UAB
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

The Conditionality of Citizens' Commitment to Minority-Rights Protection

Damjan Tomic

ADVERTIMENT. L'accés als continguts d'aquesta tesi queda condicionat a l'acceptació de les condicions d'ús establertes per la següent llicència Creative Commons: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/?lang=ca

ADVERTENCIA. El acceso a los contenidos de esta tesis queda condicionado a la aceptación de las condiciones de uso establecidas por la siguiente licencia Creative Commons: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/?lang=es

WARNING. The access to the contents of this doctoral thesis it is limited to the acceptance of the use conditions set by the following Creative Commons license: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/?lang=en

The Conditionality of Citizens' Commitment to Minority-Rights Protection



PhD Dissertation

Damjan Tomic

The Conditionality of Citizens' Commitment to Minority-Rights Protection

UAB
Universitat Autònoma
de Barcelona

Programa de Doctorat en Ciència Política, Polítiques Públiques i Relacions Internacionals

The Conditionality of Citizens' Commitment to Minority-Rights Protection

Damjan Tomic

Directors | Dr. Guillermo Rico Camps
Dr. Enrique Hernández Pérez

Barcelona. Juny de 2026

TESI DOCTORAL DIPOSITADA EN COMPLIMENT DELS REQUISITS PER OBTENIR EL TÍTOL DE

Doctor en Ciència Política

UAB
Universitat Autònoma
de Barcelona

Damjan Tomic, 2026



"Democracy is never a thing done.
Democracy is always something that a nation must be doing."

- Archibald MacLeish

Abstract

There is mounting concern that liberal democracy is facing growing challenges. Incumbents have eroded liberal principles, such as minority rights, with relatively little public resistance, while far-right parties whose agendas challenge these rights continue to gain electoral support. These developments raise important questions about the role citizens play in facilitating or constraining democratic backsliding. At the same time, a large body of research suggests that citizens generally endorse liberal-democratic principles and are therefore expected to act as safeguards against illiberal forces. To explain why citizens who express support for minority rights nevertheless tolerate—or even support—their erosion, this dissertation advances an argument that moves beyond the assumption that support for minority rights constitutes a fixed democratic commitment. Instead, it argues that support for minority-rights protection is often conditional and therefore more fragile than conventional measures of democratic support suggest. Citizens do not evaluate minority rights in isolation, but in relation to competing democratic principles, evaluations of the groups affected by those rights, and the social environments in which political judgments are formed. Drawing on original survey data from fifteen countries and employing both observational and experimental methods, this paper-based dissertation examines different dimensions of this argument across four studies.

The first study examines whether citizens remain committed to minority-rights protection when this principle comes into conflict with majority rule. Using a novel measure of democratic tradeoffs, it maps citizens' preferences between these competing democratic principles and identifies the factors associated with different positions on this tradeoff. The results show that, when forced to choose, citizens tend to prioritize majority rule, suggesting weaker commitment to minority rights than conventional measures imply. These preferences are shaped by both democratic belief systems and instrumental considerations. More broadly, the findings suggest that democratic erosion may emerge not only from anti-democratic attitudes, but also from democratic preferences that become increasingly majoritarian when democratic principles are perceived to conflict.

The second study examines whether support for minority-rights protection depends on how citizens understand minority status and on the groups to whom those rights are applied. Using a conjoint experiment conducted in Belgium, France, Switzerland, and Hungary, it investigates which characteristics lead citizens to perceive groups as minorities and how these perceptions shape support for protecting their rights. The findings show that citizens readily recognize minority status based on numerical size and perceived disadvantage. However, perceiving a group as a minority does not necessarily translate into stronger support for protecting its rights. Even respondents who are generally supportive of minority rights display inconsistencies in how they apply this principle.

The third study further investigates group-based conditionality by examining variation in support for minority-rights protection across different social groups. Using the full sample of fifteen countries and a design that varies item wording, it shows that citizens are considerably more supportive of protecting the rights of groups they view positively than of groups they view negatively. While perceptions of deservingness also shape support for minority rights, they do not eliminate these affective biases. Instead, evaluations of deservingness appear to operate through citizens' broader feelings toward the groups in question.

The fourth study examines whether support for minority rights responds to external social cues. Using a priming vignette experiment embedded in the Swiss survey, it tests whether citizens react to changes in minority-rights protection itself or to signals about broader public opinion. The results show that exposure to referendum outcomes restricting minority rights reduces support for minority-rights protection, whereas exposure to referendum outcomes expanding minority rights has no effect. These findings suggest that citizens adjust their views in response to perceived public consensus, providing support for a norm-based account of opinion change.

Taken together, the four studies demonstrate that support for minority rights is shaped by multiple sources of conditionality, including tradeoffs between democratic principles, perceptions of minority status, affective evaluations of social groups, and perceived social norms. Consequently, citizens who endorse liberal-democratic principles may nevertheless tolerate—or even support—their erosion. These findings suggest that understanding democratic resilience requires examining not only whether citizens support democratic principles in the abstract, but also how consistently they uphold them when those principles become politically contested. Ultimately, the resilience of liberal democracy depends not only on citizens' endorsement of democratic values, but also on their willingness to defend those values when they come under pressure.

Keywords: public opinion, minority-rights protection, democratic tradeoffs, political tolerance, social norms, democratic backsliding

Resum

Hi ha una preocupació creixent pels desafiaments cada vegada més grans als quals s'enfronta la democràcia liberal. Els governs en exercici han erosionat principis liberals, com ara els drets de les minories, amb relativament poca resistència pública, mentre que els partits d'extrema dreta els programes dels quals qüestionen aquests drets continuen guanyant suport electoral. Aquests desenvolupaments plantegen interrogants importants sobre el paper que exerceixen els ciutadans a l'hora de facilitar o limitar l'erosió democràtica. Al mateix temps, una àmplia literatura suggereix que els ciutadans, en general, donen suport als principis liberaldemocràtics i, per tant, s'espera que actuïn com a salvaguardes davant les forces antiliberals. Per explicar per què ciutadans que expressen suport als drets de les minories toleren, tanmateix —o fins i tot donen suport a— la seva erosió, aquesta tesi doctoral desenvolupa un argument que va més enllà del supòsit que el suport als drets de les minories constitueix un compromís democràtic estable. En canvi, sosté que el suport a la protecció dels drets de les minories és sovint condicional i, per tant, més fràgil del que suggereixen les mesures convencionals de suport a la democràcia. Els ciutadans no avaluen els drets de les minories de manera aïllada, sinó en relació amb principis democràtics en competència, les seves avaluacions dels grups afectats per aquests drets i els entorns socials en què es formen els judicis polítics. Basant-se en dades originals d'enquestes realitzades en quinze països i emprant mètodes tant observacionals com experimentals, aquesta tesi per compendi d'articles examina diferents dimensions d'aquest argument a través de quatre estudis.

El primer estudi examina si els ciutadans mantenen el seu compromís amb la protecció dels drets de les minories quan aquest principi entra en conflicte amb la regla de la majoria. Utilitzant una mesura innovadora de les disjuntives democràtiques (trade-offs democràtics), analitza les preferències dels ciutadans entre aquests principis democràtics en competència i identifica els factors associats a les diferents posicions respecte a aquesta disjuntiva. Els resultats mostren que, quan es veuen obligats a triar, els ciutadans tendeixen a prioritzar la regla de la majoria, fet que suggereix un compromís més feble amb els drets de les minories que no pas el que suggereixen les mesures convencionals. Aquestes preferències estan determinades tant per sistemes de creences democràtiques com per consideracions instrumentals. En un sentit més ampli, les troballes suggereixen que l'erosió democràtica pot sorgir no només d'actituds antidemocràtiques, sinó també de preferències democràtiques que esdevenen cada vegada més majoritàries quan els principis democràtics es perceben com a incompatibles.

El segon estudi examina si el suport a la protecció dels drets de les minories depèn de com els ciutadans entenen la condició de minoria i dels grups als quals aquests drets s'apliquen. Utilitzant un experiment de tipus conjoint realitzat a Bèlgica, França, Suïssa i Hongria, investiga quines característiques porten els

ciutadans a percebre determinats grups com a minories i com aquestes percepcions influeixen en el suport a la protecció dels seus drets. Els resultats mostren que els ciutadans reconeixen fàcilment la condició de minoria a partir de la mida numèrica i del desavantatge percebut. Tanmateix, percebre un grup com una minoria no es tradueix necessàriament en un major suport a la protecció dels seus drets. Fins i tot els enquestats que, en termes generals, donen suport als drets de les minories mostren inconsistències en la manera com apliquen aquest principi.

El tercer estudi aprofundeix en la condicionalitat basada en els grups socials examinant la variació en el suport a la protecció dels drets de les minories entre diferents grups socials. Utilitzant la mostra completa de quinze països i un disseny que varia la redacció dels ítems, mostra que els ciutadans són considerablement més favorables a protegir els drets dels grups que avaluen positivament que no pas a protegir els drets d'aquells que avaluen negativament. Tot i que les percepcions de mereixement també influeixen en el suport als drets de les minories, no eliminen aquests biaixos afectius. En canvi, les avaluacions de mereixement semblen operar a través dels sentiments més amplis que els ciutadans senten envers els grups en qüestió.

El quart estudi examina si el suport als drets de les minories respon a senyals socials externs. Utilitzant un experiment de vinyeta amb priming integrat en l'enquesta realitzada a Suïssa, posa a prova si els ciutadans reaccionen a canvis en la mateixa protecció dels drets de les minories o a senyals sobre una opinió pública més àmplia. Els resultats mostren que l'exposició a resultats de referèndums que restringeixen els drets de les minories redueix el suport a la protecció dels drets de les minories, mentre que l'exposició a resultats de referèndums que amplien aquests drets no té cap efecte. Aquestes troballes suggereixen que els ciutadans ajusten les seves opinions en resposta al consens públic percebut, fet que dona suport a una explicació del canvi d'opinió basada en normes socials.

Considerats en conjunt, els quatre estudis demostren que el suport als drets de les minories està subjecte a múltiples formes de condicionalitat, entre les quals hi ha les disjuntives entre principis democràtics, les percepcions sobre la condició de minoria, les avaluacions afectives dels grups socials i les normes socials percebudes. En conseqüència, els ciutadans que donen suport a principis liberaldemocràtics poden, tanmateix, tolerar —o fins i tot donar suport a— la seva erosió. Aquestes troballes suggereixen que comprendre la resiliència democràtica requereix examinar no només si els ciutadans donen suport als principis democràtics en abstracte, sinó també fins a quin punt els defensen de manera consistent quan aquests principis esdevenen objecte de controvèrsia política. En última instància, la resiliència de la democràcia liberal depèn no només del suport dels ciutadans als valors democràtics, sinó també de la seva disposició a defensar aquests valors quan es veuen sotmesos a pressió.

Paraules clau: *opinió pública, protecció dels drets de les minories, disjuntives democràtiques, tolerància política, normes socials, erosió democràtica*

Resumen

Existe una creciente preocupación por los desafíos cada vez mayores que enfrenta la democracia liberal. Los gobiernos en funciones han erosionado principios liberales, como los derechos de las minorías, con relativamente poca resistencia pública, mientras que los partidos de extrema derecha cuyos programas cuestionan estos derechos continúan ganando apoyo electoral. Estos desarrollos plantean importantes interrogantes sobre el papel que desempeñan los ciudadanos en facilitar o limitar el retroceso democrático. Al mismo tiempo, una amplia literatura sugiere que los ciudadanos, por lo general, respaldan los principios liberal-democráticos y, por tanto, se espera que actúen como salvaguardias frente a las fuerzas antiliberales. Para explicar por qué ciudadanos que expresan apoyo a los derechos de las minorías toleran, sin embargo —o incluso apoyan— su erosión, esta tesis doctoral desarrolla un argumento que va más allá del supuesto de que el apoyo a los derechos de las minorías constituye un compromiso democrático fijo. En su lugar, sostiene que el apoyo a la protección de los derechos de las minorías es a menudo condicional y, por tanto, más frágil de lo que sugieren las medidas convencionales de apoyo a la democracia. Los ciudadanos no evalúan los derechos de las minorías de forma aislada, sino en relación con principios democráticos en competencia, sus evaluaciones de los grupos afectados por esos derechos y los entornos sociales en los que se forman los juicios políticos. Basándose en datos originales de encuestas realizadas en quince países y empleando métodos tanto observacionales como experimentales, esta tesis por compendio de articulos examina distintas dimensiones de este argumento a través de cuatro estudios.

El primer estudio examina si los ciudadanos mantienen su compromiso con la protección de los derechos de las minorías cuando este principio entra en conflicto con la regla de la mayoría. Utilizando una medida novedosa de las disyuntivas democráticas (trade-offs democráticos), analiza las preferencias de los ciudadanos entre estos principios democráticos en competencia e identifica los factores asociados a las distintas posiciones respecto a esta disyuntiva. Los resultados muestran que, cuando se ven obligados a elegir, los ciudadanos tienden a priorizar la regla de la mayoría, lo que sugiere un compromiso más débil con los derechos de las minorías de lo que indican las medidas convencionales. Estas preferencias están determinadas tanto por sistemas de creencias democráticas como por consideraciones instrumentales. En un sentido más amplio, los hallazgos sugieren que la erosión democrática puede surgir no solo de actitudes antidemocráticas, sino también de preferencias democráticas que adoptan un carácter cada vez más mayoritario cuando los principios democráticos se perciben como incompatibles.

El segundo estudio examina si el apoyo a la protección de los derechos de las minorías depende de cómo los ciudadanos entienden la condición de minoría y de los grupos a los que se aplican esos derechos. Utilizando un experimento de tipo conjoint realizado en Bélgica, Francia, Suiza y Hungría, investiga

qué características llevan a los ciudadanos a percibir a determinados grupos como minorías y cómo estas percepciones influyen en el apoyo a la protección de sus derechos. Los resultados muestran que los ciudadanos reconocen fácilmente la condición de minoría a partir del tamaño numérico y de la desventaja percibida. Sin embargo, percibir a un grupo como una minoría no se traduce necesariamente en un mayor apoyo a la protección de sus derechos. Incluso los encuestados que, en términos generales, apoyan los derechos de las minorías muestran inconsistencias en la forma en que aplican este principio.

El tercer estudio profundiza en la condicionalidad basada en los grupos sociales al examinar la variación en el apoyo a la protección de los derechos de las minorías entre distintos grupos sociales. Utilizando la muestra completa de quince países y un diseño que varía la redacción de los ítems, muestra que los ciudadanos son considerablemente más favorables a proteger los derechos de los grupos que evalúan positivamente que a proteger los derechos de aquellos que evalúan negativamente. Aunque las percepciones de merecimiento también influyen en el apoyo a los derechos de las minorías, no eliminan estos sesgos afectivos. En cambio, las evaluaciones de merecimiento parecen operar a través de los sentimientos más amplios que los ciudadanos albergan hacia los grupos en cuestión.

El cuarto estudio examina si el apoyo a los derechos de las minorías responde a señales sociales externas. Utilizando un experimento de viñeta con priming integrado en la encuesta realizada en Suiza, pone a prueba si los ciudadanos reaccionan a cambios en la propia protección de los derechos de las minorías o a señales sobre la opinión pública más amplia. Los resultados muestran que la exposición a resultados de referendos que restringen los derechos de las minorías reduce el apoyo a la protección de los derechos de las minorías, mientras que la exposición a resultados de referendos que amplían dichos derechos no tiene ningún efecto. Estos hallazgos sugieren que los ciudadanos ajustan sus opiniones en respuesta al consenso público percibido, lo que proporciona respaldo a una explicación del cambio de opinión basada en normas sociales.

Considerados en conjunto, los cuatro estudios demuestran que el apoyo a los derechos de las minorías está sujeto a múltiples formas de condicionalidad, entre ellas las disyuntivas entre principios democráticos, las percepciones sobre la condición de minoría, las evaluaciones afectivas de los grupos sociales y las normas sociales percibidas. En consecuencia, los ciudadanos que respaldan principios liberal-democráticos pueden, sin embargo, tolerar —o incluso apoyar— su erosión. Estos hallazgos sugieren que comprender la resiliencia democrática requiere examinar no solo si los ciudadanos apoyan los principios democráticos en abstracto, sino también hasta qué punto los defienden de manera consistente cuando esos principios se convierten en objeto de controversia política. En última instancia, la resiliencia de la democracia liberal depende no solo del respaldo de los ciudadanos a los valores democráticos, sino también de su disposición a defender esos valores cuando se ven sometidos a presión.

***Palabras clave**: opinión pública, protección de los derechos de las minorías, disyuntivas democráticas, tolerancia política, normas sociales, retroceso democrático*

Thesis Regulations

This doctoral thesis has been submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the PhD Programme in Politics, Policies and International Relations at the Department of Political Science and Public Law, Faculty of Political Science and Sociology, Autonomous University of Barcelona.

This research has received funding by the European Union (ERC Starting Grant 101042292 DEMOTRADEOFF). Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Council Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Contents

Abstract **ix**

Resum **xi**

Resumen **xiii**

Thesis Regulations **xv**

List of Figures **xxi**

List of Tables **xxv**

Agraïments / Acknowledgements **xxvii**

1 Introduction **1**
- 1.1 Motivation . . . 1
- 1.2 Theory . . . 5
  - 1.2.1 Democratic tradeoffs: Minority rights & majority rule . . . 5
  - 1.2.2 Defining minorities & rights protection . . . 7
  - 1.2.3 Attitudes toward minority-rights protection . . . 10
  - 1.2.4 Belief systems and the conditionality of minority-rights support . . . 11
- 1.3 Dissertation dataset . . . 13
  - 1.3.1 Data . . . 13
  - 1.3.2 Cases . . . 14
  - 1.3.3 Outcome variables . . . 15
- 1.4 Overview of empirical papers . . . 18
  - 1.4.1 Tradeoffs within Liberal Democracy: Citizens' Preferences for Minority-Rights Protection at the Expense of Majority Rule . . . 18
  - 1.4.2 In the eye of the citizenry: Minority Status & Deservingness of Protection . . . 18
  - 1.4.3 Democratic Volatility & Conditionality: Citizens' Inconsistent Commitment to Democratic Rights . . . 19
  - 1.4.4 Normalizing illiberalism: How perceived public consensus erodes support for minority rights . . . 19
- 1.5 Broader implications . . . 20

References . . . 22

2 Study I. Tradeoffs within Liberal Democracy: Citizens' Preferences for Minority-Rights Protection at the Expense of Majority Rule **27**
- 2.1 Introduction . . . 27
- 2.2 Theory . . . 29
- 2.3 Data & methods . . . 32

2.4 Results . . . 37
2.5 Discussion . . . 45
References . . . 50
Appendix A: Supplementary materials . . . 54
A.1 Key survey items . . . 54
A.2 Additional analyses . . . 59
A.3 Codebook & machine-readable prompt for coding open-ended minority self-identification responses . . . 72

3 Study II. In the eye of the citizenry: Minority Status & Deservingness of Protection **79**
3.1 Introduction . . . 79
3.2 Theory . . . 81
3.2.1 The protection of minority rights . . . 81
3.2.2 Perceived minority status & deservingness of protection . . . 84
3.3 Research Design . . . 87
3.3.1 Case Selection . . . 87
3.3.2 Data & Methods . . . 88
3.4 Results . . . 91
3.4.1 Citizens' perception of minority status . . . 91
3.4.2 Exploratory subgroup analyses . . . 93
3.5 Discussion . . . 94
References . . . 98
Appendix B: Supplementary materials . . . 105
B.1 Overview of attributes used in conjoint . . . 105
B.2 Additional information & analyses . . . 106

4 Study III. Democratic Volatility & Conditionality: Citizens' Inconsistent Commitment to Democratic Rights **123**
4.1 Introduction . . . 123
4.2 Theory . . . 125
4.2.1 Volatility . . . 127
4.2.2 Value- and affect-laden conditionality . . . 130
4.3 Data & Methods . . . 133
4.3.1 Data . . . 133
4.3.2 Methods . . . 135
4.4 Results . . . 137
4.4.1 Volatility . . . 137
4.4.2 Value- and affect-laden conditionality . . . 141
4.5 Conclusion . . . 146
References . . . 149
Appendix C: Supplementary materials . . . 155
C.1 Additional results and robustness checks . . . 155
C.2 Historical cultural minorities . . . 185
C.3 Deviations from pre-registration . . . 185

5 Study IV. Normalizing illiberalism: How perceived public consensus erodes support for minority rights **189**
5.1 Introduction . . . 189

5.2 Theory . . . 191
5.2.1 Public opinion & minority rights . . . 191
5.2.2 Thermostatic-based model . . . 193
5.2.3 Norm-based model . . . 196
5.3 Research Design . . . 199
5.4 Results . . . 205
5.5 Conclusion . . . 212
References . . . 217
Appendix D: Supplementary materials . . . 225
D.1 Referenda descriptions . . . 225
5.6 Survey items . . . 227
5.7 Additional analyses . . . 229

6 Conclusion **241**
6.1 Overview . . . 241
6.2 Main takeaways . . . 242
6.3 Contributions to the literature . . . 243
6.4 Limitations & future research . . . 246
References . . . 250

List of Figures

Figure 1.1 Conceptual framework and paper layout 13
Figure 1.2 Item capturing respondents' preferences for protecting minority rights in tradeoff with majority rule 15
Figure 1.3 Item capturing respondents' preferences for protection from hate speech in tradeoff with free speech 17

Figure 2.1 Item capturing respondents' preferences for protecting minority rights in tradeoff with the will of the majority 34
Figure 2.2 Distribution of support for minority rights: unconstrained vs. tradeoff framing 38
Figure 2.3 Distribution of respondents who assigned 5 points to each principle in main tradeoff outcome 39
Figure 2.4 Principled and instrumental determinants of attitudes towards tradeoff between minority-rights protection and majority rule 40
Figure 2.5 Influence of subjective minority group membership on support for minority rights at the expense of respecting majority will 42
Figure 2.6 Interactions between principled and instrumental determinants of democratic tradeoff preferences 44
Figure A.1 Follow up item 55
Figure A.2 Traditional items measuring support for democratic principles in isolation . 55
Figure A.3 Items used by European Social Survey to measure support for protecting minority rights 55
Figure A.4 Populism battery 56
Figure A.5 Perceived majority alignment 56
Figure A.6 Identies as political minority question 56
Figure A.7 Test question: minorities 57
Figure A.8 Test question: political minorities 57
Figure A.9 Follow up open-ended question asked to those who identify as minorities . . 57
Figure A.10 Political knowledge question 1 57
Figure A.11 Political knowledge question 2 58
Figure A.12 Distribution of open-ended responses coded into each category: human vs. automated classification 59
Figure A.13 Distribution of classification of open-ended responses per category: human vs. automated category classification 60
Figure A.14 Human vs. automated category measurement agreement 60
Figure A.15 Follow-up distribution of respondents who skipped main tradeoff outcome . 62
Figure A.16 Distribution of difference in support for minority rights when asked in isolation vs when pitted against majority will 62
Figure A.17 Average support for protecting minority rights in isolation per country . . . 63
Figure A.18 Average support for minority rights in tradeoff with majority rule per country 63

Figure A.19 Average change in support for protecting minority rights when measured in isolation vs in tradeoff with majority rule per country 64
Figure A.20 Confidence interval plot containing average authoritarian beliefs per self-described minority group 64

Figure 3.1 Conceptualization of citizens' perceptions of minorities 86
Figure 3.2 Example of conjoint 89
Figure 3.3 Outcome variables 90
Figure 3.4 Perceived minority status per average marginal component effect 92
Figure 3.5 Perceived deservingness of having rights protected per average marginal component effect 93
Figure B.1 Support for minority rights protection item from ESS 10 106
Figure B.2 Characteristics by country 107
Figure B.3 Approximate demographic distribution of societal groups 107
Figure B.4 Perceived minority status per marginal means 108
Figure B.5 Perceived minority status per AMCE by minority self-identification 108
Figure B.6 Perceived minority status per MM by minority self-identification 109
Figure B.7 Perceived deservingness of protection per AMCE by minority self-identification 109
Figure B.8 Perceived deservingness of protection per MM by minority self-identification 110
Figure B.9 Perceived minority status per AMCE by income 110
Figure B.10 Perceived minority status per MM by income 111
Figure B.11 Perceived deservingness of protection AMCE by income 111
Figure B.12 Perceived deservingness of protection per MM by income 112
Figure B.13 Perceived minority status per AMCE by social status 112
Figure B.14 Perceived minority status per MM by social status 113
Figure B.15 Perceived deservingness of protection per AMCE by social status 113
Figure B.16 Perceived deservingness of protection per MM by social status 114
Figure B.17 Perceived minority status per AMCE by age 114
Figure B.18 Perceived minority status per MM by age 115
Figure B.19 Perceived deservingness of protection per AMCE by age 115
Figure B.20 Perceived deservingness of protection per MM by age 116
Figure B.21 Perceived minority status per AMCE by gender 116
Figure B.22 Perceived minority status per MM by gender 117
Figure B.23 Perceived deservingness of protection per AMCE by gender 117
Figure B.24 Perceived deservingness of protection per MM by gender 118
Figure B.25 Perceived minority status per AMCE by education 118
Figure B.26 Perceived minority status per MM by education 119
Figure B.27 Perceived deservingness of protection per AMCE by education 119
Figure B.28 Perceived deservingness of protection per MM by education 120
Figure B.29 Perceived minority status per AMCE by ideology 120
Figure B.30 Perceived minority status per MM by ideology 121
Figure B.31 Perceived deservingness of protection per AMCE by ideology 121
Figure B.32 Perceived deservingness of protection per MM by ideology 122

Figure 4.1 Levels of democratic volatility 138
Figure 4.2 Determinants of democratic volatility 139
Figure 4.3 Average support for specific realizations of democratic rights by group randomly assigned to and democratic right 141

Figure 4.4 Influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for specific realizations of democratic rights 142
Figure 4.5 Average linear prediction of support for each specific democratic right by like/dislike and minority status of groups the right is randomly linked to 143
Figure 4.6 Marginal effect of considering a group a minority on support for democratic rights by like/dislike of that group. 144
Figure C.1 Levels of democratic volatility by general support for the corresponding democratic right 156
Figure C.2 Determinants of democratic volatility without controlling for general support for corresponding democratic right 158
Figure C.3 General and specific support for democratic rights and principles as a function of politcal knowledge and political intetest 158
Figure C.4 General and specific support for democratic rights and principles as a function of support for democracy 159
Figure C.5 General and specific support for democratic rights and principles as a function of support for fundamental human rights 159
Figure C.6 Volatility and satisfaction with democracy 160
Figure C.7 Average support protecting minority rights and protection from hate speech in abstract terms and when applied to specific groups 162
Figure C.8 Average support for the protection of the rights of minorities by group randomly assigned to and democratic right 163
Figure C.9 Average support for protection against hate speech by group randomly assigned to and democratic right 166
Figure C.10 Influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for specific realizations of democratic rights using affect towards feminists 167
Figure C.11 Average linear prediction of support for each specific democratic right by like/dislike and minority status of groups the right is randomly linked to using affect towards feminists 169
Figure C.12 Marginal effect of considering a group a minority on support for democratic rights by like/dislike of that group using affect towards feminists 169
Figure C.13 Influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for specific realizations of democratic rights with additional controls 170
Figure C.14 Average linear prediction of support for each specific democratic right by like/dislike and minority status of groups the right is randomly linked to including additional controls 173
Figure C.15 Marginal effect of considering a group a minority on support for democratic rights by like/dislike of that group including additional controls. 174
Figure C.16 Influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for specific realizations of democratic rights with additional controls + general support 175
Figure C.17 Average linear prediction of support for each specific democratic right by like/dislike and minority status of groups the right is randomly linked to including additional controls + general support 178
Figure C.18 Marginal effect of considering a group a minority on support for democratic rights by like/dislike of that group including additional controls+ general support . 179
Figure C.19 Influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for specific realizations of democratic rights with additional controls + general support squared 180

Figure C.20 Average linear prediction of support for each specific democratic right by like/dislike and minority status of groups the right is randomly linked to including additional controls + general support squared 183
Figure C.21 Marginal effect of considering a group a minority on support for democratic rights by like/dislike of that group including additional controls+ general support squared 184
Figure C.22 Average support for specific realizations of representation via quotas by randomly assigned group 186

Figure 5.1 Average change in perceived minority rights protection per experimental arm 204
Figure 5.2 Regression model coeficients of within individual change in support for minority rights protection per experimental arm 206
Figure 5.3 Treatment effects for respondents with matched perceived-desired minroity protection scores 207
Figure 5.4 Predicted margins of change in support for protecting minority rights per initial support 209
Figure 5.5 Predicted means of treatment effects per like/dislike of group 210
Figure 5.6 Sub-group analysis: Predicted means of treatment effects for SVP/EDU voters & self-identified minorities 211
Figure D.1 Distribution of initial support for minority rights 230
Figure D.2 Distribution of perceived-desired minority rights protection mismatch scores 230
Figure D.3 Predicted margins of treatment effects per (all categories of) perceived-desired mismatch scores 232
Figure D.4 Marginal effect of change in support for protecting minority rights per treatment arm 232
Figure D.5 Distribution of affect towards groups used in Treatments 2 and 3 235
Figure D.6 Treatment effects per like/dislike of group 235
Figure D.7 Initial support for protecting minority rights among SVP/EDU voters and self-identified minorities 236
Figure D.8 Change in support for protecting minority rights per party affiliation × treatment 237
Figure D.9 Change in support for protecting minority rights per minority self-identification × treatment 238

List of Tables

Table 1.1 Illustrative responses to the minority-rights protection vs. majority rule tradeoff item 16

Table A.1 Examples of open-ended descriptions of minority status and corresponding human/automated classifications 61
Table A.2 Principled and instrumental correlated of tradeoff preferences for in support for minority-rights protection at the expense of majority rule 65
Table A.3 Models for impact of minority status on support for minority-rights protection in isolation and in tradeoff framing (at the expense of majority rule) per manual annotation 66
Table A.4 Models for impact of minority status support for minority-rights protection in isolation and in tradeoff framing (at the expense of majority rule) per automated classification 67
Table A.5 Impact of predictors on perceived alignment with majority opinion 68
Table A.6 Interactions between principles predictors and perceived majority alignment on support for minority-rights protection vs. majority rule 69
Table A.7 Interactions between principles predictors and winner-loser status on support for minority-rights protection vs. majority rule 70
Table A.8 Interactions between principles predictors and minority status on support for minority-rights protection vs. majority rule 71

Table 4.1 Wording of items 134
Table 4.2 Specific groups used for each of the grounded or specified items 135
Table C.1 OLS estimation to examine determinants of volatility 157
Table C.2 OLS estimation to examine effect of volatility on satisfaction with democracy 161
Table C.3 OLS estimation to examine influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for minority rights 164
Table C.4 OLS estimation to examine influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for protection against hate speech 165
Table C.5 OLS estimation to examine influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for protection against hate speech using affect towards feminists 168
Table C.6 OLS estimation to examine influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for minority rights controlling for correlates of volatility 171
Table C.7 OLS estimation to examine influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for protection against hate speech controlling for correlates of volatility 172
Table C.8 OLS estimation to examine influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for minority rights controlling for correlates of volatility + general support 176
Table C.9 OLS estimation to examine influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for protection against hate speech controlling for correlates of volatility + general support 177

Table C.10 OLS estimation to examine influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for minority rights controlling for correlates of volatility + general support squared . . . 181
Table C.11 OLS estimation to examine influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for protection against hate speech controlling for correlates of volatility + general support squared . . . 182
Table C.12 Historical cultural minority per country . . . 185
Table C.13 Specific groups intended to be used for the specified item of representation via quotas . . . 186
Table C.14 OLS estimation to examine influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for promotiong of political equality through quotas . . . 187
Table C.15 OLS estimation to examine influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for representations via quotas controlling for correlates of volatility . . . 188

Table 5.1 Treatments per experimental arm . . . 202
Table 5.2 Support for minority rights protection item . . . 203
Table D.1 Perceived minority rights protection item . . . 227
Table D.2 Example of treatment . . . 228
Table D.3 Political knowledge question 1 . . . 228
Table D.4 Political knowledge question 2 . . . 228
Table D.5 Balance tests across treatment arms for socio-demographic characteristics . . . 229
Table D.6 Balance tests across treatment arms for potential confounders . . . 231
Table D.7 Main models . . . 231
Table D.8 Predicted margins of treatment effects per perceived-desired mismatch scores 233
Table D.9 Interaction with change in support for MR× initial support . . . 234
Table D.10 Effects of treatments × liking group on change in support for MR . . . 236
Table D.11 Initial support for protecting minority rights per party affiliation and minority self-identification . . . 237
Table D.12 Effects of treatments × party affiliation and minority self-identification on change in support for MR . . . 239

Agraïments / Acknowledgements

This is my favorite part. It is typically the last section to be written, meaning that most of the hard work is already done. As Dani Marinova would say, the best dissertation is a completed one. Following this logic, the best part of a dissertation is the one that marks its completion. Moreover, it is not often that one has the opportunity to reflect on such a long intellectual journey and formally express gratitude to those who have helped along the way. Such an exercise is emotionally satisfying because it provides a sense of closure. Academically, it is also important because it contributes to the tradition of giving credit where credit is due, but in a more personal way than a citation. Finally, I have always found this section of a dissertation inspiring. At the beginning of a PhD, the finish line seems so far away that one can barely imagine reaching it. During difficult periods, one may even question whether one is on the right path. Yet whenever I read the acknowledgments of a dissertation, I felt a renewed sense of ambition. In fact, I would often fantasize about writing my own. This is because acknowledgments serve as a testament to the fact that finishing a dissertation is possible. Whether intentionally or not, authors also tend to leave behind little gems—reflections I could readily relate to, useful practical advice, or alternative perspectives—all of which encouraged me. So, if this acknowledgments section in some small way helps anyone along their own journey, I would consider it a success.

My first reflection is that great teachers do not just communicate information effectively; they inspire learning through their passion and encouragement. I have been fortunate to have a few such teachers. My English teachers at Earl Haig Secondary School were so passionate about English literature that their enthusiasm rubbed off on me. I have enjoyed reading and writing ever since. My high school biology teacher once invited me to a seminar at the University of Toronto. It was the first time I had set foot on a university campus. As a high-school student, I did not understand much of the molecular genetics research being discussed, but I was thrilled to be there and experience the dynam-

ics of a graduate seminar. I have enjoyed attending seminars ever since. At Western University, Dr. Kathleen Hill and Dr. Graeme Taylor instilled in me a passion for presenting ideas in public. Kathleen would have us debate one another. Those debates taught me to think on my feet and defend my ideas. Graeme, in particular, pushed me to craft presentations that would leave a strong impression. His confidence in me strengthened my confidence in myself. Near the end of my undergraduate studies, I asked him for advice on becoming a better public speaker. He replied, "You don't need my tips. Just keep doing what you're doing." Those words meant the world to me.

My second reflection is that one does not always recognize a critical juncture until after the fact. Along the way, I have experienced several that I can only now fully appreciate. When I was applying to Master's programs, I had originally planned to return to France. Thanks to a friend's recommendation, however, I came across the Master's program at the UAB. From the very beginning, the quality of the teaching convinced me that I wanted to stay in the department and one day collaborate with the scholars who taught me. As such, I had little hesitation about continuing into the PhD program. The first year of the PhD, however, made me question whether I could afford to stay. Here, Carol, Eva, and Quique played critical roles. My savings were running low, and I was beginning to consider packing my bags. Carol and Eva's decision to hire me as a research assistant provided a financial lifeline that allowed me to remain in Spain. Meanwhile, Quique must have written dozens of reference letters in support of applications to every conceivable funding scheme. Yet, for one reason or another, nothing seemed to materialize. Eventually, Quique found a solution. He encouraged me to apply for the pre-doctoral position on his new ERC project. Ángel Luis Torres once told me that, to survive a PhD, someone would have to take me under their wing. I guess this is what he meant.

My third reflection is that research is a surprisingly powerful means of fostering community. A former boss of mine warned me about academia, describing it as a sad world marked by countless lonely hours spent in dark offices. At least in my experience, this could not have been further from the truth. First, Guillem and Quique always found time for me, so I never felt alone. Graeme once told me that the difference between a good PhD experience and a bad one often comes down to the relationship you have with your supervisors. He was right. Next, the DEMOTRADEOFF team made the project intellectually stimulating and genuinely enjoyable. Some of my fondest memories remain those full-day discussions about what exactly constitutes a tradeoff. By the end of the day,

Sergi and I would return to the office so cognitively spent that we could hardly formulate coherent sentences. More broadly, the DEC research group created an unusually vibrant and supportive environment. That strong sense of community owes much to Eva's leadership. Beyond DEC, I have also been fortunate to become part of a wider political science community through research stays and collaborations at the EUI, Aarhus University, and, most recently, the University of Konstanz. At my first international conference, I was shy and nervous. Now, I can barely make it to a panel on time because I keep bumping into international colleagues.

My final reflection is that relationships with loved ones form the foundation upon which academic endeavors can be built. A common piece of advice is that health and happiness depend on maintaining balance between work and other important dimensions of life. Yet, as this dissertation argues, pursuing one goal often comes at the expense of another. Research can consume a great deal of time and energy, thereby threatening that balance. This is further complicated by the fact that researchers do not leave their work at the office; they carry it with them wherever they go. Consequently, it can spill over into other aspects of life, and loved ones occasionally bear the consequences. I can become quite grumpy when my Stata code refuses to cooperate or my Overleaf file will not recompile. In conversations with friends and family, I may question the validity of a premise or advance counterarguments as though I were commenting on a paper—which can be rather annoying. Loved ones play a vital role here because they are often willing to call us out when we need it. Then there are the cancelled plans or the occasions when I arrive late because something came up. Being understanding—or at least tolerant—in these moments represents a unique form of support. The same is true of the constant encouragement, motivation, and emotional support. Together, these forms of support help offset the imbalance that research can sometimes create. While great teachers, critical junctures, and a community of peers contributed to me completing this dissertation, my loved ones helped me maintain balance while doing so. This dissertation is ultimately about the conditions under which support for democratic principles weakens. I have been fortunate to have loved ones whose support never did.

1

Introduction

1.1 Motivation

There is mounting concern that the liberal democratic order is weakening in contemporary societies (Diamond, 2015; Plattner, 2017, 2020). There are various symptoms of this broader phenomenon, including electoral losers contesting election results, executives weakening constitutional constraints on their power, and incumbents packing courts with loyalists in order to influence the judiciary (Nord et al., 2026). One symptom that has received comparably less scholarly attention, however, is that minority rights are increasingly being challenged.

Minority rights are basic rights and protections guaranteed by a nation-state (often stipulated in national constitutions and reinforced by international organizations) to groups of people who are smaller in number and possess less power or privilege than majority/dominant groups within society.[1] Protecting the rights of minorities is a fundamental democratic and humanitarian principle. Yet liberal democracies have increasingly witnessed minority rights being undermined, often by the same aspiring autocrats who weaken democratic institutions in order to consolidate power. For instance, recent developments in some of Africa's most democratic countries,[2] Hungary,[3] and the United States illustrate that incumbents can curtail minority rights while encountering limited public resistance (Donà, 2021; Montague, 2025; Primecz & Pelyhe, 2024).

[1] This is a minimalist working definition, see "Defining Minorities & Rights Protection" for an elaborated conceptualization of minorities.

[2] See this BBC article for more on Ghana and Senegal criminalizing homosexuality.

[3] Citizens have recently voted the Orbán-led Fidesz party out of office, albeit after sixteen years in power.

These developments are puzzling in light of two established findings in the literature. First, citizens consistently express strong support for democracy and its core principles, including the protection of minorities (Hernández, 2025; Kokkonen & Linde, 2021; Kriesi et al., 2016). Second, a robust civic culture—composed of citizens committed to democratic principles—has traditionally been viewed as a key safeguard against illiberal or undemocratic behavior (Almond & Verba, 1963; Easton, 1965). The underlying logic is that citizens committed to democracy would refrain from supporting openly undemocratic actors and would remove incumbents from office should they become illiberal while in power. Why, then, do citizens who express support for liberal principles such as minority rights tolerate—or even endorse—political actors who undermine them?

