



# Attitudes to the mono-plural-ism divide: an investigation into the views of Swedish students

**Christian Fernandez**  
**Malmö University**  
**Sweden**

**Ravi Pendakur**  
**University of Ottawa**  
**Canada**



# Overview

- We use a combination of factor analysis and OLS regression to investigate the impact of diversity (individual and contextual) on preferences for ethnocultural pluralism or monism amongst 2025, 9<sup>th</sup> graders in Swedish public schools.
- We find that overall, students with minority backgrounds favour pluralism while majority students lean more toward monoculturalism.
- Grades have a strong impact on shifting views for the majority toward pluralism (but not necessarily for the minority students).
- The contextual impact of immigrants in the school is uneven, but in general, higher proportions of immigrants is associated with higher support for pluralism.

## Reason to care

- Immigration intake in Sweden has both increased and diversified substantially over the last two decades.
- With diversity comes pressure to incorporate new groups into the core of society. Traditional mono-ethnic conceptions of nationhood may not be compatible with these new pressures.
- This is amongst the first groups of students who have been exposed to 'visible' diversity. If they are reluctant to accept a broader definition of citizenship and membership, Sweden's very generous integration policy measures risk failure.

# Themes in the literature

- Nationhood as citizenship vs Nationhood as ethnicity (belonging)
- Citizenship
  - Bauböck 2010: citizenship traditions, laws and policies of states as “constellations”
- Belonging and nation
  - Brubaker 2010: migration and membership (belonging) in the modern nation-state
  - Antonsich 2010; 2018: Belonging is a notion both vaguely defined and ill-theorized.
    - The civic nation can be understood as a political-legal community of citizens who share the same civic culture and, therefore, is voluntarist and inclusive.
    - The ethnic nation embodies a community of shared descent, which is ascriptive and exclusive
- Nation building
  - Hall 1993: The capacity to live with difference is ... the coming question of the twenty-first century

## Monoculturalism and multiculturalism:

- Goot, Murray. 1993. "Multiculturalists, Monoculturalists and the Many in between: Attitudes to Cultural Diversity and Their Correlates." *Journal of Sociology* 29 (2): 226–53.

## Student attitudes:

- Antonsich 2018: attitudes of the majority to people who are perceived to look "different" but sound "the same", as is often the case for children of migrants.
- Gniewosz, Burkhard, and Peter Noack. 2008. "Classroom Climate Indicators and Attitudes towards Foreigners." *Journal of Adolescence* 31 (5): 609–24.
- Thijs, Jochem, and Maykel Verkuyten. 2014. "School Ethnic Diversity and Students' Interethnic Relations." *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 84 (1): 1–21.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12032>.

# Data\*

- Special survey of 2025 Swedish students who:
  - Are in the last year of compulsory school (9<sup>th</sup> year)
  - Are 16 years old by December 2019
  - Attend a school where at least 20% of students are immigrants (either born outside Sweden or are not citizens by birth)
- Measures:
  - Attitudes about pluralism, trust in others, trust in institutions, tombstone data
- Matched to:
  - Register data on respondent's and parents' (place of birth, years in Sweden)
  - Register data on % of immigrants in school
  - Grades in history, civics and religion from school register
- Note:
  - After this, students go to 'gymnasium' where they are streamed (i.e.: academic, trades, etc.)
  - Survey of teachers and their teaching methods (matched to school but not class) (not done yet)
- \* Similar surveys are being conducted in Norway and Denmark (as of December 2019 they were not available)

## Dependent variable: factor variable comprised of 9 items

To what degree do you agree with the following statements:

1. It is best if everyone in Sweden shares the same culture
2. In the long-term immigration is good for Swedish society
3. Cultural diversity is good for Sweden
4. People from different cultures can learn a lot from each other
5. It is bad for Sweden if immigrants cling to their cultures

There are many different ideas about what it takes to be able to call oneself Swedish. How important do you think these things are in order for a person to call themselves Swedish?

