

Appendix to

Beliefs About Public Opinion and the Perceived Legitimacy of Policy Decisions

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Section A: Further information on measurement

Table A1: Text of the information treatments (translated into English)

Issue	Information vignette
Stop arm deliveries to Ukraine	“According to a representative survey conducted by the polling institute Forschungsgruppe Wahlen from June 10 to 12, 2024, 68% of all German voters surveyed are in favor of maintaining or increasing military support for Ukraine, while 28% are in favor of reducing support.”
Abolish same-sex marriage	„According to a representative survey conducted by the opinion research institute IPSOS from February 17 to March 3, 2023, 62% of the German population surveyed are in favor of same-sex couples being able to marry.“
Relax constitutional debt brake	“According to a representative survey conducted by the polling institute Forschungsgruppe Wahlen from June 25 to 27, 2024, 56% of all German voters surveyed are in favor of retaining the debt brake. 40% are in favor of relaxing it.”
Abolish right to asylum	„According to a representative survey conducted by the opinion research institute forsa on July 20 and 21, 2023, 62% of German citizens surveyed are in favor of every single politically persecuted person being allowed to apply for asylum in the European Union. 32% are in favor of abolishing the individual right to asylum.“

Figure A1: Screenshot of information treatments (in German)

(A) Stop arm deliveries to Ukraine

Laut einer repräsentativen Befragung des Meinungsforschungsinstituts Forschungsgruppe Wahlen vom 10. bis 12. Juni 2024 sprechen sich 68 Prozent aller befragten deutschen Wahlberechtigten für eine Beibehaltung oder Verstärkung der militärischen Unterstützung für die Ukraine aus, während 28 Prozent für eine Verringerung der Unterstützung sind.

Angenommen, in Deutschland würde politisch beschlossen, die Waffenlieferungen an die Ukraine einzustellen. Für wie legitim würden Sie eine solche Entscheidung halten?

- ☐ 0 - Ganz und gar nicht legitim
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6 - Vollkommen legitim

(B) Abolish same-sex marriage

Laut einer repräsentativen Befragung des Meinungsforschungsinstituts IPSOS vom 17. Februar bis zum 3. März 2023 sind 62 Prozent der befragten deutschen Bevölkerung dafür, dass auch gleichgeschlechtliche Paare heiraten können sollten.

Angenommen, in Deutschland würde politisch beschlossen, die Ehe wieder auf Partnerschaften von Mann und Frau zu beschränken. Für wie legitim würden Sie eine solche Entscheidung halten?

- ☐ 0 - Ganz und gar nicht legitim
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6 - Vollkommen legitim

(C) Relax debt brake

Laut einer repräsentativen Befragung des Meinungsforschungsinstituts Forschungsgruppe Wahlen vom 25. bis 27. Juni 2024 sind 56 Prozent aller befragten deutschen Wahlberechtigten für die Beibehaltung der Schuldenbremse. 40 Prozent sprechen sich für eine Lockerung aus.

Angenommen, in Deutschland würde politisch beschlossen, die im Grundgesetz festgeschriebene Schuldenbremse zu lockern. Für wie legitim würde Sie eine solche Entscheidung halten?

- ☐ 0 - Ganz und gar nicht legitim
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6 - Vollkommen legitim

(D) Abolish right to asylum

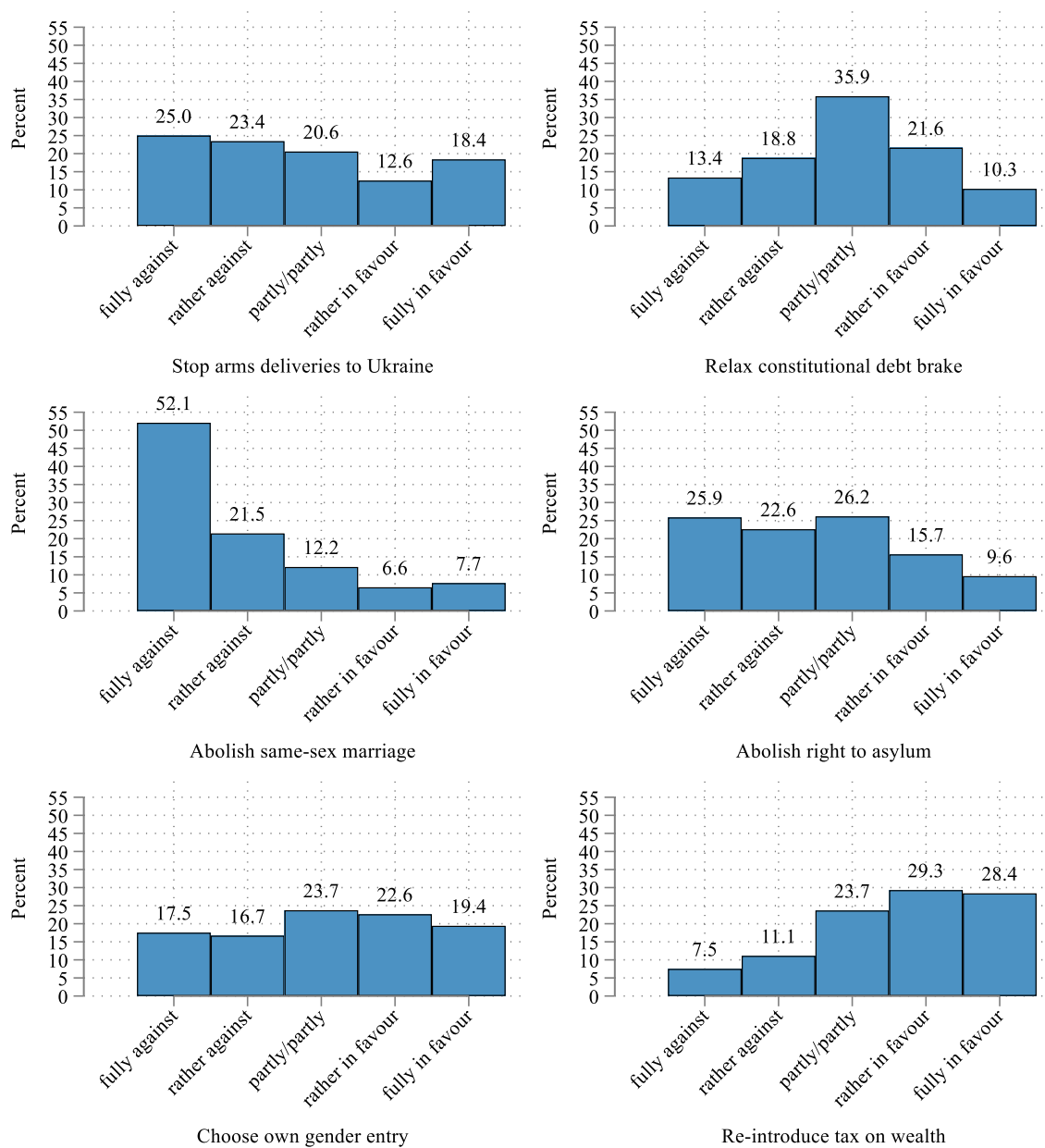
Laut einer repräsentativen Befragung des Meinungsforschungsinstituts forsa am 20. und 21. Juli 2023 sind 62 Prozent der befragten deutschen Bundesbürger dafür, dass weiterhin jeder einzelne politisch Verfolgte Asyl in der Europäischen Union beantragen darf. 32 Prozent sind für die Abschaffung des Individualrecht auf Asyl.

Angenommen, in Deutschland würde politisch beschlossen, das individuelle Grundrecht auf Asyl weiter einzuschränken. Für wie legitim würden Sie eine solche Entscheidung halten?