One potential explanation is that citizens fail to recognize the erosion of minority rights when it occurs. For instance, they may not recognize a group whose rights are being curtailed as a minority. Alternatively, they may not perceive a policy or constitutional amendment that negatively affects minorities as one that jeopardizes their rights. While these explanations cannot be ruled out entirely, the evidence presented in this dissertation does not align with them.[4] Instead, the findings collectively suggest that, although citizens generally recognize both minorities and threats to their rights, their commitment to protecting those rights may be less robust than commonly assumed. The question, therefore, is not whether citizens recognize minority-rights erosion, but why they often tolerate it despite doing so.

This dissertation advances an explanation for why support for minority-rights protection is particularly susceptible to conditionality through the concept of belief systems. Existing research often treats support for minority rights as an isolated attitude. However, citizens do not evaluate minority-rights protection independently of their other political beliefs. Rather, support for this principle is embedded within broader networks of sociopolitical beliefs that contain multiple—and sometimes competing—considerations (Converse, 1964; Hernández, 2019). Whether citizens support minority-rights protection in a given situation therefore depends, in part, on the relative weight these competing considerations occupy within their belief systems. The central argument of this dissertation is that minority-rights protection occupies a comparatively peripheral position within many citizens' democratic belief systems. As a result, support for this principle is especially vulnerable to competing

[4] See Studies II, III, and IV.

democratic principles, evaluations of social groups, and perceptions of prevailing social norms. Consequently, support for minority-rights protection is highly conditional and may weaken when these competing considerations are activated.

First, support for minority-rights protection is conditional on the democratic costs citizens perceive it to entail. Citizens may genuinely support protecting the rights of minorities in principle—all else being equal. In reality, however, all else is rarely equal. In addition to facing tradeoffs between democratic and non-democratic aspects of governance (Frederiksen, 2024; Neundorf et al., 2026), citizens may also be confronted by tradeoffs *within* liberal democracy itself. Political theorists have long argued that certain democratic principles—such as minority-rights protection and majority rule—can enter into tension (Dahl, 1971; Diamond & Morlino, 2005), yet empirical research on political attitudes has largely overlooked how citizens navigate such tradeoffs. The findings of this dissertation show that, when these principles are placed in tension, most citizens prioritize majority rule over minority-rights protection. The findings further demonstrate that preferences regarding this tradeoff are shaped both by citizens' normative beliefs about how democracy ought to function and by instrumental considerations related to self-interest and in-group interest. Thus, support for minority-rights protection is conditioned not only by citizens' commitment to democratic principles, but also by the relative weight they assign to competing democratic and instrumental considerations.[5]

Second, support for minority-rights protection is conditional not only on democratic tradeoffs, but also on the groups to whom those rights are applied. Drawing on insights from the literature on political tolerance (Prothro & Grigg, 1960), this dissertation argues that support for minority-rights protection depends on whether this principle is considered in abstract terms or applied to specific minority groups—as well as on the particular minority group in question. The dissertation provides evidence of such inconsistencies between citizens' support for minority rights in the abstract and their willingness to protect the rights of specific minorities. Moreover, competing considerations related to perceptions of deservingness and affect toward different groups are found to influence context-specific political judgments. For instance, citizens are more supportive of protecting the rights of sexual minorities (e.g., homosexuals) than those of ethno-religious minorities (e.g., Muslims). These findings suggest that citizens may selectively invoke majority rule to justify weaker protections for

[5] These mechanisms are explored in Study I.

groups they dislike or consider less deserving of protection, thereby reducing potential cognitive dissonance (Krishnarajan, 2022). Hence, citizens may tolerate illiberal actions directed at particular minorities while continuing to express support for minority-rights protection in abstract terms.[6]

Third, support for minority-rights protection is conditional on perceived social norms and public consensus. Building on the literature on democratic norms and social influence (Noelle-Neumann, 1974; Valentim, 2021, 2024a, 2024b), this dissertation argues that support for minority-rights protection is sustained, at least in part, by perceived social norms. The empirical findings support this expectation. When citizens receive cues suggesting that public opinion favors restricting minority rights, they reduce their own support for this principle accordingly. Consequently, even citizens who are otherwise strongly supportive of minority rights become less supportive under certain conditions.[7] Taken together, these findings suggest that citizens' commitment to minority-rights protection is not fixed but conditional on democratic tradeoffs, the social groups involved, and perceptions of prevailing social norms.

The remainder of this chapter proceeds as follows. The next sections discuss tensions within liberal democracy, the historical development of minority-rights protection, the literature on attitudes toward minority-rights protection, and the overarching theoretical framework that guides the analyses. The dataset and key outcome measures are then introduced, followed by a brief overview of the four empirical studies that constitute the dissertation. The chapter concludes by discussing the broader implications of the dissertation for understanding democratic support, democratic backsliding, and democratic resilience. The subsequent chapters present the four studies in full. The dissertation concludes by discussing its limitations, outlining avenues for future research, and reflecting on the broader implications of the findings for understanding citizens' commitment to liberal democracy.

[6] Studies II and III focus on these inconsistencies.
[7] Study IV focuses on this explanation.

1.2 Theory

1.2.1 Democratic tradeoffs: Minority rights & majority rule

Liberal democracy consists of several desirable principles.[8] While some of these principles may mutually reinforce one another, others have intrinsic incompatibilities that generate tensions or even paradoxes (Diamond & Morlino, 2005; Hidalgo, 2019). As a result, real-world democracies cannot simultaneously maximize the realization of all democratic principles without jeopardizing the integrity of the political system as a whole (Arrow, 1985; Dahl, 1971). Instead, greater implementation of one principle often comes at the expense of another (Lauth, 2016; Lauth & Schlenkrich, 2018).

Such tradeoff dynamics are perhaps best exemplified when aspiring to realize the will of the majority while simultaneously protecting the rights of minorities. As long as the general will does not encroach on minority rights or even advances them, there is no tension between these two principles. However, the moment the majority desires an outcome that undermines minorities and their basic rights, a democratic stalemate ensues: a win for the majority entails a loss for minorities, and vice versa, such that any given verdict inevitably inflicts democratic collateral damage. Thus, the protection of minority rights and majority rule are key democratic principles that may enter into tension but must always remain in a delicate balance—otherwise democracy becomes illiberal or the political system ceases being democratic altogether (Dahl, 1989).

To better understand why such a dynamic may emerge, it is necessary to closely consider these two principles. Popular sovereignty is central to democracy. In fact, it constitutes the main distinction between democracy and non-democratic political systems such as autocracies, oligarchies, or monarchies (Dahl, 2006). At least in theory, leaders assume power via the will of the people and if—or when—the populace becomes displeased with these leaders, they may withdraw their consent and effectuate change. Popular sovereignty, however, is a theoretical ideal. In reality, the "people" are not one monolithic entity, but a collection of distinct individuals. As such, it is practically impossible for every individual to agree on every issue—all the time. Hence, the democratic principle of

[8] The literature may alternatively speak of democratic dimensions, democratic values, democratic rights or democratic norms, all of which may be considered synonyms for the purposes at hand.

majoritarianism: A decision is just and democratic if it reflects the will of the *majority* of the people. Indeed, majority rule has come to define democracy and the virtues of majoritarianism continue to lend normative credence to this political system (Spitz, 1984).

Majoritarianism, however, suffers a logical incongruence. In a dictatorship or an absolute monarchy, power is concentrated in the hands of one. In aristocracies or military juntas, power is concentrated in the hands of a few. Hence, each of these systems are characterized by unequal distributions of political power. In a democracy, the principle of political equality is intended to address such power imbalances by ensuring that every individual has the same amount of political power (e.g., the "one-person, one-vote" rule). Yet, when individuals come together to form a majority, that majority—as a collective—finds itself in a position of power that *could* be abused.

That individuals who share an opinion or position with the majority of the populace get their way on a given issue, while those who disagree with the majority (i.e., the minority) do not, would not be problematic if preferences were evenly distributed and individuals alternated—with more or less equal frequency—between siding with the majority and siding with the minority. However, preferences are not randomly distributed (Rodden, 2010). Certain individuals possess characteristics—particularly those that are innate, pertain to identity, and define membership in a collective—that predispose them to belonging to a minority. These "persistent" minorities are vulnerable to tyrannical majority factions (Abizadeh, 2021; Gamble, 1997; Horwitz, 1966)

Hence, citizens—particularly members of persistent majorities—must exercise a certain degree of forbearance to avoid abusing their democratic power (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). At the same time, members of minorities must also consent that majorities have a democratic right to rule (Nadeau & Blais, 1993; Schattschneider & Adamany, 1975). To assess citizens' commitment to democratic forbearance and consent in this context, it is essential to understand how they perceive the relationship between minority rights and majority rule. Moreover, understanding how citizens navigate such tradeoffs is essential for explaining the democratic conditionality of support for minority-rights protection.

1.2.2 Defining minorities & rights protection

Before analyzing how citizens perceive the relationship between minority-rights protection and majority rule, it is necessary to distinguish between two conceptions of minorities that are often conflated. Democratic political systems produce "procedural" minorities, while the emergence of modern nation-states produced "national" minorities.[9] Because most contemporary nation-states are also democracies, minority status and minority-rights protection reflect a historically contingent combination of these two conceptions.

In democratic systems, minorities can be understood procedurally as the losers of majority-rule decision-making. In referenda, their preferences fail to prevail because they are not shared by a majority of voters. In representative democracies, their preferred parties or candidates fail to enter government for the same reason. Early debates in the United States illustrate this understanding of minorities and their rights. Following the American Revolution, concerns about unjust taxation led many political elites to view wealthy citizens as numerically vulnerable groups whose property rights required protection from redistributive majority factions (Du Rivage, 2018). James Madison famously expressed concern in Federalist No. 10 that individuals possessing less property could unite to form a majority faction that would grant them the democratic authority to implement property redistribution, uneven taxation or "any other improper or wicked project" (Patterson & Gallagher, 2009).

Importantly, however, this conception applied only to enfranchised individuals. In the early United States, voting rights were largely restricted to propertied White men. Black Americans, although numerical minorities, became democratic minorities only through formal enfranchisement under the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870. Even then, discriminatory laws and grandfather clauses severely undermined their political participation for nearly a century. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 therefore constituted a minority-rights measure aimed at protecting equal democratic participation. Under this procedural conception, minority rights are not understood as distinct collective rights. Rather, they consist of the same civil and political rights guaranteed to all citizens in a democracy. The central concern is ensuring that these rights are protected from both current majorities (or their elected governments) and discriminatory institutions created by previous majorities.

[9] While no universally accepted definition exists, national minorities are typically understood through objective characteristics connected to collective language, religion, traditions, or culture.

The emergence of national minorities followed a different historical trajectory tied to the rise of the modern nation-state. Pre-modern empires and composite monarchies often ruled over vast territories populated by religiously, linguistically, and ethnically diverse subjects (Brubaker, 1996). In Western Europe, the transition from dynastic empire to nation-state was generally gradual. As nationalism spread, states increasingly sought to define themselves as culturally unified political entities (Anderson, 2006). This process often involved "homogenization" campaigns aimed at consolidating state legitimacy, strengthening national identity, and reducing perceived internal fragmentation (Gellner, 1994). In France, for example, linguistic homogenization took the form of centralized French-language education and the marginalization of regional languages in public life (Weber, 1976). A similar process occurred in Italy following unification.

Over time, these policies contributed to the linguistic assimilation of many regional ethno-linguistic communities and reduced the political salience of minority identities. In Spain, however, state centralization and linguistic assimilation remained comparatively incomplete. Although successive governments attempted to impose Castilian linguistic dominance, strong resistance persisted in regions such as Catalonia and the Basque Country, where distinct linguistic and national identities remained territorially concentrated and politically mobilized. Consequently, Spain developed a more pluralistic constitutional framework, including territorial autonomy and co-official regional languages for certain minority communities (Kymlicka, 1995). The varying strength of minority recognition and rights protections in Western Europe therefore reflects differing degrees of state centralization and cultural assimilation, combined with the survival of territorially concentrated identities capable of political mobilization.

In Central and Eastern Europe, by contrast, the transition to nation-states was comparatively abrupt. Following World War I, the German, Austro-Hungarian, Russian, and Ottoman Empires collapsed, and new nation-states emerged in their wake. The Paris Peace Settlement, particularly the Treaty of Versailles and related treaties, redrew the political map of the region. As a result, Germans became minorities in Poland and Czechoslovakia, Hungarians became minorities in Romania and Yugoslavia, Ukrainians became minorities in Poland, and Jews constituted substantial minority populations throughout the region. The Allied powers feared that the mistreatment of minorities

could destabilize the fragile postwar order and encourage territorial revisionism by neighboring "kin-states."[10]

Poland provides a particularly important example. Re-established after more than a century of partition between Germany, Russia, and Austria-Hungary, the new Polish state incorporated territories from all three former empires and included large non-Polish populations, including Germans, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Lithuanians, and Jews. Article 93 of the Versailles framework, implemented through the Polish Minority Treaty (i.e., the Little Treaty of Versailles), required Poland to recognize minority protections as a condition of international recognition and membership in the League of Nations. In addition to guaranteeing the same rights to all citizens regardless of birth, nationality, language, race, or religion, the treaty protected distinct collective rights such as the free use of minority languages, religious institutions, and, in certain regions, public education in minority languages. Similar minority treaties or clauses were imposed upon, or accepted by, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania, Greece, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, Turkey, Albania, and the Baltic states.

Following World War II, the United Nations replaced the League of Nations and continued the broader internationalization of human-rights protection, although with a greater emphasis on universal individual rights and non-discrimination rather than minority-specific treaty regimes. Nevertheless, the UN's later emphasis on ethnic, religious, and linguistic identity reflected the enduring influence of the interwar minority-protection framework. However, this framework excludes collectives that the literature nevertheless considers minorities, such as sexual minorities (Gross, 1991) and individuals with disabilities (Hahn, 1996).

To account for different conceptions of minorities, this dissertation draws on both the procedural understanding of minorities in democratic theory and the cultural understanding associated with national minorities in nation-states. Minorities are understood more generally as distinct groups based on social identity whose members are systematically vulnerable to disadvantage, exclusion, or underrepresentation within institutions structured by majority rule decision making. Such vulnerability may result from numerical inferiority, historical discrimination, territorial marginalization, or unequal access to political power. The rights associated with minority protection, on the other hand, vary across groups and political contexts and therefore cannot be reduced to a single formula-

[10] These concerns ultimately proved well founded. During the interwar period, Nazi Germany used the alleged mistreatment of Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia to justify intervention and territorial annexation.

tion. Different minorities may require different forms of protection depending on their relationship to citizenship, political participation, cultural identity, or historical discrimination. Immigrants and refugees, for example, may possess universal human rights and social rights such as access to education while lacking political rights such as participation in national elections (Kymlicka, 1997).

These distinctions are important because they illustrate the conceptual complexity of minority-rights protection. Different understandings of who qualifies as a minority, combined with historically contingent trajectories of rights institutionalization, mean that minority-rights protection encompasses a diverse set of groups, rights, and political claims. Unlike more intuitive democratic principles such as majority rule, minority-rights protection therefore lacks a single, easily identifiable referent. Citizens may consequently differ not only in the degree to which they support minority rights, but also in what they understand minorities and minority-rights protection to mean. This conceptual ambiguity makes support for minority-rights protection particularly susceptible to conditionality and helps explain why citizens may apply the principle inconsistently across different groups and contexts.

1.2.3 Attitudes toward minority-rights protection

Due to the distinct conceptions of minorities and the overlapping historical trajectories of rights protection, the study of minority rights has emerged across a range of disciplines, including international law (e.g., Thornberry, 1991), human rights (e.g., Kamenka, 1978), history (e.g., Chaliand et al., 1989), sociology (e.g., Gurr, 2015), and political theory (e.g., Barry, 2002; Kymlicka, 1995). A strand of literature most relevant to the this dissertation has examined citizens' attitudes toward minorities and the protection of their rights. Broadly speaking, this literature can be divided into two main approached. On the one hand, research on citizens' support for democracy has increasingly moved away from measuring support for "democracy" as an abstract political system and toward examining support for the democratic norms, institutions, and principles that constitute it (Claassen et al., 2024; Ferrín & Kriesi, 2016, 2025). These studies generally find that support for minority-rights protection is relatively high and that citizens' conceptions of democracy account for a substantial portion of the variation in such support (Grossman et al., 2022; Kokkonen & Linde, 2021; Wunsch et al., 2022).

However, these studies tend to focus on and measure support for the principle of minority-rights protection in abstract terms.

1.2.4 Belief systems and the conditionality of minority-rights support

To explain this conditionality, the dissertation draws on the concept of political belief systems. It argues that minority-rights protection occupies a comparatively peripheral position within many citizens' belief systems relative to majoritarian principles and other politically salient considerations. As a result, support for minority-rights protection is particularly vulnerable to contextual pressures and competing considerations.

Minority-rights protection is an abstract democratic principle, and evaluating its implementation in practice is often cognitively demanding. Because attention and cognitive resources are limited, individuals rely on simplified mental frameworks to make sense of complex political issues (Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Simon, 1955). According to Converse (1964), political attitudes are organized through belief systems: interconnected sets of cognitions that help individuals interpret information and form judgments. Democratic principles occupy different positions within citizens' belief systems (Hernández, 2019). Majority rule is likely to occupy a particularly central position because it is both conceptually intuitive and heavily reinforced through democratic socialization. Principles that are more central are likely to be more stable and resistant to contextual pressures, whereas more peripheral principles are more susceptible to competing considerations. These belief systems, and the connections they establish between different cognitions, reduce cognitive burdens by supplying heuristics and simplified mental models for evaluating political questions. However, they also make judgments susceptible to biases, motivated reasoning, and, at times, errors (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). As a result, support for minority-rights protection may be more conditional and context dependent than is often assumed. Citizens do not hold isolated attitudes toward minority-rights protection. Rather, they evaluate minority rights through broader belief systems that contain multiple, and sometimes competing, considerations. Conditionality thus emerges because minority-rights protection is evaluated alongside other cognitions that become salient depending on context.

At the most general level, citizens may express support for minority-rights protection when this principle is considered in isolation. However, support for any democratic principle does not exist

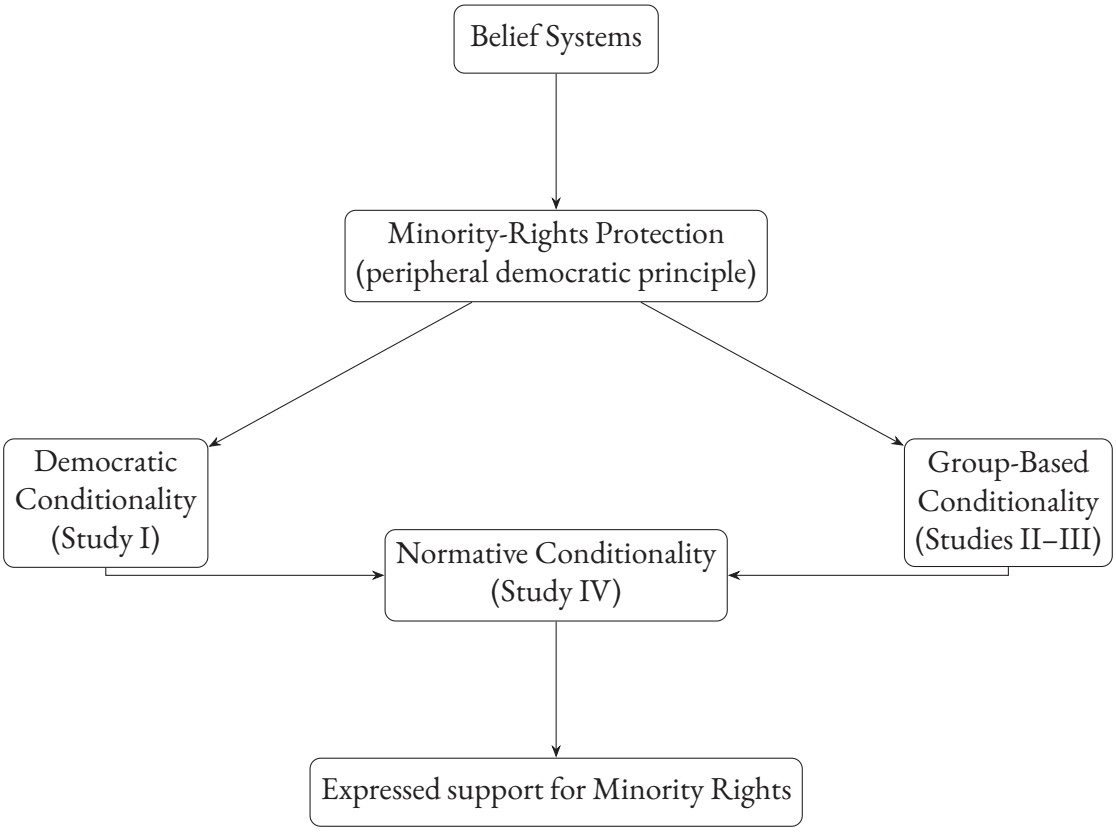
independently of other political beliefs. When minority-rights protection is placed in tension with other desirable democratic principles, such as majority rule, citizens must reconcile competing considerations within their belief systems. Support for minority-rights protection therefore becomes contingent on the relative importance citizens assign to competing democratic principles. These evaluations are shaped both by citizens' normative conceptions of how democracy ought to function and by instrumental considerations related to self-interest and group interest. This form of democratic conditionality is examined in Study I.

Support for minority-rights protection may also vary when the principle is applied to specific groups rather than considered in abstract terms. In such cases, evaluations of minority rights become intertwined with beliefs about the groups concerned. Citizens may be more supportive of protecting the rights of groups they perceive as vulnerable, deserving, or legitimate minorities, while being less supportive of groups they dislike or perceive as threatening. These judgments are informed by stereotypes, social identities, affective evaluations, and broader perceptions of intergroup relations. Consequently, support for minority-rights protection may depend not only on commitment to the principle itself but also on evaluations of the groups seeking protection. This form of group-based conditionality is examined in Studies II and III.

Finally, citizens do not form opinions in isolation. Their attitudes are influenced by perceptions of what others believe and by broader social norms. Support for minority-rights protection may therefore depend partly on beliefs about the extent to which such support is shared by other members of society. Individuals often adjust both their attitudes and their willingness to express them in order to align more closely with perceived public opinion or prevailing social expectations (Noelle-Neumann, 1974). Consequently, support for minority rights may strengthen or weaken in response to cues regarding societal consensus. This form of normative conditionality is examined in Study IV.

Taken together, this framework conceptualizes support for minority-rights protection not as a fixed democratic commitment but as an attitude embedded within broader belief systems that contain multiple and sometimes competing considerations. Because minority-rights protection competes with other democratic principles, evaluations of specific social groups, and perceptions of prevailing social norms, support for this principle is expected to vary across contexts. This helps explain why citizens who express strong support for minority rights may nevertheless tolerate—or even

Figure 1.1 Conceptual framework and paper layout



support—their erosion. If minority-rights protection occupies a weaker and less central position in many citizens' democratic belief systems than principles such as majority rule, competing considerations may ultimately override support for minority rights when these principles come into conflict. Figure 1.1 illustrates the different arguments of this framework and which empirical papers address them.

1.3 Dissertation dataset

1.3.1 Data

This dissertation draws on original data generate from the DEMOTRADEOFF Project.[11] All the data for this dissertation is based on an online survey fielded in May-July 2024 in 15 countries: Spain, UK, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, France, Belgium, Czechia, Sweden, Poland, Hungary, Greece, Por-

[11] This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant agreement No. 101042292).

tugal, Israel and the Netherlands. The sample was drawn from Bilendi's panel using representative quotas for gender, education, age and region for each country. All countries have a sample size of 1500 respondents, except for Spain, Italy, Hungary and the UK, which each have 2300 respondents.

Respondents who failed at least one of the two general attention checks included in the survey, "speeders" (i.e., those who completed the survey in less than 5 minutes) and "straight-liners" (i.e., those who gave the exact same answer in at least 75 percent of the survey batteries) are excluded from the final dataset. The final dataset consists of 25,718 respondents.[12]

1.3.2 Cases

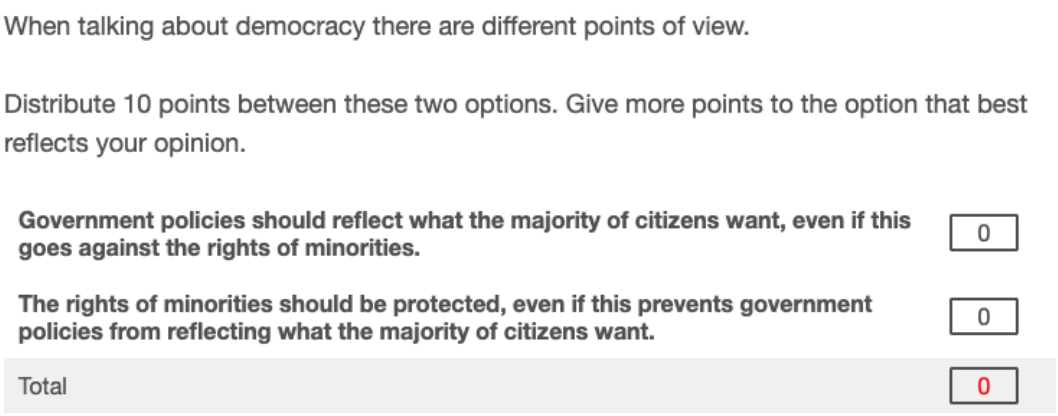
The 15 countries were selected to capture distinct historical legacies, as well as both between- and within-country variation across several dimensions that may shape attitudes toward minority rights. Minority protections vary considerably across countries. For example, certain minority groups receive stronger legal and institutional recognition than others, as illustrated by the contrast between the protection afforded to Romansh speakers in Switzerland and Breton speakers in France. Variation also exists within countries, where some minority groups enjoy stronger protections than others. In Hungary, for instance, national and linguistic minorities benefit from extensive legal protections, including minority-language education in German, Slovak, and Romanian.[13] At the same time, recent constitutional amendments have restricted the legal recognition of transgender individuals and limited the public assembly rights of LGBTQ+ groups (Spike, 2025).

The selected countries also differ in the degree to which political institutions facilitate the expression of majority rule. In the United Kingdom, first-past-the-post elections, strong single-party governments, and comparatively weak constitutional constraints allow for a more direct expression of majoritarianism (Lijphart, 2012). By contrast, Belgium and Switzerland are characterized by proportional representation, federalism, coalition governments, and institutional vetoes that constrain simple majority rule (Powell, 2000). Because democratic institutions shape how citizens understand

[12] The master questionnaire, which included the items and experiments used in the four studies that make up this dissertation, were reviewed and approved by the Commission for Ethics in Animal and Human Experimentation (CEEAH) of the Autonomous University of Barcelona.

[13] As provided by Act CLXXIX of 2011 on the Rights of Nationalities.

Figure 1.2 Item capturing respondents' preferences for protecting minority rights in tradeoff with majority rule



Note: The survey item was programmed to only allow responses that sum a total of 10 points.

and evaluate democracy (Ferrín & Hernández, 2021), they likely also influence how citizens perceive tradeoffs between majority rule and minority-rights protection.

Studies I and III use the full cross-national dataset. Study II focuses on a subset of countries—Belgium, France, Switzerland, and Hungary—while Study IV centers exclusively on Switzerland. Switzerland constitutes a particularly important case because it combines extensive minority accommodation with strong instruments of direct democracy.

1.3.3 Outcome variables

One of the main novelties of this dissertation is the development and use of an original survey item that captures citizens preferences for minority-rights protection and majority rule in a tradeoff setting. This item is presented in Figure 2.1. Respondents are asked to distribute a total of 10 points between two opposing statements in the way that best reflects their personal opinion. The first states that government policies should reflect what the majority of citizens want, even if this goes against the rights of minorities, while the other states that the rights of minorities should be protected, even if this prevents government policies from reflecting what the majority of citizens want (i.e., the opposite). The item was programmed such that the points attributed to the two statements had to total 10 points in order to be considered valid. This item is the basis of the main outcome used in Studies I, II, and III.

Given the novelty of this item, it was pre-tested in a pilot survey fielded in Spain (N = 3,011). Following Behr et al., 2017, its validity was assessed using web probing, a cognitive interviewing technique for online surveys. Immediately after responding, participants were asked open- and closed-ended questions to explain their answers. The results suggest a satisfactory understanding of the item, as most respondents provided explanations consistent with their original responses. Table 1.1 contains examples of the open-ended answers respondents provided to justify their point allocation on the tradeoff item.

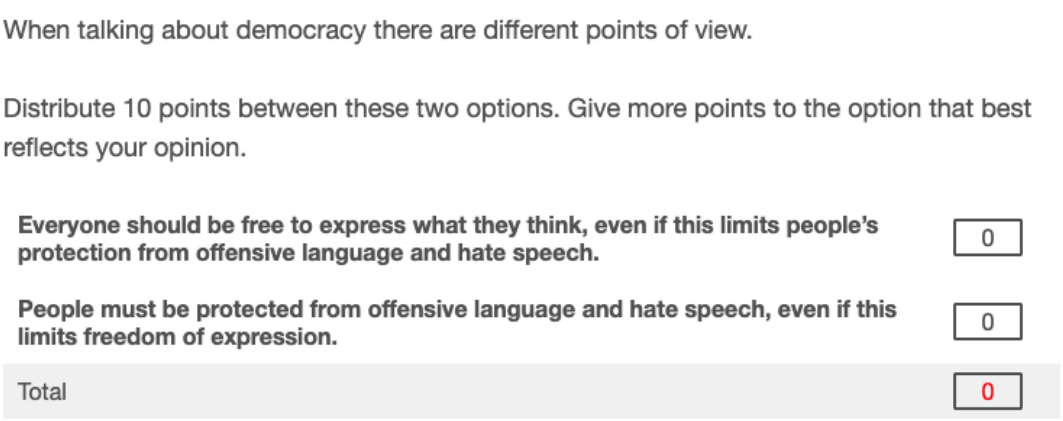
Respondents are also presented a "traditional" item measuring support for minority-rights protection. These item is based on items used by the European Social Survey to gauge support for democratic principle, in isolation, on a scale from 0 to 10. This item is presented before the main tradeoff item. In Study I, this item is used to as a point of reference and to investigate how support for minority-rights protection changes as a function of how it is measured. In Study IV, this traditional item is used as the main outcome variable as the design of this study already applies the tension minority rights can experience with majority rule using referenda.

Table 1.1 Illustrative responses to the minority-rights protection vs. majority rule tradeoff item

Respondent	Majority rule	Minority-rights protection	Justification
A	10	0	It's democracy, and if the majority decides something, it must be respected.
B	4	6	The majority prevails, although minorities should not be forgotten. Since it is the majority, it carries a little more weight without excluding minorities.
C	5	5	Good politics is always finding the necessary balance between various extreme options.
D	2	8	Rights must be respected, and we live in a diverse country with many minorities. The government must ensure that all citizens enjoy their rights.

Study II and Study III use slight variations of the tradeoff item. Study II uses an item that asks if the rights of "people like the one described above" to to capture support for this principle across different social groups presented in an unpaired conjoint with varying characteristics. Study III, in turn, used both the original item presented in Figure 2.1, as well as set of modified versions of this item that replace "minorities" with specific groups (i.e., transgender people, Muslims). Further, Fig-

Figure 1.3 Item capturing respondents' preferences for protection from hate speech in tradeoff with free speech



Note: The survey item was programmed to only allow responses that sum a total of 10 points.

ure 1.3 presents another original tradeoff item used in Study III. This items also asks respondents to distribute a total of 10 points between two opposing sentences in the way that best reflects their personal opinion. The first states that everyone should be free to express what they think, even if this limits people's protection from offensive language and hate speech. The second states that people must be protected from offensive language and hate speech, even if this limits freedom of expression. A set of modified versions of this item that replaces "people" with specific groups (i.e., women, immigrants) and "hate" speech with specific types of speech (e.g., sexist, racist). Given that the wording of this item involves only changing the group referred to in the question, any observed differences in support for the democratic principle can be assumed to result from the specific group itself—and not another potential source of variation such as differences in framing or sentence structure.

These items are fundamental to the objectives of this dissertation, which require capturing the conditionality of citizens' support for minority-rights protection. Traditional survey items typically measure support for democratic principles in isolation and in abstract terms, potentially overstating commitment by overlooking the conditions under which support may weaken (Ferrín & Kriesi, 2016, 2025). While recent efforts have introduced even-if" or even-when" clauses to make explicit some of the costs associated with the implementation of democratic principles (Claassen et al., 2024),[14] the measures developed here go a step further by presenting respondents with competing even-if" statements and requiring them to allocate points between the two positions. Combined with variations that refer to specific social groups, these measures make it possible to examine support for minority-

[14] For instance, "The right to protest should be protected *even when* protesters inconvenience others."

rights protection under different political and social conditions. They therefore provide the empirical foundation for identifying and explaining the sources of conditionality examined throughout this dissertation.

1.4 Overview of empirical papers

The four studies that comprise this dissertation examine different sources of conditionality in citizens' support for minority-rights protection. Drawing on the overarching framework developed in the previous section, the studies investigate how support for minority rights changes when citizens confront competing democratic principles, evaluate specific social groups, or receive cues regarding prevailing social norms. Together, they provide a comprehensive account of why citizens who express support for minority rights may nevertheless tolerate—or even support—their erosion in certain contexts.

1.4.1 Tradeoffs within Liberal Democracy: Citizens' Preferences for Minority-Rights Protection at the Expense of Majority Rule

The first study examines democratic conditionality by investigating whether support for minority-rights protection remains robust when it is placed in tension with majority rule. Using a novel tradeoff measure administered across 15 countries, the study shows that most citizens prioritize majority rule over minority-rights protection when forced to choose between the two. Preferences on this tradeoff are shaped by both principled factors, such as populist, nativist, and authoritarian democratic beliefs, and instrumental considerations related to perceived majority alignment, winner–loser status, and subjective minority status. The findings suggest that, when these principles come into conflict, minority-rights protection often occupies a less central position than majority rule within citizens' democratic belief systems.

1.4.2 In the eye of the citizenry: Minority Status & Deservingness of Protection

The second study begins examining group-based conditionality by looking at how citizens define minorities and what impact this has on their support for minority rights protection. The study argues

that citizens perceive minority status through a combination of numerical size and social subordination. Using a conjoint experiment conducted in four European countries, it finds that citizens readily recognize minority status—although not always in ways that align with legal or scholarly definitions. More importantly, groups perceived as minorities are not consistently viewed as more deserving of rights protections than comparable majority groups. In fact, certain groups that are among the most likely to be identified as minorities are perceived as lest deserving of having their rights protected compared to dominant or majority groups. These findings suggest that support for minority-rights protection depends not only on who citizens recognize as a minority but how also on who is considered deserving of protection.

1.4.3 Democratic Volatility & Conditionality: Citizens' Inconsistent Commitment to Democratic Rights

The third study further examines group-based conditionality by investigating why citizens do not apply democratic rights consistently across different minority groups. Whereas Study II focuses on who is recognized as a minority, Study III examines how evaluations of those groups shape support for democratic protections. Using survey data from 15 European democracies, the study shows that support for democratic rights varies both across levels of abstraction and across target groups. Citizens frequently endorse democratic principles in the abstract while withdrawing support when those principles are applied to specific groups, and they are substantially more willing to extend democratic protections to groups they like than to groups they dislike. These findings suggest that affective evaluations often outweigh principled commitments when citizens decide whose rights deserve protection.

1.4.4 Normalizing illiberalism: How perceived public consensus erodes support for minority rights

The fourth study examines normative conditionality by investigating whether support for minority-rights protection responds to perceived public consensus. Drawing on theories of social norms and public-opinion formation, it argues that citizens' commitment to minority rights is shaped not only by their own beliefs but also by perceptions of what others consider acceptable. Using a survey ex-

periment in Switzerland, the study finds that exposure to referendum outcomes restricting minority rights reduces support for minority-rights protection, whereas outcomes expanding minority rights have little effect. These findings suggest that support for minority rights is partly sustained by social norms and may erode when restrictive positions come to appear socially accepted, helping explain how illiberal attitudes can become normalized within democratic societies.

1.5 Broader implications

Taken together, the four studies show that citizens generally support minority rights, but not unconditionally. Support for minority-rights protection is shaped by competing democratic considerations, attitudes toward the social groups to whom this principle is applied, and perceptions of public consensus. More broadly, these findings challenge conventional understandings of democratic support. Citizens may appear highly supportive of democratic principles when these are measured in isolation and in abstract terms, yet such support is not necessarily fixed. Consequently, failing to account for the conditional nature of democratic commitments—and the circumstances under which this conditionality becomes politically consequential—may lead scholars to overestimate citizens' willingness to defend democratic principles in reality.

This insight may help explain why citizens who support liberal-democratic principles nonetheless tolerate actors who erode them. A common assumption in the literature is that citizens who support democratic principles will oppose political actors who seek to undermine them. However, the findings of this dissertation suggest that such opposition should not be taken for granted. Citizens who support a democratic principle—and recognize challenges to it—may nevertheless tolerate its erosion when competing political considerations dominate their political judgments. Consequently, illiberal actors may be able to maintain electoral support despite challenging minority rights when they successfully activate competing considerations that weaken citizens' commitment to thus liberal-democratic principle.

In sum, the resilience of liberal democracy depends not only on whether citizens endorse democratic principles, but also on whether they defend them when doing so becomes politically costly. Expressions of support for such principles should therefore not be interpreted as evidence that cit-

izens will consistently defend them when they come under pressure. Understanding when citizens defend minority rights—and when they do not—is therefore not merely a question about minority rights. It is ultimately a question about the resilience of liberal democracy itself.

References

Abizadeh, A. (2021). Counter-Majoritarian Democracy: Persistent Minorities, Federalism, and the Power of Numbers. *American Political Science Review*, *115*(3), 742–756. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055421000198

Almond, G. A., & Verba, S. (1963). *The civic culture: Political attitudes and democracy in five nations* (New ed.). Sage Publications.

Anderson, B. R. O. (2006). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Verso.

Arrow, K. J. (1985). *Social choice and individual values* (2. ed., [18. print.]). Yale Univ. Press.

Barry, B. M. (2002). *Culture and equality: An egalitarian critique of multiculturalism* (2. print). Harvard Univ. Press.

Behr, D., Meitinger, K., Braun, M., & Kaczmirek, L. (2017). *Web probing – implementing probing techniques from cognitive, interviewing in web surveys with the goal to assess the validity of survey questions (GESIS Survey Guidelines)* (tech. rep.) (Version Number: 1.0). GESIS - Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences. https://doi.org/10.15465/GESIS-SG_EN_023

Brubaker, R. (1996, September). *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511558764

Chaliand, G., Berrett, T., & Groupement pour le Droit des Minorités (Eds.). (1989). *Minority peoples in the age of nation-states* (1. publ). Pluto Press.

Claassen, C., Ackermann, K., Bertsou, E., Borba, L., Carlin, R. E., Cavari, A., Dahlum, S., Gherghina, S., Hawkins, D., Lelkes, Y., Magalhães, P. C., Mattes, R., Meijers, M. J., Neundorf, A., Oross, D., Öztürk, A., Sarsfield, R., Self, D., Stanley, B., … Zechmeister, E. J. (2024). Conceptualizing and Measuring Support for Democracy: A New Approach. *Comparative Political Studies*, 00104140241259458. https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140241259458

Converse, P. E. (1964). The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Public. In D. E. Apter (Ed.), *Ideology and discontent.* Free Press, New York.

Dahl, R. A. (1971). *Polyarchy: Participation and opposition*. Yale university press.

Dahl, R. A. (2006). *A Preface to Democratic Theory, Expanded Edition* [OCLC: 8162957417]. University of Chicago Press.

Dahl, R. A. (1989). *Democracy and its critics* (Nachdr.). Yale University Press.

Diamond, L. (2015). Facing Up to the Democratic Recession [Number: 1]. *Journal of Democracy*, *26*(1), 141–155. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2015.0009

Diamond, L., & Morlino, L. (Eds.). (2005). *Assessing the quality of democracy*. Hopkins Univ. Press.

Donà, A. (2021). Radical right populism and the backlash against gender equality: The case of the Lega (Nord). *Contemporary Italian Politics*, *13*(3), 296–313. https://doi.org/10.1080/23248823.2021.1947629

Du Rivage, J. (2018). *Revolution Against Empire: Taxes, Politics, and the Origins of American Independence*. Yale University Press. https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300227659

Easton, D. (1965). *A systems analysis of political life*. Wiley.

