

Pretty Hireable?

The causal effects of physical attractiveness and migration background on hiring discrimination in Germany

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Ethnic discrimination on the labor market

- Consistent evidence of hiring discrimination against people with migration background in European countries, especially those of Turkish / Middle Eastern descent (Kaas & Manger 2012, Koopmans, Veit & Yemane 2019, Thijssen et al. 2021a, Veit & Thijssen 2021)
- Signals of adherence to Islam (specifically, headscarves) especially penalized in European labor markets (Fernández-Reino et al. 2023, Weichselbaumer 2020)
- The extent of labor market discrimination seems to reflect local ethnic hierarchies, with higher discrimination against immigrants from more culturally distant host countries (Thijssen et al. 2021b, Vernby & Dancygier 2019)

Attractiveness on the labor market

Why might attractive candidates be favored on the labor market?

1. *Status characteristics theory*: attractiveness acts as a status symbol that conveys higher expectations of competence (Webster & Driskell 1983)
2. *Stereotyping*: “what is beautiful is good” (Dion et al. 1972)

Existing evidence: discrimination against unattractive men & women (Rooth 2009, López Bóo et al. 2013), or against unattractive men & attractive women (Ruffle & Shtudiner 2015)

Attractiveness and ethnic discrimination

RQ: Does attractiveness moderate the ethnic penalty in the German labor market? If so, how?

Greater benefits for ethnic majority?

- ◆ Local beauty standards may privilege features typical of ethnic majority

Greater benefits for people with migration background?

- ◆ Attractiveness may act as a signal of ethnic atypicality which improves labor market outcomes for members of stigmatized groups (Kunst et al. 2023, Monk et al. 2021)

Benefits for some and penalties for others?

- ◆ Mixed status cues are disadvantaged on the labor market (Marquis et al. 2024) → advantages for ethnic majority and disadvantages for ethnic minority group members?

Design

- Unpaired (between-subject) correspondence test design
- Responding to job listings nationwide on the German Federal Employment Agency website
 - ◆ 8 occupations: Receptionist, Custodian, Retail sales clerk, IT specialist, Industrial clerk, Secretary, Sales assistant, Purchasing agent

#	Dimensions	Levels
1	Gender	Male / Female [2]
2	Attractiveness	Low / Medium / High [3]
3	Group (Name)	German / Turkish / Greek / Danish [4]
4	Ambiguity (Phenotype)	Ambiguous / Unambiguous [2]
5	Religiosity (Turkish profiles only)	Secular / Religious [2]
6	Work Performance	No references / Average / Excellent [3]

Application materials

- Applications include résumé, cover letter, educational certificates, and employer references
- Signal ethnicity on résumé with photo, name, languages spoken
- All applicants born and educated in Germany (2nd or later generation), with 3 years of work experience

Photo stimuli

- Selection of 36 photos from Bogazici, Chicago, and DeZIM Face Databases edited to match clothing (Ma et al. 2015, Saribay et al. 2018, Veit & Essien 2022)
 - ◆ Pre-rated by sample of 1,125 Germans
- Treatments:
 - ◆ Attractiveness (3 levels: high, medium, low)
 - ◆ Ethnicity (German, Turkish, Greek, Danish)
- Further editing to add religious signals: veil (women) or large beard (men)

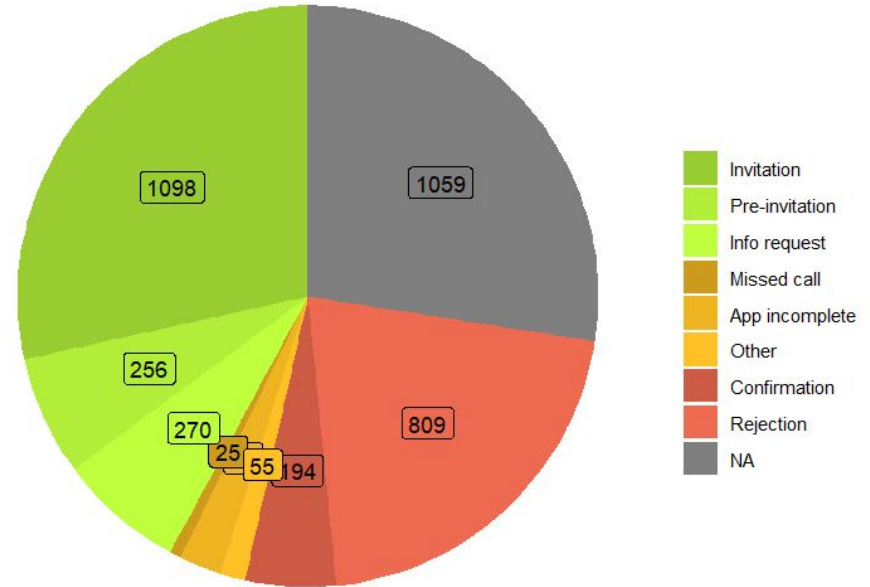
Current status of data collection

→ Final N = 3,856 applications

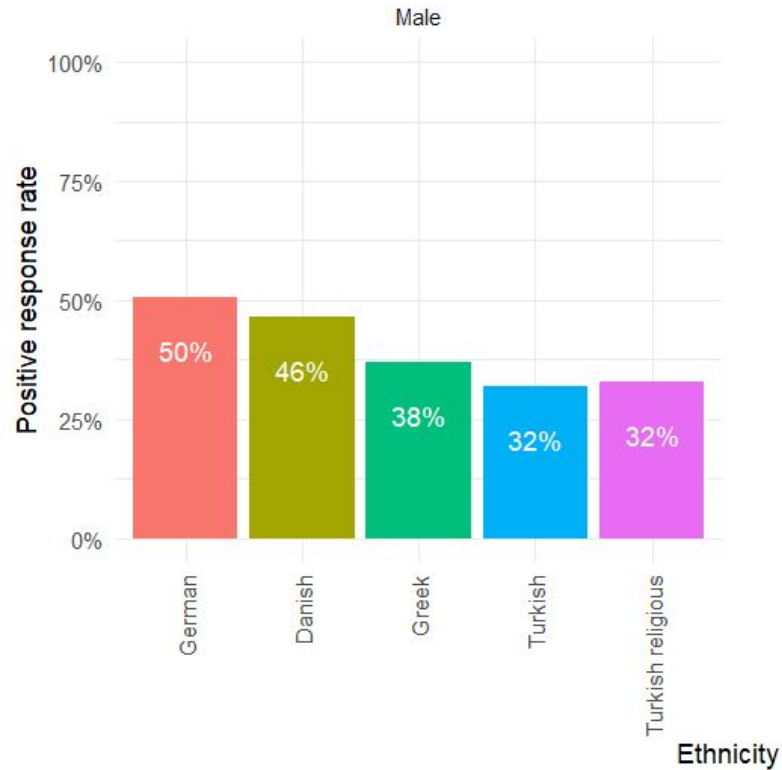
- ◆ Sending complete, but still recording replies through Nov.

