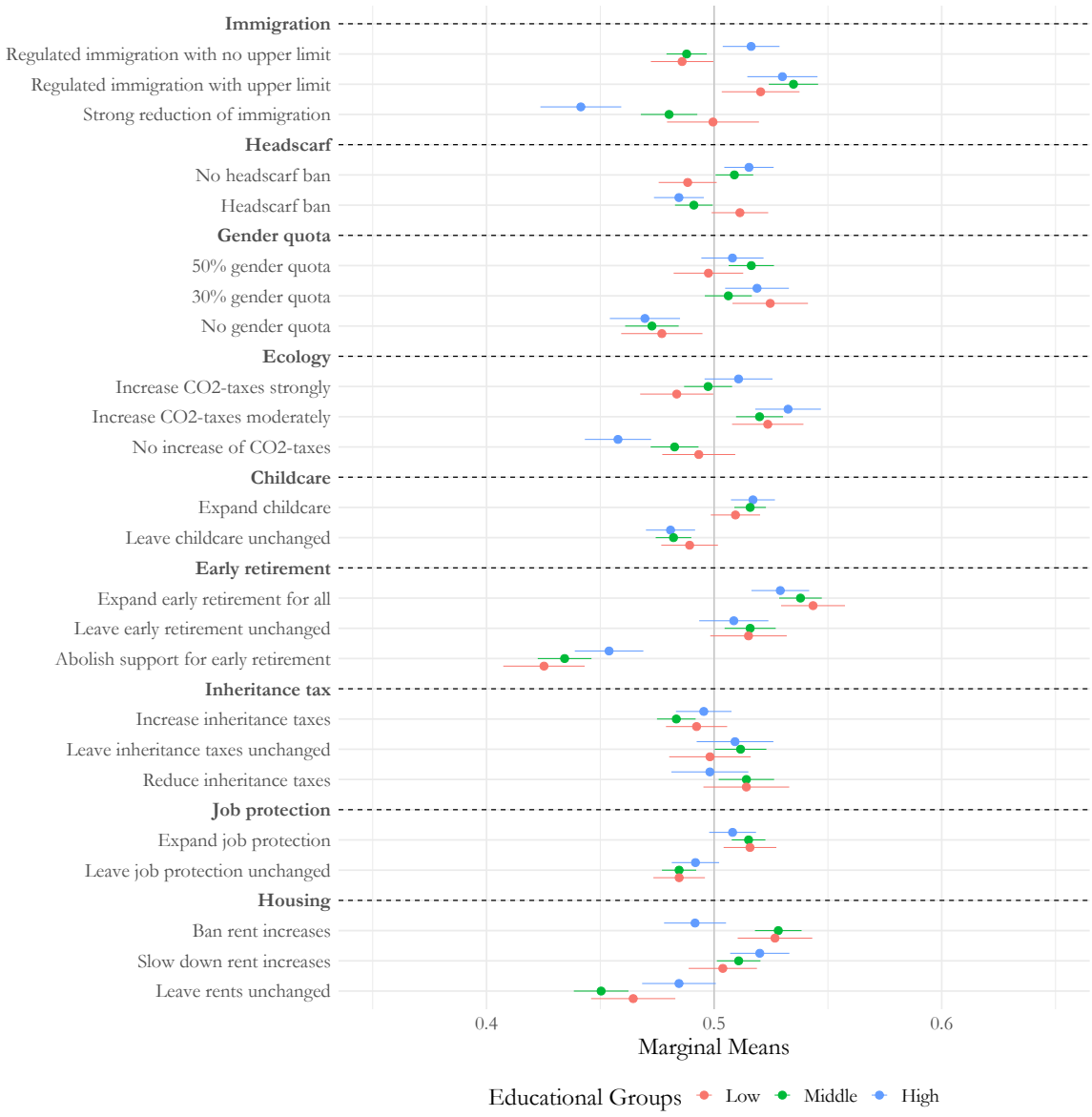


Figure D7: Marginal means by education (only potentials); Potential defined with PTV > 5 only

Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

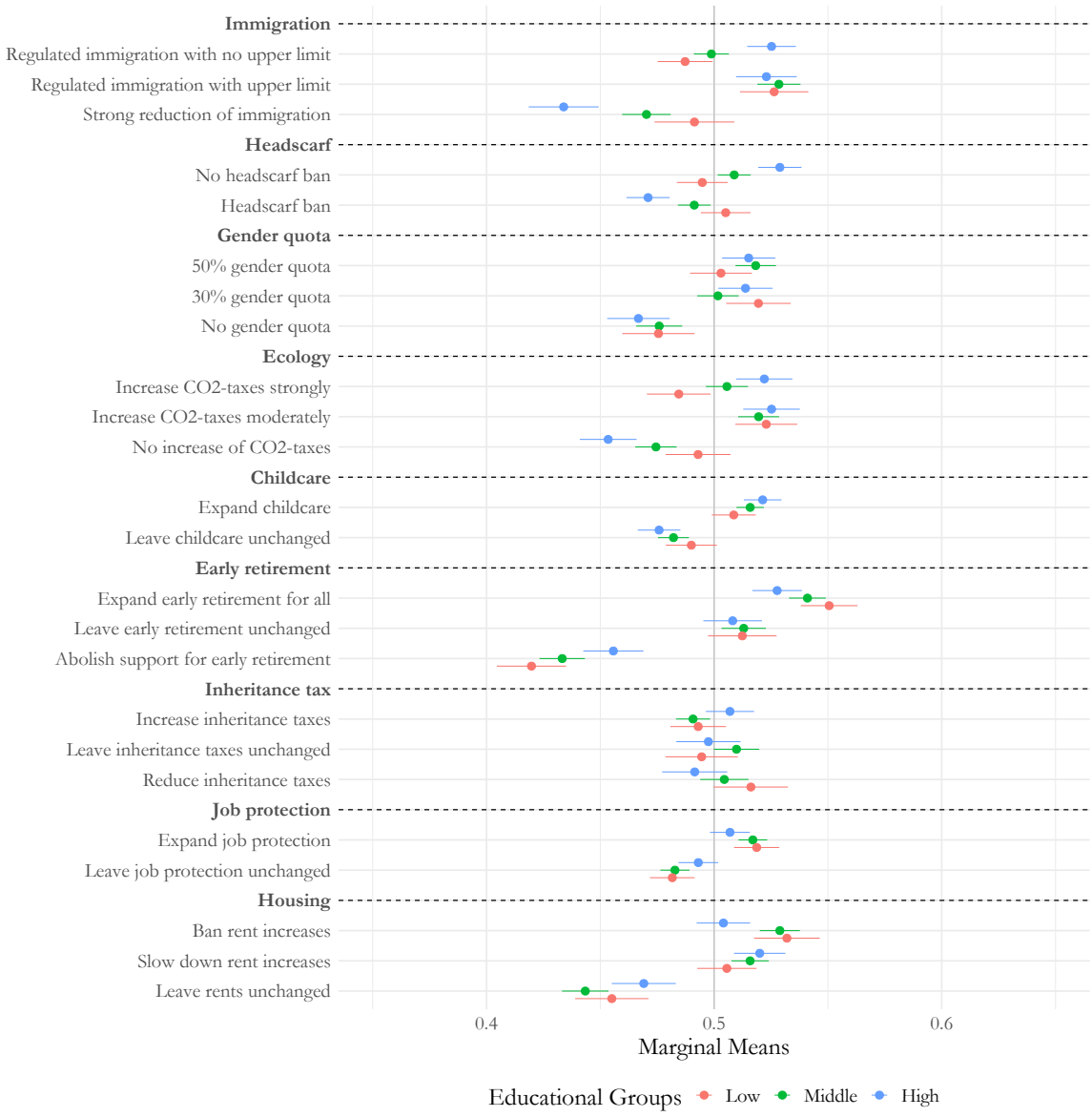


Figure D8: Marginal means by education (only potentials); Potential defined with PTV>6 OR a left-right self placement of <5

Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

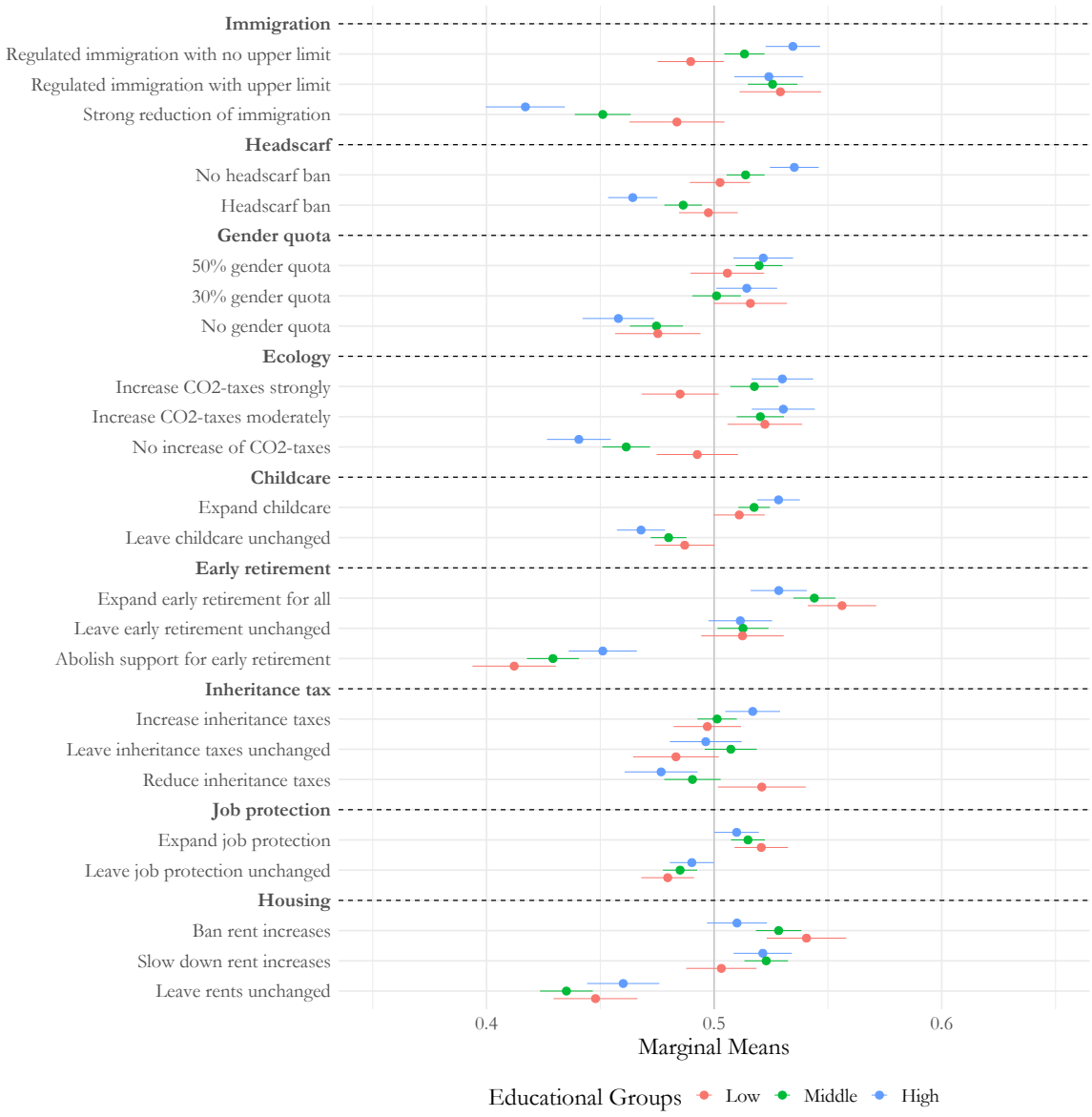


Figure D9: Marginal means by education (only potentials); Potential defined with left-right self placement of <5 only

Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

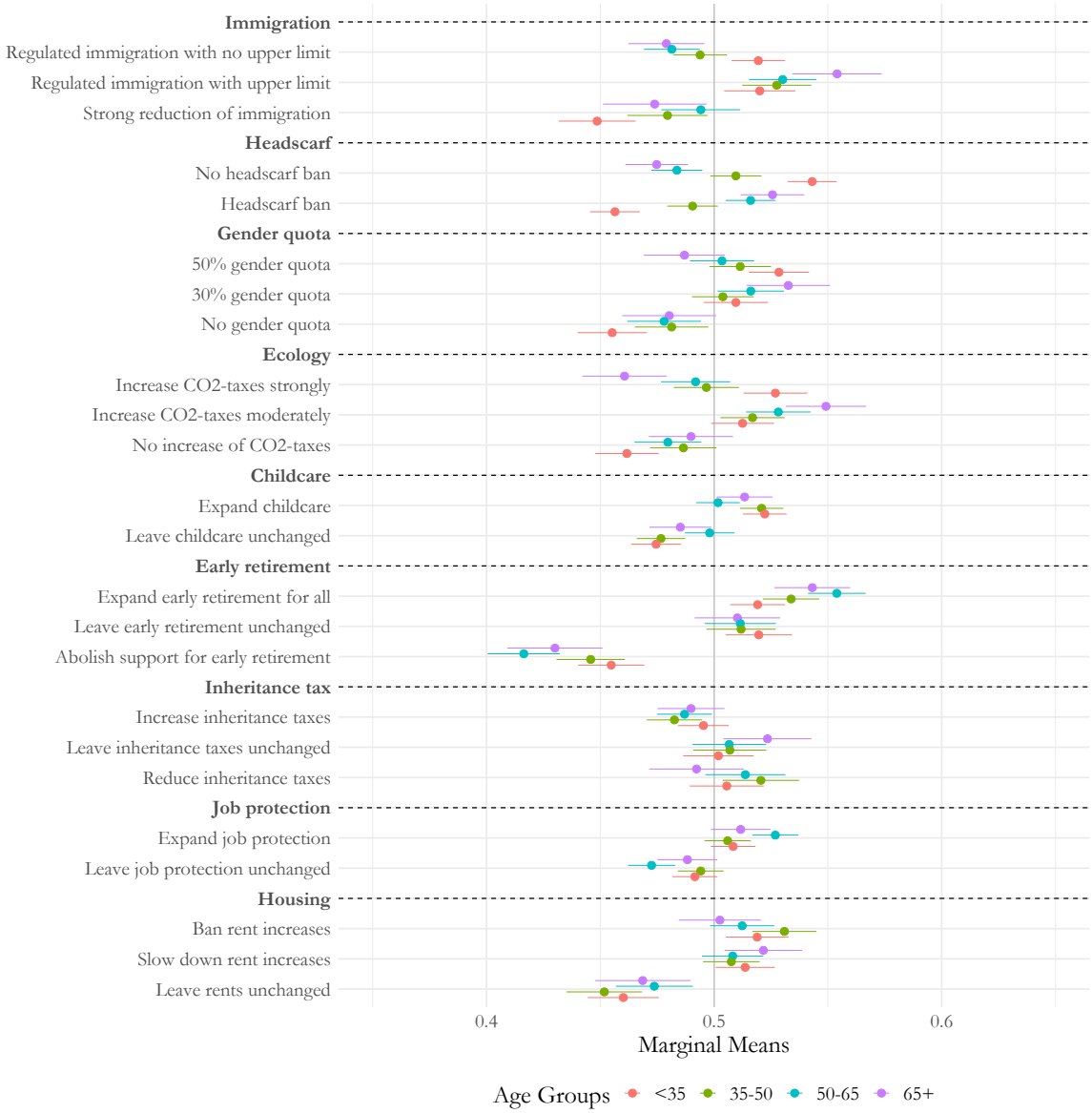


Figure D10: Marginal means by age (only potentials); Potential defined with PTV $>$ 5 only

Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

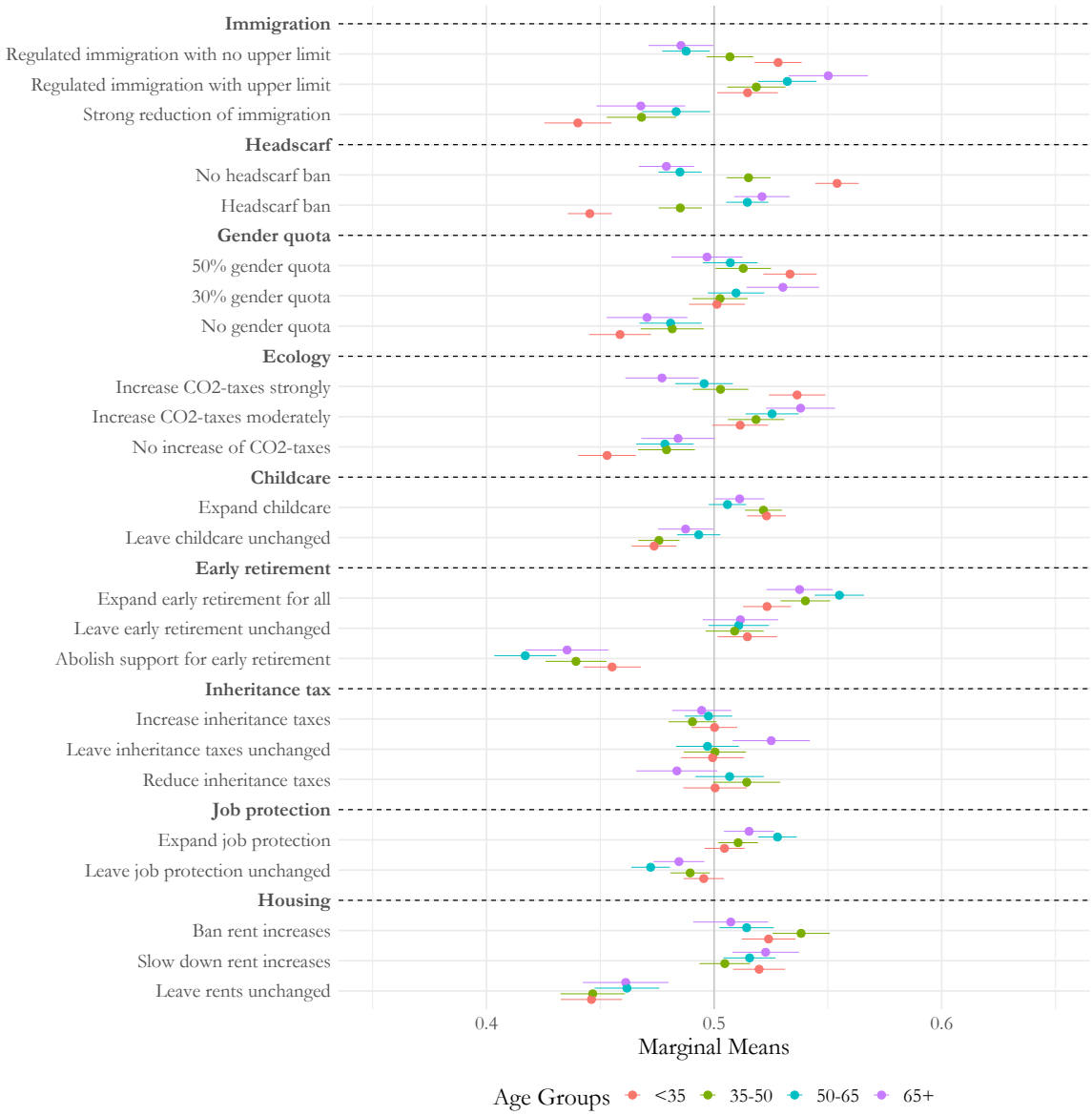


Figure D11: Marginal means by age (only potentials); Potential defined with PTV>6 OR a left-right self placement of <5

Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

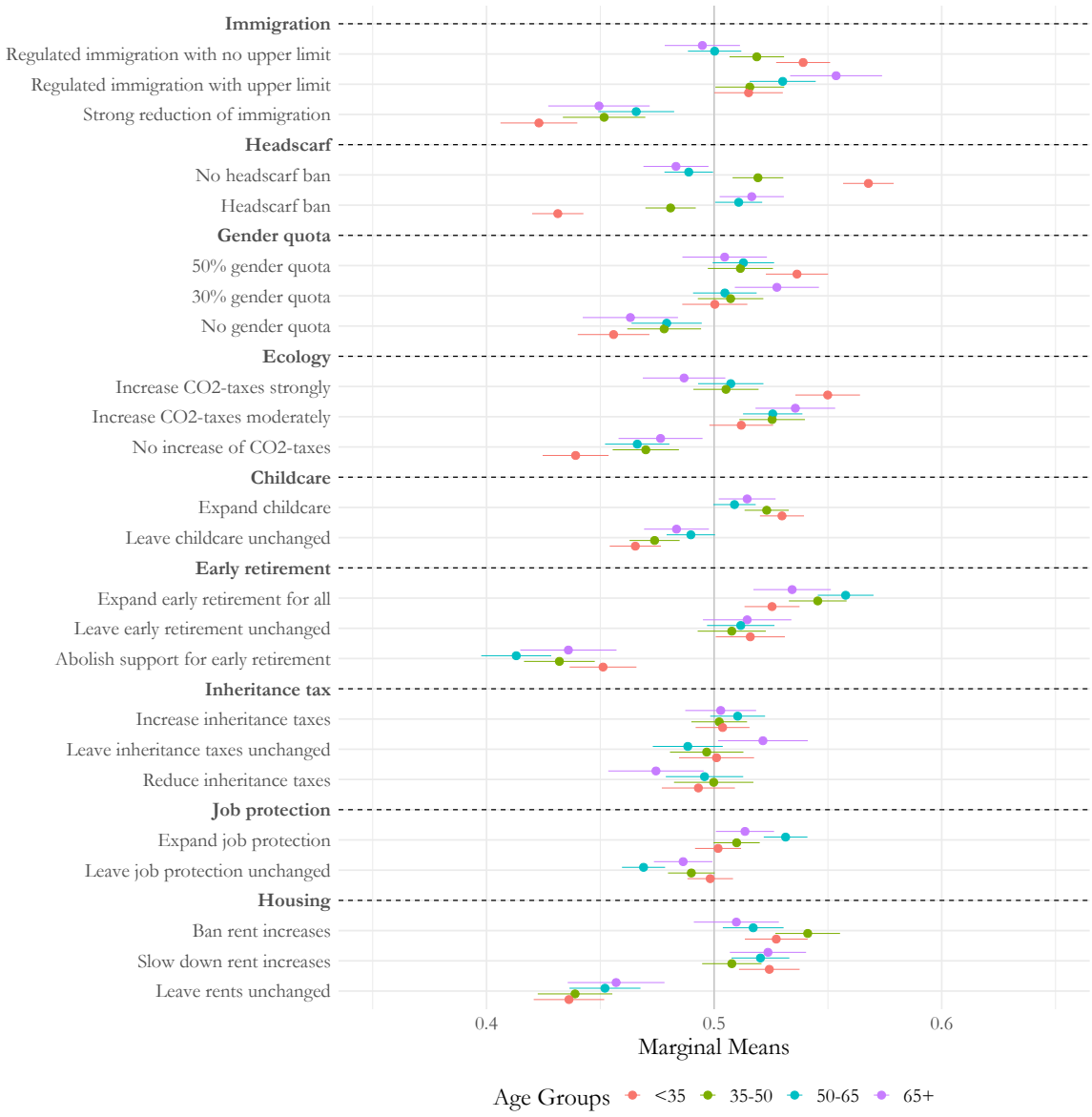


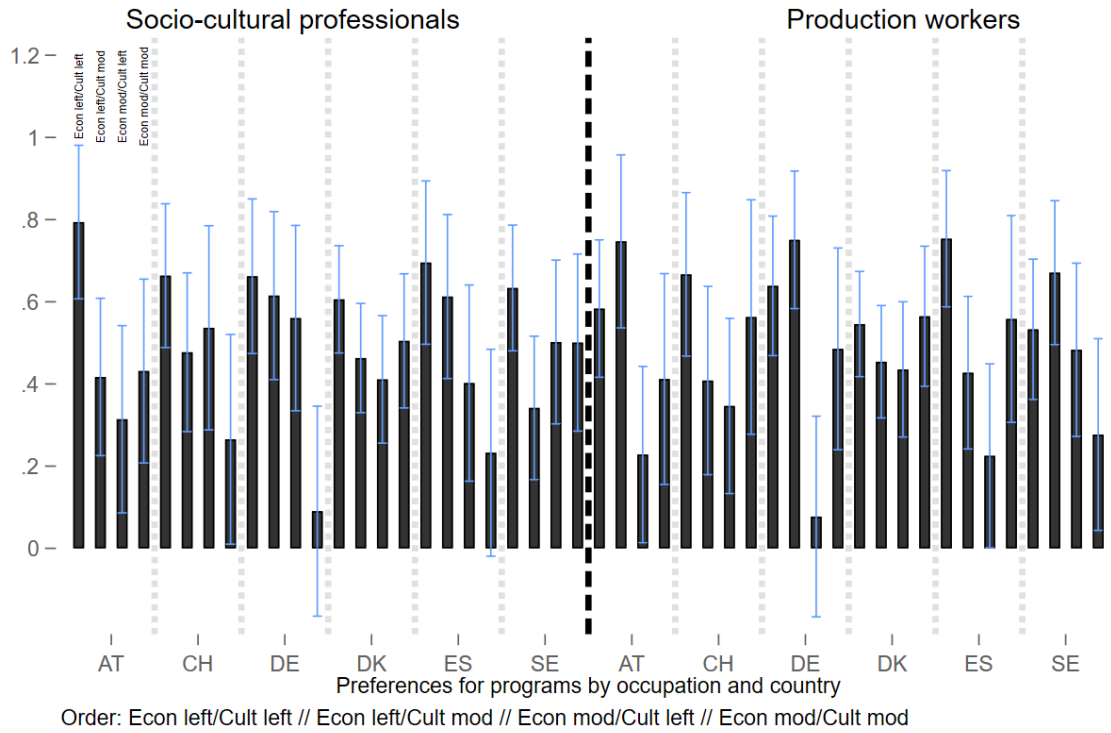
Figure D12: Marginal means by age (only potentials); Potential defined with left-right self placement of <5 only

Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

7.5 Appendix E: Additional results, programmatic bundles

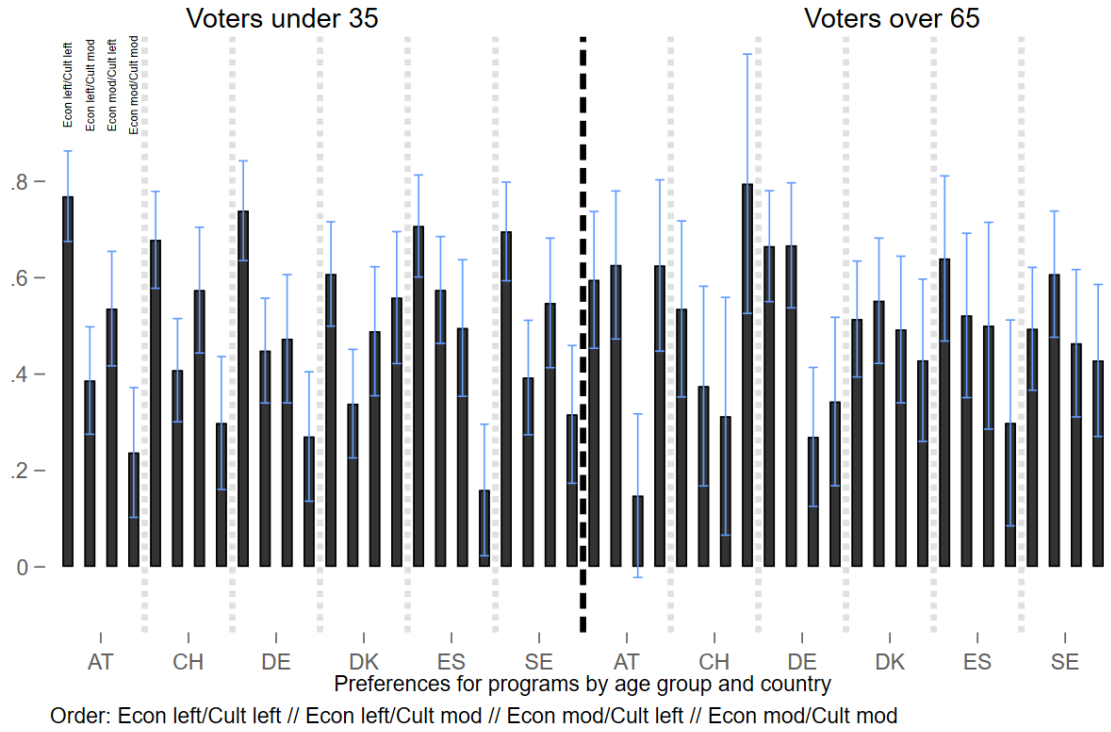
This Appendix contains four Figures, all relating to the analysis that bundles economic and cultural issues. The first two Figures show the country-level results for age and occupation groups. Sample sizes for these analyses are small, and confidence intervals large accordingly. Nevertheless, the overall patterns tend to match those in the pooled analysis, with some exceptions (especially Danish voters under 35 and Austrian voters over 65).

Figure E1: Preferences for different programs by occupation and country



Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Potentials only. Country-level results in Appendix E.

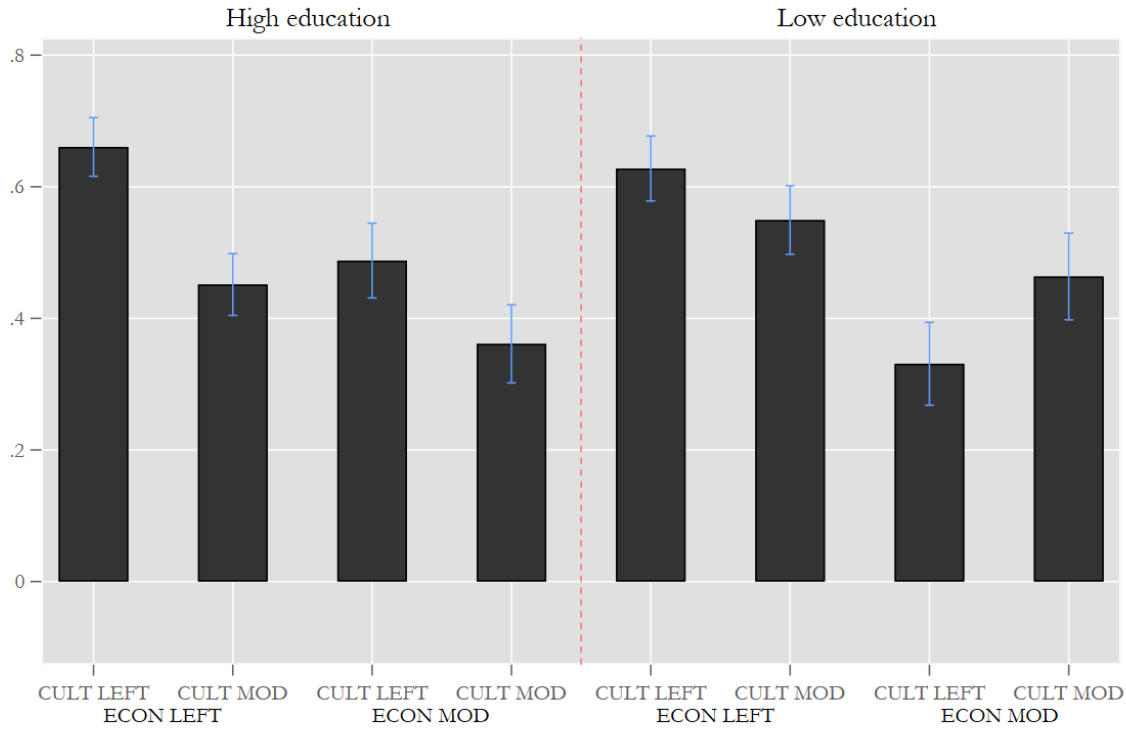
Figure E2: Preferences for different programs by age groups and country



Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Potentials only. Country-level results in Appendix E.

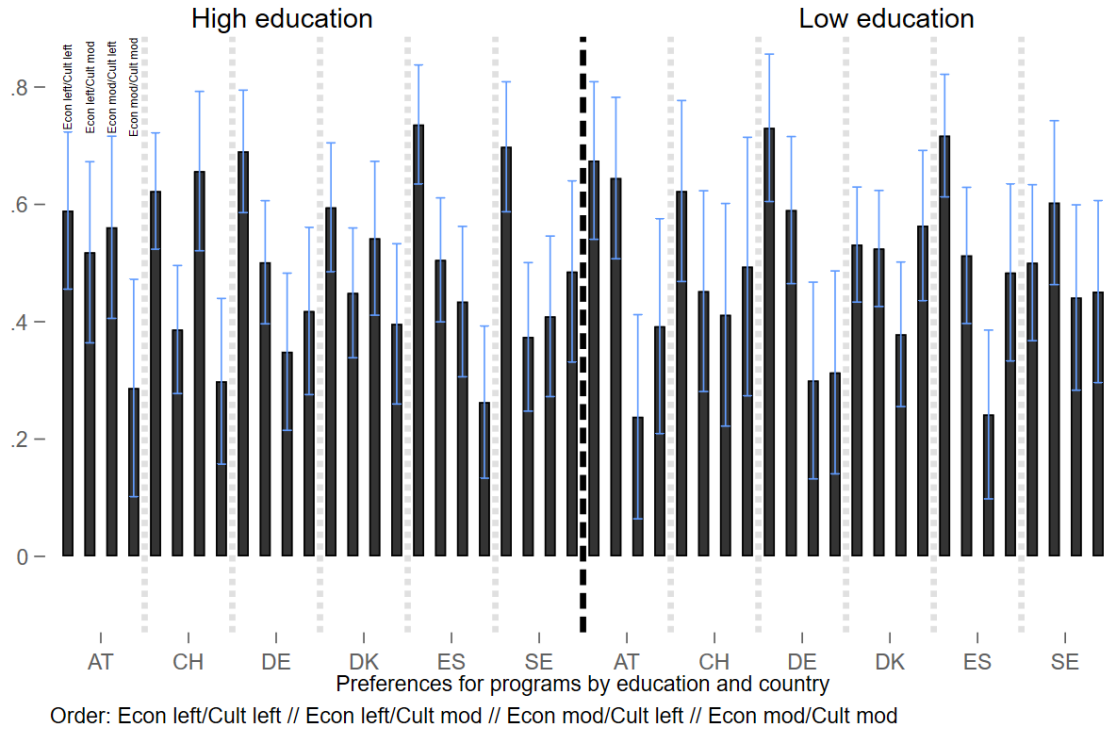
The next two Figures show the results for education, which largely match patterns for the analysis by occupation and are therefore not included in the main paper. In our data, the high education group is larger than the low education group (28 to 21 per cent); given that a quota for education was set for the survey, this is also likely to broadly reflect population proportions.

Figure E3: Preferences for different programs by education groups



Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Potentials only.

Figure E4: Preferences for different programs by education groups and country



Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Potentials only. Country-level results in Appendix E.

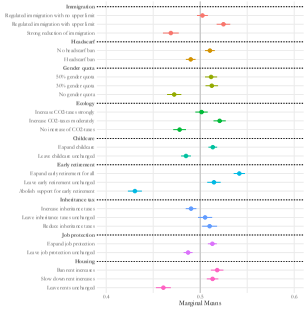
7.6 Appendix F: Country differences

The first set of figures shows our main analysis leaving one country out at a time. Here, we find that the effects are barely affected by the exclusion of any country. We thus conclude that our findings are not driven by the inclusion of one specific country.

