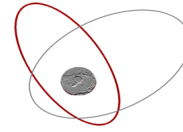


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Methodological nationalism in comparative survey research and strategies to overcome it

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Preamble

- Globalization and rise of migrations (Castles and Miller, 1993)
- Multiple societies present in our national societies
- Differentiation of migrations
 - Human capital assets of migrants (more skilled)
 - Demographic composition (more balance between men and women)
 - Social structure (immigrants employed in different strata of social structure)
- Increase in comparative social surveys and production of data
- Nation as the main administrative frame of social surveys

The rise of methodological nationalism

Wimmer and Schiller (2002) or Chernillo (2006) define methodological nationalism as a set of practices in social research which (implicitly) identify the “society” with the nation-state, or treat the nation as a container for the society (and thus, as the natural contextual unit for comparative studies)

Why would methodological nationalism affect surveys findings?

- Mainly, because survey samples are distorted by way of three different processes:
 - *Spot-lighting*: Surveys are centred around prototypical communities, delineated within the boundaries of the nation-state
 - *Contrasting*: A dichotomous division samples between “nationals” and “foreigners” is carried out
 - *Shadowing*: Differences between national minorities are blurred

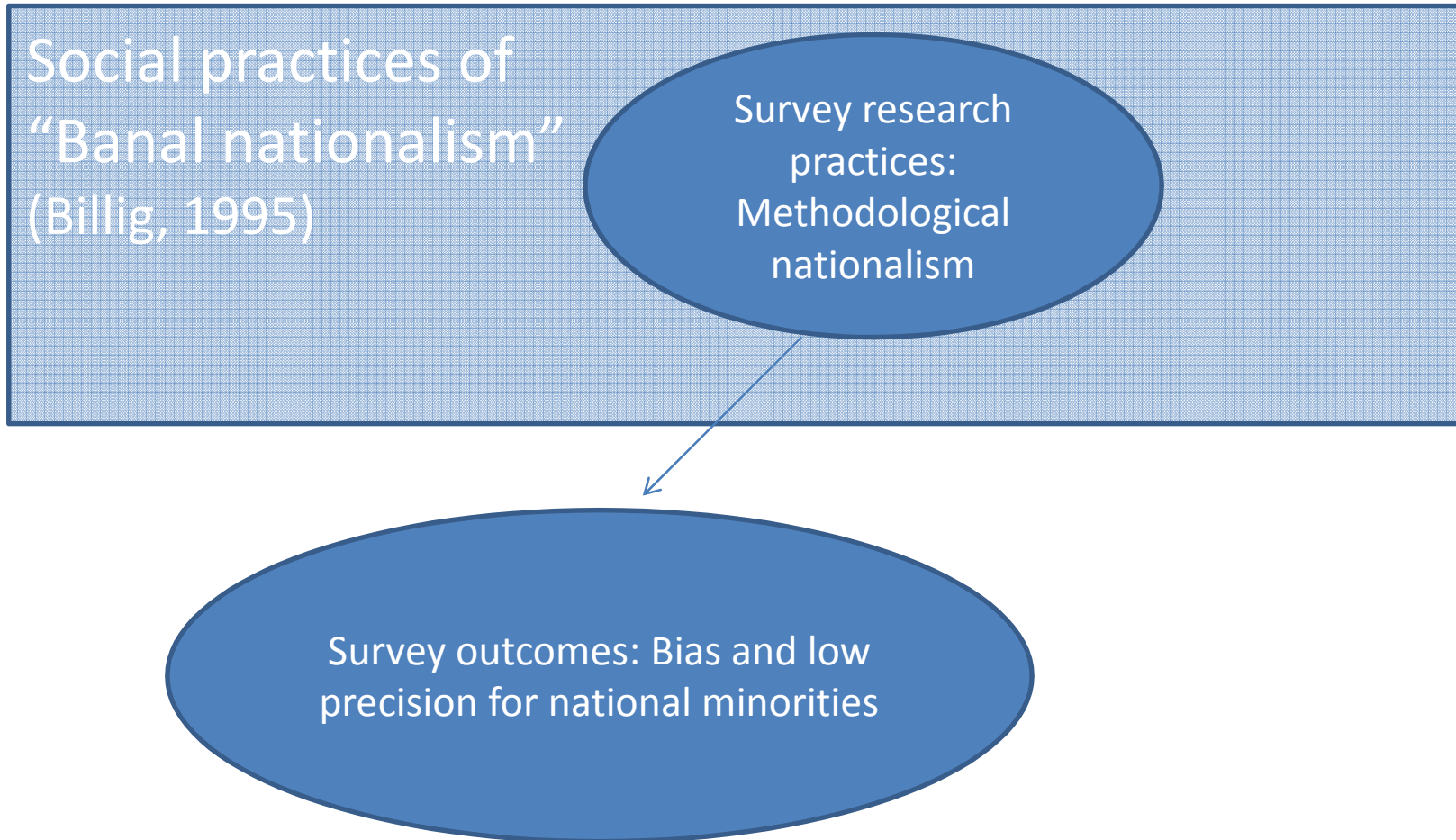
Consequences on comparative research I

- Systematic underrepresentation of the *margins* of societies and accentuation of the *prototypical traits* of national societies
- Comparative surveys tend to compare the core of nations.
- This might lead to exaggerate the differences between nations.

Consequences on comparative research II

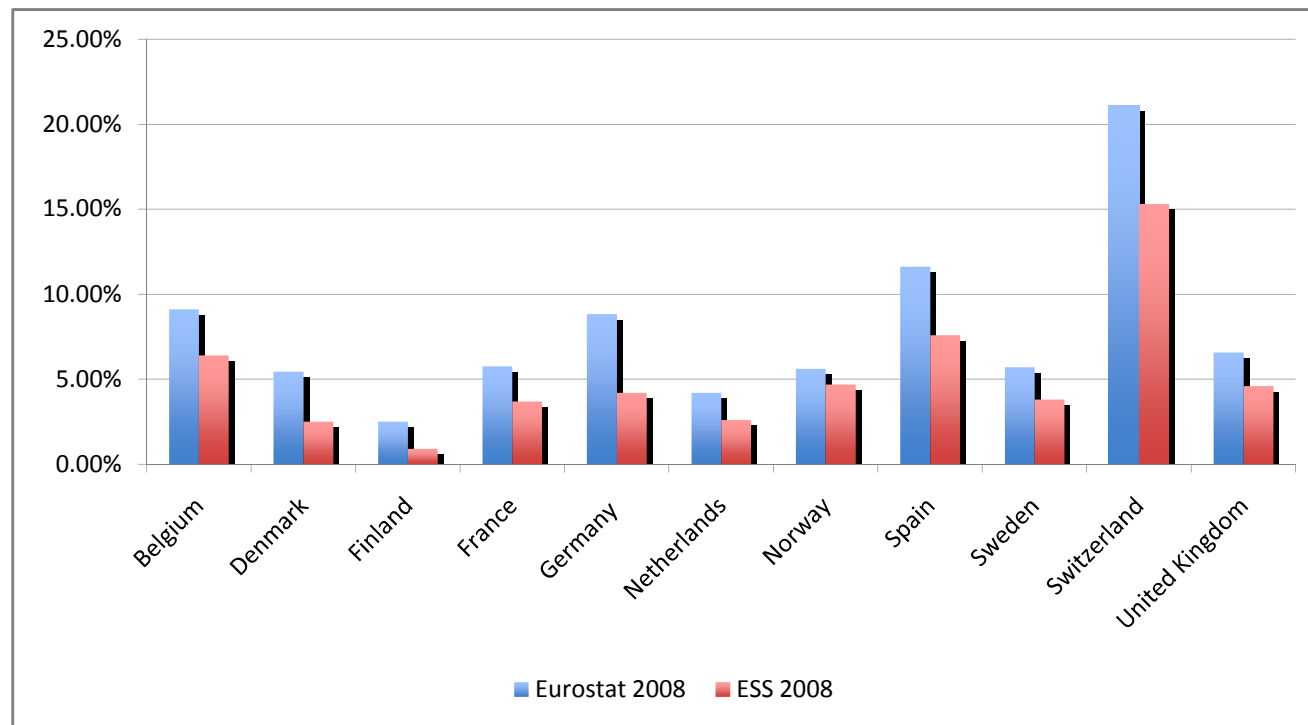
- The direct consequence is that there are problems in comparing categories that are not at the core of the nation state, like national minorities.
- Additionally, since being part of a national minority is related to social exclusion, this involves also an underestimation of poverty or similar indicators
- Hence, dealing with the problem of methodological nationalism is an important issue for data quality in comparative research.

