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The Swiss Armed Forces' Reputation and Its Integration Function for Recruits with Migration Backgrounds

Workshop: The Power of Diversity in the Armed Forces



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Guiding question



Does military service in Switzerland help **integrating** young adults with migration backgrounds **into society**?

→ **Structural / Social / Cultural / Emotional Integration**





A glance at Swiss society



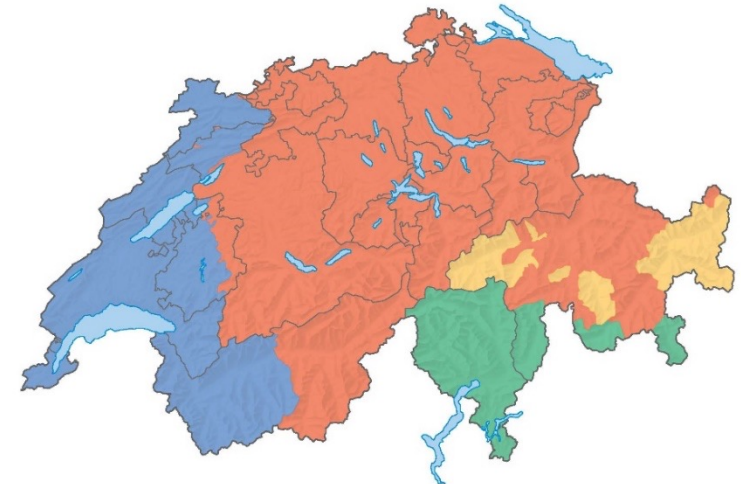
A multicultural society

- 8.5 millions of residents
- 30% foreign born residents
- 25% foreign citizens



Four different official languages

- 65% German-speaking
- 22.5% French-speaking
- 7.5% Italian-speaking
- 0.5% Romansh-speaking





The Swiss military system



- 120'000 soldiers
- Compulsory military service for every man (women on voluntary basis, less than 1%)
- Only Swiss citizens aged between 18-25 admitted to recruit school (basic military training)
- Duration of recruit school: 5 month
- Recognized "latent" function: School of life, integration of the different parts of the country

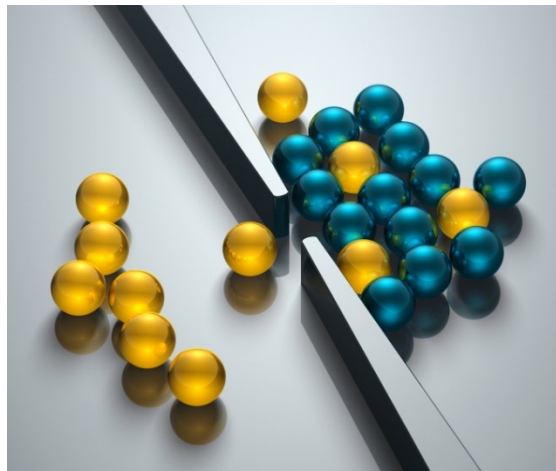




The theory of ethnic boundary making



- Integration process does not stop with naturalization
- Distinction between immigrant and native...
 - ... is the result of a social process rather than ascribed through birth.
 - ... depends on the circumstances.
 - ... is the outcome of a symbolic struggle.



Wimmer, Andreas (2008):
The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries: A Multilevel Process Theory. American Journal of Sociology
Vol. 113, Nr. 4.