→ Positive response rate: 42%

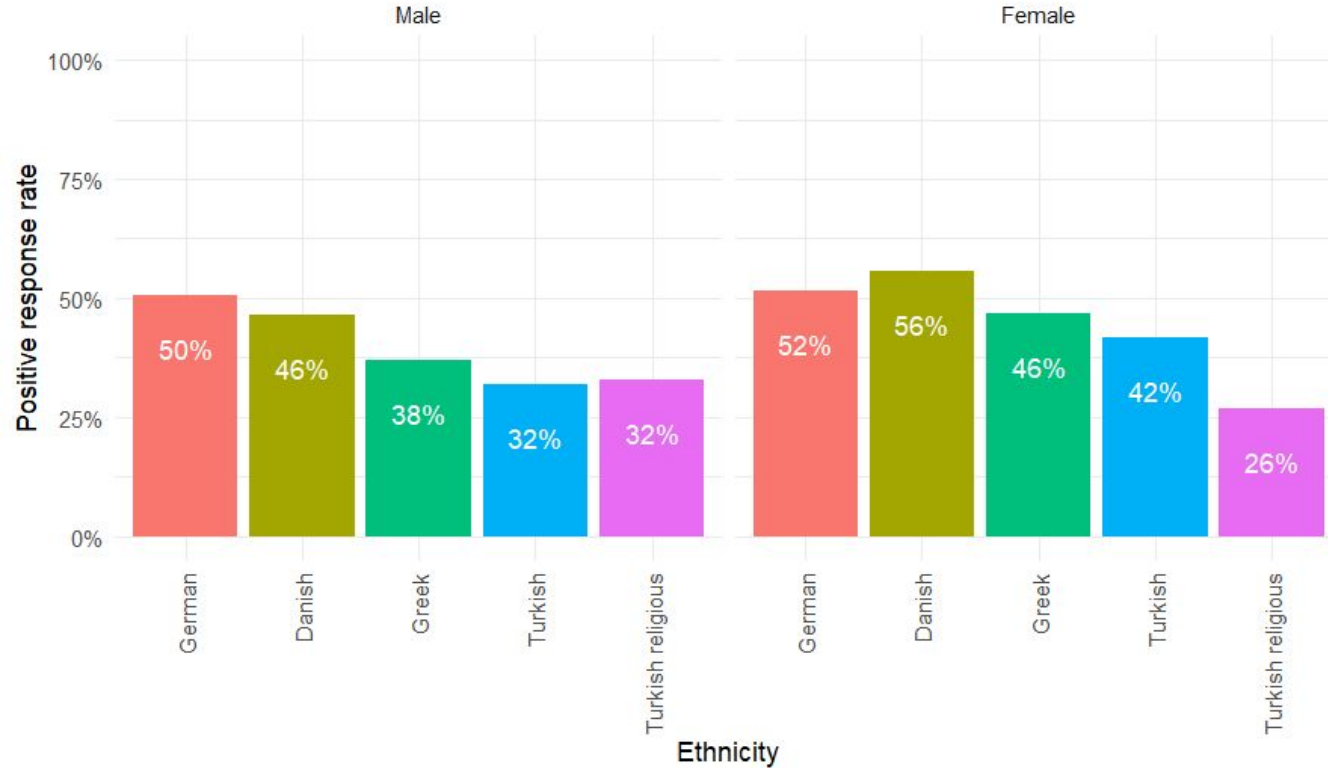
- ◆ Includes all responses that suggest that candidate has passed a selection process