6. That one is born and bred in Sweden
7. That you embrace Swedish culture
8. That one's family has lived in Sweden for generations
9. That you have a Christian background

# Factor: Mono-Plural-ism (dependent)

|                        |       |            |            |            |
|------------------------|-------|------------|------------|------------|
| Number of observations | 1,859 |            |            |            |
| Factor (first 2 only)  |       | Eigenvalue | Difference | Proportion |
| Factor 1               |       | 3.54       | 2.77       | 0.91       |
| Factor 2               |       | 0.77       | 0.55       | 0.20       |

## Factor Loadings

| Variable                               | Scale 1-4                       | Factor1 | Factor2 | Uniqueness |
|--|---------------------------------|---------|---------|------------|
| Same culture                           | Very important -> not important | 0.64    | -0.06   | 0.54       |
| Immigration beneficial                 | Not important -> very important | 0.64    | -0.27   | 0.49       |
| Diversity beneficial                   | Not important -> very important | 0.74    | -0.35   | 0.33       |
| Cultures can learn from each other     | Not important -> very important | 0.65    | -0.28   | 0.47       |
| Immigrants should not cling to culture | Very important -> not important | 0.57    | -0.16   | 0.58       |
| Born in Sweden                         | Very important -> not important | 0.63    | 0.39    | 0.44       |
| Embrace Swedish culture                | Very important -> not important | 0.60    | 0.07    | 0.59       |
| Generations in Sweden                  | Very important -> not important | 0.63    | 0.47    | 0.38       |
| Christian background                   | Very important -> not important | 0.53    | 0.29    | 0.62       |



# Independent variables

- Gender
- Place of birth / ethnic origin
- Years in Sweden (for immigrant students)
- Student performance (factor score based on grades in history, religion and civics)
- Percent of immigrants in the school

# Factor: Student performance

|                        |       |            |            |            |
|------------------------|-------|------------|------------|------------|
| Number of observations | 2,120 |            |            |            |
| Factor (first 2 only)  |       | Eigenvalue | Difference | Proportion |
| Factor 1               |       | 2.56       | 2.61       | 1.05       |
| Factor 2               |       | -0.06      | 0.01       | -0.02      |