- ☐ 0 - Ganz und gar nicht legitim
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6 - Vollkommen legitim

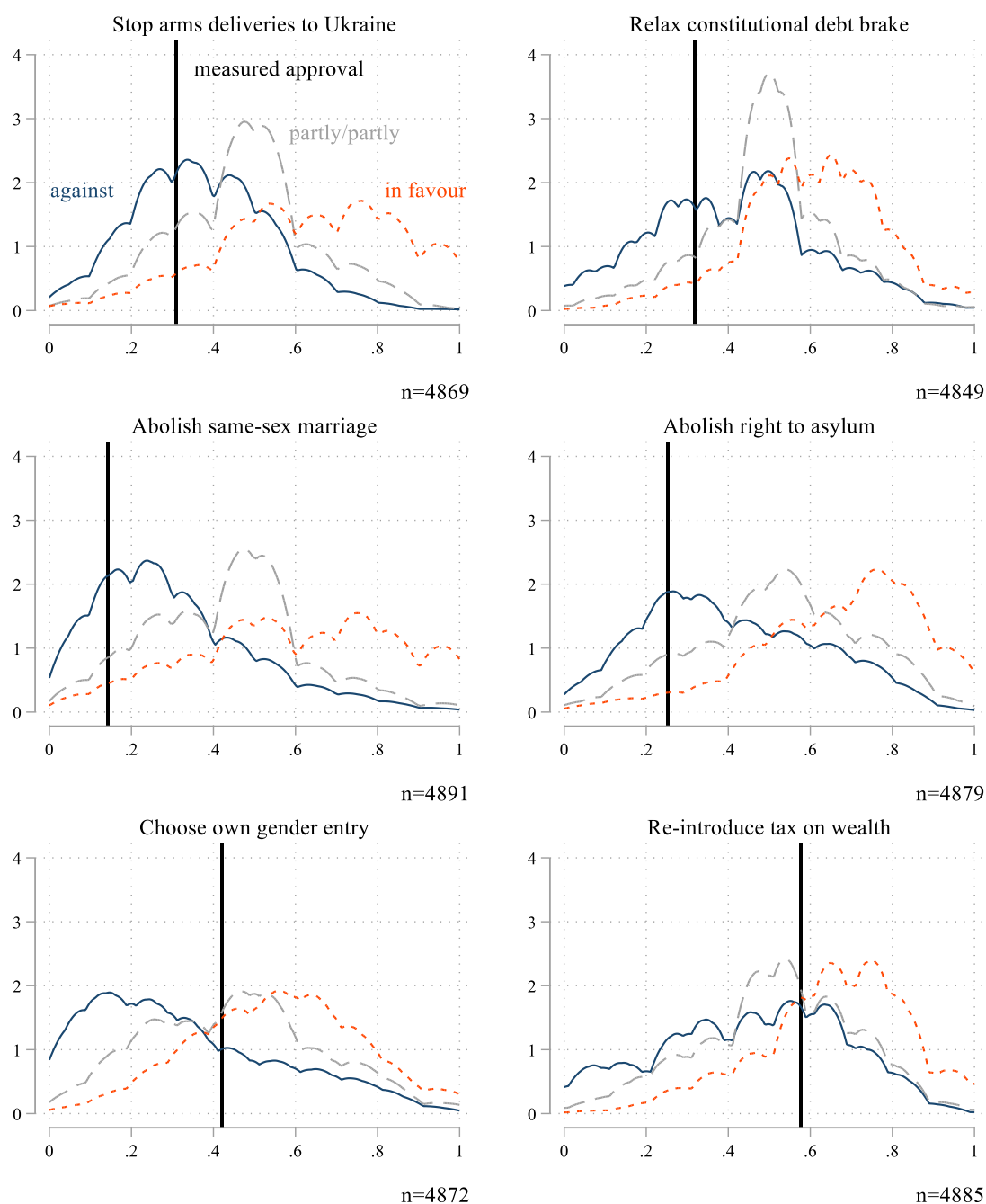
Section B: Additional descriptive results

Figure B1: Distribution of own positions on the six policies



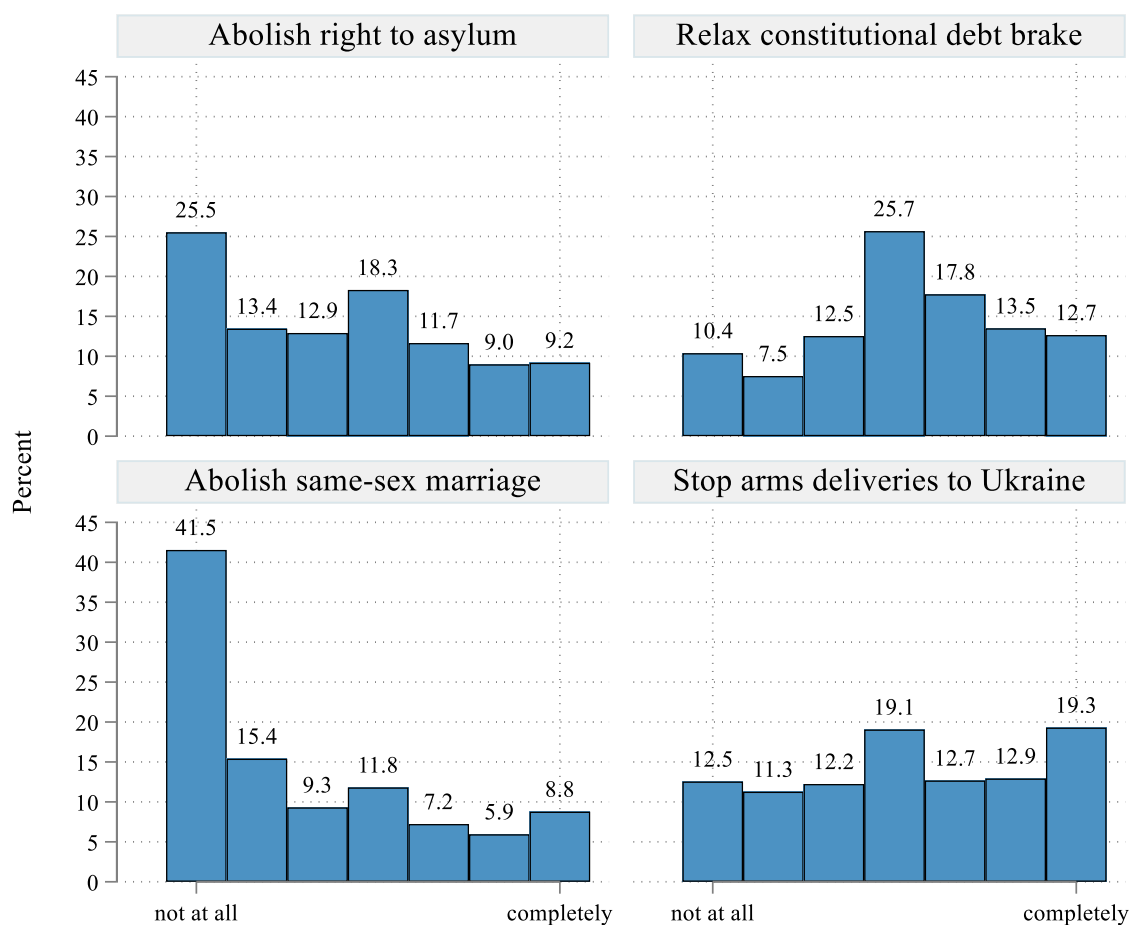
Note: This figure includes the two additional issues that were not included in the legitimacy block. Design weight employed.

Figure B2: Distributions of estimated public approval by own position



Note: This figure is similar to Figure 2 in the main article but includes the two additional issues that were not included in the legitimacy block. Distributions of respondents' estimates of public approval for the six policy proposals, shown separately by respondents' own position toward the proposal. The vertical black lines ('measured approval') indicate the corresponding benchmark levels of public approval, measured as the share of respondents in the GESIS Panel.pop who report being rather or fully in favour of the proposal among valid answers. Design weight employed.

Figure B3: Distribution of legitimacy assessments by policy



Note: Design weight employed.

Section C: Additional results for observational analysis of perceived public support and perceived legitimacy

Table C1: Regression table for the results in Figure 3

	(1) Linear	(2) Binned	(3) By issue	(4) By own position
Estimated public approval (continuous): est	0.93*** (0.09)		1.08*** (0.14)	0.87*** (0.17)
<i>Estimated approval bins (ref.: 0-.1)</i>				
≤.2		0.23** (0.09)		
≤.3		0.31*** (0.08)		
≤.4		0.50*** (0.08)		
≤.5		0.50*** (0.07)		
≤.6		0.57*** (0.08)		
≤.7		0.73*** (0.09)		
≤.8		0.74*** (0.09)		
≤.9		0.88*** (0.11)		
≤.1		0.76*** (0.14)		
<i>Estimated approval × issue</i>				
Relax constitutional debt brake # est			-0.03 (0.20)	
Abolish same-sex marriage # est			-0.45 ⁺ (0.23)	
Stop arms deliveries to Ukraine # est			-0.18 (0.25)	
<i>Estimated approval × own position</i>				
rather against # est				-0.09 (0.24)
partly/partly # est				0.67** (0.25)
rather in favour # est				0.38 (0.25)
fully in favour # est				-0.69* (0.27)
<i>Own position (ref.: fully against)</i>				
rather against	1.04*** (0.05)	1.03*** (0.05)	0.93*** (0.09)	1.08*** (0.10)
partly/partly	2.00*** (0.05)	1.99*** (0.05)	2.12*** (0.08)	1.68*** (0.12)
rather in favour	3.01*** (0.06)	3.02*** (0.06)	3.11*** (0.10)	2.81*** (0.14)
fully in favour	3.80*** (0.07)	3.83*** (0.07)	4.00*** (0.12)	4.30*** (0.17)
<i>Issue (ref.: abolish right to asylum)</i>				
Relax constitutional debt brake	0.47*** (0.04)	0.46*** (0.04)	0.24 ⁺ (0.12)	0.46*** (0.04)
Abolish same-sex marriage	0.14** (0.05)	0.15** (0.05)	0.28* (0.12)	0.14** (0.05)

