Differentiation or Discrimination? Discretionary Decision-making of Street-level Bureaucrats

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Abstract

Discretionary decision-making is a regular feature of street-level administrative action on individual cases. While the principle of 'justice as impartiality' is a central public service norm, treating everyone exactly equally often does not lead to just and appropriate results of bureaucratic action. Discretion allows street-level bureaucrats to tailor their decisions to the complex situations of welfare recipients and to acknowledge relevant differences. However, discretion also allows decision-making based on illegitimate criteria. This study investigates what standard of impartiality street-level bureaucrats meet and whether this standard differs from the general population. We answer this question based on a conjoint experiment in which we forced respondents to prioritize the prepayment of a household commodity between two equally eligible welfare recipients. Recipients' profiles vary with respect to different attributes. Empirical results show weak signs of discrimination and substantial effects of earned- and need-deservingness in all samples. Contrary to expectations, respondents' decision-making behavior does not differ substantially between sectors.

1

1 Introduction

Discretionary decision-making on individual cases is a regular feature of street-level administrative action (Lipsky, 1980, pp. 13–25; Frederickson, 2010, pp. 51–52; Zacka, 2017, pp. 36–37). While a central public service norm under the rule of law is the norm of "justice as impartiality" (Mendus, 2008, p. 427), treating everyone exactly equally will not always lead to just and appropriate bureaucratic decisions (Rothstein and Teorell, 2008, p. 177). Discretion is then a means that allows street-level bureaucrats (hereinafter referred to as "SLB") to take differences between individual cases into account and to develop solutions catering to the individual situation while still applying the law properly. However, discretion also opens room for potential abuse and spurious unequal treatment. In this paper we therefore argue, that discretion is a double-edged sword that enables legitimate *differentiation* as well as illegitimate *discrimination*.

While discretionary decision-making is highly relevant in nearly all administrative areas, it is of particular effect in the context of social welfare. Welfare decisions by SLBs at the local level have immediate consequences on the lives of the most vulnerable members of a community. In this context, decisions violating the principle of impartiality can severely compromise the state`s welfare mission, which is to make sure that every citizen can participate at a collectively agreed minimum level in the everyday life of society (Mac Cárthaigh, 2014). The impact and the direct consequence that discretionary decisions have in the context of social welfare make it a purposeful and persuasive environment to explore discretion. For this reason, we constructed our experimental design around a question of need and hence asked how the application of discretion does work in practice. Do SLBs follow the principle of "justice as impartiality" (Mendus, 2008, p. 427) and treat everyone as Max Weber would have it, "*sine ira et studio*", without anger and prejudice, or do they tend to favor specific groups and discriminate against others? What norms and values guide their decisions when the law does not prescribe precisely, what to do? And how does the impartiality of SLBs measure up against people who do not work in the public sector?

Extant empirical research provides evidence for the existence of discrimination in street-level discretionary decisions. It shows that not all public services are delivered impartially (e.g. Hemker and Rink, 2017; Jilke and Tummers, 2018; Meier, 2019). In this context, this study aims to investigate how public service norms, public service motivation (PSM) (Perry and Wise, 1990), and socialization into a public service work environment affect SLBs' discretionary decision-making. To determine the effect of public service norms, we compare people working in public administration to people working in the private sector. Both groups were sampled in a general population survey. In order to look for the effects of PSM (Perry and Wise, 1990) and public service socialization, we additionally compare three student populations. Representing the public service side are prospective social workers studying at the University for Social Work Hamburg and prospective general civil service SLBs studying at the University for Applied Local Public Administration of Lower Saxony. The prospective social workers and general SLBs are compared to a general student population studying at the University of Hamburg.

Using an experimental approach, we confront our subjects with the hypothetical decision to prioritize the allocation of an indivisible good between two equally eligible welfare recipients in a conjoint experiment (Hainmueller et al., 2014). To be specific, respondents are required to decide on a situation of need where there are only sufficient resources to help one of two equally eligible recipients immediately. The only criteria to inform this decision are the recipients' profiles that vary with respect to a number of ascriptive (e.g., gender, age, country of origin) as well as behavioral (e.g., self-inflicted welfare dependency) and need-oriented (e.g., family with dependent children) attributes.

Our empirical results yield three key findings. (1) Contrary to the theoretical expectation, there are no substantive differences in individuals' decision-making behavior between the public and the private sector. (2) Subjects' choice in decision-making in all samples is driven mainly by client behavior and need. (3) We find weak signs for favoring German welfare recipients and discrimination against some Non-Germans recipients among public and private sector people in the general population sample. Among the student samples, this pattern does not reemerge consistently.

This study contributes to the emerging field of behavioral public administration in three ways: First, we shed light on the respective discretionary behavior of SLBs in the context of welfare policy in situations where the law does not provide clear guidance for administrative action. Second, we provide an evaluation of administrative behavior by comparing individuals working in the public service to a group of people who work in the private sector. Finally, we show the usefulness of conjoint designs to study SLBs' choice behavior.

We proceed as follows. In the next section, we briefly review the concept of discretion and discuss the necessity to make differences between clients in bureaucratic decisions. Subsequently, we examine the specific relevance of impartiality in the public sector relative to the private sector and discuss the role of deservingness in discretionary decision-making. The third section then introduces our experimental design, data set, and estimation strategy. In section four, we present the results of our empirical analysis. Finally, we discuss and summarize our findings.

2 Conceptual Framework

2.1 Discretion and its Challenges

Modern state bureaucracies in Western democracies tend to draw on the concept of the Weberian rational-legal rule. Following this ideal, bureaucracies in a perfect, omniscient world would fully eliminate the influence of decision-makers and their attitudes and values. There would be a statutory default for every situation, no matter how unlikely, which SLBs just needed to implement like an algorithm. In this "ideal" situation, justice naturally would be impartial (Mendus, 2008, p. 427). However, few people familiar with administrative procedures and decisions would deny that uncertainty in administrative decision-making exists. Lipsky (1980), for example, demonstrates that many tasks of SLBs are too complex and too individual to be completely formalized, making discretion necessary from

3

a technical perspective. Discretion also allows SLBs to "respond to the human dimensions of situations" (ibid., p. 15). The relevance and the impact that discretion takes on in administrative decision-making becomes particularly apparent in the context of welfare, as we will now show.

It is the welfare state's mission to provide goods and services that are a prerequisite for activities that every member of a society should be able to carry out at some collectively agreed minimum level (Mac Cárthaigh, 2014, pp. 460–461). The welfare state steps in as a system of public interventions when people cannot meet this minimum level for themselves (Goodin, 1988, p. 32) and provides them with monetary and non-monetary benefits to fulfill basic need. An impartial welfare system is committed to the principle of equality with the goal of treating everyone equally (Rothstein and Teorell, 2008; Mendus, 2008), and in many cases, welfare laws directly ensure equality. A case in point are daily allowances that are exactly defined by the law. As soon as a formal need assessment has been carried out, i.e., information on assets, living conditions, and need has been formally confirmed, the regular allowance is determined according to standardized procedures and money is transferred.[1] Yet not all decisions of welfare bureaucracies fall into such a category. Some circumstances are just too complex for formalization. Here the welfare state explicitly wants SLBs to have room to tailor decisions to address exceptional individual need. Lipsky (1980, p. 15) argues that societies "to a degree [...] not only [seek] impartiality from its public agencies but also compassion for special circumstances and flexibility in dealing with them." An example here would be an SLB who, based on knowing that an applicant's customer's young children live in the client's household, handles this specific customer's concern earlier (or faster) in order to e.g. prevent a utility company from shutting off electricity. Discretion thus opens room for acknowledging differences, helping to reach the policy goals at the heart of welfare legislation, instead of bluntly equalizing cases (Rothstein and Teorell, 2008, p. 178). The authors even go further in arguing that there can be no fair and appropriate decision without discretion since unequal cases need to be treated differently to reach a result that is as equitable as possible (ibid., p. 177). Lipsky (1980) or Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003), empirically demonstrate how ubiquitous as well as inevitable discretionary action is from a street-level perspective (for Germany, see e.g., Grimm and Plambeck (2013)). The use of discretion is therefore not the exception but an integral part of the daily work routine of street-level bureaucracies.

However, the use of discretion can come in two shapes: legitimate *differentiation* and illegitimate *discrimination*. Differentiation responds to the aforementioned "human dimensions of situations" (Lipsky, 1980, p. 15) and is based on a strong commitment to policy goals and to impartiality as the core principle for engaging with public service clients. Discretionary decisions, on the other hand, are discriminatory, if SLBs grant or deny a client in search of support a service or benefit based on

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[1] In Germany, all residents over the age of 15 are entitled to basic income support ("Hartz IV"). Prerequisites are the capability to work for at least three hours a day and to be considered in need of assistance, i.e., unable to support oneself (§ 7 Abs. 1 SGB II).

illegitimate factors. Illegitimate factors for unequal treatment clearly violate the principle of impartiality by, for example, making decisions based on a client's age, gender, race, or ethnic background.