Callback rates: ethnicity



Callback rates: ethnicity

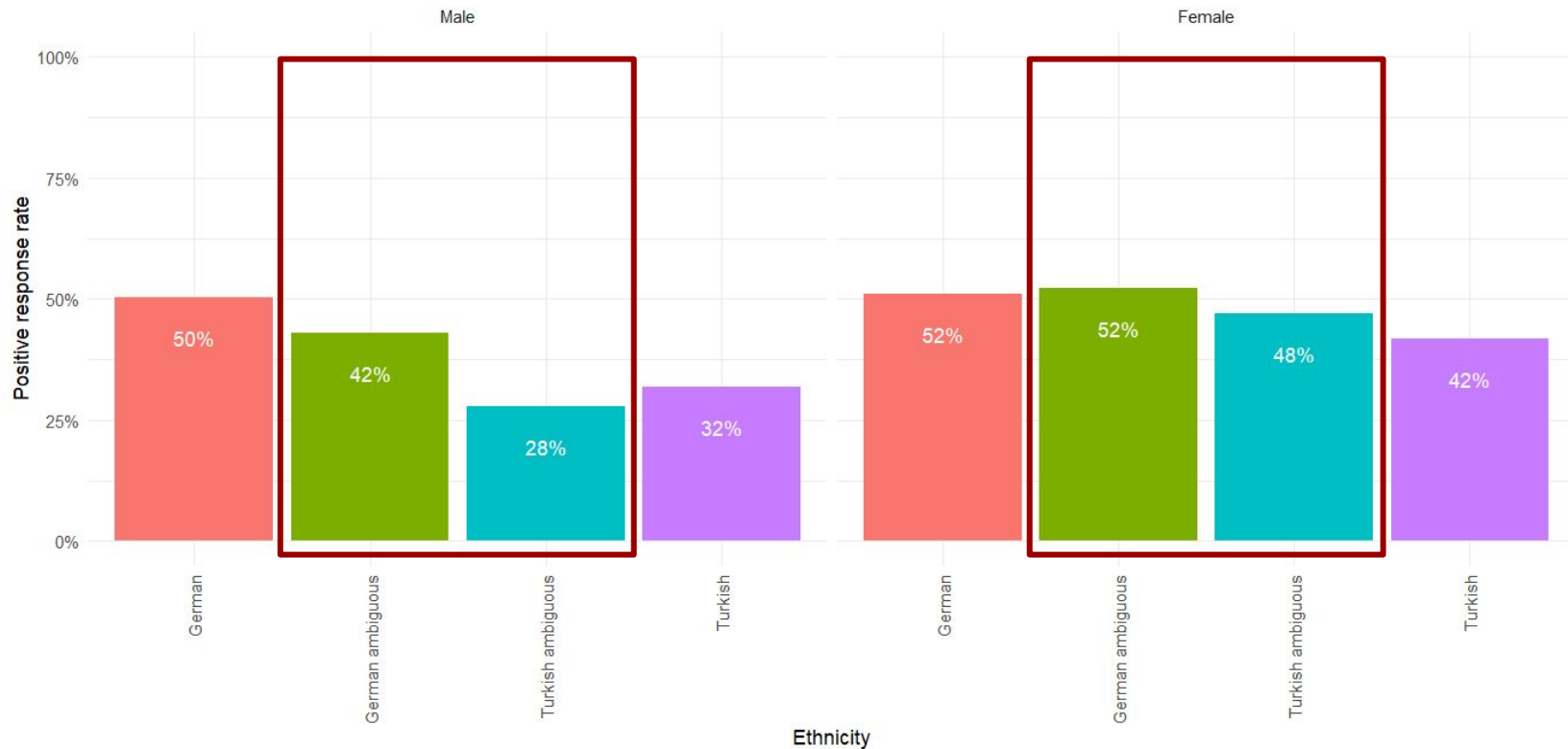


Ambiguity treatment

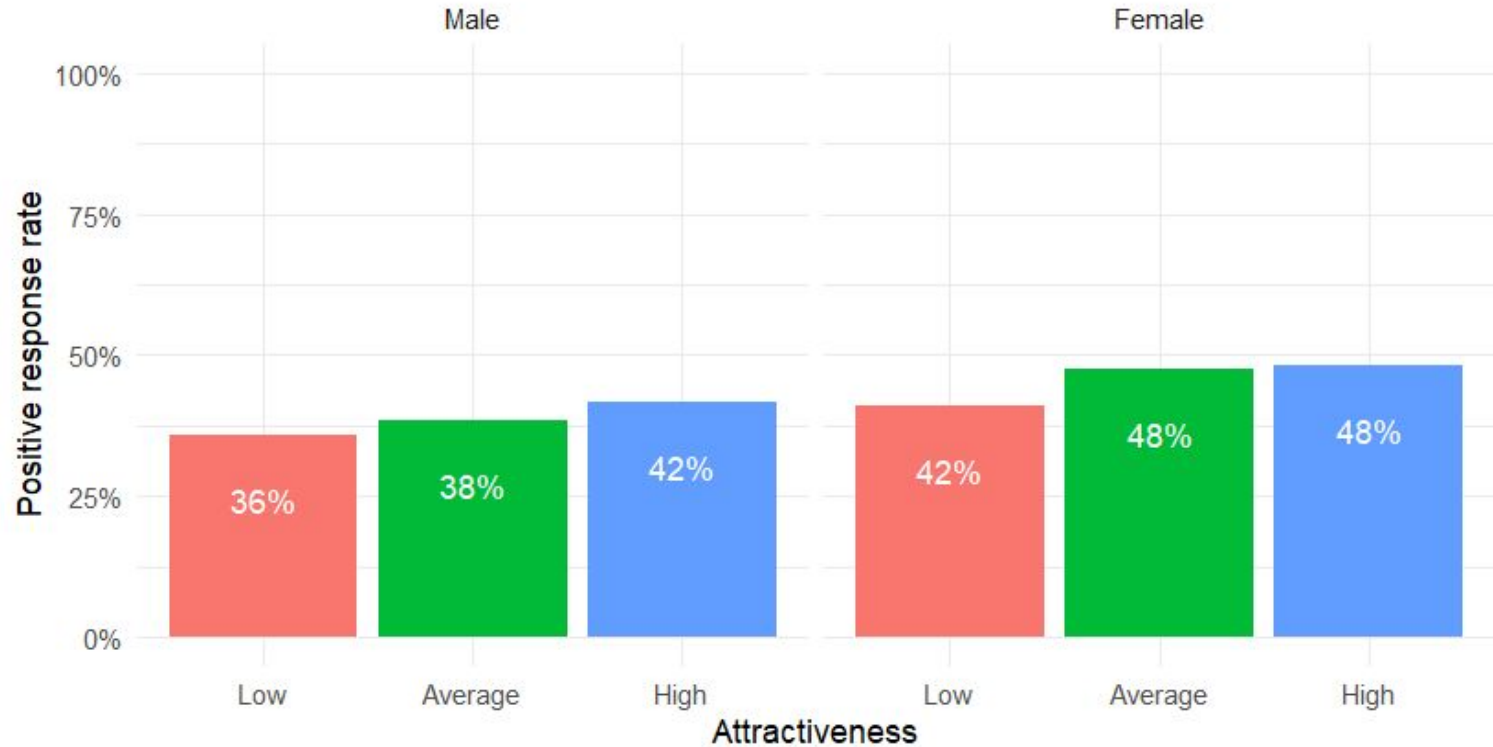
RQ: What is the ethnic penalty if appearance (profile picture) is held constant?

- Including photos that were rated about equally likely to be German and Turkish in our pre-test
 - ◆ Assigning these photos both typically German and typically Turkish names
- Separate effects of two ethnic signals: name and photo

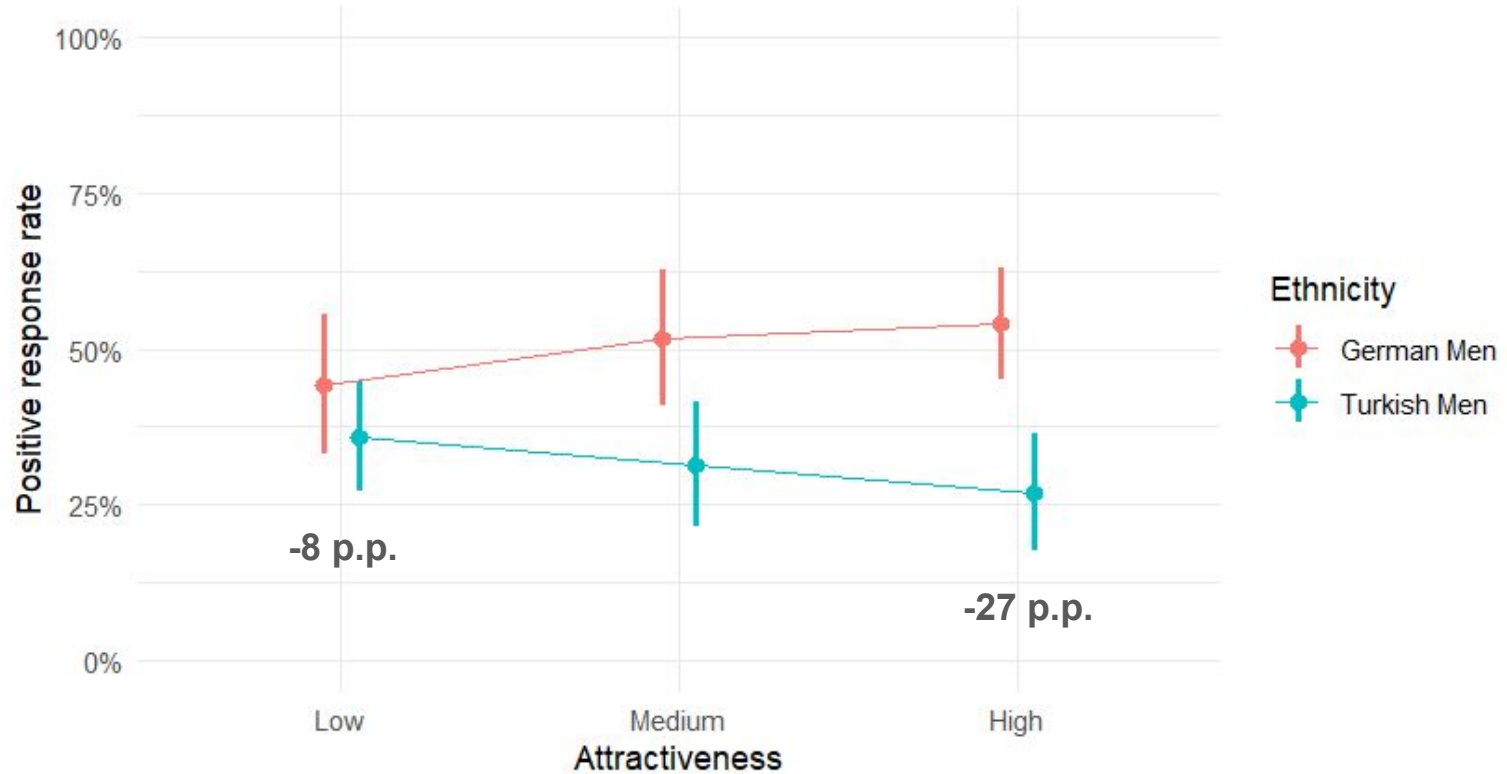
Callback rates: ethnic ambiguity (same pictures)