Methodological nationalism and bias against national minorities in social surveys



An example from the European Social Survey

Percentage of foreigners in European countries. Comparison between Eurostat population statistics and European Social Survey samples



In all European countries, the bias against national minorities exists, although the magnitude of the bias varies

Sources: Eurostat, European Social Survey. Year: 2008

A Swiss case study

- The highest incidence of immigrants among European countries.
- Heterogeneity of immigrants in terms of social conditions, countries of origins, educational level.
- For this reasons, analyzing how national minorities are represented in Swiss surveys can be an issue of interest also for comparative research

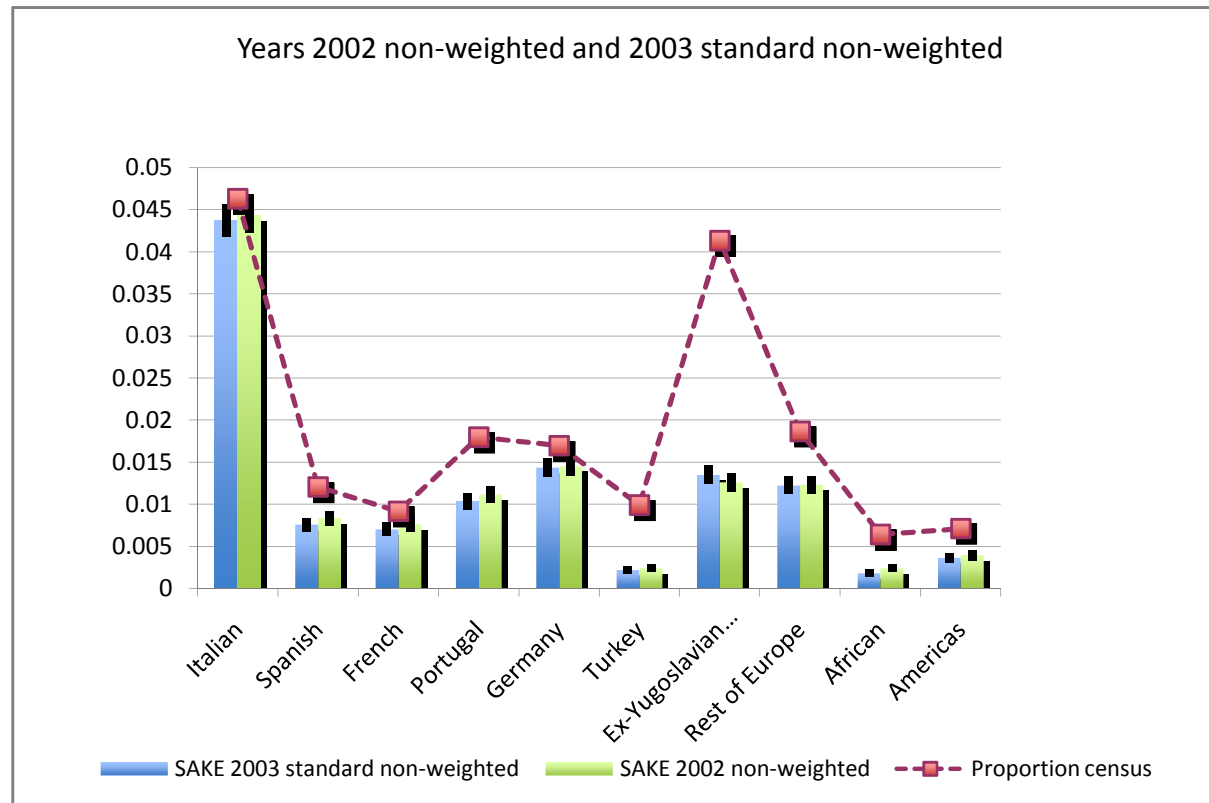
Aim of the research