There is considerable evidence in extant research on discrimination in public service provision, even though the law requires the equal treatment of citizens and comprehensive anti-discrimination and equal-opportunity laws are in place to enforce this principle in many welfare states (e.g. OECD, 2015). Einstein and Glick (2017), for example, conduct a correspondence experiment among public housing authorities in US metropolitan regions. Using requests from putative white, Black, or Hispanic senders, they find that Hispanics receive less friendly responses from officials than whites or Blacks. Likewise, Jilke, van Dooren, et al. (2018) employ a correspondence experiment to explore whether there are differences in discriminatory behavior between public and private social services providers. For elderly care facilities, they find that private providers discriminate more against ethnic minorities than public providers do. Another correspondence experiment by Pfaff et al. (2021) provides evidence in support of religious discrimination among SLBs in the American public school system. Turning to Germany, evidence granting or denying public service based on illegitimate attributes is mixed. Conducting a conjoint experiment among German welfare offices, Hemker and Rink (2017) find that response rates did not vary across the treatment conditions. However, the response quality was significantly lower for requests from non-natives. Grohs et al. (2016) sent requests to municipal administrations with the sender varying concerning gender and ethnic background (Turkish and German). Their results indicate that German administrators do not commit systematic ethnic discrimination, but they find a tendency for positive discrimination when ethnicity and gender stereotypes interact (also see Adam, Grohs, et al., 2020).

2.2 Discrimination and Differentiation in the Public Service and in the Private Sector

It is widely accepted that impartiality reflects a societal commitment to equality (Mendus, 2008, p. 423). But does this commitment apply to each individual disposition in a similar manner? Barry (2012) argues that impartiality is primarily a requirement on a society's (sic!) moral and legal rules in the public sphere. In contrast, Barry sees individuals in the private sphere as being entitled to be biased e.g. towards family members at the expense of strangers (ibid.). However, to individuals occupying a public office, the requirement of impartiality applies very strictly, at least while acting in their capacity as a servant of the state (Mendus, 2008, p. 427; Lipsky, 1980, p. 14). In the provision of social welfare, impartiality then means, "that in deciding how to allocate the resource, we ignore all personal attributes [...] that are irrelevant to the problem at hand" (Moreno-Ternero and Roemer, 2006, p. 1419). Based on this line of argument, we expect that impartial non-discriminating decision-making will be more prevalent in public servants whose work ethic is undergirded by the norm of impartiality than in respondents from the private sector.

Unlike private enterprises, public sector organizations operate in an environment of extensive political and societal monitoring (Boyne, 2002, p. 98). Public organizations and their staff must adhere to a vast number of formal procedures while making decisions. They have to document every action taken carefully and are subject to close control mechanisms that restrict their autonomy of action (ibid., p.

101). Private organizations and their employees are not as closely restricted and monitored. This suggests that disrespect of equity and impartiality is more likely to be observed in public than private sector organizations and that barriers to client discrimination are higher as well. Hence, we expect public sector subjects taking part in our study to be less discriminating than private-sector subjects.

Multiple streams of research finally expect systematic differences between public and private sector employees' work motives and normative orientations. Two prominent accounts are the concept of PSM (Perry, 1996; Perry and Wise, 1990) and socialization into public service norms through public service training as well as being on the job (e.g. Merritt and Farnworth, 2018). Taylor (2007, p. 934) defines PSM as "a mix of motives that drives an individual to engage in an act that benefits society". Besides rational and norm-based motives, PSM particularly emphasizes altruistic motives, such as self-sacrifice and compassion, which distinguishes the concept from traditional rational choice approaches (Perry and Wise, 1990). Individuals with higher PSM levels are also presumed to be more likely to enter the civil service (e.g. Bozeman and Su, 2015). Through professional training and work experience, SLBs may further improve their normative adherence to impartiality and their skills in applying this principle.

The principle of impartiality and its proper realm, the effect of public scrutiny of public organizations, and the reflection on public service motivation and socialization all lead to the expectation that active SLBs, as well as future SLBs in training, are less prone to discriminate than their private-sector counterparts. Hence our first hypothesis:

H_1: *Subjects from the public sector are less likely to discriminate against welfare recipients than subjects from the private sector*.

2.3 Inside Differentiation

At the beginning of this section, we argued that welfare law allows discretion at the bureaucratic street-level in order to enable SLBs to recognize relevant differences between welfare clients' need as well as to apply legitimate differentiation in their decisions based on these differences. However, when and how is differentiation 'legitimate' and what are permissible criteria for differentiation? The debate on what makes differentiation in decision-making legitimate is intricately related to the concept of deservingness of welfare state clients. The extant literature provides two different approaches that further dissect deservingness: van Oorschot (2000) draws on empirical data and dimensional analysis to establish five sub-dimensions of deservingness, whereas Jilke and Tummers (2018) apply a systematic approach to the same end. Before deriving our second hypothesis, we will outline both approaches.

Drawing on general population survey data on attitudes toward "the poor" van Oorschot (2000, p. 36) observed five deservingness cues that are present in people's attitudes towards the poor and that influence the level of commitment to help the poor. He refers to these cues as CARIN criteria. They are: (1) a poor person's *control* over her neediness, (2) her *attitude* towards the support she receives, (3) the degree of *reciprocation* by a poor person, (4) her *identity* as her (not) belonging to a certain group in

society, and (5) the level of a poor person's perceived *need* (also see van Oorschot and F. Roosma, 2015).

Deservingness understood in this way has been shown to explain support for and opposition to social benefits among citizens and politicians (e.g., Baekgaard et al., 2020; Kullberg, 2005; Reeskens and Meer, 2019; Reeskens and Oorschot, 2013). The empirical findings on the effects of these deservingness cues suggest that a client's perceived deservingness increases with (1) a decrease in control a person has over her situation, (2) higher levels of a grateful attitude towards help offered, (3) an increased level of reciprocity by a welfare client, (4) a smaller social distance between a poor person and the respondent's own group in society, i.e., some "us" a respondent feels to belong to and (5) increasing levels of a welfare recipient's perceived need (van Oorschot, 2000, p. 36).

The CARIN-criteria establish plausible sub-dimensions of (perceived) deservingness. However, the identity dimension clearly violates the norm of impartiality if applied as a criterion by SLBs. If their decisions are based on identity differences, they count as discrimination and not as differentiation. Conceptual inconsistency in the CARIN-criteria is unsurprising, as these criteria were not developed based on logical deduction from overarching principles but on empirical observation of citizens' attitudes. While unsurprising, this inconsistency implies that the CARIN-criteria cannot be unconditionally applied to establish sub-dimensions of deservingness for differentiation between welfare clients. Hence, we turn to Jilke and Tummers (2018) for further council. In fact, Jilke and Tummers (ibid., pp. 228–231) developed three conceptual types of deservingness: *need-deservingness*, *earned-deservingness,* and *resource-deservingness*.

Need-deservingness means that "clients are seen as worthy of investing time and resources because they are perceived to be in need of help" (ibid., p. 231) as a consequence of their living conditions and social disadvantages. The underlying motive to help a client based on need-deservingness is charity or altruism. An example of need-deservingness is a low-income family with dependent children or an individual with severe health conditions. Under earned-deservingness, "clients are seen as worthy [of help] because they have shown high effort" (ibid., p. 231) towards managing their situation. Here the underlying motive for help is reciprocity. An example of earned-deservingness is somebody who diligently worked his entire adult life, only to find herself unemployed shortly before retirement age. Finally, resource-deservingness means that "clients are seen as worthy [...] because they are perceived to be successful in terms of bureaucratic success criteria" (ibid., p. 231). Here the underlying motive to help is the efficient use of limited (government) resources. An example of resource deservingness would be a young and well-educated unemployed person in need of only a specific additional qualification to be swiftly re-integrated into the regular job market.

We argue that Jilke and Tummers's (2018) deservingness approach can be subsumed under two perspectives. The need- and earned-deservingness place the needy person and their individual circumstances at the center of consideration, while the resource-deservingness targets the efficiency and effectiveness of an administrative action and views the process as a technicality. The first perspective is

particularly important for our research question as we are primarily interested in how individual attributes of welfare state clients affect the discretionary behavior of SLBs and to determine whether discretion is an act of discrimination or differentiation. We consequently decided to neglect resource-deservingness and concentrate our analysis on need- and earned-deservingness.

To sum up, van Oorschot's (2000) and Jilke and Tummers's (2018) concepts deliver useful dimensions for our analysis, but they both contain elements that are not suitable for our purpose. The identity cue by van Oorschot (2000) is not a permissible foundation for legitimate differentiation, and resource-deservingness (Jilke and Tummers, 2018) focuses on the process of welfare provision and not on the person in need herself. The cues control, attitude, reciprocation, and need (van Oorschot, 2000) as well as the dimensions need- and earned-deservingness (Jilke and Tummers, 2018) appear reasonable and can be grouped in two common dimensions. For doing so, we synthesize the aforementioned concepts by assigning the deservingness cues by van Oorschot (2000) to the two relevant dimensions conceived by Jilke and Tummers (2018). This allows us to derive two main motives for legitimate differentiation, which are illustrated in Figure 1. First, we consider the level of need (van Oorschot, 2000) and need deservingness (Jilke and Tummers, 2018) to cover the same dimension and thus refer to it as "need-deservingness". We use "earned-deservingness" as our second dimension as it relies on a recipient's behavior and takes reciprocity, attitude, and control (van Oorschot, 2000) into account. Reciprocity is earned-deservingness by definition (Jilke and Tummers, 2018, p. 231), attitude (van Oorschot, 2000), to our understanding, overlaps with reciprocity. This is because having the right attitude towards help, for example by being cooperative in the welfare process, can be the consequence of some effort by the welfare client, thus earning her a supportive attitude from others. Control addresses earned-deservingness from a wider perspective. When people are responsible for their dire straits themselves, for example when they did not do enough to prevent such a situation, they would earn less support than if the opposite were true. A decision is thus guided by earned-deservingness when an SLB relies on the behavior of a person.
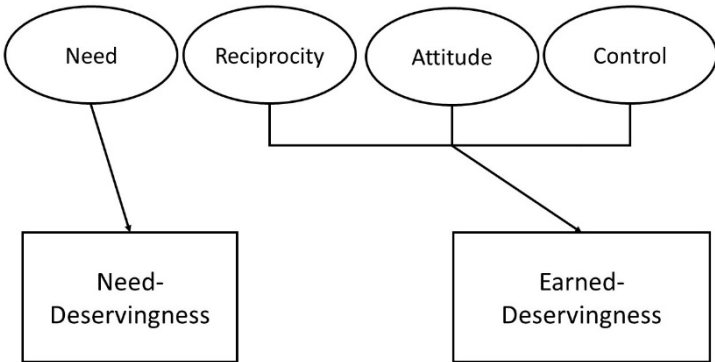