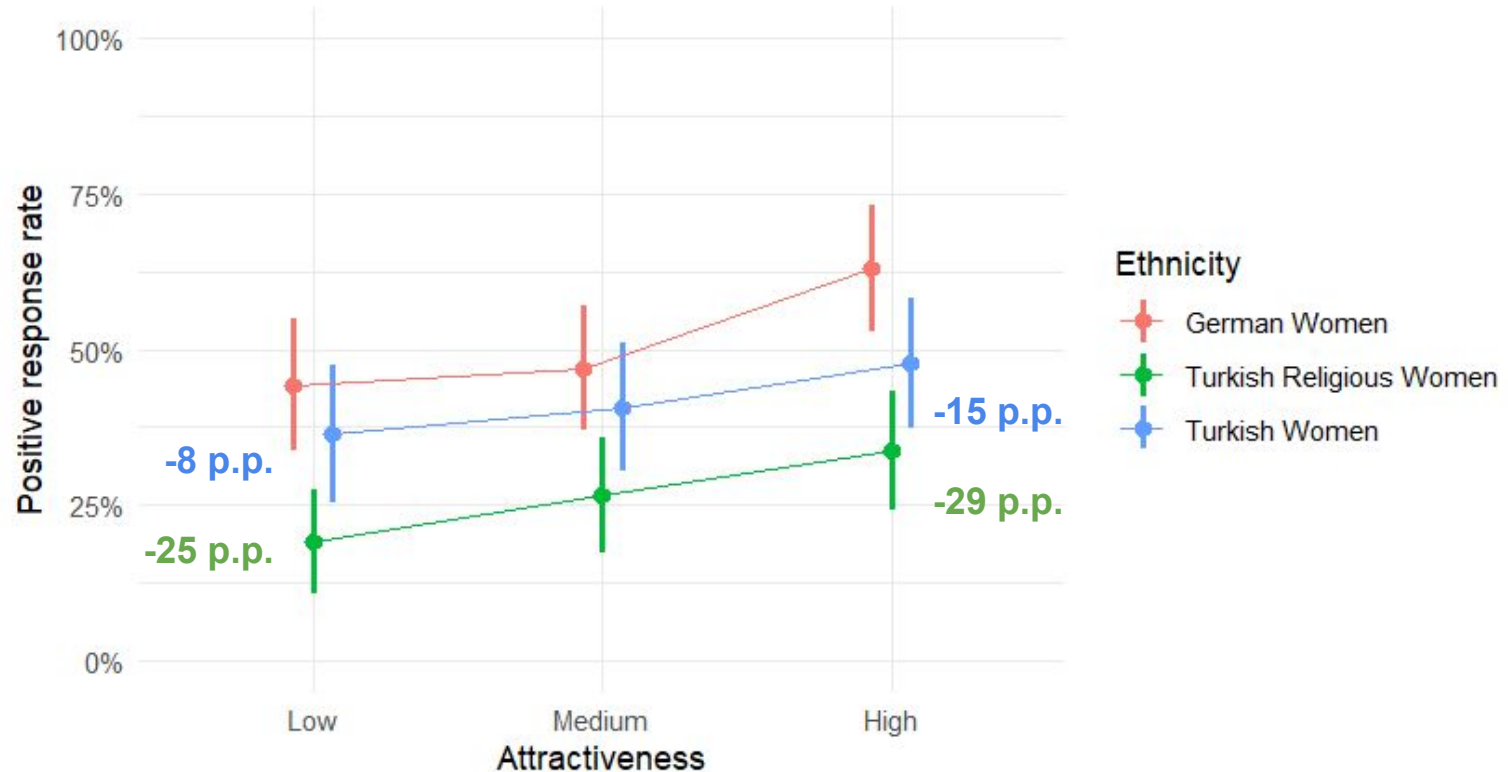
Callback rates: facial attractiveness



Attractiveness and ethnic penalty: men



Attractiveness and ethnic penalty: women



Summary

- Evidence for ethnic hierarchy, ethnic penalty for (religious) applicants with Turkish migration background in Germany
 - ◆ Male Greek and Turkish applicants are significantly disadvantaged
 - ◆ Largest penalty for women wearing headscarves
 - ◆ Results on high end of range from previously published findings (5-13 p.p. for Turkish-origin applicants, 14-28 p.p. for veiled women)
- Evidence for *small* beauty premium in callback rates when comparing the least and most attractive applicants (6 p.p.)
- Physical attractiveness does not close the minority-majority callback gap, but may even *exacerbate* ethnic biases?

Questions?

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Applications: cover story

- ★ Applicants 23-26 years old, completed education / apprenticeship and ~3 years work experience
 - Age range matches ages of people in CV photos
- ★ Birthplace and current residence in area where education was completed
 - Cities chosen based on availability of documents
 - For applicants with migration background: signals second (or later) immigrant generation
- ★ Signal interest in moving “to be near family”
 - Allows for applications nationwide, even in small towns
 - No applications in current city (100 km radius) to limit potential for detection

Names

- ★ Similarly to photos, names rated by online access panel (n = 800) on:
 - Ethnic and sex typicality
 - Social class
 - Religiosity, attractiveness, trustworthiness
- ★ Set of 48 names chosen (6 per ethnicity x gender category)
 - Easily identifiable with ethnicity and gender
 - No outliers with perceptions to social class

Information treatment

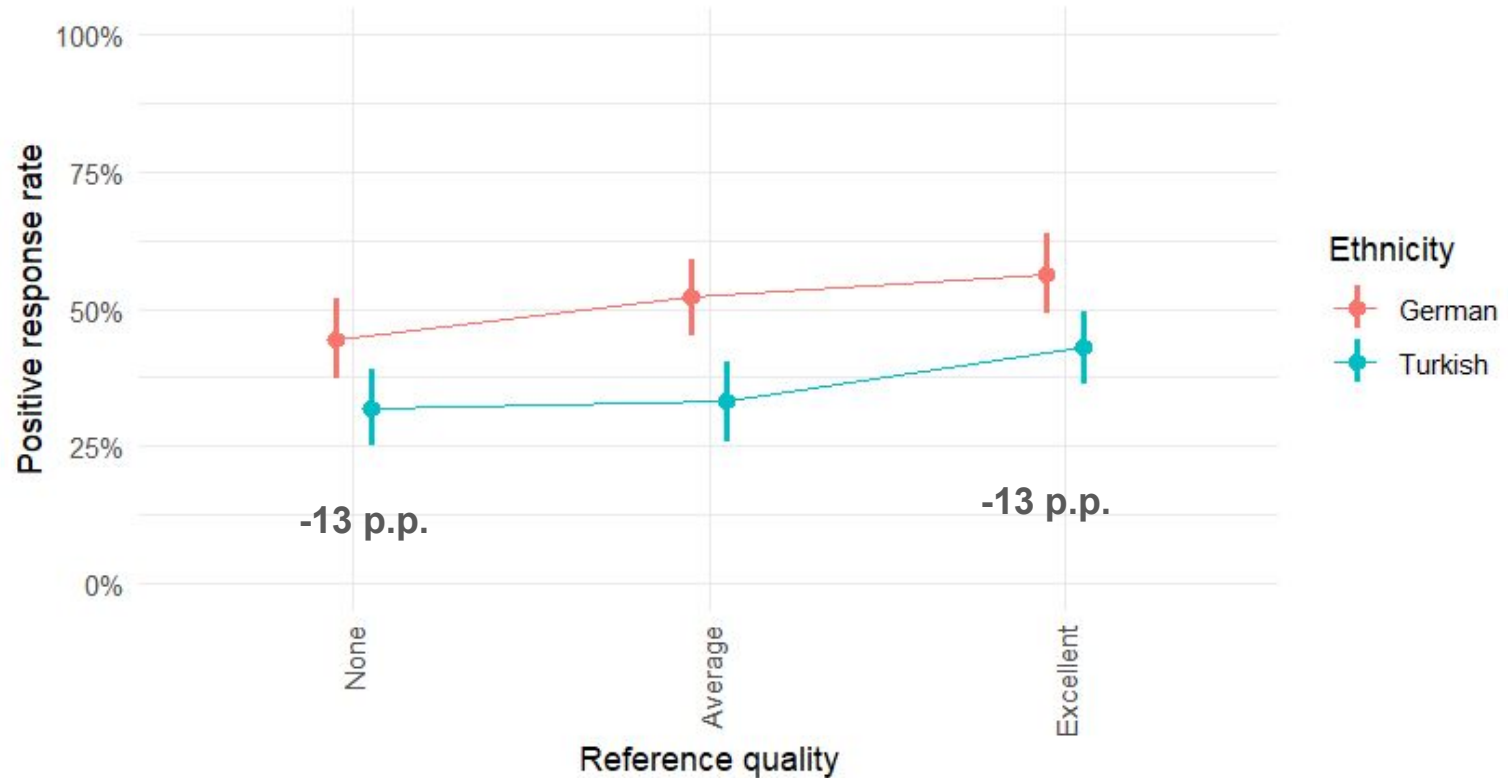
RQ: Does (excellent) information close the ethnic penalty in the labor market?

