

Responsive or Responsible? The Reputational Cost of Political Compromises *

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With electoral fragmentation on the rise political compromises are more than ever daily necessities. Yet, while the abstract democratic principle of political compromise finds broad support, voters have been shown to reject compromise when confronted with specific compromises between political parties. Compromises obscure a party's policy reputation, which can negatively affect electoral support. During coalition negotiations political parties therefore face a trade-off between responsiveness to their voters and responsibility in government formation. This begs the question: Do compromises confront parties with reputational costs? Using a pre-registered observational study of 6 Western European countries as a proof of concept, we show that being less willing to accept compromise coincides with lower levels of trust in political parties. To examine more closely whether responsive or responsible party behaviour in coalition negotiations is decisive for voters' party trust, we further conduct a pre-registered survey experiment in Germany fielded just after the 2021 parliamentary elections (N=8,000). This allows us to 1) isolate the effect of parties' negotiation position from success or failure in the negotiations; and 2) delve into the mechanisms that drive voters' party trust after (not) accepting compromises. Our study sheds light on the reputational costs associated with accepting compromises in coalition negotiations. Thereby, our study has important implications for the study of political representation.

Keywords: Experiment, Populist Attitudes

Introduction

Acceptance of Political Compromises

H1 (Steadfast): *All else equal, in-partisans view their party more positively when a party remains steadfast in coalition talks, compared to accepting a compromise.*

H2 (Outcome): *All else equal, in-partisans view their party more positively when coalition talks continue compared to stalling of the coalition talks.*

H3 (Compromise): *All else equal, in-partisans view their party that accepts a compromise more positively when coalition talks continue compared to stalling of the coalition talks.*

H4 (Principledness): *All else equal, the more principled a respondent is, the higher the evaluation of a steadfast party.*

H5 (Mutual Distrust): *All else equal, the more distrusting a respondent is, the higher the evaluation of a steadfast party.*

*Replication files are available on the author's Github account (<https://github.com/MarikenvdVelden/willingness-to-accept-compromises>). **Current version:** November 12, 2021; **Corresponding author:**

Data, Measurement & Method

Observational Study

Data

Measurement

Method

Experimental Study

Data

The survey experiment is conducted in Germany between the 13th of October 2021 and the 11th of November 2021. The sample, recruited through Respondi, consists of 8,000 participants (based on the power analysis presented in Figure ??) of 18 years and older. Respondi works with opt-in respondents, so we have implemented quota on age, gender, and education. Moreover, we measure some more demographic background variables (see Section 3.2). Balance checks are conducted to demonstrate whether certain categories are over represented in a certain experimental group (see Section 3.2.3, Figure .1). The study has been approved by the Research Ethics Review Committee of the *Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam* (see the approval [here](#)). To ensure good quality of our data, two attention checks are included. Each respondent failing the attention check will be excluded and replaced with another “good” response.

Measurement

Dependent Variables

Experimental Conditions

Covariates

Method

Figure .1: Balance Checks



Table .1: Descriptive Information

Variables	Mean Value	St. Dev	Min. Value	Max. Value
Treatment: Party Compromised	0.55	0.50	0	1
Employment	4.14	3.86	0	11
Income	6.39	3.11	0	13
DV: Trust	5.41	2.41	0	10
DV: Credibility	5.31	2.41	0	10
DV: Representation	5.21	2.57	0	10
Principledness (1)	9.84	1.54	2	14
Principledness (2)	2.38	1.68	0	4
Mutual Trust	4.86	2.03	0	10
Manipulation Checks	1.44	0.67	0	2
Treatment: Coalition Talks	0.51	0.50	0	1
Continue				
Political Knowledge	2.17	1.07	0	4
Populist Attitudes	3.54	0.79	1	5
Position Speed Limit	0.53	0.50	0	1
Position Top Tax	0.57	0.49	0	1
Position Legalization Cannabis	0.53	0.50	0	1
Salience Speed Limit	4.23	3.52	0	11
Salience Top Tax	4.79	3.56	0	11
Salience Legalization Cannabis	3.99	3.42	0	11
Political Interest	2.91	1.05	1	5
Ideology	4.76	1.77	0	10
Partisan Strength	2.93	1.01	1	5