Figure 1 Synthesizing of van Oorschot (2000) and Jilke and Tummers (2018)

8

What implications can we draw from the discussion on deservingness for discretion in the public sector? Frederickson (2010) argues that the public service has to enhance social equity in a society. From a public service orientation toward social equity, Perry (1996, p. 7) argues that unconditional compassion for the well-being of one's fellow citizens and especially the needy among them is an important element of public service motivation. Based on this argument, we expect public sector subjects to be more oriented towards need-deservingness. Private sector employees work in an environment that is on average more competitive than the public sector and more performance-oriented as well. We hence expect active SLBs and future SLBs in training to be more likely to condition support based on reciprocity and control, i.e. rather acting on the dimension of earned-deservingness. Hence, our second hypothesis is this:

H_{2a}: *Subjects from the public sector have a propensity to differentiate according to the need-deservingness of the welfare recipients.*

H_{2b}: *Subjects from the private sector have a propensity to differentiate according to the earned-deservingness of the welfare recipients.*

3 Research Design

To test the set of hypotheses derived above, we designed a paired conjoint experiment (Hainmueller et al., 2014) that simulates a discretionary decision in a welfare context. Subjects have to make a decision between two fictional social welfare recipients who are in need of a prepayment to satisfy an exceptional need (fix a broken refrigerator). In legal terms, both recipients are equally eligible for the prepayment. However, the case manager, an SLB, can only grant one prepayment immediately due to budget constraints, and the other recipient is hence required to wait for four weeks.[2] The welfare recipients randomly vary according to a set of attributes reflecting potentially discriminating characteristics as well as the recipients' earned- and need-deservingness. After being given this information, respondents are asked to decide which of the two welfare recipients should receive the prepayment first (see online appendix for full instructions). The decision setting is repeated eight times, with the characteristics of the recipients repeatedly randomized in each new round. In what follows, we describe how our research design measured legitimate and illegitimate information for discretion.

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[2] We carefully constructed the task based on effective legal provisions in Germany. We augmented the conjoint data with additional data gathered through qualitative interviews in street-level offices of the German employment bureaucracy, known as "Job Centers". In these interviews, Job Center employees mentioned almost exactly the setting we describe in our vignette several times as a common example for discretionary decision-making.

3.1 Multi-Dimensionality of Clients' Attributes

In the conjoint experiment, we use eight different attributes to describe both applicants (see Table 1 for a list of the attributes and the online appendix for an exemplary vignette). Three of these attributes are connected to discrimination. Another three attributes offer information about the application's deservingness. To ensure that the conjoint experiment reflects information about the applicant that is typically available to SLBs in a real-world prioritization situation, we include a third set of two attributes to improve experimental realism. These attributes are the education level and the duration of unemployment.

3.1.1 Discriminating Attributes

We use gender, age, and ethnic background as attributes that can only illegitimately be used to make differences between applicants.[3] To examine whether an individual's age is a source of discrimination, we divided our hypothetical applicants into four life and working phases. Applicants in the first group are considered to be at the beginning of their vocational careers and are 23-years-olds. Applicants in the second and third groups are expected to have reached a stable employment situation and are 36 and 48 years old. The fourth group is most likely at the end of their professional career and close to retirement and is 57 years old.

A large number of publications recently addressed discrimination against minorities in the private and public sectors (Adam, Fernández-i-Marín, et al., 2021; Einstein and Glick, 2017; Jilke and Tummers, 2018; Thomann and Rapp, 2018). They demonstrate that the allocation of welfare is influenced by the heterogeneity of a community and individuals tend to give benefits to groups with higher similarity (Kittel, 2020; van Oorschot and Femke Roosma, 2017). Our attribute 'ethnic background' therefore contains different nationalities that vary in their proximity to the (German) majoritarian community. We use France as the country with the most significant similarity to Germany due to its regional proximity and related culture and history. Immigrants of Turkish origin represent the largest migrant population in Germany. Although some of the Turkish population in Germany is already in its third generation, recent research shows that the Turkish population is still less integrated than other groups of immigrants (Diehl et al., 2013). Immigrants from Romania are afflicted with numerous stereotypes in Germany and are often confronted with the accusation of exploiting the German welfare state services. We regard the last two nationalities, Syria and Vietnam, as groups with the highest cultural distance. To examine whether a Muslim background influences decision-making, we used Vietnam as a comparison group. The attribute 'German' was weighted twice when constructing our vignettes to avoid comparing minority

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[3] In Germany, the norm for non-discriminating behavior is set in the German constitution (*Grundgesetz*) and the Anti-Discrimination Act (*Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz*, AGG, enacted in 2006). The AGG prohibits any discrimination based on race, ethnic heritage, gender, religion or ideology, physical disability, age, or sexual identity (§ 1 AGG).

groups with each other too often. Therefore, the welfare recipients had a German citizenship in two out of seven cases and another nationality in five out of seven.

		Attribute	Values
Discrimination		Gender	- Male - Female
		Age	- 23 Years - 36 Years - 48 Years - 57 Years
		Ethnic Background	- German - France - Romania - Turkey - Syria - Vietnam
Deservingness	Need	Household Composition	- 1 Adult - 2 Adults - 2 Adults, 1 Child - 1 Adult, 2 Children - 2 Adults, 3 Children
	Earned	Reason for Unemployment	- Disabled due to accident - Bankruptcy of employer - Voluntary dismissal - Fired for wrongdoing
		Supportive Behavior	- Low

			- Medium
			- High
Supplementary Attributes		Education Level	- Unskilled
			- Vocational Training
			- Technical College
			- University
		Duration of Unemployment	- 0.5 Years
			- 1 Year
			- 1.5 Years
			- 3 Years

Table 1: Individual attributes used to "construct" welfare applicants of different types

3.1.2 Deservingness Attributes

Drawing on our discussion of deservingness in chapter 2.3, we use three attributes to account for clients' deservingness. Need-deservingness is captured by the number of people currently living in the household of the welfare recipient. We assume that a higher number of persons in the household and especially the involvement of children lead to a higher level of perceived need-deservingness as more and dependent individuals are affected by the SLB's decision. We hence expect a strong perception of need with single parents and large families (2 adults, 3 children). In contrast, we expect a comparatively low perception with single households and childless couples. Earned-deservingness is operationalized by two attributes: (1) Why someone became unemployed and hence a welfare recipient and (2) how well clients cooperate with the social welfare administration. The reason for unemployment (1) aims to capture the control element of earned-deservingness. We suggest that applicants who lost their jobs due to a work accident or bankruptcy of their employers are perceived to deserve more support due to their lack of control than people who quit their jobs or were fired and can thus be understood as being responsible for their situation themselves. The level of cooperation (2) aims to capture the reciprocity and the attitude element of earned-deservingness. Here, we vary how well welfare recipients cooperate with the welfare administration operationalized by punctuality and completeness of documents. If recipients systematically refuse to cooperate, they can be subjected to sanctions, e.g., reeducation or refusal to pay monthly social assistance.

3.2 Samples[4]

The empirical analysis draws on a general population and a student sample. The general population was sampled by *DALIA Research* using quotas for gender, age, education level, and parental status based on the German Microzensus. Respondents were paid a small monetary incentive upon completion of the survey. 3,354 respondents started the survey. After data cleaning and speeder control, 1,937 respondents were left for further analysis. Of these 1,336 self-identified as working in the private sector, and 352 self-identified as working in the public sector (see Table 2 for descriptive statistics).

The student sample consists of three groups: 'Public Administration', 'Social Work', and 'General Student Sample'. The subsample 'Public Administration' includes undergraduate and graduate students from the University for Applied Local Public Administration of Lower Saxony (*Kommunale Hochschule für Verwaltung Niedersachsen* – HSVN). Of the 1,258 students contacted by the HSVN's administration, 557 participated in the survey. This corresponds to a response rate of approximately 46%. After data cleaning and speeder control, 510 cases were available for analysis.

For the subsample 'Social Work', we recruited students from University for Social Work and Deaconry Hamburg (*Rauhes Haus – Evangelische Hochschule für Soziale Arbeit und Diakonie*). 147 of the 523 enrolled students took part in our survey. This is a response rate of about 28%. We excluded twenty students after data cleaning and speeder control, leaving 127 cases for our analysis.

The 'General Student Subsample' includes students from different fields of study at the University of Hamburg. The Research Laboratory at the Faculty of Business, Economics, and Social Sciences distributed the survey to 2,031 members of its opt-in subject pool. 772 students took part in our survey. As a result of data cleaning and speeder control, we dropped 56 students from the sample.

Students from all subsamples were given the option to take part in a lottery with a chance to win Amazon gift cards worth between 25 and 250 euros. A total of 7,000 euros was paid out to the participants.