	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.11)	(0.05)
Stop arms deliveries to Ukraine	0.82***	0.81***	1.30***	0.82***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.14)	(0.05)
<i>Own position × issue</i>				
rather against # Relax constitutional debt brake			0.54***	
			(0.15)	
rather against # Abolish same-sex marriage			0.13	
			(0.13)	
rather against # Stop arms deliveries to Ukraine			-0.15	
			(0.15)	
partly/partly # Relax constitutional debt brake			0.14	
			(0.13)	
partly/partly # Abolish same-sex marriage			0.20	
			(0.14)	
partly/partly # Stop arms deliveries to Ukraine			-0.67***	
			(0.15)	
rather in favour # Relax constitutional debt brake			0.20	
			(0.15)	
rather in favour # Abolish same-sex marriage			0.23	
			(0.16)	
rather in favour # Stop arms deliveries to Ukraine			-0.67***	
			(0.17)	
fully in favour # Relax constitutional debt brake			0.23	
			(0.17)	
fully in favour # Abolish same-sex marriage			0.03	
			(0.20)	
fully in favour # Stop arms deliveries to Ukraine			-0.77***	
			(0.19)	
<i>Age group (ref.: 35 or younger)</i>				
age: 36-49	0.04	0.04	0.02	0.05
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
age: 50-64	0.11	0.11	0.09	0.11
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
age: 65-	0.04	0.04	0.00	0.04
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
<i>Gender</i>				
gender: male	0.45***	0.44***	0.42***	0.45***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
<i>Education (ref.: lower secondary)</i>				
education: middle	0.14**	0.13*	0.15**	0.14**
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
education: high	0.34***	0.32***	0.34***	0.33***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
<i>Region</i>				
East	-0.00	-0.00	0.02	-0.00
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Constant	-0.11	-0.14	-0.20 ⁺	-0.09
	(0.09)	(0.11)	(0.12)	(0.11)
Observations	9,415	9,415	9,415	9,415
R ²	0.531	0.531	0.537	0.532

Note: Coefficients from OLS regressions; standard errors clustered at the respondent level are shown in parentheses. The data are stacked at the respondent–issue level. The sample is limited to control observations, that is, legitimacy ratings elicited without prior polling information. The outcome is perceived legitimacy of adopting the proposal, measured on a scale from 0 (“not at all legitimate”) to 6 (“completely legitimate”). Design weights are used. + $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Section D: Additional results for analysis of corrective polling information and perceived legitimacy

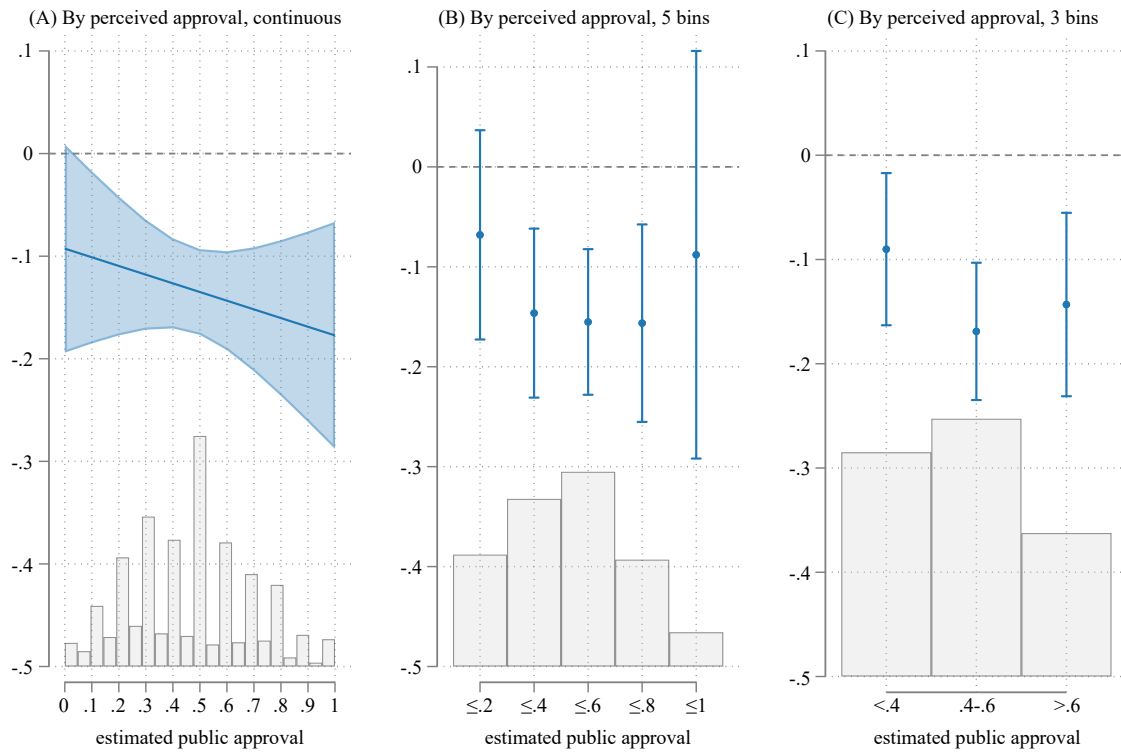
Table D1: Full regression table for results in Table 1

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Treatment	-0.15*** (0.03)	-0.13*** (0.02)	-0.13*** (0.02)	-0.14*** (0.02)	-0.03 (0.05)	-0.06 (0.05)
Estimated public approval (continuous)					0.99*** (0.08)	
Treatment × est (continuous)					-0.22* (0.10)	
<i>Estimated approval bins (ref.: 0-.2)</i>						
≤.4						0.28*** (0.05)
≤.6						0.42*** (0.05)
≤.8						0.63*** (0.06)
≤1						0.71*** (0.09)
<i>Treatment × estimated approval bins</i>						
Treatment X estimated approval: >.2-.4						-0.07 (0.07)
Treatment X estimated approval: >.4-.6						-0.08 (0.06)
Treatment X estimated approval: >.6-.8						-0.14+ (0.07)
Treatment X estimated approval: >.8-1.0						-0.19+ (0.12)
<i>Own position (ref.: fully against)</i>						
rather against		1.09*** (0.04)	1.01*** (0.04)	1.09*** (0.04)	0.96*** (0.04)	0.97*** (0.04)
partly/partly		2.11*** (0.04)	1.99*** (0.04)	2.11*** (0.04)	1.88*** (0.04)	1.88*** (0.04)
rather in favour		3.20*** (0.04)	3.08*** (0.04)	3.07*** (0.04)	2.87*** (0.05)	2.89*** (0.05)
fully in favour		4.18*** (0.05)	4.00*** (0.05)	4.02*** (0.05)	3.71*** (0.05)	3.76*** (0.05)
<i>Issue (ref.: abolish right to asylum)</i>						
Relax constitutional debt brake			0.47*** (0.03)	0.46*** (0.03)	0.49*** (0.03)	0.48*** (0.03)
Abolish same-sex marriage			0.04 (0.03)	0.06* (0.03)	0.13*** (0.03)	0.12*** (0.03)
Stop arms deliveries to Ukraine			0.70*** (0.03)	0.70*** (0.03)	0.75*** (0.03)	0.74*** (0.03)
<i>Age group (ref.: 35 or younger)</i>						
age: 36-49		0.12* (0.06)	0.12* (0.06)		0.12* (0.06)	0.11* (0.06)
age: 50-64		0.18*** (0.05)	0.18*** (0.05)		0.18*** (0.05)	0.18*** (0.05)
age: 65-		0.11+ (0.05)	0.11+ (0.05)		0.10+ (0.05)	0.10+ (0.05)
<i>Gender</i>						
gender: male		0.39*** (0.03)	0.38*** (0.03)		0.40*** (0.03)	0.40*** (0.03)
<i>Education (ref.: lower secondary)</i>						
education: middle		0.10* (0.05)	0.10* (0.05)		0.09* (0.05)	0.09+ (0.05)
education: high		0.25*** (0.05)	0.23*** (0.05)		0.24*** (0.05)	0.23*** (0.05)
<i>Region</i>						
East		0.03	0.04		0.03	0.03

		(0.03)	(0.03)		(0.03)	(0.03)
Constant	2.74***	0.59***	0.39***	0.81***	-0.02	0.09
	(0.02)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.03)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Observations	19,301	18,844	18,844	19,258	18,844	18,844
R2	0.001	0.483	0.503	0.718	0.510	0.509

Note: Coefficients from linear regression models; standard errors clustered at the respondent level are shown in parentheses. The data are stacked at the respondent–issue level. The outcome is perceived legitimacy of adopting the proposal, measured from 0 (“not at all legitimate”) to 6 (“completely legitimate”). Design weights are used. Models 1–4 estimate the average effect of the information treatment across alternative specifications: Model 1 is bivariate; Model 2 adds respondents’ own positions and socio-demographic controls; Model 3 additionally includes issue fixed effects; and Model 4 replaces socio-demographic controls with respondent fixed effects while retaining own-position controls and issue fixed effects. Models 5 and 6 examine moderation by respondents’ pre-treatment estimates of public approval using continuous and binned specifications, respectively. In Model 6, estimated public approval at or below .2 is the reference category. + $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Figure D1: Effect of information treatment across perceived public approval with respondent fixed-effects



Note: Marginal effects of the information treatment on perceived legitimacy across respondents' pre-treatment estimates of public approval, estimated with respondent fixed effects. Panel A is based on a continuous interaction between treatment and estimated public approval. Panel B uses five bins of estimated public approval, and Panel C uses three bins. All models include respondents' own position toward the proposal and issue fixed effects; standard errors are clustered at the respondent level. Whiskers and shaded areas indicate 95% confidence intervals. Histograms show the observed distribution of estimated public approval in the estimation sample. Design weights are used. The underlying regression models are shown in Table D2.