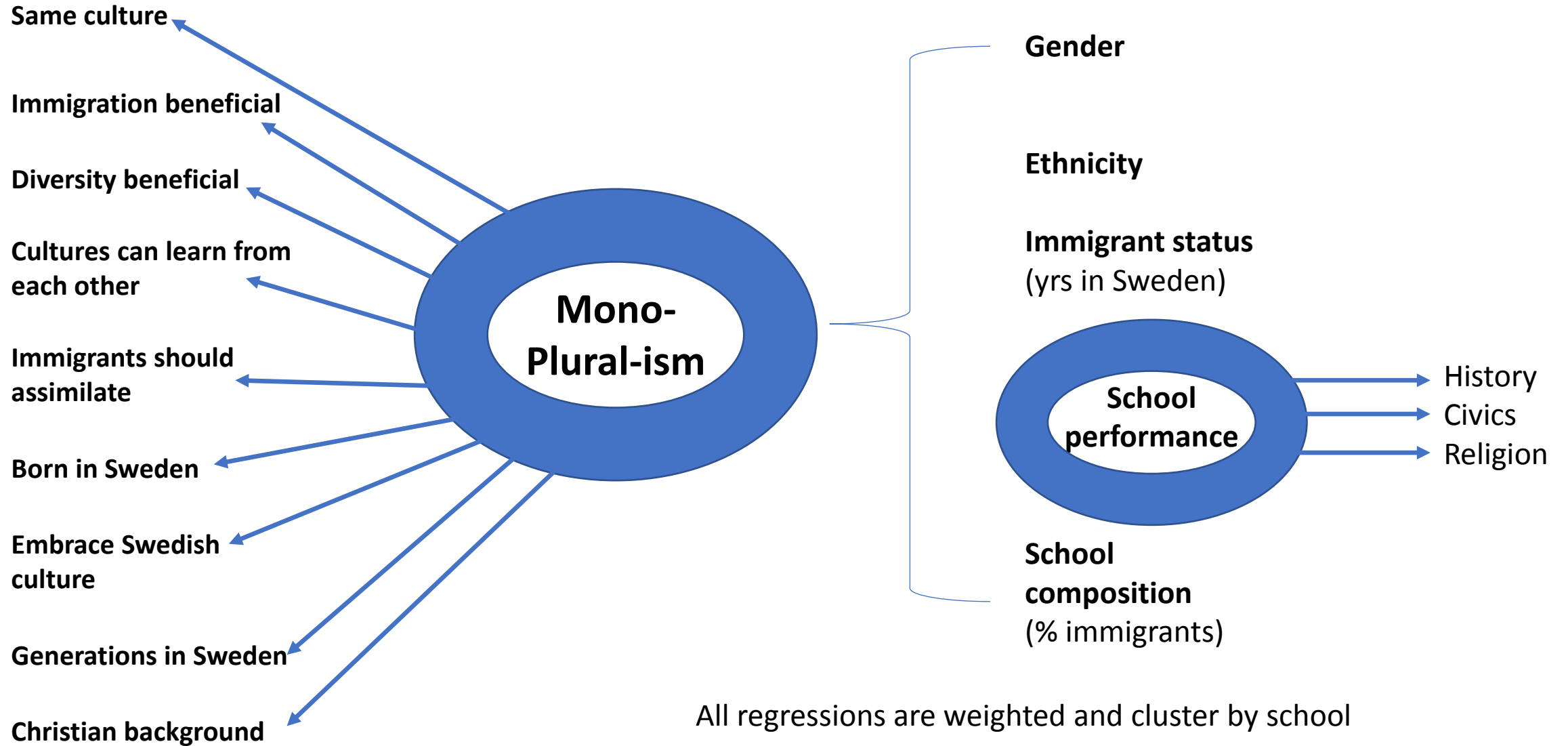
## Factor Loadings

| Variable | Scale          | Factor1 | Uniqueness |
|----------|----------------|---------|------------|
| History  | F (1) to A (7) | 0.92    | 0.16       |
| Religion | F (1) to A (7) | 0.92    | 0.15       |
| Civics   | F (1) to A (7) | 0.93    | 0.13       |

# Factor means

| Factor Means  | obs. | mean | std dev | min   | max  |
|---|------|------|---------|-------|------|
| Support for monoculturalism (-)<br>vs pluralism (+) | 1859 | 0.00 | 0.93    | -2.87 | 1.65 |
| Student performance                                 | 2120 | 0.00 | 0.97    | -1.70 | 3.63 |

# model



# Ethnic origin coding

1. Place of birth of respondent (recoded into 8 categories)
2. If POB of respondent is Sweden, use POB of mother
3. If ethnicity of respondent is still Swedish use POB of father
4. If ethnicity of respondent is still Swedish and there is 1 declared ethnic origin (other than Swedish) use the declared ethnic origin check-in boxes of respondent (17 options)

## Ethnic categories:

|                |         |                  |             |
|----------------|---------|------------------|-------------|
| Swedish        | Nordic  | N and S European | E. European |
| Middle Eastern | African | E & S Asian      | Other       |