- Against which categories of national minorities are Swiss surveys biased?
- What is the impact of different surveys designs parameters on the representation of different categories of immigrants?

The data

- Different type of data used in the analysis:
 - European Social Survey in Switzerland
 - Swiss Labour Force Survey
 - Swiss Household Panel
- Reasons:
 - Surveys that are part of international programs (with different levels of standardisation)
 - Different survey designs
 - Different attempts to enhance response rates

Bias against national minorities in the Swiss Labor Force Survey



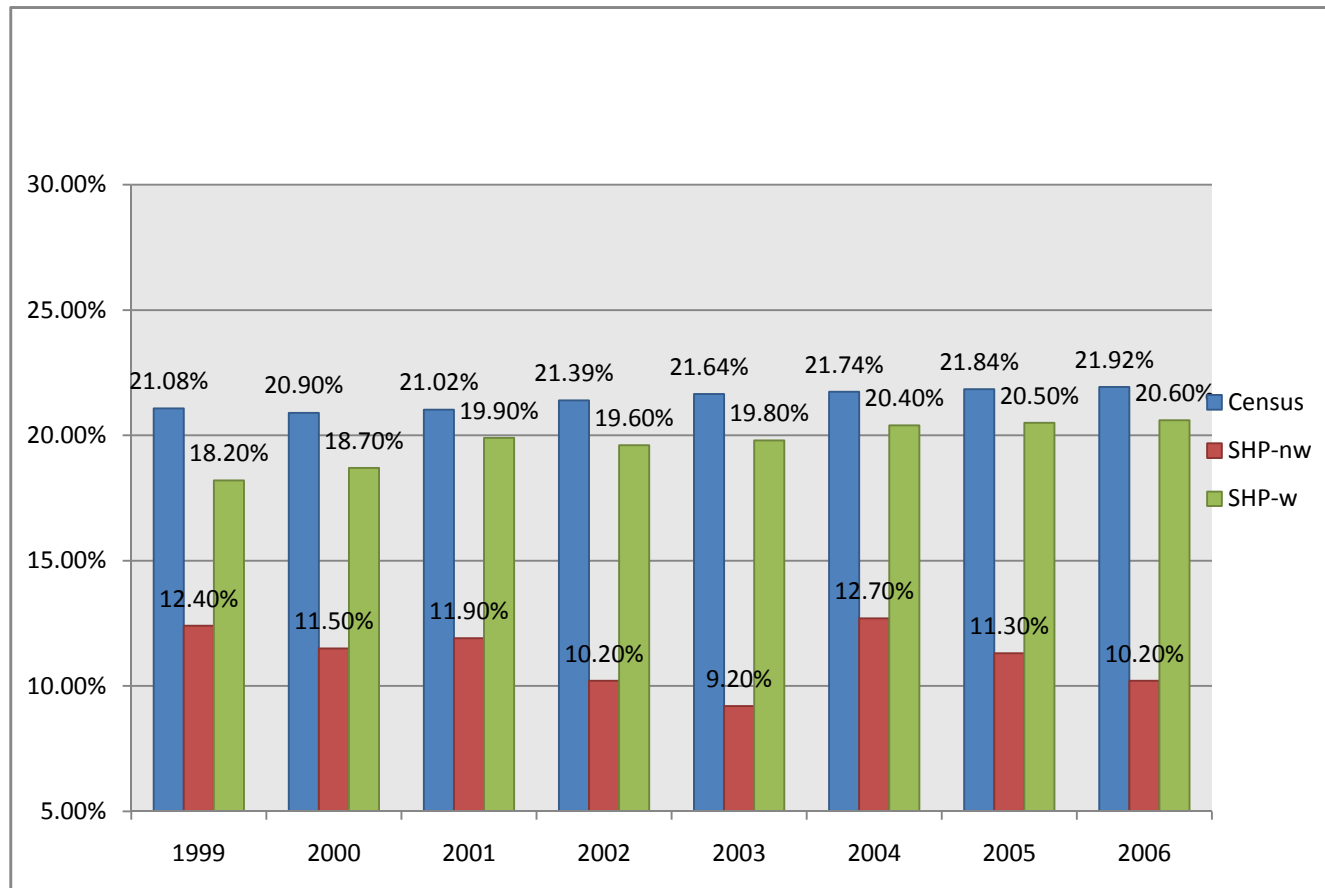
National minorities' representation is generally biased. Only minorities coming from neighbouring countries are well represented. The largest bias is related to the second largest national minority (Ex-Yugoslavian and Albanian)