Ferrín, M., & Hernández, E. (2021). Preferences for consensus and majoritarian democracy: Long- and short-term influences. *European Political Science Review*, *13*(2), 209–225. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773921000047

Ferrín, M., & Kriesi, H. (Eds.). (2016). *How Europeans view and evaluate democracy* (First edition). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198766902.001.0001

Ferrín, M., & Kriesi, H. (Eds.). (2025, February). *How Europeans View and Evaluate Democracy Revisited: Ten Years Later* (1st ed.). Oxford University PressOxford. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198883319.001.0001

Fiske, S. T., & Taylor, S. E. (1984). *Social cognition*. Addison-Wesley.

Frederiksen, K. V. S. (2024). Do Partisanship and Policy Agreement Make Citizens Tolerate Undemocratic Behavior? *The Journal of Politics*, *86*(2), 766–781. https://doi.org/10.1086/726938

Gamble, B. S. (1997). Putting Civil Rights to a Popular Vote. *American Journal of Political Science*, *41*(1), 245. https://doi.org/10.2307/2111715

Gellner, E. (1994). *Nations and nationalism* (6. print). Cornell Univ. Press.

Gross, L. (1991). Out of the Mainstream: Sexual Minorities and the Mass Media. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *21*(1-2), 19–46. https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v21n01_04

Grossman, G., Kronick, D., Levendusky, M., & Meredith, M. (2022). The Majoritarian Threat to Liberal Democracy. *Journal of Experimental Political Science*, *9*(1), 36–45. https://doi.org/10.1017/XPS.2020.44

Gurr, T. R. (2015, November). *Why Men Rebel* (oth ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315631073

Hahn, H. (1996). Antidiscrimination Laws and Social Research on Disability: The Minority Group Perspective. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, *14*(1), 41–59. https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1099-0798(199624)14:1<41::AID-BSL223>3.0.CO;2-R

Hernández, E. (2019). Democracy belief systems in Europe: Cognitive availability and attitudinal constraint. *European Political Science Review*, *11*(4), 485–502. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773919000286

Hernández, E. (2025, February). Stability and change in Europeans' views of democracy. In M. Ferrín & H. Kriesi (Eds.), *How Europeans View and Evaluate Democracy Revisited* (1st ed., pp. 55–78). Oxford University PressOxford. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198883319.003.0003

Hidalgo, O. (2019). The Theory of Democratic Antinomies and the Identification of Value Trade-Offs in Political Practice [Number: 4]. *Politics and Governance*, *7*(4), 264–274. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v7i4.2243

Horwitz, M. J. (1966). Tocqueville and the Tyranny of the Majority. *The Review of Politics*, *28*(3), 293–307. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670500007105

Kamenka, E. (Ed.). (1978). *Human rights* (1. publ). Arnold.

Kokkonen, A., & Linde, J. (2021). Nativist attitudes and opportunistic support for democracy [Number: 0 _eprint: https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2021.2007459]. *West European Politics*, *0*(0), 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2021.2007459

Kriesi, H., Pappas, T. S., Aslanidis, P., Bernhard, L., & Betz, H.-G. (Eds.). (2016). *European populism in the shadow of the great recession* (Paperback edition). ECPR Press.

Krishnarajan, S. (2022). Rationalizing Democracy: The Perceptual Bias and (Un)Democratic Behavior. *American Political Science Review*, 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055422000806

Kymlicka, W. (1995). *Multicultural citizenship: A liberal theory of minority rights*. Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press.

Kymlicka, W. (1997). Do We Need a Liberal Theory of Minority Rights? Reply to Carens, Young, Parekh and Forst. *Constellations*, *4*(1), 72–87. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.00038

Lauth, H.-J. (2016). The internal relationships of the dimensions of democracy: The relevance of trade-offs for measuring the quality of democracy. *International Political Science Review*, *37*(5), 606–617. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512116667630

Lauth, H.-J., & Schlenkrich, O. (2018). Making Trade-Offs Visible: Theoretical and Methodological Considerations about the Relationship between Dimensions and Institutions of Democracy

and Empirical Findings [Number: 1]. *Politics and Governance*, *6*(1), 78–91. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v6i1.1200

Levitsky, S., & Ziblatt, D. (2018). *How democracies die* (First edition). Crown.

Lijphart, A. (2012). *Patterns of Democracy* (2nd ed.). Yale University Press. https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300189124

Montague, Z. (2025). Trump's Cuts to N.I.H. Grants Focused on Minority Groups Are Illegal, Judge Rules. *The New York Times*.

Nadeau, R., & Blais, A. (1993). Accepting the Election Outcome: The Effect of Participation on Losers' Consent. *British Journal of Political Science*, *23*(4), 553–563. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123400006736

Neundorf, A., Dahlum, S., Skaaning Frederiksen, K. V., & Öztürk, A. (2026). Elections Without Constraints? The Appeal of Electoral Autocracy Across the World. *British Journal of Political Science*, *56*, e1. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123425101129

Noelle-Neumann, E. (1974). The Spiral of Silence a Theory of Public Opinion. *Journal of Communication*, *24*(2), 43–51. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1974.tb00367.x

Nord, M., Altman, D., Fernandes, T., & God, A. G. (2026). *Democracy Report 2026: Unraveling The Democratic Era?* (Tech. rep.). University of Gothenburg: V-Dem Institute. Gothenburg, Sweden.

Patterson, E., & Gallagher, J. (Eds.). (2009). *Debating the war of ideas* (1st ed). Palgrave Macmillan.

Plattner, M. F. (2017). Liberal Democracy's Fading Allure [Number: 4]. *Journal of Democracy*, *28*(4), 5–14. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0060

Plattner, M. F. (2020). Democracy Embattled [Number: 1]. *Journal of Democracy*, *31*(1), 5–10. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2020.0000

Powell, G. B. (2000). *Elections as instruments of democracy: Majoritarian and proportional visions*. Yale university press.

Primecz, H., & Pelyhe, V. (2024). Hungary as a precarious context for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community. Interviews with transgender people. *Gender, Work & Organization*, *31*(5), 1812–1827. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.13038

Prothro, J. W., & Grigg, C. M. (1960). Fundamental Principles of Democracy: Bases of Agreement and Disagreement. *The Journal of Politics*, *22*(2), 276–294. https://doi.org/10.2307/2127359

Rodden, J. (2010). The Geographic Distribution of Political Preferences. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *13*(1), 321–340. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.12.031607.092945

Schattschneider, E. E., & Adamany, D. (1975). *The semisovereign people: A realist view of democracy in America*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich college publ.

Simon, H. A. (1955). A Behavioral Model of Rational Choice. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *69*(1), 99. https://doi.org/10.2307/1884852

Spike, J. (2025, March). A new anti-LGBTQ+ bill in Hungary would ban Pride event, allow facial recognition software use [Section: World & Nation].

Spitz, E. (1984). *Majority rule*. Chatham House.

Thornberry, P. (1991, September). *International Law and the Rights of Minorities*. Oxford University PressOxford. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198256205.001.0001

Tversky, A., & Kahneman, D. (1974). Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases: Biases in judgments reveal some heuristics of thinking under uncertainty. *Science*, *185*(4157), 1124–1131. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.185.4157.1124

Valentim, V. (2021). Parliamentary Representation and the Normalization of Radical Right Support. *Comparative Political Studies*, *54*(14), 2475–2511. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414021997159

Valentim, V. (2024a, September). *The Normalization of the Radical Right: A Norms Theory of Political Supply and Demand* (1st ed.). Oxford University PressOxford. https://doi.org/10.1093/9780198926740.001.0001

Valentim, V. (2024b). Norms of Democracy, Staged Democrats, and Supply of Exclusionary Ideology. *Comparative Political Studies*, 00104140241283009. https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140241283009

Weber, E. (1976). *Peasants into Frenchmen: The modernization of rural France, 1870-1914*. Stanford university press.

Wunsch, N., Jacob, M., & Derksen, L. (2022, January). *The Demand Side of Democratic Backsliding: How Divergent Understandings of Democracy Shape Political Choice* (tech. rep.) (type: article). OSF Preprints. https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/c64gf

2

Study I
Tradeoffs within Liberal Democracy: Citizens' Preferences for Minority-Rights Protection at the Expense of Majority Rule

2.1 Introduction

There is mounting evidence that liberal democracy is facing significant challenges (Plattner, 2020). In countries such as the United States and Hungary,[1] incumbents have curtailed civil rights while encountering relatively limited public resistance (Montague, 2025; Primecz & Pelyhe, 2024). Meanwhile, far-right parties whose rhetoric and policy agendas threaten minority rights continue to gain electoral support (Mudde, 2021). Given that a citizenry committed to democratic values has traditionally been viewed as a fundamental safeguard against illiberal forces (Almond & Verba, 1963), these developments appear difficult to reconcile with citizens' consistently high levels of expressed support for minority rights (Hernández, 2025). Indeed, recent experimental research suggests that support for democratic values can coexist with illiberal orientations and anti-democratic tendencies (Simonovits et al., 2022).

Two prominent explanations have been advanced for this discrepancy. First, citizens' expressed support for democratic principles may be disingenuous. Individuals may falsify their true illiberal preferences in order to comply with perceived democratic norms (Valentim, 2021, 2024a, 2024b). Alternatively, citizens may genuinely endorse democratic values in isolation, yet weigh these values against competing considerations in practice. Recent research shows that even committed democrats

[1] Citizens recently voted Orbán out of office after sixteen years in power. See this BBC article for more.

are willing to trade off democratic principles for policy interests, partisan loyalty, security, and economic considerations (Frederiksen, 2024; Neundorf et al., 2026).

This study advances a third explanation. Citizens may may genuinely support democratic principles in isolation, however, these principles may be subject to tradeoffs *within* liberal democracy, which influence citizens' attitudes towards them. Although political theorists have long argued that democratic principles such as minority-rights protection and majority rule may come into conflict (Dahl, 1971; Diamond & Morlino, 2005), empirical research on political attitudes has largely overlooked such tensions. These dynamics are particularly relevant in contemporary democracies, where populist radical-right parties frequently contrast allegedly "woke" agendas benefiting niche minorities with the struggles of "ordinary people" and portray liberalism as increasingly undemocratic (Mudde, 2021; Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

Taken together, these considerations motivate an examination of citizens' preferences regarding the tradeoff between minority-rights protection and majority rule, as well as the factors shaping these preferences. While citizens may strongly support minority-rights protection in isolation, when confronted with competing democratic principles they are expected to prioritize majoritarian aspects of democracy that occupy a more central position within their democratic belief systems because elections, majority rule, and responsiveness are more readily associated with democracy than countermajoritarian protections (Claassen, 2018; Converse, 1964; Hernández, 2019). Leveraging a novel tradeoff item that pits minority-rights protection against majority rule, original survey data from fifteen countries show that most citizens become less supportive of minority-rights protection when doing so constrains majority rule.

To explain variation in citizens' preferences regarding this tradeoff, the study advances two complementary mechanisms. Citizens may prioritize one democratic principle over another based either on *principled* understandings of how democracy ought to function or on *instrumental* considerations linked to self-interest and in-group interest. First, citizens who endorse beliefs associated with the far right—particularly populism, nativism, and authoritarianism—are expected to prioritize majority rule over minority-rights protection because these ideologies tend to conceive of democracy in strongly majoritarian terms. Complementing this mechanism, individuals who perceive their views as aligned with those of the broader public are expected to favor majority rule because they stand to ben-

efit from majoritarian decision-making. By contrast, electoral losers and respondents who identify as minorities are expected to favor minority-rights protection because they possess stronger incentives to constrain excessive majoritarianism. The results largely support these expectations while also showing that principled and instrumental considerations can interact in meaningful ways.

Additional analyses based on open-ended responses in which respondents who identify as minorities describe their minority status reveal important heterogeneity within this group. Sexual and intersectional minorities, for instance, express the strongest support for minority-rights protection at the expense of majority rule. By contrast, a subset of respondents who claim minority status while invoking markers associated with majority or culturally dominant groups (e.g., "pure-blooded Swedes" or "straight white men") strongly prioritize majority rule over minority-rights protection.

Taken together, these findings contribute to a novel perspective on citizens' commitment to minority rights by highlighting tensions and tradeoffs within liberal democracy itself. More broadly, they suggest that democratic erosion may emerge not only from outright anti-democratic attitudes, but also from democratic preferences that become increasingly majoritarian when democratic principles are perceived to conflict. These findings also help explain why citizens who endorse minority rights may nevertheless tolerate—or even support—political actors who undermine them. When large segments of the citizenry prioritize majority rule over minority-rights protection, political actors can exploit this tension and legitimize illiberal policies in the name of popular sovereignty.

2.2 Theory

Liberal democracy consists of several desirable principles.[2] While some of these principles reinforce one another, others contain intrinsic incompatibilities that may generate tensions (Diamond & Morlino, 2005; Hidalgo, 2019). Consequently, liberal democracies cannot fully realize all democratic principles simultaneously, as advancing one principle may come at the expense of another (Arrow, 1985; Dahl, 1971; Lauth, 2016; Lauth & Schlenkrich, 2018).

[2] The literature may alternatively speak of democratic/liberal dimensions, values, rights or norms, all of which may be considered synonyms for the purposes at hand.

The potential for such tradeoff dynamics is exemplified in the relationship between the democratic principle of majority rule and the liberal principle of minority-rights protection. When the preferences of the majority do not threaten minorities, the two principles coexist without conflict. However, when majority demands undermine the rights of minorities, a democratic tension emerges. As such, limits have to be implemented to each principle so they may remain in a democratic balance (Dahl, 1989). Otherwise, unconstrained majoritarianism may result in a tyranny of the majority, while excessive minoritarian defenses may undermine the democratic character of the political system (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2024; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012).

Although political institutions establish frameworks for maintaining this democratic balance (Ferrín & Hernández, 2021), citizens also play an important role. Members of majorities must exercise forbearance in the use of their political power without trampling on the rights of minorities (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018), while minorities must respect the will of the majority, irrespective of whether it aligns with their preferences (Nadeau & Blais, 1993; Schattschneider & Adamany, 1975).

Studies that have examined citizens' support for democratic principles have found that most individuals are very supportive of protecting minority rights (Ferrín & Kriesi, 2016; Hernández, 2025; Kokkonen & Linde, 2021). Yet, these same studies have found that citizens are also very supportive of majority rule. If the principle of minority-rights protection were to undermine realizing the will of the majority, citizens may abandon their support for protecting minorities—or they may double down on it. However, we know very little about citizens' preferences under such circumstances.

When forced to chose, citizens' prioritization of democratic principles is likely informed by the structure of their democratic belief systems (Converse, 1964; Hernández, 2019). While citizens may conceptualize democracy in different ways (Wunsch et al., 2022), certain democratic principles are likely central to most people's understandings of democracy. Studies have consistently shown that elections and majority rule are the first things that come to people's minds when thinking about democracy and that these are the democratic elements they value most (Adserà et al., 2023; Ferrer et al., 2025; Ferrín & Kriesi, 2016; Neundorf et al., 2026).

Majoritarian aspects of liberal democracy, such as elections and majority rule, may be more intuitive than "minoritarian" or "anti-majoritarian" principles like judicial review and the protection of minority rights (Claassen, 2018). Alternatively, majoritarian elements may be seen are more impor-

tant in a democracy. For instance, decisions that reflect the opinion of the majority tend to be perceived as fair (Qvortrup, 2014), suggesting that majoritarianism lends democracy normative credence (Spitz, 1984). Finally, it may simply be that citizens are socialized to be more familiar with majoritarian principles via the education system (Dalton et al., 2007), personal experiences with voting, and extensive media coverage of campaigns and elections (Druckman, 2005). In any case, majority rule likely occupies a central position in most citizens' mental maps of liberal democracy. The principle of protecting minority rights, on the other hand, presumably occupies a more peripheral position in their democratic belief systems. If forced to choose between these principles, citizens likely prioritize the one that is more central to their conceptualization of democracy. Hence the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: In a tradeoff setting, citizens prioritize majority rule over minority-rights protection.

For the average citizen, their preference for majority rule over minority-rights protection may be relatively modest. However, across the general population, citizens likely differ both in which principle they prioritize and in the extent to which they prioritize one principle over the other. Some individuals may prefer more or less of a balance, while others may strongly prefer one principle over the other. Some may even desire maximizing one principle to the point of completely disregarding the other entirely. Such attitudes may challenge the liberal-democratic order, which depends on maintaining a certain balance between the principles involved in this tradeoff (Dahl, 1989). However, we do not which factors a predict tradeoff preferences and may be associated with potentially extreme positions.

Two complementary mechanisms are advanced to explain citizens' preferences regarding the tradeoff between minority-rights protection and majority rule: a *principled* mechanism rooted in individuals' ideological beliefs about how democracy ought to function, and an *instrumental* mechanism rooted in self-interest and in-group interest. Beginning with principled preferences, some individuals may have loosely structured democratic belief systems in which majority rule occupies a somewhat more central position than minority-rights protection. These individuals will likely express a slight preference for the former over the latter. Conversely, other citizens may have coherently structured democratic belief systems in which different principles are hierarchically sorted in order of perceived importance in a way that reflects their conception of democracy. Following Wunsch et al., 2022, those with liberal conceptions of democracy value both majoritarian principle such as the protection

of minority rights and the majoritarian aspects of democracy. As such, they may be more likely to favor a more or less balanced tradeoff preference. Conversely, those with majoritarian conceptions of democracy likely have democratic belief systems where majoritarian principles occupy dominant positions and majoritarian principles occupy subordinate positions much lower on their metal hierarchies.

This *principled* mechanism is especially relevant in the context of radical-right politics. Radical-right parties are widely regarded as major contemporary threats to minority rights in liberal democracies (Bernhard, 2021; Rydgren, 2017, 2018; Svolik et al., 2023; Valentim, 2024b). This is because their rhetoric and policy proposals tend to promote stronger forms of majoritarianism while undermining minority rights. Given that populism, nativism, and authoritarianism constitute the core ideological components of the radical right (Mudde, 2007; Rama et al., 2021), citizens who endorse these beliefs are likely to espouse conceptions of democracy in which majority rule overrides minority-rights protection

2.3 Data & methods

This study examines citizens' preferences regarding the tradeoff between protecting minority rights and majority rule using original online survey data from 15 countries: Belgium, Czechia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. These cases capture substantial cross-national variation along dimensions likely to shape attitudes toward minority rights. One important dimension concerns the degree to which minorities are formally recognized and protected. For example, the rights of linguistic minorities receive stronger institutional recognition in some countries (e.g., Romansh speakers in Switzerland) than in others (e.g., Occitan speakers in France).[3] Moreover, countries may extend protections unevenly across different minority groups. Hungary, for instance, provides stronger protections for national and linguistic minorities than for sexual minorities.[4]

[3] See Minority Rights Group: Romansh and Minority Rights Group: Occitan for further details.
[4] See Act CLXXIX of 2011 and Spike, 2025.

The selected countries also vary considerably in the extent to which their political institutions facilitate or constrain majority rule. The United Kingdom, for example, combines first-past-the-post elections, strong single-party governments, and relatively weak constitutional constraints, thereby enabling a more direct expression of the general will of the people (Lijphart, 2012). Belgium and Switzerland, by contrast, are characterized by proportional representation, federalism, coalition governments, and minority vetoes, all of which constrain majoritarian rule (Powell, 2000).

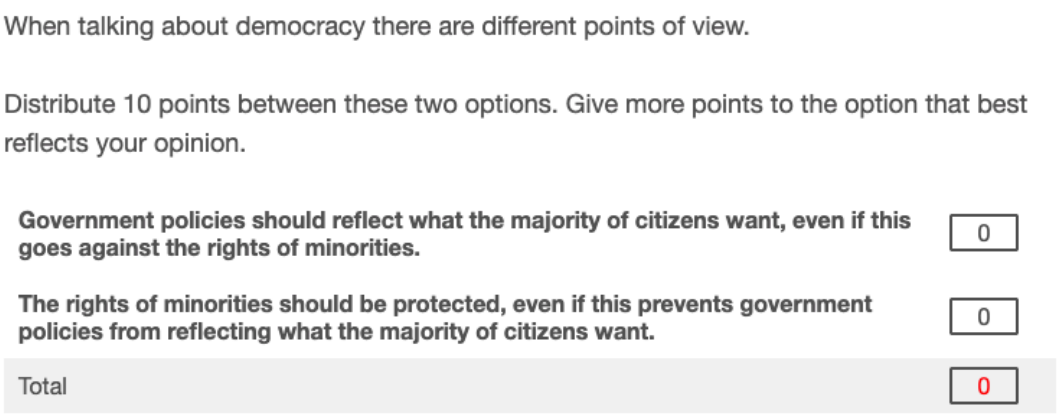
The survey was fielded through the online panels of the commercial survey firm Bilendi using nationally representative quotas for gender, education, age, and region. Most country samples contain 1,500 respondents, although Hungary, Spain, Italy, and the United Kingdom each include 2,300 respondents. Several quality-control procedures were implemented prior to constructing the final dataset. Respondents who failed at least one of the two general attention checks included in the survey, "speeders" (i.e., respondents who completed the survey in less than five minutes), and "straightliners" (i.e., respondents who provided the same response across more than 75 percent of survey batteries) were excluded from the final effective sample. The resulting dataset contains 25,719 respondents.[5]

The main outcome of this study is based on respondents' preferences on the tradeoff between protecting minority rights and respecting the will of the majority. Figure 2.1 contains a novel survey item used to capture these preferences. Respondents are asked to distribute a total of 10 points between two opposing statements in the way that best reflects their personal opinion. The first states that government policies should reflect what the majority of citizens want, even if this goes against the rights of minorities, while the other states that the rights of minorities should be protected, even if this prevents government policies from reflecting what the majority of citizens want. This wording highlights the tradeoff dynamic that may arise when implementing these two principles using "even if this goes against/prevents."

The item also reduces the level of abstraction associated with majority rule by framing it in terms of government responsiveness to majority preferences, thereby improving clarity and interpretability. Given the novelty of this item, it was pre-tested in a pilot survey fielded in Spain (N = 3,011). Following Behr et al., 2017, its validity was assessed using web probing, a cognitive interviewing tech-

[5] This study was reviewed and approved by the Commission for Ethics in Animal and Human Experimentation (CEEAH) of the Autonomous University of Barcelona on February 16, 2024, under decision number CEEAH 6801.

Figure 2.1 Item capturing respondents' preferences for protecting minority rights in tradeoff with the will of the majority



Note: The survey item was programmed to only allow responses that sum a total of 10 points.

nique for online surveys. Immediately after responding, participants were asked open- and closed-questions to explain their answers. The results suggest at least a basic understanding of the item, as most respondents provided explanations consistent with their original responses.

The item was programmed such that the points assigned to the two statements had to sum to 10 in order for the response to be considered valid. The dependent variable corresponds to the number of points allocated to the statement:"The rights of minorities should be protected, even if this prevents government policies from reflecting what the majority of citizens want." Given the relational structure of the item and the parallel wording of the two statements, higher values indicate stronger support for minority-rights protection at the expense of majority rule, whereas lower values indicate stronger support for majority rule relative to minority-rights protection.

To avoid mechanically forcing respondents toward one side of the tradeoff in ways that might not reflect their genuine preferences, respondents were permitted to assign five points to each statement. Those respondents—as well as respondents who skipped the item—were subsequently presented with a follow-up question asking which principle they would prioritize if forced to choose. Importantly, respondents were not required to prioritize either principle and could instead indicate that neither was more important than the other. This design distinguishes respondents who genuinely prefer a balance between the two principles from those who assigned five points to each statement primarily to avoid engaging with the tradeoff despite ultimately favoring one principle over the other.

Respondents were also presented with a "traditional" measure of support for minority-rights protection. This item, adapted from measures used in the European Social Survey, gauges support for democratic principles in isolation on a scale ranging from 0 to 10. Because similar items are widely used in the literature on citizens' attitudes toward minority-rights protection, this measure serves as a benchmark against which attitudes under the tradeoff framing can be compared.

Moving now to the *principled* determinants of attitudes towards this tradeoff. Three separate items are used to construct a five-point populism scale for which higher values correspond to greater endorsement of a populist ideology. The items relate to taking pride in being an ordinary person (i.e., people centered), the importance of political leaders being like the people they represent (i.e., anti-elitism), and the idea of politics is a struggle between good and evil (i.e., Manichaeism), as inspired by Akkerman et al., 2014. Nativism is measured using an item that asks respondents if they feel their country is made worse or better by people coming from other countries on a 0-to-10 scale. The scale is reverse coded, such that higher values on the variable correspond to stronger nativist sentiment (Kokkonen & Linde, 2021). Authoritarianism is measured by respondents' agreement with the statement that obedience and respect for authority are the most important values children should learn, with higher values indicating greater authoritarianism.

In term of *instrumental* factors, perceived majority alignment is measured using an item that asks respondents how many people in their country share their political views. Responses range from "Almost no one shares my own political views" to "Almost everyone shares my own political views" on a five-point scale. Higher values correspond to higher perceived alignment with the majority. Next, winner/loser status is operationalized using vote recall in the last national election, coding as winners those who voted for parties that form the government and as losers everyone else.[6] The resulting dichotomous variable takes the value 0 in the case of electoral winners and 1 for electoral loser.

Respondents' minority status is captured using an item that asks respondents if they identify as members of a *political* minority. The resulting dichotomous variable takes the value of one if the respondent identifies as a minority and zero if they do not.[7] An open-ended follow-up is administered to respondents who identify as political minorities, asking them to specify the type of minority to

[6] This included respondents who answered "Other party," "Blank vote," "I did not vote," "I was not eligible to vote," or "I prefer not to say."

[7] The wording for this item was also tested in the pilot survey.

which they belong. Responses are translated into English using ChatGPT 5.2. The full corpus (N = 5,118) is analyzed inductively develop a minority taxonomy and a codebook for classifying responses into minority categories.[8] The corpus is then manually coded following this codebook, which remains the gold standard (Grimmer & Stewart, 2013), and the resulting categorical variable is used in the primary analyses. To ensure replicability, the corpus is also coded using automated text classification using by Claude (1.3883.0 (93ff6c) with Opus 4.7)), based on the same codebook. Table A.1 in Appendix A contains examples of responses to these open-ended questions, along with classifications made by human and automated annotation. Furthermore, Figure A.12, Figure A.13, and Figure A.14 compare intercoder overlap and category-specific agreement between human and automated classification. A Cohen's κ of 0.82 reveals an "almost perfect" intercoder agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977). This alternative variable, based on automated annotation, is used for cross-validation (Song et al., 2020).

Controls include sex, education, and age. Political knowledge may also shape both ideological orientations (related to populist, nativist, and authoritarianism) as well as preferences over democratic tradeoffs. As such, it is controlled for it using a linear additive index based on correct responses to two factual questions: one identifying a minister and another concerning the number of Members of Parliament. The questions are adapted to each country.

A first set of analyses descriptively compares the distribution of respondents' support for protecting minority rights in isolation and respondents' support for protecting minority rights at the expense of majority rule (i.e., the tradeoff outcome). In a second set of analyses, the main tradeoff outcome is modeled as a function of respondents' populist, nativist, and authoritarian beliefs, perceived majority alignment, winner/loser status, and dichotomous minority status, while controlling for sex, education, age, and political knowledge. In these models, numerical predictors are rescaled so that a one-unit increase corresponds to a two-standard-deviation change in the underlying variable, making them directly comparable to each other and to dichotomous predictors (Gelman, 2008). All models further include county fixed-effects to account for unobserved cross-country heterogeneity.

Finally, the main outcome is regressed on the alternative categorical variable that breaks down minority status per minority groups, using those who do not identify as minorities as the reference

[8] See Appendix A for codebook.

category. Standard controls such as sex, education and age are excluded from these models as these factors relate to minority categories (as observed in the open-ended responses).

2.4 Results

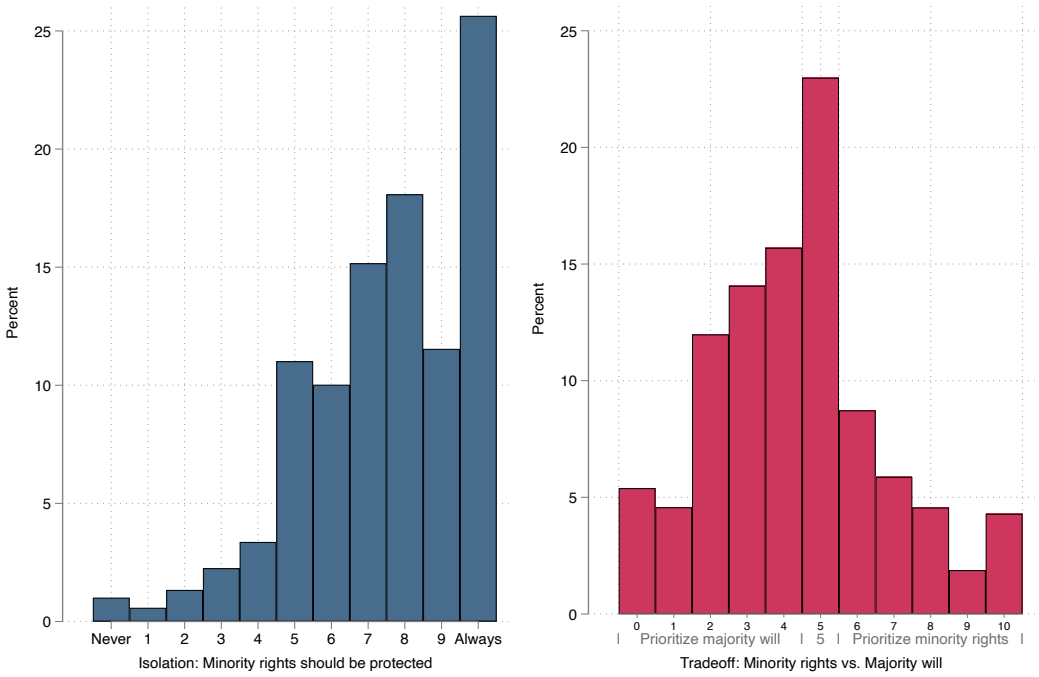
Before examining the correlates of citizens' attitudes toward the tradeoff between minority-rights protection and majority rule, it is useful to first consider the distribution of these attitudes. Figure 2.2 presents the distribution of support for minority-rights protection using two different measurement approaches. This comparison reveals how support for this key democratic principle changes depending on whether it is framed in isolation or in relation to a tradeoff with majority rule.

The panel on the left displays the distribution of support for protecting minority rights when the principle is measured in isolation, as in traditional survey items. The pronounced negative skew (-0.84) indicates high overall support for this principle, with a mean of 7.5, a median of 8, and a mode of 10. This finding is consistent with existing research (Ferrín & Kriesi, 2016, 2025; Kokkonen & Linde, 2021). The panel on the right, however, shows that once minority-rights protection is framed as potentially constraining majority rule, support for the principle declines substantially. Here, respondents evaluated the following statement: "The rights of minorities should be protected, even if this prevents government policies from reflecting what the majority of citizens want." Higher values therefore indicate prioritizing minority-rights protection over majority rule, whereas lower values indicate prioritizing majority rule over minority-rights protection.

The shift toward a positive skew (0.36) indicates that, when confronted with a democratic tradeoff, citizens tend to prioritize majority rule at the expense of minority-rights protection. Although the modal response is 5—with nearly one quarter of respondents indicating that the two principles should be balanced—the mean of 4.4, the median of 4, and the overall distribution indicate that most citizens lean toward prioritizing majority rule. More broadly, these findings suggest that citizens' apparent commitment to liberal-democratic principles depends heavily on whether those principles are measured in isolation or under conditions of democratic conflict.

It is also noteworthy that only 1% of respondents selected a value of zero when minority-rights protection was measured in isolation, indicating a complete absence of support for this principle. By

Figure 2.2 Distribution of support for minority rights: unconstrained vs. tradeoff framing

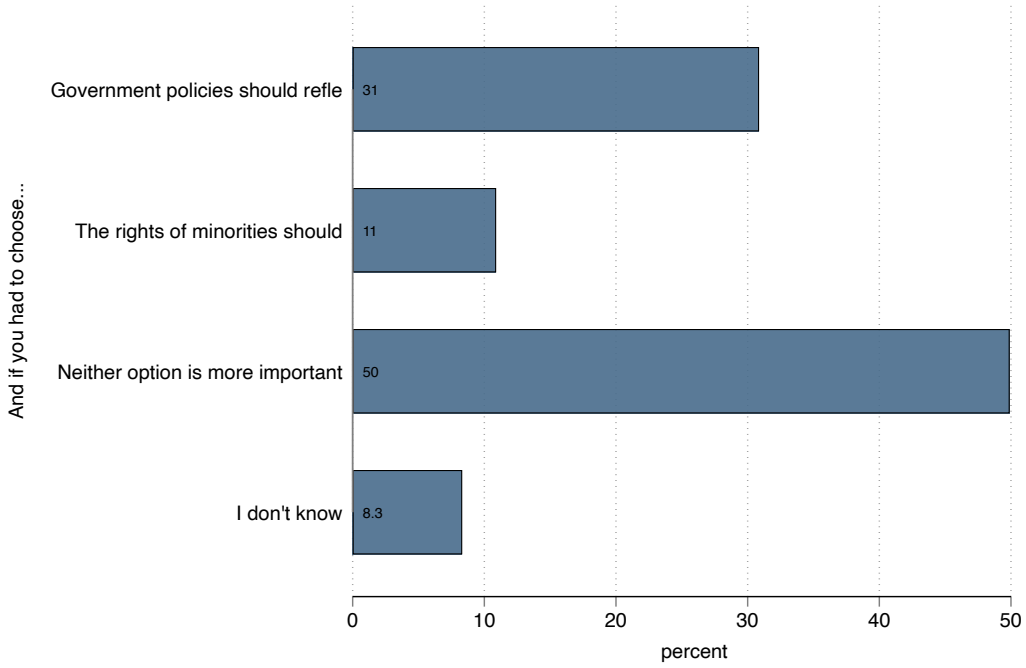


Note: Mean support for protecting minority rights when gauged in isolation (left panel) is 7.5, with a standard deviation of 2.2. When asked using a tradeoff framing (right panel) support for protecting minority rights at the expense of respecting the will of the majority is 4.4, with a standard deviation of 2.4.

contrast, when presented as a tradeoff, more than 5% of respondents selected zero, indicating support for majority rule to the point of disregarding minority-rights protection. Conversely, just over 4% selected 10, indicating support for minority-rights protection to the point of disregarding majority rule altogether. These responses suggest that a non-trivial portion of citizens hold absolutist democratic preferences that reject the balancing of principles required in liberal democracy (Dahl, 1989).

Figure 2.3 contains the distribution of a follow up question asking respondents who selected 5 on the outcome variable which principle they would prioritize if they had to choose between the two. Half of the 5,781 respondents who selected 5 on the main outcome maintain this response in the follow-up, indicating that neither principle is more important than the other. These respondents might be considered true "balancers" in that they seem to genuinely desire a perfect equilibrium between these two principles (representing 11% of the total sample). Meanwhile, 31% of respondents ultimately prioritize majority rule over minority-rights protection, while only 11% of respondents end up selecting minority-rights protection over majority rule.[9] This finding strengthens the validity

Figure 2.3 Distribution of respondents who assigned 5 points to each principle in main tradeoff outcome



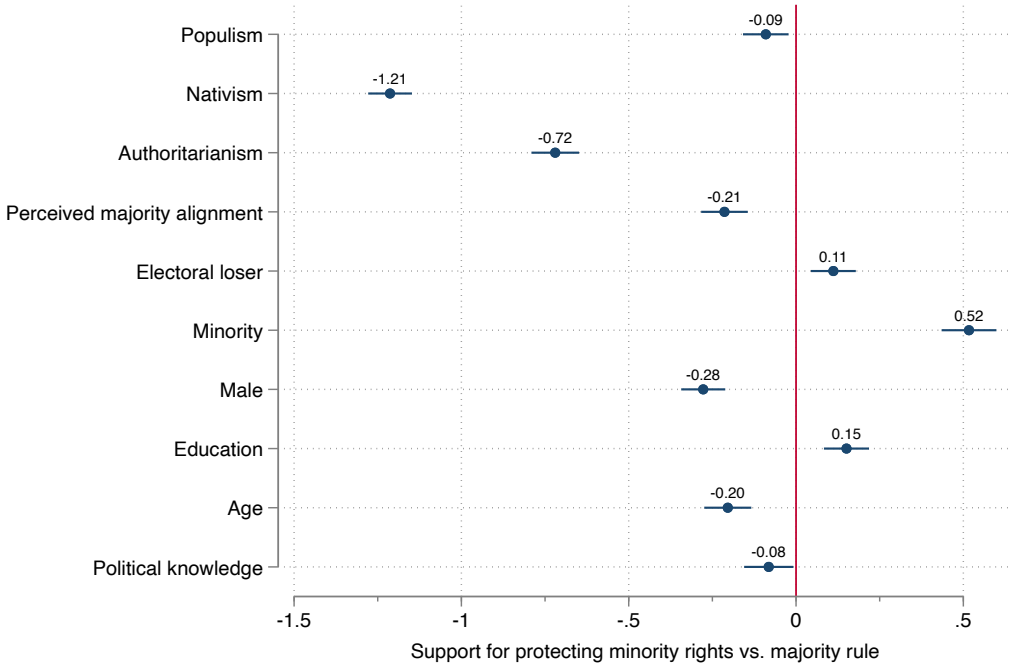
Note: Percent of 5,781 respondents who attribute 5/5 points to original tradeoff question.

of the tradeoff measure by demonstrating that midpoint responses frequently reflect genuine democratic balancing rather than indecision or satisficing.

It is also possible to examine how support for minority rights changes depending on how it is measured by subtracting respondents' support for minority rights in isolation from their support under tradeoff conditions. Figure A.16 in Appendix A shows the distribution of within-individual change between these two measures. As expected, most respondents reduce their support for minority rights when doing so jeopardizes majority rule. Taken together, these findings support Hypothesis 1: In a tradeoff setting, citizens prioritize majority rule over minority-rights protection. Furthermore, they suggest that existing survey items may overestimate support for minority rights. While most citizens support minority rights in principle, this support declines significantly when doing so jeopardizes majority rule. Finally, these findings challenge conventional interpretations of democratic support by showing that endorsement of liberal-democratic principles may weaken substantially once those

[9] Figure A.15 in Appendix A show the results of the same follow-up item asked to the respondents who skipped the main outcome question (approximately 2% of the sample). The results are similar: 38% of respondents prioritize majority rule, 15% prioritize minority rights, 32% claime both are important, and the rest select "I don't know."

Figure 2.4 Principled and instrumental determinants of attitudes towards tradeoff between minority-rights protection and majority rule



Note: Coefficient plot based on Model (6) in Table A.2 in Appendix A. Models (1)–(5) in Table A.2 sequentially introduce additional predictors into the regression. Numerical predictors are rescaled so that a one-unit increase corresponds to a change of two standard deviations in the underlying variable, allowing their coefficients to be compared directly with one another and with categorical predictors. Horizontal lines represent 95% confidence intervals.

principles are placed in tension with one another—particularly with the majoritarian components of democracy.