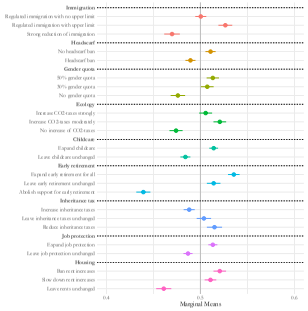
Second, in Figure F2a and Figure F2b we show how our main effects vary by country. As expected, we can see some country differences. However, we do not find that a country consistently constitutes an outlier. Some differences match differences in the status quo on a policy issue. For Denmark and Sweden (countries with expansive childcare policies in place) we do not find that the attribute on childcare expansion significantly affects if a program is chosen. On immigration, Swiss respondents prefer more progressive programs significantly more than in other countries, whereas Danish and Swedish respondents are comparably the ones to most strongly prefer moderately progressive positions. Despite these differences, we cannot find potential social democratic voters preferring sociocultural conservative position in *any* of the analyzed countries. Furthermore, Spanish, Austrian, and German respondents most strongly prefer programs that contain economically left-wing positions, with respondents in the latter two countries particularly preferring programs containing left-wing housing policies and the expansion of job protection. Again, no country shows a consistent effect for right-wing economic issues. Overall, the analysis by country makes us confident that we can reliably interpret the pooled results in our main analysis.

Third, the last set of figures then show the trade-offs specifically for every single country in our analysis. Here, we see that trade-offs are mostly similar in the observed countries. In line with our pooled findings, zero-sum trade-offs can predominantly be found for sociocultural issues (headscarf ban and immigration) when comparing age groups, for example in Germany, Sweden and Switzerland. For socioeconomic issues, we only find saliency trade-offs, notably for education groups and classes. They are strongest in Austria and Switzerland and somewhat weaker in Denmark and Sweden. In Germany and Spain, we find barely any trade-offs between any sociodemographic groups when looking at socioeconomic issues.

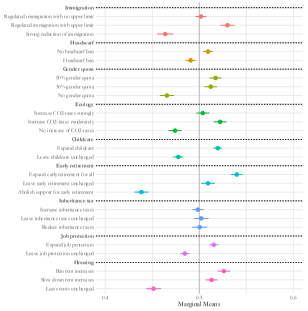
(a) Excluding Austria



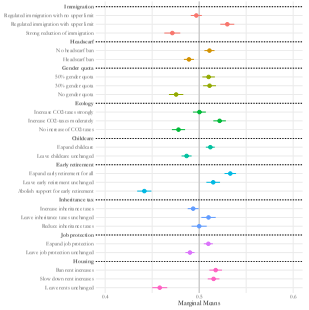
(b) Excluding Germany



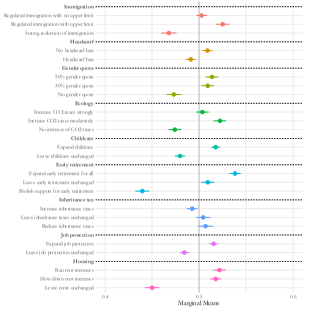
(c) Excluding Denmark



(d) Excluding Spain



(e) Excluding Sweden



(f) Excluding Switzerland

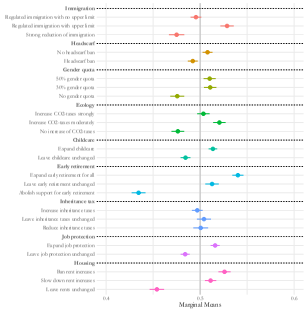
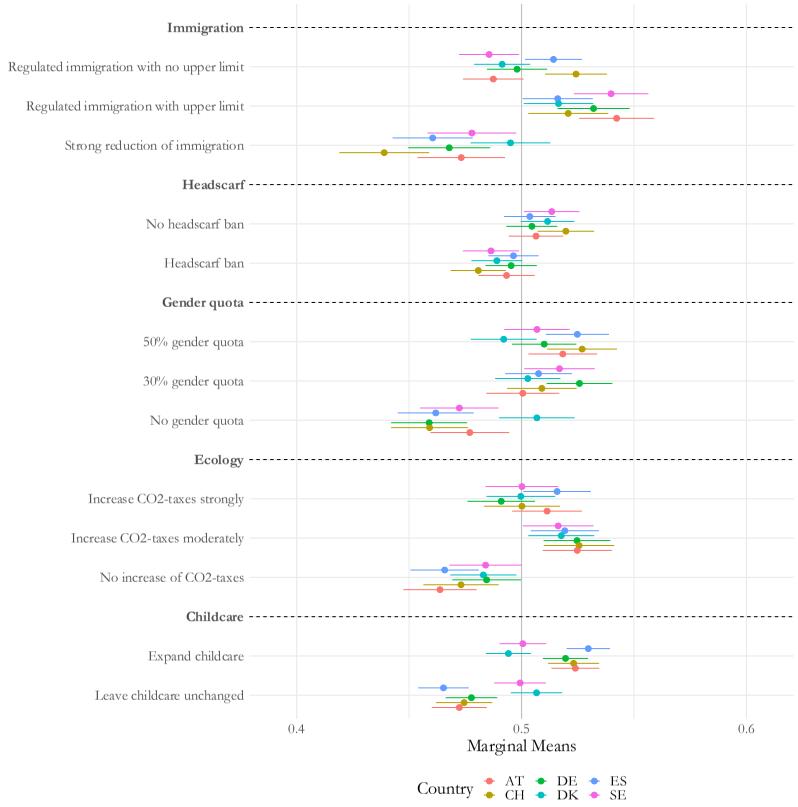


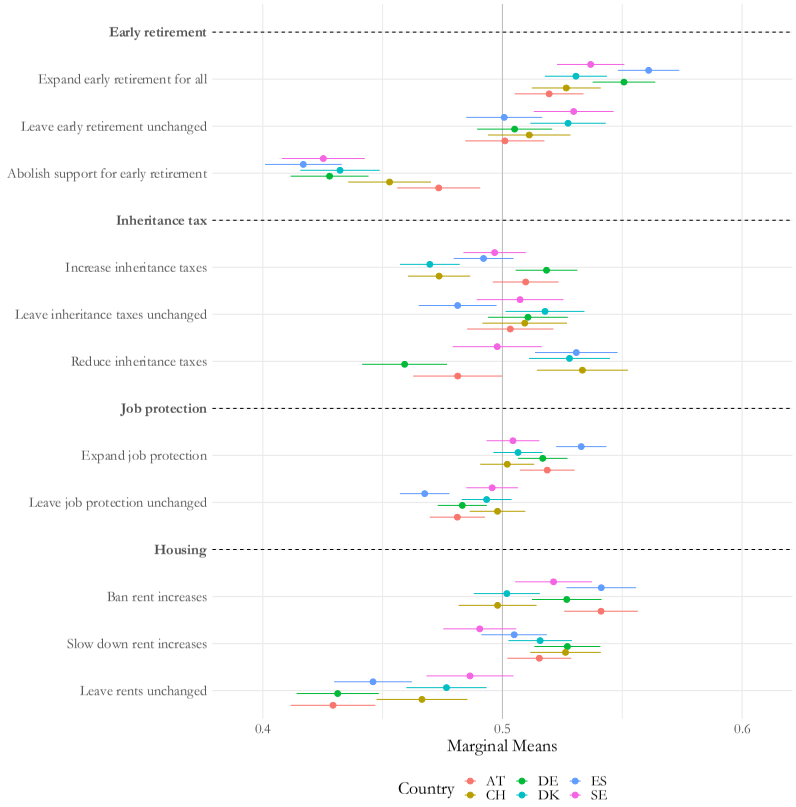
Figure F1: Marginal means, one country excluded

Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Potentials are those with >=5 in self-reported likelihood to ever vote for the Social Democratic party or <5 on a 0-10 left-right scale.



(a) Marginal means by Country

Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Potentials are those with >5 in self-reported likelihood to ever vote for the Social Democratic party or <5 on a 0-10 left-right scale.

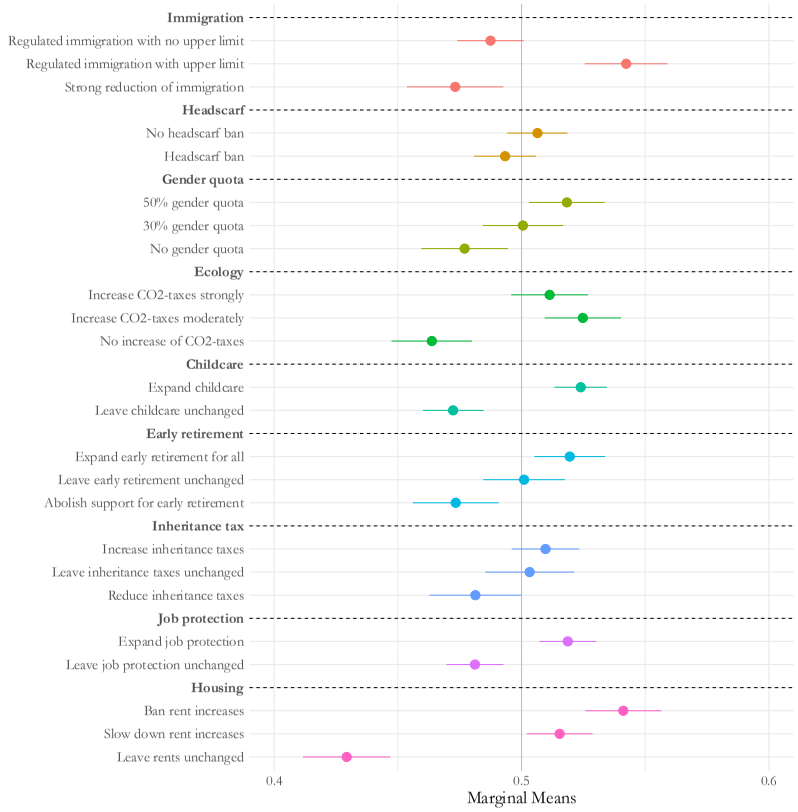


(b) Marginal means by Country

Notes: Based on pooled surveys conducted in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Potentials are those with >5 in self-reported likelihood to ever vote for the Social Democratic party or <5 on a 0-10 left-right scale.