Sources: Swiss National Labor Force Survey data, 2002 (Standard sample)

What is the effect of possible solution to reduce immigrants' bias in Swiss social surveys?

- Post-stratification weights
- General measures to enhance representativity
 - Increase contacts
 - Convert non respondent
 - Use of professionalized interviewers
- Specific measures:
 - Stratified sampling
 - Use of questionnaire in different languages

Post-stratification weights

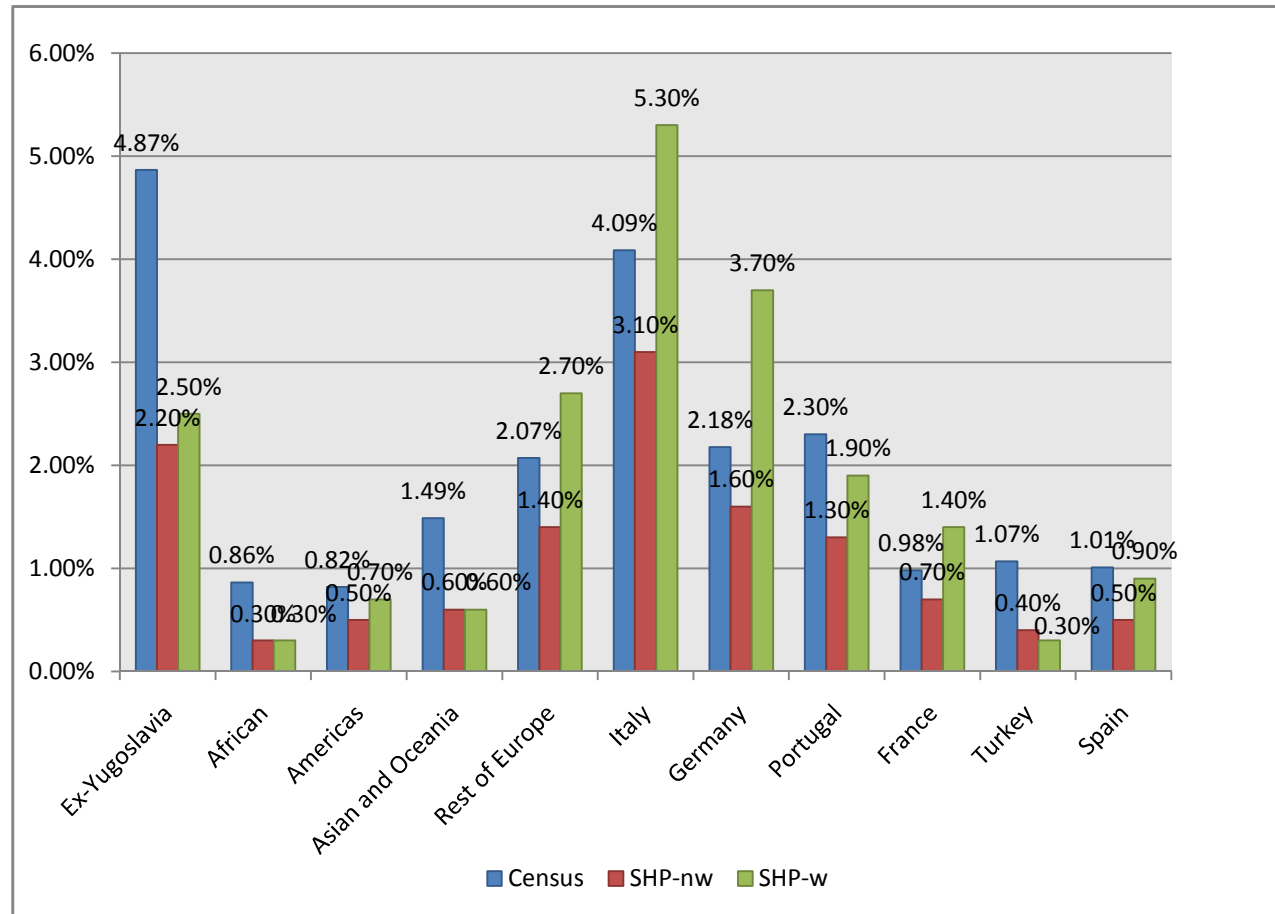


Even if the presence of “foreigners” is biased in all the years of Swiss Household Panel, the weights seem to correct quite efficiently the bias...

Comparison between percentage of foreigners in Census compared with Swiss Household Panel data: weighted (SHP-w) and not weighted (SHP-nw)

Source: Swiss Household Panel data

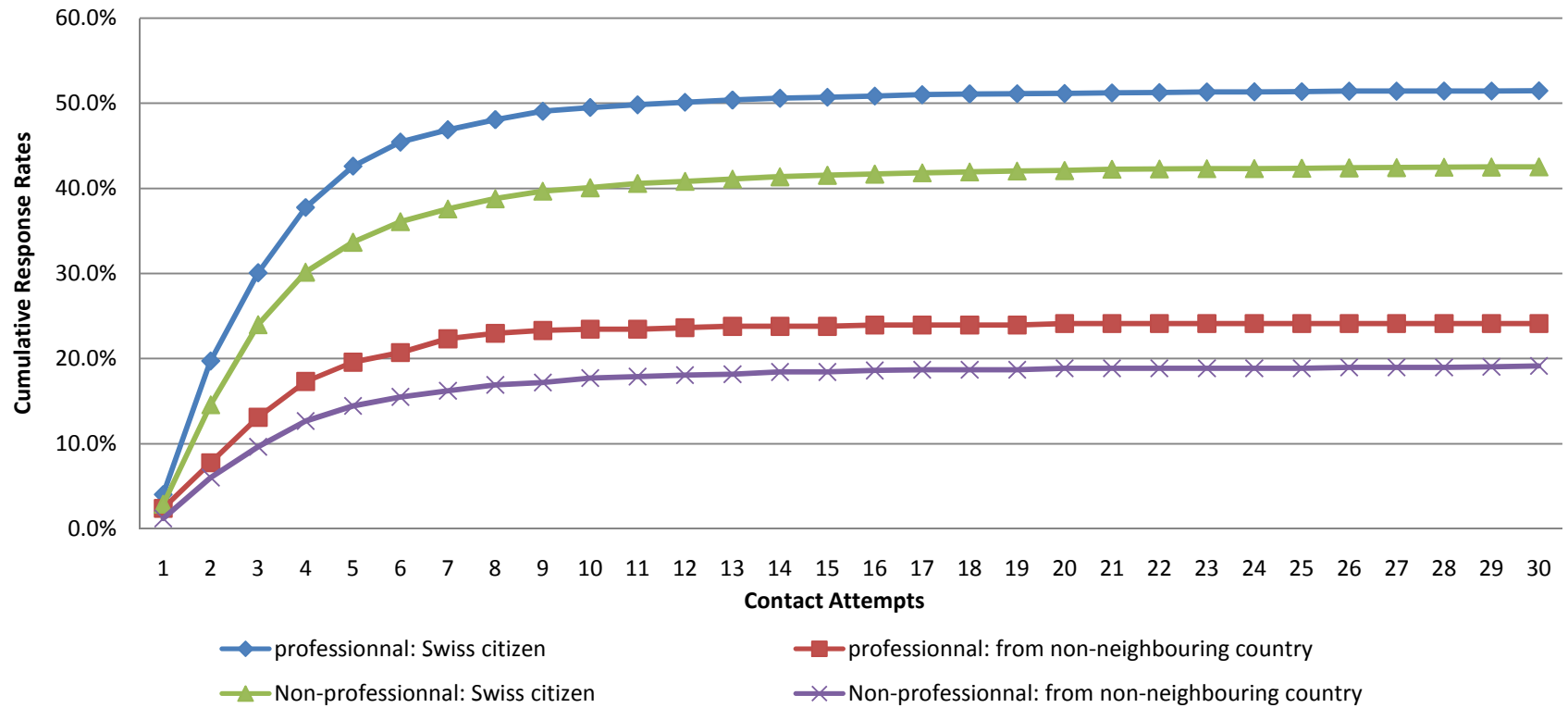
Post-stratification weights and national minorities' bias



