

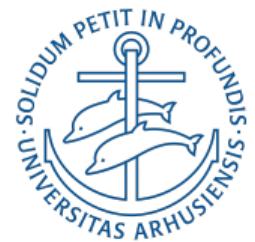
# How Citizens Perceive Others: The Role of Social Norms for Democracies

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## *Motivation: Democracy challenges, US*



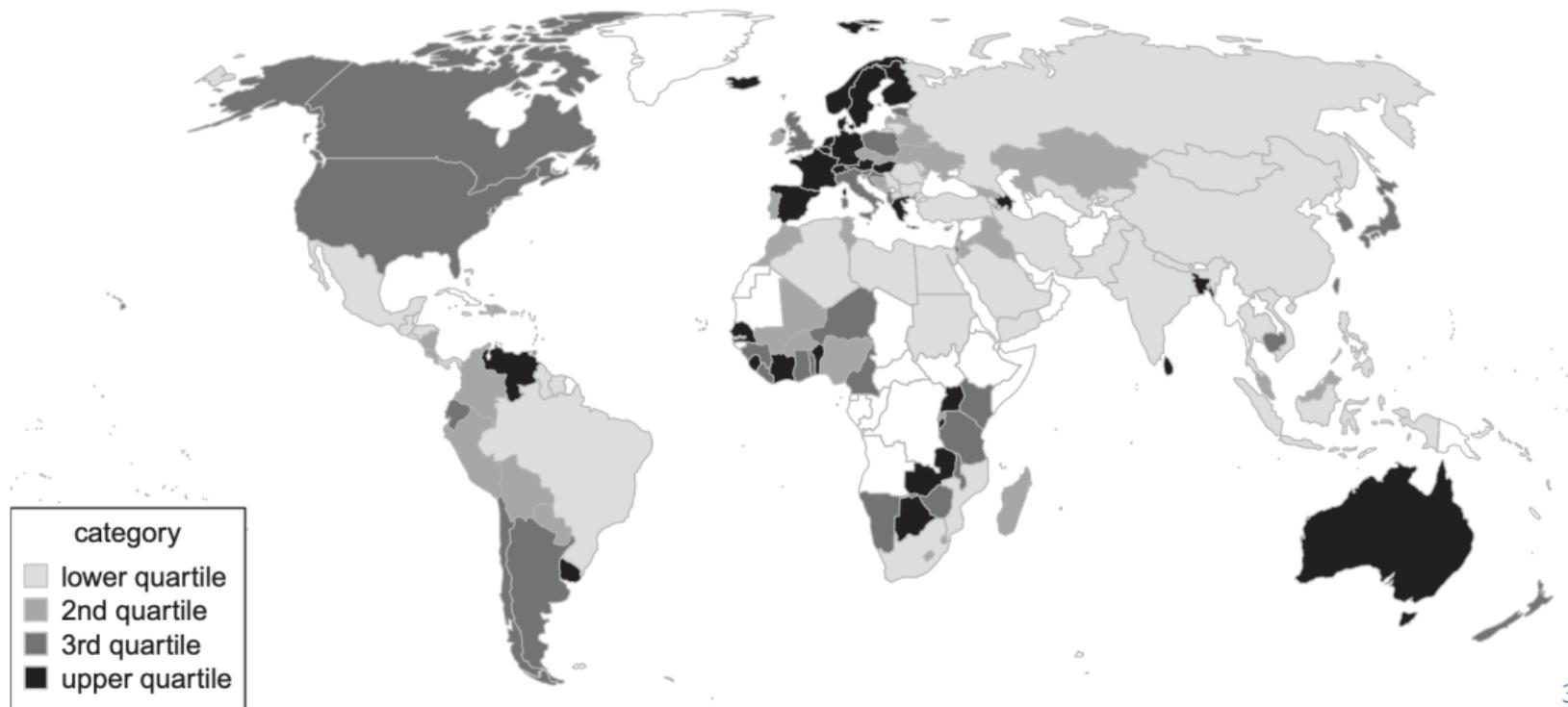
## *Motivation: But also beyond*



# *Motivation: Democratic support stable as ever*

Claassen (2020: 7)

2015



What is this “*social consensus*” conceptually?