→ Testing for taste-based vs. statistical discrimination by adding information about competence

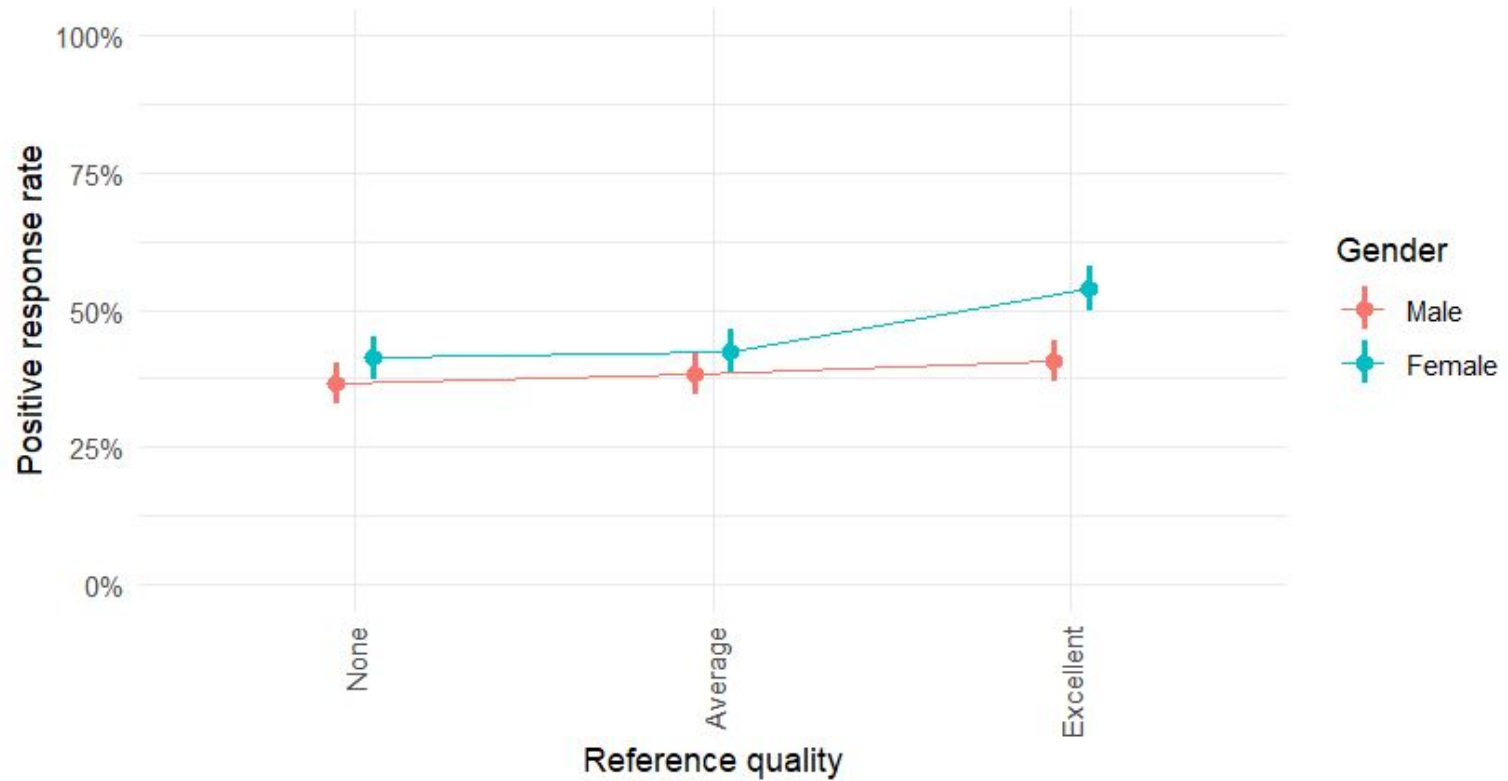
Varying performance information in 3 conditions:

- **No information:** no employer references, educational certificates with average grades
- **Average:** sufficient employer references, educational certificates with average grades
- **Excellent:** enthusiastic employer references, educational certificates with above-average grades

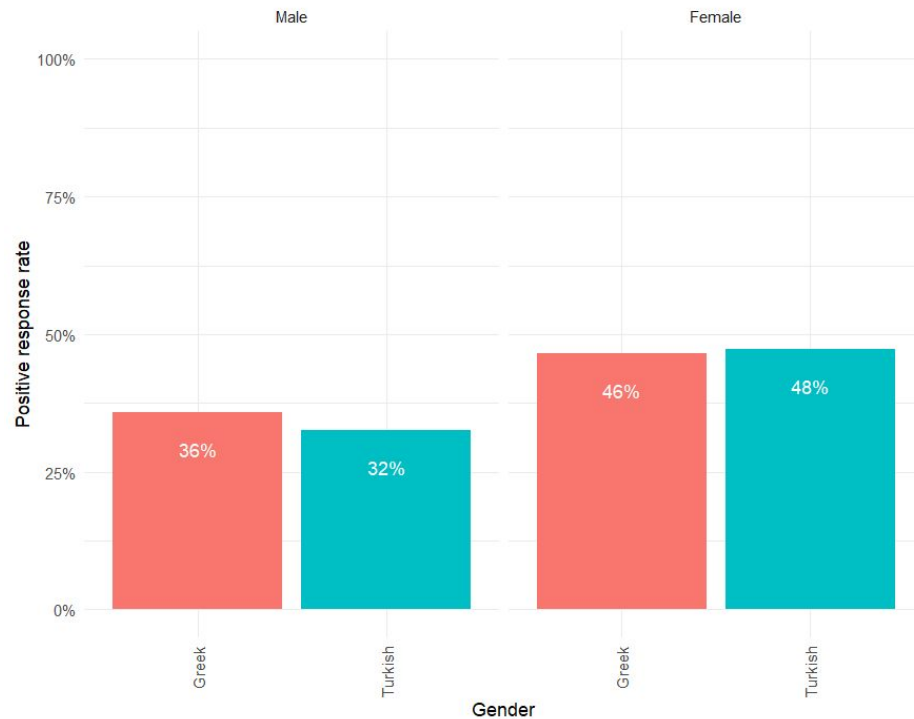
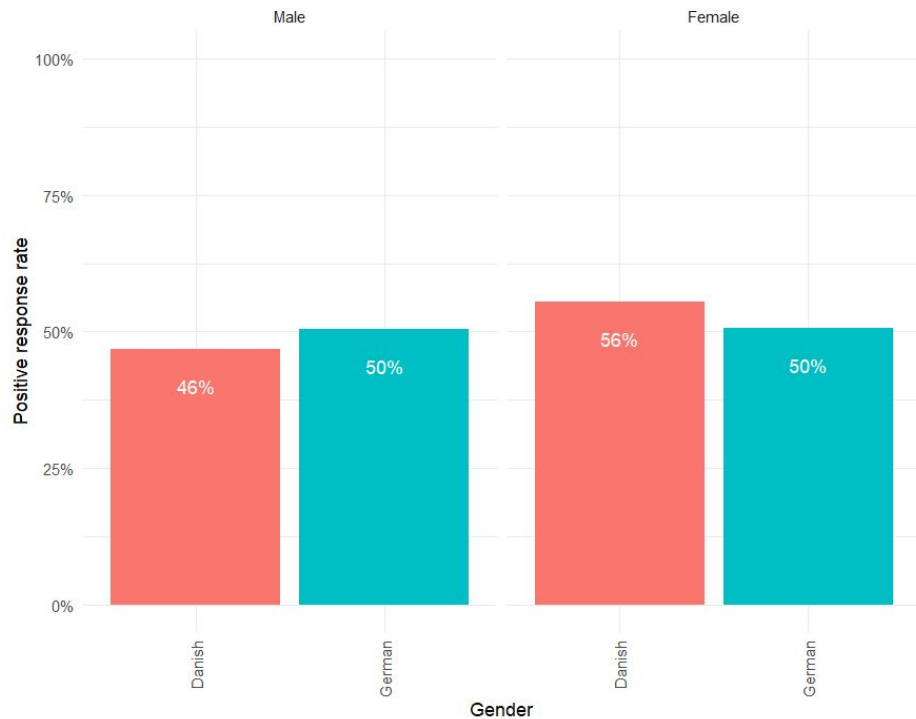
Information x ethnicity