Figure F2: Marginal means by country

(a) Only Austria



(b) Only Austria, support by class

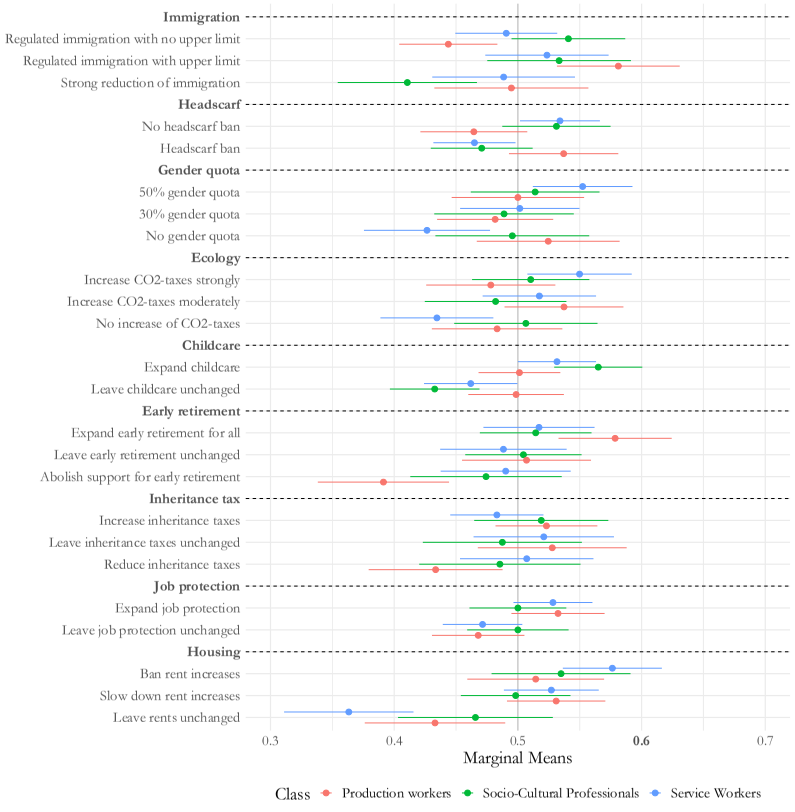
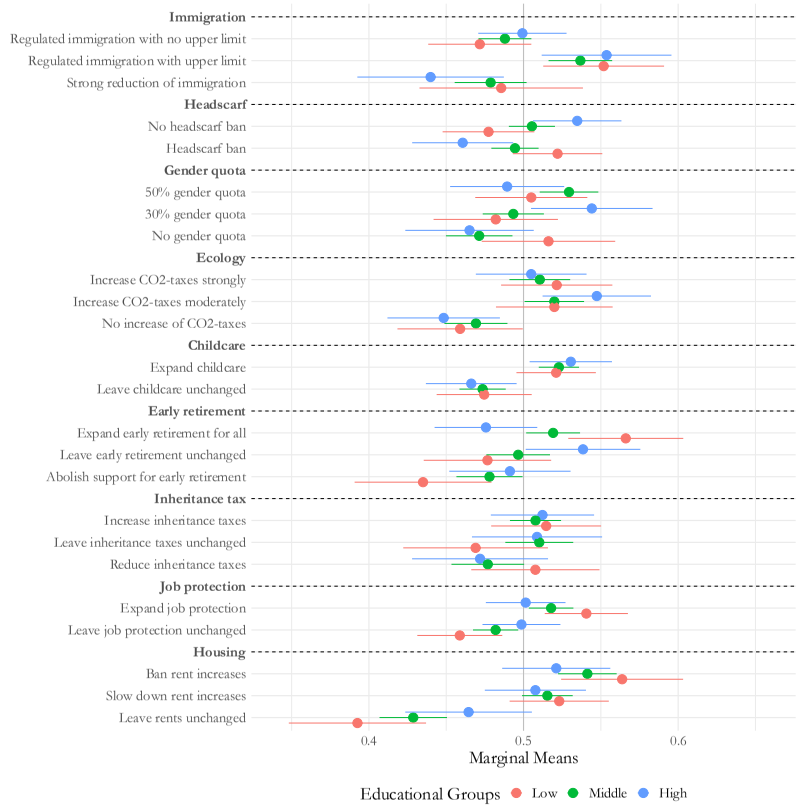


Figure F3: Marginal means, only Austria

Notes: Based on survey conducted in Austria. Potentials only.

(a) Only Austria, support by education



(b) Only Austria, support by age

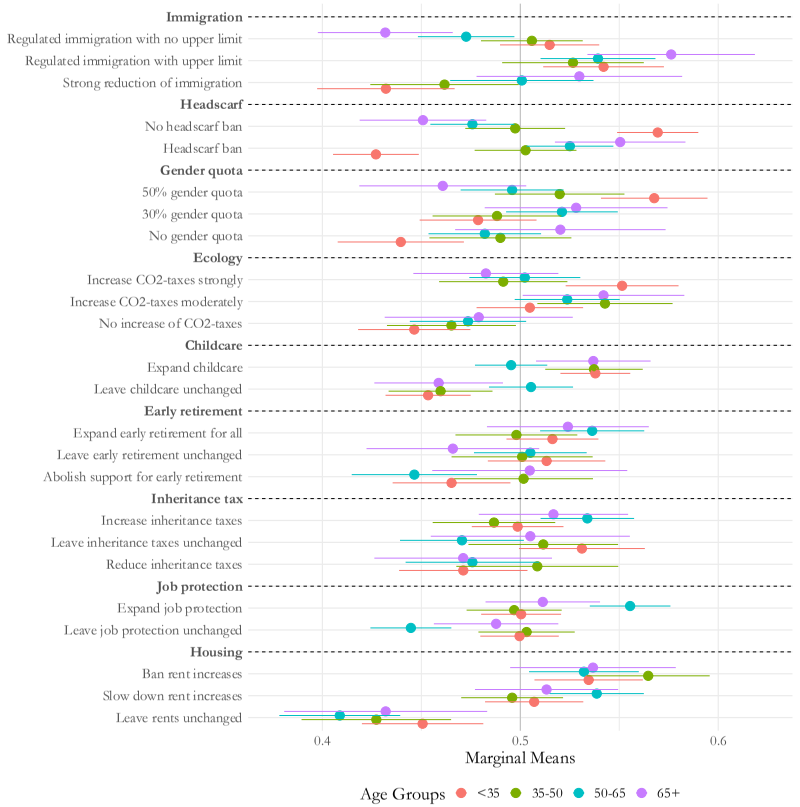
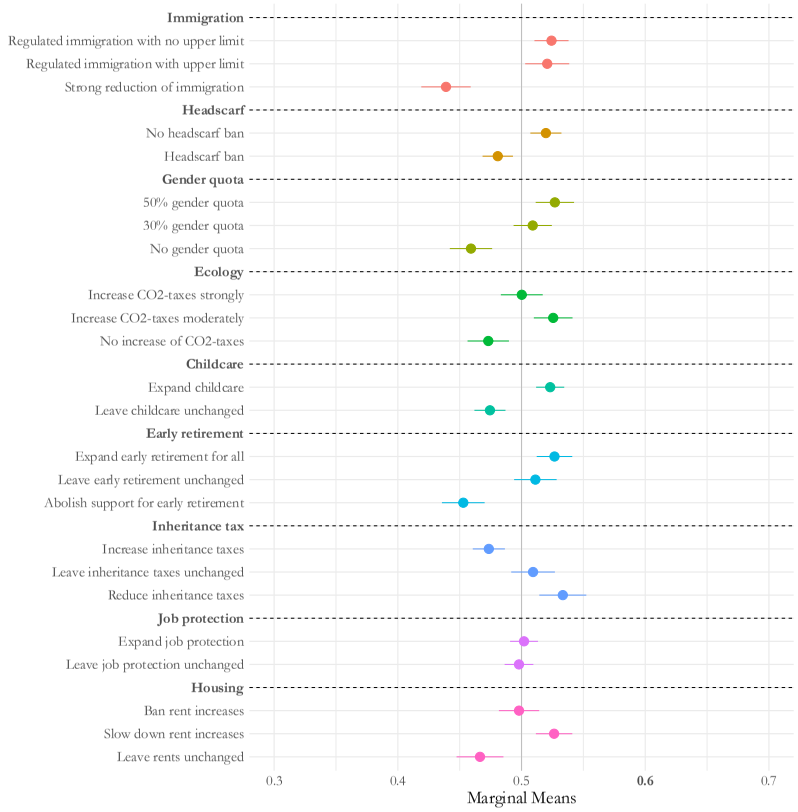


Figure F4: Marginal means, only Austria

Notes: Based on survey conducted in Austria. Potentials only.

(a) Only Switzerland



(b) Only Switzerland, support by class

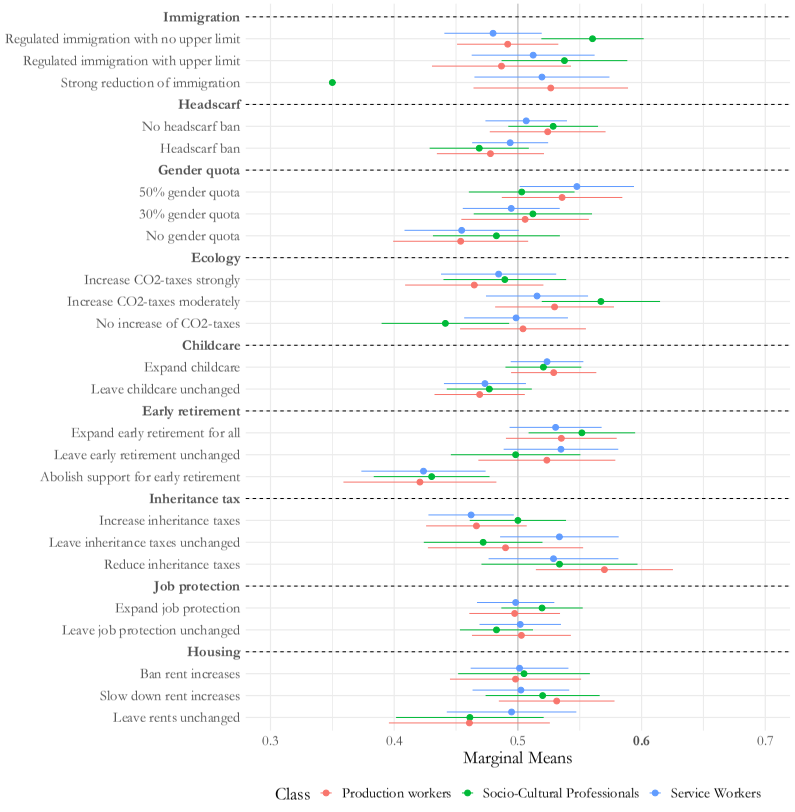
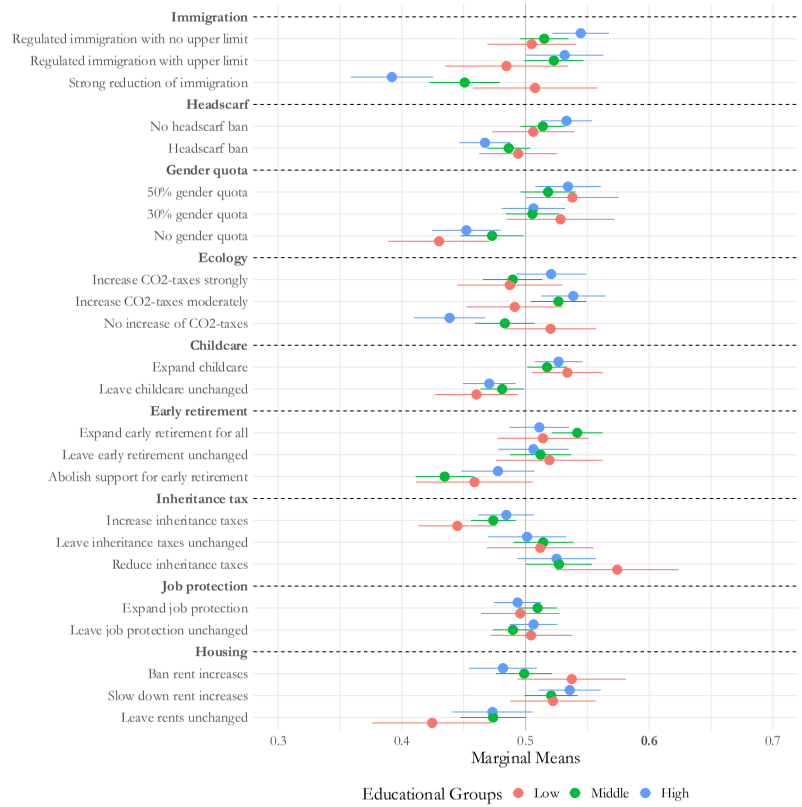


Figure F5: Marginal means, only Switzerland

Notes: Based on survey conducted in Switzerland. Potentials only.