The survey

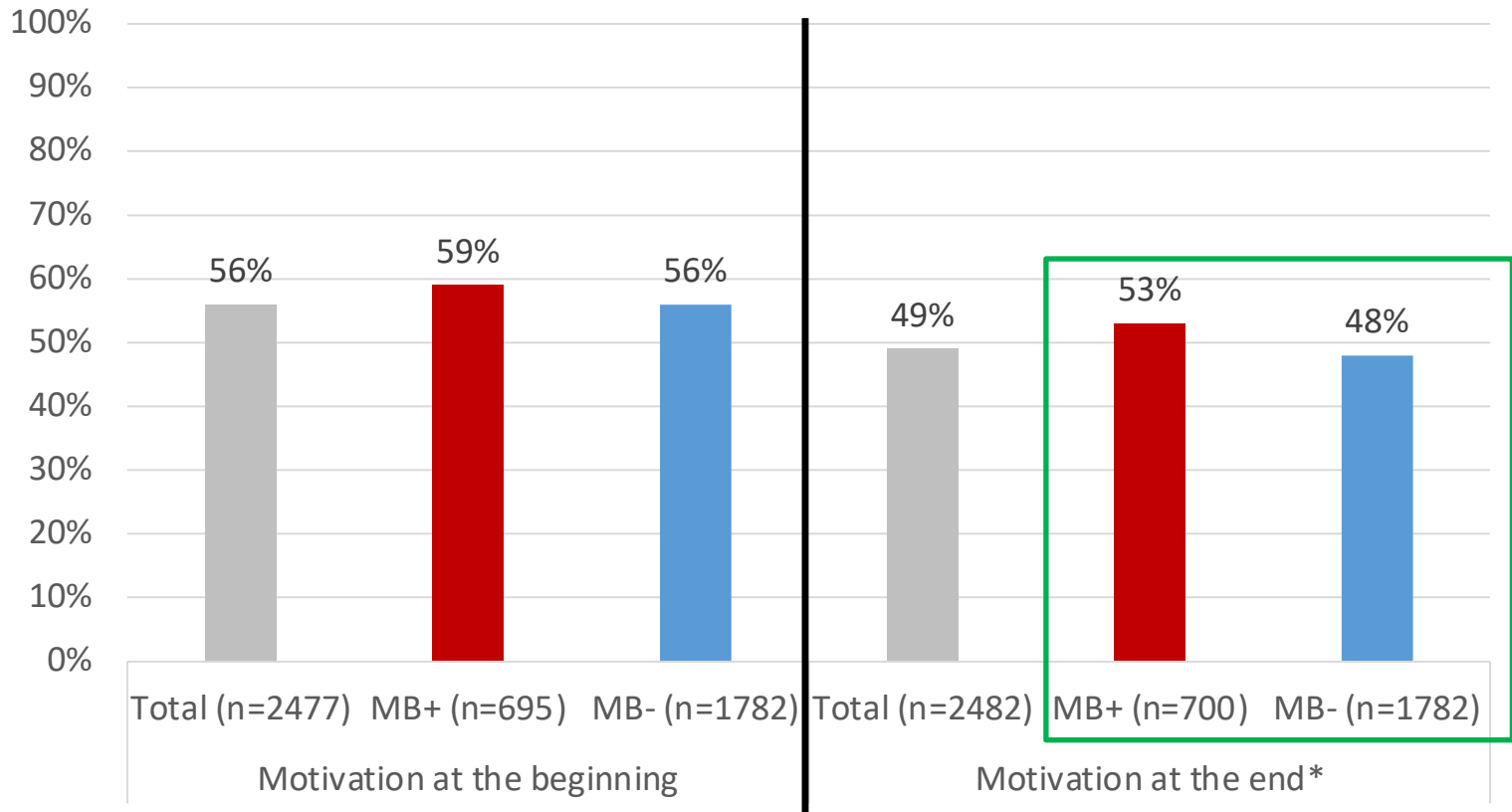


- Questionnaire based survey in the years 2013 / 2014
- 15 recruit schools, every branch of service represented.
Final sample: 2'508 recruits, 10% of a recruit cohort of one year
- 3 Survey time points: at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of recruit school
- 28% have foreign origin (→ at least one parent born abroad)
- Mean age between 20 and 21