Costs of Compromises for Responsive and Responsible Parties

Pre-Registered Hypotheses

Observational

Experiments

Explorations

Figure .2: Results: H1 and H2

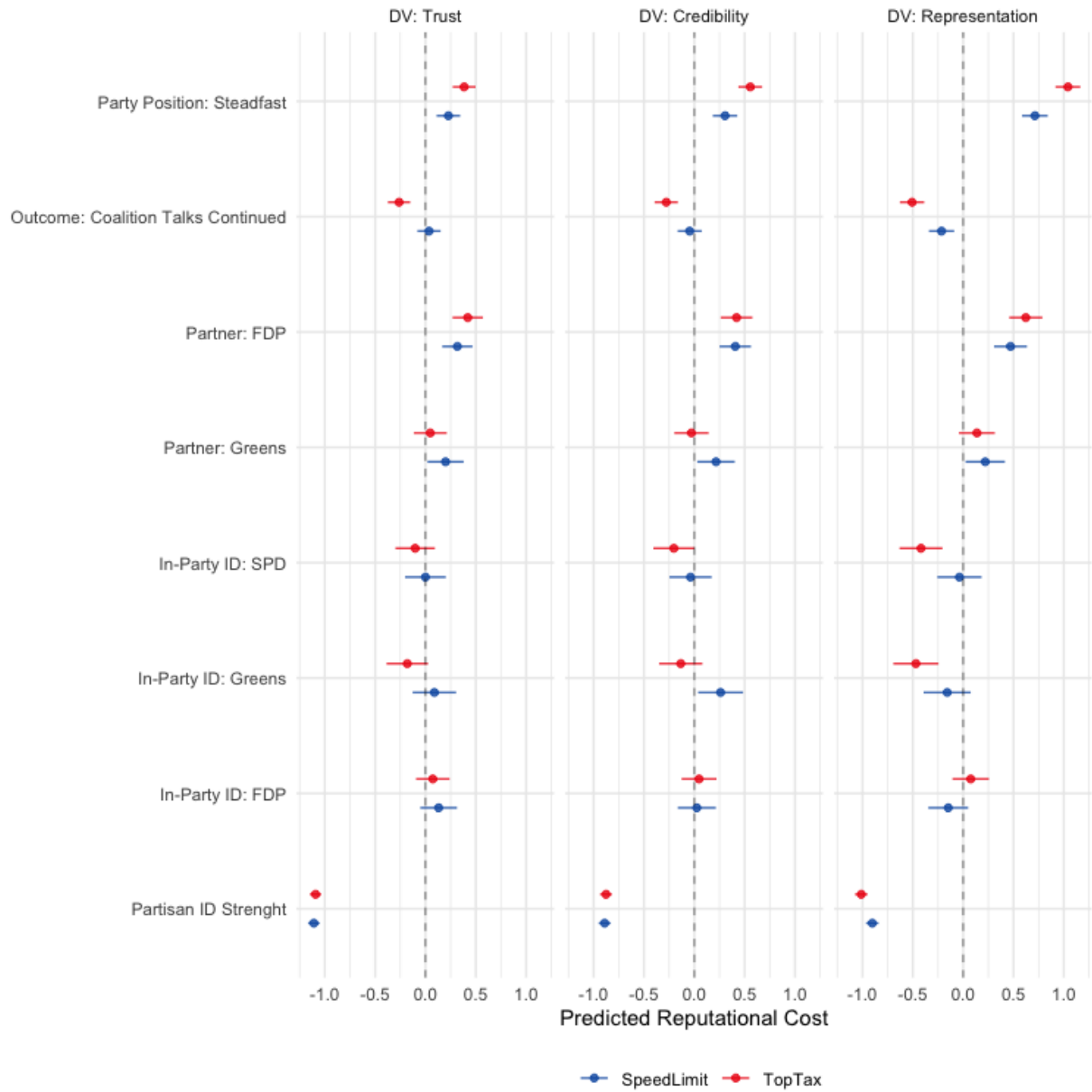


Figure .3: Results: H3

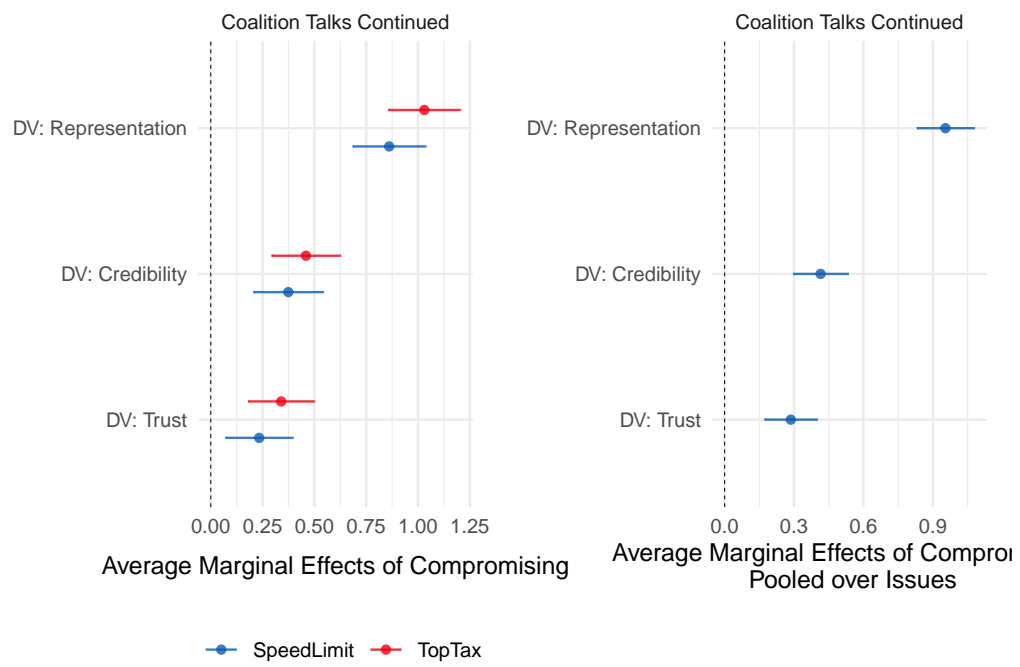