General Population					
Sample	Fieldwork	N	Age	Gender (female)	Education (High School)
Private Sector	05/2019	1,336	44.6	46%	39%
Public Sector	05/2019	352	43.1	55%	50%

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[4] Please refer to the online-appendix for more detailed information on our samples and the sampling procedures.

Sample	Fieldwork	N	Age	Gender (female)	Education (High School)
No sector identified	05/2019	249	35.7	65%	56%
Total		1,937	42.9	50%	43%
Students					
Sample	Fieldwork	N	Age	Gender (female)	Education (High School)
Public Administration	05/2019	510	23.8	59%	100%
Social Work	05/2019	127	31.2	74%	100%
General Student Sample	05-06/2019	716	25.6	63%	100%
Total		1,353	25.4	62%	100%

Table 2: Summary of samples

4 Empirical Results

To interpret the empirical results we report the marginal means (Figure 2 and Figure 4) and the differences in marginal means (Figure 3 and Figure 5) of the eight conjoint attributes for the general population sample and the student samples. Marginal means greater than 0.5 indicate an above-average probability of being chosen for the prepayment, and marginal means of less than 0.5 indicate a below-average probability. If a confidence interval includes the value of 0.5, we observe no significant effect for a particular attribute (Figure 2 and Figure 4). Since our theoretical expectations focus on group differences, we also display the difference in marginal means for the general public sample (Figure 3) and for the three student groups in the student sample (Figure 5). In Figure 3, private sector respondents serve as the reference category, meaning that the estimates show whether public sector respondents have a higher (positive values) or lower (negative values) preference for a certain level compared to private sector respondents. In Figure 5, students of public administration serve as the reference category.
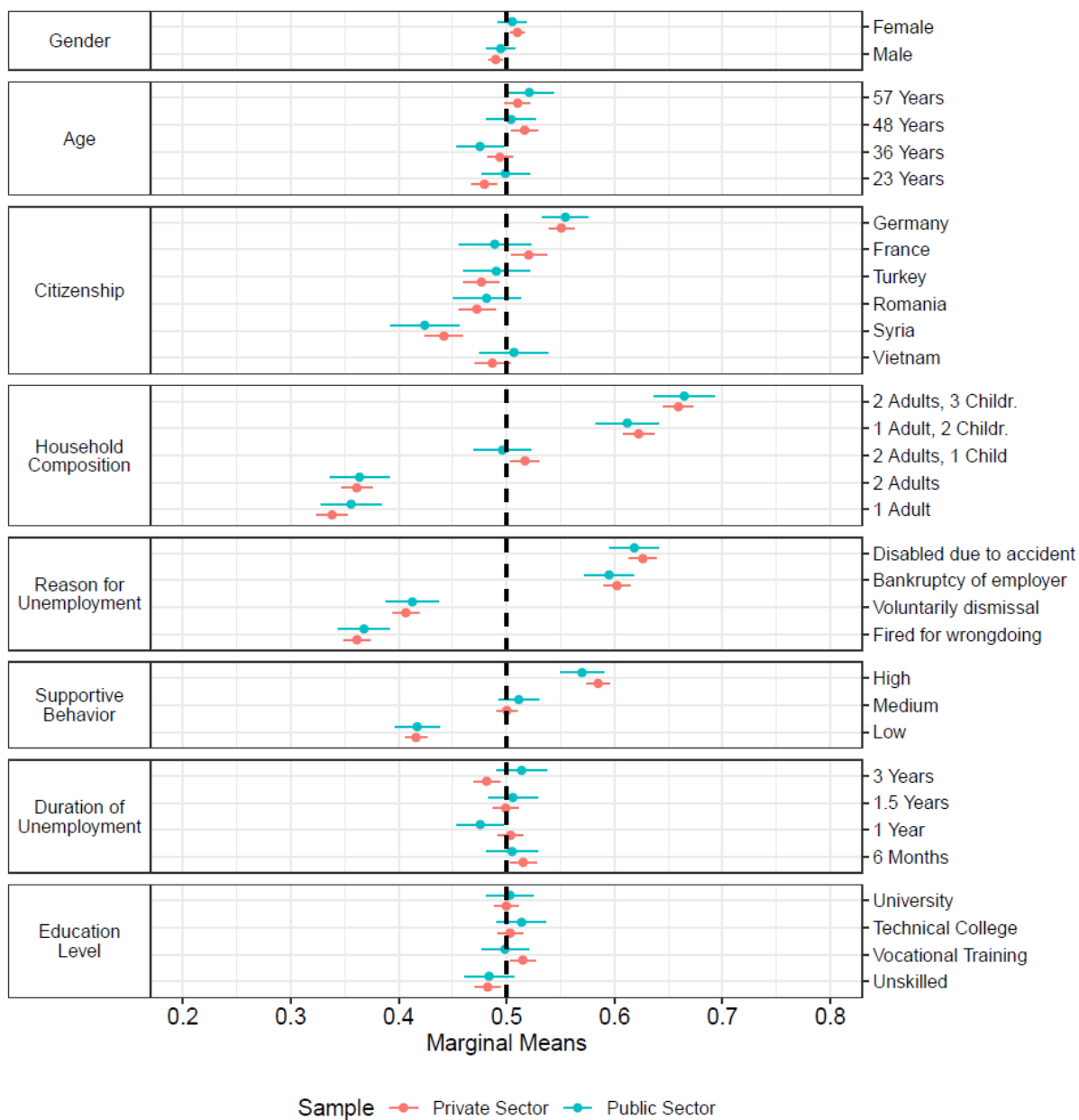
Figure 2: *Baseline results from the general population sample. Horizontal lines are 95% confidence intervals.*
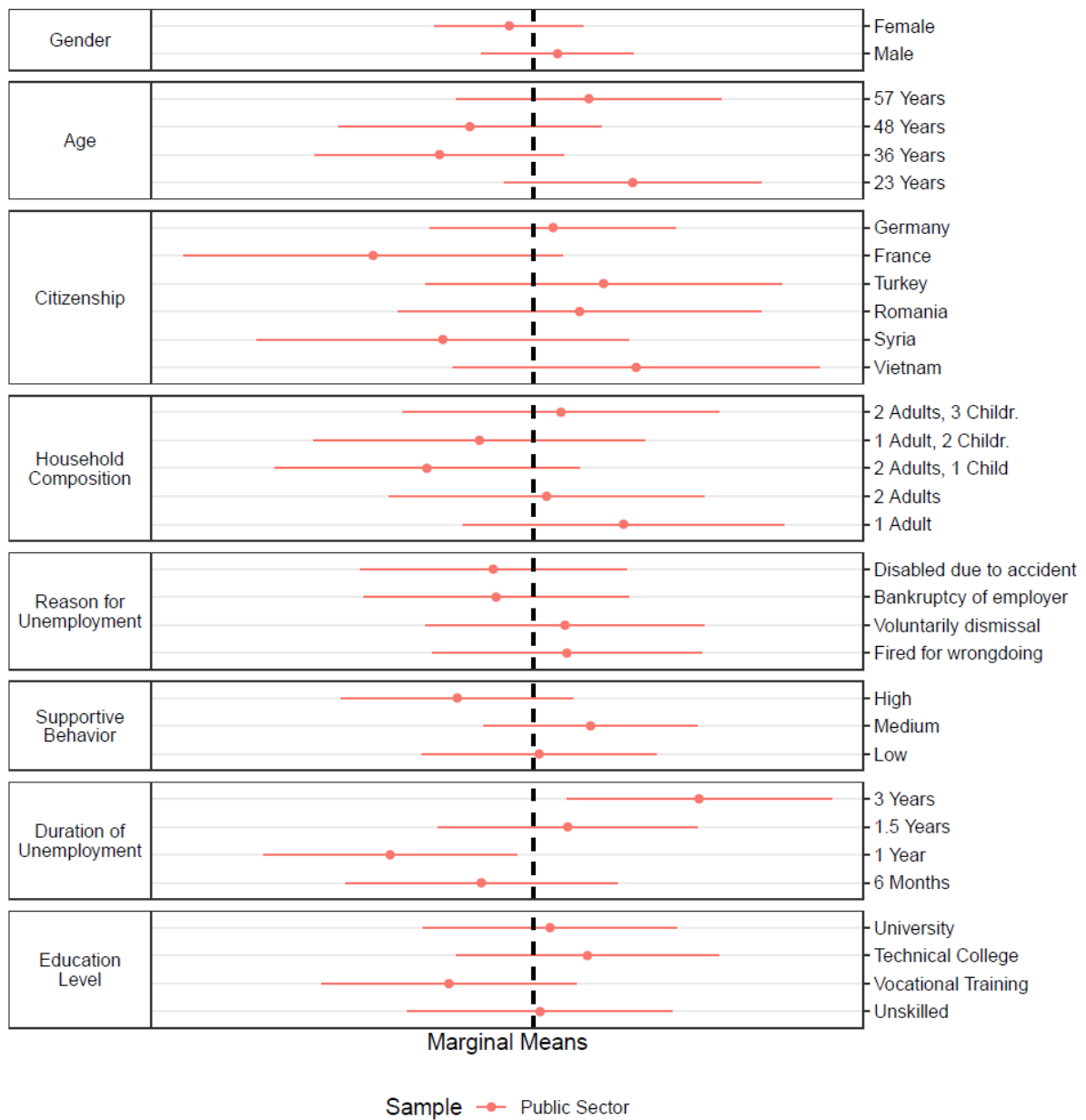
Figure 3: *Difference in marginal means from the general population sample. Reference category: Private sector. Horizontal lines are 95% confidence intervals.*

4.1 Discrimination based on ascriptive characteristics

In this article, we raise the question if discretionary spaces lead to differentiation and discrimination. Our first hypothesis H_1 assumes that active SLBs and future SLBs in training are less prone to let their discretionary choice be affected by potentially discriminating client characteristics due to a higher

commitment to the principle of justice as impartiality. We use a comparison group of non-public resp. private sector employees and three different student groups to test this expectation.