Results: Motivation for recruit school

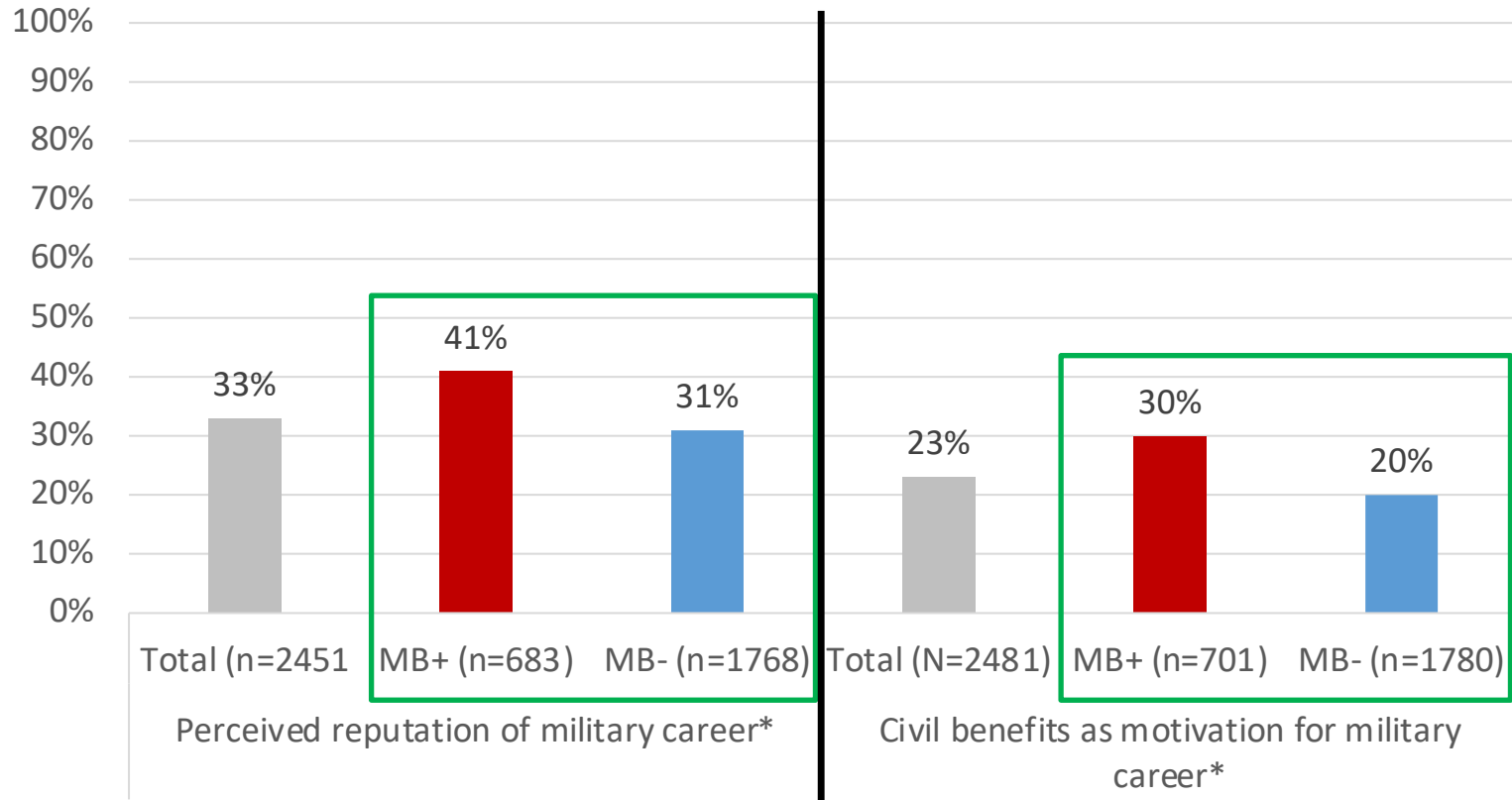


Summed agreement of the answers "tends to be true", "is true" and "is completely true" on a scale of six answers.