(a) Only Switzerland, support by education



(b) Only Switzerland, support by age

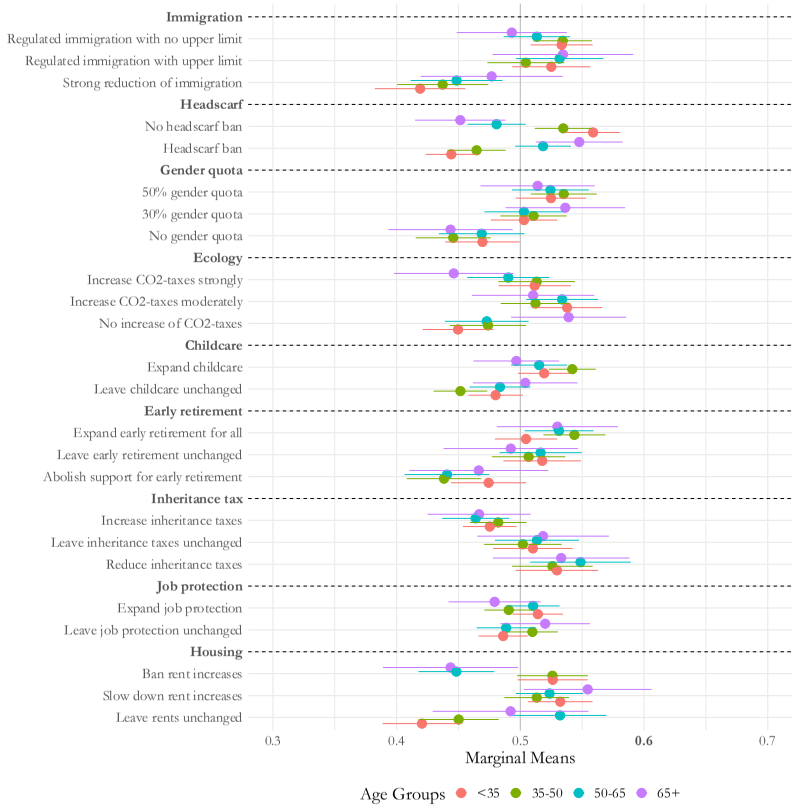
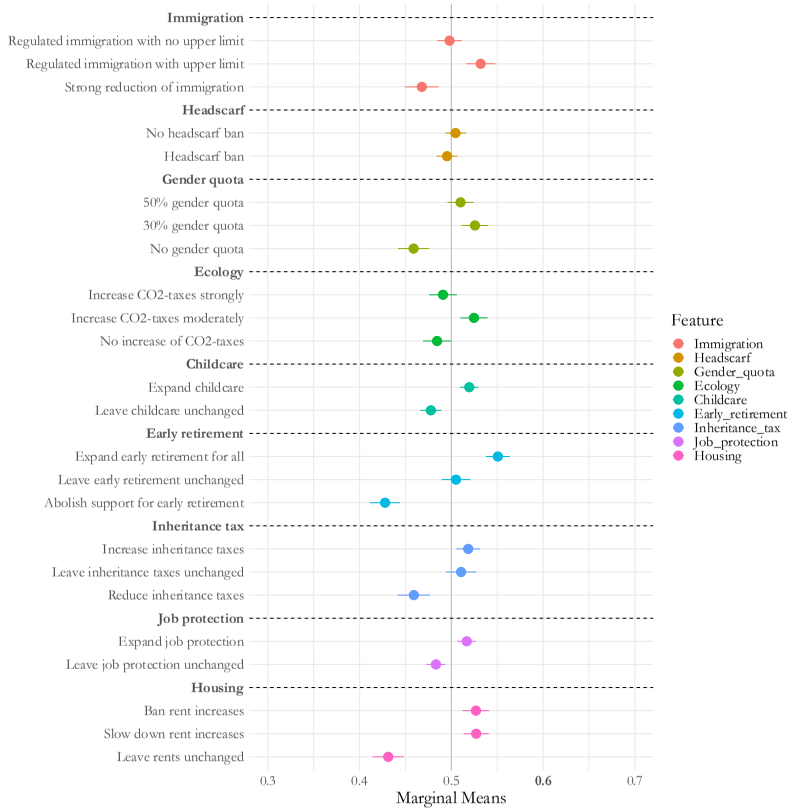


Figure F6: Marginal means, only Switzerland

Notes: Based on survey conducted in Switzerland. Potentials only.

(a) Only Germany



(b) Only Germany, support by class

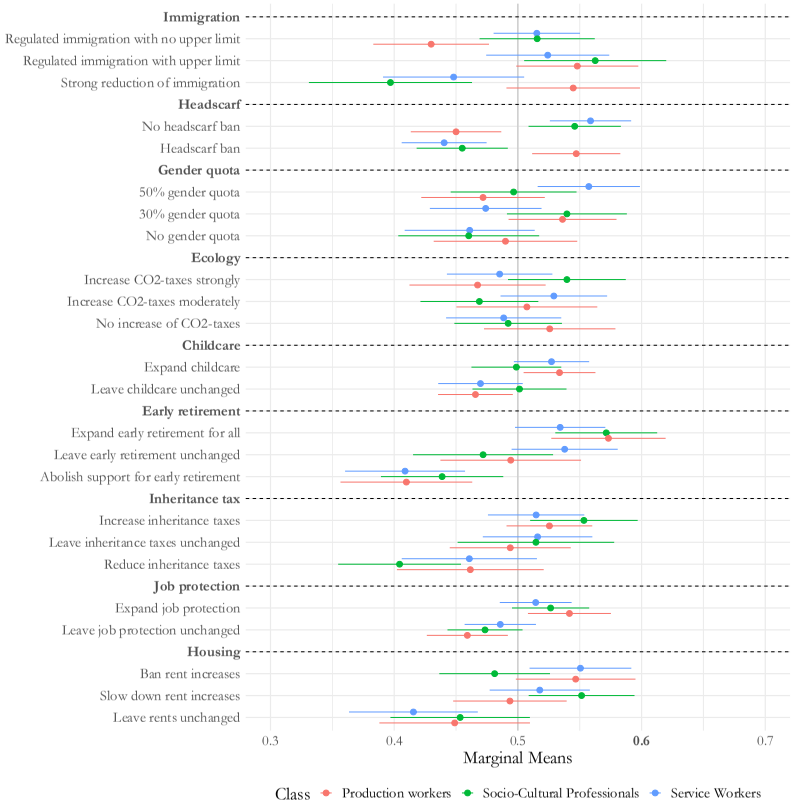
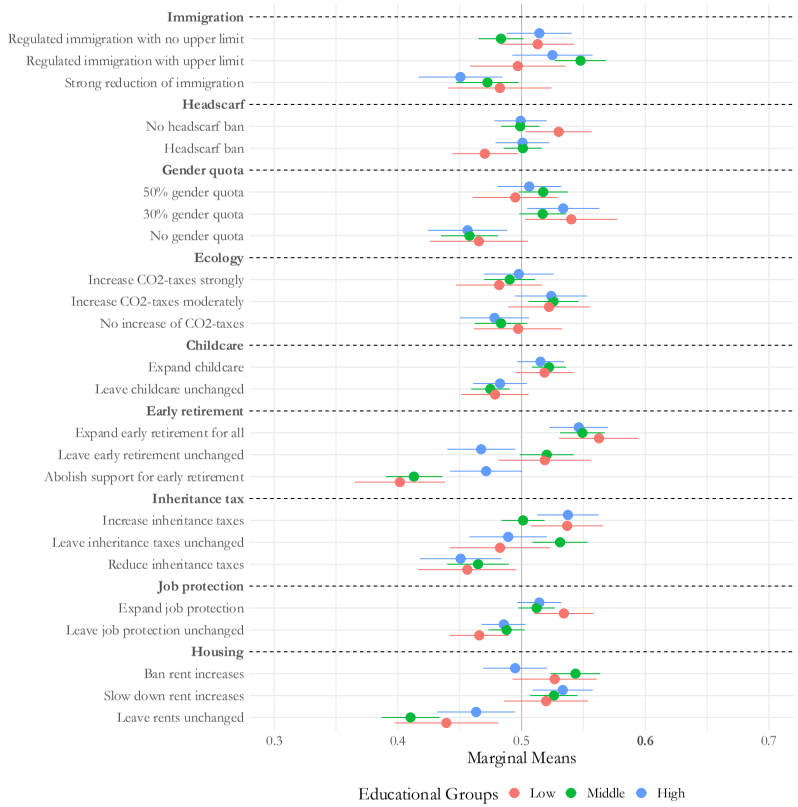


Figure F7: Marginal means, only Germany

Notes: Based on survey conducted in Germany. Potentials only.

(a) Only Germany, support by education



(b) Only Germany, support by age

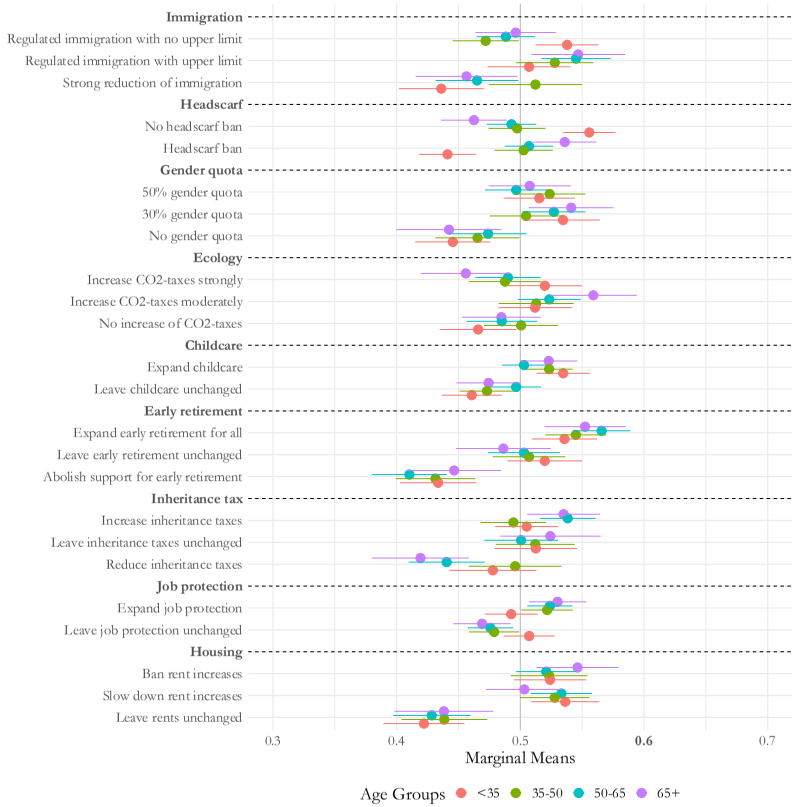
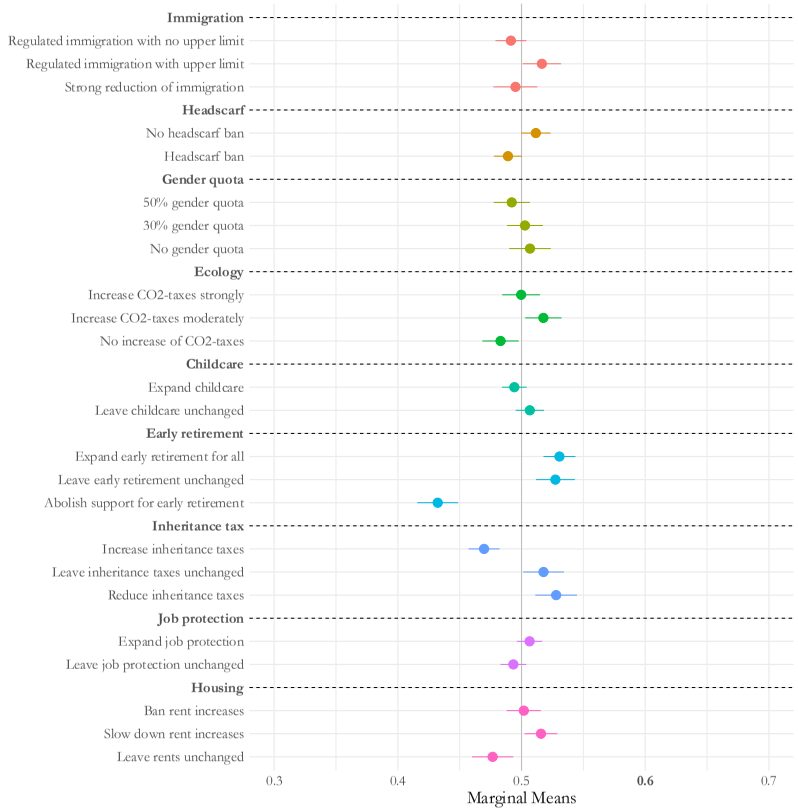


Figure F8: Marginal means, only Germany

Notes: Based on survey conducted in Germany. Potentials only.