Looking at the three attributes assigned to discrimination (age, gender, ethnic background) in the general population sample (Figure 2), we find almost no significant marginal effects for gender and age in both groups. Private sector employees minimally prefer female to male applicants, while 23-year-old applicants are slightly disadvantaged. SLBs slightly disfavor 36-year-old applicants and favor the oldest group of 57 years of age. To our understanding, the later observation rather points in the direction of differentiation than that of discrimination. It is much more difficult for older people to reenter the labor market, than for younger ones. It may hence seem legitimate to prioritize older clients over younger ones even with not directly job-related support measures.

However, we find discrimination against people from Syria and positive discrimination against applicants with German citizenship in both subgroups. Remarkably, public and private sector employees treat these two specific ethnic backgrounds the same way. For the other nationalities, we find no significant effects for the public sector, but some in the private sector. In the latter, we observe a tendency to favor France applicants and disfavor people with a Turkish or Romanian background. Figure 3 shows that neither of the differences between the two subgroups in the prioritization decision is significant.

For the three student samples (Figure 4), we also find only minimal effects for gender and age, but some for the clients' ethnic backgrounds. Unlike in the general population sample, the student groups show varying decision patterns: Students of public administration slightly favor German natives and discriminate against applicants from Syria while being indifferent towards the other nationalities. Social Work students, in contrast, give out the prepayment for the exceptional good significantly less often to Germans and favor people from Syria instead. We also find insignificant tendencies of favoritism toward Turkish applicants. Students of the general student sample behave in a comparable way to the future social workers: German applicants are slightly disadvantaged, and applicants from Turkey and Syria are slightly favored. However, both effects are not significant at the 95%-confidence level. Thus, concerning the attribute of ethnic background, students of public administration act similarly to respondents in the general population. Social work students and students of the general student sample show a more unexpected behavior as they tend to slightly disadvantage German citizens and favor people from Syria. This form of positive discrimination may be grounded in a perception of higher need in people with an immigration background, especially from Syria. However, we can only speculate here.

In sum, we see no significant results regarding Hypothesis H_1 on sector differences in the general population. Respondents from both subgroups behave similarly, slightly favoring applicants from the majority of society and disadvantaging Syrians. Employees from the private sector additionally show weak signs of favoritism toward French applicants and discrimination against people from Turkey, Romania, and (insignificantly) Vietnam. Public sector employees are indifferent to all ethnic backgrounds except Germany and Syria. The results of the student samples also do not support our

17

Hypothesis. Students of public administration, who will most certainly work in the public sector, discriminate against Syrians and favor German applicants. For the other two student groups, we observe the opposite choice behavior. Thus, with respect to H_1, a strong link to the public sector in college has no systematic effect on behavior.

4.2 Differentiation based on Deservingness

In chapter 2.3, we discussed the deservingness of welfare recipients as a possible foundation for legitimate differentiation in the discretionary decision-making of SLBs. Following the idea that public service employment is linked to a commitment to provide for the well-being of all society members, we expect SLBs and public sector prospects to be more attentive to need-deservingness. On the other hand, we expect private sector employees and students of the general student sample as the counterparts in comparison, to be more attentive to attributes connected to earned-deservingness as a result of a more performance-oriented work environment.
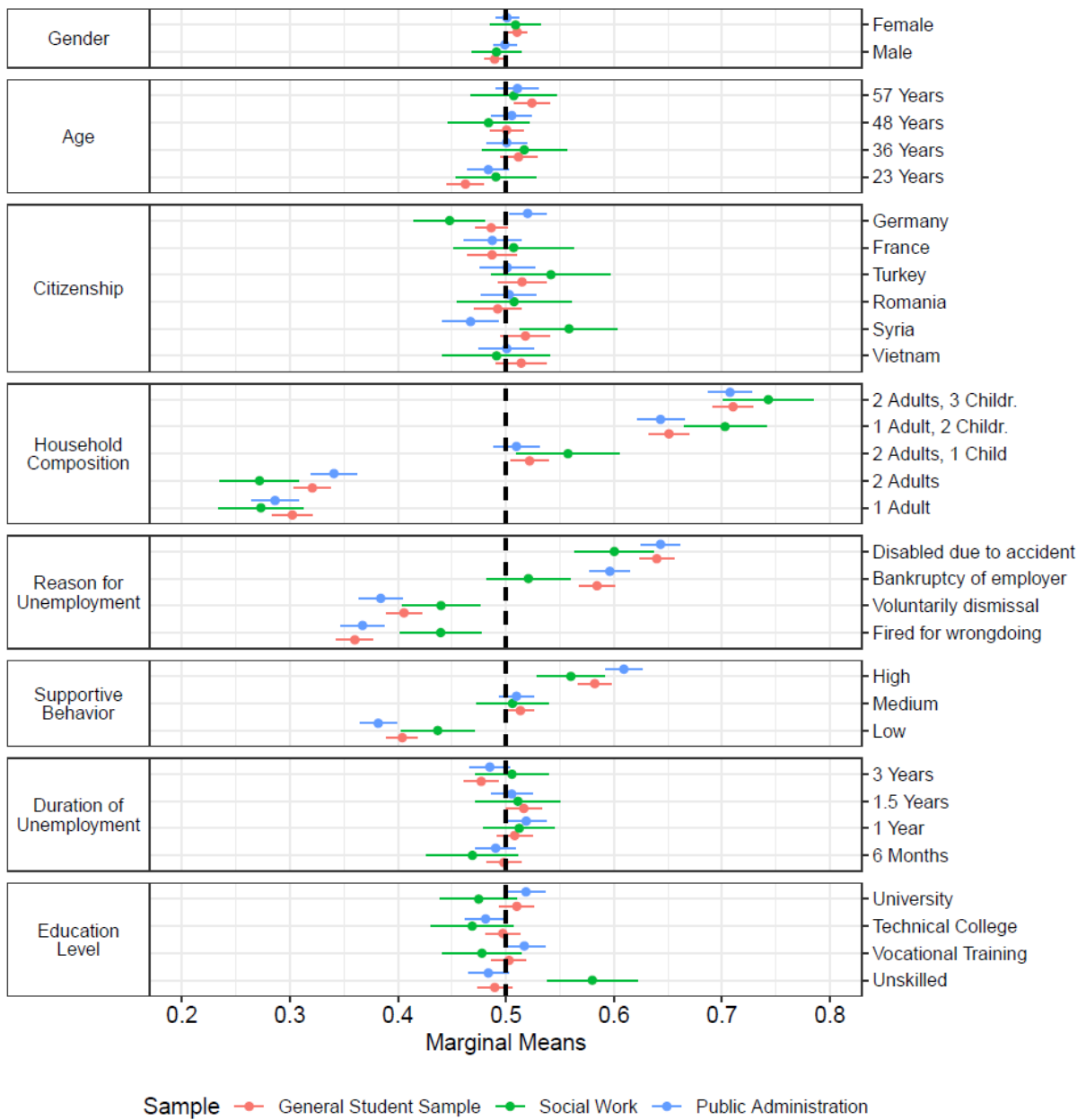
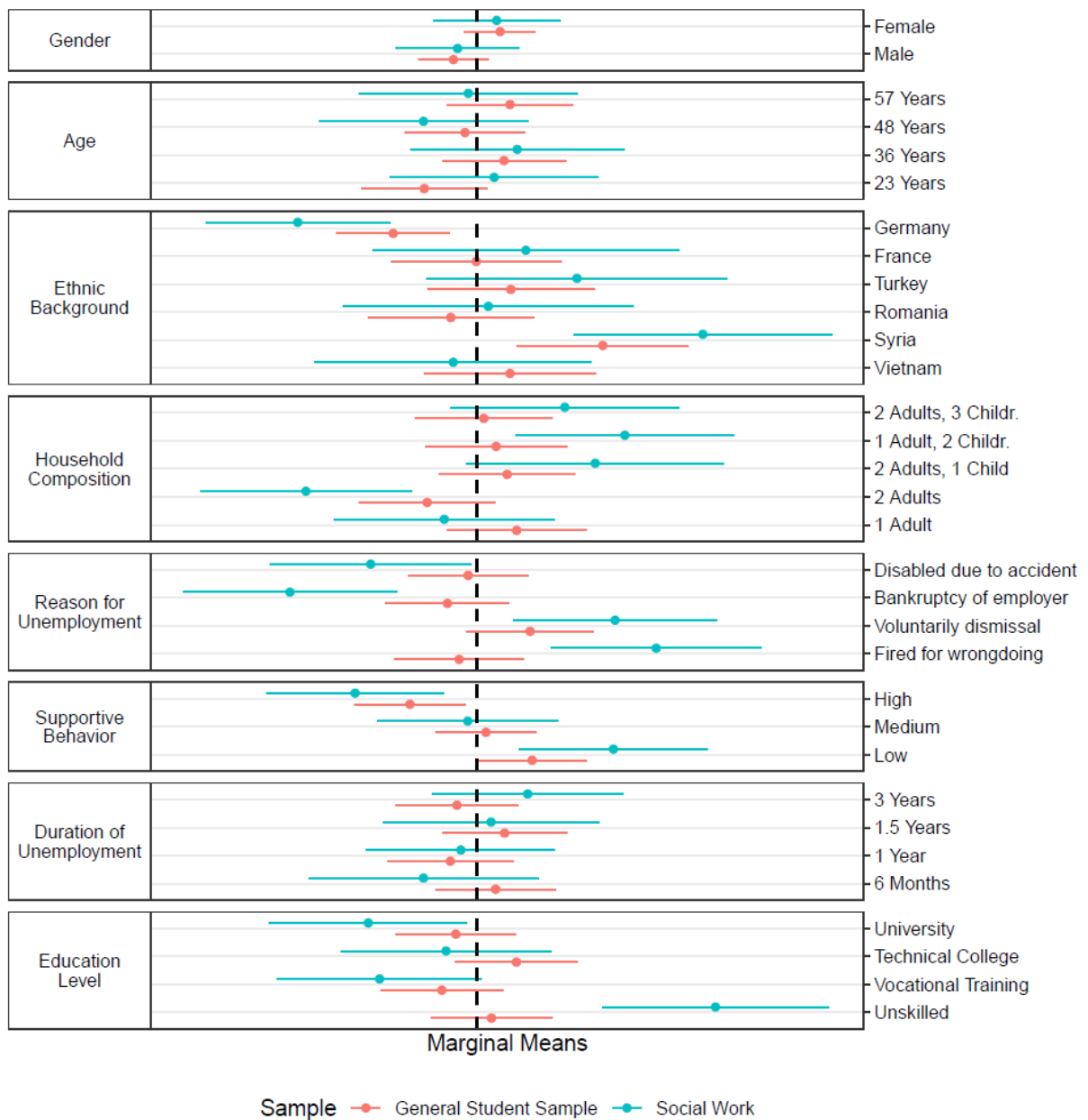***Figure 4:*** *Baseline results from student sample. Horizontal lines are 95% confidence intervals.*