Next, it is worth examining potential heterogeneity between the 15 countries analyzed in this paper. For instance, Figure A.17 and Figure A.18 in Appendix A show that citizens in Italy, on average, favor minority-rights protection, regardless of how it is measured. In a tradeoff framing, the average Italian citizen desires a perfect equilibrium between minority-rights protection and majority rule (this is the only country where the confidence intervals pass the midpoint on the tradeoff outcome). The citizens of every other country prioritize majority rule over minority-rights protection, albeit to different degrees. Czech citizens are, on average, the least supportive of minority-rights protection, both when measured in isolation and when framed as a tradeoff with majority rule (mean = 3.76, SD = 2.2). Interestingly, Hungarian citizens are among the most supportive of protecting the rights of minorities when support for this principle is measured in isolation. Yet, when doing so comes at the expense of majority rule, their support for this principle drops significantly. Figure A.19 in Ap-

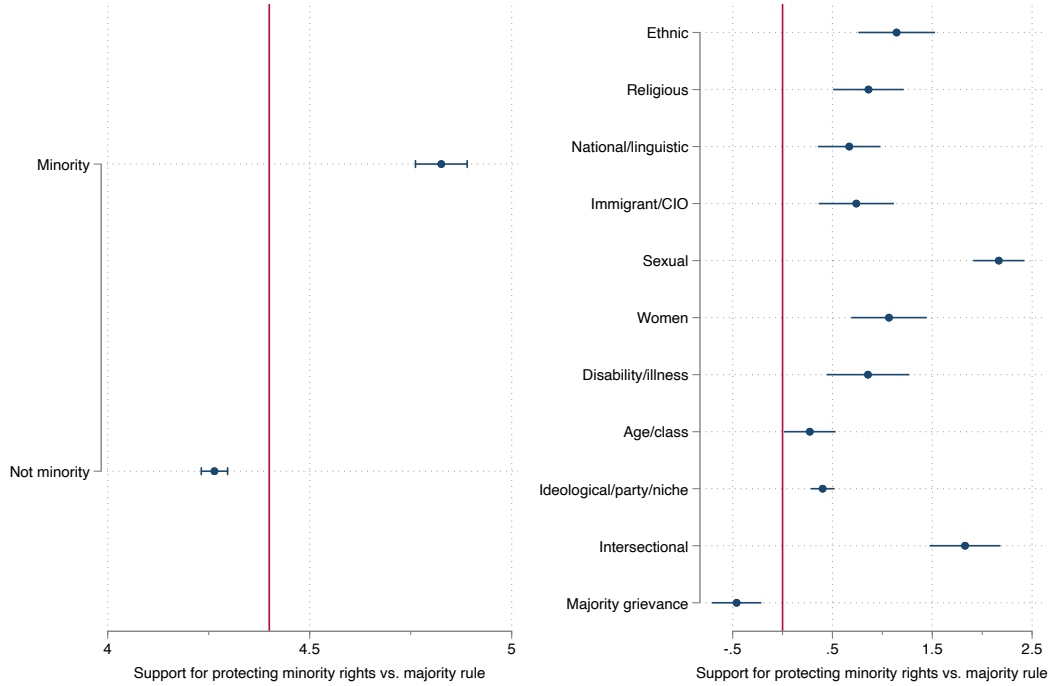
pendix A shows that the average drop in support for protecting minority rights when measured in isolation versus at the expense of majority rule is largest among Hungarians. This finding suggests that Hungarian citizens are particularly sensitive to zero-sum framings that legitimize undermining minority rights in the name of majority rule.

Turning to the factors that shape citizens' preferences regarding the tradeoff between minority-rights protection and majority rule, Figure 2.4 displays the coefficients from an OLS model regressing the tradeoff outcome on both *principled* and *instrumental* predictors while controlling for sex, education, age, and political knowledge. Consistent with Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4, stronger populist, nativist, and authoritarian beliefs are associated with greater prioritization of majority rule over minority-rights protection when the two principles are placed in tension. Similarly, individuals who perceive their views as aligned with those of the broader public are more likely to prioritize majority rule over minority-rights protection, supporting Hypothesis 5. By contrast, electoral losers and respondents who identify as minorities express greater support for minority-rights protection at the expense of majority rule, in line with Hypotheses 6.1 and 6.2. Among the predictors considered, nativist beliefs—and, to a lesser extent, authoritarian beliefs—emerge emerge as particularly strong correlates of attitudes toward this democratic tradeoff. For instance, respondents with the strongest nativist beliefs differ from those with the weakest in their prioritization of majority rule over minority-rights protection by nearly one full standard deviation on the tradeoff outcome.

To further investigate Hypothesis 6.2, the left panel of Figure 2.5 uses predicted margins to illustrate that respondents who identify as minorities are more supportive of minority-rights protection at the expense of majority rule than non-minorities by approximately a quarter of a standard deviation. However, minorities are not a homogeneous category. It is therefore important to examine potential heterogeneity in tradeoff preferences across different minority groups. The right panel of Figure 2.5 categorizes respondents who identify as minorities into distinct minority groups. These categories are derived from the manual coding of open-ended responses in which respondents who identified as minorities were asked to describe the basis of their minority status.[10] For example, the category "Women" does not include all women in the sample, but only respondents who first identi-

[10] See Table A.4 in Appendix A for regression tables using the alternative variable based on automated annotation. The results are substantively similar.

Figure 2.5 Influence of subjective minority group membership on support for minority rights at the expense of respecting majority will



Note: The panel on the left contains predicted margins. The red vertical line in this panel corresponds to the mean value of the outcome variable. The panel on the right is a coefficient plot. The vertical red line corresponds to the reference category, consisting of all respondents who do not identify as minorities (i.e., the "Not the minority" category in the left panel). The categories in the right panel are based on open-ended questions that were asked only to respondents who identified as a minorities (i.e., the "Minority" category in the left panel). See Table A.3 in Appendix A for corresponding models. Horizontal lines represent 95% confidence intervals.

fied as political minorities and subsequently described their minority status in terms of sex or gender (e.g., "I am a woman").

Several patterns emerge from these results. First, most minority groups place greater emphasis on minority-rights protection over majority rule than respondents who do not identify as minorities (the reference category). This effect is weakest among respondents in the "Age/Class" category, which includes groups such as pensioners, students, and economically disadvantaged individuals.[11] A notable exception is the "Majority" category, which consists of respondents who identify as minorities while simultaneously invoking dominant-group markers when describing their status (e.g., "straight white man," "pure-blooded Swede"). These respondents express markedly lower endorsement of minority-rights protection than even respondents who do not identify as minorities. This category likely captures forms of backlash politics and cultural grievance associated with segments of

[11] Indeed, this effect disappears in Table A.4.

the radical right (Anduiza & Rico, 2024; Off, 2023). This finding illustrates how the language of minority status can itself become incorporated into grievance-based majoritarian politics. Importantly, these respondents also attenuate the overall effect of minority self-identification observed in the left panel.

Most minority groups exhibit effect sizes of roughly one point on the tradeoff scale, corresponding to approximately 40% of a standard deviation in the outcome variable. Even respondents who identify as minorities in electoral or ideological terms exhibit greater support for minority-rights protection. Sexual and intersectional minorities, however, emerge as the strongest supporters of minority-rights protection on this tradeoff.[12] When placed in tension with majority rule, the coefficient associated with sexual minorities exceeds 90% of a standard deviation in the tradeoff outcome—a substantively very large effect (Cohen, 2013). Taken together, these findings provide additional support for Hypothesis 6.2.

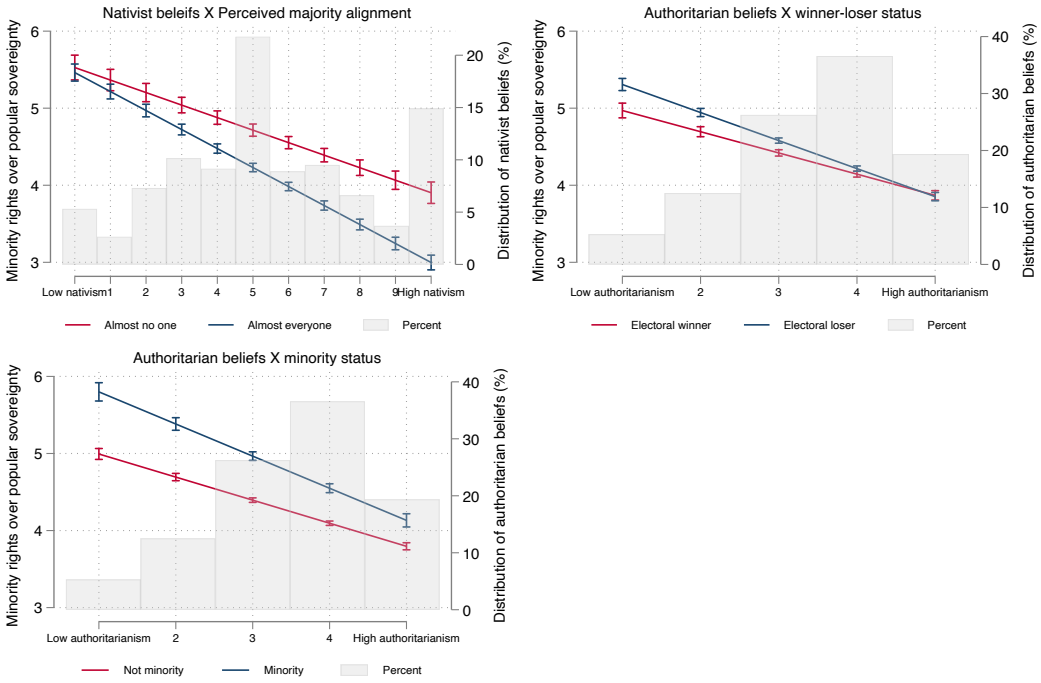
Finally, *principled* and *instrumental* factors shaping preferences regarding the tradeoff between minority-rights protection and majority rule may themselves interact. Kokkonen and Linde, 2021, for instance, argue that nativists tend to believe that the majority of the population shares their views, making them opportunistic supporters of direct democracy as a means of advancing their nativist agenda. As such, nativists may also display instrumental support for majority rule as a democratic means of advancing their preferred majoritarian democratic order. Similar dynamics may apply to citizens with strong populist or authoritarian beliefs who leverage their status as electoral winners to advance majoritarian aspects of democracy at the expense of minority-rights protection.

Table A.6, Table A.7, and Table A.8 in Appendix A present models in which each principled factor (populist, nativist, and authoritarian beliefs) is interacted with perceived majority alignment, winner–loser status, and minority status, respectively. Three interactions emerge as statistically significant: the interaction between nativist beliefs and perceived majority alignment, the interaction between authoritarian beliefs and winner–loser status, and the interaction between authoritarian beliefs and minority status. These interactions are illustrated in Figure 2.6 using predicted margins.

The top-left panel shows that support for minority-rights protection at the expense of majority rule is lowest among respondents with strong nativist beliefs who also perceive their views as aligned

[12] Respondents are categorized as intersectional when their responses correspond to two or more minority categories, excluding the majority-grievance category (e.g., "gay and disabled," "Muslim woman").

Figure 2.6 Interactions between principled and instrumental determinants of democratic tradeoff preferences



Note: The top-left panel shows the interaction between nativist beliefs and perceived majority alignment, while the top-right and bottom-left panels show interactions between authoritarian beliefs and winner–loser status, and minority status, respectively. Background histograms display the distribution of the corresponding moderator variables. Predicted margins are based on Table A.6, Table A.7, and Table A.8 in Appendix A. Bars represent 84% confidence intervals.

with those of the broader public. This finding suggests that nativists may opportunistically favor majority rule when they believe that "almost everyone" shares their views, possibly because such conditions increase the likelihood of realizing a form of democracy in which minority-rights protections do not constrain the preferences of fellow nativists.

A different pattern emerges among respondents with strong authoritarian beliefs. Among individuals with low levels of authoritarianism, electoral losers are significantly more supportive of minority-rights protection at the expense of majority rule than electoral winners, consistent with instrumental reasoning. However, this winner–loser gap disappears among respondents with strong authoritarian beliefs. Thus, although authoritarian beliefs are associated with opposition to minority-rights protections when these constrain majority rule, authoritarian commitments appear to override instrumental incentives associated with electoral defeat. In this sense, individuals with strong authoritarian beliefs remain consistently committed to majoritarian conceptions of democracy regardless of their immediate self-interest.

Finally, the bottom-left panel of Figure 2.6 shows that the negative relationship between authoritarian beliefs and support for minority-rights protection is more pronounced among respondents who identify as minorities. In fact, minorities who score 5 on the authoritarianism scale are statistically indistinguishable from non-minorities who score 4 on the same scale. Figure A.20 further shows substantial variation in authoritarian beliefs across minority groups. While intersectional and sexual minorities exhibit comparatively low levels of authoritarianism, respondents who identify as minorities on the basis of majority grievances or age/class, as well as ethnic and religious minorities, exhibit comparatively high levels. These findings suggest that shared minority status does not necessarily produce generalized support for minority-rights protection. More broadly, they indicate that not all minorities are equally supportive of protecting the rights of other minorities.

2.5 Discussion

This study examines citizens' democratic preferences regarding the tradeoff between minority-rights protection and majority rule and identifies two sets of factors associated with these preferences. When these principles are placed in tension, citizens tend to prioritize majority rule at the expense of minority-rights protection. Tradeoff preferences are shaped by principled factors such as populist, nativist, and authoritarian democratic belief systems, which conceive of democracy as a political system in which majority rule should take precedence over minority-rights protection. Furthermore, these preferences are also shaped by instrumental considerations, including the degree to which individuals perceive their political views as aligned with those of the broader public, winner–loser status, and subjective minority status. Beyond these direct effects, principled and instrumental factors interact in important ways. For instance, individuals with strong nativist attitudes become especially supportive of majority rule when they perceive their views as aligned with those of the broader public. By contrast, authoritarian conceptions of democracy appear strong enough to override the self-protective incentives normally associated with minority status or electoral defeat. Taken together, these findings suggest that citizens' commitment to minority-rights protection is conditional and may weaken substantially once liberal-democratic principles are framed as being in conflict with majoritarian rule.

These findings contribute to the literature on citizens' understandings of democracy by showing that many citizens reveal an implicit majoritarian bias in their conceptions of democracy (Ferrín & Kriesi, 2016; Grossman et al., 2022; Wunsch, 2025; Wunsch et al., 2022). They also complement recent research demonstrating that citizens subordinate democratic principles to considerations such as competence, partisanship, and policy interests (Frederiksen, 2022, 2024; Graham & Svolik, 2020; Neundorf et al., 2026; Svolik, 2019). Finally, the results align with studies showing that citizens' commitment to democratic principles weakens once those principles become associated with tangible costs (Adserà et al., 2023; Ferrer et al., 2025).

Comparing support for minority rights in isolation (as captured by traditional measures) with support under tradeoff conditions suggests that conventional survey items may overestimate citizens' commitment to this principle. These findings support the argument that respondents may exaggerate or even falsify their preferences when asked about democratic principles in isolation (Valentim, 2021, 2024b). Leveraging tradeoffs within democracy may help address these limitations by more closely approximating real-world political settings and reducing the availability of normatively preferable responses. In the tradeoff setting used in this study, for example, respondents with illiberal attitudes may feel more comfortable expressing preferences less supportive of minority-rights protection because these can be justified in the name of another normatively legitimate democratic principle—majority rule. After all, both positions are democratic by definition. Future research could adapt this tradeoff framework to examine citizens' commitment to other democratic norms and principles that are vulnerable to social desirability bias and preference falsification.

Along these lines, future research could systematically compare support for democratic principles measured in isolation using traditional survey items with support measured under tradeoff conditions. The degree of "slippage" between these measures may provide important insight into why certain groups of citizens are more tolerant of the erosion of some democratic principles in the name of advancing others. Citizens with populist attitudes, for instance, may be particularly sensitive to such tradeoffs. While some scholars argue that populists reject constitutional liberalism (Pasquino, 2008), others challenge this claim (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012, 2013). One possible way of reconciling these perspectives is that, once authoritarianism and nativism are accounted for, citizens with populist beliefs may genuinely support minority rights. However, this support may be con-

ditional and weaken when democratic principles are framed in zero-sum terms. This dynamic may help explain why populist radical-right parties can mobilize support for illiberal agendas even among citizens with otherwise relatively liberal preferences. More broadly, frustrations with perceived "undemocratic liberalism" are argued to have contributed to the rise of the populist radical right, particularly when mainstream parties frame issues such as immigration or European integration as beyond democratic contestation (Mudde, 2021). Similar dynamics may emerge when minority-rights protection is framed as incompatible with majority rule. Emphasizing the possibility of balancing these principles may benefit mainstream parties, especially given that many citizens appear to prefer such an equilibrium.

These differences can also be examined comparatively at both the party and national levels. For instance, the finding that Hungarian citizens significantly reduce their support for minority-rights protection when it is framed in zero-sum terms against majority rule raises an important research question: Has Fidesz under Orbán remained in power for so long because Hungarians were already particularly susceptible to tolerating illiberal actions in the name of majoritarianism (e.g., due to historical legacies or cultural norms), or did citizens gradually become more tolerant of such behavior over the course of sixteen years of elite rhetoric and party cues framing these transgressions as democratically legitimate? Addressing this question could involve a supply-side approach examining how political parties frame democratic tradeoffs and justify illiberal policies. Alternatively, comparative research could employ multilevel models to examine whether citizens' tradeoff preferences differ systematically across regions and institutional contexts, such as between Eastern and Western Europe, post-communist and post-fascist societies, or majoritarian and consensual democracies.

The use of democratic tradeoffs also raises a broader conceptual challenge: prioritizing one democratic principle (such as majority rule) over another (such as minority-rights protection) is not necessarily undemocratic, provided that some degree of balance is maintained. After all, democracies vary in the extent to which they emphasize particular democratic principles while nevertheless remaining liberal democracies (Ferrín & Hernández, 2021). At the same time, excessive prioritization of any one principle at the expense of others may undermine the balance required in a liberal democracy (Dahl, 1989). However, it remains unclear where the threshold between democratic preference and democratically destabilizing extremity lies. A conservative benchmark might classify respondents

who allocate all 10 points to one principle and 0 to the other as holding extreme tradeoff preferences. Yet allocations such as 9/1 or even 8/2 may also reflect substantial imbalance. Future research should therefore seek to identify empirically which tradeoff preferences are associated with tolerance for or support of illiberal policies, democratic transgressions, or anti-democratic candidates. One possible approach would involve categorizing respondents according to their tradeoff profiles and examining how these relate to support for illiberal actions using conjoint experiments similar to those employed by Wunsch, 2025. Once such thresholds are identified empirically, civic-education initiatives could be designed to strengthen citizens' understanding of democratic tradeoffs and the importance of balancing competing democratic principles (Eroglu et al., 2025).

Another important contribution of this study concerns the heterogeneity in tradeoff preferences observed across different minority groups. Classifying respondents into distinct collectives based on their open-ended responses reveals substantial variation that may inspire future research. For instance, the finding that sexual minorities are especially supportive of minority-rights protection aligns with existing research showing that "lavender voters" tend to prefer socially liberal parties that support the expansion of LGBT+ rights (Hertzog, 1996; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2022). However, it remains unclear why sexual minorities express stronger support for minority-rights protection than other minority groups. One possibility is that this pattern reflects differences in the politicization and contemporary salience of minority rights issues rather than differences in demographic vulnerability. Debates surrounding same-sex adoption, gender identity, and sexuality education, for example, may currently heighten the perceived importance of minority-rights protections among sexual minorities.

Future research could also further investigate the finding that minorities do not necessarily support the rights of all minorities equally. Examining how members of certain minority groups perceive the rights of other minorities may reveal important tensions between competing worldviews and value systems. For instance, conflicts may emerge between socially conservative religious minorities and more socially liberal sexual minorities (Ivarsflaten & Sniderman, 2022; Turnbull-Dugarte & López Ortega, 2024). Finally, future research should examine more closely the segment of respondents who identify as minorities while simultaneously expressing majority grievances when describing their minority status. These responses appear to capture forms of cultural backlash among members of historically dominant groups, which have been linked to support for far-right parties (Anduiza &

Rico, 2024; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). In some cases, these grievances overlap across multiple dimensions (e.g., "cisgender white heterosexual man who feels Spanish"), providing further empirical support for what Off, 2024 describes as "intersectional cultural grievances."

The heterogeneity observed across minority groups also highlights an important limitation of this study. The survey item used to measure support for minority-rights protection refers to the "rights of minorities" in abstract terms and therefore cannot capture variation in support across specific rights or minority groups. Citizens may support the rights of some minorities while opposing the rights of others. Future research should therefore examine support for different types of rights across distinct minority groups in order to better capture this variation. Such research could also investigate whether support depends on perceptions of vulnerability, deservingness, or affective evaluations of specific groups. Finally, future studies could examine how individuals who do not identify as minorities define minority status and compare these understandings with the dimensions identified in this study, particularly those that lack formal institutional recognition (e.g., age/class, ideological minorities, or niche identities).

Despite these limitations, this study advances our understanding of why citizens who endorse liberal principles may nevertheless tolerate—or even support—their erosion. When democratic principles are placed in tension, most citizens prioritize majority rule over minority-rights protection. In doing so, they may legitimize political actors who undermine liberal protections in the name of the people and democratic responsiveness. These findings challenge the view that citizens are steadfast defenders of liberal democracy. Rather, they suggest that democratic commitments are conditional and that the erosion of liberal democracy may emerge not only from outright anti-democratic attitudes, but also from democratic preferences that become increasingly majoritarian in times of political conflict.

References

Adserà, A., Arenas, A., & Boix, C. (2023). Estimating the value of democracy relative to other institutional and economic outcomes among citizens in Brazil, France, and the United States. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *120*(48), e2306168120. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2306168120

Akkerman, A., Mudde, C., & Zaslove, A. (2014). How Populist Are the People? Measuring Populist Attitudes in Voters. *Comparative Political Studies*, *47*(9), 1324–1353. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414013512600

Almond, G. A., & Verba, S. (1963). *The civic culture: Political attitudes and democracy in five nations* (New ed.). Sage Publications.

Anduiza, E., & Rico, G. (2024). Sexism and the Far-Right Vote: The Individual Dynamics of Gender Backlash. *American Journal of Political Science*, *68*(2), 478–493. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12759

Arrow, K. J. (1985). *Social choice and individual values* (2. ed., [18. print.]). Yale Univ. Press.

Behr, D., Meitinger, K., Braun, M., & Kaczmirek, L. (2017). *Web probing – implementing probing techniques from cognitive, interviewing in web surveys with the goal to assess the validity of survey questions (GESIS Survey Guidelines)* (tech. rep.) (Version Number: 1.0). GESIS - Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences. https://doi.org/10.15465/GESIS-SG_EN_023

Bernhard, M. (2021). Democratic Backsliding in Poland and Hungary. *Slavic Review*, *80*(3), 585–607. https://doi.org/10.1017/slr.2021.145

Claassen, C. (2018). In the Mood for Democracy? Democratic Support as Thermostatic Opinion. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3194554

Cohen, J. (2013). *Statistical Power Analysis for the Behavioral Sciences*. Elsevier Science.

Converse, P. E. (1964). The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Public. In D. E. Apter (Ed.), *Ideology and discontent.* Free Press, New York.

Dahl, R. A. (1971). *Polyarchy: Participation and opposition*. Yale university press.

Dahl, R. A. (1989). *Democracy and its critics* (Nachdr.). Yale University Press.

Dalton, R. J., Sin, T.-c., & Jou, W. (2007). Understanding Democracy: Data from Unlikely Places. *Journal of Democracy*, *18*(4), 142–156. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2007.a223229

Diamond, L., & Morlino, L. (Eds.). (2005). *Assessing the quality of democracy*. Hopkins Univ. Press.

Druckman, J. N. (2005). Media Matter: How Newspapers and Television News Cover Campaigns and Influence Voters. *Political Communication*, *22*(4), 463–481. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600500311394

Eroglu, M. H., Finkel, S. E., Neundorf, A., Öztürk, A., & Rascón Ramírez, E. G. (2025). Choosing Democracy Over Party? How Civic Education Can Mitigate the Anti-Democratic Effects of Partisan Polarization. *British Journal of Political Science*, *55*, e65. https://doi.org/10.1017/S000712342500016X

Ferrer, S., Hernández, E., Prada, E., & Tomic, D. (2025). The value of liberal democracy: Assessing citizens' commitment to democratic principles. *European Journal of Political Research*, 1475–6765.70021. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.70021

Ferrín, M., & Hernández, E. (2021). Preferences for consensus and majoritarian democracy: Long- and short-term influences. *European Political Science Review*, *13*(2), 209–225. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773921000047

Ferrín, M., & Kriesi, H. (Eds.). (2016). *How Europeans view and evaluate democracy* (First edition). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198766902.001.0001

Ferrín, M., & Kriesi, H. (Eds.). (2025, February). *How Europeans View and Evaluate Democracy Revisited: Ten Years Later* (1st ed.). Oxford University PressOxford. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198883319.001.0001

Frederiksen, K. V. S. (2022). Does Competence Make Citizens Tolerate Undemocratic Behavior? *American Political Science Review*, *116*(3), 1147–1153. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055422000119

Frederiksen, K. V. S. (2024). Do Partisanship and Policy Agreement Make Citizens Tolerate Undemocratic Behavior? *The Journal of Politics*, *86*(2), 766–781. https://doi.org/10.1086/726938

Gelman, A. (2008). Scaling regression inputs by dividing by two standard deviations. *Statistics in Medicine*, *27*(15), 2865–2873. https://doi.org/10.1002/sim.3107

Graham, M. H., & Svolik, M. W. (2020). Democracy in America? Partisanship, Polarization, and the Robustness of Support for Democracy in the United States [Number: 2]. *American Political Science Review*, *114*(2), 392–409. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055420000052

Grimmer, J., & Stewart, B. M. (2013). Text as Data: The Promise and Pitfalls of Automatic Content Analysis Methods for Political Texts. *Political Analysis*, *21*(3), 267–297. https://doi.org/10.1093/pan/mps028

Grossman, G., Kronick, D., Levendusky, M., & Meredith, M. (2022). The Majoritarian Threat to Liberal Democracy. *Journal of Experimental Political Science*, *9*(1), 36–45. https://doi.org/10.1017/XPS.2020.44

Hernández, E. (2019). Democracy belief systems in Europe: Cognitive availability and attitudinal constraint. *European Political Science Review*, *11*(4), 485–502. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773919000286

Hernández, E. (2025, February). Stability and change in Europeans' views of democracy. In M. Ferrín & H. Kriesi (Eds.), *How Europeans View and Evaluate Democracy Revisited* (1st ed., pp. 55–78). Oxford University PressOxford. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198883319.003.0003

Hertzog, M. (1996). *The lavender vote: Lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals in American electoral politics*. New York University Press.

Hidalgo, O. (2019). The Theory of Democratic Antinomies and the Identification of Value Trade-Offs in Political Practice [Number: 4]. *Politics and Governance*, *7*(4), 264–274. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v7i4.2243

Ivarsflaten, E., & Sniderman, P. M. (2022). *The struggle for inclusion: Muslim minorities and the democratic ethos*. University of Chicago Press.

Kokkonen, A., & Linde, J. (2021). Nativist attitudes and opportunistic support for democracy [Number: 0 _eprint: https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2021.2007459]. *West European Politics*, *0*(0), 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2021.2007459

Krippendorff, K. (2013). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (3. ed). SAGE Publ.

Landis, J. R., & Koch, G. G. (1977). The Measurement of Observer Agreement for Categorical Data. *Biometrics*, *33*(1), 159. https://doi.org/10.2307/2529310

Lauth, H.-J. (2016). The internal relationships of the dimensions of democracy: The relevance of trade-offs for measuring the quality of democracy. *International Political Science Review*, *37*(5), 606–617. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512116667630

Lauth, H.-J., & Schlenkrich, O. (2018). Making Trade-Offs Visible: Theoretical and Methodological Considerations about the Relationship between Dimensions and Institutions of Democracy and Empirical Findings [Number: 1]. *Politics and Governance*, *6*(1), 78–91. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v6i1.1200

Levitsky, S., & Ziblatt, D. (2018). *How democracies die* (First edition). Crown.

Levitsky, S., & Ziblatt, D. (2024). *Tyranny of the minority: How to reverse an authoritarian turn and forge a democracy for all*. Penguin Books.

Lijphart, A. (2012). *Patterns of Democracy* (2nd ed.). Yale University Press. https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300189124

Montague, Z. (2025). Trump's Cuts to N.I.H. Grants Focused on Minority Groups Are Illegal, Judge Rules. *The New York Times*.

Mudde, C. (2007, August). *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511492037

Mudde, C. (2021). Populism in Europe: An Illiberal Democratic Response to Undemocratic Liberalism (The *Government and Opposition* /Leonard Schapiro Lecture 2019). *Government and Opposition*, *56*(4), 577–597. https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2021.15

Mudde, C., & Rovira Kaltwasser, C. (2012). Populism and (liberal) democracy: A framework for analysis. In C. Mudde & C. Rovira Kaltwasser (Eds.), *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or corrective for democracy?* Cambridge university press.

Mudde, C., & Rovira Kaltwasser, C. (2013). Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America. *Government and Opposition*, *48*(2), 147–174. https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2012.11

Nadeau, R., & Blais, A. (1993). Accepting the Election Outcome: The Effect of Participation on Losers' Consent. *British Journal of Political Science*, *23*(4), 553–563. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123400006736

Neundorf, A., Dahlum, S., Skaaning Frederiksen, K. V., & Öztürk, A. (2026). Elections Without Constraints? The Appeal of Electoral Autocracy Across the World. *British Journal of Political Science*, *56*, e1. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123425101129

Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2019). *Cultural backlash: Trump, Brexit, and the rise of authoritarian populism*. Cambridge university press.

Off, G. (2023). Gender equality salience, backlash and radical right voting in the gender-equal context of Sweden. *West European Politics*, *46*(3), 451–476. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2022.2084986

Off, G. (2024). Multidimensional and intersectional cultural grievances over gender, sexuality and immigration. *European Journal of Political Research*, *63*(4), 1351–1373. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12665

Pasquino, G. (2008). Populism and Democracy. In D. Albertazzi & D. McDonnell (Eds.), *Twenty-First Century Populism* (pp. 15–29). Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230592100_2

Plattner, M. F. (2020). Democracy Embattled [Number: 1]. *Journal of Democracy*, *31*(1), 5–10. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2020.0000

Powell, G. B. (2000). *Elections as instruments of democracy: Majoritarian and proportional visions*. Yale university press.

Primecz, H., & Pelyhe, V. (2024). Hungary as a precarious context for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community. Interviews with transgender people. *Gender, Work & Organization*, *31*(5), 1812–1827. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.13038

Qvortrup, M. (2014). *Referendums around the world: The continued growth of direct democracy*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Rama, J., Zanotti, L., Turnbull-Dugarte, S. J., & Santana, A. (2021, May). *VOX: The Rise of the Spanish Populist Radical Right* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003049227

Rydgren, J. (2017). Radical right-wing parties in Europe: What's populism got to do with it? *Journal of Language and Politics*, 485–496. https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.17024.ryd

Rydgren, J. (2018). *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right* (1st ed). Oxford University Press, Incorporated.

Schattschneider, E. E., & Adamany, D. (1975). *The semisovereign people: A realist view of democracy in America*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich college publ.

Simonovits, G., McCoy, J., & Littvay, L. (2022). Democratic Hypocrisy and Out-Group Threat: Explaining Citizen Support for Democratic Erosion. *The Journal of Politics*, *84*(3), 1806–1811. https://doi.org/10.1086/719009

Song, H., Tolochko, P., Eberl, J.-M., Eisele, O., Greussing, E., Heidenreich, T., Lind, F., Galyga, S., & Boomgaarden, H. G. (2020). In Validations We Trust? The Impact of Imperfect Human Annotations as a Gold Standard on the Quality of Validation of Automated Content Analysis. *Political Communication*, *37*(4), 550–572. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2020.1723752

Spike, J. (2025, March). A new anti-LGBTQ+ bill in Hungary would ban Pride event, allow facial recognition software use [Section: World & Nation].

Spitz, E. (1984). *Majority rule*. Chatham House.

Svolik, M. W. (2019). Polarization versus Democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, *30*(3), 20–32. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0039

Svolik, M. W., Avramovska, E., Lutz, J., & Milaèiæ, F. (2023). In Europe, Democracy Erodes from the Right. *Journal of Democracy*, *34*(1), 5–20. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2023.0000

Turnbull-Dugarte, S. J. (2022). Who wins the British lavender vote? (Mostly) Labour. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, *10*(3), 388–409. https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2020.1838304

Turnbull-Dugarte, S. J., & López Ortega, A. (2024). *Instrumentally* Inclusive: The Political Psychology of Homonationalism. *American Political Science Review*, *118*(3), 1360–1378. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055423000849

Valentim, V. (2021). Parliamentary Representation and the Normalization of Radical Right Support. *Comparative Political Studies*, *54*(14), 2475–2511. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414021997159

Valentim, V. (2024a, September). *The Normalization of the Radical Right: A Norms Theory of Political Supply and Demand* (1st ed.). Oxford University PressOxford. https://doi.org/10.1093/9780198926740.001.0001

Valentim, V. (2024b). Norms of Democracy, Staged Democrats, and Supply of Exclusionary Ideology. *Comparative Political Studies*, 00104140241283009. https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140241283009

Wunsch, N. (2025). *Democratic commitment: Why citizens tolerate democratic backsliding*. Oxford University Press.

Wunsch, N., Jacob, M., & Derksen, L. (2022, January). *The Demand Side of Democratic Backsliding: How Divergent Understandings of Democracy Shape Political Choice* (tech. rep.) (type: article). OSF Preprints. https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/c64gf

Appendix A: Supplementary materials

A.1 Key survey items

Figure A.1 Follow up item

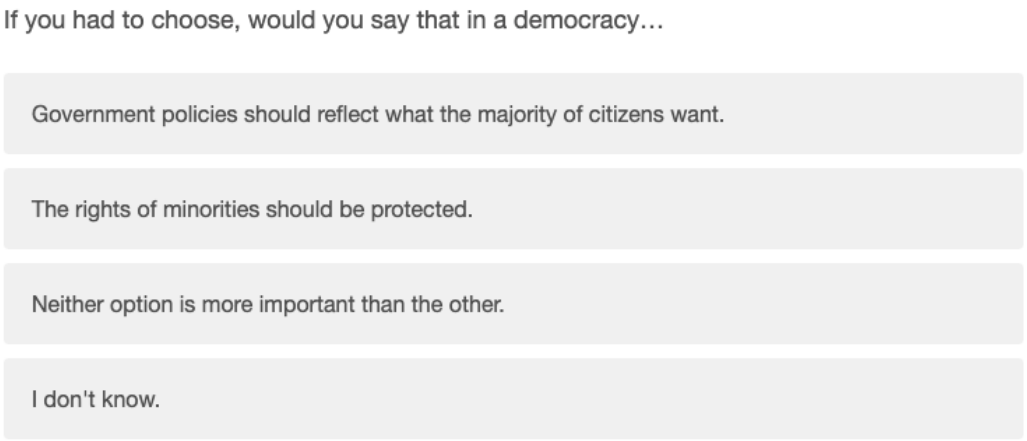


Figure A.2 Traditional items measuring support for democratic principles in isolation

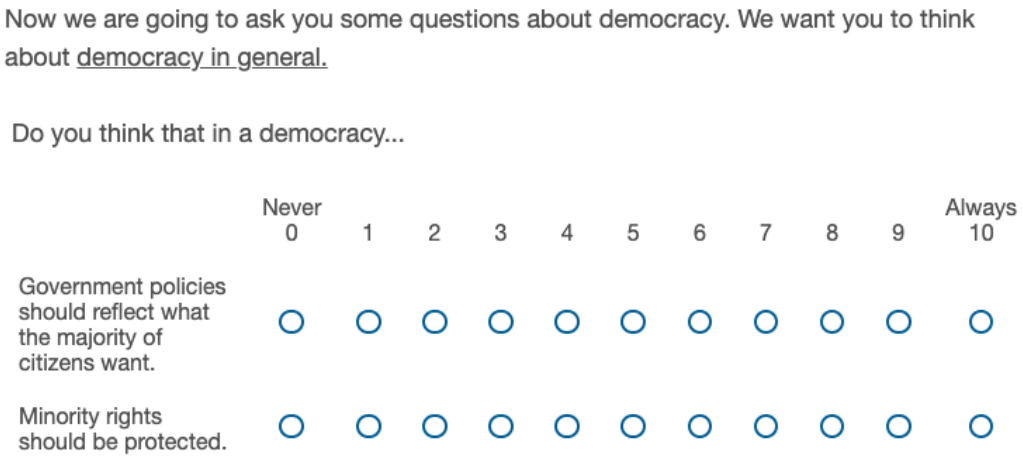


Figure A.3 Items used by European Social Survey to measure support for protecting minority rights

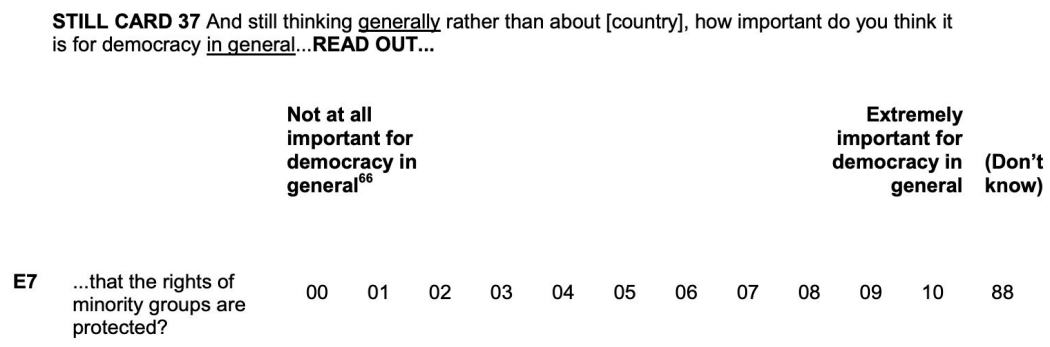


Figure A.4 Populism battery

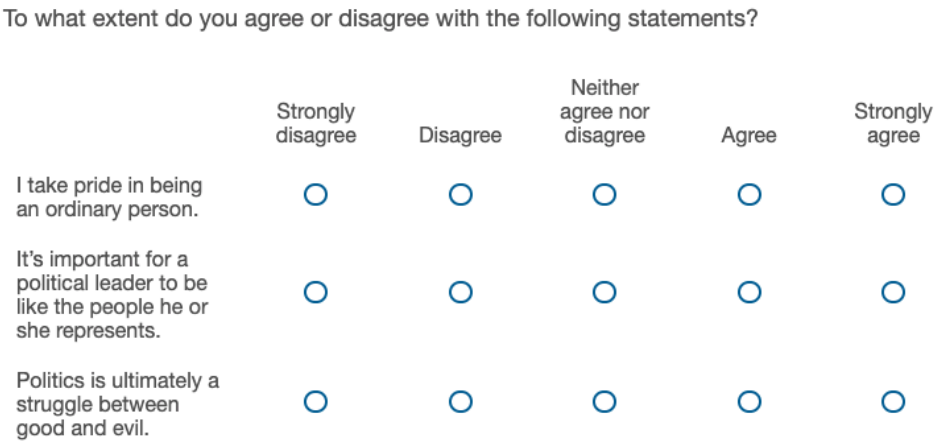


Figure A.5 Perceived majority alignment

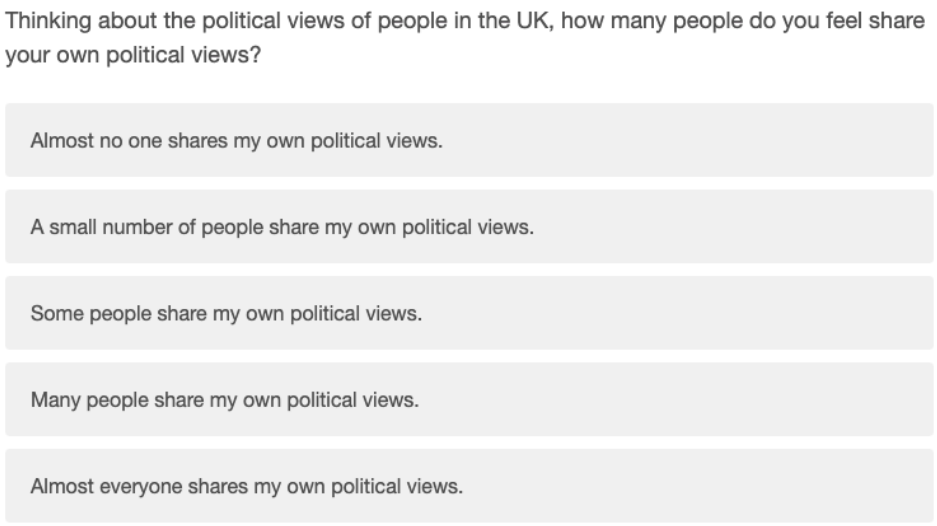


Figure A.6 Identies as political minority question

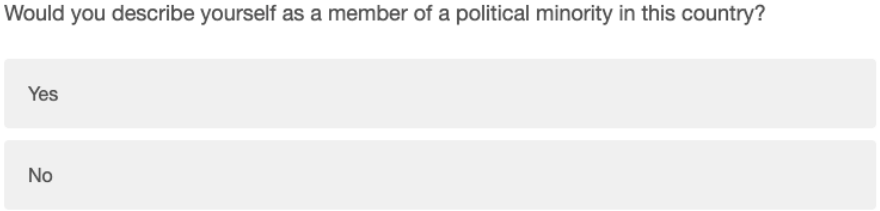


Figure A.7 Test question: minorities

What do you understand to be a minority?