(a) Only Denmark



(b) Only Denmark, support by class

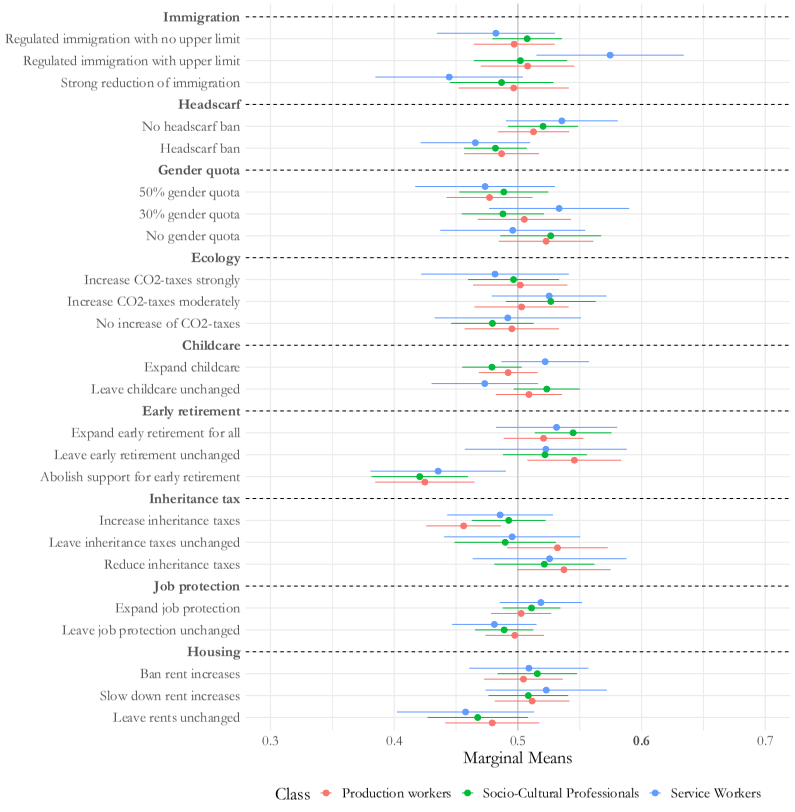
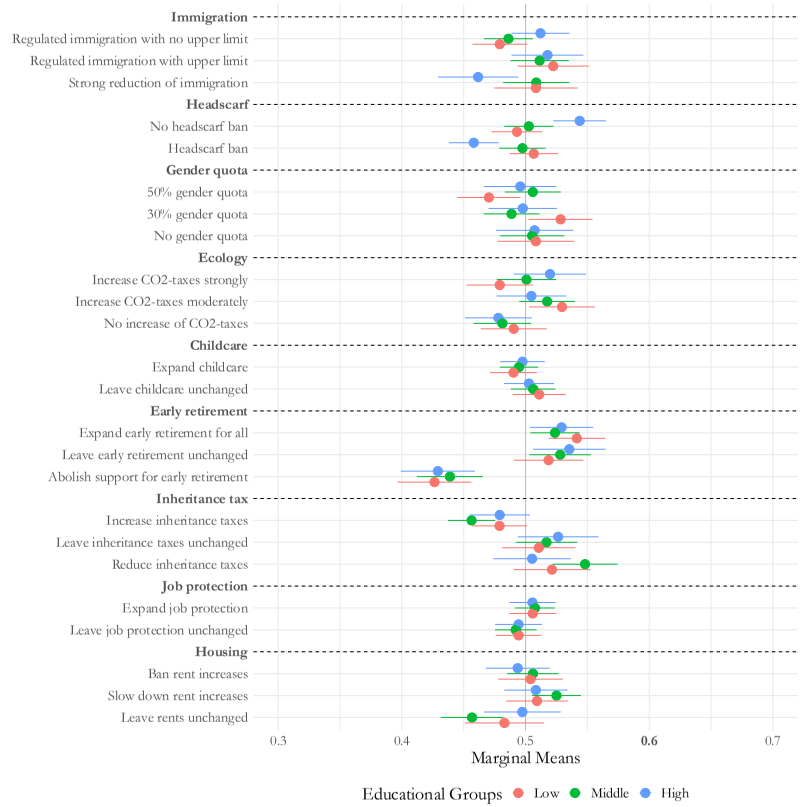


Figure F9: Marginal means, only Denmark

Notes: Based on survey conducted in Denmark. Potentials only.

(a) Only Denmark, support by education



(b) Only Denmark, support by age

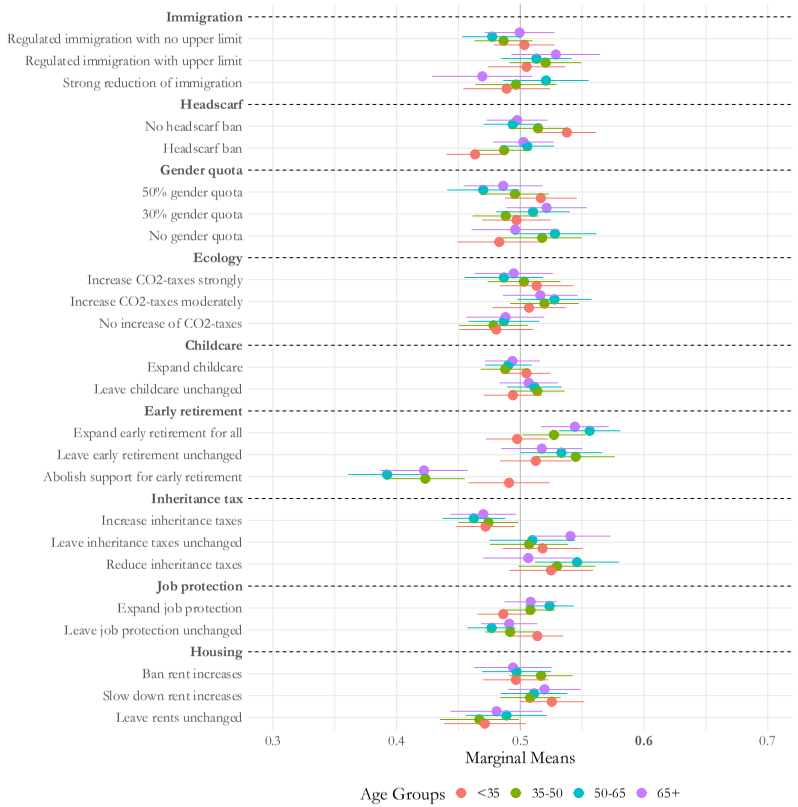
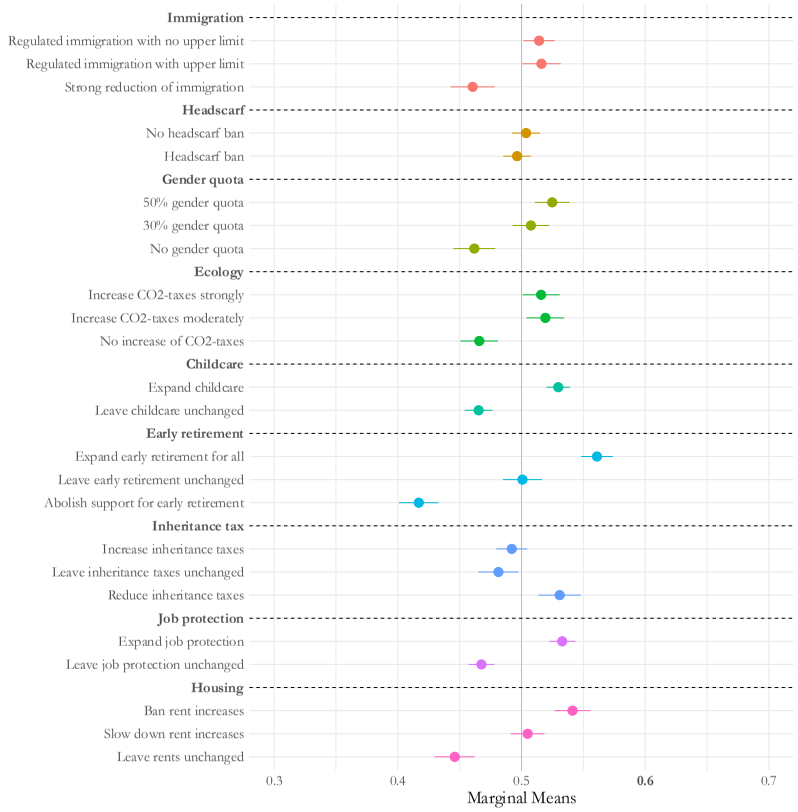


Figure F10: Marginal means, only Denmark

Notes: Based on survey conducted in Denmark. Potentials only.

(a) Only Spain



(b) Only Spain, support by class

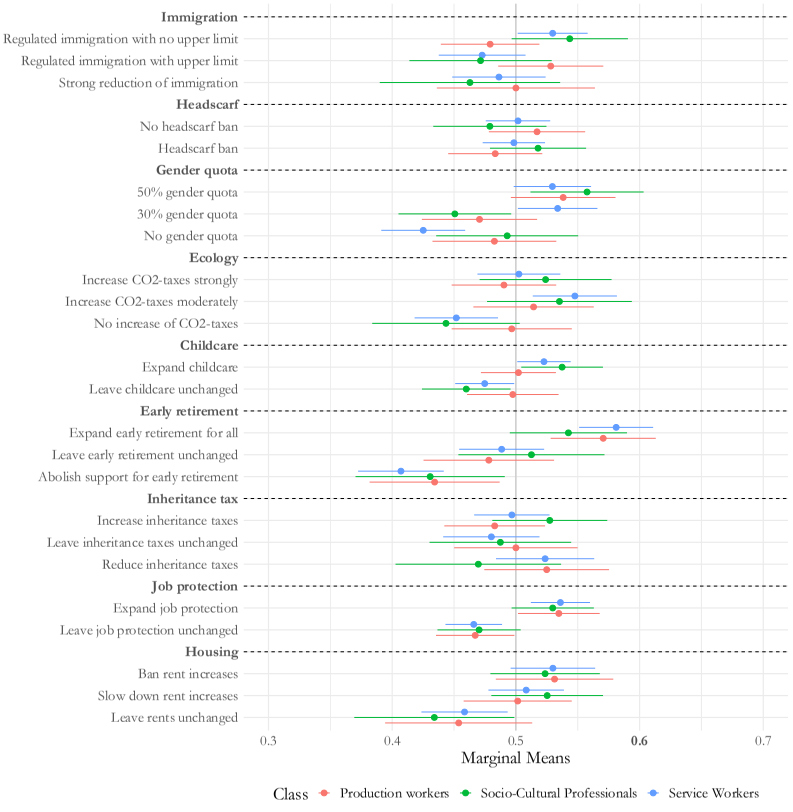
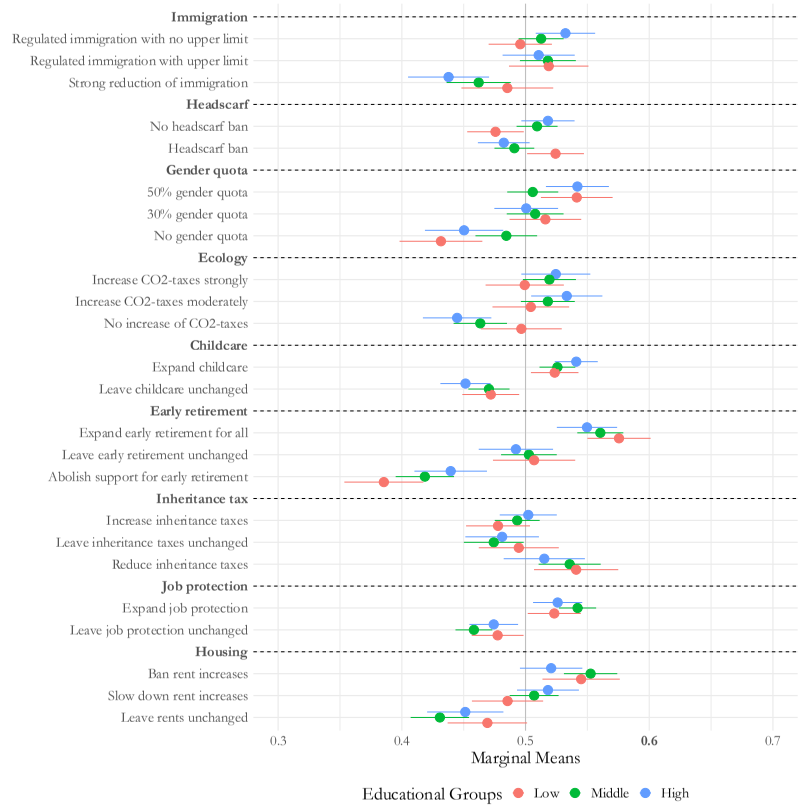


Figure F11: Marginal means, only Spain

Notes: Based on survey conducted in Spain. Potentials only.