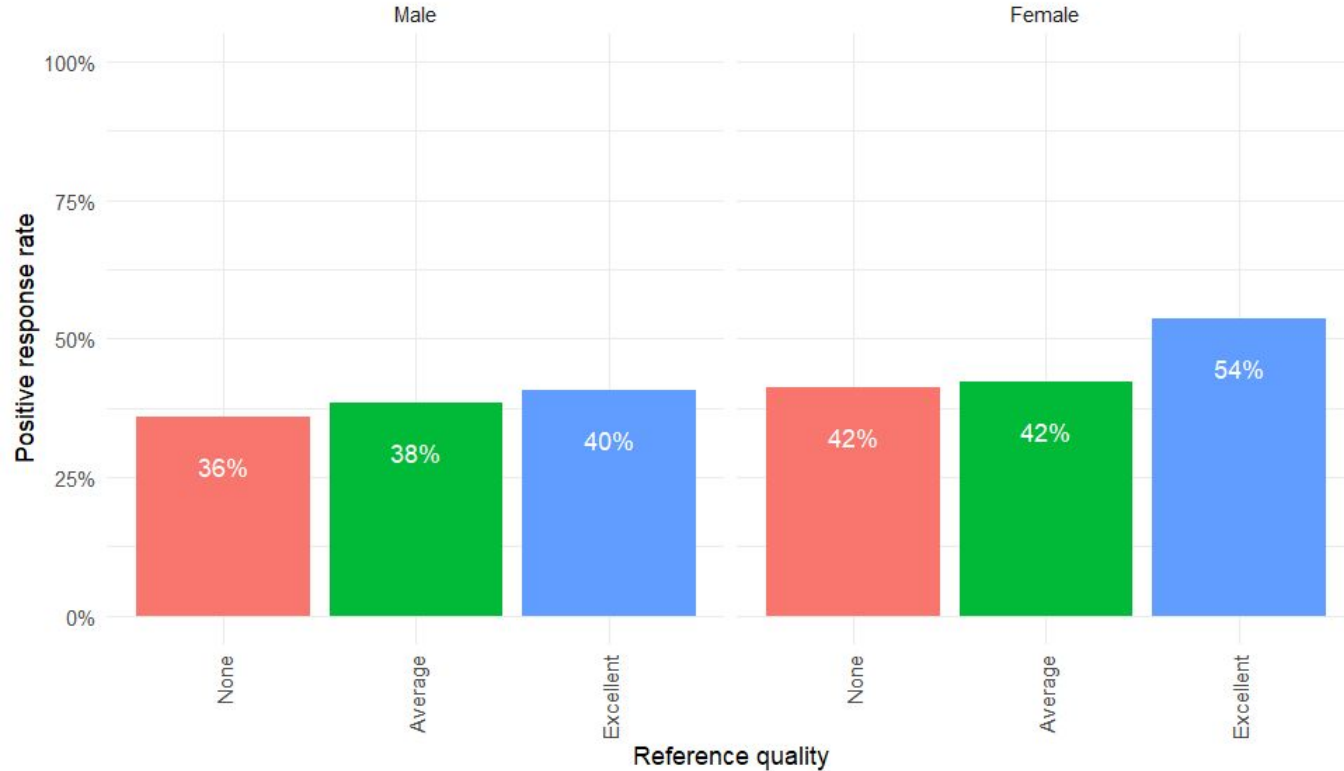
Information x gender



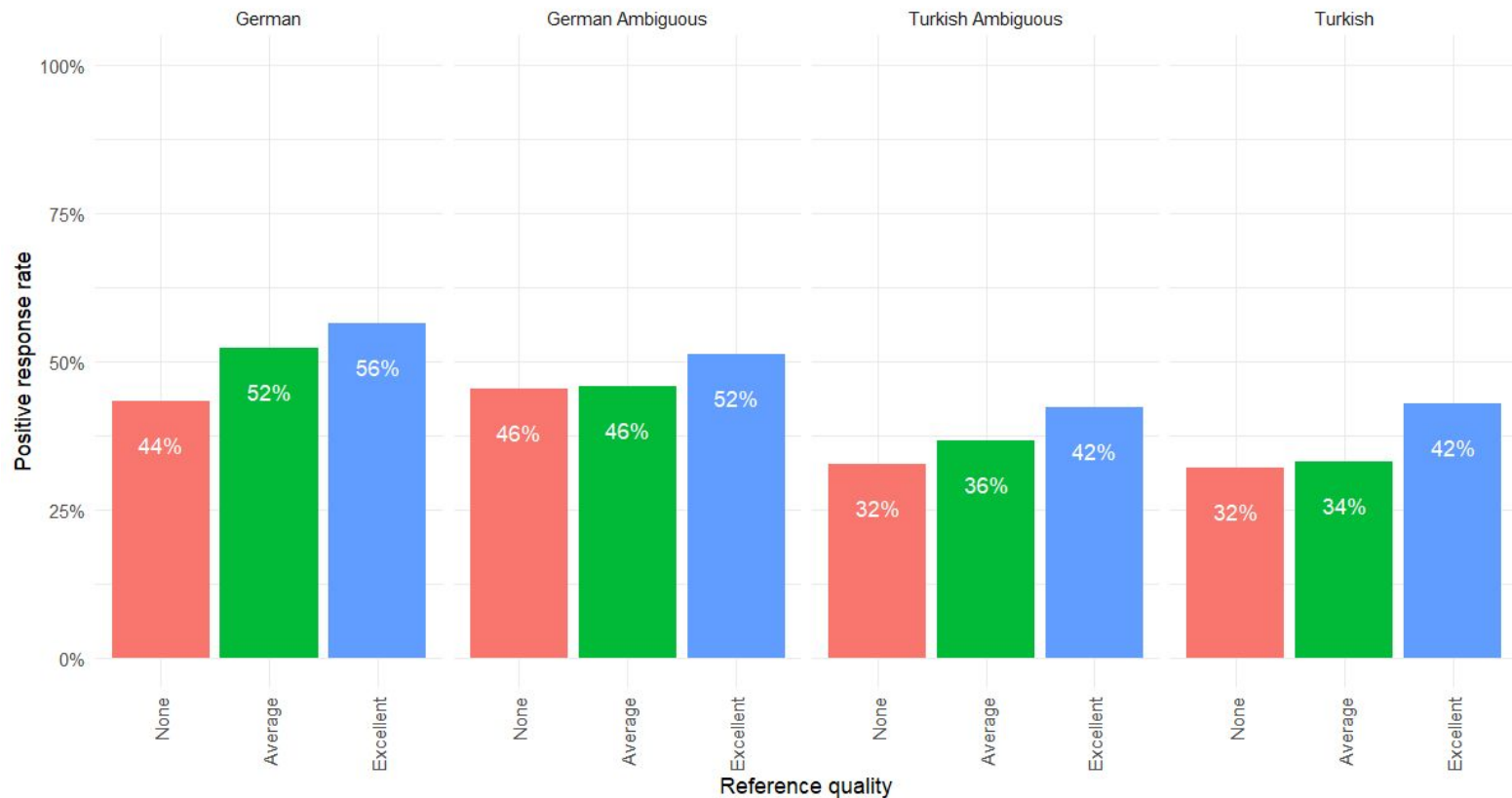
Ambiguity: Danish - German; Greek - Turkish



