<http://polisczurich.wordpress.com/2010/12/01/the-effectiveness-of-arguments-in-direct-democratic-decisionmaking-evidence-from-the-swiss-deportation-initiative/>The Effectiveness of Arguments in Direct-democratic Decisionmaking: Evidence from the Swiss Deportation Initiative?

<http://polisczurich.wordpress.com/author/mbechtel/>Michael Bechtel | December 1, 2010 at 3:41 pm | URL: <http://wp.me/pJ4hS-mo>http://wp.me/pJ4hS-mo

On Sunday the Swiss decided to automatically expel foreign nationals guilty of serious crimes including murder and drug dealing. The vote on the deportation initiative has triggered strong reactions. Unsatisfied with the outcome of the referendum and allegedly ever more xenophobic Swiss immigration policies, opponents of the deportation initiative even engaged in partly violent demonstrations in several towns in Switzerland, a rarity in a country known for its peaceableness.

Two arguments dominated the public debate prior to the referendum, each attached to one of the two political camps. The Swiss People's Party (SVP), which instigated the deportation initiative, ran a costly and highly professionalized campaign, claiming that immigrants to Switzerland are disproportionately responsible for crime. The SVP argued that expelling foreign criminals would significantly reduce crime rates and thereby add to public security. It also played to stereotypes. The "Ivan S., rapist, soon a Swiss citizen?"-flyer invoked the well-known Swiss antipathy against immigrants from former Yugoslavia and presumably also alluded to Ivan IV of Russia known as Ivan the Terrible.

<http://polisczurich.files.wordpress.com/2010/12/svp_ivan_plakat1.jpg>

SVP Deportation Initiative Flyer. Source: www.kriminelle-nein.ch/downloads/index.html

Opponents like the Social Democratic Party (SP) said the deportation initiative was too harsh. They argued it would violate basic rights guaranteed in the Swiss constitution and even international law, since in some cases individuals would have to be deported to countries that practice torture or the death penalty.

Which of these arguments was more effective in changing people's minds about the deportation initiative? This question is not only interesting for practitioners and scholarship on electoral behavior and immigration. Immigration constitutes a key component of globalization, a process in which countries remove legal restrictions on the flow of capital, goods, services, and, last but not least, labor. Immigration has therefore also become one of the rising themes in international political economy. The Swiss vote on the deportation initiative presents a valuable case to learn about the

politics of immigration and the effectiveness of arguments in changing people's minds about immigration policy.

From a political science perspective, examining the effectiveness of these two arguments poses a considerable challenge. Clearly, asking people about their preferences over the deportation initiative and having them indicate how convincing they find one argument or the other fails to provide any credible evidence. Individuals could hold an opinion because they find an argument convincing, but they could as well find an argument convincing because it supports their own opinion. We also have far too limited knowledge about the large number of other factors that potentially affect both citizens' preferences over the deportation initiative and whether they find an argument convincing or not.

<http://www.mit.edu/~jhainm/>Jens Hainmueller, <http://www.ipw.unibe.ch/content/team/dominik_hangartner/index_eng.html>Dominik Hangartner, <http://www.marc-helbling.ch/>Marc Helbling and <http://www.ib.ethz.ch/people/mbechtel>I have devised an empirical test that allows us to get an impression of each argument's causal effects on citizens' vote intentions. In the week prior to the referendum we conducted a large, representative telephone survey in which we embedded a randomized experiment.<#_ftn1>[1] We randomly allocated respondents into three groups. We exposed one group to the security argument and the second group to the non-discrimination argument. A third set of respondents received no argument and therefore served as a control group. To evaluate the effects of partisan cues we designed additional statements that individuals were exposed to randomly.

After providing respondents with an argument, we asked them to indicate their preferences over the deportation initiative and to answer more general questions about their attitudes toward immigrants. Any difference in respondents' preferences between these different groups would be entirely attributable to the exposure to different arguments. Also, we are currently conducting a post-referendum survey in which we call the same individuals and ask them about their voting behavior and attitudes toward immigration to see whether the exposure to one of these arguments has any effects that last beyond the vote on the referendum.

We are currently conducting the last 300 interviews of the post-referendum survey and will post first results in this blog soon, so stay tuned.