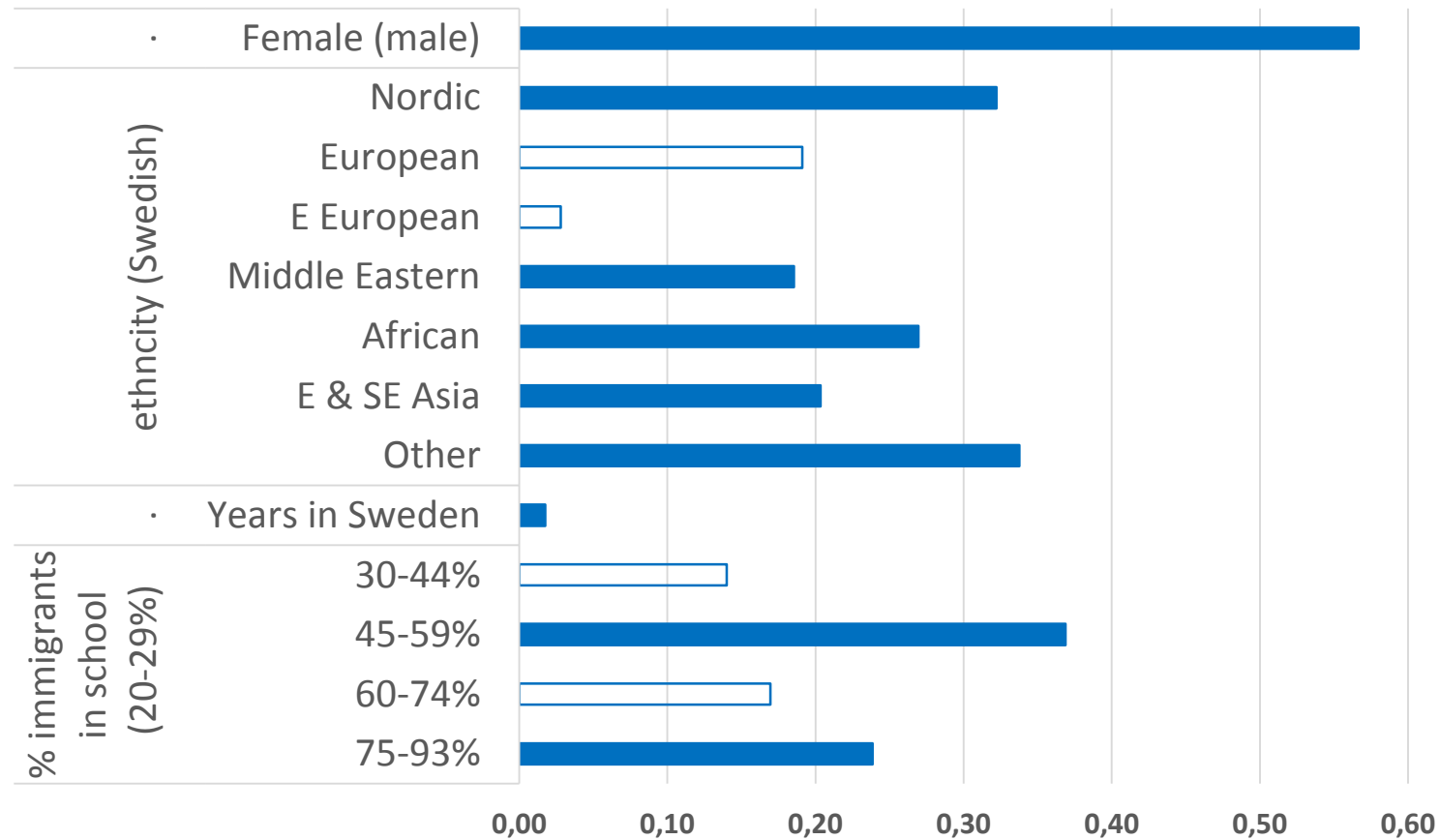
# Weighted frequencies

|                          |                                    |                | count | %    |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------|-------|------|
| Personal Characteristics | Total                              |                | 2125  | 100% |
|                          | Gender                             | Male           | 1103  | 52%  |
|                          |                                    | Female         | 1022  | 48%  |
|                          | Ethnicity                          | Swedish        | 1139  | 54%  |
|                          |                                    | Nordic         | 93    | 4%   |
|                          |                                    | Europe         | 51    | 2%   |
|                          |                                    | E Europe       | 119   | 6%   |
|                          |                                    | Middle East    | 266   | 13%  |
|                          |                                    | Africa         | 263   | 12%  |
|                          |                                    | E & SE Asia    | 92    | 4%   |
|                          |                                    | Other          | 101   | 5%   |
|                          | Years in Sweden                    | born in Sweden | 1596  | 75%  |
|                          |                                    | LT 3           | 129   | 6%   |
|                          |                                    | 4-6            | 153   | 7%   |
| 7-11                     |                                    | 164            | 8%    |      |
| 12-16                    |                                    | 84             | 4%    |      |
| School composition       | Students by % immigrants in school | Total          | 2125  | 100% |
|                          |                                    | 20-29%         | 992   | 47%  |