Can we measure it across countries?

What social consensus do citizens perceive?

*Our idea:* conceptualize, theorize and measure the “social consensus”

Consensus not far-reaching enough: understands individual preferences as being **independent** from and **unconditional** of what ‘others’ think.

*Our idea:* conceptualize, theorize and measure the “social consensus”

Norms are social conventions; they guide human behavior (Bicchieri 2016).

## *Our idea: conceptualize, theorize and measure the “social consensus”*

Understanding the “social consensus” as an individual’s perception of democratic support among **fellow citizens**:

- ▶ **Descriptive:** One may think that most people in advanced democracies support democratic institutions.
- ▶ **Injunctive:** One may think that most people also believe that one *ought* to support democracy and its institutions
- ▶ **Conditional preferences:** individuals falsify their preferences towards social norms

## *Our argument: different perceptions of social norms*

- ▶ Likely that abstract support is adequately perceived; but more specific democratic principles are not perceived  
(Wuttke, Dahlum, and Kotsadam 2023)
- ▶ “*Democratic de-consolidation*”: younger cohorts perceive weaker social norms  
(Foa and Mounk 2017; Frederiksen and Skaaning 2023)
- ▶ “*Radical right bubble*”: different perception of social norms in democracy
- ▶ If social norms are at work, citizens **falsify their preferences** in order to conform with perceived social norm  
(Bischof and Wagner 2019; Valentim 2023; Wuttke, Dahlum, and Kotsadam 2023)

## Research Design

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## *Research Design:*

1. **Own survey:** measuring social norms  
ego positions + perception of others
2. **Own experiments:** using vignettes to evaluate conditionality  
experimental manipulation of “social pressures”

## Own survey: design

- ▶ 3,000 respondents per country (with Cint)
  - ▶ Austria, Brazil, Denmark, Germany, India, France, Hungary, Italy, Mexico, Poland, Spain, South Africa, United Kingdom, United States
1. Individual attitudes in relation to democracy
  2. Social norms – descriptive & injunctive – in relation to democracy
    - ➔ “We will ask the previous question to 100 people in your country. If you had to guess, how many of them will say that they agree with each of the following statements?”

## *Own survey: which social norms in relation to democracy?*

Some classics, some new ones:

- ▶ *Democratic political system is a good way of governing this country*
- ▶ *Churchill*
- ▶ *Freedom of speech should have limits to protect minorities*
- ▶ *Strong leader*
- ▶ *Accept election losses*
- ▶ *Majoritarian views*
- ▶ *Army rule*
- ▶ *Hostility towards minorities justified*
- ▶ *Political violence: storming political institutions*