Figure .4: Results: H4 pooled

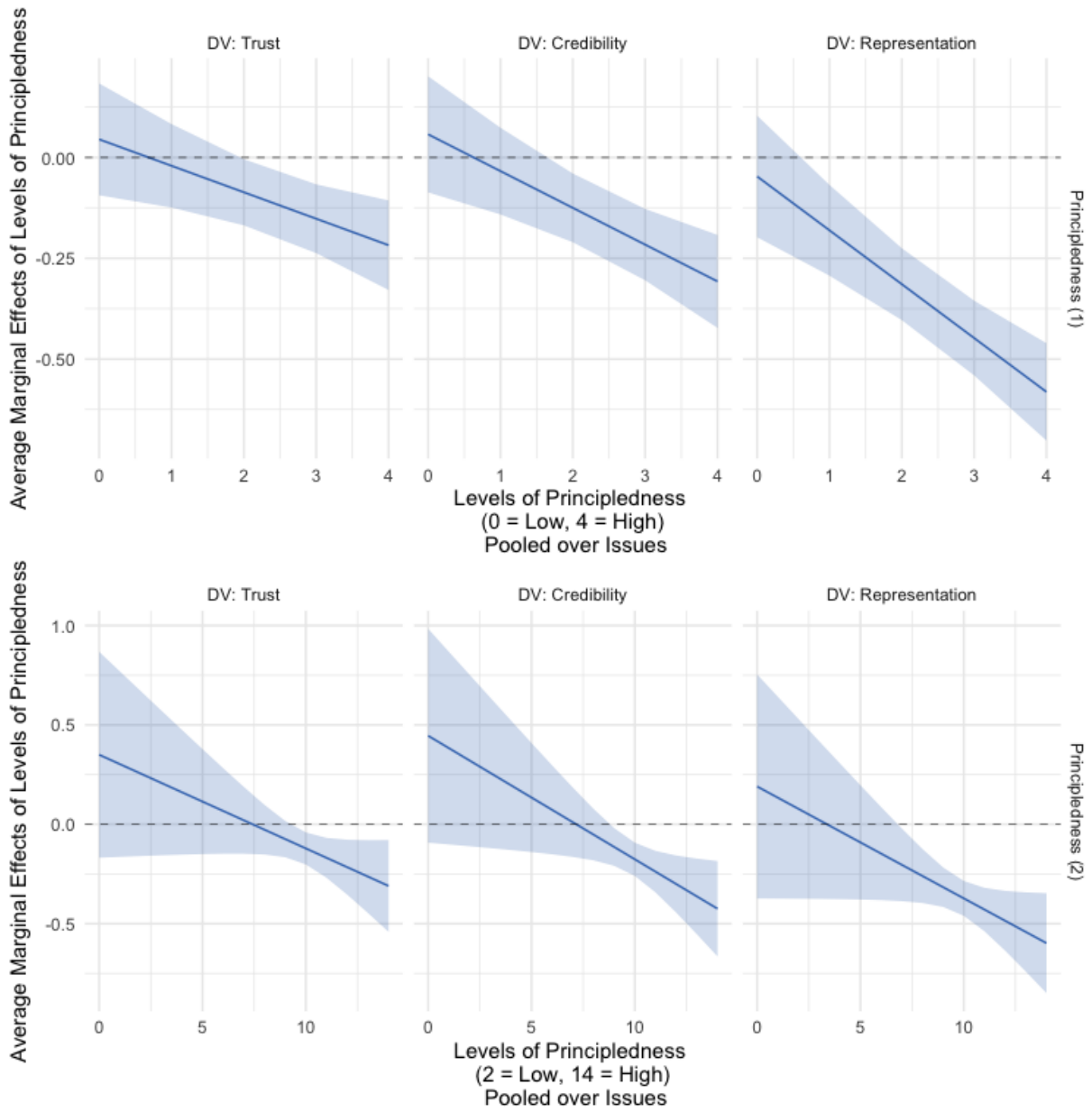
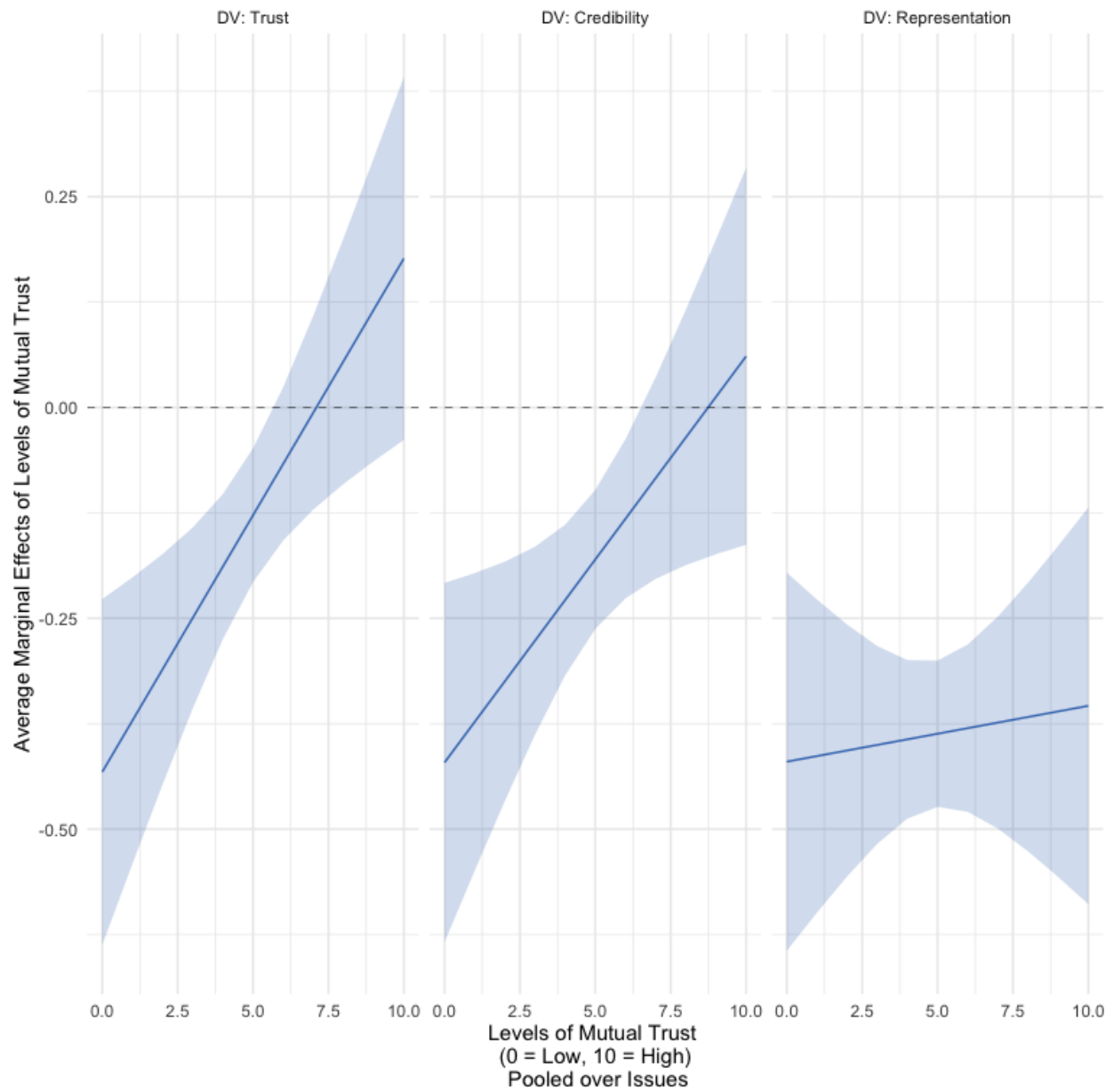