|                          |                                    | 30-44%         | 611   | 29%  |
|                          |                                    | 45-49%         | 75    | 4%   |
|                          |                                    | 60-74%         | 185   | 9%   |
|                          |                                    | 75+ %          | 262   | 12%  |

# Mean factor scores: monoculturalism versus pluralism

|                        |                 | Mean           | Se    |
|------------------------|-----------------|----------------|-------|
| Sex                    | Males           | -0.28          | 0.03  |
|                        | Females         | 0.29           | 0.03  |
| Ethnicity              | Swedish         | -0.14          | 0.03  |
|                        | Nordic          | 0.23           | 0.09  |
|                        | European        | 0.18           | 0.14  |
|                        | E. European     | -0.02          | 0.08  |
|                        | Middle Eastern  | 0.14           | 0.05  |
|                        | African         | 0.27           | 0.05  |
|                        | E and SE Asian  | 0.15           | 0.08  |
|                        | Other           | 0.22           | 0.08  |
|                        | Years in Sweden | born in Sweden | -0.05 |
|                        | LT 3            | -0.05          | 0.06  |
|                        | 4 - 6           | 0.00           | 0.07  |
|                        | 7 - 11          | 0.32           | 0.07  |
|                        | 12 - 16         | 0.34           | 0.08  |
| % immigrants in school | 20-29%          | -0.13          | 0.03  |
|                        | 30-44%          | 0.03           | 0.04  |
|                        | 45-49%          | 0.32           | 0.10  |
|                        | 60-74%          | 0.15           | 0.07  |
|                        | 75+ %           | 0.26           | 0.06  |