## *Own survey: which social norms in relation to democracy?*

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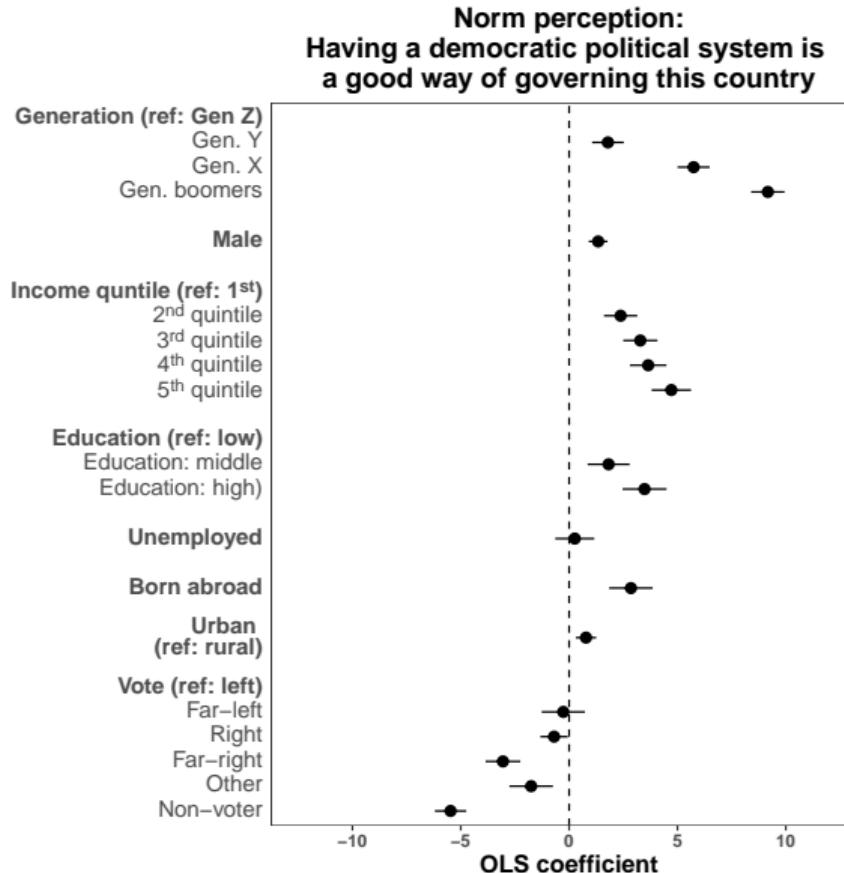
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- ▶ *Hostility towards minorities justified*
- ▶ **Political violence: storming political institutions**

## *Findings: overview*

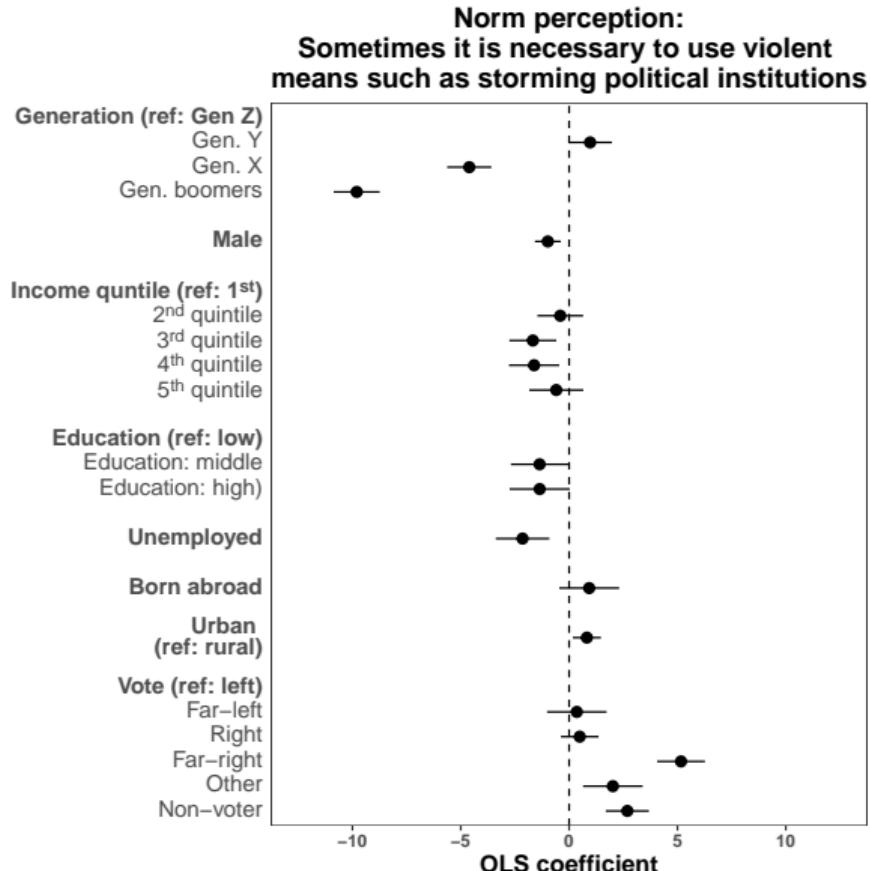
Social norms are ...