Figure .5: Results: H5 pooled



Discussion

References

Appendix A. Experimental Conditions

Table .2: Experimental Conditions (1)

	In-Party	Partner	Compromise	Outcome	Issue
1	CDU	SPD	Yes	Stalled	TopTax
2	CDU	SPD	Yes	Negotiation	TopTax
3	CDU	SPD	No	Stalled	TopTax
4	CDU	SPD	No	Negotiation	TopTax
5	CDU	SPD	Yes	Stalled	SpeedLimit
6	CDU	SPD	Yes	Negotiation	SpeedLimit
7	CDU	SPD	No	Stalled	SpeedLimit
8	CDU	SPD	No	Negotiation	SpeedLimit
9	CDU	die Grünen	Yes	Stalled	TopTax
10	CDU	die Grünen	Yes	Negotiation	TopTax
11	CDU	die Grünen	No	Stalled	TopTax
12	CDU	die Grünen	No	Negotiation	TopTax
13	CDU	die Grünen	Yes	Stalled	SpeedLimit
14	CDU	die Grünen	Yes	Negotiation	SpeedLimit
15	CDU	die Grünen	No	Stalled	SpeedLimit
16	CDU	die Grünen	No	Negotiation	SpeedLimit
17	FDP	SPD	Yes	Stalled	TopTax
18	FDP	SPD	Yes	Negotiation	TopTax
19	FDP	SPD	No	Stalled	TopTax
20	FDP	SPD	No	Negotiation	TopTax
21	FDP	SPD	Yes	Stalled	SpeedLimit
22	FDP	SPD	Yes	Negotiation	SpeedLimit
23	FDP	SPD	No	Stalled	SpeedLimit
24	FDP	SPD	No	Negotiation	SpeedLimit
25	FDP	die Grünen	Yes	Stalled	TopTax
26	FDP	die Grünen	Yes	Negotiation	TopTax
27	FDP	die Grünen	No	Stalled	TopTax
28	FDP	die Grünen	No	Negotiation	TopTax
29	FDP	die Grünen	Yes	Stalled	SpeedLimit
30	FDP	die Grünen	Yes	Negotiation	SpeedLimit
31	FDP	die Grünen	No	Stalled	SpeedLimit
32	FDP	die Grünen	No	Negotiation	SpeedLimit

Table .3: Experimental Conditions (2)

	In-Party	Partner	Compromise	Outcome	Issue
33	SPD	CDU	Yes	Stalled	TopTax
34	SPD	CDU	Yes	Negotiation	TopTax
35	SPD	CDU	No	Stalled	TopTax
36	SPD	CDU	No	Negotiation	TopTax
37	SPD	CDU	Yes	Stalled	SpeedLimit
38	SPD	CDU	Yes	Negotiation	SpeedLimit
39	SPD	CDU	No	Stalled	SpeedLimit
40	SPD	CDU	No	Negotiation	SpeedLimit
41	SPD	FDP	Yes	Stalled	TopTax
42	SPD	FDP	Yes	Negotiation	TopTax
43	SPD	FDP	No	Stalled	TopTax
44	SPD	FDP	No	Negotiation	TopTax
45	SPD	FDP	Yes	Stalled	SpeedLimit
46	SPD	FDP	Yes	Negotiation	SpeedLimit
47	SPD	FDP	No	Stalled	SpeedLimit
48	SPD	FDP	No	Negotiation	SpeedLimit
49	die Grünen	CDU	Yes	Stalled	TopTax
50	die Grünen	CDU	Yes	Negotiation	TopTax
51	die Grünen	CDU	No	Stalled	TopTax
52	die Grünen	CDU	No	Negotiation	TopTax
53	die Grünen	CDU	Yes	Stalled	SpeedLimit
54	die Grünen	CDU	Yes	Negotiation	SpeedLimit
55	die Grünen	CDU	No	Stalled	SpeedLimit
56	die Grünen	CDU	No	Negotiation	SpeedLimit
57	die Grünen	FDP	Yes	Stalled	TopTax
58	die Grünen	FDP	Yes	Negotiation	TopTax
59	die Grünen	FDP	No	Stalled	TopTax
60	die Grünen	FDP	No	Negotiation	TopTax
61	die Grünen	FDP	Yes	Stalled	SpeedLimit
62	die Grünen	FDP	Yes	Negotiation	SpeedLimit
63	die Grünen	FDP	No	Stalled	SpeedLimit
64	die Grünen	FDP	No	Negotiation	SpeedLimit