** = statistical significant difference between MB+ (with migration background) and MB- (without migration background)*



Results: Military career

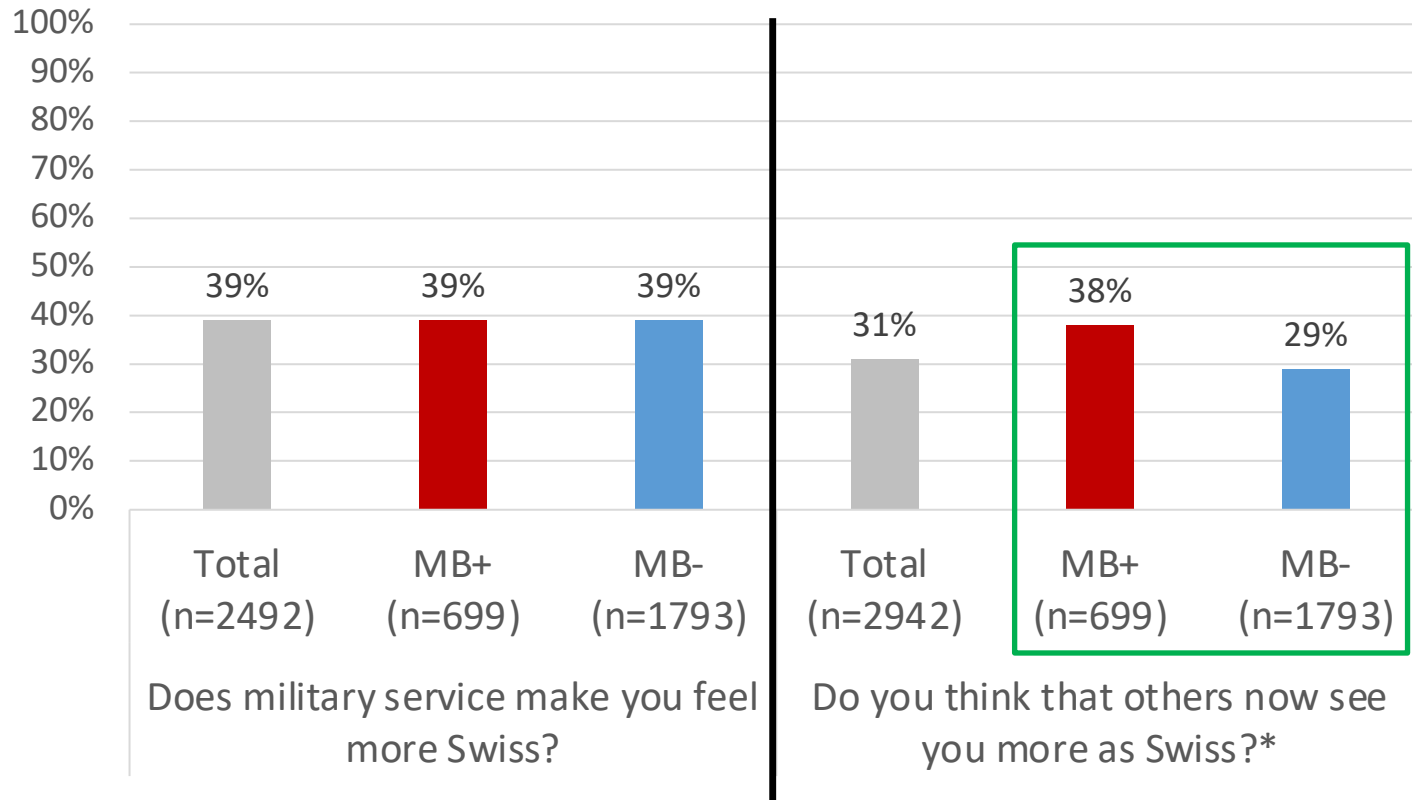


Summed agreement of the answers "tends to be true", "is true" and "is completely true" on a scale of six answers.