Figure A.8 Test question: political minorities

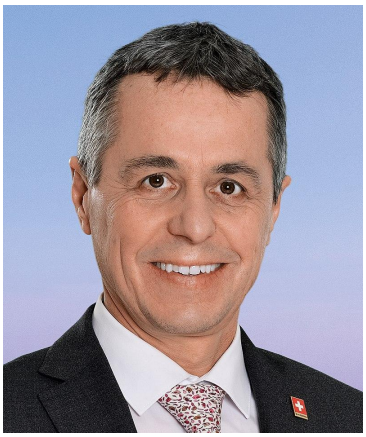
What do you understand to be a political minority?

Figure A.9 Follow up open-ended question asked to those who identify as minorities

What political minority would that be?

Figure A.10 Political knowledge question 1

What position does the person in the photo hold?



1. Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research
2. **Federal Department of Foreign Affairs**
3. Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research
4. Federal Department of Home Affairs
5. I don't know

Note: Bold text indicates correct response.

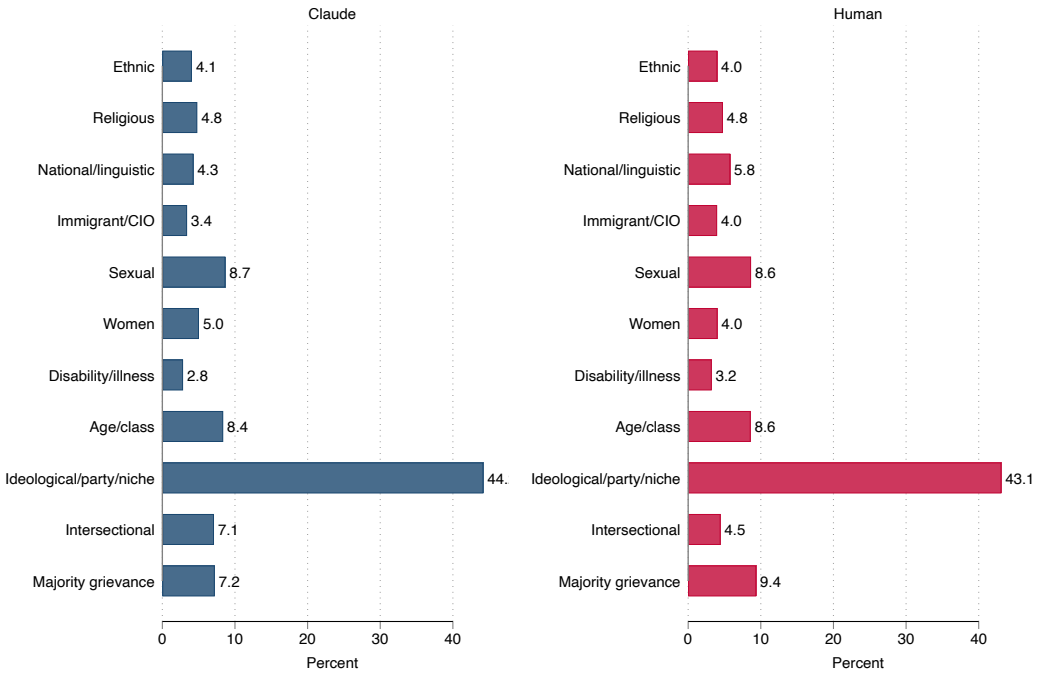
Figure A.11 Political knowledge question 2

How many national advisors are there in Federal Assembly?

1. More than 300
2. Between 250 and 299
3. **Between 200 and 249**
4. Between 150 and 199
5. I don't know

Note: Bold text indicates correct response.

Figure A.12 Distribution of open-ended responses coded into each category: human vs. automated classification



A.2 Additional analyses

Figure A.13 Distribution of classification of open-ended responses per category: human vs. automated category classification

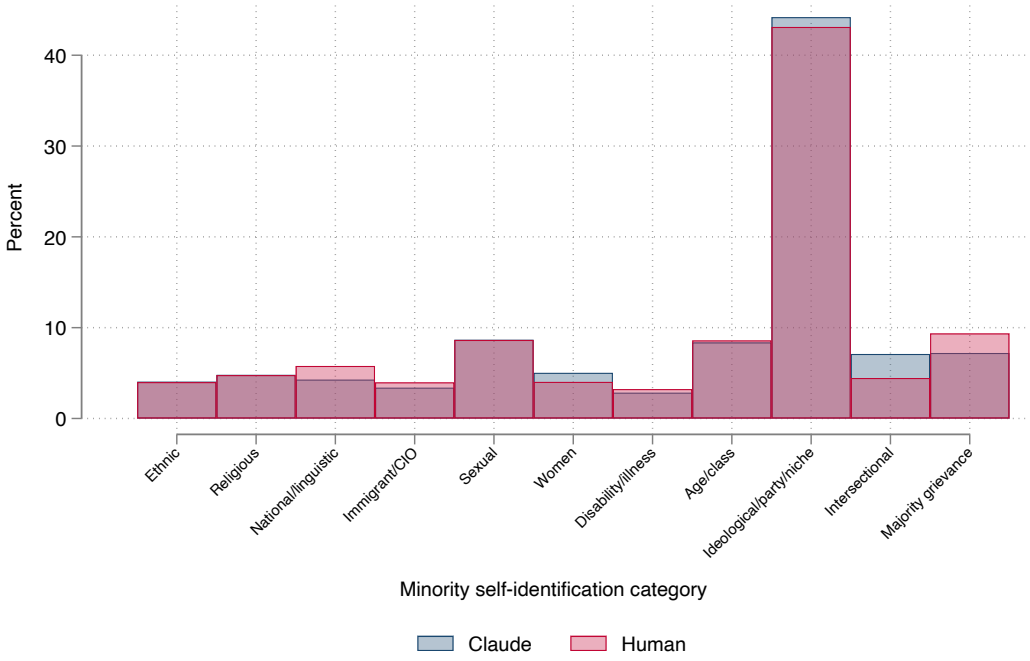
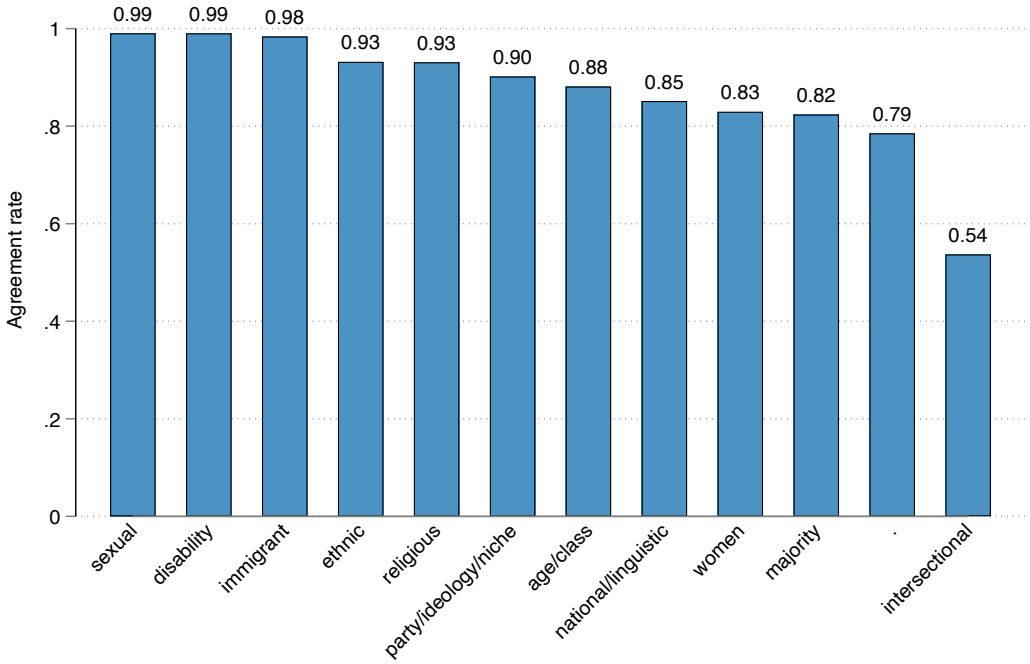


Figure A.14 Human vs. automated category measurement agreement



Note: While agreement rates are high across most categories, the lower rate for the "intersectional" category suggest potential ambiguity (Krippendorff, 2013).

Table A.1 Examples of open-ended descriptions of minority status and corresponding human/automated classifications

Country	Self-description	Claude coding	Human coding
Belgium	Skin color	ethnic	ethnic
Czechia	Romani person	ethnic	ethnic
Israel	Arab	ethnic	ethnic
Sweden	Navajo	.	ethnic
UK	black british	ethnic	.
Germany	Muslims	religious	religious
Greece	Jewish	religious	religious
Israel	Christians	religious	religious
Poland	Silesians	national/linguistic	national/linguistic
Spain	Catalan	national/linguistic	national/linguistic
UK	Scots	national/linguistic	national/linguistic
Hungary	Scythian	.	national/linguistic
Switzerland	Daughter of immigrants	immigrant	immigrant
UK	Legal working immigrant	immigrant	immigrant
Spain	Undocumented people	immigrant	immigrant
Czechia	Foreigner from Slovakia	immigrant	immigrant
Netherlands	LGBTQIA+	sexual	sexual
Portugal	Trans man	sexual	sexual
Spain	Homosexuals	sexual	sexual
Switzerland	Queer	sexual	sexual
Hungary	Women	women	women
Sweden	Swedish woman	women	women
UK	Female	women	women
Israel	People with mental disabilities	disability	disability
UK	Disabled people	disability	disability
UK	DISBLED	.	disability
Czechia	Pensioners	age/class	age/class
Italy	Young people	age/class	age/class
Hungary	Poor people	age/class	age/class
Italy	No NATO	.	party/ideology/niche
Italy	Communists	party/ideology/niche	party/ideology/niche
Spain	Animal-rights activists	party/ideology/niche	party/ideology/niche
UK	Equality for women, free childcare	women	party/ideology/niche
Poland	Unemployed disabled woman	intersectional	intersectional
UK	gays, mental health sufferers	sexual	intersectional
Germany	Trans person and homosexual	intersectional	intersectional
Sweden	"Real" Swede	majority	majority
UK	English and white	majority	majority
Belgium	Belgians; Islamists are the majority	majority	majority
France	White heterosexual man	majority	majority
Hungary	Hungarian	majority	majority
Italy	Pacifist	party/ideology/niche	party/ideology/niche
Netherlands	PVV voters	party/ideology/niche	party/ideology/niche
Netherlands	Muslim woman	intersectional	intersectional
Netherlands	No direct influence on government policy	.	.

Note: These are real responses. Response IDs are omitted because they are anonymized. A dot (period) indicates a classification as per the coding schema outlines in th codebook.

Figure A.15 Follow-up distribution of respondents who skipped main tradeoff outcome

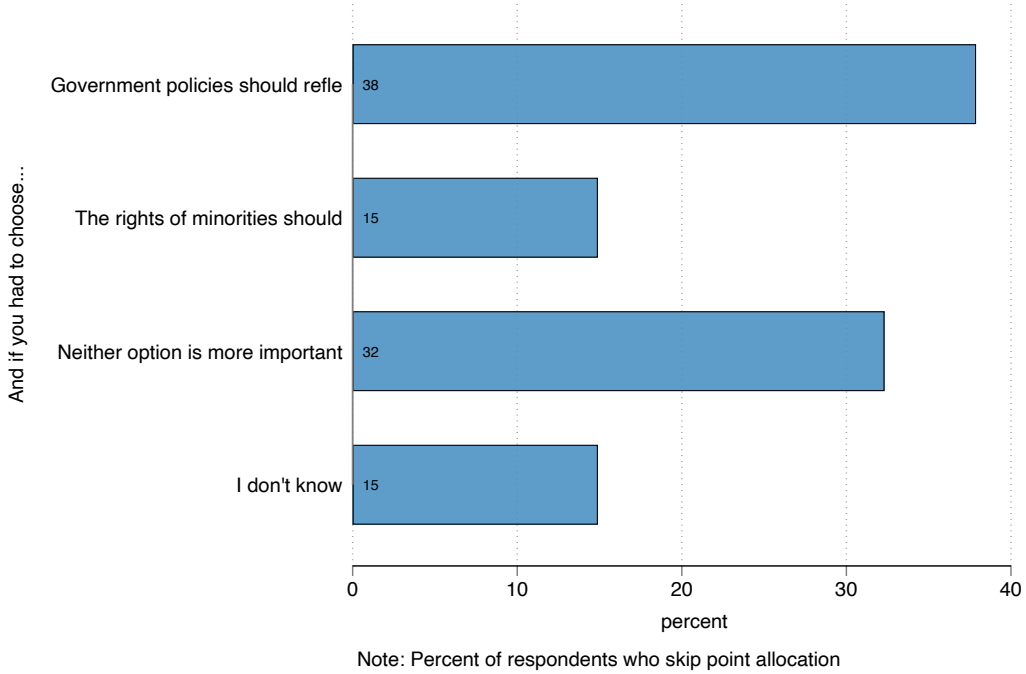


Figure A.16 Distribution of difference in support for minority rights when asked in isolation vs when pitted against majority will

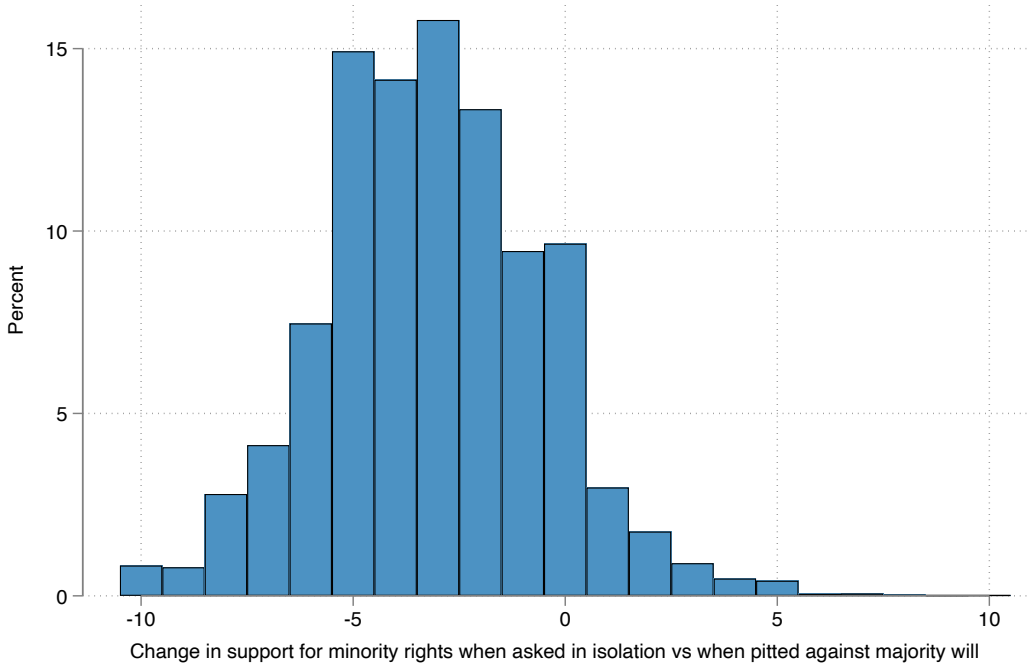


Figure A.17 Average support for protecting minority rights in isolation per country

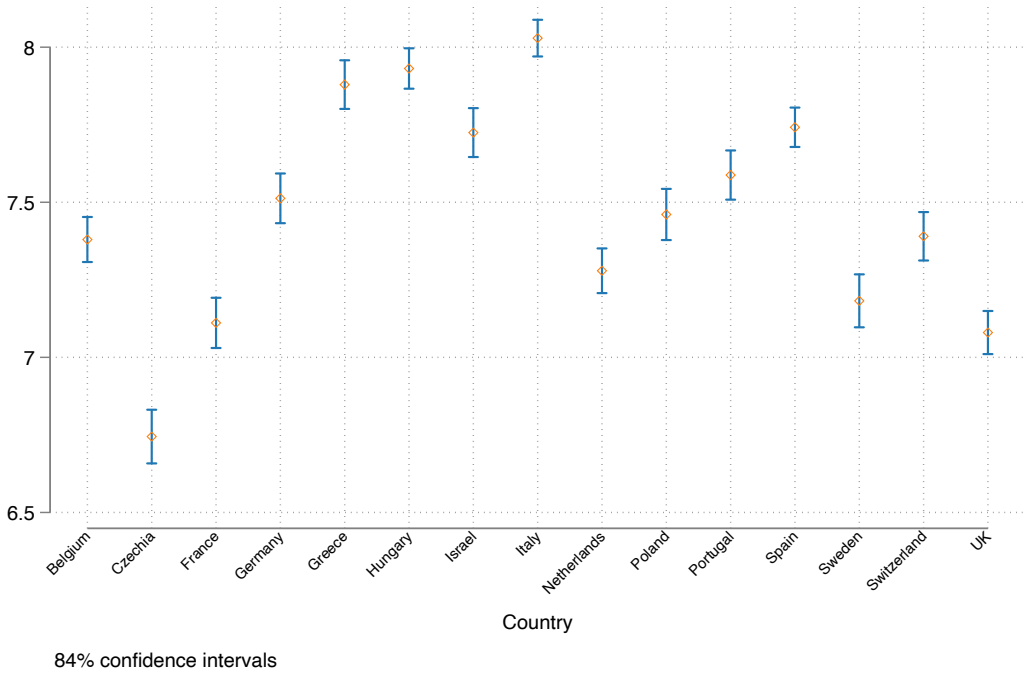


Figure A.18 Average support for minority rights in tradeoff with majority rule per country

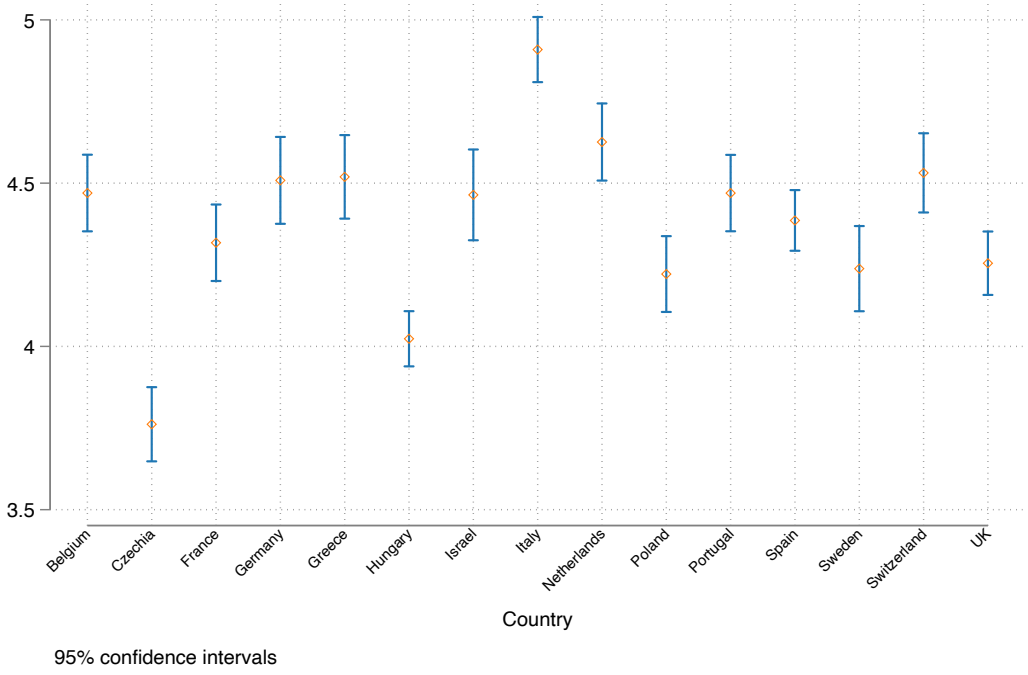


Figure A.19 Average change in support for protecting minority rights when measured in isolation vs in tradeoff with majority rule per country

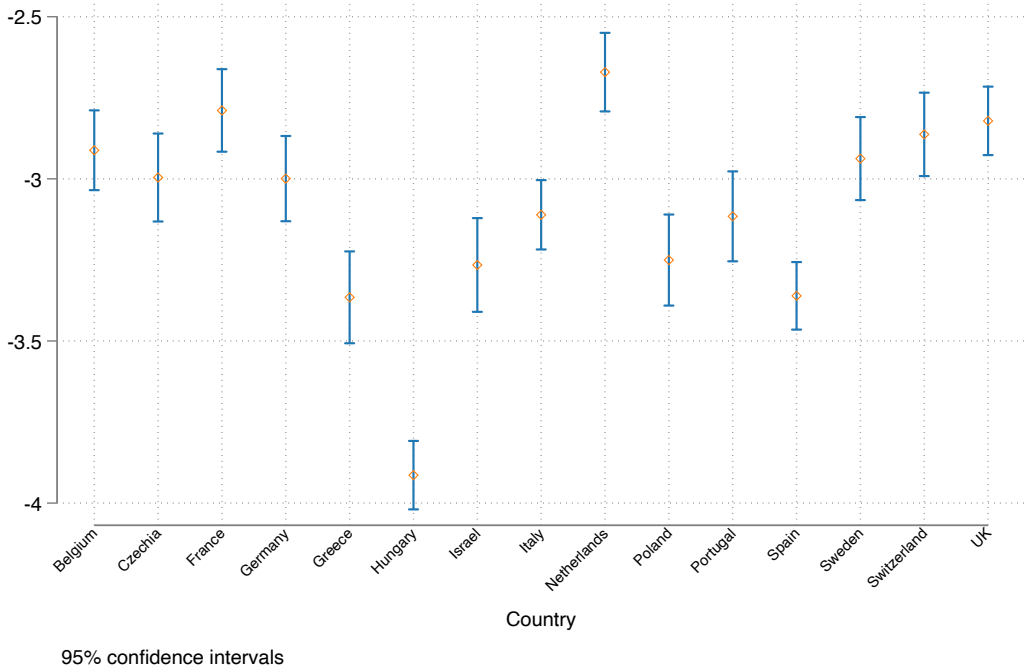
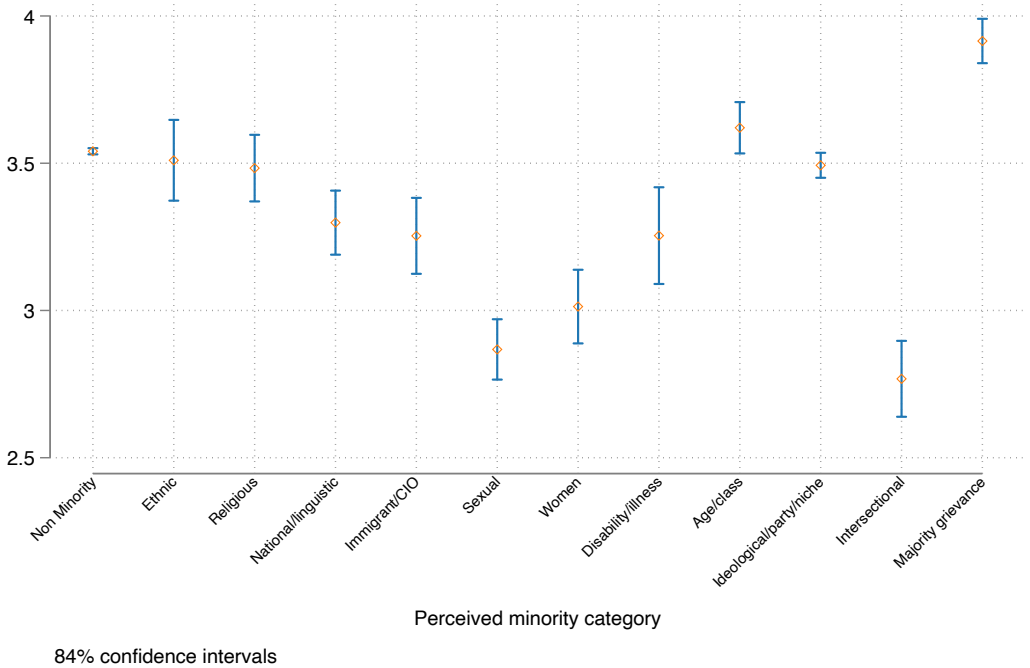


Figure A.20 Confidence interval plot containing average authoritarian beliefs per self-described minority group



Note: 84% confidence intervals used to facilitate distinguishing statistical differences visually.

Table A.2 Principled and instrumental correlated of tradeoff preferences for in support for minority-rights protection at the expense of majority rule

	(1) TF	(2) TF	(3) TF	(4) TF	(5) TF	(6) TF
Populism	-0.18**	-0.19**	-0.07**	-0.06**	-0.05*	-0.06**
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Nativism		-0.22**	-0.21**	-0.21**	-0.21**	-0.21**
		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Authoritarianism			-0.32**	-0.32**	-0.34**	-0.33**
			(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Perceived majority status				-0.17**	-0.16**	-0.13**
				(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Electoral loser					0.15**	0.11**
					(0.03)	(0.03)
Minority						0.52**
						(0.04)
Male	-0.32**	-0.34**	-0.28**	-0.29**	-0.28**	-0.28**
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Education level	0.12**	0.10**	0.04*	0.06**	0.09**	0.09**
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Age	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Political knowledge	-0.00	-0.15**	-0.17**	-0.13**	-0.12*	-0.11*
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Constant	5.48**	6.91**	7.67**	8.09**	8.01**	7.75**
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.15)	(0.15)
Observations	25097	25084	25080	25064	18780	18776
R^2	0.030	0.100	0.117	0.120	0.124	0.132

TF stands for tradeoff outcome

Standard errors in parentheses

Country fixed effects included but not shown

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table A.3 Models for impact of minority status on support for minority-rights protection in isolation and in tradeoff framing (at the expense of majority rule) per manual annotation

	(1) Source variable	(2) Manual coding
Minority	0.56**	
	(0.04)	
Ethnic		1.14**
		(0.20)
Religious		0.86**
		(0.18)
National/linguistic		0.67**
		(0.16)
Immigrant/CIO		0.74**
		(0.19)
Sexual		2.17**
		(0.13)
Women		1.07**
		(0.19)
Disability/illness		0.86**
		(0.21)
Age/class		0.27*
		(0.13)
Ideological/party/niche		0.40**
		(0.06)
Intersectional		1.83**
		(0.18)
Majority grievance		-0.46**
		(0.13)
Constant	4.35**	4.37**
	(0.06)	(0.06)
Observations	25131	23846
R^2	0.022	0.034

Standard errors in parentheses

Country fixed effects included but not shown

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table A.4 Models for impact of minority status support for minority-rights protection in isolation and in tradeoff framing (at the expense of majority rule) per automated classification

	(1) Source variable	(2) Claude coding
Minority	0.56**	
	(0.04)	
Ethnic		1.02**
		(0.20)
Religious		0.87**
		(0.18)
National/linguistic		0.57**
		(0.19)
Immigrant/CIO		0.66**
		(0.21)
Sexual		2.17**
		(0.13)
Women		0.91**
		(0.18)
Disability/illness		0.74**
		(0.23)
Age/class		0.15
		(0.14)
Ideological/party/niche		0.41**
		(0.06)
Intersectional		1.34**
		(0.15)
Majority grievance		-0.35*
		(0.15)
Constant	4.35**	4.37**
	(0.06)	(0.06)
Observations	25131	23697
R^2	0.022	0.032

Standard errors in parentheses

Country fixed effects included but not shown

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table A.5 Impact of predictors on perceived alignment with majority opinion

	(1)	(2)
Populism	0.08**	
	(0.01)	
Nativism	0.00	
	(0.00)	
Authoritarianism	0.01**	
	(0.00)	
Minority	-0.22**	
	(0.01)	
Male	-0.04**	
	(0.01)	
Education level	0.09**	
	(0.01)	
Age	0.00**	
	(0.00)	
Political knowledge	0.26**	
	(0.01)	
Ethnic		-0.28**
		(0.06)
Religious		-0.01
		(0.06)
National/linguistic		-0.02
		(0.05)
Immigrant/CIO		-0.20**
		(0.06)
Sexual		-0.11*
		(0.04)
Women		-0.19**
		(0.06)
Disability/illness		-0.31**
		(0.07)
Age/class		-0.23**
		(0.04)
Ideological/party/niche		-0.22**
		(0.02)
Intersectional		-0.11
		(0.06)
Majority grievance		-0.18**
		(0.04)
Constant	2.58**	3.40**
	(0.04)	(0.01)
Observations	25576	24347
R^2	0.072	0.008

Standard errors in parentheses
Country fixed effects included but not shown
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table A.6 Interactions between principles predictors and perceived majority alignment on support for minority-rights protection vs. majority rule

	(1) Populism	(2) Nativism	(3) Authoritarianism
Perceived majority status	-0.18	-0.02	-0.02
	(0.09)	(0.04)	(0.07)
Populism	-0.11	-0.06*	-0.06**
	(0.10)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Perceived majority status × Populism	0.01		
	(0.03)		
Nativism	-0.21**	-0.14**	-0.21**
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)
Authoritarianism	-0.33**	-0.33**	-0.23**
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.07)
Electoral loser	0.11**	0.11**	0.11**
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Minority	0.52**	0.51**	0.52**
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Male	-0.28**	-0.28**	-0.28**
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Education level	0.09**	0.09**	0.09**
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Age	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Political knowledge	-0.11*	-0.11*	-0.11*
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Perceived majority status × Nativism		-0.02**	
		(0.01)	
Perceived majority status × Authoritarianism			-0.03
			(0.02)
Constant	7.91**	7.35**	7.38**
	(0.35)	(0.20)	(0.28)
Observations	18776	18776	18776
R^2	0.132	0.132	0.132

Standard errors in parentheses

Country fixed effects included but not shown

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table A.7 Interactions between principles predictors and winner-loser status on support for minority-rights protection vs. majority rule

	(1) Populism	(2) Nativism	(3) Authoritarianism
Electoral loser	0.04	0.20**	0.43**
	(0.15)	(0.07)	(0.11)
Populism	-0.07*	-0.06**	-0.06**
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Electoral loser × Populism	0.02		
	(0.04)		
Nativism	-0.21**	-0.20**	-0.21**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Authoritarianism	-0.33**	-0.33**	-0.28**
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Perceived majority status	-0.13**	-0.13**	-0.13**
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Minority	0.52**	0.52**	0.52**
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Male	-0.28**	-0.28**	-0.28**
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Education level	0.09**	0.10**	0.09**
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Age	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Political knowledge	-0.11*	-0.11*	-0.11*
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Electoral loser × Nativism		-0.02	
		(0.01)	
Electoral loser × Authoritarianism			-0.09**
			(0.03)
Constant	7.78**	7.69**	7.57**
	(0.18)	(0.16)	(0.17)
Observations	18776	18776	18776
R^2	0.132	0.132	0.132

Standard errors in parentheses

Country fixed effects included but not shown

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table A.8 Interactions between principles predictors and minority status on support for minority-rights protection vs. majority rule

	(1) Populism	(2) Nativism	(3) Authoritarianism
Minority	0.69**	0.60**	0.92**
	(0.18)	(0.09)	(0.13)
Populism	-0.05	-0.06**	-0.06*
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Minority × Populism	-0.05		
	(0.05)		
Nativism	-0.21**	-0.21**	-0.21**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Authoritarianism	-0.33**	-0.33**	-0.30**
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Perceived majority status	-0.13**	-0.13**	-0.13**
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Electoral loser	0.11**	0.11**	0.11**
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Male	-0.28**	-0.28**	-0.28**
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Education level	0.09**	0.09**	0.09**
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Age	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Political knowledge	-0.11*	-0.11*	-0.11*
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Minority × Nativism		-0.02	
		(0.01)	
Minority × Authoritarianism			-0.12**
			(0.03)
Constant	7.70**	7.73**	7.64**
	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)
Observations	18776	18776	18776
R^2	0.132	0.132	0.132

Standard errors in parentheses

Country fixed effects included but not shown

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

A.3 Codebook & machine-readable prompt for coding open-ended minority self-identification responses

Task

You will code open-ended survey responses about political minority self-identification. The survey was conducted across multiple countries. Responses have already been translated into English.

Each input row contains exactly two columns:

- country
- minority_self_descr_eng

Your job is to return a tab-separated table with exactly four columns in this exact order:
country minority_self_descr_eng minority_self_descr_coded unclear

Output Requirements

For every input row:

- Copy country exactly as provided
- Copy minority_self_descr_eng exactly as provided
- Fill in:
  - minority_self_descr_coded
  - unclear

Output Format Rules

- Output must be plain text
- Output must be tab-separated
- Each row must contain exactly 4 fields separated by tab characters
- Do not add numbering, bullets, commentary, explanations, or extra text
- Do not add a header unless the input explicitly includes one
- Do not alter spelling, capitalization, punctuation, or spacing in the first two columns
- Do not translate, normalize, or rewrite the first two columns
- Use only the allowed code values defined below

Allowed Values

minority_self_descr_coded Must be exactly one of:

party/ideology/niche
sexual
women
disability
religious
ethnic
immigrant
national/linguistic
age/class
intersectional
majority
.

unclear Must be exactly one of:

0
1

General Coding Principles

1. **Assign exactly one category**
2. **Use only explicit information** Do not infer unstated traits.
3. **Ignore majority markers when non-majority markers are present** If any non-majority identity is present, do not assign majority.
4. **Use country only where required** Country context may be used only for:
    - identifying dominant vs. non-dominant religion
    - distinguishing dominant national in-group, non-dominant nationality, and immigrant identity
    - identifying national/linguistic minorities

Definition: Identity Marker

An identity marker is any explicit word or phrase referring to a social, political, demographic, or cultural group.

Valid identity markers include:

- demographic groups (e.g., “woman”, “young”, “working class”)
- political or ideological identities (e.g., “socialist”, “environmentalist”)
- ethnicity, nationality, or religion (e.g., “Arab”, “Polish”, “Muslim”)
- citizenship or nativist majority labels (e.g., “citizen”, “native”, “true English”, “real Spaniard”)

Do NOT treat the following as identity markers:

- vague terms (e.g., "normal", "different")
- personality traits alone, without a group label (e.g., "honest", "introvert")
- unspecified grievances (e.g., "ignored", "not heard")

Decision Procedure

Step 1: Missing or invalid Code . and set unclear = 1 if:

- empty or missing response
- "I don't know", "none"
- unintelligible or irrelevant text
- vague or unspecified group references (e.g., "people like me")
- grievances without identifiable group (e.g., "they don't listen")
- generic or unspecified group labels (e.g., "minority", "a minority") without further qualification (see Special Rule below)

Step 2: Identify identity markers Extract all explicit identity markers in the response.
Markers may be separated by:

- commas
- conjunctions (e.g., "and")
- slashes or hyphens
- spaces between distinct identity terms (do not split fixed expressions such as "working class" or "middle class")

Step 3: Assign categories to markers Map each identity marker to one of the allowed categories.

Step 4: Apply majority rule

- If any non-majority categories are present, ignore all majority markers
- If only majority markers are present, assign majority

Step 5: Determine final category First collapse markers belonging to the same category before applying the rules below.

- If no valid category remains → .
- If multiple markers belong to the same category, treat them as a single category (e.g., "gay lesbian" → sexual)
- If exactly one category remains → assign that category
- If two or more distinct non-majority categories remain → intersectional

Step 6: unclear Set unclear = 1 if and only if:

- Step 1 was triggered (i.e., the response is missing, vague, or contains no identifiable group)

Otherwise, set to 0.

If multiple interpretations are possible, apply the Tie-Breaking Rule.

Category Definitions

party/ideology/niche Political parties, ideologies, issue-based or lifestyle-political identities (e.g., socialist, environmentalist, feminist, anti-system).

sexual Sexual orientation and gender identity (e.g., gay, lesbian, trans, queer).

Note:

- Multiple sexual orientation markers (e.g., "gay lesbian") remain sexual
- Combinations of sexual orientation and gender identity (e.g., "gay trans") are coded as intersectional

women Female identity markers (e.g., woman, female).

disability Physical, mental, or neurodivergent identity.

religious Only non-dominant religions are coded as religious. Dominant religions are always treated as majority.

ethnic Race or ethnicity without migration reference (e.g., Black, Arab).

immigrant Migration-related identity (e.g., immigrant, descendant of immigrants). Nationality used to describe immigrant origin does not create an additional category.

national/linguistic Nationality or regional/linguistic minority (e.g., Basque, Polish, Kurdish). Nationality without explicit reference to migration is coded as national/linguistic unless it refers to the dominant national in-group in that country, in which case it is coded as majority.

age/class Socioeconomic or age identity (e.g., working class, poor, elderly). Middle class is coded as majority.

intersectional Two or more distinct non-majority categories.

majority Dominant or non-minority identity, including:

- dominant nationality (e.g., "French" in France)
- dominant religion (e.g., "Catholic" in Spain)
- male identity (e.g., "male")
- heterosexual identity (e.g., "straight")

- middle class (e.g., "the dwindling middle class")
- citizenship or native-majority identity when used in a nativist or majority-defining way (e.g., "citizen", "native", "true English", "real Spaniard", "ordinary citizens")

. Missing, invalid, or unclassifiable response.

Tie-Breaking Rule

When classification is uncertain:

- prioritize explicit wording over interpretation
- do not infer migration, ethnicity, or marginalization
- choose the simplest valid classification

Special Rule: Qualified Minority Statements

If the response uses the term "minority" together with a specific identity dimension, code the specified dimension:

- "ethnic minority" → ethnic
- "sexual minority" → sexual
- "religious minority" → religious
- "minority religion" → religious
- "minority based on my ethnicity" → ethnic

If no specific identity dimension is provided, code as . and set unclear = 1.

Special Rule: Citizenship and Nativist Majority Statements

If the response identifies the respondent through citizenship, nativeness, or authentic membership in the dominant national group, code as majority.

This includes expressions such as:

- "citizen" or "citizens"
- "native"
- "true" or "real" followed by the country's dominant nationality
- "ordinary citizens", "honest citizens", "hard-working citizens" when "citizens" is the identity marker

Descriptive adjectives such as "honest", "hard-working", or "ordinary" do not prevent coding as majority if the underlying identity marker is a dominant citizen or national in-group.

Do not code as majority if "citizen" refers to a non-dominant, excluded, foreign, or explicitly marginalized status.

Historically Dominant Religions

- Belgium — Catholic/Christian
- Czechia — Catholic/Christian
- France — Catholic/Christian
- Germany — Catholic/Protestant/Christian
- Greece — Greek Orthodox/Christian Orthodox
- Hungary — Catholic/Christian
- Israel — Judaism
- Italy — Catholic/Christian
- Netherlands — Protestant/Catholic/Christian
- Poland — Catholic/Christian
- Portugal — Catholic/Christian
- Spain — Catholic/Christian
- Sweden — Lutheran/Christian
- Switzerland — Catholic/Protestant/Christian
- UK — Protestant/Catholic/Christian

Examples

Denmark / working class → age/class, 0
France / Muslim → religious, 0
Germany / disabled immigrant woman → intersectional, 0
Sweden / I don't know → ., 1
France / German → national/linguistic, 0
France / German immigrant → immigrant, 0
France / immigrant → immigrant, 0
Spain / Christian → majority, 0
Sweden / Arab → ethnic, 0
Spain / Basque → national/linguistic, 0
Poland / Protestant → religious, 0
France / woman, queer → intersectional, 0
Germany / gay man → sexual, 0
Spain / male immigrant → immigrant, 0
Spain / white woman → women, 0
Germany / Brazilian immigrant → immigrant, 0
Germany / Polish Catholic → national/linguistic, 0
Germany / white immigrant woman → intersectional, 0
Spain / they don't listen → ., 1

UK / honest citizens → majority, 0
UK / true English → majority, 0
Spain / hard-working citizens → majority, 0
France / real French → majority, 0
Netherlands / native Dutch → majority, 0
UK / ordinary citizens → majority, 0
Spain / ordinary people → ., 1
France / second-class citizens → ., 1

Final Instruction

For every row:

- Preserve the first two columns exactly
- Assign exactly one valid category
- Assign unclear as 0 or 1
- Output only a tab-separated table

3

Study II
In the eye of the citizenry: Minority Status & Deservingness of Protection

3.1 Introduction

There is reason to believe that something is amiss in contemporary liberal democracy (Plattner, 2020). Recent developments in Hungary and the United States have shown that incumbents can erode minority rights while encountering only limited public resistance (Donà, 2021; Montague, 2025; Primecz & Pelyhe, 2024). Elsewhere, challenges to minority rights persist in the form of discrimination (Lee et al., 2022; Waite, 2021), as well as enduring economic and political inequalities. These patterns are evident even in advanced liberal democracies (Gurr, 2015; Rhead et al., 2024). Yet such observations stand in contrast to research on political attitudes showing that citizens generally express strong support for protecting minority rights (Ferrín & Kriesi, 2016; Hernández, 2025). This apparent mismatch raises the possibility that existing measures overstate citizens' commitment to minority-rights protection by assessing support for the principle in overly abstract terms.