Table D2: Full regression table for results in Figure D1

	(1) Continuous moderation	(2) 5-bin moderation	(3) 3-bin moderation
Treatment	-0.09 ⁺ (0.05)	-0.07 (0.05)	-0.09* (0.04)
Estimated approval (continuous)	1.11*** (0.09)		
<i>Estimated approval bins, 5 bins (ref.: 0–.2)</i>			
Estimated approval: >.2–.4		0.27*** (0.05)	
Estimated approval: >.4–.6		0.47*** (0.05)	
Estimated approval: >.6–.8		0.68*** (0.06)	
Estimated approval: >.8–1.0		0.79*** (0.09)	
<i>Estimated approval bins, 3 bins (ref.: <.4)</i>			
Estimated approval: .4–.6			0.33*** (0.04)
Estimated approval: >.6			0.57*** (0.05)
<i>Treatment × estimated approval</i>			
Treatment X approval (continuous)	-0.08 (0.10)		
Treatment X approval: >.2–.4		-0.08 (0.07)	
Treatment X approval: >.4–.6		-0.09 (0.06)	
Treatment X approval: >.6–.8		-0.09 (0.08)	
Treatment X approval: >.8–1.0		-0.02 (0.12)	
Treatment X approval: .4–.6			-0.08 (0.05)
Treatment X approval: >.6			-0.05 (0.06)
<i>Own position (ref.: fully against)</i>			
Rather against	1.04*** (0.04)	1.04*** (0.04)	1.05*** (0.04)
Partly/partly	1.98*** (0.04)	1.99*** (0.04)	2.01*** (0.04)
Rather in favour	2.82*** (0.05)	2.85*** (0.05)	2.87*** (0.05)
Fully in favour	3.69*** (0.06)	3.72*** (0.06)	3.76*** (0.06)
<i>Issue (ref.: abolish right to asylum)</i>			
Relax constitutional debt brake	0.49*** (0.03)	0.48*** (0.03)	0.48*** (0.03)
Abolish same-sex marriage	0.17*** (0.03)	0.16*** (0.03)	0.15*** (0.03)
Stop arms deliveries to Ukraine	0.75*** (0.03)	0.74*** (0.03)	0.74*** (0.03)
Constant	0.37*** (0.05)	0.50*** (0.04)	0.61*** (0.03)
Observations	19,258	19,258	19,258
R2	0.724	0.723	0.722

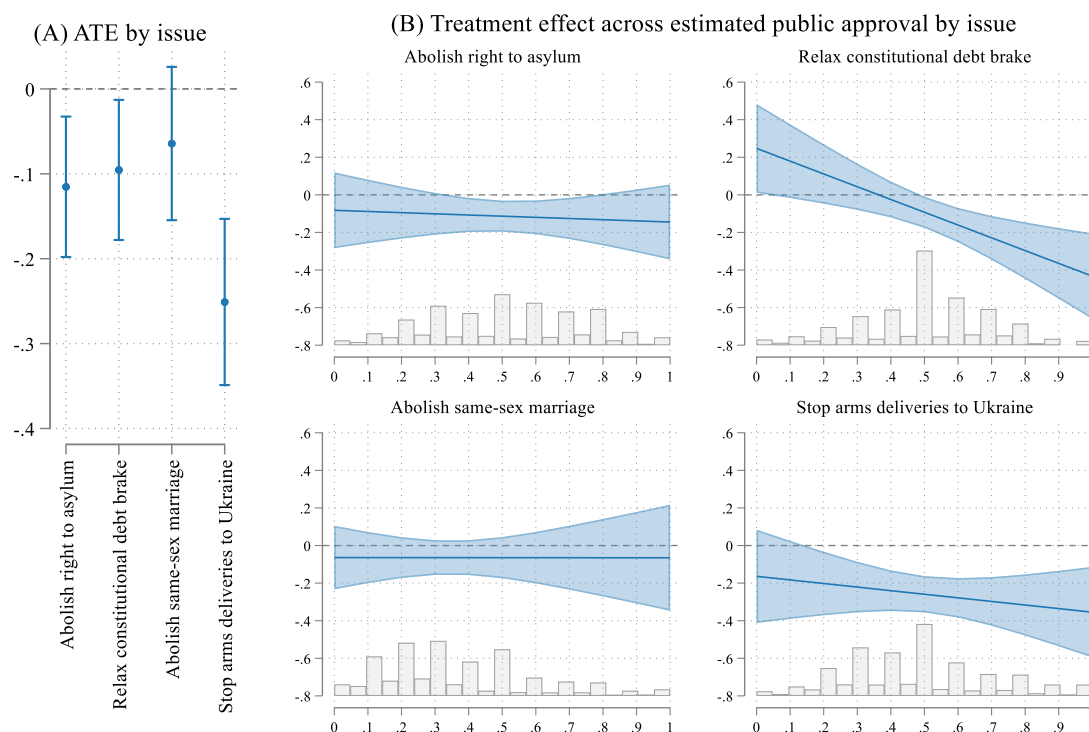
Note: Coefficients from respondent fixed-effects linear regression models; standard errors clustered at the respondent level are shown in parentheses. The data are stacked at the respondent–issue level. The outcome is perceived legitimacy of adopting the proposal, measured from 0 (“not at all legitimate”) to 6 (“completely

legitimate”). All models include respondent fixed effects, respondents’ own position toward the proposal, and issue fixed effects. Model 1 uses a continuous interaction between treatment and estimated public approval. Models 2 and 3 use five-bin and three-bin specifications of estimated public approval, respectively. Design weights are used. + $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Subsection D1: Effect of information treatment across issues

In a supplementary analysis, we examine whether the effect of the information treatment varies across issues. First, we extend the specification of model 3 in Table 1 by interacting the treatment indicator with a categorical variable for the four issues. Second, we augment model 5 with a three-way interaction between the treatment indicator, estimated public approval, and issue. Figure D2 plots the resulting marginal effects of the treatment by issue (panel A) and the marginal treatment effects across levels of estimated public approval by issue (panel B).

Figure D2: Effect of information treatment by issue



Note: Estimated effects of the information treatment on perceived legitimacy by issue. Panel A shows average treatment effects by issue, based on a model interacting the treatment indicator with issue. Panel B shows marginal treatment effects across respondents' pre-treatment estimates of public approval by issue, based on a model interacting the treatment indicator with estimated public approval and issue. Both models include respondents' own positions, socio-demographic controls, and issue indicators; standard errors are clustered at the respondent level. Whiskers and shaded areas indicate 95% confidence intervals. Histograms show the observed distribution of estimated public approval within each issue. Design weights are used. Full regression results are reported in Table D3 below.

Panel A shows that the estimated treatment effect is negative for all four issues (consistent with H2). However, the treatment effect on the perceived legitimacy of abolishing same-sex marriage is not reliably different from zero ($p = 0.16$). By contrast, the estimated average treatment effect for ending arms deliveries to Ukraine—reaching $-.25$ —is notably larger than for the other issues.

The conditional-effect plots in Panel B indicate that, for three of the four issues, the treatment effect becomes more negative as respondents' pretreatment estimates of public approval increase (consistent with H3). The strength of this moderation varies across issues: it is most pronounced for relaxing the debt brake but much weaker for abolishing the right to asylum, where the slope is only modestly negative. For abolishing same-sex marriage, the treatment effect remains statistically indistinguishable from zero even at higher levels of estimated public approval.

One plausible explanation for the cross-issue differences is that the weight citizens assign to public support depends on the relative salience of competing considerations they bring to bear when judging legitimacy. Although we did not preregister issue-specific expectations, our post-hoc interpretation is that treatment effects tend to be weaker where legitimacy judgments are anchored in moral and/or legal considerations and thus evaluated against non-majoritarian standards. Accordingly, many respondents may view abolishing the basic right to asylum or same-sex marriage as illegitimate largely irrespective of public opinion, because such policies are seen as conflicting with fundamental rights.¹ This may be less true for more pragmatic issues such as the debt brake (even though it is also of constitutional rank), where respondents may hold weaker moral priors, making majority support a more relevant cue for what counts as a legitimate policy. The especially large average treatment effect for arms deliveries to Ukraine

¹ This seems to be reflected in the response behavior in that the shares of respondents who would consider a decision to abolish same-sex marriage (41.5%)/the right to asylum (25.5%) “not at all legitimate” are relatively high (see Figure B3).

may reflect that such decisions are commonly associated with executive foreign-policy discretion, which may make legitimacy judgments more responsive to perceived public support. Because these interpretations are post hoc, developing a more systematic account of issue-level heterogeneity remains an important task for future research.