Appendix B. Issue Analyses H4 and H5

Figure .6: Results: H4

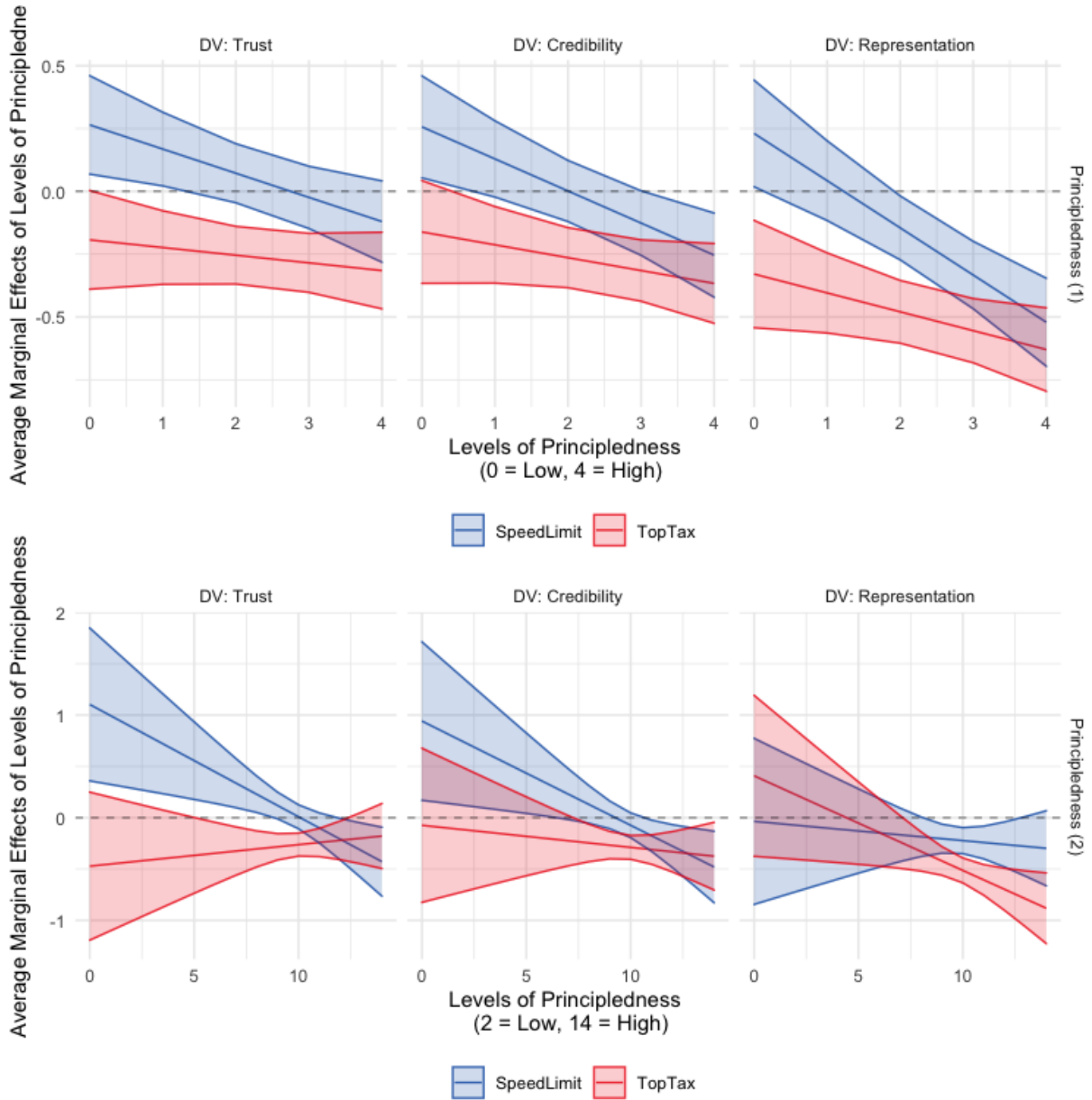


Figure .7: Results: H5