First, existing studies often rely on survey items that ask about "minorities" in abstract terms (e.g., Hernández, 2025), making it unclear *which* groups respondents have in mind when expressing support for their rights. Similar to the ambiguity surrounding the concept of "democracy," citizens may disagree not only about how minorities should be treated, but also about who qualifies as a minority in the first place (Claassen et al., 2024; König et al., 2022). This ambiguity matters because minority rights are typically protected through specific policies directed at particular social groups, while research on political tolerance has consistently shown that attitudes toward rights and protections vary depending on the group involved (Ivarsflaten & Sniderman, 2022; Prothro & Grigg, 1960; Scheepers,

2002). Consequently, citizens' attitudes toward an abstract "minority" may reveal little about their willingness to protect the rights of actual groups in practice. More relevant are their attitudes toward the specific groups they themselves recognize as minorities.

Second, existing studies of attitudes toward minorities and minority rights often rely on unconstrained survey items that gauge support for minority rights in isolation (e.g., Claassen et al., 2024; Ferrín & Kriesi, 2016), which may induce exaggerated or uncritical expressions of support (Schedler & Sarsfield, 2007). This is particularly problematic when studying attitudes that are susceptible to social desirability bias—a concern that likely applies to minorities and their rights (Harkness et al., 2003). Moreover, just as citizens' commitment to democracy may weaken when democratic options are pitted against other desirable outcomes (Adserà et al., 2023; M. H. Graham & Svolik, 2020; Svolik, 2019), support for specific democratic principles may also decline when those principles come into conflict with competing considerations. This possibility is particularly relevant because democratic norms and principles can enter into tension with one another, requiring citizens to choose between outcomes that are simultaneously desirable yet mutually incompatible (L. Diamond & Morlino, 2004; O'Donnell, 1999). Protecting minority rights and respecting the will of the majority constitute perhaps the clearest example of such a tension (Dahl, 1989). Even when these principles do not directly conflict, political actors can invoke majoritarian appeals to justify policies that undermine minority rights (Grossman et al., 2022; Wunsch et al., 2022). Just as citizens may rationalize an undemocratic option as democratic in order to reduce cognitive dissonance (Krishnarajan, 2022), they may also rationalize the erosion of one democratic principle in the name of another. Consequently, accurately assessing citizens' commitment to minority-rights protection requires examining support for this principle when it competes with majority rule, one of democracy's most fundamental and widely endorsed principles (Spitz, 1984).

To address these limitations, this paper examines who citizens consider minorities and how such perceptions shape support for protecting minority rights. Theoretically, it contributes to the literature by drawing on democratic theory and legal definitions of minorities (Wheatley, 2005), as well as insights from Social Dominance Theory (Sidanius et al., 2004), to develop a framework for understanding how citizens perceive minority status. This framework is tested using a customized nonpaired conjoint experiment fielded in France, Belgium, Switzerland, and Hungary. Respondents are

presented with profiles of hypothetical individuals possessing randomly varying characteristics and are first asked whether they consider each individual a minority. They are then asked to what extent that individual's rights should be protected. Importantly, the term "minority" is omitted from the latter question, which instead refers only to the individuals described in the profiles. Support for this democratic principle is measured using an original tradeoff framing that pits protecting minority rights against respecting the will of the majority.

Empirically, the study demonstrates that citizens' perceptions of minorities do not necessarily align with formal definitions, thereby challenging assumptions often implicit in prior research. Respondents readily recognize minority status on the basis of both numerical size and perceived subordination, as expected. However, when these characteristics diverge, perceptions of subordination tend to outweigh numerical considerations (e.g., social class and sex). Citizens' perceptions of minorities can therefore depart from the concept's defining criterion of numerical underrepresentation. The analyses further reveal that groups perceived as minorities are rarely viewed as more deserving of rights protections than corresponding majority or dominant groups. One exception is the poor and the working class relative to the rich, suggesting the presence of self-serving considerations. Subgroup analyses further show that even respondents who express the strongest support for minority-rights protection—such as those on the political left, the highly educated, and those who self-identify as minorities—apply this principle inconsistently. Their willingness to protect rights varies depending on which minority is under consideration. Taken together, these findings cast doubt on whether citizens can serve as consistent and reliable safeguards of liberal democracy.

3.2 Theory

3.2.1 The protection of minority rights

The protection of minority rights and majority rule are core democratic principles that may enter into tension and therefore must remain in balance (Dahl, 1989). In a democratic system founded on political equality, a decision is considered legitimate if it reflects the will of the majority of "the people" (Dahl, 2006; Spitz, 1984). Democratic power, therefore, ultimately rests in numbers. If preferences

were evenly distributed, individuals would alternate—with more or less equal frequency—between siding with the majority and the minority on any given issue. In reality, however, preferences are not randomly distributed (Rodden, 2010). Citizens possess characteristics—particularly those related to social identity—that may predispose them to belonging to minorities. These "persistent minorities" consequently face a structural democratic disadvantage (Abizadeh, 2021). Democratic polities marked by such persistent divisions risk devolving into systems in which majorities repeatedly encroach upon the rights of minorities (Donovan & Bowler, 1998; Gamble, 1997; Horwitz, 1966; Rovny, 2024). Consequently, citizens—particularly members of persistent majorities—must exercise a degree of democratic forbearance and restraint to avoid abusing their political power (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). One way to assess citizens' commitment to such forbearance is by examining their support for the protection of minority rights (Almond & Verba, 1963; Easton, 1965).

Prior research has found that citizens generally place high importance on democratic rights and principles, ranging from free and fair elections to civil liberties, political equality, and—of particular relevance to this paper—the protection of minority rights (Ferrín & Kriesi, 2016; Hernández, 2025; Kokkonen & Linde, 2021). This does not mean, however, that support for minority rights is distributed evenly across citizens. A substantial body of research has examined the factors that explain variation in attitudes toward minorities and their rights. Important explanations include citizens' ideological orientations and broader worldviews (Kokkonen & Linde, 2021; LeVine & Campbell, 1972; M. E. McIntosh et al., 1995; Verkuyten, 2004, 2005), as well as experiences related to intergroup contact and perceptions of various forms of threat (Allport, 1970; Bremmer, 1994; Evans & Need, 2002; Evans & Whitefield, 1995; Hechter, 1978; LeVine & Campbell, 1972; Quillian, 1995; Scheepers, 2002; Sherif, 1970; Sullivan et al., 1981).

While these studies have contributed greatly to our understanding of attitudes toward minorities and their rights, many rest on assumptions that may constitute important oversights. One strand of research examining support for minority rights relies on survey items that refer to "minorities" in abstract terms (e.g., Ferrín and Kriesi, 2016), making it unclear who—or what—respondents have in mind when answering these questions. This ambiguity matters because, for minority rights to be protected in practice, the principle must ultimately be translated into specific policies and applied to particular social groups. Other studies have adopted a different approach by focusing on attitudes

toward specific minorities within particular national contexts, such as attitudes toward Turks in Romania (M. E. McIntosh et al., 1995) or prejudice toward Russians in Ukraine (Eras, 2023).[1] While this strategy improves internal validity by clearly specifying the groups under consideration, it necessarily comes at the expense of generalizability. Moreover, these studies typically define minorities deductively, relying on theoretical understandings or legal classifications and implicitly assuming that citizens perceive these groups as minorities. To date, this assumption has received little direct empirical attention. The first objective of this paper is therefore to identify who citizens themselves recognize as minorities.

Another strand of literature has examined the (in)consistency between citizens' support for abstract democratic principles and their support for specific rights and liberties. As the seminal study by Prothro and Grigg (1960) demonstrates, most citizens endorse principles such as minority-rights protection when asked in the abstract. However, this consensus often collapses when citizens are asked about specific groups and concrete manifestations of their rights and liberties. Such divergences between principle and practice have been extensively documented and theorized in the literatures on political tolerance and democratic consensus (Gibson, 2006; McClosky, 1964; McClosky & Brill, 1983; McClosky & Zaller, 1984; Simonovits et al., 2022; Sniderman et al., 1989; Stefanelli et al., 2025). Although insightful, these studies often conflate opposition to specific policies with intolerance toward the groups affected by them. As a result, it is difficult to disentangle resistance to particular policies—such as affirmative action, which may be perceived as unfair or excessively costly (Corns & Schotter, 1999; Son Hing et al., 2002)—from prejudice toward the beneficiaries of those policies. The second objective of this paper is therefore to examine whether support for protecting minority rights depends on the degree to which a group is perceived as a minority, regardless of the specific rights or policies under consideration. This makes it possible to determine whether groups that are equally likely to be perceived as minorities are nevertheless viewed as unequally deserving of rights protection, thereby identifying a form of attitudinal inconsistency that has received little direct empirical attention.

Finally, citizens' commitment to democratic principles is often shaped by competing considerations, including personal interests (Bartels & Johnston, 2020; Stefanelli et al., 2025). Yet existing

[1] This approach was particularly common in research on ethnic minorities in Central and Eastern Europe following the third wave of democratization, as ethnic tensions were believed to threaten democratic stability in post-Soviet societies (L. J. Diamond, 1995; Evans & Lipsmeyer, 2001).

studies typically rely on unconstrained survey items to measure support for minority rights. These generally ask respondents how important they consider a principle to be or how strongly they agree with a particular statement using a Likert or 0-to-10 scale.[2] While informative, such measures may capture idealized rather than fully considered preferences. Respondents may overstate their support due to social desirability bias (Harkness et al., 2003). Alternatively, even genuinely held commitments may be conditional. Citizens may support protecting minority rights *ceteris paribus*, yet become less supportive when doing so entails sacrificing another desirable outcome. Support for minority rights may therefore weaken when it comes at the expense of competing considerations. The third objective of this paper is to more accurately assess citizens' commitment to minority-rights protection by examining support for this principle when it conflicts with majority rule.

3.2.2 Perceived minority status & deservingness of protection

To identify the characteristics that citizens might associate with minority status, this study draws on a widely used definition provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, 2010). The definition was originally formulated by Francesco Capotorti, Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, in 1977. According to this definition, a minority is:

> *A group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State, in a non-dominant position, whose members—being nationals of the State—possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language.*

Two aspects that readily stand out from this definition: (1) numerical considerations ("[a] group numerically inferior to the rest of the population") and (2) considerations of social subordination ("in a non-dominant position"). Here, minorities are conceived as collectivities that are smaller in number *and* occupy a subordinate position in terms of power or privilege. However, marginalized collectivities are not always numerical minorities (e.g., Black South Africans under Apartheid). It is well established that certain social groups—such as men, White people and heterosexuals—are systematically privileged in Western cultures (Connell, 1987; Frankenberg, 1993; Walgenbach, 2005; Warner,

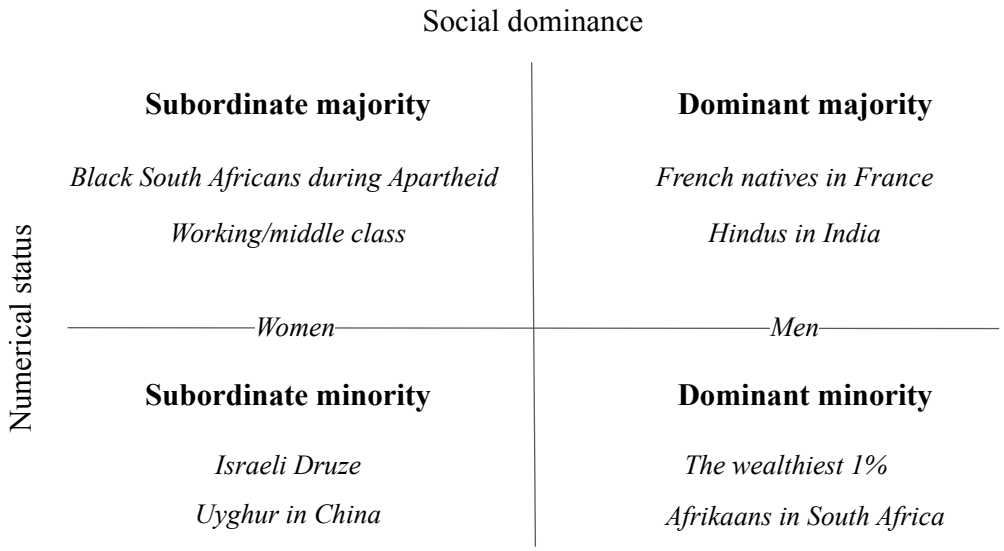
[2] See Figure B.1 in Appendix B for an example from Round 10 of the European Social Survey.

1993), while others, regardless of their numerical size, occupy subordinante positions as a function of socio-historical constructs (Calvert & Ramsey, 1996; Sasson-Levy, 2013). For instance, this may be the case with women, as has been argued in the literature (e.g., Hacker, 1951). Whether citizens rely primarily on numerical considerations, social subordination, or a combination of both when identifying minorities remains an open empirical question. The present study therefore examines how these two dimensions shape perceptions of minority status and whether such perceptions translate into greater support for protecting minority rights.

Given that both numerical considerations and perceived subordination may be relevant to how citizens understand minorities, these dimensions are treated as analytically distinct. Figure 3.1 depicts the four combinations they yield, along with examples of each. The lower-left quadrant (i.e., subordinate minority) and the upper-right quadrant (i.e., dominant majority) correspond most closely to conventional understandings of minorities and majorities, respectively. However, Figure 3.1 illustrates that other combinations are also possible. For instance, the wealthiest 1% constitute a numerical minority while possessing disproportionate economic and, in some cases, political power (Rowbottom, 2010). Conversely, the working class is comparatively subordinate in terms of economic power while being numerically larger, which potentially translates into greater electoral influence. Citizens should therefore readily identify subordinate minorities as minorities and dominant majorities as non-minorities. It is less clear, however, how groups that do not fit neatly into either category are perceived. One key empirical question, therefore, is which of these two dimensions citizens prioritize when numerical size and social subordination point toward different classifications.

Shifting now to citizens' support for protecting minorities, the principle of minority-rights protection rests on the notion that certain groups require or warrant additional safeguards because of their vulnerability within a democratic system. However, citizens may not perceive all groups as equally vulnerable and therefore equally deserving of protection. Prior scholarship has shown that people tend to support others receiving what they deserve—for better or for worse. For instance, Drolet et al., 2016 find that individuals tolerate human-rights violations when they believe the targets of those violations deserve severe treatment because of their past behavior. Similarly, citizens are more likely to accept court rulings when they perceive them as fair and just, even when those rulings conflict with their policy preferences or partisan interests (Tyler & Rasinski, 1991). Such findings

Figure 3.1 Conceptualization of citizens' perceptions of minorities



Note: These examples provided in italics serve strictly illustrative purposes.

are consistent with just-world beliefs (Lerner, 1965) and the moral principle of fairness (J. Graham et al., 2011; Haidt & Graham, 2007), which suggest that individuals care not only about favorable outcomes but also about whether those outcomes are perceived as fair and deserved (Adams, 1965; Walster et al., 1973).

Minorities may be perceived as particularly vulnerable to discrimination, marginalization, or injustice compared to other social groups. As such, citizens would be expected to consider political minorities more deserving of protection than majority groups in order to ensure equal treatment and opportunities within society (Dahl, 1989; L. Diamond & Morlino, 2005). However, for this mechanism to operate, a given social group must first be perceived as a political minority. Otherwise, extending additional protections to that group may be viewed as illegitimate or unfair. This logic is consistent with research documenting public backlash against policies such as affirmative action (Son Hing et al., 2002). Therefore, the more likely a group is to be perceived as a minority, the more citizens are expected to support the protection of its rights.

3.3 Research Design

3.3.1 Case Selection

France, Belgium, Switzerland, and Hungary were selected to capture substantial between- and within-country variation in factors that may shape perceptions of minorities and attitudes toward their rights. For example, the rights of certain minorities—particularly linguistic minorities—receive stronger institutional protection in Switzerland (e.g., Italian and Romansh speakers) and Belgium (e.g., German speakers) than in France (e.g., Occitan and Corsican speakers). Moreover, countries may recognize and protect the rights of some minorities while denying similar protections to others. Hungary provides a clear example of this dynamic. National and linguistic minorities enjoy legal protections related to education, including access to public schools and universities offering instruction in languages such as German, Slovak, and Romanian.[3] By contrast, recent constitutional amendments have restricted the legal recognition of transgender individuals and limited the rights of LGBTQ+ groups to public assembly (Spike, 2025).

These differences may shape citizens' political attitudes through processes of institutional learning. According to institutional-learning models, the institutional structure of a political system influences citizens' orientations toward democracy (Rohrschneider, 2004). For example, Ferrín and Hernández, 2021 find that citizens living in consensual systems are more likely to endorse such systems over majoritarian alternatives and to express preferences for coalition governments. By the same logic, citizens' perceptions of minorities and support for their rights may be influenced by whether particular minorities are formally recognized and by the degree to which their rights receive institutional protection. Together, these cases provide variation in minority-rights regimes while remaining broadly comparable as European democracies.

[3] As provided by Act CLXXIX of 2011.

3.3.2 Data & Methods

To empirically examine whom citizens consider minorities and whom they deem deserving of protection, this study draws on original survey data featuring a customized conjoint experiment fielded in France, Belgium, Switzerland, and Hungary. The final effective sample consists of 1,503 respondents in France, 1,503 in Belgium, 1,509 in Switzerland, and 2,301 in Hungary. The survey was administered between May and July 2024 through online panels provided by the commercial survey firm Bilendi, using nationally representative quotas for gender, education, age, and region.[4]

After completing a pre-treatment questionnaire, respondents proceeded to the conjoint experiment. They were informed that they would be presented with a description of a hypothetical individual composed of a set of randomly varying characteristics, as illustrated in Figure 3.2. These characteristics included ethnicity, religion, the language usually spoken by the individual, citizenship status, sexual orientation or gender identity, social class, and sex. Ethnicity, religion, and language were included because they correspond to established definitions of minorities in international law (Wheatley, 2005). The remaining characteristics were included because existing scholarship frequently discusses minorities along these dimensions and because they allow examination of the four combinations that emerge when crossing numerical status with social dominance or subordination, as depicted in Figure 3.1 (Gross, 1991; Hacker, 1951; Kymlicka, 2009; Lipset & Rokkan, 1967; Parmigiani, 2022).[5]

Each attribute level in the conjoint was fully randomized with equal probability of appearing and without cross-attribute constraints. To this end, the levels for each attribute were carefully selected to avoid implausible combinations and reduce threats to external validity (Hainmueller et al., 2014).[6] Furthermore, the order in which attributes appeared in the conjoint table was randomized across respondents but remained fixed across all conjoint tasks for a given respondent. Finally, the levels of each attribute were identical across country surveys, with the exception of "Language" and "Residence," which were adapted to the national context.

[4] This study was reviewed and approved by the Commission for Ethics in Animal and Human Experimentation (CEEAH) of the Autonomous University of Barcelona on February 16, 2024, with decision number CEEAH 6801.
[5] See Appendix B for a detailed overview and justification of each attribute used in the conjoint experiment.
[6] See Figure B.2 in Appendix B for the complete set of attribute levels used in each country-specific conjoint.

Figure 3.2 Example of conjoint

On the next 3 screens you will see a description of some people. We will describe their characteristics: ethnicity, religion, language they usually speak, whether they are a citizen of the country where they live or not, where they live in the country, their sexual orientation or gender identification, their social class and their sex.

We will ask for your opinion on these people.

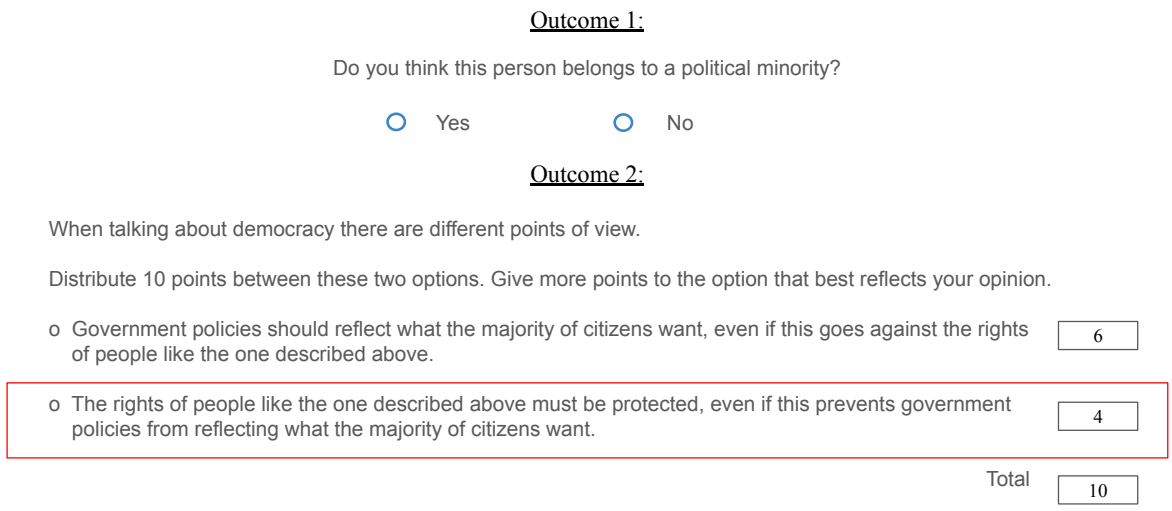
Here is an example of what is provided on the following screens.

Individual	
Ethnicity	Arabic
Religion	Christian
Language	Arabic
Citizen	Yes
Residence	Corsica
Orientation & Gender ID	Heterosexual
Social Class	Working class
Sex	Male

After respondents had been presented with the description of a hypothetical individual, they were asked whether they considered that person to belong to a political minority, as shown in Figure 3.3. The first outcome therefore consists of a binary forced-choice question with "Yes" and "No" response options. The resulting dependent variable takes the value 1 if the profile was perceived as belonging to a minority and 0 otherwise. The term "political minority" was intentionally left undefined, allowing respondents to rely on their own understanding of minority status rather than imposing a specific demographic, legal, or cultural definition. This approach makes it possible to directly observe which characteristics citizens associate with minority status.

After responding to Outcome 1, respondents were asked to distribute a total of 10 points between two opposing statements in the way that best reflected their personal opinion: prioritizing the protection of minority rights over respecting the will of the majority, or vice versa (see Figure 3.3). This original tradeoff framing was adopted for three reasons. First, it gauges support for minority rights in a manner that more closely approximates real-world democratic politics, where these principles may enter into tension (Dahl, 1989). Second, it helps mitigate the potential overestimation of support that may arise from unconstrained survey items asked in isolation. The logic is that pitting two desirable principles against one another introduces a cost to supporting either principle, since greater support for one necessarily implies less support for the other. More importantly, the tradeoff framing mirrors the theoretical argument advanced in this paper: citizens' commitment to

Figure 3.3 Outcome variables



minority-rights protection is revealed most clearly when it competes with another legitimate democratic principle. Third, measuring support for minority rights while providing respondents with a legitimate democratic alternative—respecting the will of the majority—should help reduce social desirability bias. Taken together, this tradeoff framing is expected to provide a more accurate measure of respondents' commitment to protecting minority rights.

A variable was then created based on the number of points allocated to the second option (i.e., protecting the rights of people like the one presented to respondents, even if doing so prevents government policies from reflecting what the majority of citizens want). This variable ranges from 0 to 10, with higher values indicating greater support for protecting minority rights at the expense of majority rule. Each respondent completed three rounds of the conjoint experiment, yielding three observations per individual and a total of 20,448 observations in the pooled sample.

The use of an unpaired conjoint design offers several advantages for the present study. First, it enables the nonparametric estimation of the effects of multiple dimensions associated with minority status simultaneously (Hainmueller et al., 2014). Because all estimates are expressed on the same outcome scale, their relative importance can be directly compared. Substantively, this makes it possible to assess support for protecting the rights of different social groups relative to one another, thereby providing a more nuanced understanding of citizens' commitment to minority-rights protection. Second, conjoint experiments do not require strong assumptions about the specific mechanisms linking

attributes to outcomes, allowing the influence of numerical status and social subordination to be examined simultaneously. Finally, conjoint designs provide respondents with multiple characteristics on which to base their evaluations, thereby reducing the pressure to justify responses through any single socially sensitive consideration and helping mitigate social desirability bias (Wallander, 2009).

3.4 Results

3.4.1 Citizens' perception of minority status

To measure the extent to which each conjoint attribute level is associated with perceived minority status and deservingness of protection, Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs) and Marginal Means (MMs) are computed from linear probability models estimated on the pooled sample of the four countries. AMCEs present effects in relative terms, using the numerical majority or dominant group as the reference category.[7] MMs, by contrast, present estimates in the original metric of the outcome variables. In all models, standard errors are clustered at the individual level, and country fixed effects are included to account for unobserved cross-country heterogeneity.

Figure 3.4 presents Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs) indicating the extent to which each attribute level is associated with perceived minority status relative to the corresponding reference category.[8] The first point to note is that most levels corresponding to numerical minorities or subordinate groups are significantly more likely to be associated with minority status than the corresponding majority or dominant group. These findings suggest that respondents readily perceive minority status through both relative numerical size and social subordination.

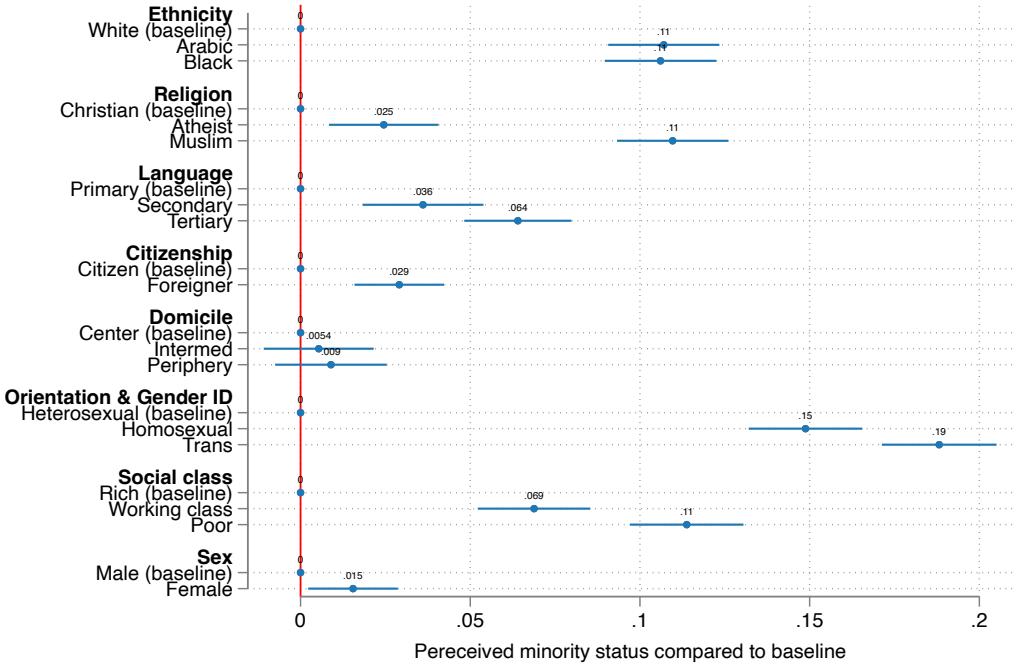
"Domicile" is the only attribute for which there are no significant differences in the likelihood that individuals residing in peripheral or intermediate localities are considered minorities relative to those living in central localities.[9] For example, individuals living in Corsica or Békés are no more likely

[7] See Figure B.3 in Appendix B for the relative numerical standing of each social group used in the conjoint.

[8] Figure B.4 in Appendix B presents the same results as Marginal Means (MMs).

[9] The categories have been collapsed across countries and recoded to make them more directly comparable. Each level was tailored to the country in which the survey was fielded (e.g., Brussels for Belgium and Zurich for Switzerland). The recoded variable uses the region containing the capital city as the baseline, while intermediary and peripheral levels correspond to progressively less populous regions. The same procedure was applied to the attribute "Language," although based on the number of native speakers.

Figure 3.4 Perceived minority status per average marginal component effect

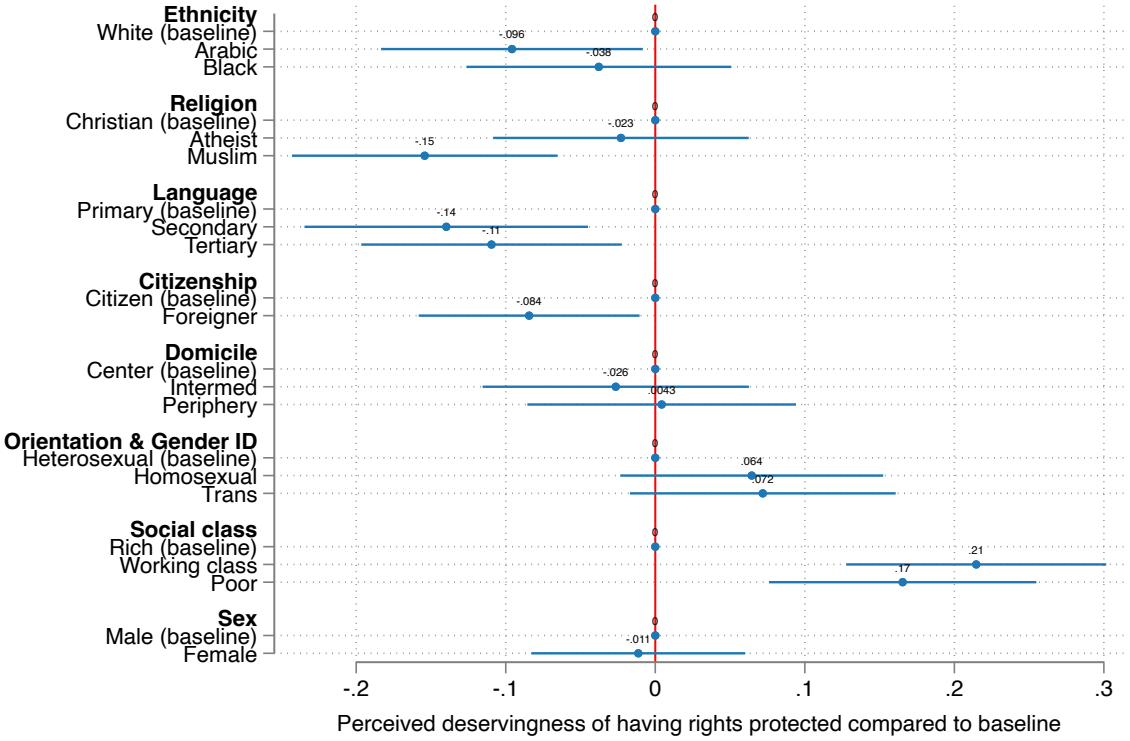


Note: X-axis values correspond to likelihood of perceiving each characteristic as pertaining to a minority compared to that of the reference group. Specifications include standard errors clustered at the individual level and country-fixed effects. Coefficients presented with 96% confidence intervals.

to be considered minorities than those living in Paris or Budapest, respectively. These findings suggest that center–periphery cleavages and broader urban–rural dynamics do not meaningfully shape perceptions of minority status.

All other attributes contain at least one level that is significantly more likely to be associated with minority status than its corresponding reference category, although the magnitude of these effects varies considerably. The strongest effects concern sexual minorities, with transgender individuals being nearly 20 percentage points more likely—and homosexuals approximately 15 percentage points more likely—to be perceived as minorities than heterosexuals. Three attributes are particularly noteworthy: social class, sex, and citizenship. The fact that "the working class/poor" and women are more likely to be considered minorities than the "rich" and men, respectively, suggests that perceptions of minority status are often driven by considerations of social subordination rather than numerical inferiority alone. Furthermore, foreigners are, by definition, non-nationals and therefore do not satisfy one of the core criteria in Capotorti's definition. Taken together, these findings reveal important

Figure 3.5 Perceived deservingness of having rights protected per average marginal component effect



Note: X-axis values correspond to support for protecting the rights of groups with each characteristic with respect to that of the reference group. Specifications include standard errors are clustered at the individual level and country-fixed effects. Coefficients presented with 96% confidence intervals.

discrepancies between how citizens understand minority status and how minorities are defined in international law and by intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations.

3.4.2 Exploratory subgroup analyses

To shed further light on the previous findings, a number of subgroup analyses are performed based on respondents' characteristics. To begin with, Figure B.5 through Figure B.8 in Appendix B show that respondents who self-identify as minorities are generally more likely to perceive social groups as minorities and to support protecting their rights. However, they are not consistently more supportive of protecting minority groups relative to corresponding majority groups. In some cases, they are even less supportive of certain minorities, such as Arabs, than respondents who do not identify as minorities. While these findings suggest greater general sensitivity to rights protection, they provide little evidence that self-identification as a minority generates a generalized tendency to support all

minority groups. Because the survey does not identify which minority group respondents belong to, the role of self-interest cannot be assessed directly.

Next, self-reported household income and subjective social standing are used as proxies for social status (Carvacho et al., 2013; Gidron & Hall, 2017). As shown in ?? and Figure B.15, respondents with lower incomes and lower subjective social standing are significantly more supportive of protecting the rights of the poor and working class relative to the rich, but not of most other minority groups. These findings are consistent with the possibility that self-interest or in-group considerations shape support for minority-rights protection.

Finally, Figure B.17 through Figure B.32 in Appendix B present subgroup analyses based on age, gender, education, ideology, and democratic support. Consistent with previous research, younger, female, highly educated, left-leaning, and strongly democratic respondents tend to more readily identify minority status and express greater support for protecting rights in general. However, this greater recognition and general support does not consistently translate to stronger support for all minorities. For instance, these respondents are particularly supportive of protecting sexual minorities—especially transgender individuals—but are often no more supportive of protecting ethnic and religious minorities than their respective counterparts.

Taken together, these subgroup analyses reveal a striking pattern. Even respondents who appear most committed to protecting minority rights do not apply this principle consistently across groups. Whether examined through self-identification as a minority, social status, ideology, education, or democratic support, commitment to minority-rights protection remains selective rather than universal. These findings reinforces the broader conclusion that support for minority rights is conditional on the specific groups under consideration. Recognition of minority status alone is therefore insufficient to generate consistent support for protecting minority rights.

3.5 Discussion

This study has examined who citizens consider minorities and what implications these perceptions have for support for protecting minority rights. To address limitations in the existing literature, the study operationalized the abstract notion of political minorities through specific social characteris-

tics using an unpaired conjoint experiment and employed an original tradeoff framing to capture citizens' commitment to minority-rights protection under conditions of democratic tension. The findings reveal that while respondents readily recognize minority status, they are generally unwilling to extend greater rights protection to minorities than to corresponding majority or dominant groups. Recognition of minority status, therefore, does not automatically translate into support for protecting minority rights.

To begin with, the attribution of minority status aligns largely with numerical considerations. Sexual minorities are by far the most likely to be perceived as minorities, followed by ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities, as well as non-nationals. Beyond numerical considerations, however, perceptions of minority status also appear to be shaped by social subordination. This is evident with respect to sex, where women are slightly more likely to be considered political minorities than men. Similarly, economically disadvantaged individuals and members of the working class are more likely to be perceived as political minorities than the wealthy.

These perceptions challenge expectations derived from democratic theory. Historically, wealthy citizens were among the first groups conceptualized as minorities, and property rights constituted their proto-minority rights (Ball, 2017; Horwitz, 1966). Nor do citizens' perceptions align with legal definitions employed by international organizations, which generally exclude sexual minorities and non-nationals and require numerical inferiority as a defining characteristic of minority status (OHCHR, 2010). One contribution of this paper, therefore, is to provide empirical evidence that citizens' understandings of minorities differ in important respects from those of political theorists and international organizations. While such differences have often been assumed, they have rarely been examined directly. Second, the findings of this study reveal that, when minority-rights protection is pitted against respecting the will of the majority and measured relative to support for the rights of majority or dominant groups, citizens are not particularly supportive of protecting minorities. More importantly, perceived minority status does not translate into greater perceived deservingness of protection, as would be expected. Most groups that are considered minorities are viewed as no more deserving of protection than majority or dominant groups, while some minorities are considered *less* deserving. A persistent anti-Arab/Muslim bias is particularly evident. Although Muslims are the second most likely group to be considered a minority, respondents nevertheless perceive pro-

files described as "Christian" and "White" as more deserving of protection than profiles described as "Muslim" and "Arab," respectively. These findings are consistent with previous research documenting intolerance toward Muslims (Ivarsflaten & Sniderman, 2022; Spruyt & Elchardus, 2012; Strabac et al., 2014), as well as the practice of "discriminatory rejection," whereby individuals apply different standards to Muslim and Christian religious practices (Dangubić et al., 2020; Hurwitz & Mondak, 2002).

There is one notable exception to this pattern. Respondents identify the poor and the working class as minorities and view them as more deserving of protection than the rich. Exploratory subgroup analyses suggest that self-interest may partially explain this finding, as respondents with lower subjective social status and lower household incomes are particularly supportive of protecting the rights of these groups. In other words, they appear especially supportive of groups with which they identify and perceive as minorities, but not necessarily of other minorities.[10] More broadly, subgroup analyses reveal that even respondents who are generally most supportive of rights protection—such as younger respondents, women, the highly educated, and those on the political left—apply this principle selectively. They may be more supportive of protecting rights in general, or particularly supportive of certain minorities, but they do not consistently extend stronger protections to all minority groups. These findings add nuance to established research showing that characteristics such as education and ideology are associated with lower prejudice and more positive out-group attitudes.[11] While such individuals may appear more supportive of social equality overall, they nevertheless apply this commitment unevenly across groups. Support for minority-rights protection therefore appears conditional not only on whether a group is perceived as a minority, but also on which minority is under consideration.

Finally, this form of conditionality in support for minority rights has broader implications for understanding citizens' commitment to liberal democracy and their tolerance of illiberal practices. As Wunsch et al., 2022 argues, citizens may hold different conceptions of democracy depending on the democratic principles they value most, making them more willing to tolerate violations of principles they consider less important in order to advance those they prioritize (Ferrer et al., 2025). Similarly,

[10] Education and ideology were also found to predict support for the rights of the working class and/or the poor (relative to the rich), suggesting that mechanisms beyond self-interest may also be at work.

[11] See Altemeyer, 1981 and Pratto et al., 1994 on authoritarianism and social dominance orientation, as well as Maykovich, 1975, Quillian, 1995, and Carvacho et al., 2013.

Grossman et al., 2022 argues that extreme majoritarianism poses a particular threat to liberal democracy because it legitimizes the subordination of minority rights to majority preferences. The findings of this study are consistent with these arguments.

Subgroup analyses further reveal that even respondents who express the strongest support for minority-rights protection do not apply this principle consistently. Their support for protecting minority rights varies depending on the minority group under consideration. This suggests that commitment to liberal-democratic principles may be less robust than commonly assumed. If citizens selectively extend protections across groups, their ability to serve as reliable safeguards against the erosion of minority rights may be more limited than conventional accounts of democratic resilience suggest.

References

Abizadeh, A. (2021). Counter-Majoritarian Democracy: Persistent Minorities, Federalism, and the Power of Numbers. *American Political Science Review*, *115*(3), 742–756. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055421000198

Adams, J. S. (1965). Inequity In Social Exchange. In *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (pp. 267–299, Vol. 2). Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60108-2

Adserà, A., Arenas, A., & Boix, C. (2023). Estimating the value of democracy relative to other institutional and economic outcomes among citizens in Brazil, France, and the United States. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *120*(48), e2306168120. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2306168120

Allport, G. W. (1970). *The nature of prejudice* (Abridged, [Nachdr.]). Doubleday.

Almond, G. A., & Verba, S. (1963). *The civic culture: Political attitudes and democracy in five nations* (New ed.). Sage Publications.

Altemeyer, B. (1981). *Right-wing authoritarianism*. University of Manitoba Press.

Ball, T. (2017). *James Madison* (1st ed). Taylor; Francis.