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Results: Perception of being Swiss

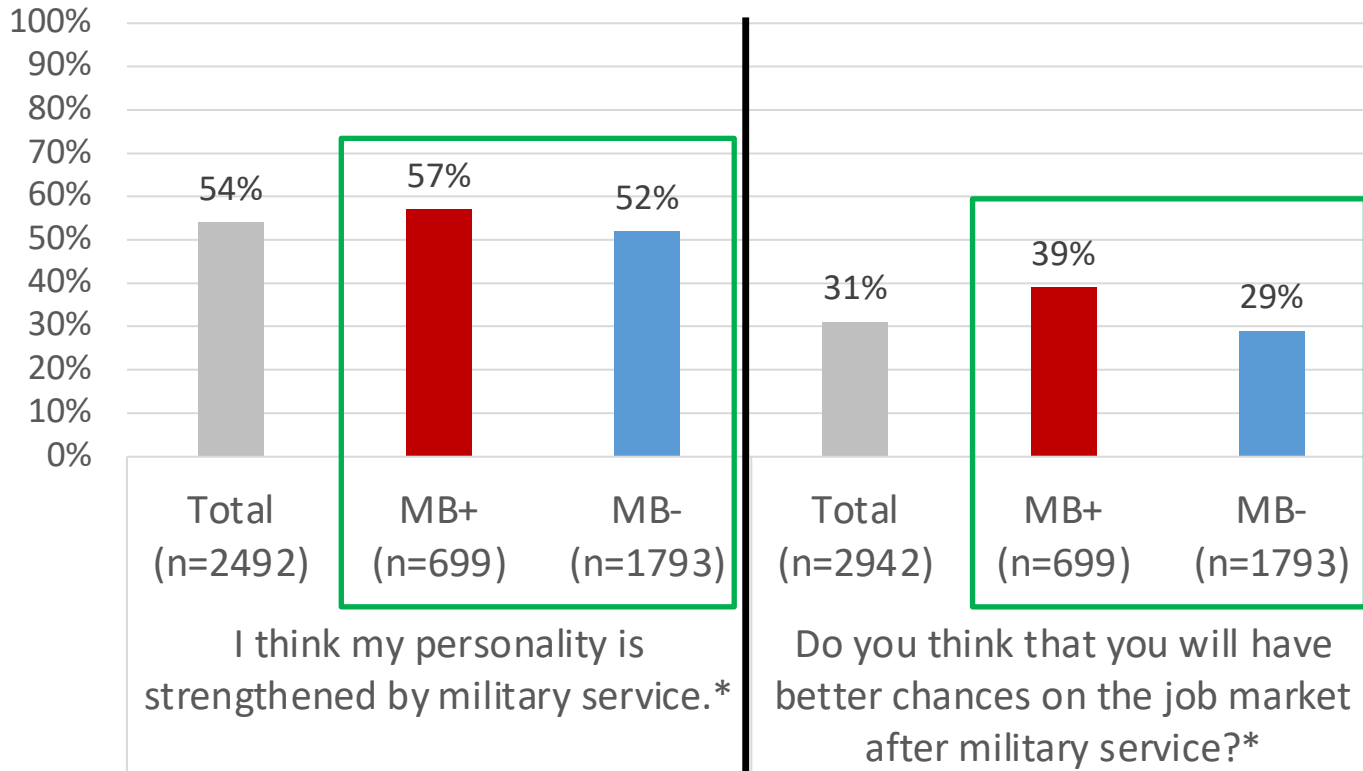


Summed agreement of the answers "tends to be true", "is true" and "is completely true" on a scale of six answers.