- ▶ stable on abstract (e.g. supporting democracy as an institutions) and minimal definition of democracy (i.e. “accepting election losses”)
- ▶ weak when we move on to liberal democracy items (e.g. freedom of speech and minority rights, hostility towards minorities)
- ▶ Descriptive and injunctive norms are highly correlated; yet experimental evidence shows that respondents can clearly differentiate the two
- ▶ Citizens underestimate support for democracy across most items!

# Support for democracy: individual-level correlates

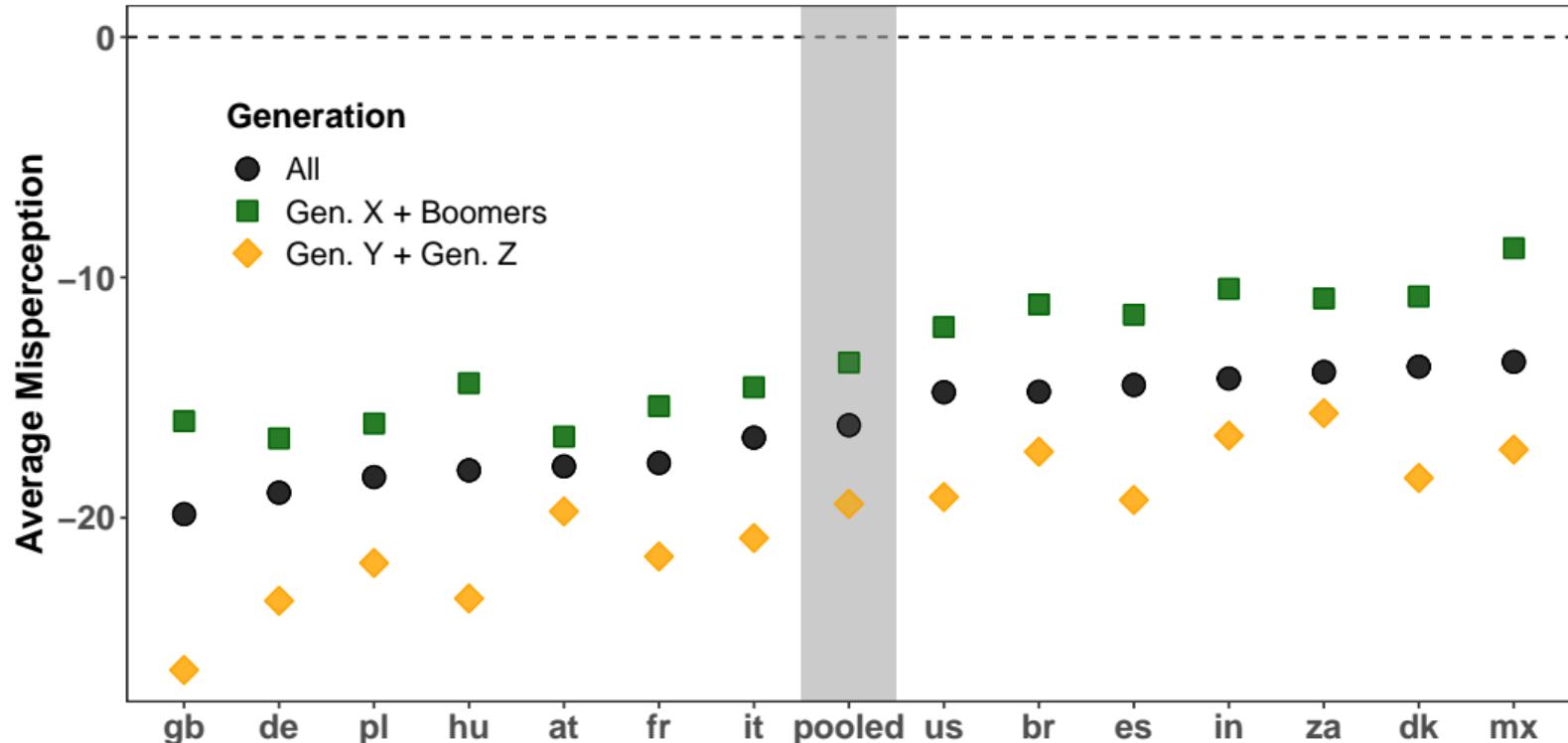


# Storming institutions: individual-level correlates



## The generational drift:

**Having a democratic political system is  
a good way of governing this country**



## *Research Design:*

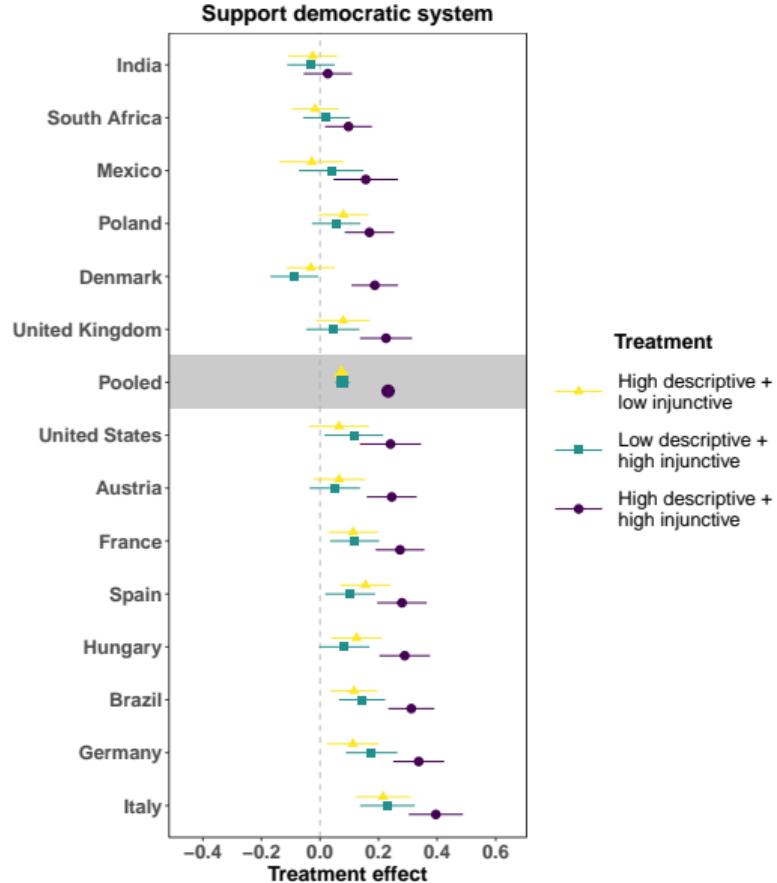
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## Own survey: vignette experiment

*A person like you lives in a country that is very similar to yours. **Most/Few** people in the country have said that they prefer to have a democratic political system. **Most/Few** have also said that supporting a democratic political system is something you ought to do.*

- ▶ Items: *support for democracy + storming institutions*
- ▶ Outcomes: *support + share said opinion publicly*
- ▶ Allows us to understand whether preferences on democracy are conditional
- ▶ Less subject to experimenter demand effect + compound effects

# Findings: vignettes



## *Robustness and more: Vignettes*

- ▶ Similar findings for revealing position in public
- ▶ Strong manipulation (*exception: India*)
- ▶ Controlling for pre-treatment individual norm perceptions does not affect our results

## *Conclusion*

- ▶ Conceptualizing social consensus for democracy as a **social norm**
- ▶ Measuring social norms across 14 countries
- ▶ Build a descriptive understanding of (mis-)perception across 14 countries
- ➔ Longterm: manipulating citizens' social norms in relation to democracy

## References

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- Valentim, Vicente. 2023. "Political Stigma and Preference Falsification: Theory and Observational Evidence." *Journal of Politics* p. forthcoming.
- Wuttke, Alexander, Sirianne Dahlum, and Andreas Kotsadam. 2023. "The social foundation of democracy: An Ash-style Lab experiment."