Bartels, B. L., & Johnston, C. D. (2020). Analysis | Why Americans are perfectly willing to undermine the integrity and independence of the Supreme Court. *Washington Post*.

Blais, A. (2010). *To vote or not to vote? the merits and limits of rational choice theory*. University of Pittsburgh Press.

Bremmer, I. (1994). The politics of ethnicity: Russians in the New Ukraine. *Europe-Asia Studies*, *46*(2), 261–283. https://doi.org/10.1080/09668139408412161

Calvert, L. M., & Ramsey, V. J. (1996). Speaking as Female and White: A Non-Dominant/Dominant Group Standpoint. *Organization*, *3*(4), 468–485. https://doi.org/10.1177/135050849634004

Carvacho, H., Zick, A., Haye, A., González, R., Manzi, J., Kocik, C., & Bertl, M. (2013). On the relation between social class and prejudice: The roles of education, income, and ideological attitudes. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *43*(4), 272–285. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.1961

Claassen, C., Ackermann, K., Bertsou, E., Borba, L., Carlin, R. E., Cavari, A., Dahlum, S., Gherghina, S., Hawkins, D., Lelkes, Y., Magalhães, P. C., Mattes, R., Meijers, M. J., Neundorf, A., Oross, D., Öztürk, A., Sarsfield, R., Self, D., Stanley, B., … Zechmeister, E. J. (2024). Conceptualizing and Measuring Support for Democracy: A New Approach. *Comparative Political Studies*, 00104140241259458. https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140241259458

Clarke, H. D., & Acock, A. C. (1989). National Elections and Political Attitudes: The Case of Political Efficacy. *British Journal of Political Science*, *19*(4), 551–562. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123400005639

Connell, R. W. (1987). *Gender and power*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Corns, A., & Schotter, A. (1999). Can Affirmative Action Be Cost Effective? An Experimental Examination of Price-Preference Auctions. *American Economic Review*, *89*(1), 291–305. https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.89.1.291

Crenshaw, K. (2015). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, *1989*(1).

Dahl, R. A. (2006). *A Preface to Democratic Theory, Expanded Edition* [OCLC: 8162957417]. University of Chicago Press.

Dahl, R. A. (1989). *Democracy and its critics* (Nachdr.). Yale University Press.

Dangubić, M., Verkuyten, M., & Stark, T. H. (2020). Rejecting Muslim or Christian religious practices in five West European countries: A case of discriminatory rejection? *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *43*(16), 306–326. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2020.1792525

Diamond, L., & Morlino, L. (2004). The Quality of Democracy: An Overview [Number: 4]. *Journal of Democracy*, *15*(4), 20–31. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2004.0060

Diamond, L., & Morlino, L. (Eds.). (2005). *Assessing the quality of democracy*. Hopkins Univ. Press.

Diamond, L. J. (Ed.). (1995). *Nationalism, ethnic conflict, and democracy* (2. [print.]). Johns Hopkins Univ. Press.

Donà, A. (2021). Radical right populism and the backlash against gender equality: The case of the Lega (Nord). *Contemporary Italian Politics*, *13*(3), 296–313. https://doi.org/10.1080/23248823.2021.1947629

Donovan, T., & Bowler, S. (1998). Direct Democracy and Minority Rights: An Extension. *American Journal of Political Science*, *42*(3), 1020. https://doi.org/10.2307/2991742

Drolet, C. E., Hafer, C. L., & Heuer, L. (2016). The Role of Perceived Deservingness in the Toleration of Human Rights Violations. *Social Justice Research*, *29*(4), 429–455. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11211-016-0273-y

Easton, D. (1965). *A systems analysis of political life*. Wiley.

Eras, L. (2023). War, Identity Politics, and Attitudes toward a Linguistic Minority: Prejudice against Russian-Speaking Ukrainians in Ukraine between 1995 and 2018. *Nationalities Papers*, *51*(1), 114–135. https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2021.100

Evans, G., & Lipsmeyer, C. S. (2001). The democratic experience in divided societies: The Baltic states in comparative perspective. *Journal of Baltic Studies*, *32*(4), 379–401. https://doi.org/10.1080/01629770100000161

Evans, G., & Need, A. (2002). Explaining ethnic polarization over attitudes towards minority rights in Eastern Europe: A multilevel analysis. *Social Science Research*, *31*(4), 653–680. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0049-089X(02)00018-2

Evans, G., & Whitefield, S. (1995). The Politics and Economics of Democratic Commitment: Support for Democracy in Transition Societies. *British Journal of Political Science*, *25*(4), 485–514. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123400007328

Ferrer, S., Hernández, E., Prada, E., & Tomic, D. (2025). The value of liberal democracy: Assessing citizens' commitment to democratic principles. *European Journal of Political Research*, 1475–6765.70021. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.70021

Ferrín, M., & Hernández, E. (2021). Preferences for consensus and majoritarian democracy: Long- and short-term influences. *European Political Science Review*, *13*(2), 209–225. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773921000047

Ferrín, M., & Kriesi, H. (Eds.). (2016). *How Europeans view and evaluate democracy* (First edition). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198766902.001.0001

Frankenberg, R. (1993). *White women, race matters: The social construction of whiteness*. University of Minnesota Press.

Gamble, B. S. (1997). Putting Civil Rights to a Popular Vote. *American Journal of Political Science*, *41*(1), 245. https://doi.org/10.2307/2111715

García Del Horno, R., Rico, G., & Hernández, E. (2024). Do they feel like they don't matter? The rural-urban divide in external political efficacy. *West European Politics*, *47*(7), 1447–1472. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2023.2261085

Gibson, J. L. (2006). Enigmas of Intolerance: Fifty Years after Stouffer's Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties. *Perspectives on Politics*, *4*(01). https://doi.org/10.1017/S153759270606004X

Gidron, N., & Hall, P. A. (2017). The politics of social status: Economic and cultural roots of the populist right. *The British Journal of Sociology*, *68*(S1). https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12319

Gimpel, J. G., Lovin, N., Moy, B., & Reeves, A. (2020). The Urban–Rural Gulf in American Political Behavior. *Political Behavior*, *42*(4), 1343–1368. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-020-09601-w

Graham, J., Nosek, B. A., Haidt, J., Iyer, R., Koleva, S., & Ditto, P. H. (2011). Mapping the moral domain. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *101*(2), 366–385. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021847

Graham, M. H., & Svolik, M. W. (2020). Democracy in America? Partisanship, Polarization, and the Robustness of Support for Democracy in the United States [Number: 2]. *American Political Science Review*, *114*(2), 392–409. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055420000052

Gross, L. (1991). Out of the Mainstream: Sexual Minorities and the Mass Media. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *21*(1-2), 19–46. https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v21n01_04

Grossman, G., Kronick, D., Levendusky, M., & Meredith, M. (2022). The Majoritarian Threat to Liberal Democracy. *Journal of Experimental Political Science*, *9*(1), 36–45. https://doi.org/10.1017/XPS.2020.44

Gurr, T. R. (2015, November). *Why Men Rebel* (0th ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315631073

Hacker, H. M. (1951). Women as a Minority Group. *Social Forces*, *30*(1), 60–69. https://doi.org/10.2307/2571742

Haidt, J., & Graham, J. (2007). When Morality Opposes Justice: Conservatives Have Moral Intuitions that Liberals may not Recognize. *Social Justice Research*, *20*(1), 98–116. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11211-007-0034-z

Hainmueller, J., Hopkins, D. J., & Yamamoto, T. (2014). Causal Inference in Conjoint Analysis: Understanding Multidimensional Choices via Stated Preference Experiments. *Political Analysis*, *22*(1), 1–30. https://doi.org/10.1093/pan/mpt024

Harkness, J. A., Vijver, F. J. R. v. d., & Mohler, P. P. (Eds.). (2003). *Cross-cultural survey methods*. J. Wiley.

Harteveld, E., Van Der Brug, W., De Lange, S., & Van Der Meer, T. (2022). Multiple roots of the populist radical right: Support for the Dutch PVV in cities and the countryside. *European Journal of Political Research*, *61*(2), 440–461. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12452

Hechter, M. (1978). Group Formation and the Cultural Division of Labor. *American Journal of Sociology*, *84*(2), 293–318. https://doi.org/10.1086/226785

Heim, D. (2016). "Old" natives and "new" immigrants: Beyond territory and history in Kymlicka's account of group-rights. *Migration Letters*, *13*(2), 214–227.

Hernández, E. (2025, February). Stability and change in Europeans' views of democracy. In M. Ferrín & H. Kriesi (Eds.), *How Europeans View and Evaluate Democracy Revisited* (1st ed., pp. 55–78). Oxford University PressOxford. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198883319.003.0003

Horwitz, M. J. (1966). Tocqueville and the Tyranny of the Majority. *The Review of Politics*, *28*(3), 293–307. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670500007105

Hurwitz, J., & Mondak, J. J. (2002). Democratic Principles, Discrimination and Political Intolerance. *British Journal of Political Science*, *32*(01). https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123402000042

Ivarsflaten, E., & Sniderman, P. M. (2022). *The struggle for inclusion: Muslim minorities and the democratic ethos*. University of Chicago Press.

Kazyak, E., Burke, K., Behrendt, M., & Oliver, M. (2024). Religious Exemption, LGBT Rights, and the Social Construction of Harm and Freedom. *Law & Social Inquiry*, *49*(2), 980–1003. https://doi.org/10.1017/lsi.2023.5

Kokkonen, A., & Linde, J. (2021). Nativist attitudes and opportunistic support for democracy [Number: 0 _eprint: https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2021.2007459]. *West European Politics*, *0*(0), 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2021.2007459

König, P. D., Siewert, M. B., & Ackermann, K. (2022). Conceptualizing and Measuring Citizens' Preferences for Democracy: Taking Stock of Three Decades of Research in a Fragmented Field. *Comparative Political Studies*, *55*(12), 2015–2049. https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140211066213

Krishnarajan, S. (2022). Rationalizing Democracy: The Perceptual Bias and (Un)Democratic Behavior. *American Political Science Review*, 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055422000806

Kymlicka, W. (1995). *Multicultural citizenship: A liberal theory of minority rights*. Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press.

Kymlicka, W. (1997). Do We Need a Liberal Theory of Minority Rights? Reply to Carens, Young, Parekh and Forst. *Constellations*, *4*(1), 72–87. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.00038

Kymlicka, W. (2000). Nation-building and minority rights: Comparing West and East. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *26*(2), 183–212. https://doi.org/10.1080/136918300500222767

Kymlicka, W. (2009). Categorizing Groups, Categorizing States: Theorizing Minority Rights in a World of Deep Diversity. *Ethics & International Affairs*, *23*(4), 371–388. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7093.2009.00229.x

Lee, Y. H., Liu, Z., Fatori, D., Bauermeister, J. R., Luh, R. A., Clark, C. R., Bauermeister, S., Brunoni, A. R., & Smoller, J. W. (2022). Association of Everyday Discrimination With Depressive Symptoms and Suicidal Ideation During the COVID-19 Pandemic in the All of Us Research Program. *JAMA Psychiatry*, *79*(9), 898. https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2022.1973

Lerner, M. J. (1965). Evaluation of performance as a function of performer's reward and attractiveness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *1*(4), 355–360. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0021806

LeVine, R. A., & Campbell, D. T. (1972). *Ethnocentrism: Theories of conflict, ethnic attitudes, and group behavior*. Wiley.

Levitsky, S., & Ziblatt, D. (2018). *How democracies die* (First edition). Crown.

Lipset, S. M., & Rokkan, S. (1967). *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives*. Free Press.

Maxwell, R. (2019). Cosmopolitan Immigration Attitudes in Large European Cities: Contextual or Compositional Effects? *American Political Science Review*, *113*(2), 456–474. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055418000898

Maykovich, M. K. (1975). Correlates of racial prejudice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *32*(6), 1014–1020. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.32.6.1014

McClosky, H. (1964). Consensus and Ideology in American Politics. *American Political Science Review*, *58*(2), 361–382. https://doi.org/10.2307/1952868

McClosky, H., & Brill, A. (1983). *Dimensions of tolerance: What Americans believe about civil liberties*. Russell Sage foundation.

McClosky, H., & Zaller, J. (1984). *The American ethos: Public attitudes toward capitalism and democracy*. Harvard Univ. Press.

McIntosh, M. E., Iver, M. A. M., Abele, D. G., & Nolle, D. B. (1995). Minority Rights and Majority Rule: Ethnic Tolerance in Romania and Bulgaria. *Social Forces*, *73*(3), 939. https://doi.org/10.2307/2580553

McIntosh, P. (2020). *On privilege, fraudulence, and teaching as learning: Selected essays 1981–2019*. Routledge.

Montague, Z. (2025). Trump's Cuts to N.I.H. Grants Focused on Minority Groups Are Illegal, Judge Rules. *The New York Times*.

O'Donnell, G. (1999). Horizontal Accountability in New Democracies. In *The self-restraining state: Power and accountability in new democracies*. Lynne Rienner.

OHCHR. (2010). Minority Rights: International Standards and Guidance for Implementation.

Parmigiani, A. (2022). *The political power of economic elites in contemporary Western democracies*. UNRISD.

Plattner, M. F. (2020). Democracy Embattled [Number: 1]. *Journal of Democracy*, *31*(1), 5–10. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2020.0000

Plöderl, M., & Tremblay, P. (2015). Mental health of sexual minorities. A systematic review. *International Review of Psychiatry*, *27*(5), 367–385. https://doi.org/10.3109/09540261.2015.1083949

Pratto, F., Sidanius, J., Stallworth, L. M., & Malle, B. F. (1994). Social dominance orientation: A personality variable predicting social and political attitudes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *67*(4), 741–763. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.67.4.741

Primecz, H., & Pelyhe, V. (2024). Hungary as a precarious context for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community. Interviews with transgender people. *Gender, Work & Organization*, *31*(5), 1812–1827. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.13038

Prothro, J. W., & Grigg, C. M. (1960). Fundamental Principles of Democracy: Bases of Agreement and Disagreement. *The Journal of Politics*, *22*(2), 276–294. https://doi.org/10.2307/2127359

Quillian, L. (1995). Prejudice as a Response to Perceived Group Threat: Population Composition and Anti-Immigrant and Racial Prejudice in Europe. *American Sociological Review*, *60*(4), 586. https://doi.org/10.2307/2096296

Rhead, R., Harber-Aschan, L., Onwumere, J., Polling, C., Dorrington, S., Ehsan, A., Stevelink, S. A. M., Khunti, K., Mir, G., Morriss, R., Wessely, S., Woodhead, C., & Hatch, S. (2024). Ethnic inequalities among NHS staff in England: Workplace experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, *81*(3), 113–121. https://doi.org/10.1136/oemed-2023-108976

Rodden, J. (2010). The Geographic Distribution of Political Preferences. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *13*(1), 321–340. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.12.031607.092945

Rohrschneider, R. (2004). *Learning democracy: Democratic and economic values in unified Germany*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198295174.001.0001

Rovny, J. (2024). *Ethnic minorities, political competition, and democracy: Circumstantial liberals*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/9780198906742.001.0001

Rowbottom, J. (2010). *Democracy distorted: Wealth, influence and democratic politics*. Cambridge University Press.

Sasson-Levy, O. (2013). A Different Kind of Whiteness: Marking and Unmarking of Social Boundaries in the Construction of Hegemonic Ethnicity. *Sociological Forum*, *28*(1), 27–50. https://doi.org/10.1111/socf.12001

Savin-Williams, R. C. (2001). A critique of research on sexual-minority youths. *Journal of Adolescence*, *24*(1), 5–13. https://doi.org/10.1006/jado.2000.0369

Schedler, A., & Sarsfield, R. (2007). Democrats with adjectives: Linking direct and indirect measures of democratic support. *European Journal of Political Research*, *46*(5), 637–659. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2007.00708.x

Scheepers, P. (2002). Ethnic Exclusionism in European Countries. Public Opposition to Civil Rights for Legal Migrants as a Response to Perceived Ethnic Threat. *European Sociological Review*, *18*(1), 17–34. https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/18.1.17

Sherif, M. (1970). *Group conflict and co-operation: Their social psychology* (Repr. [d. Ausg.] 1967). Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Shields, S. A. (2008). Gender: An Intersectionality Perspective. *Sex Roles*, *59*(5), 301–311. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-008-9501-8

Sidanius, J., Pratto, F., Van Laar, C., & Levin, S. (2004). Social Dominance Theory: Its Agenda and Method. *Political Psychology*, *25*(6), 845–880. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2004.00401.x

Simonovits, G., McCoy, J., & Littvay, L. (2022). Democratic Hypocrisy and Out-Group Threat: Explaining Citizen Support for Democratic Erosion. *The Journal of Politics*, *84*(3), 1806–1811. https://doi.org/10.1086/719009

Sniderman, P. M., Tetlock, P. E., Glaser, J. M., Green, D. P., & Hout, M. (1989). Principled Tolerance and the American Mass Public. *British Journal of Political Science*, *19*(1), 25–45. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123400005305

Son Hing, L. S., Bobocel, D. R., & Zanna, M. P. (2002). Meritocracy and opposition to affirmative action: Making concessions in the face of discrimination. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *83*(3), 493–509. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.83.3.493

Spike, J. (2025, March). A new anti-LGBTQ+ bill in Hungary would ban Pride event, allow facial recognition software use [Section: World & Nation].

Spitz, E. (1984). *Majority rule*. Chatham House.

Spruyt, B., & Elchardus, M. (2012). Are anti-Muslim feelings more widespread than anti-foreigner feelings? Evidence from two split-sample experiments. *Ethnicities*, *12*(6), 800–820. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796812449707

Stefanelli, A., Abts, K., & Meuleman, B. (2025). Freedom for all? Populism and the instrumental support of freedom of speech. *West European Politics*, *48*(7), 1629–1652. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2024.2434798

Strabac, Z., Aalberg, T., & Valenta, M. (2014). Attitudes towards Muslim Immigrants: Evidence from Survey Experiments across Four Countries. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *40*(1), 100–118. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2013.831542

Sullivan, J. L., Marcus, G. E., Feldman, S., & Piereson, J. E. (1981). The Sources of Political Tolerance: A Multivariate Analysis. *American Political Science Review*, *75*(1), 92–106. https://doi.org/10.2307/1962161

Svolik, M. W. (2019). Polarization versus Democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, *30*(3), 20–32. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0039

Tyler, T. R., & Rasinski, K. (1991). Procedural Justice, Institutional Legitimacy, and the Acceptance of Unpopular U.S. Supreme Court Decisions: A Reply to Gibson. *Law & Society Review*, *25*(3), 621–630. https://doi.org/10.2307/3053729

Verkuyten, M. (2004). Everyday Ways of Thinking about Multiculturalism. *Ethnicities*, *4*(1), 53–74. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796804040328

Verkuyten, M. (2005). Ethnic Group Identification and Group Evaluation Among Minority and Majority Groups: Testing the Multiculturalism Hypothesis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *88*(1), 121–138. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.88.1.121

Waite, S. (2021). Should I Stay or Should I Go? Employment Discrimination and Workplace Harassment against Transgender and Other Minority Employees in Canada's Federal Public Service. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *68*(11), 1833–1859. https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2020.1712140

Walgenbach, K. (2005). *"Die weisse Frau als Trägerin deutscher Kultur": Koloniale Diskurse über Geschlecht, "Rasse" und Klasse im Kaiserreich*. Campus.

Wallander, L. (2009). 25 years of factorial surveys in sociology: A review. *Social Science Research*, *38*(3), 505–520. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2009.03.004

Walster, E., Berscheid, E., & Walster, G. W. (1973). New directions in equity research. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *25*(2), 151–176. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0033967

Warner, M. (1993). *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* [Google-Books-ID: S58X0otIM60C]. U of Minnesota Press.

Wheatley, S. (2005, December). *Democracy, Minorities and International Law* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511584336

Wunsch, N., Jacob, M., & Derksen, L. (2022, January). *The Demand Side of Democratic Backsliding: How Divergent Understandings of Democracy Shape Political Choice* (tech. rep.) (type: article). OSF Preprints. https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/c64gf

Appendix B: Supplementary materials

B.1 Overview of attributes used in conjoint

Ethnicity, religion and language are used as attributes in the conjoint as these are the traditional characteristics used to define minorities (e.g., as per Capotorti's definition). Sex is included, even though men and women are even in terms of numerical status, due to women's subordinate position in society and because some scholars consider them minorities (Crenshaw, 2015; Hacker, 1951; P. McIntosh, 2020; Shields, 2008)

Social class is included to explore citizens' perception of minority status when there is a clear discord between numerical status and societal power dominance. Namely, the wealthy constitute a form of elite that are few in number but high in social status, power and privileged (Parmigiani, 2022). Furthermore, including social class allows testing of the degree to which citizens are aware of—and are influenced by—the traditional notion of minorities as wealthy individuals that require the state to protect their property rights (Ball, 2017).

Furthermore, citizenship status is included in the conjoint. There is some debate about whether immigrants can be considered minorities, especially given that there are rights such as the right to vote or run for office that non-citizens are not entitled to (Heim, 2016; Kymlicka, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2009). On the other hand, immigrant populations tend to preserve their culture, traditions, religion or language—just like "traditional minorities" (as per Capotorti's definition). Furthermore, 'Asians' and 'Latinos' tend to be considered minorities in the US regardless of their immigration status. Finally, (Kymlicka, 2000, 2009) considers immigrants one type of minority, albeit with less claim to rights than other minorities.[12] In sum, the existing literature provides sufficient reason to believe that citizens may consider immigrants (i.e., non-citizens) minorities and including a citizenship dimension in the analyses allows for addressing these theoretical debates empirically from the perspective of citizens.

Next, place of residence is included as a characteristic. Doing so allows for tapping political dimensions of power along the traditional center–periphery and urban-rural cleavages (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967).[13] Capital cities tend to concentrate political/economic institutions and actors, leading peripheral rural areas to sometimes be considered 'left-behind places that don't matter' (Gimpel et al., 2020; Harteveld et al., 2022; Maxwell, 2019). Indeed, rural inhabitants feel less politically efficacious as they consider political system to be less responsive to their demands (García Del Horno et al., 2024). Given that political efficacy is positively associated with political participation (Blais, 2010; Clarke & Acock, 1989), such individuals may be less likely to turn out to vote, less likely to end up with adequate representation and more likely to feel like electoral losers—which are, by definition, numerical minorities in an electoral system.

Finally, a characteristics pertaining to sexual minorities is included as there is a clear consensus in the literature that individuals whose sexual identity, orientation or practices differ from the majority of society constitute a minority (Gross, 1991; Plöderl & Tremblay, 2015; Savin-Williams, 2001). Recent controversies and debates pertaining to the rights of sexual minorities further justify the inclusion of this dimension (Kazyak et al., 2024).[14]

[12] For instance, indigenous peoples such as the Maori or American Indians ought to have the rights to self-government, customary law, and land claims. Regionally concentrated national minorities such as the Catalans or Québécois ought to have rights to territorial autonomy and official language status. Immigrants and refugees ought to have rights to naturalization and reasonable accommodations.

[13] Dimensions along which the cases show relevant variation (e.g., Switzerland vs. France).

[14] Particularly in Hungary (Primecz & Pelyhe, 2024).

Figure B.1 Support for minority rights protection item from ESS 10

Now some questions about democracy. Later on I will ask you about how democracy is working in [country]. First, however, I want you to think instead about how important you think different things are for democracy in general[71]. There are no right or wrong answers so please just tell me what you think.

CARD 35 Using this card, please tell me how important you think it is for democracy in general... **READ OUT**…

[Display before items D2-D5: STILL CARD 35 (IF NECESSARY: How important do you think it is for democracy in general…) **READ OUT**…**]**

		Not at all important for democracy in general[72]										**Extremely[73] important for democracy in general**	**(Refusal)**	**(Don't know)**
D4	...that the rights of minority groups are protected?	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	77	88

B.2 Additional information & analyses

Figure B.2 Characteristics by country

Country	Ethnicity	Religion	Language	Citizen	Residence	Orientation & Gender ID	Social Class	Sex
Belgium	Black	Muslim	French	Yes	Brussels-Capital	Homosexual	Poor	Male
	White	Christian	German		Flanders	Heterosexual	Working class	
	Arab	Atheist	Flemish	No	Wallonia	Trans	Wealthy	Female
France	Black	Muslim	Arabic	Yes	Île-de-France	Homosexual	Poor	Male
	White	Christian	Corsican		Pays de la Loire	Heterosexual	Working class	
	Arab	Atheist	French	No	Corsica	Trans	Wealthy	Female
Switzerland	Black	Muslim	Arabic	Yes	Bern	Homosexual	Poor	Male
	White	Christian	German		Ticino	Heterosexual	Working class	
	Arab	Atheist	Italian	No	Graubünden	Trans	Wealthy	Female
Hungary	Black	Muslim	Arabic	Yes	Budapest	Homosexual	Poor	Male
	White	Christian	(Swabian) German		Baranya	Heterosexual	Working class	
	Arab	Atheist	Hungarian	No	Békés	Trans	Wealthy	Female

Figure B.3 Approximate demographic distribution of societal groups

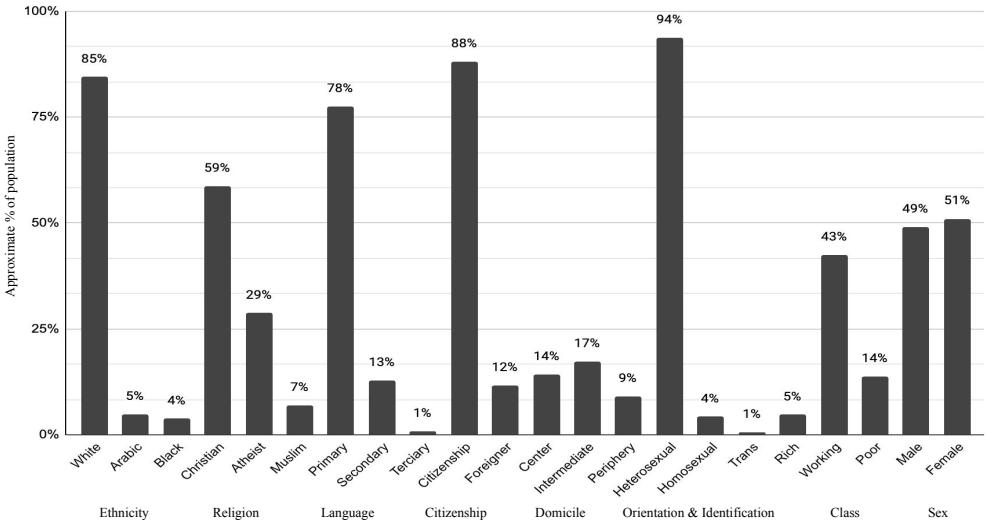
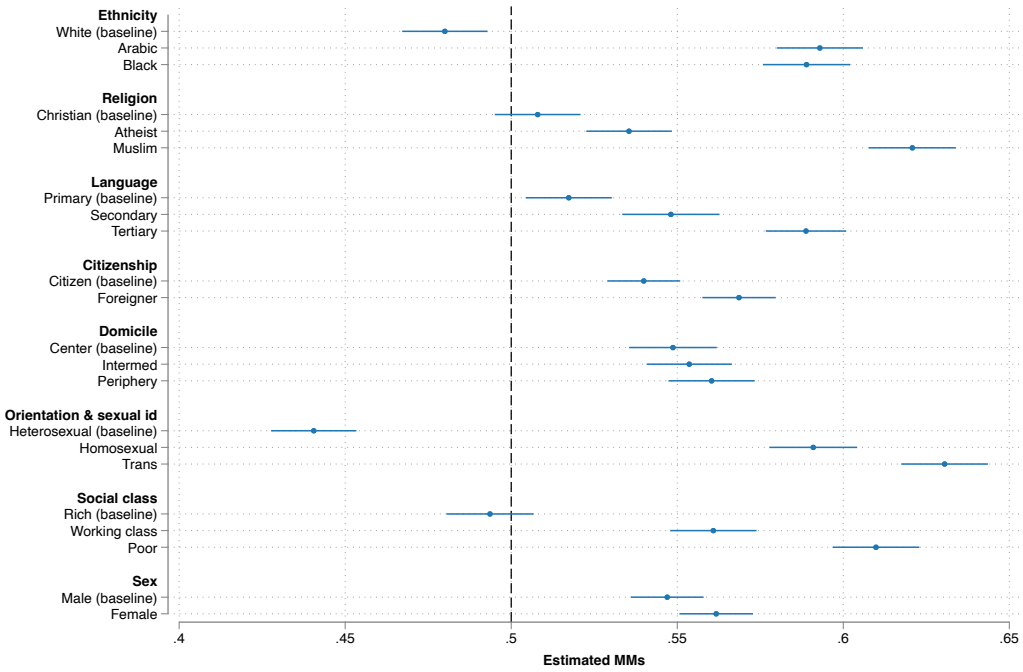


Figure B.4 Perceived minority status per marginal means



Note: Estimates indicate the likelihood of any given characteristic being considered indicative of minority status in absolute terms—although a reference line has been added at the 0.5 mark, which corresponds to random selection Recall that the answers to the is-this-person-a-minority outcome are "Yes" or "No," meaning that a characteristic that had no influence would be associated with minority status about 50% of the time by sheer chance.

Figure B.5 Perceived minority status per AMCE by minority self-identification

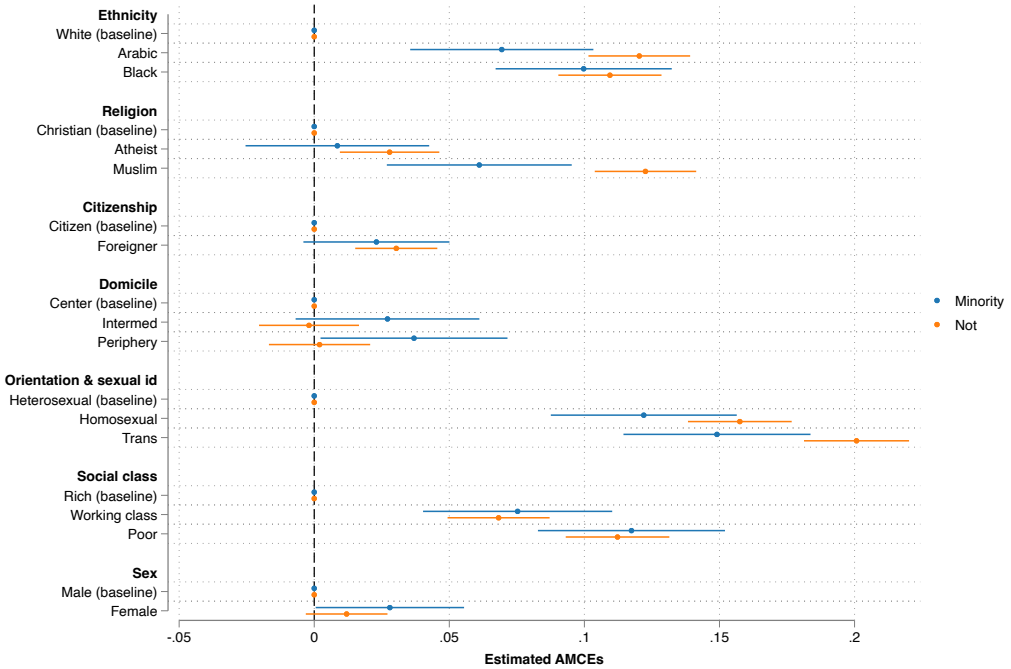


Figure B.6 Perceived minority status per MM by minority self-identification

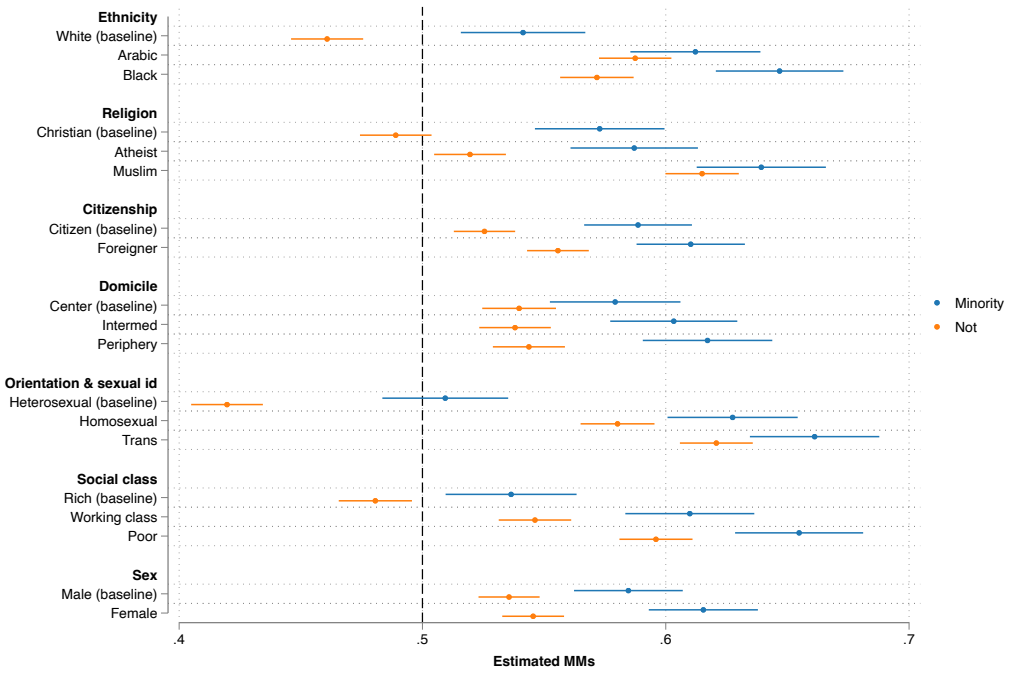


Figure B.7 Perceived deservingness of protection per AMCE by minority self-identification

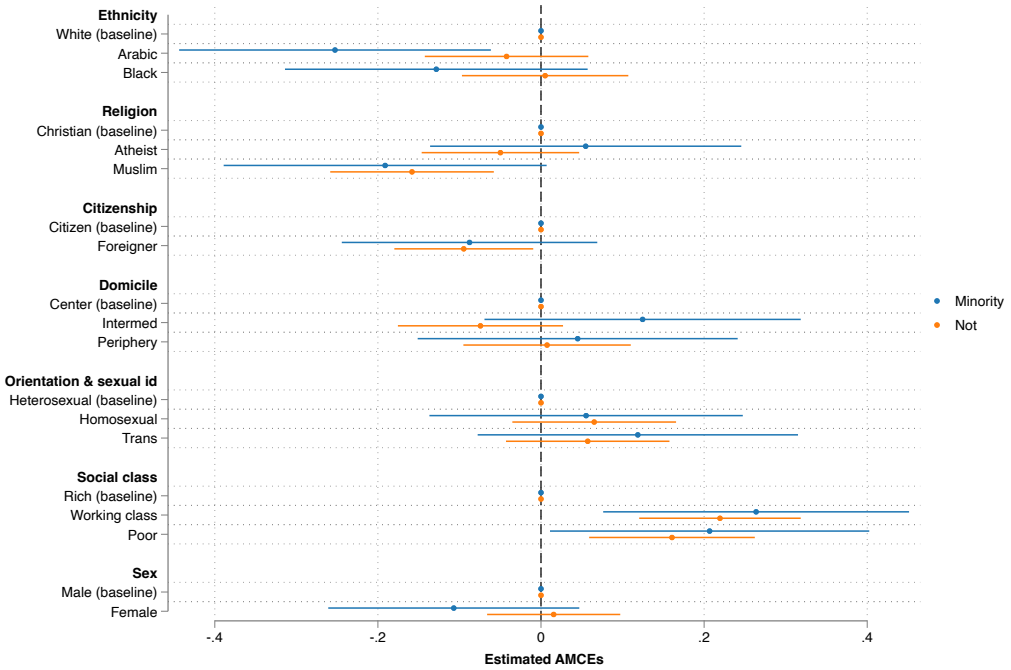


Figure B.8 Perceived deservingness of protection per MM by minority self-identification