Table D3: Regression table for the results in Figure D2

	(1)	(2)
Own position (ref: fully against)		
rather against	0.96*** (0.038)	0.96*** (0.038)
partly/partly	1.87*** (0.038)	1.87*** (0.038)
rather in favour	2.87*** (0.045)	2.87*** (0.045)
fully in favour	3.71*** (0.054)	3.74*** (0.054)
Estimated public approval	0.88*** (0.069)	1.28*** (0.13)
Information treatment	-0.12** (0.042)	-0.082 (0.10)
Est. public approval X treatment		-0.062 (0.19)
Issue (ref.: abolish right to asylum)		
Relax debt brake	0.49*** (0.035)	0.49*** (0.097)
Abolish same-sex marriage	0.10* (0.046)	0.30** (0.10)
Stop arms deliveries to Ukraine	0.81*** (0.047)	1.22*** (0.12)
Treatment X issue (ref.: abolish right to asylum)		
X Relax debt brake	0.020 (0.052)	0.33* (0.15)
X Abolish same-sex marriage	0.051 (0.070)	0.018 (0.14)
X Stop arms deliveries to Ukraine	-0.14+ (0.071)	-0.082 (0.18)
Est. public approval X issue (ref.: abolish right to asylum)		
X Relax debt brake		-0.013 (0.17)
X Abolish same-sex marriage		-0.39+ (0.21)
X Stop arms deliveries to Ukraine		-0.83*** (0.21)
Est. public approval X treatment X issue (ref.: abolish right to asylum)		
X Relax debt brake		-0.62* (0.28)
X Abolish same-sex marriage		0.061 (0.30)
X Stop arms deliveries to Ukraine		-0.13 (0.32)
Age (ref: -35)		
36-49	0.12* (0.057)	0.11* (0.057)
50-64	0.18*** (0.055)	0.18** (0.055)
65-	0.10+ (0.054)	0.096+ (0.054)
Gender: male	0.40*** (0.030)	0.40*** (0.030)
Education (ref: low)		
middle	0.093* (0.046)	0.096* (0.046)

high	0.24*** (0.046)	0.24*** (0.046)
Eastern Germany	0.029 (0.034)	0.038 (0.034)
Constant	0.025 (0.075)	-0.18 ⁺ (0.10)
Observations	18844	18844
R^2	0.510	0.512

Note: Coefficients from OLS regressions (with standard errors clustered at the respondent-level in parentheses). Stacked data in which observations are at the individual-issue level. Outcome variable measures how legitimate respondents would consider a political decision to adopt the policy in question on a scale from 0 (“not at all legitimate”) to 6 (“completely legitimate”). Design weight employed. ⁺ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Subsection D2: Effect of information treatment across perceived public approval by further moderators

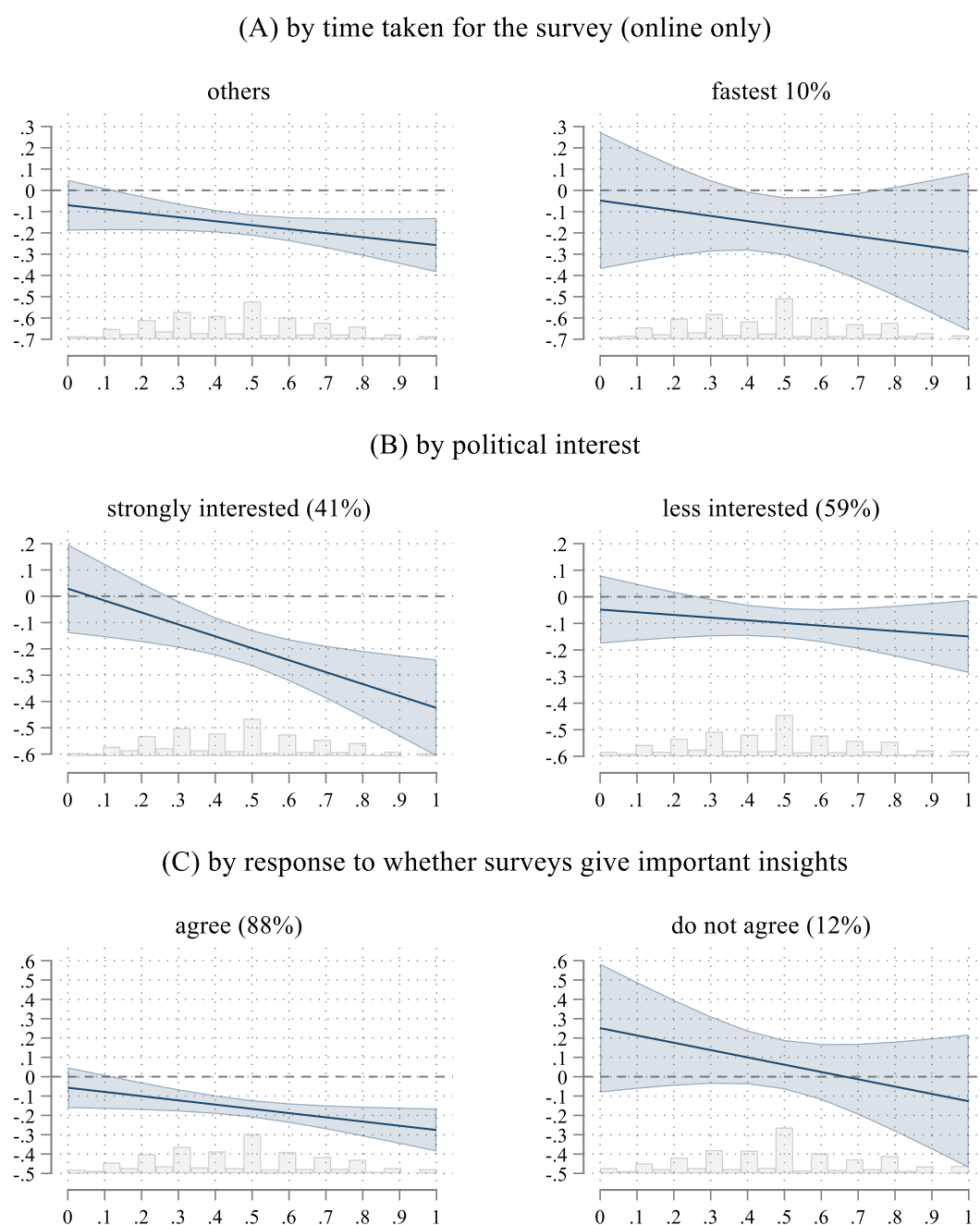
To further explore heterogeneity in the treatment effect, we examine three non-preregistered moderators: speeding, political interest, and respondents' general attitudes toward opinion polls. We focus on these variables as plausible sources of heterogeneity related to attention to the vignette (speeding and political interest) and to the credibility assigned to the information (attitudes toward polls). We dichotomize each measure (as described below) and estimate models that include three-way interactions among the moderator, the treatment indicator, and estimated public approval. Figure D3 displays the marginal effect of the information treatment across levels of estimated public approval separately for each value of the three moderators. We discuss the results in turn.

First, the effect of the information treatment may be attenuated among respondents who paid limited attention to the vignette. To assess this, we use overall survey duration in wave 1d as a moderator (available for online respondents), coding the fastest 10% as speeders. While the estimates for speeders are much noisier—consistent with the smaller group size—the expected pattern emerges as well. We therefore conclude that general inattentiveness is unlikely to be a major concern.

Second, we examined whether treatment effects vary by political interest. We recoded self-reported political interest (from wave 1a) into a dummy for (very) strong political interest. The pattern from the main analysis is also evident among respondents with lower levels of political interest, but the treatment effects are substantially larger among the highly interested—reaching up to -0.42 among those who had (incorrectly) assumed public support to be high. Overall, this pattern is consistent with the interpretation that politically interested respondents are more likely to attend to and incorporate polling information when forming legitimacy judgments, whereas less interested respondents respond less strongly (or more noisily) to the same cue.

Third, some respondents may not have updated their beliefs because they did not regard the poll figures as credible indicators of public opinion. Because we did not include a direct credibility check for the vignette, we instead use a measure of respondents' general attitudes toward surveys. At the beginning of wave 1d, respondents were asked whether they "think that important insights can be gained from surveys". 88% tended to agree, suggesting that generalized skepticism toward surveys is uncommon among panelists. When we use agreement with this statement as a moderator, we find clear conditional treatment effects among respondents who express trust in surveys. Among those who do not agree, by contrast, we find no evidence of a (negative) treatment effect. Although estimates for this much smaller subgroup are imprecise, the results are consistent with the interpretation that polling information affects legitimacy judgments primarily among respondents who view surveys as informative.