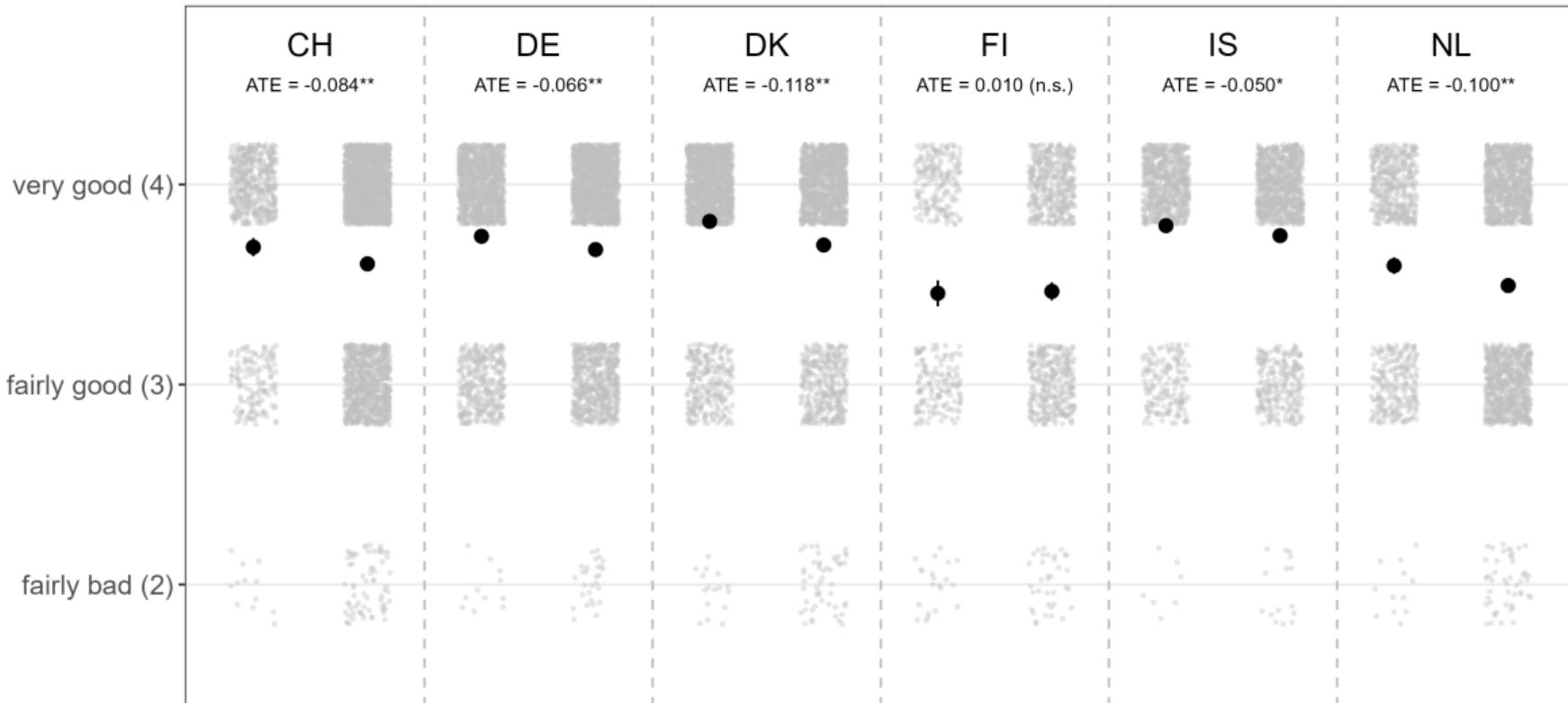
## Appendix

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## *Democratic Support Items:*