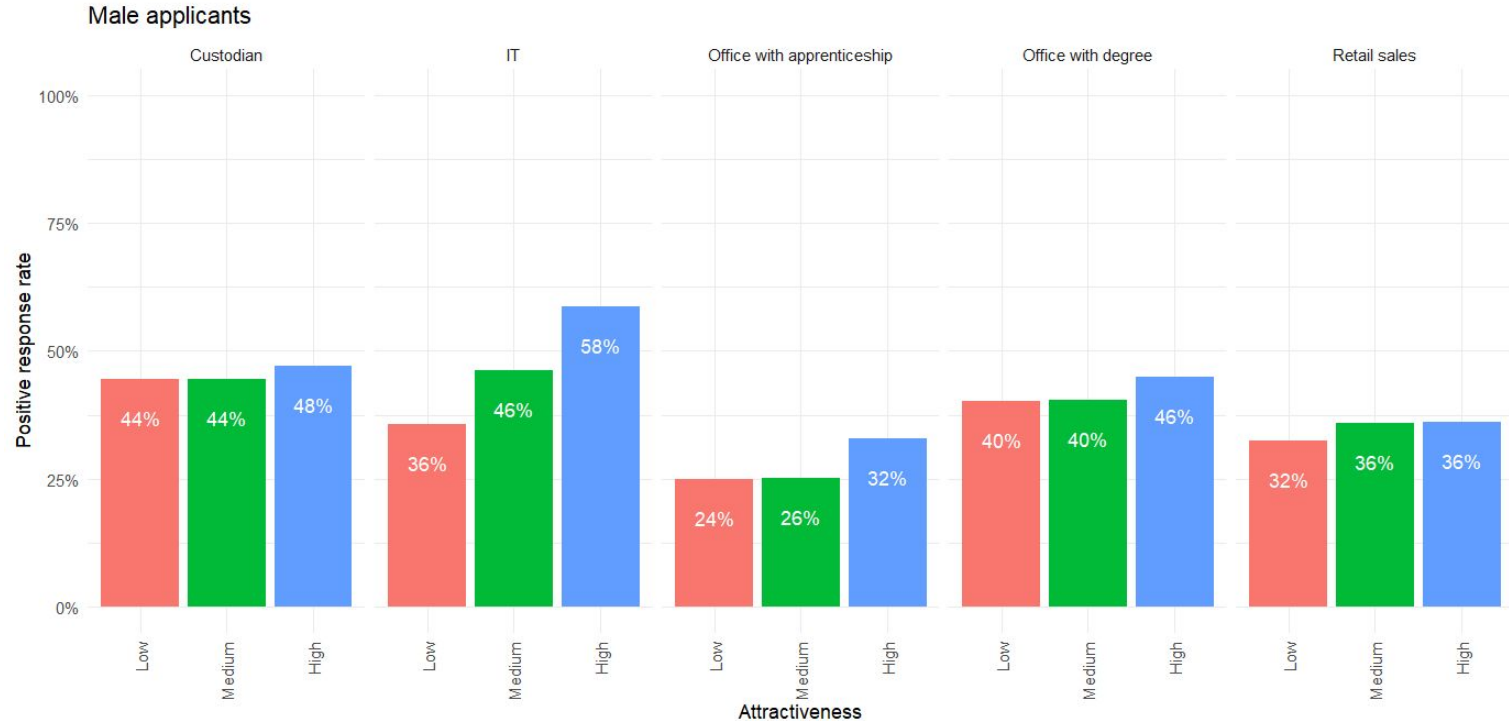
Information x gender



Information x ethnicity

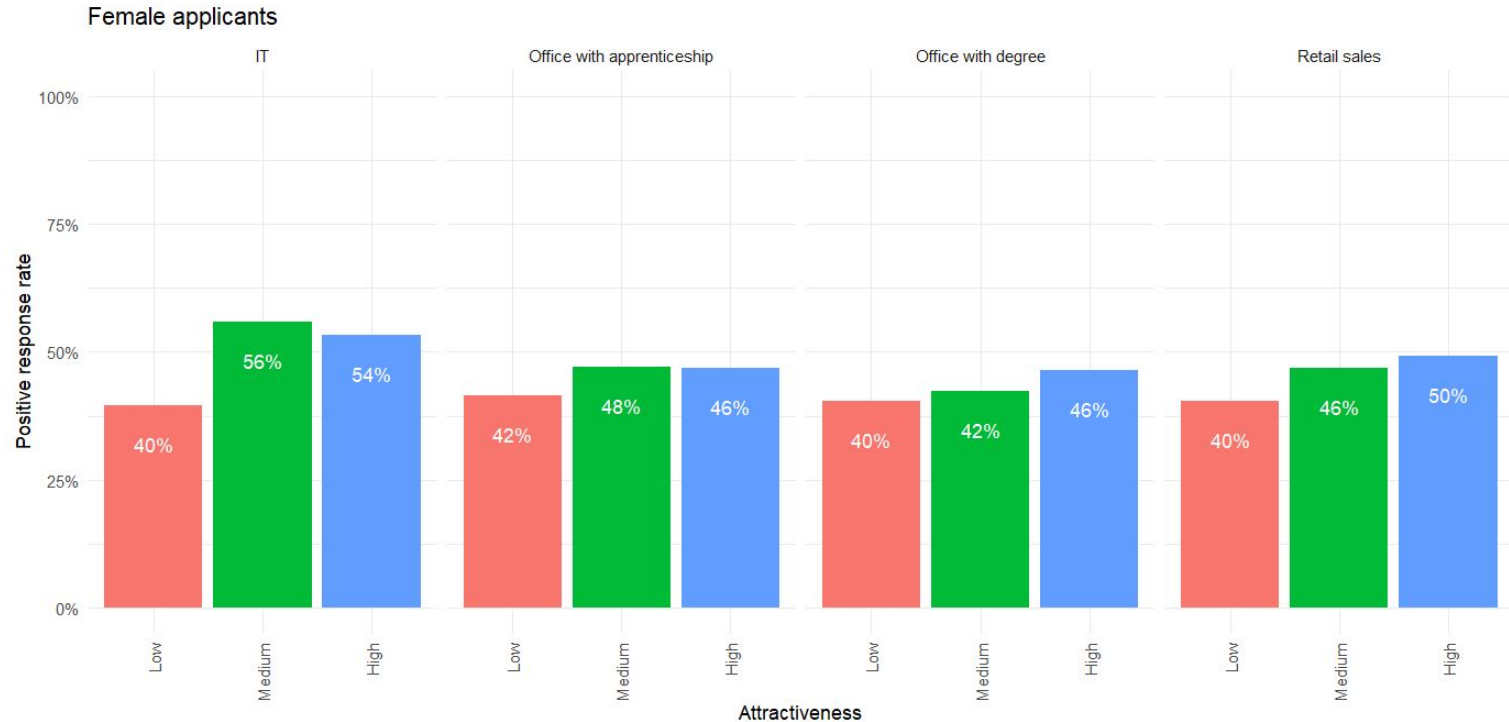


MEN: attractiveness x occupation



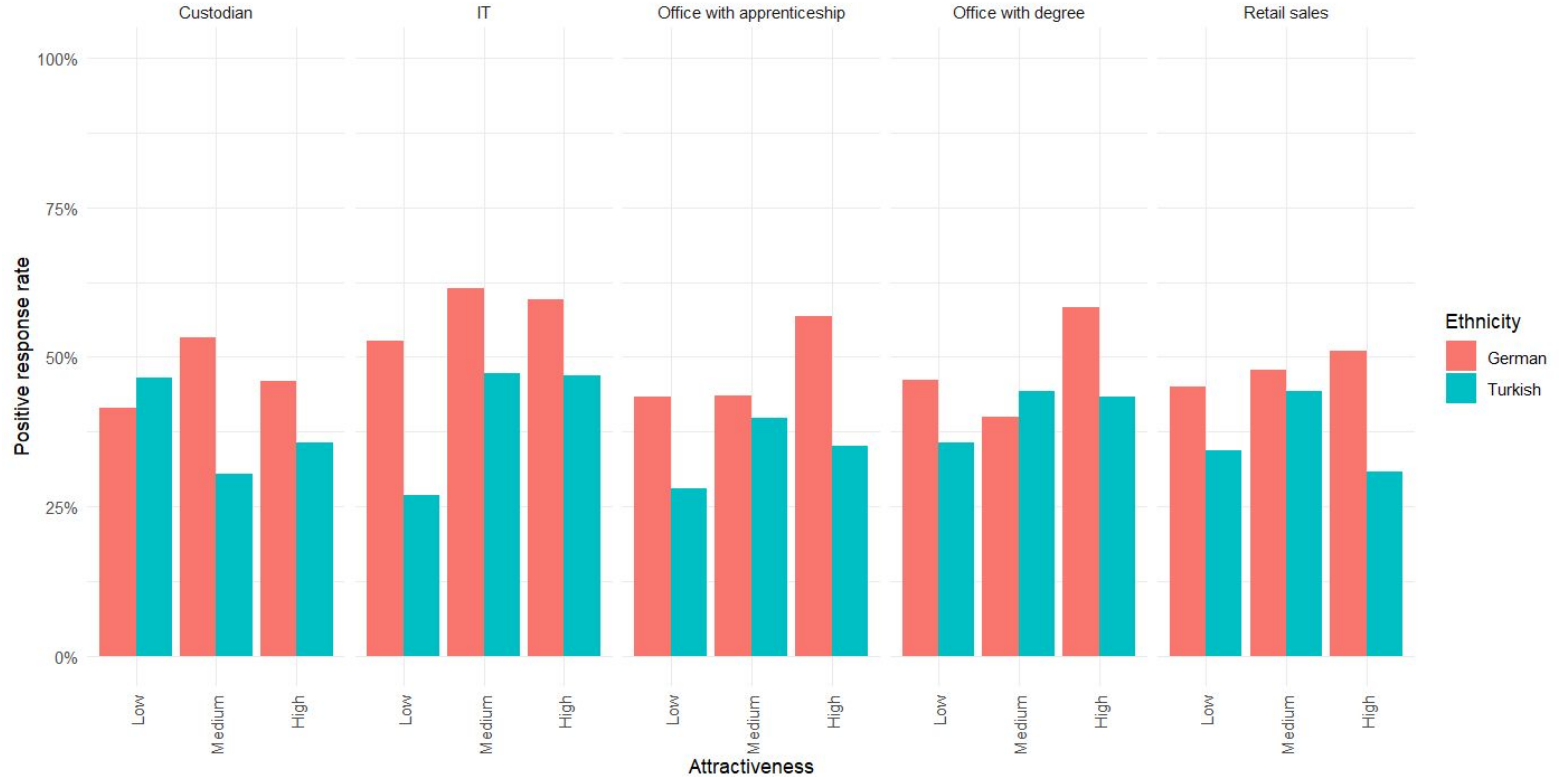
Office with apprenticeship: secretary & industrial clerk. Office with degree: Purchasing agent & sales assistant.