Figure D3: Effect of information treatment across perceived public approval by further moderators



Note: Marginal effects of the information treatment on perceived legitimacy across respondents' pre-treatment estimates of public approval, shown separately by the two values of each moderator. Estimates are based on three separate models, each interacting the treatment indicator with estimated public approval and the respective dichotomous moderator. Specifications otherwise correspond to Model 5 in Table 1 and include respondents' own positions, issue fixed effects, and socio-demographic controls; standard errors are clustered at the respondent level. Shaded areas indicate 95% confidence intervals. Histograms show the observed distribution of estimated public approval within each moderator group. Design weights are used. Full regression results are reported in Table D4 below.

Table D4: Regression table for the results in Figure D3

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Own position (ref: fully against)			
rather against	0.97*** (0.042)	0.97*** (0.039)	0.96*** (0.038)
partly/partly	1.89*** (0.042)	1.88*** (0.040)	1.87*** (0.038)
rather in favour	2.89*** (0.050)	2.86*** (0.047)	2.87*** (0.045)
fully in favour	3.81*** (0.057)	3.70*** (0.056)	3.71*** (0.054)
Estimated public approval	0.95*** (0.095)	1.15*** (0.13)	1.02*** (0.086)
Information treatment	-0.070 (0.061)	0.029 (0.086)	-0.057 (0.054)
Est. public approval X treatment	-0.19 (0.11)	-0.45** (0.17)	-0.22* (0.10)
Response time: fast	0.13 (0.16)		
Response time: fast X estimated public approval	-0.39 (0.29)		
Response time: fast X treatment	0.022 (0.18)		
Response time: fast X est. public approval X treatment	-0.053 (0.35)		
Political interest: lower		-0.13 (0.087)	
Political interest: lower X estimated public approval		-0.12 (0.16)	
Political interest: lower X treatment		-0.077 (0.11)	
Political interest: lower X est. public approval X treatment		0.35+ (0.21)	
Surveys give insights: not agree			-0.077 (0.12)
Surveys give insights: not agree X estimated public approval			-0.060 (0.23)
Surveys give insights: not agree X treatment			0.31+ (0.18)
Surveys give insights: not agree X est. public approval X treatment			-0.16 (0.34)
Age (ref: -35)			
36-49	0.12+ (0.059)	0.12* (0.060)	0.12* (0.057)
50-64	0.17** (0.060)	0.16** (0.058)	0.18** (0.055)
65-	0.10+ (0.060)	0.075 (0.058)	0.10+ (0.054)
Gender: male	0.44*** (0.034)	0.37*** (0.032)	0.41*** (0.030)
Education (ref: low)			
middle	0.10+ (0.056)	0.043 (0.049)	0.085+ (0.047)
high	0.25*** (0.054)	0.19*** (0.049)	0.23*** (0.046)
Eastern Germany	0.0048 (0.039)	0.031 (0.035)	0.027 (0.034)
Issue (ref.: abolish right to asylum)			

Relax debt brake	0.51*** (0.031)	0.50*** (0.028)	0.49*** (0.027)
Abolish same-sex marriage	0.14*** (0.032)	0.14*** (0.029)	0.13*** (0.028)
Stop arms deliveries to Ukraine	0.79*** (0.034)	0.74*** (0.030)	0.75*** (0.030)
Constant	-0.031 (0.092)	0.099 (0.10)	-0.017 (0.078)
Observations	14627	16894	18668
R^2	0.522	0.508	0.510

Note: Coefficients from OLS regressions (with standard errors clustered at the respondent-level in parentheses). Stacked data in which observations are at the individual-issue level. Outcome variable measures how legitimate respondents would consider a political decision to adopt the policy in question on a scale from 0 (“not at all legitimate”) to 6 (“completely legitimate”). Design weight employed. ⁺ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Section E: Additional results for populist attitudes

We pre-registered the following hypotheses regarding populist attitudes:

H_{populist attitudes}: The stronger an individual's tendency to overestimate public agreement with their own views, the higher they score on populist attitudes (as measured in the subsequent wave).

We thereby sought to replicate the association between false consensus beliefs and populist attitudes reported by Steiner et al. (2026), while using a different measure of populist attitudes.

MEASUREMENT OF POPULIST ATTITUDES: Whereas Steiner et al. (2026) used the scale by Akkerman et al. (2014), we use the scale from Schulz et al. (2018). This scale has the advantage that it allows for a clear distinction between three subdimensions of populist attitudes: *anti-elitism, homogeneity of the people, sovereignty of the people*. This scale was included in the subsequent wave of the GESIS Panel.pop (wave “ma”, fielding period 19 February–15 April 2025), after our measurement of false consensus beliefs (wave “ld”, fielding period 20 November 2024–14 January 2025). The included items are listed in Table E1.

Table E1: Measurement of populist attitudes

Subdimension	Item (1 = strongly disagree ... 5 = strongly agree)
Anti-elitism	“Politicians talk too much and act too little.”
Anti-elitism	“The differences between the people and the so-called elite are much greater than the differences within the people.”
Anti-elitism (reversed)	“Politicians care about what ordinary people think.”
Homogeneity of the people	“Ordinary citizens are united by their good and honest character.”
Homogeneity of the people	“Ordinary citizens pull together.”
Homogeneity of the people	“Ordinary citizens share the same values and interests.”
Sovereignty of the people	“The people should have the last word on important political issues by means of a referendum.”
Sovereignty of the people	“The people, not the politicians, should make the most important political decisions.”

Sovereignty of the people	“The politicians in parliament must follow the will of the people.”
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Our preferred measure of populist attitudes (as pre-registered) uses the multiplicative aggregation rule outlined in Wuttke et al. (2020, see supplement 2). Thus, we first re-coded all items such that higher values stand for more populist orientations (if necessary) and then recoded them to range from 0 to 1. Second, we computed the mean per populist subdimension (anti-elitism, homogeneity, sovereignty). Third, we multiplied the three subdimension scores with each other to obtain a populist attitude score. We also report results for a simple mean index, i.e. the mean value of the three subdimensions, as well as results for the three subdimensions separately.

MEASUREMENT OF FALSE CONSENSUS BELIEFS: We measure an individual’s tendency to hold false consensus beliefs using the procedure outlined in Steiner et al. (2026). To that end, we used the six issues for which we elicited both respondents’ own positions and their estimates of public opinion; descriptive distributions for these issues are reported in Appendix Figure B2. Steiner et al. (2026) propose four measures, and we considered all four of those. We used the *mean own-direction perceptual error* as our main measure (as they do in their study). This entails the following: For each individual and for each proposal on which this individual holds a position against or in favour, we, first, compute the absolute difference, or perceptual “error”, between estimated and actual public opinion (expressed as shares, that is scaled between 0 and 1). “Actual public opinion” was computed based on the actual share of respondents in the survey who indicated to be (absolutely or rather) in favour of the respective policy proposals (excluding don’t know and item nonresponse, and with weights applied). If the error is in the “wrong” direction (i.e., underestimation if individuals are in favour, overestimation if individuals are against), we set this value to zero. We then took the average of the resulting values per individual across issues. This gives a straightforward, rather intuitive and relatively easy to

interpret measure of how strongly perceptions of public opinion are biased in the direction of an individual's own position. We discuss the alternative measures below (see caption of Figure E1).

METHOD: To test $H_{populist\ attitudes}$ we ran OLS regressions, where we regressed populist attitudes on false consensus beliefs and a set of control variables. As control variables, we included a set of basic socio-demographic variables (age, gender, education, living in Eastern Germany), self-reported political interest (from wave ma) and positions on the six policy proposals (both scaled from zero to one). This is the exact same set as used in Steiner et al. (2026).

RESULTS: The results for our main measure of false consensus beliefs (*mean own-direction perceptual error*) are shown in Table E2. We find a statistically significant positive association for both measures of populist attitudes, our preferred multiplicative measure (model 1) as well as the mean index (model 2). The association is also positive for the subdimension scores, with $p < 0.05$ for anti-elitism (model 3), sovereignty of the people (model 4), and homogeneity of the people (model 5).