BUT: Post-stratification weights produce an *over*-representation of national minorities that are “closer” to the “core” of Swiss society (such as Italians, Germans, or French) and they maintain the under-representation of more “distant” minorities (such as migrants from the former Yugoslavia).

Sources: Swiss census and Swiss Household panel. Year 2004.

Increasing response rates and use of professional interviewers



Cumulative response rate and contact attempts in European Social Survey.
Source: European Social Survey 2002-2006

Introducing different languages in questionnaires

	Coef.	Std. Err.	P> z
Managers/Professionals (Isco 1 + Isco 2) (Ref.)	0.00		
Intermediate positions (Isco 3)	0.102	0.273	0.707
Clerks (Isco 4)	-.0317	0.278	0.909
Service and market sales workers (Isco 5)	0.292	0.243	0.231
Skill Agricultural worker (Isco 6)	1.652	0.364	0.000
Skilled Working class (Isco 7 + Isco 8)	0.947	0.228	0.000
Elementary Occupations (Isco 9)	1.43	0.242	0.000
N	3218		
Pseudo R2	0.2309		

Binomial logistic regression of choosing Serbo-Croat and Albanian questionnaire (1) instead of one of the three Swiss national languages (0).

Controlled for Gender, Educational level, Age cohorts, Zone of residence and Years since living in Switzerland

Source: Our elaboration on Sake National Labour Force Survey data. Year: 2003

Summary of findings

- There is a general bias against national minorities. The better represented national minorities are those closer to the core of the country (Italian, Germans, Spanish). More marginalized communities (e.g., ex-Yugoslavian) are dramatically underrepresented.
- Remedies proposed in methodological literature only partially solve the problem (and sometimes they are clearly counter-productive even)

Discussion

- Are there ways to overcome research practices and methodological strategies that produce findings which adequately reflect the world of those communities that are the most prototypical of the national society, but which become increasingly fuzzy toward the margins of this society?
- Do we need to focus on more specific measures ?
 - ... which directly aim to increase the social and cultural heterogeneity of survey samples
 - ... which allow to diminish bias and increase precision of estimates related to national minorities
 - Such measures should in particular allow comparative research to become more relevant to the analysis of transnational communities (of increasing importance to our societies).