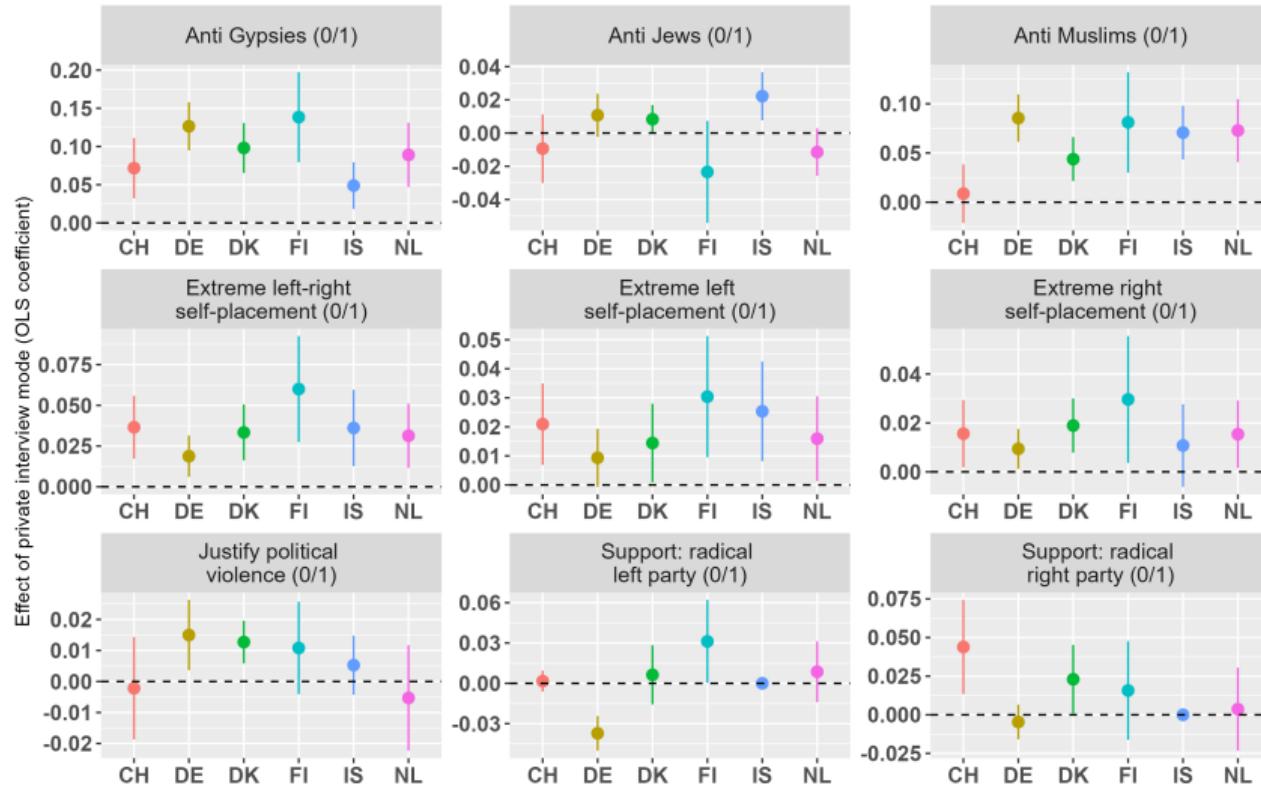
1. Democracy may have its problems, but it is better than any other form of government
2. Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections is a good way of governing this country
3. Having the army rule is a good way of governing this country
4. Having a democratic political system is a good way of governing this country
5. Elections are a good way of solving disagreements between people
6. Sometimes it is necessary to use violent means such as storming political institutions
7. Freedom of speech should have strict limits to protect vulnerable individuals and groups
8. The will of the majority should always prevail, even over the rights of minorities.
9. Hostility against \*minorities\* is sometimes justified, even if it ends up in violence
10. This country would be better able to [Performance Condition] if the government [(Un)democratic Behaviour]