Table E2: Regressing populist attitudes on false consensus beliefs (main measure)

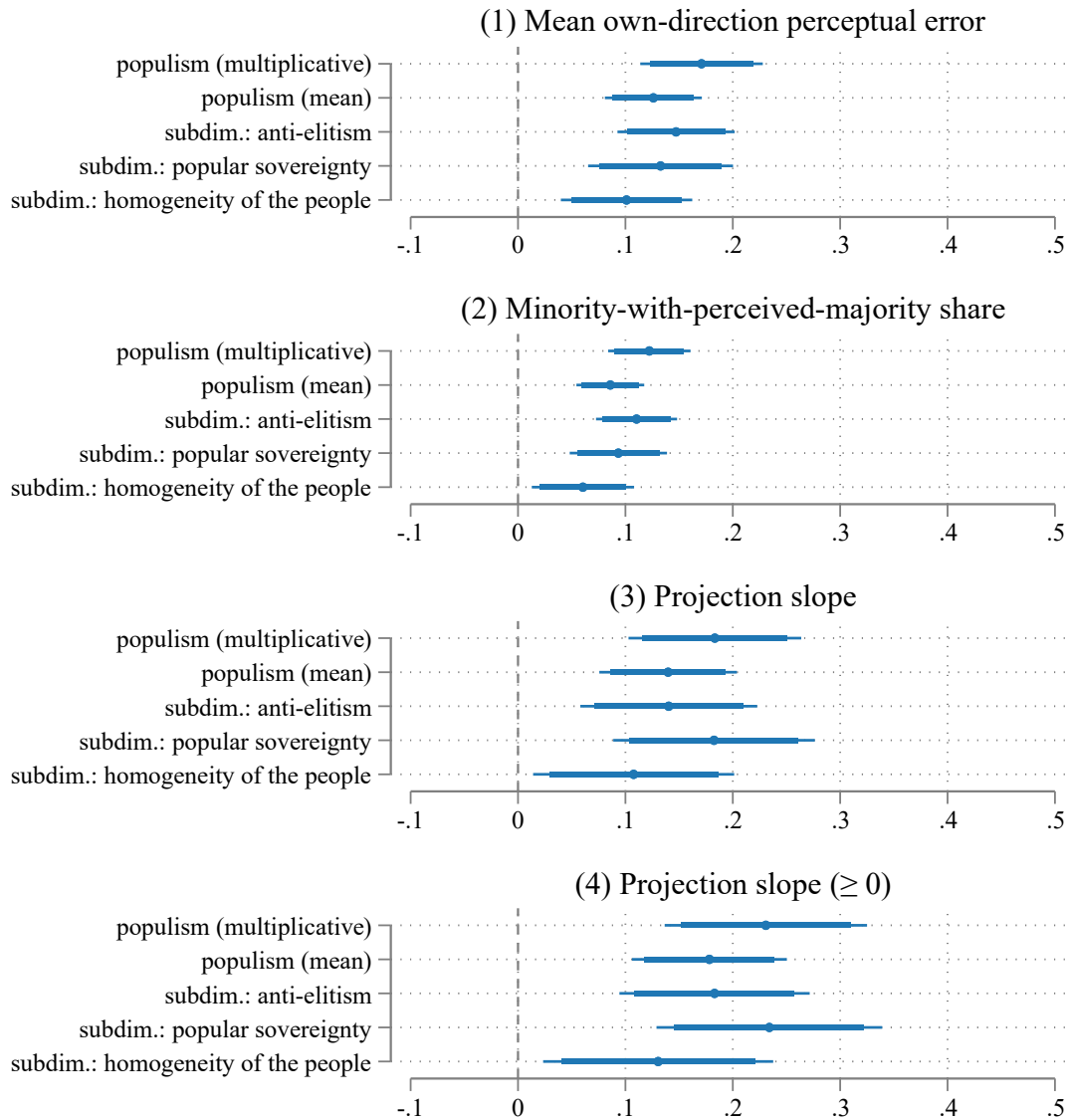
	(1) Multiplicative	(2) Mean index	(3) Subdim.: Anti- elitism	(4) Subdim.: Popular sovereignty	(5) Subdim.: Homogenous people
False consensus beliefs (FCB)	0.17*** (0.029)	0.13*** (0.023)	0.15*** (0.028)	0.13*** (0.034)	0.10** (0.031)
Age: 36-49	0.00077 (0.011)	-0.0053 (0.0094)	-0.011 (0.012)	-0.021 (0.014)	0.015 (0.015)
Age: 50-64	0.00077 (0.010)	-0.0040 (0.0090)	-0.013 (0.011)	-0.024+ (0.013)	0.025+ (0.014)
Age: 65-	0.012 (0.010)	0.0071 (0.0092)	0.0052 (0.011)	-0.026+ (0.013)	0.043** (0.015)
Male	0.015** (0.0050)	0.014** (0.0043)	0.012* (0.0054)	0.022*** (0.0065)	0.0062 (0.0066)
Education: middle	-0.016* (0.0079)	-0.015* (0.0060)	0.0034 (0.0076)	-0.020* (0.0095)	-0.029*** (0.0087)
Education: high	-0.036*** (0.0076)	-0.037*** (0.0060)	-0.021** (0.0078)	-0.047*** (0.0093)	-0.045*** (0.0082)
East	0.020*** (0.0060)	0.016*** (0.0047)	0.0087 (0.0060)	0.031*** (0.0073)	0.0055 (0.0074)
Political interest	0.014 (0.012)	-0.0032 (0.0093)	-0.026* (0.012)	0.018 (0.014)	-0.0073 (0.014)
Choose own gender entry	-0.0063 (0.0089)	-0.0083 (0.0079)	-0.043*** (0.0100)	-0.0019 (0.012)	0.020+ (0.011)
Re-introduce tax on wealth	0.025* (0.0098)	0.018* (0.0081)	0.045*** (0.0099)	0.031** (0.012)	-0.021+ (0.012)
Relax debt brake	-0.067*** (0.010)	-0.066*** (0.0085)	-0.066*** (0.011)	-0.088*** (0.013)	-0.042** (0.013)
Abolish the basic right to asylum	0.082*** (0.010)	0.082*** (0.0089)	0.11*** (0.011)	0.12*** (0.013)	0.016 (0.012)
Stop arms deliveries to Ukraine	0.081*** (0.0082)	0.076*** (0.0069)	0.064*** (0.0087)	0.14*** (0.011)	0.022* (0.010)
Abolish same-sex marriage	0.025* (0.012)	0.020* (0.0087)	-0.013 (0.011)	0.035** (0.013)	0.034* (0.014)
Constant	0.14*** (0.016)	0.54*** (0.013)	0.63*** (0.017)	0.50*** (0.020)	0.49*** (0.021)
Observations	4350	4350	4408	4430	4405
R ²	0.257	0.288	0.215	0.257	0.067

Note: Coefficients from OLS regression with standard errors in parentheses. + $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. False consensus beliefs are measured by *mean own-direction perceptual error*. Reference categories: age: -35, female, education: low, Western Germany. Political interest and issue items scaled from zero to one. Design weight employed.

In Figure E1, we report the coefficient for false consensus beliefs using the four alternative measures described in Steiner et al. (2026). The top panel is based on the five models reported in Table E2. The panels below are from the same models but with the measure of false consensus beliefs replaced by the respective alternative. Figure E1 shows that the positive association between false consensus beliefs and populist attitudes is robust across all four operationalizations. Each measure is significantly associated with both aggregate indices and

all three subdimensions of populist attitudes (all $p < .05$).

Figure E1: Association between false-consensus beliefs and populist attitudes (with alternative measures of false consensus beliefs)



Note: Regression coefficients (with 95% and 90% confidence intervals) for different measures of false consensus beliefs (based on Steiner et al. 2026) with different measures of populist attitudes (based on the scale by Schulz et al. 2018). The first panel plots the coefficients from models 1 to 5 in Table E2. The three panels below are based on similar models but with different measures of false consensus beliefs. The measures are:

(1) *Mean own-direction perceptual error*: For each issue, compute $(\text{perceived} - \text{measured approval}) \times \text{own position}$ (-1 against, 0 neutral, $+1$ in favor); keep only positive values (favor $\rightarrow$ overestimate; oppose $\rightarrow$ underestimate), set negative values to 0 , then average across issues with non-neutral own positions.

(2) *Minority-with-perceived-majority share*: Share of issues where a respondent holds the minority position (vs. the weighted sample distribution) and nevertheless believes their side has majority support (>0.50 if they favor the

proposal; <0.50 if they oppose it), standardized by the number of issues with valid self-placement and perception data.

(3) *Projection slope*: Respondent-specific random-slope estimate from a multilevel model predicting perception error (perceived – measured approval) from own position (–1 against, 0 neutral, +1 in favor) across issue–respondent observations; larger positive slopes indicate stronger false-consensus-style projection.

(4) *Projection slope (≥ 0)*: Same projection-slope measure as above, but all negative slopes are recoded to 0 so the measure captures only *false-consensus-direction* projection (not “reverse” bias).

Section F: Additional results for satisfaction with democracy

In our survey, we embedded a secondary question-order experiment on satisfaction with democracy (SWD). Within each of the two experimental groups described in the main text, respondents were additionally assigned either to a condition in which SWD was measured before the legitimacy block or to a condition in which SWD was measured after the legitimacy block, including the information vignettes. Our reasoning was that exposure to the legitimacy block and the polling information might lead respondents to recognize that the status quo—challenging proposals did not command majority support. This, in turn, could result in more favorable assessments of the responsiveness of the status quo and, consequently, higher satisfaction with the functioning of democracy. Analogous to H3 in the main text, we expected this effect to be stronger among respondents who initially overestimated public approval for the status quo—challenging proposals, because these respondents had a stronger reason to update their views in response to the information signal. Accordingly, we pre-registered the following two hypotheses:

H_{effect of information treatment on SWD}: Respondents who were asked about their overall satisfaction with democracy after having received the information treatments reported higher levels of satisfaction with democracy than those asked about satisfaction with democracy before.