Figure 5: *Difference in marginal means from the student sample. Reference category: public administration students. Horizontal lines are 95% confidence intervals.*

Figure 2 shows that both subgroups of the general population sample react in a similar way to need-deservingness. The household composition and the involvement of children are the most substantial driving factors. Singles and childless couples have poor chances of prepayment, and single parents and families with three children have comparably high chances of receiving the advance payment. In terms

of earned-deservingness, we also find similar decision patterns. Involuntary unemployment has a positive effect on welfare allocation. Both subgroups prefer unemployment affected by accidents or bankruptcy to a willingly caused unemployment. The clients' performance as the second type of earned-deservingness also similarly affects the subgroups: Good behavior is rewarded, bad behavior sanctioned. In summary, there are no signs of a different reaction to need- and earned-deservingness in the general population sample (see also Figure 3).

The patterns in the student samples are similar with slight differences between subgroups (see Figure 4 and Figure 5). Like in the general population sample, need-deservingness based on household composition has the largest impact on decision-making in general. Singles and childless couples again have the lowest chance of payment, single parents and families with three children the highest. Interestingly, future social workers make no further differences between the two types of childless households and react visibly stronger if more than one child is present. The other two subsamples differentiate more sharply between the five household types. For earned-deservingness, we find a lower level of responsiveness for the group of the future social workers. Losing a job due to wrongdoing or voluntary dismissal still reduces the chance of prepayment, but significantly less compared to the general student sample. Supportive behavior is rewarded in all student samples, but students of public administration show higher levels of responsiveness here. They act slightly more punitively towards low levels of cooperation and favor applicants, who "earn" their support.

In sum, we find no substantial differences in the reaction to need- and earned-deservingness in the general population sample. Circumstances of need are more relevant for the decision in both subgroups. For the student samples, we find some evidence that social work students indeed react in a different way to need-deservingness and react less to attributes of earned-deservingness. Contrary to our expectations, public administration students act slightly more punitively and rewarding compared to students of the general student sample. Therefore, we cannot confirm that public service-related respondents show higher orientation on need in general but that it seems to be a common norm across all groups.

5 Robustness Checks

Analyzing the robustness of our findings we concentrate on two aspects: the representativeness of the general population sample and second, a conditional relationship between need-deservingness and clients' ethnic background. Concerning the first aspect, one might argue that the comparison between public and private sector employees is biased because public sectors are not a random sample of society. Instead, public sector employees might have socio-demographic characteristics or certain attitudes that are systematically different from private sector employees and thus our findings could be driven by a selection bias. To address this problem, we re-weight the two samples based on observable characteristics so that both samples are identical regarding these characteristics. Specifically, we use the entropy balancing technique developed by Hainmueller (2012) which outperforms other weighting and/or matching techniques (see also, e.g., Zhao and Percival, 2017). Replicating baseline results from

the general population sample using entropy balancing does not alter any of the substantive findings (see Figure A2 in Online Appendix Section D).

Concerning the second aspect, one might argue that the impact of clients' need-deservingness could be conditional on clients' ethnic background. To explore this, we estimated the interaction between these two attributes. To reduce the complexity we used binary coding for the household composition in *children* and *no children* and citizenship into *German* and *foreign*. Introducing an interaction between these two attributes for the general population sample and the student sample does not alter any of the substantive findings (see Figures A3 and A4 in online Appendix Section E). The presence of children has a positive influence on the prepayment irrespective of the applicant's nationality in both comparison groups. In the general population sample, however, Germans are always preferred to foreigners, no matter if the respondent works in the private or the public sector.

Public and private sector employees in the general population sample differ in their demographic composition. The proportion of female workers in the public sector is slightly higher than in the private sector (~55% vs. ~45%). Subjects from the public sector are on average 1.5 years younger than subjects from the private sector (combined mean at 44.3 years). The share of people with a high school diploma (Abitur) is slightly higher in the public sector (~50%) than in the private sector (~39%). Therefore, one might argue that the comparison between public and private sector employees is biased because public sectors are not a random sample of society. Instead, public sector employees might have socio-demographic characteristics or certain attitudes that are systematically different from private sector employees and thus our findings could be driven by a selection bias. In other words, it could be possible that once we control for the systematic differences between private and public sector employees, systematic differences between the two samples could become visible.
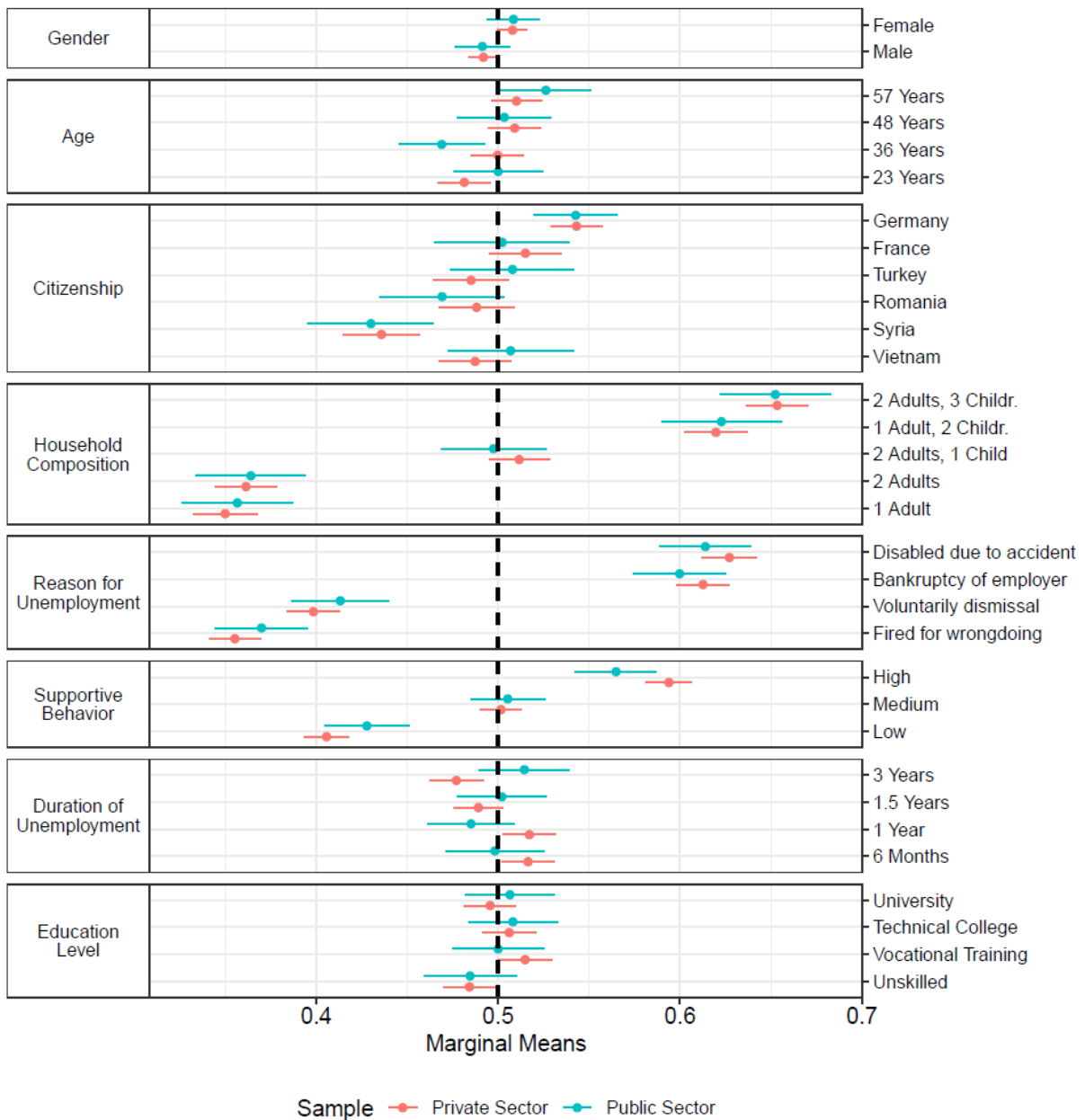
Figure A2: *Baseline results from the general population sample with weights for balance between public and private sector employees*