WOMEN: attractiveness x occupation

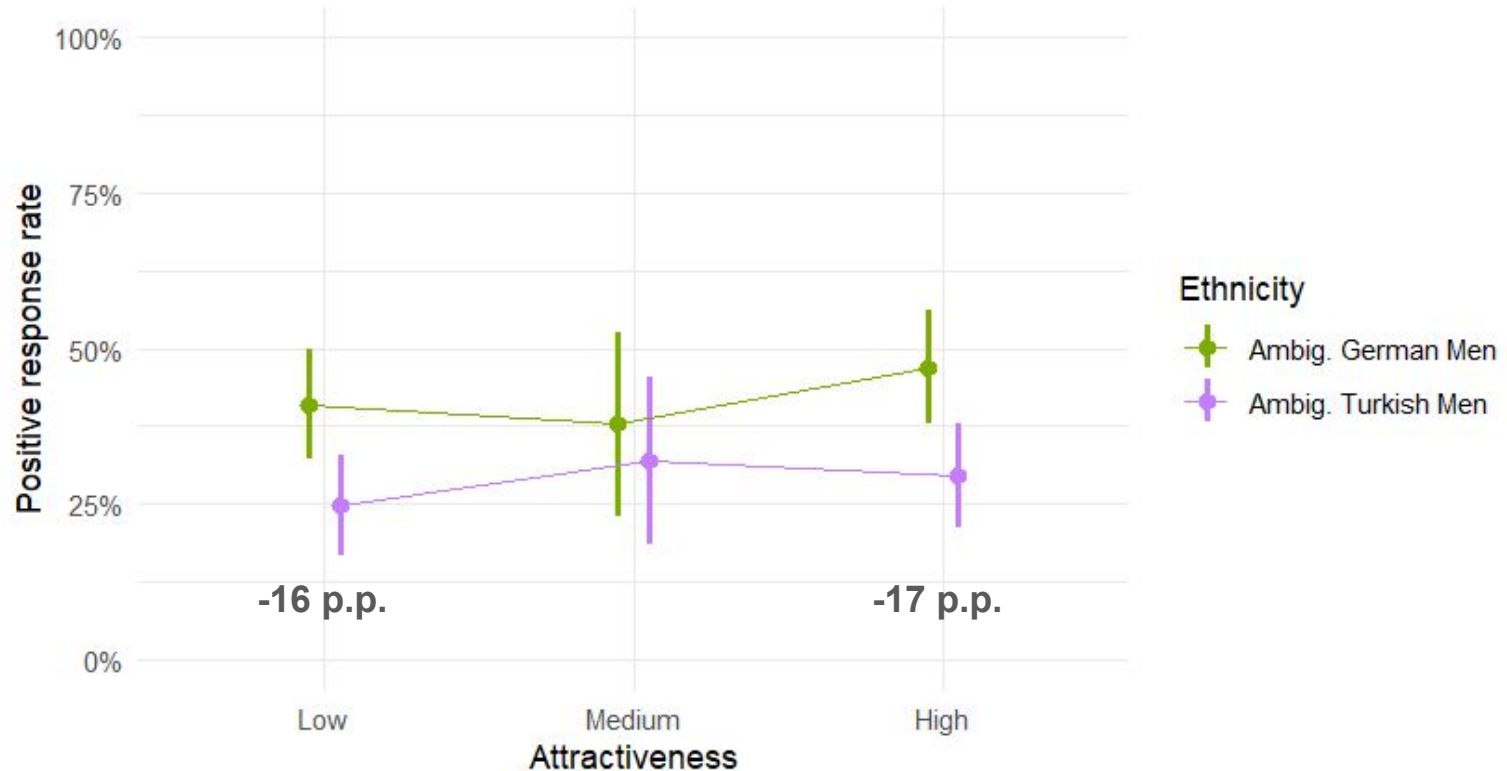


Office with apprenticeship: receptionist, secretary & industrial clerk. Office with degree: Purchasing agent & sales assistant.

Attractiveness x ethnicity x occupation



Attractiveness and ethnic penalty for **MEN**



Attractiveness and ethnic penalty for **WOMEN**