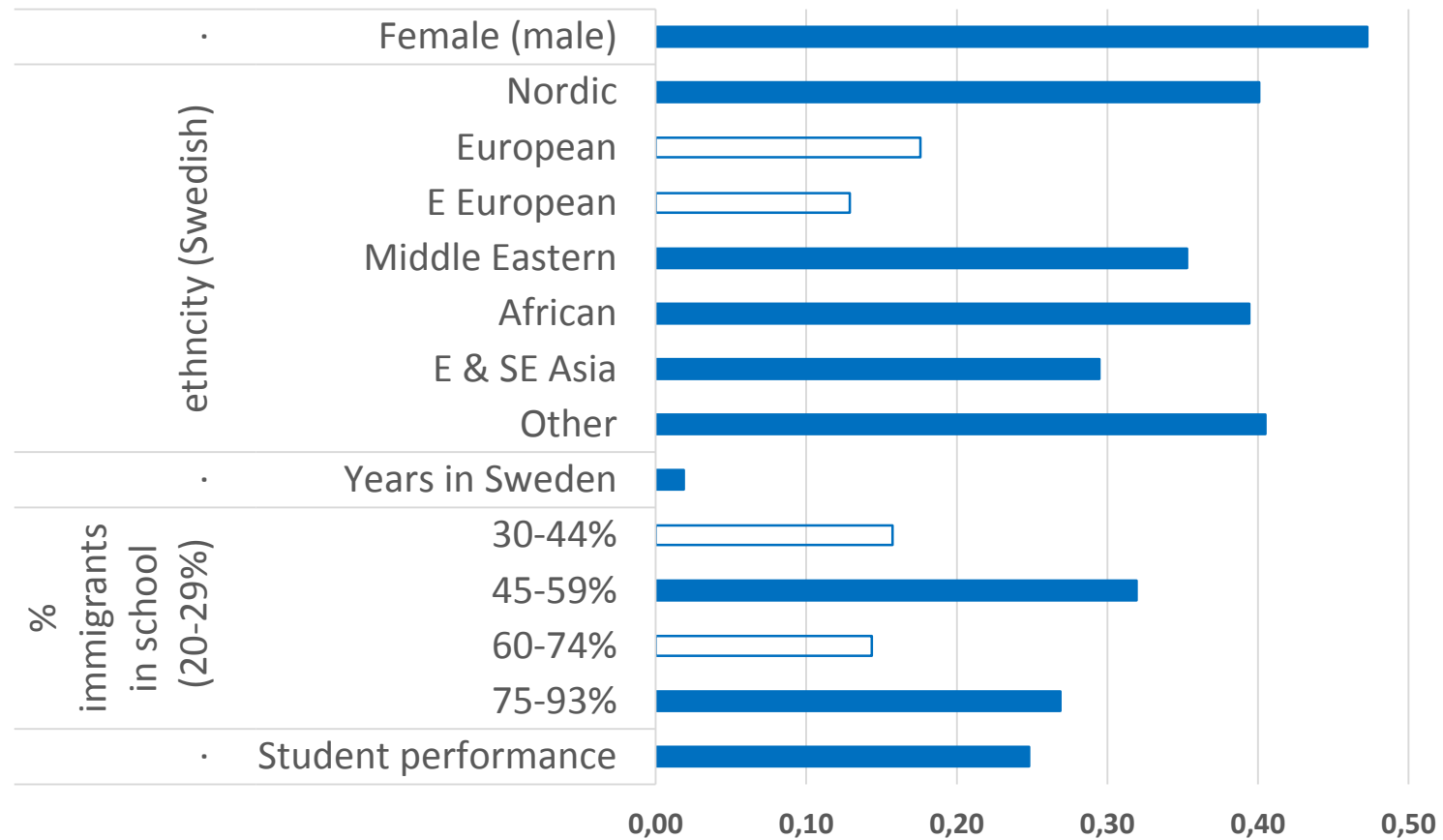
# Regression 1: Personal and school characteristics on mono-plural-ism



Note: filled in bars indicate significance of 0.05 or better  
comparison group in parentheses