H_{conditional effect of information treatment on SWD}: The difference in reported levels of satisfaction with democracy between the before and after conditions is stronger for those who (incorrectly) assumed public approval to be high (on those issues for which they received the information treatment).

To test these hypotheses, we returned to the individual-level dataset, since SWD was measured once per respondent. We first regressed SWD on a binary indicator for whether the question was administered before or after the legitimacy block. This indicator equals 0 when SWD was

measured before the legitimacy questions and 1 when it was measured after the legitimacy block and information vignettes. To increase precision, we additionally included lagged SWD as measured in wave “1a” of the GESIS Panel, the first wave of 2024, as well as socio-demographic controls for age, gender, education, and residence in eastern Germany. To test the conditional expectation, we interacted the before-after indicator with respondents’ prior perceived public approval for the two proposals for which they received polling information. We measured this moderator as the mean of respondents’ estimated public approval across the two treated proposals. Table F1 reports the results.

Table F1: Regressions of satisfaction with democracy

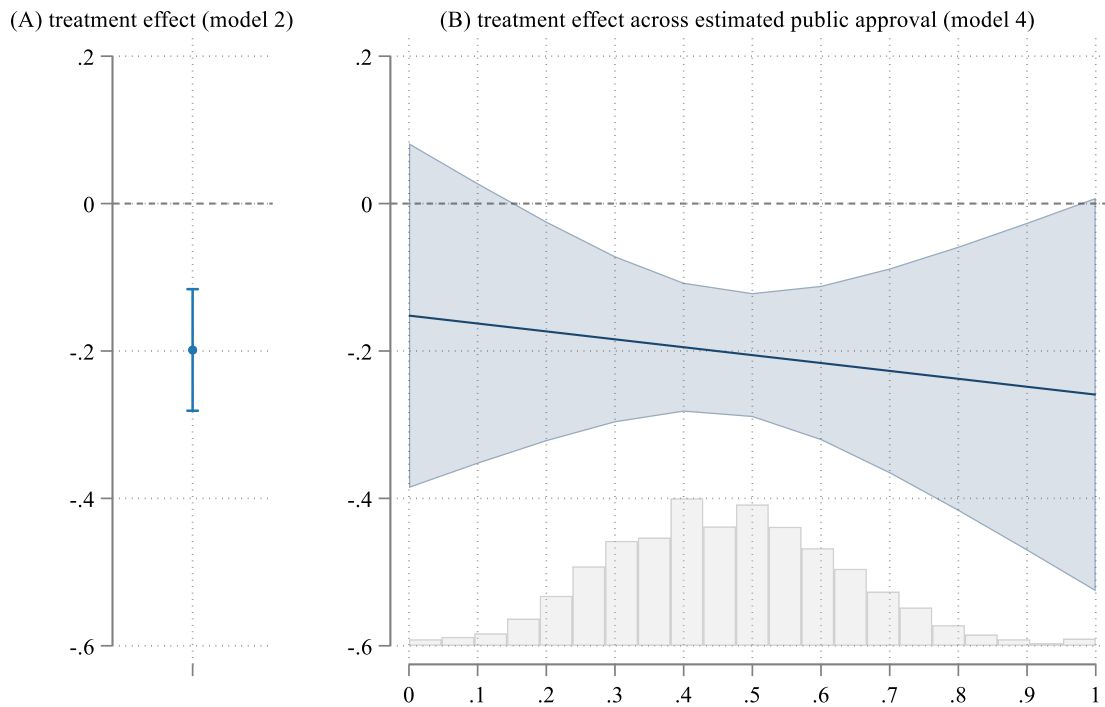
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
SWD after treatment	-0.19*** (0.054)	-0.20*** (0.042)	-0.12 (0.15)	-0.15 (0.12)
Mean estimated public approval			-1.68*** (0.22)	-0.45* (0.18)
SWD after treatment X mean est. public appr.			-0.17 (0.31)	-0.11 (0.24)
Age (ref: <35)				
36-49		-0.15+ (0.089)		-0.14 (0.089)
50-64		-0.066 (0.086)		-0.060 (0.086)
65+		0.028 (0.088)		0.036 (0.088)
Gender: male		0.065 (0.042)		0.061 (0.042)
Education (ref: low)				
middle		0.035 (0.076)		0.030 (0.076)
high		0.21** (0.076)		0.19* (0.075)
Eastern Germany		-0.19*** (0.053)		-0.17** (0.053)
SWD in t-1 (ref: very dissatisfied)				
rather dissatisfied		1.17*** (0.079)		1.16*** (0.079)
partly/partly		2.02*** (0.074)		1.99*** (0.074)
rather satisfied		2.89*** (0.072)		2.84*** (0.074)
very satisfied		3.31*** (0.18)		3.26*** (0.18)
Constant	3.12***	1.09***	3.89***	1.32***

	(0.039)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.15)
Observations	4216	4216	4216	4216
R^2	0.0033	0.40	0.038	0.41

Note: Coefficients from OLS regressions. Data are on the respondent level. Outcome variable measures how satisfied individuals are with how democracy is working in Germany on a scale from 0 (“very dissatisfied”) to 6 (“very satisfied”). Estimated public approval refers to the mean across the two treated issues. + $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Contrary to our expectation, measuring SWD after the legitimacy block is associated with lower, not higher, reported satisfaction. The estimated difference is -0.19 in the bivariate model and -0.20 after adjusting for lagged SWD and socio-demographic controls. The interaction terms in Models 3 and 4 are also negative, although imprecisely estimated, again running counter to the pre-registered expectation. We therefore find no evidence that exposure to the legitimacy block and information vignettes increased satisfaction with democracy among respondents who had initially overestimated public support for the treated proposals.

Figure F1: Effect of measuring satisfaction with democracy after the legitimacy block



Note: Marginal effects with 95% confidence intervals from Models 2 and 4 in Table F1. Panel A shows the average effect of measuring satisfaction with democracy after, rather than before, the legitimacy block. Panel B shows how this effect varies with respondents’ mean pre-treatment estimate of public approval across the two treated

proposals. The histogram shows the observed distribution of this moderator.

Figure F1 visualizes the effects of interest. The left panel shows the average marginal effect based on Model 2, while the right panel shows the marginal effect across values of estimated public approval based on Model 4. The figure shows that measuring SWD after the legitimacy block is associated with lower reported satisfaction with democracy. The right panel suggests that this negative association becomes somewhat larger as estimated public approval increases, but the difference is small and the interaction is not statistically significant.

Because we had theorized the opposite effect, any interpretation of this pattern must remain tentative. One possibility is that respondents reacted less to what the information implied about governmental responsiveness and more to its social-comparison implications. Learning that one's preferred proposal lacks majority support may be discouraging and could reduce satisfaction with how democracy is working. By contrast, the corresponding "good news" for respondents on the majority side—that most citizens share their view—may elicit a weaker response, either because it is unsurprising or because being in the majority provides little additional gratification. Under this asymmetry, with stronger disappointment among those discovering that they are in the minority than uplift among those learning that they are in the majority, a negative average effect is conceivable even if most respondents are on the majority side.

Another possibility is that the effect is driven less by the polling information itself than by respondents' reactions to evaluating the legitimacy of the proposals. Exposure to controversial status quo-challenging proposals may have reduced satisfaction with democracy among both opponents and supporters, albeit for different reasons. Opponents may have reacted negatively to the mere prospect that such proposals could be adopted, raising concerns about the direction

of democracy. Supporters, in turn, may have been reminded that their preferred changes have not yet been implemented and, when confronted with low public support, may have inferred that these changes are politically unlikely. This could have prompted frustration with democratic outcomes.

Relatedly, the difference may reflect question order rather than the information vignettes themselves. For respondents who answered the SWD question before the legitimacy block, the items on perceived public opinion had been asked immediately beforehand. For respondents who answered the SWD question after the legitimacy block, by contrast, the intervening legitimacy questions and information vignettes may have displaced this earlier cue. The pre-treatment public-opinion items may have temporarily increased satisfaction with democracy by making respondents' often overly optimistic perceptions of public agreement salient. Given the false-consensus pattern documented above, many respondents project their own views onto the public and therefore believe that most people think as they do. Bringing this perceived like-mindedness to mind could foster a more positive assessment of how democracy is working.

Ultimately, it is difficult to determine why asking about SWD at different points in the questionnaire yields systematically different levels of reported satisfaction. What is clear, however, is that our expectation that public-opinion information would increase satisfaction with democracy is not supported. One takeaway is that theoretical arguments about how such information affects democratic satisfaction should account for at least two potentially competing channels: first, the social-comparison signal about whether public opinion aligns with one's own views; and second, the implication of the information for perceived responsiveness, that is, whether current policy outcomes appear consistent with majority preferences.

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