To address this problem, we re-weight the two samples based on observable characteristics so that both samples are identical with regard to these characteristics. Specifically, we use the entropy balancing technique developed by Hainmueller (2012) which outperforms other weighting and/or matching

techniques (see also, e.g., Zhao and Percival, 2017). The weights are estimated for the private sector employees and thus this group of respondents in such a way that they resemble the distribution of the public sector employees. We balance the samples based on age categories, gender, region (East vs. West Germany), and political ideology (left-right placement). Figure A2 displays the results of the conjoint experiment based on the re-weighted samples. As can be seen, the null findings are also present in this case. In other words, the differences between the two groups do not appear to be affected by systematic differences in observable characteristics.

6 Discussion and Conclusion

Since Max Weber, impartiality is considered a critical virtue of modern state bureaucracies (Rothstein and Teorell, 2008, p. 173). But the idea of justice as impartiality (Mendus, 2008) requires more than a commitment to blunt equality. This is especially the case in the implementation of welfare state policy on the street-level, where actions of SLBs directly affect the lives of the most vulnerable members of society. To fulfill the intended policy goals of welfare programs, SLBs need to act impartially while at the same time differentiating between clients when it is necessary (Rothstein and Teorell, 2008, p. 177). The respective law, therefore, provides street-level decision-makers with the instrument of discretion so that they can react to individual situations and exceptional need of welfare recipients. However, the discretionary room granted comes at a cost: besides legitimate differentiation, it also enables illegitimate discrimination.

This study asks, therefore, what motives guide SLBs in making discretionary decisions, what standard of impartiality they meet and whether this standard differs from how impartial the general population is. Starting with the acknowledgment of normative differences between actors in the private and the public sector (Boyne, 2002), we supposed that public service-related respondents are more likely to apply impartiality in a differentiating but not discriminating way. To test these expectations, we designed a conjoint experiment in which subjects had to make a discretionary decision between two prospective welfare recipients in a situation of need.

Empirical results obtained from a general population survey and a student sample, including future SLBs, show that clients' attributes indeed have a substantive effect on subjects' discretionary decisions, while characteristics of the subjects themselves only matter at the margins. Our main findings can be summarized in three points. (1) Contrary to our Hypothesis H_1, there is no systematic difference in terms of discriminating behavior between sectors, either in the general population or in the student sample. (2) In both samples, we find some evidence of ethnic discrimination. In the general population sample, public and private sector employees show weak signs of positive discrimination against German welfare recipients and negative discrimination against some Non-German recipients (Syrians). This is also true for students of public administration in the student sample. Students of social work, on the other hand, positively discriminate against Syrians. (3) Discrimination, however, is much weaker than differentiation in all subjects, and need-deservingness is the single most crucial factor influencing the

decisions of our subjects. This finding is remarkably consistent with empirical results from a related study by Jilke and Tummers (2018) conducted on a sample of US teachers. Contrary to Hypothesis H_{2a} and H_{2b}, however, we only find minimal differences between the sectors regarding their responsiveness to earned- and need-deservingness. Need-deservingness matters in all subjects, with the strongest manifestation among future social workers, but earned-deservingness also has a strong impact on the decisions taken.

These results raise the question of why we observed almost no differences between people working in the public and the private sector when confronted with a discretionary decision in a welfare context. We have two assumptions regarding this question. First, public servants are primarily just members of their society, and they learned and internalized the implicit and explicit cultural as well as institutional norms that shape social interactions in their society, just like all other citizens do. Given that conformism – people's tendency to adapt their behavior to suit group norms (Forsyth, 2012) – applies to all members of society alike, we just see a similar force of general social norms in all our subjects. This interpretation is consistent with recent macro-level evidence on SLBs' moral behavior (e.g. Sulitzeanu-Kenan et al., 2021) and extant research on only marginal sector differences in self-reported PSM (e.g Vandenabeele and van de Walle, 2008; Christensen and Wright, 2011). Hence, impartiality is quite strong in all subjects as is answering to perceived need. Second, earned-deservingness attributes tip on subjects' adherence to the norm of social reciprocity. Evolutionary social justice research has shown that reciprocity is one of the most influential and broadly accepted norms that regulate human behavior (e.g. Bowles and Gintis, 2000). Thus, it can be presumed to be hard to find legitimate reasons to ignore signals of earned-deservingness independently of one's position in the public or private sector or respective course of study.

By outlining the rationale and values bases that street-level decisions can have, this paper contributes to theories and the literature on discretion and street-level decision-making. Methodologically, this study contributes to the behavioral public administration literature in two ways. First, following up on Jilke and Tummers (2018) we show the usefulness of conjoint designs to study the choice behavior of SLBs. Second, we show the robustness of experimental results by conducting the survey experiment on two types of theoretically selected samples: public administration students and citizens who are currently employed in the public sector.

Before considering potential policy implications, we discuss the limitations of this study beyond the general acknowledgment that evidence on hypothetical prioritization decisions cannot be mapped directly to real-world decisions. First, according to Laenen et al. (2019), there could be different understandings of deservingness across different welfare state regimes. Thus, it appears fruitful for further research to explore sector differences in deciding on exceptional social need from a cross-country perspective to elucidate the impact of welfare regimes and administrative traditions. At the same time, taking a closer look at individual processes of moral justification of making differences between clients using a qualitative research design could accompany such a research endeavor (e.g. Heuer and Zimmermann, 2020). Second, this study focused on the application of justice as impartiality in a

positively framed situation of providing additional support. Future research should test these findings also in negative frames, e.g. the sanctioning of welfare recipients for non-cooperative behavior.

There are two kinds of policy implications, we suggest. First, as we see some discrimination among students of public administration as well as people in the public sector in the general population, efforts should be intensified to discuss the respective issues and values, especially in the education of future public servants. This is likely to become even more important for an impartial public administration as societies become more and more diverse. Second, it seems important to discuss decision-making based on perceived earned-deservingness. Rawls (1958) and also Nagel (1987) claim that societies need to work out legitimate reasons for making differences among welfare recipients that everyone could agree to. If, as we see in our results, perceived earned-deservingness is an important cue for decision-making, these criteria need to be discussed explicitly, in order to allow for a consensual non-discriminatory application.

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Appendix - Differentiation and Discrimination? Discretionary Decision-making of Street-level Bureaucrats

A Conjoint Experiment Instructions

A.1 German (original)

Zwei Arbeitslosengeld-II-Empfänger:innen haben jeweils einen Antrag auf ein Darlehen gemäß § 42a SGB II gestellt. Die formellen Voraussetzungen sind in beiden Fällen gleichermaßen erfüllt. Die Antragsteller:innen bitten um ein Darlehen für die Beschaffung eines neuen Kühlschrankes, da ihr derzeitiges Gerät aufgrund eines technischen Defektes nicht mehr funktionstüchtig ist. Eine Reparatur des Gerätes ist nicht möglich. Persönliches Vermögen ist in beiden Fällen nicht vorhanden. Die Gewährleistung der Darlehen erachten Sie in beiden Fällen als erforderlich, die Maßnahme müsste allerdings von Ihrer Teamleitung bestätigt werden und Sie wissen, dass das Budget für diese Art von Leistungen in diesem Monat bereits stark beansprucht wurde. Aus Erfahrung wissen Sie daher, dass **nur einer** der beiden Anträge in diesem Monat bewilligt werden würde. Die Person, dessen Antrag **zuerst** bearbeitet wird, würde daher innerhalb weniger Tage ein sachbezogenes Darlehen für einen neuen Kühlschrank erhalten, die **zweite** müsste etwa vier Wochen auf die Bewilligung warten und ohne Gerät auskommen.

A.2 English (translated)

Two recipients of unemployment benefit II have each filed an application for a loan pursuant based on §42a SGB II. The formal requirements are equally fulfilled in both cases. The applicants ask for a loan to purchase a new refrigerator, as their current appliance is no longer functional due to a technical defect. It is not possible to repair the appliance. Personal assets are not available in either case. You consider granting the loans to be necessary in both cases, but the measure would have to be confirmed by your team leader and you know that the budget for this type of service has already been heavily used this month. Therefore, you know from experience that **only one** of the two requests would be approved this month. The person whose application is **first** processed would therefore receive a loan for a new refrigerator within a few days; the **second** would have to wait about four weeks for approval and go without an appliance during that time.

B Conjoint Decision Screen (Example)

	Person A	Person B
Geschlecht	Weiblich	Männlich
Grund für Arbeitslosigkeit	Insolvenz des Arbeitgebers	Wegen Fehlverhalten gekündigt
Zusammensetzung der Bedarfsgemeinschaft	2 Erwachsene, 3 Kinder	2 Erwachsene
Dauer des ALG II Bezuges	18 Monate (1,5 Jahre)	12 Monate (1 Jahr)
Alter	57 Jahre	48 Jahre
Staatsangehörigkeit	Syrien	Deutschland
Bildungsgrad	Berufsausbildung	Berufsausbildung
Grad der Mitwirkung (zum Beispiel Pünktlichkeit oder Vollständigkeit der Unterlagen)	Mittlere Mitwirkung	Mittlere Mitwirkung

Wessen Antrag lassen Sie zuerst bewilligen?