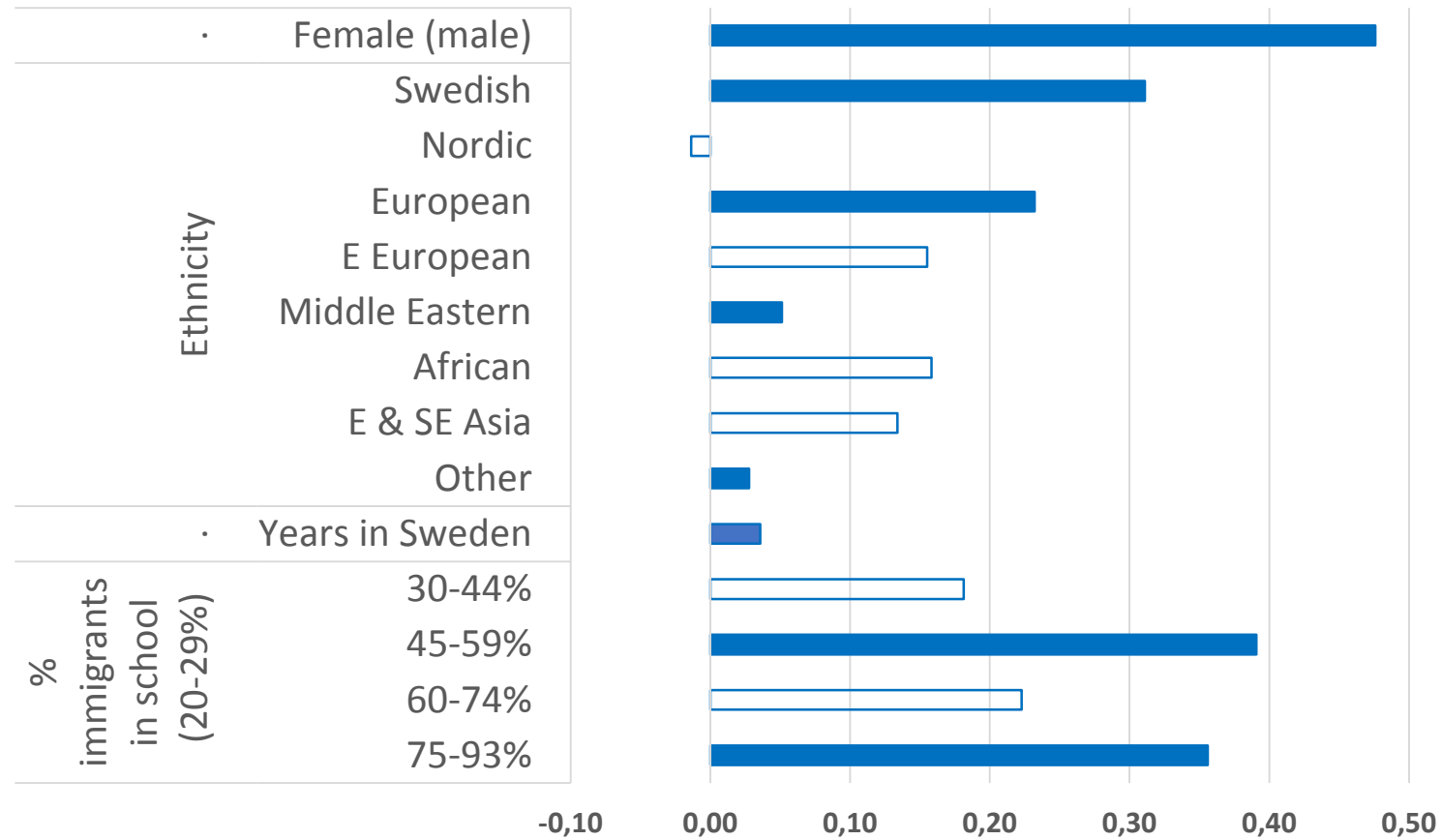


# Regression 2: Personal and school characteristics with grades on mono-plural-ism



Note: filled in bars indicate significance of 0.05 or better  
comparison group in parentheses

# Regression 3: Grades interacted with ethnicity on mono-plural-ism



Note: filled in bars indicate significance of 0.05 or better  
 comparison group in parentheses

# Discussion

- Our findings suggest that there is a high willingness on the part of minorities to embrace pluralism as a form of citizenship
  - They do not see any barriers to being incorporated into the larger Swedish society
- Majority students are more likely to favour mono-culturalism.
  - They are more likely to associate being Swedish as: generationally and culturally specific
- School performance acts to promote pluralism for the Majority
- Female students are also more likely to favour pluralism over monoculturalism.

# Implications

- Sweden has a very generous integration system for newcomers. However, true integration requires societal level acceptance as well as state support.
- If there is a reluctance to *'let newcomers in'* to the broader society, Sweden risks alienating minorities, and cutting them out of the continuous nation building project.
- This group of students is amongst the first in Sweden to experience high levels of 'visible' diversity in their schools. As such, they could be considered to be on the front lines of the mono-plural-ism debate.
  - Their willingness to accept minorities into the broader society, and accept changes to their society is critical to the nation building process.