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Results: Personality and professional career

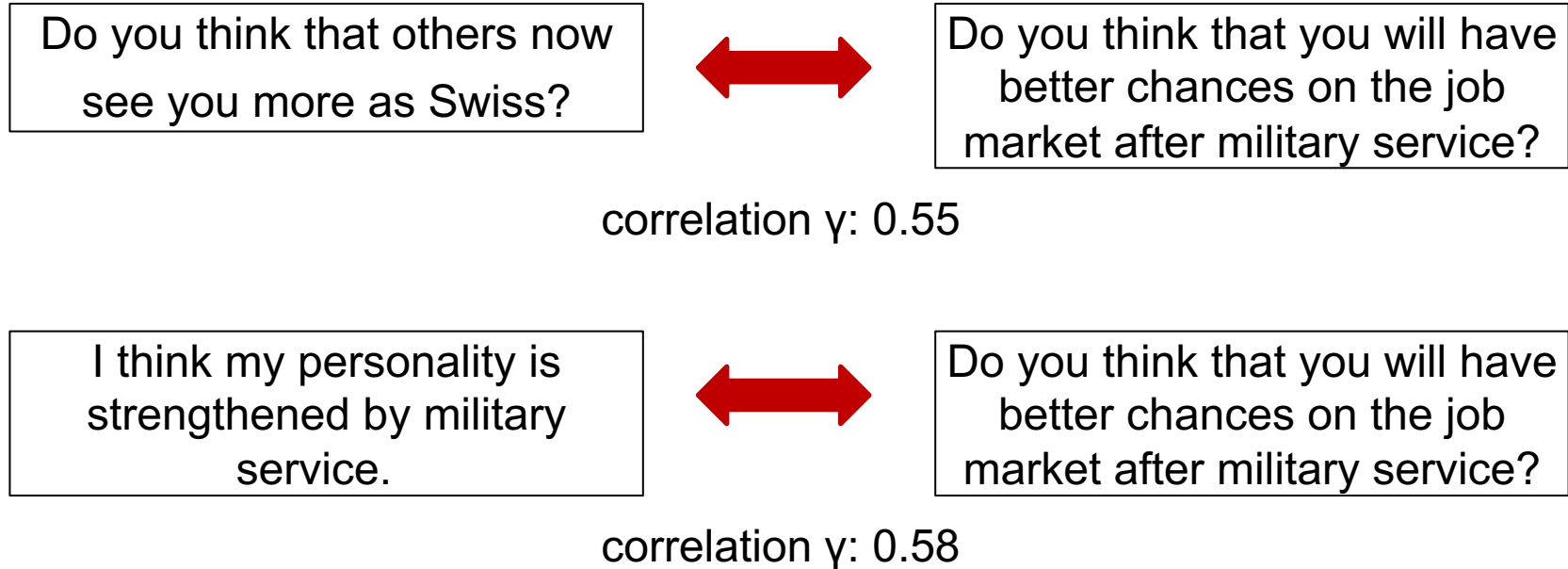


Summed agreement of the answers "tends to be true", "is true" and "is completely true" on a scale of six answers.

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Results: Personality, perception of being Swiss and professional career



→ Soldiers with migration backgrounds benefit more from recruit school



Results: Migration backgrounds vs. language affiliation



As a person belonging to a minority, recruit school has a different meaning

	I think my personality is strengthened by military service.	
	without MB	with MB
German-speaking majority	51%	54%
French-speaking minority	59%	63%
Italian-speaking minority	70%	76%

	Do you think that you will have better chances on the job market after military service?	
	without MB	with MB
German-speaking majority	27%	34%
French-speaking minority	35%	46%
Italian-speaking minority	51%	65%



Discussion



Reasons for the differences in the meaning of recruit school for minorities:

- Personal challenge which is not comparable to them of the majority
- The successful completion of the recruit school may serve like a sign to others
- Opportunity to make new relationships and to extend own network





Steps to the answer...



Soldiers with migration backgrounds perceive better chances on the labour market after military service.



Soldiers with migration backgrounds see their personality strengthened more often through military service.



Soldiers with migration backgrounds believe more often that others see them more as Swiss after military service.



Soldiers with migration backgrounds seek similar incentives in military service like persons of a minority language.



Conclusion



Compulsory military service plays an important integrative role for young Swiss citizens with migration backgrounds.



Successfully completing recruit school is a signal to others → crossing the ethnic boundary

This integrative role of military service is only possible because the SAF enjoy a high level of acceptance among the population
→ latent, "identity-creating" function



Thank you for your attention