## Having a democratic political system



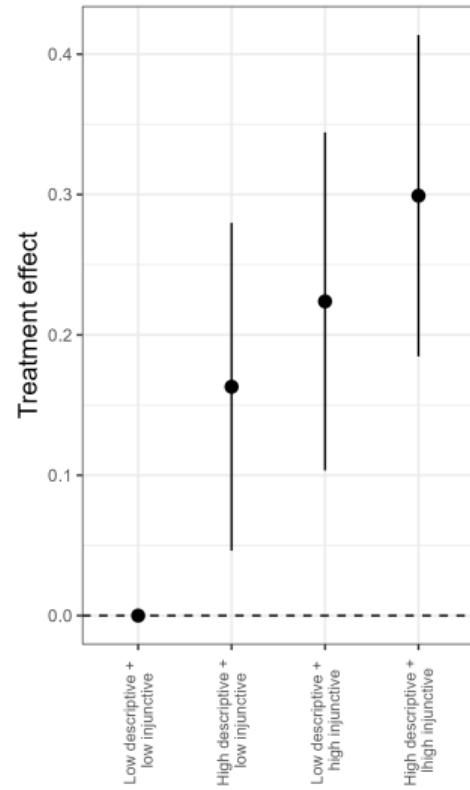
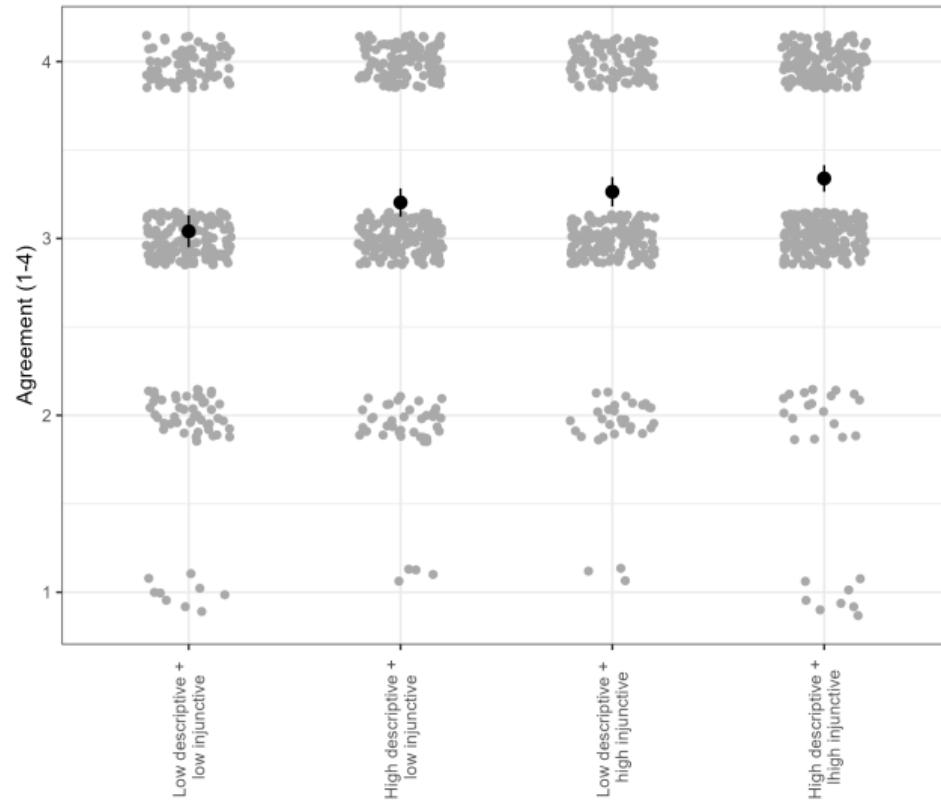
# EVS 2017: norms even stronger on minority related items

Items with strong social desirability bias



# DK: Vignette findings

Demoratic supporters: Share views



## Having a democratic political system