(a) Only Spain, support by education



(b) Only Spain, support by age

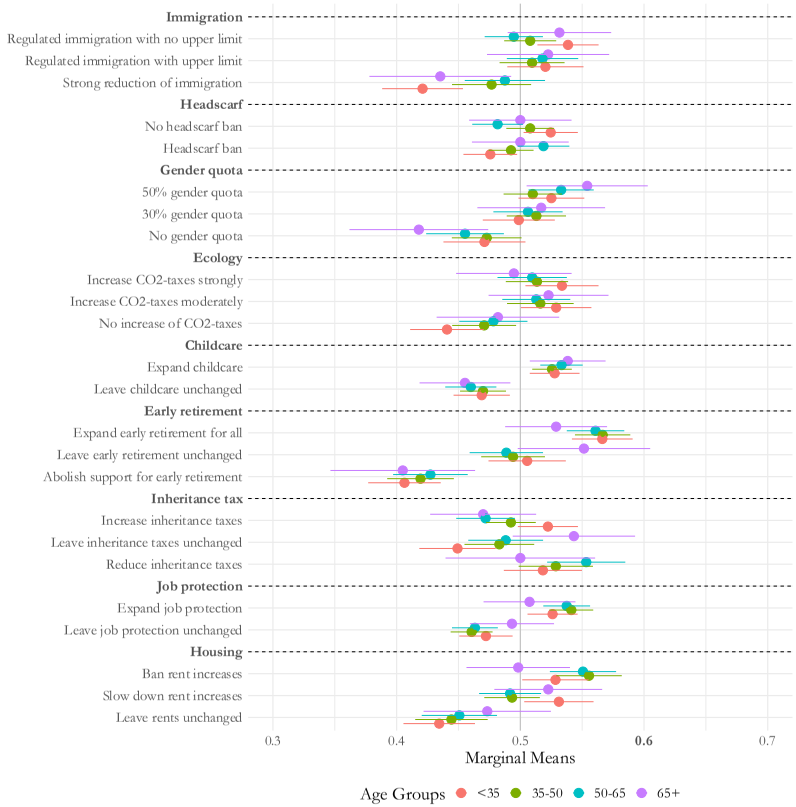
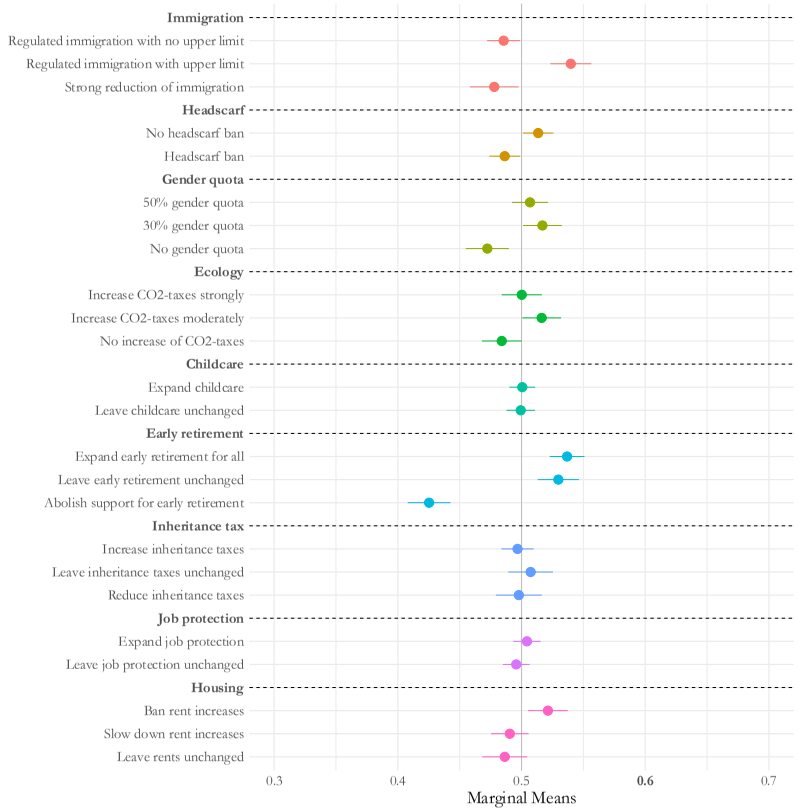


Figure F12: Marginal means, only Spain

Notes: Based on survey conducted in Spain. Potentials only.

(a) Only Sweden



(b) Only Sweden, support by class

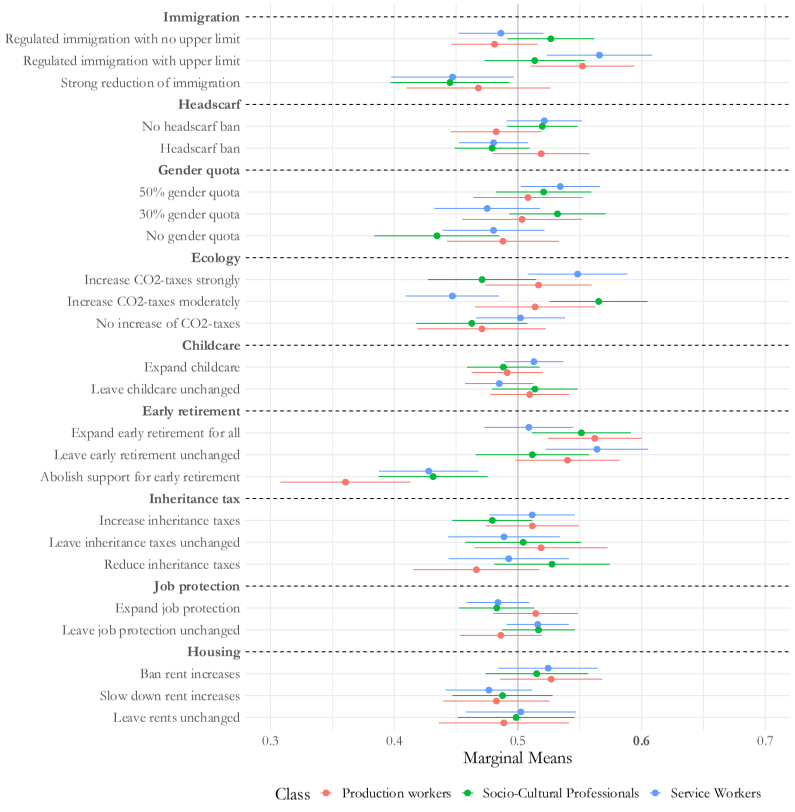


Figure F13: Marginal means, only Sweden

Notes: Based on survey conducted in Sweden. Potentials only.

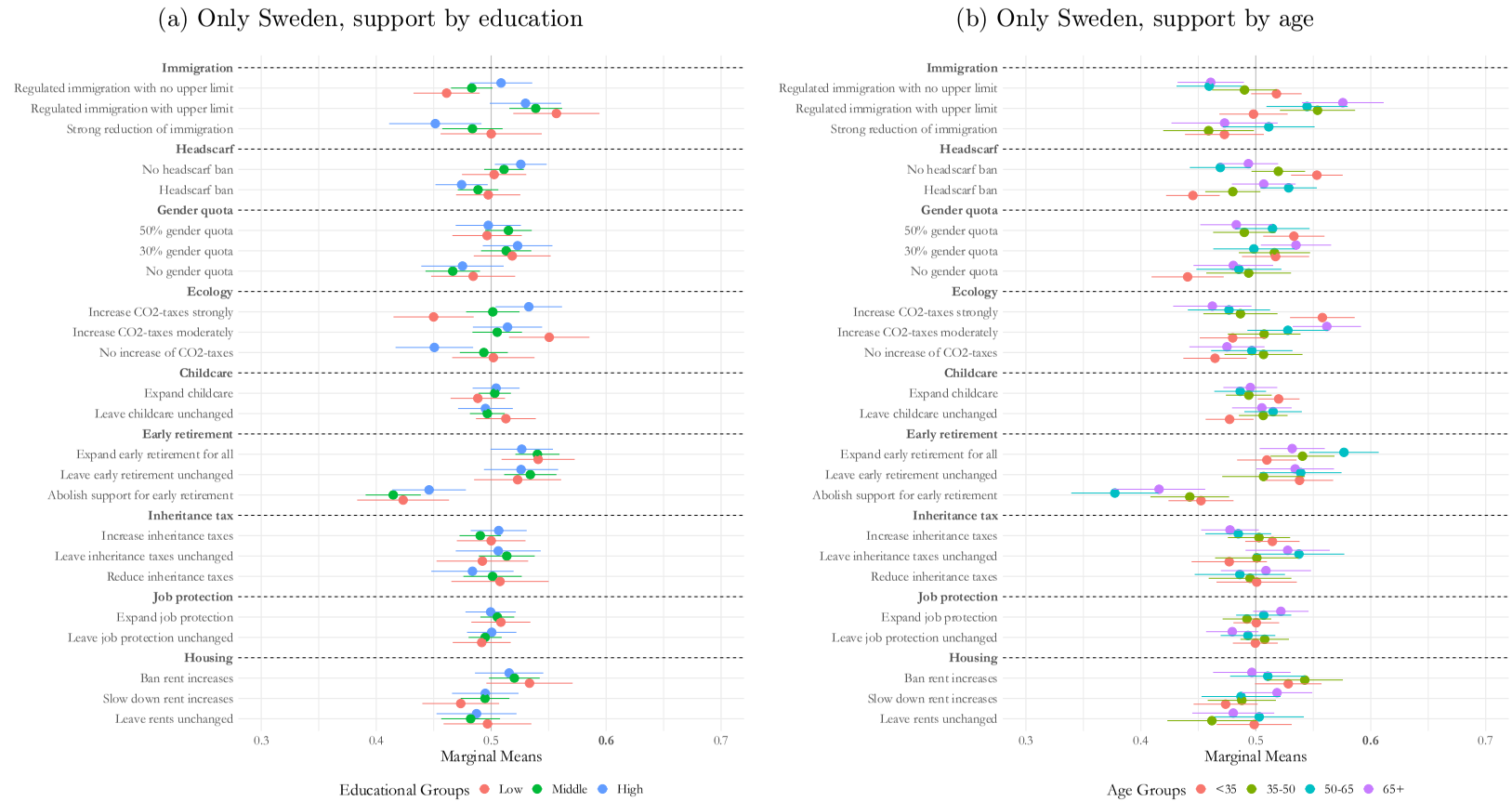


Figure F14: Marginal means, only Sweden

Notes: Based on survey conducted in Sweden. Potentials only.