Person A   Person B

Figure A1: *Example Conjoint Attribute Table*

C Sampling

The empirical analysis draws on a general population and a student sample. Field access for the German general population sample was provided by *DALIA Research* (https://daliaresearch.com/). The globally operating provider for online surveys works in line with the ESOMAR Code on Market, Opinion, and Social Research. *DALIA* distributed the survey link to potential respondents based on a river sampling method, in which people are targeted via websites and apps based on demographic quota characteristics. The general population as the target population was sampled via quota sampling, using quotas for gender, age, education level, and parental status based on the German micro census. The monetary incentive for respondents was only paid out if the completion time was above a defined speeding threshold of eight minutes. A total of 3,354 users of websites etc., were directed to the survey. After data cleaning and speeder control[5], 1,937 respondents were left for further analysis in this general population sample. Based on self-reported sector affiliation, 1,336 respondents currently work or have worked in the private sector, 352 in the public sector. In addition, 249 respondents cannot be assigned to a sector because they have none, e.g., students, pupils, or homemakers, or because they did not provide that information (see Table 2 for descriptive statistics).

The student sample consists of three student groups: 'Public Administration', 'Social Work', and 'General Student Sample'. The subsample 'Public Administration' includes voluntarily recruited undergraduate and graduate public administration students from the University for Applied Local Public Administration of Lower Saxony (*Kommunale Hochschule für Verwaltung Niedersachsen* – HSVN). The HSVN is funded by state-level administrative units. A training contract with one of these funding institutions is a precondition for student admission. After graduating, these students become tenured SLBs in municipal administration, which is the largest subgroup in the German public administration workforce. The HSVN distributed the survey to all students enrolled in the study programs General Public Administration (Bachelor), Public Management (Bachelor), and Local Public Management (Master). Of the 1,258 students contacted by the HSVN's administration, 557 participated in the survey. This corresponds to a response rate of approximately 46%. After data cleaning and speeder control, 510 cases were available for analysis.

For the student subsample 'Social Work', we recruited students of social work from a university for social work and welfare (*Rauhes Haus – Evangelische Hochschule für Soziale Arbeit und Diakonie*). The *Rauhes Haus* is a protestant university, educating people for social as well as church services. It offers four Bachelor's and two Master's degree programs in social work with different emphases. One Bachelor's and one Master's program are designed for part-time study. The majority of graduates work either as social workers or as social pedagogues in governmental and non-governmental institutions.

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[5] In line with the threshold used by DALIA Research, we defined respondents as speeders if processing time was below eight minutes. The median processing time was 10,1 minutes. Additionally, we checked item batteries for illogical and inconsistent patterns. These cases are also not included in the analyses.

The Rauhes Haus administration distributed the invitation link directly to their 523 enrolled students, of which 147 took part in the survey. This is a response rate of about 28%. Twenty students were excluded after data cleaning and speeder control, leaving 127 cases for our analysis.

The third student subsample 'General Student Sample' includes students from different subject areas at the University of Hamburg. The Wiso Research Laboratory at the Faculty of Business, Economics, and Social Sciences distributed the survey invitation to 2,031 members of its opt-in subject pool of enrolled students. 815 pool members replied and received the link to the survey. A total of 772 students took part in our survey. Among other things, we asked students to report on their study program. This information was hand-coded and then classified by study field. Of the total sample, 228 students came from economics, 183 students from social sciences, 119 from the sciences, and 93 from humanities. 46 students were allocated to law, 35 to tech, and 12 to other subjects. As a result of data cleaning and speeder control, we dropped 56 students from the sample.

Students from all three subsamples were given the option to take part in a lottery with a chance to win Amazon gift cards worth between 25 and 250 euros. In three separate lotteries, a total of 7,000 euros was paid out to the participants.

The three student samples were purposely selected based on the relevance of respondents' characteristics to the research question. Experiments conducted on student samples may be criticized for a lower external validity. For the purpose of this study, however, there are at least two major reasons, which justify the choice. First, students enrolled in public administration or social work make a conscious choice for a career in the public sector. Second, compared to SLBs in the general population sample, the student samples have the advantage of a high degree of homogeneous composition. This is particularly useful for analyzing decision behavior between groups (see Table 2 for descriptive statistics).
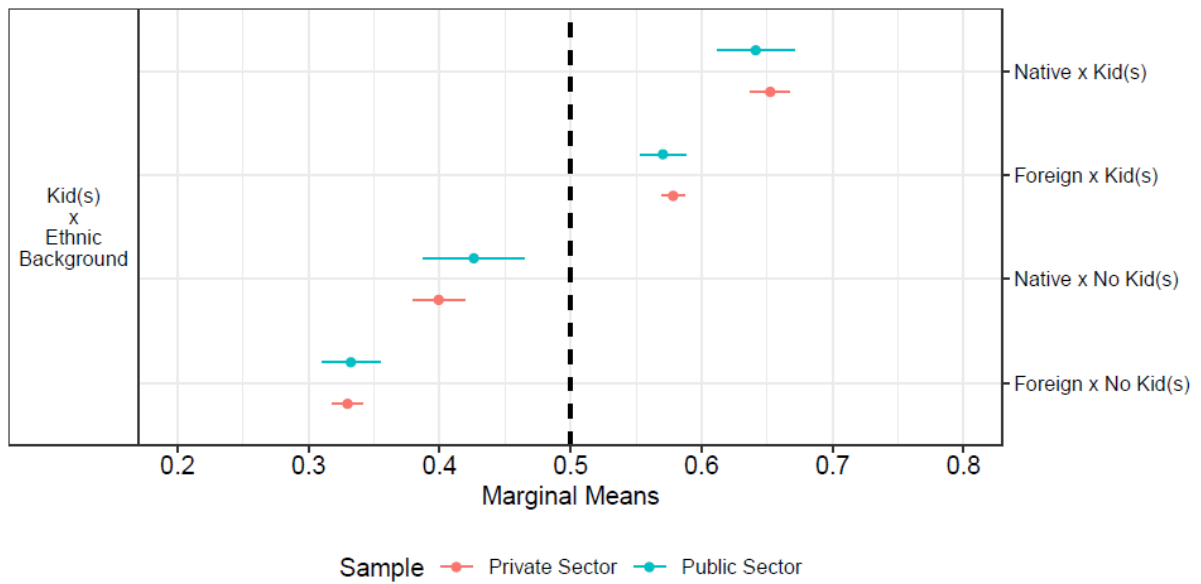
D Interaction Effects

Figure A3: *Baseline results from the general population sample for interaction between ethnic background and household composition*
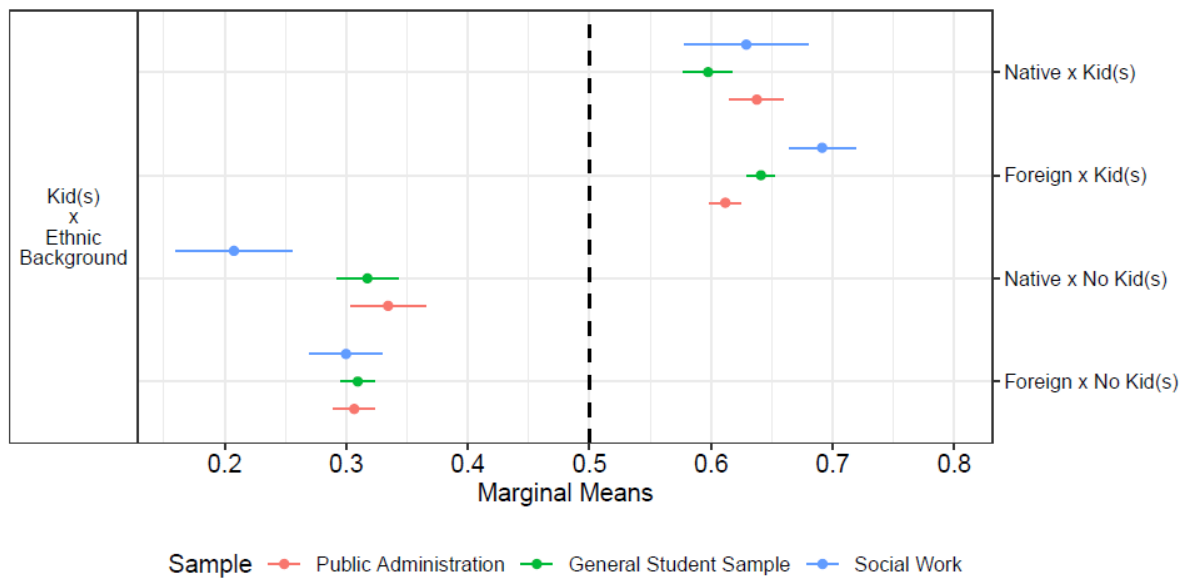
Figure A4: *Baseline results from the student sample for the interaction between ethnic background and household composition*

Note: Horizontal lines are 95% confidence intervals. The conjoint attributes were summarized and reduced to two expressions. Native includes German applicants, Foreign all Non-German. Kid(s) represents all household composition with children, No Kid(s) singles or childless couples.

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