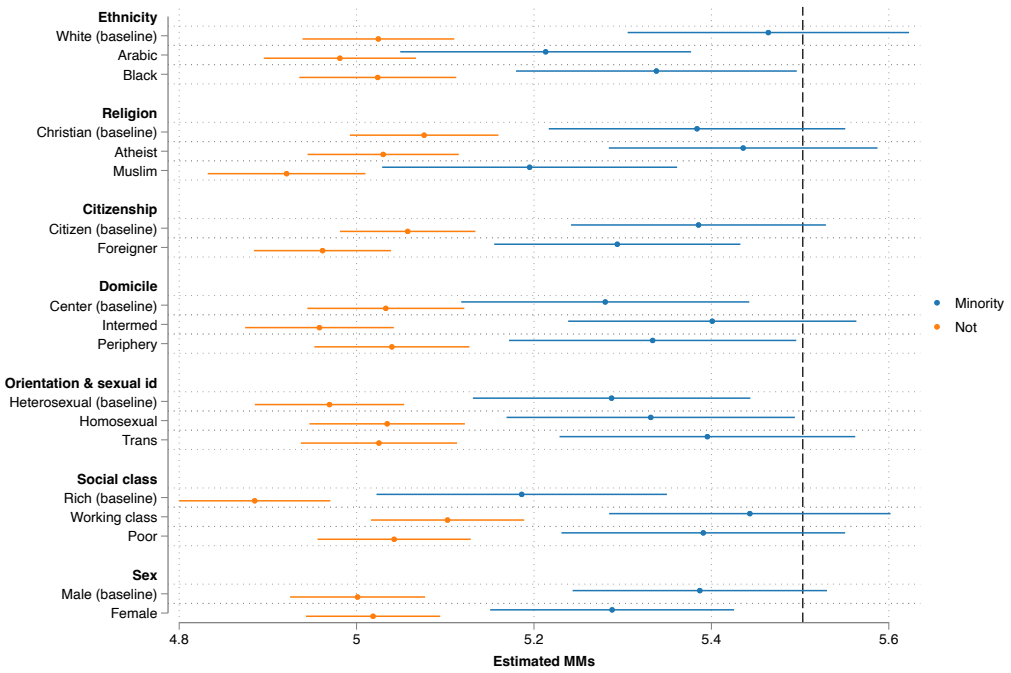


Figure B.9 Perceived minority status per AMCE by income

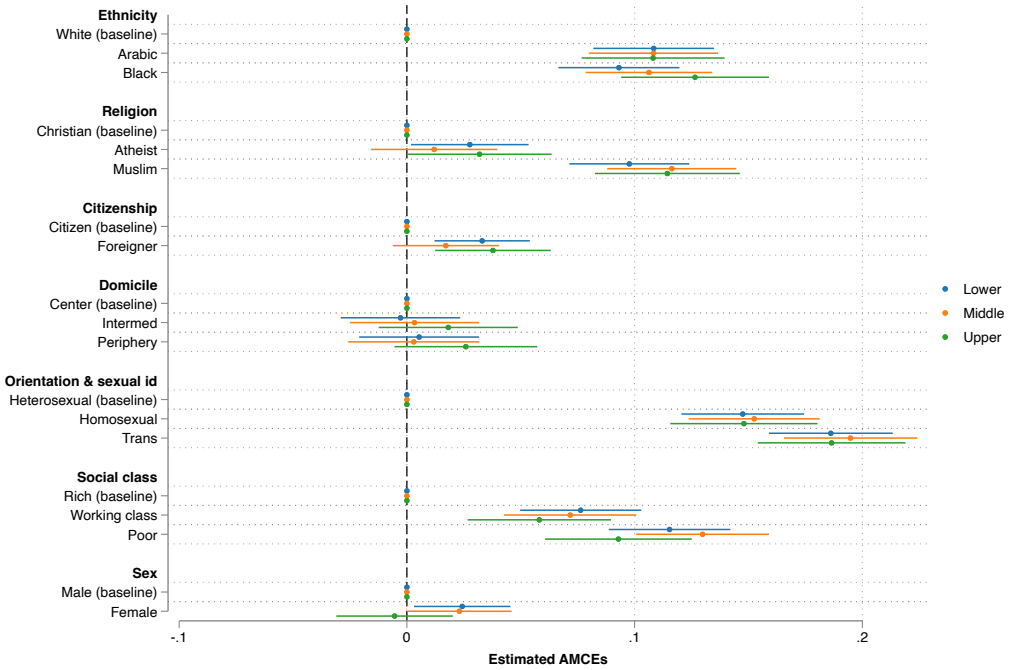


Figure B.10 Perceived minority status per MM by income

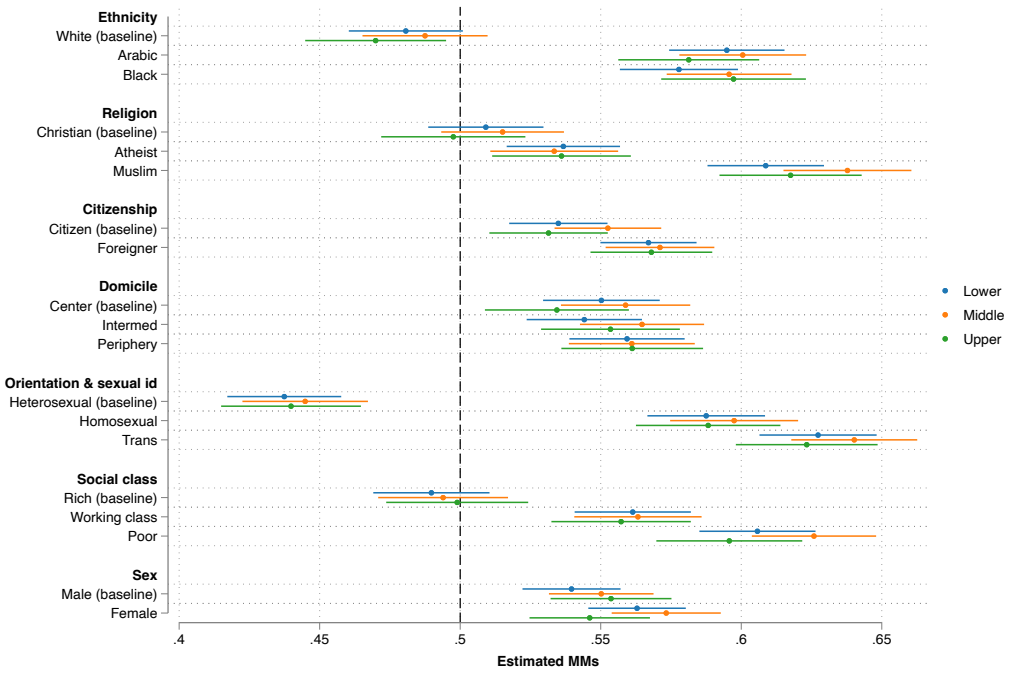


Figure B.11 Perceived deservingness of protection AMCE by income

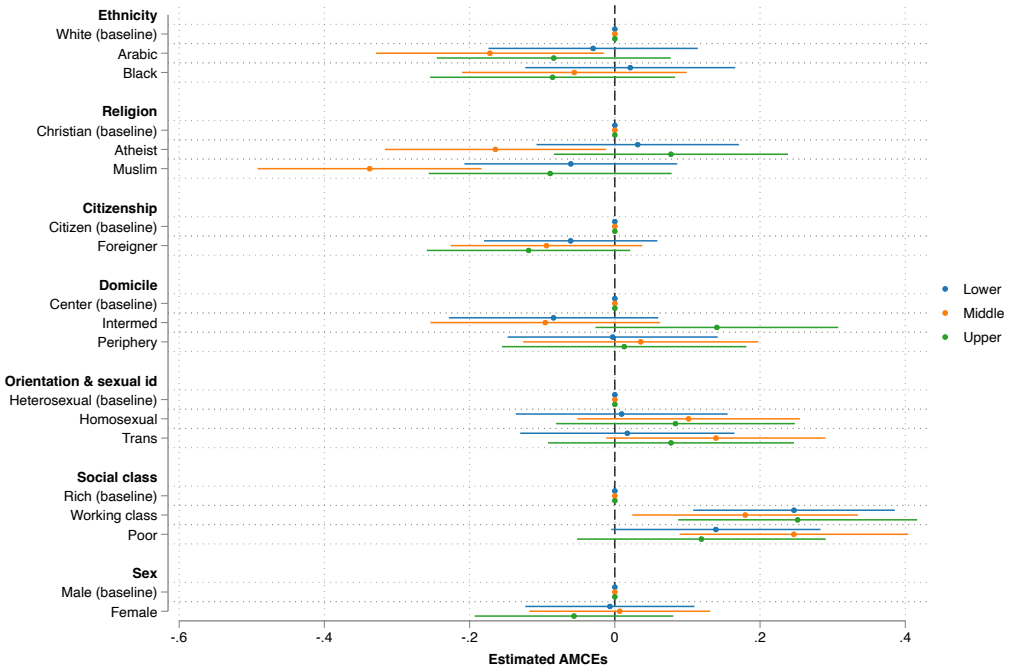


Figure B.12 Perceived deservingness of protection per MM by income

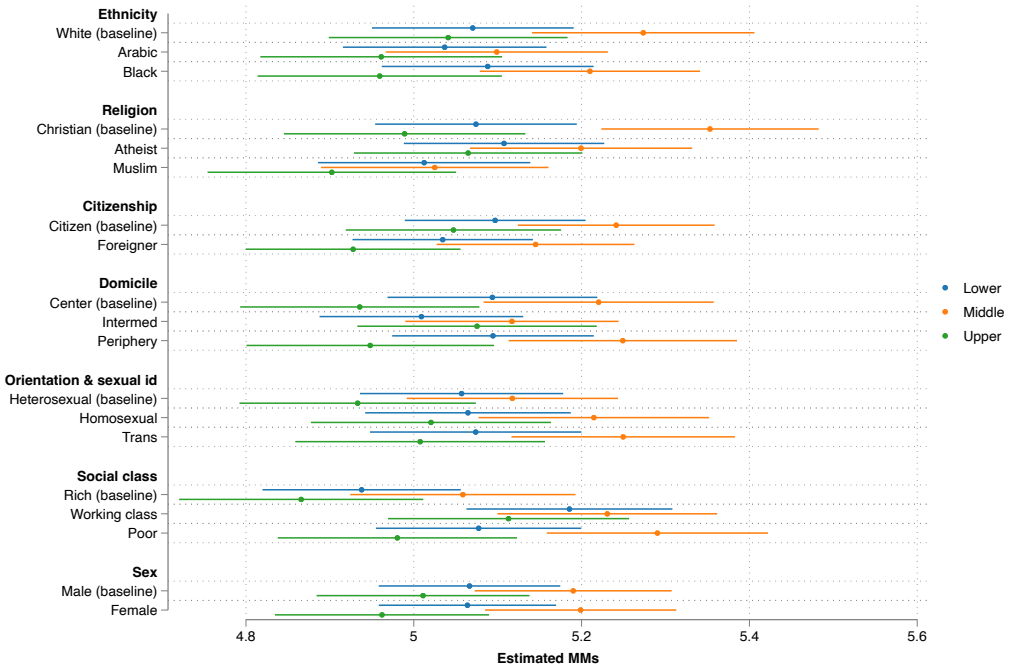


Figure B.13 Perceived minority status per AMCE by social status

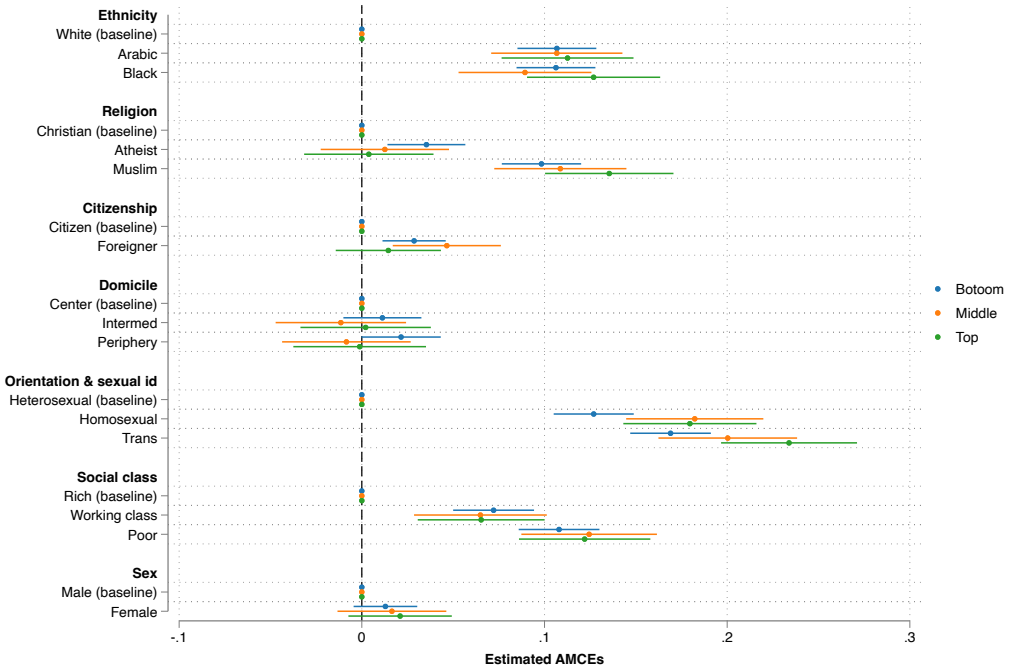


Figure B.14 Perceived minority status per MM by social status

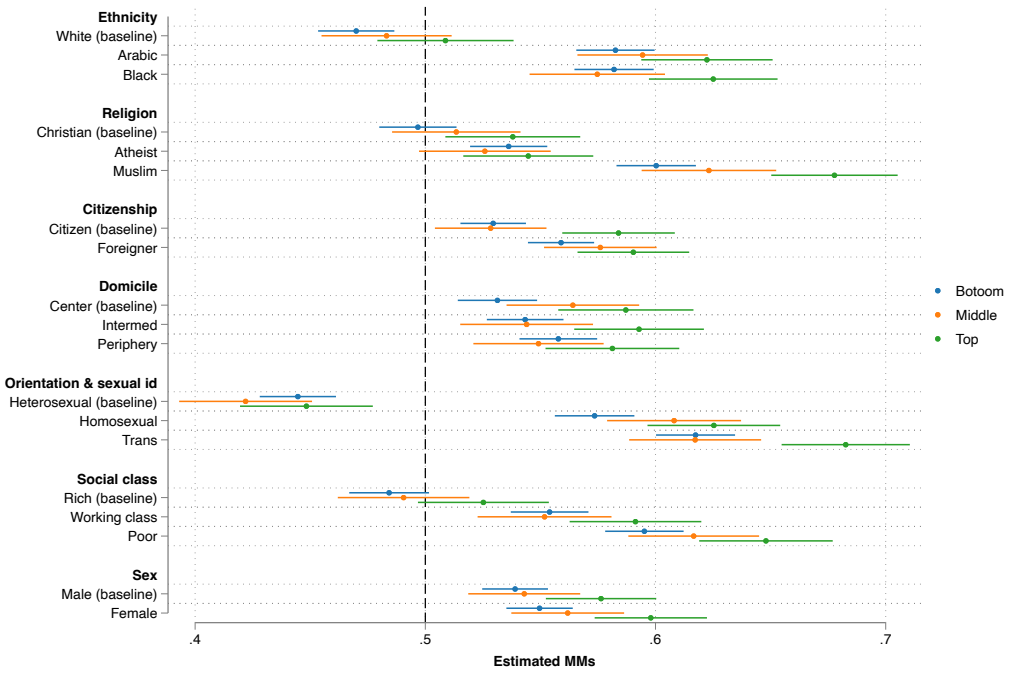


Figure B.15 Perceived deservingness of protection per AMCE by social status

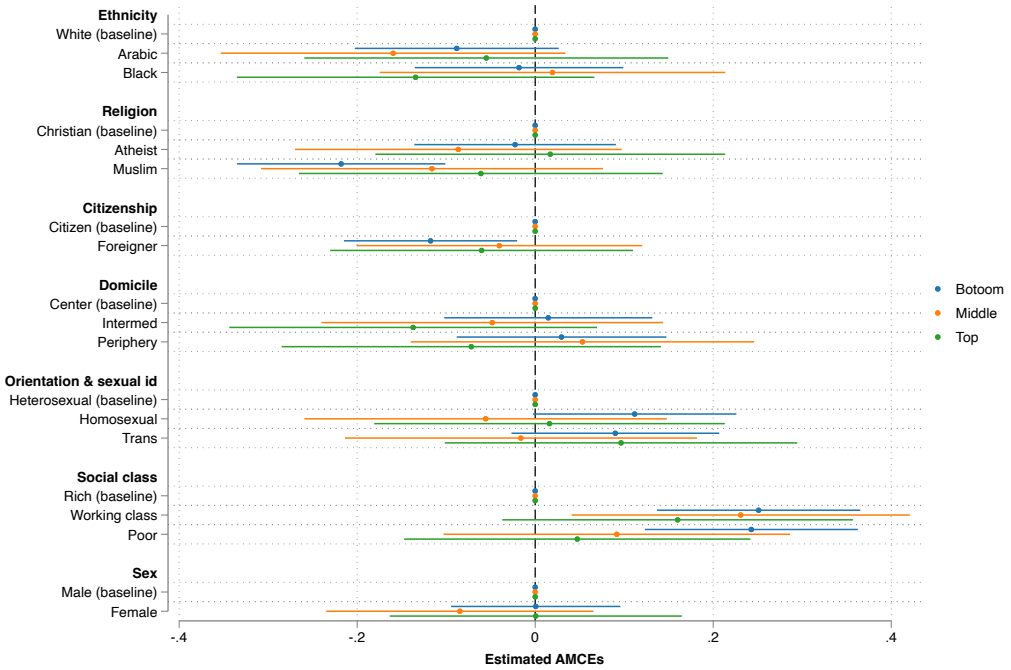


Figure B.16 Perceived deservingness of protection per MM by social status

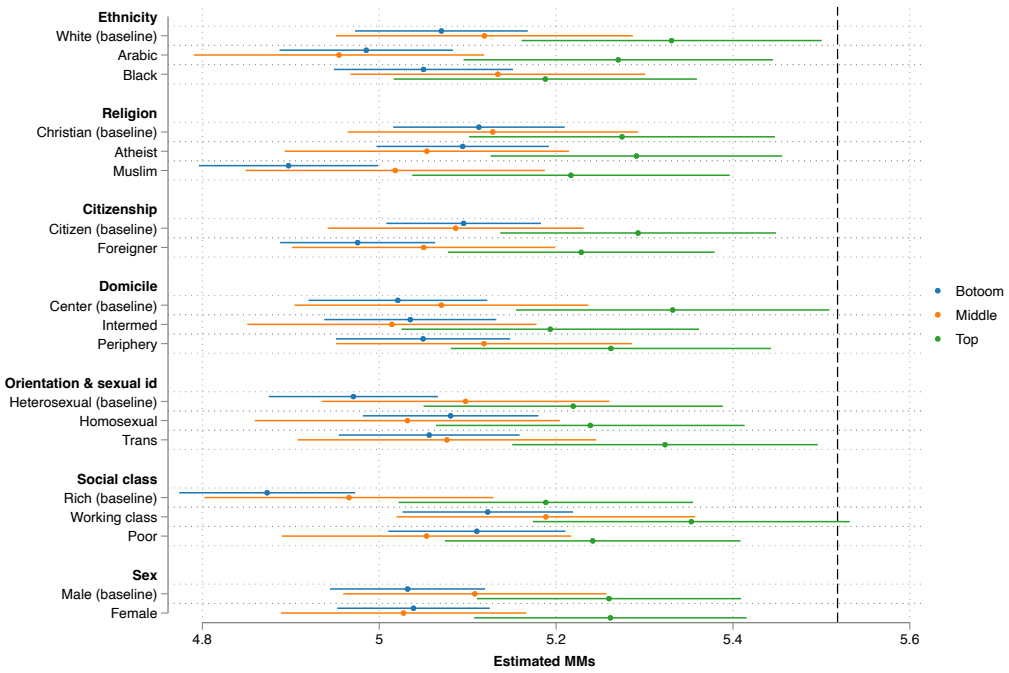


Figure B.17 Perceived minority status per AMCE by age

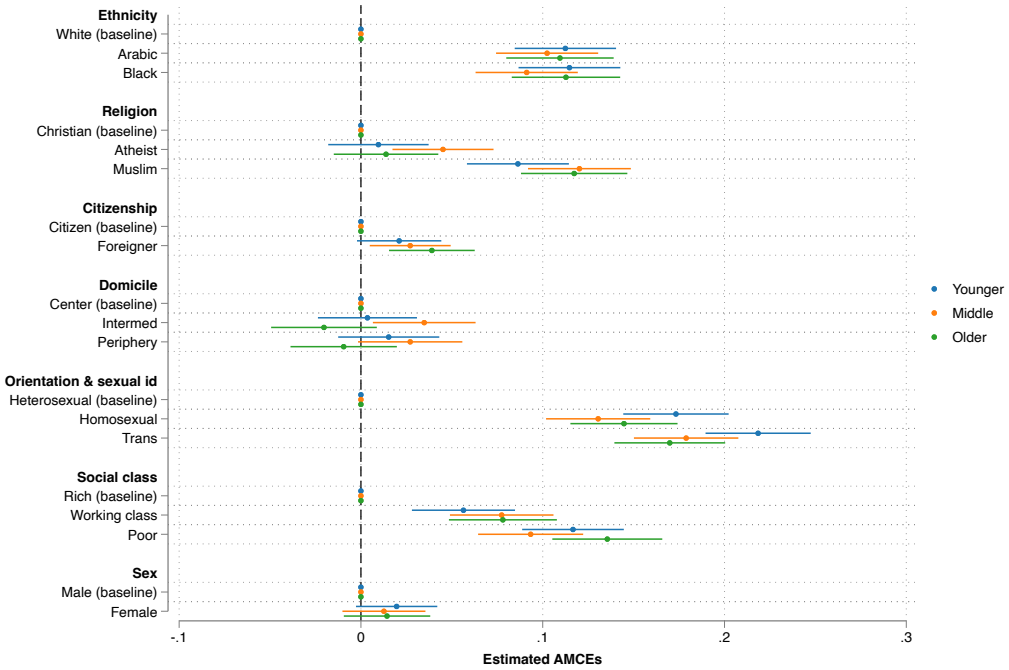


Figure B.18 Perceived minority status per MM by age

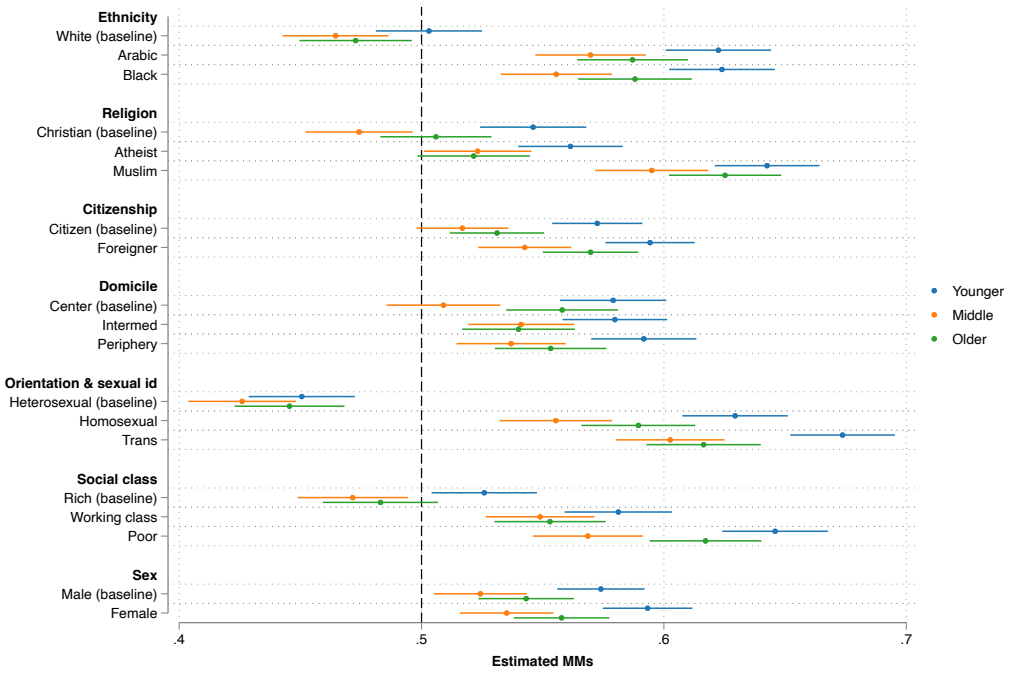


Figure B.19 Perceived deservingness of protection per AMCE by age

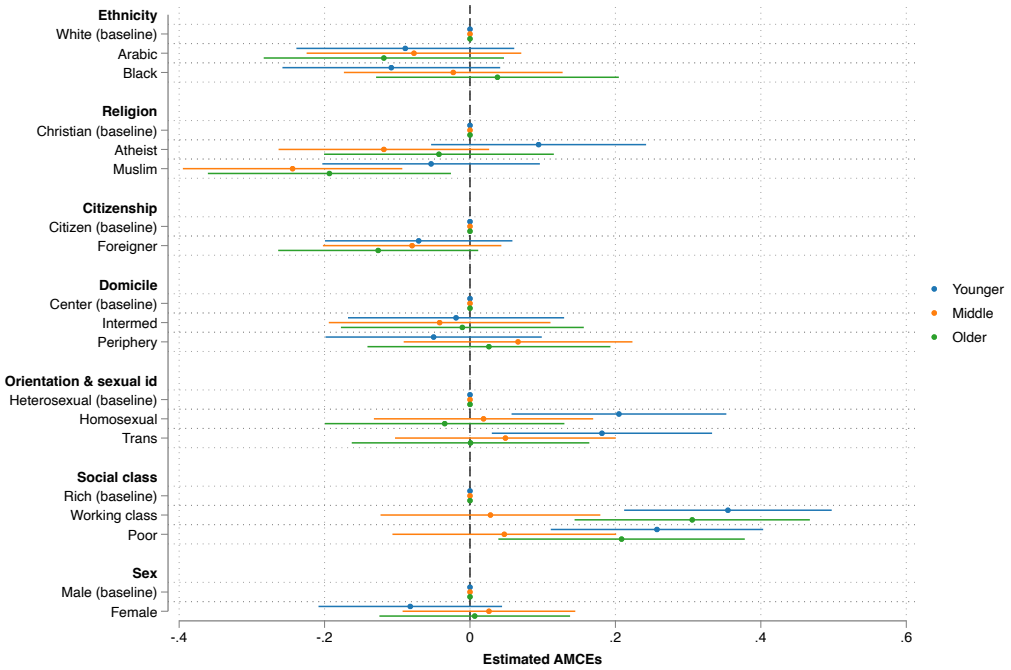


Figure B.20 Perceived deservingness of protection per MM by age

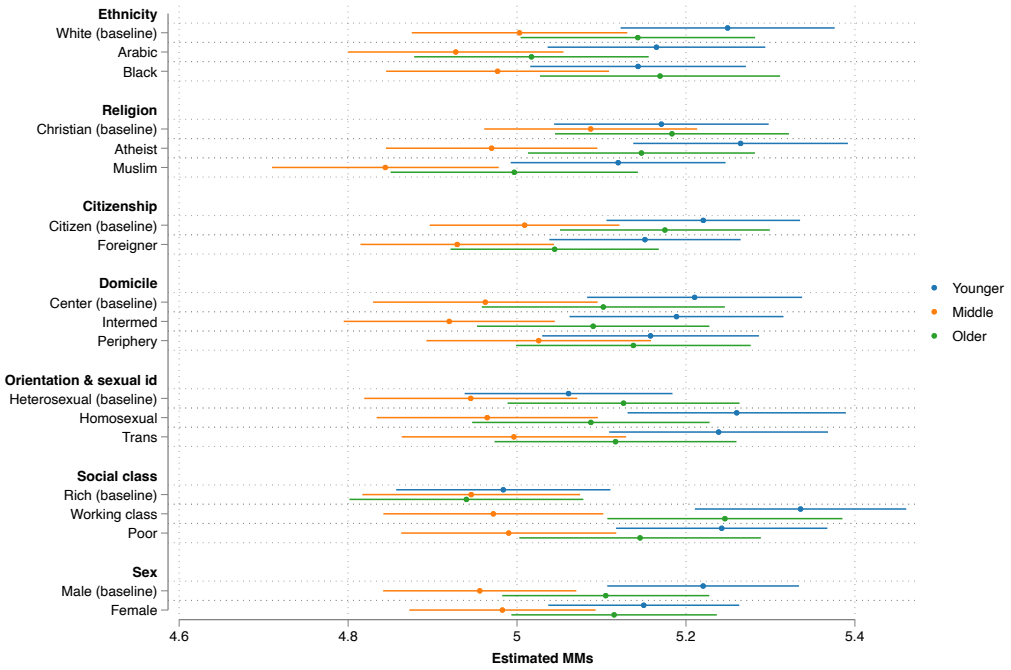


Figure B.21 Perceived minority status per AMCE by gender

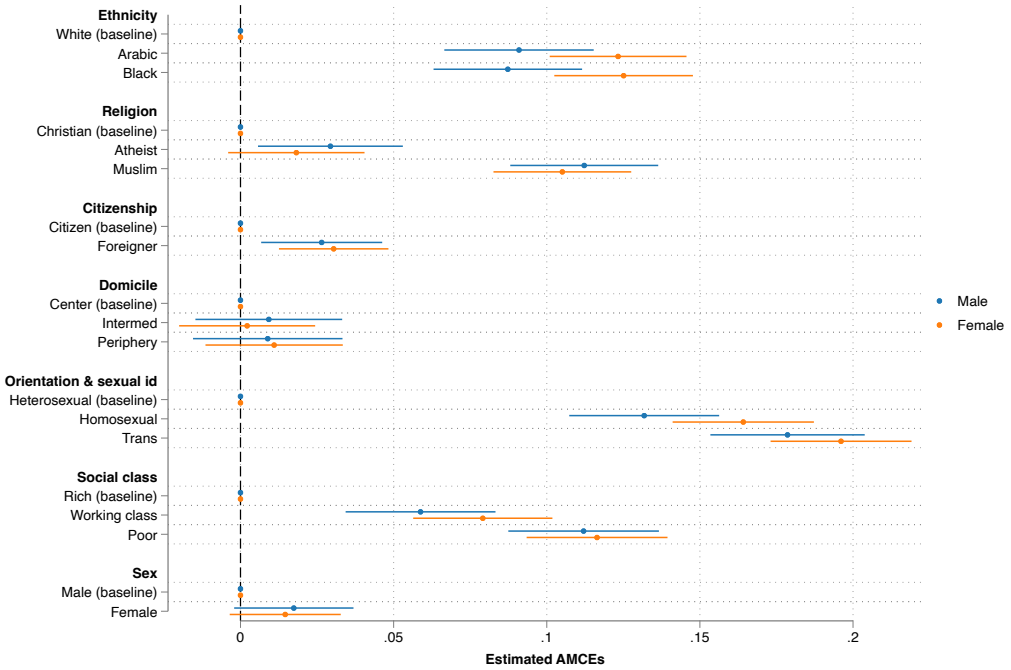


Figure B.22 Perceived minority status per MM by gender

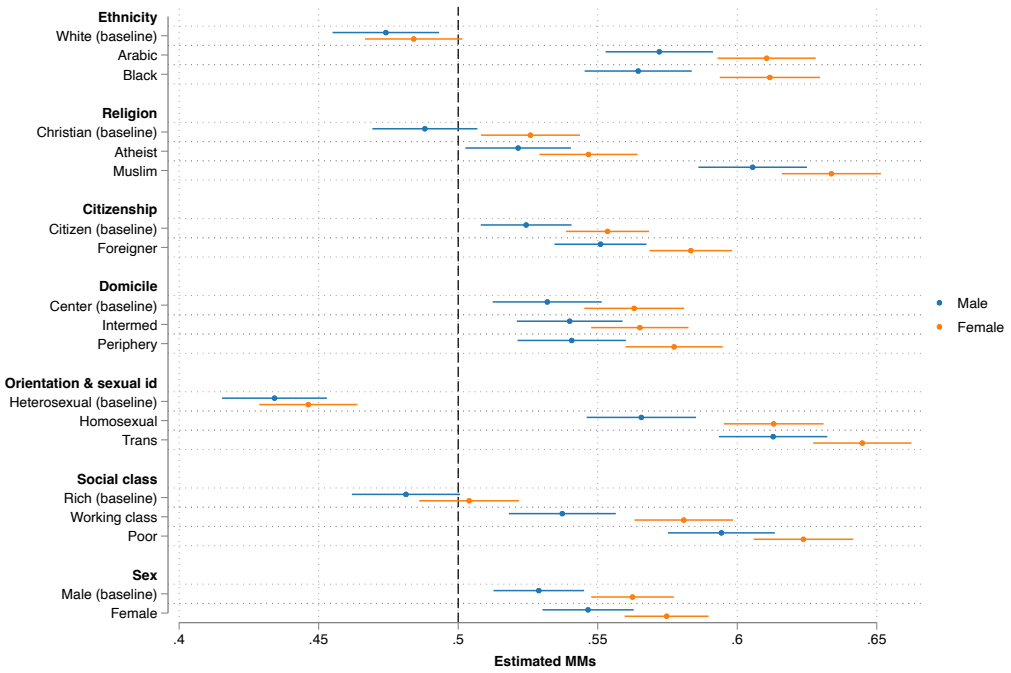


Figure B.23 Perceived deservingness of protection per AMCE by gender

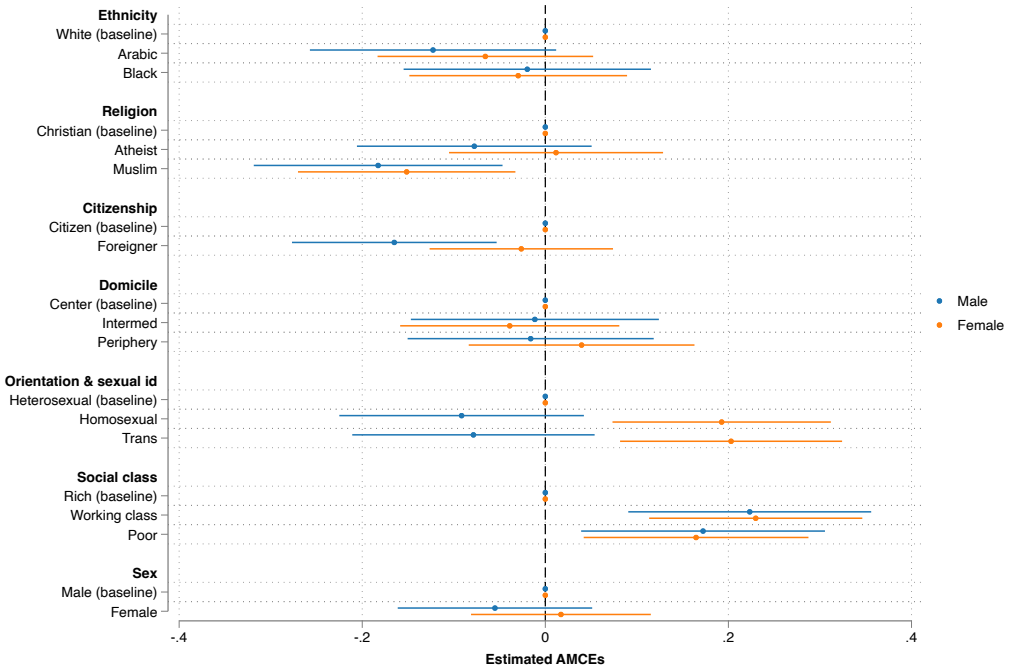


Figure B.24 Perceived deservingness of protection per MM by gender

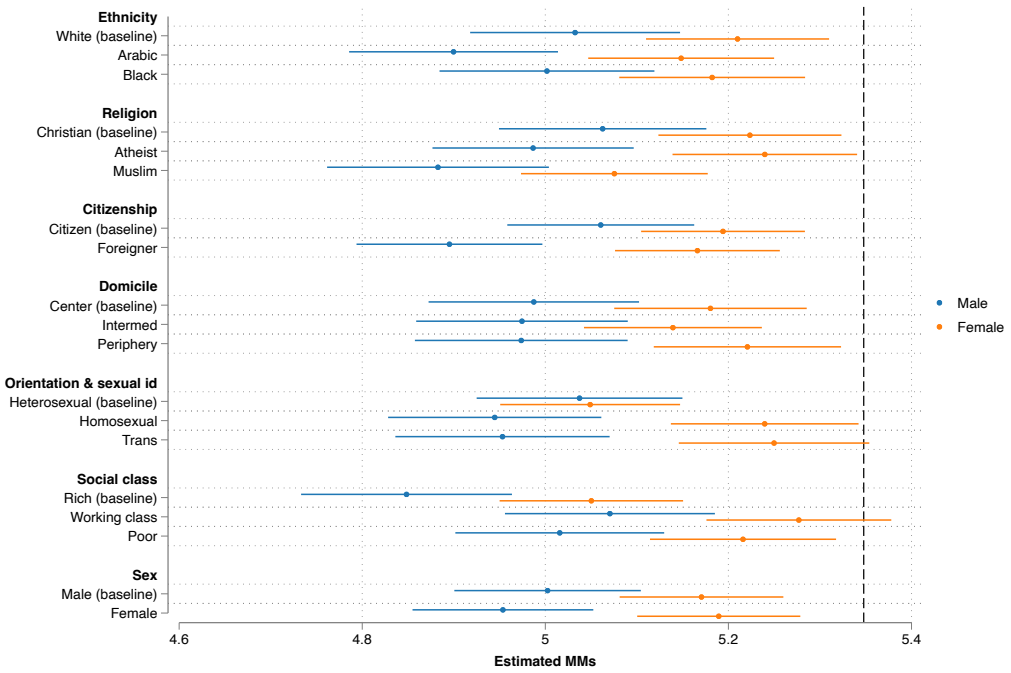


Figure B.25 Perceived minority status per AMCE by education

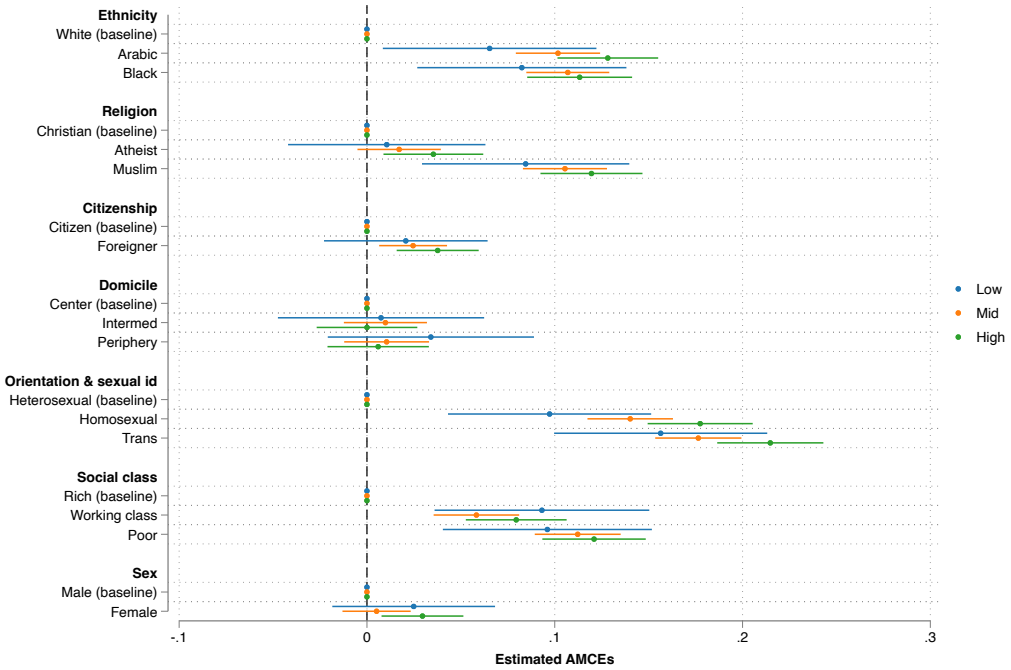


Figure B.26 Perceived minority status per MM by education

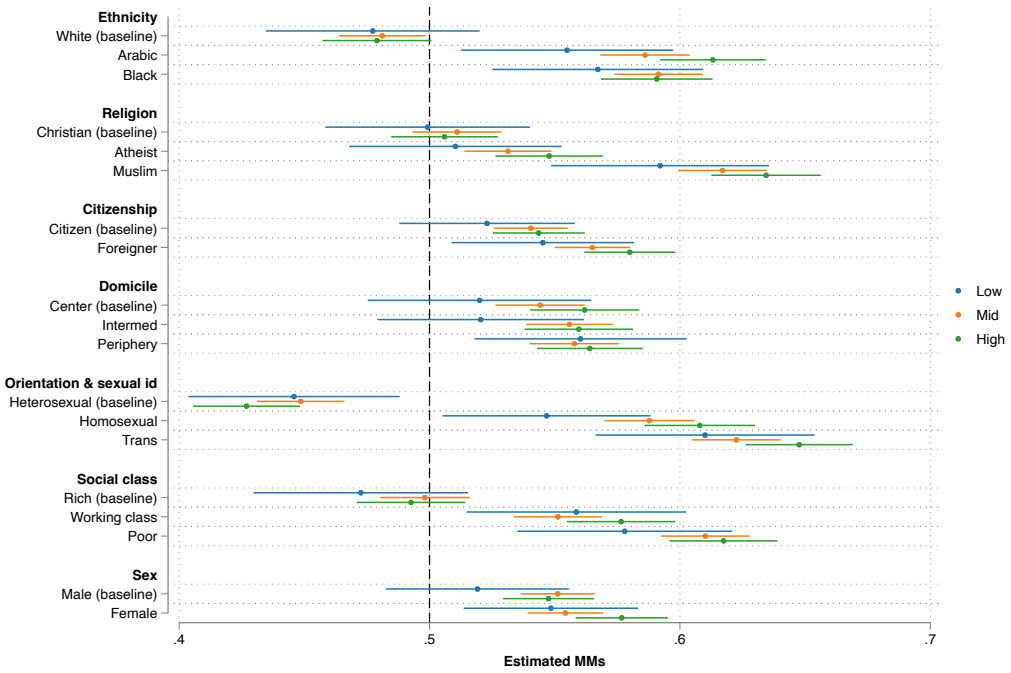


Figure B.27 Perceived deservingness of protection per AMCE by education

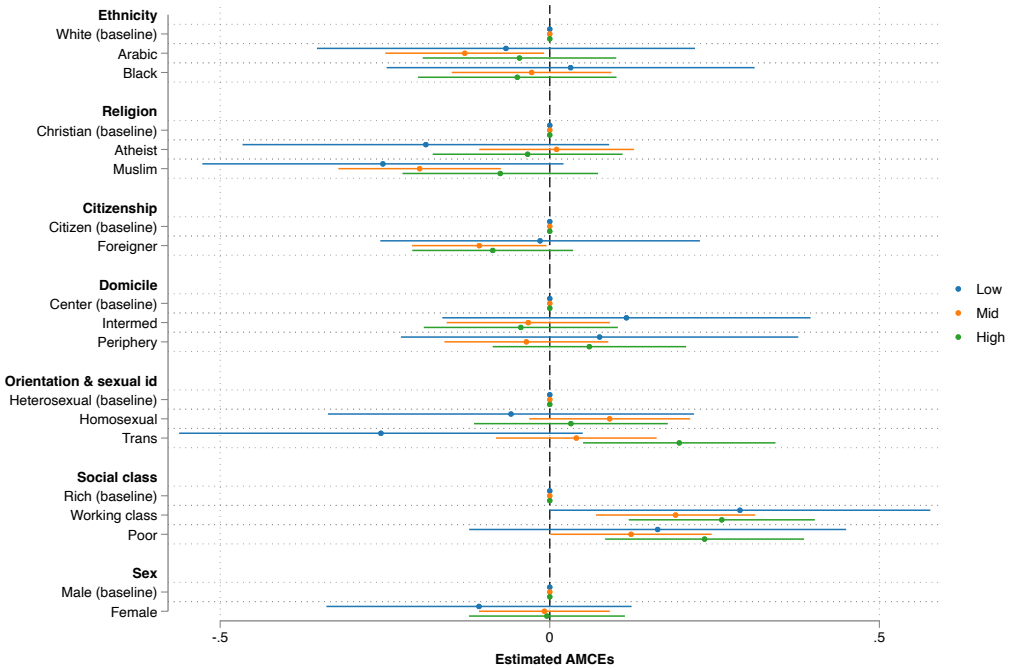


Figure B.28 Perceived deservingness of protection per MM by education

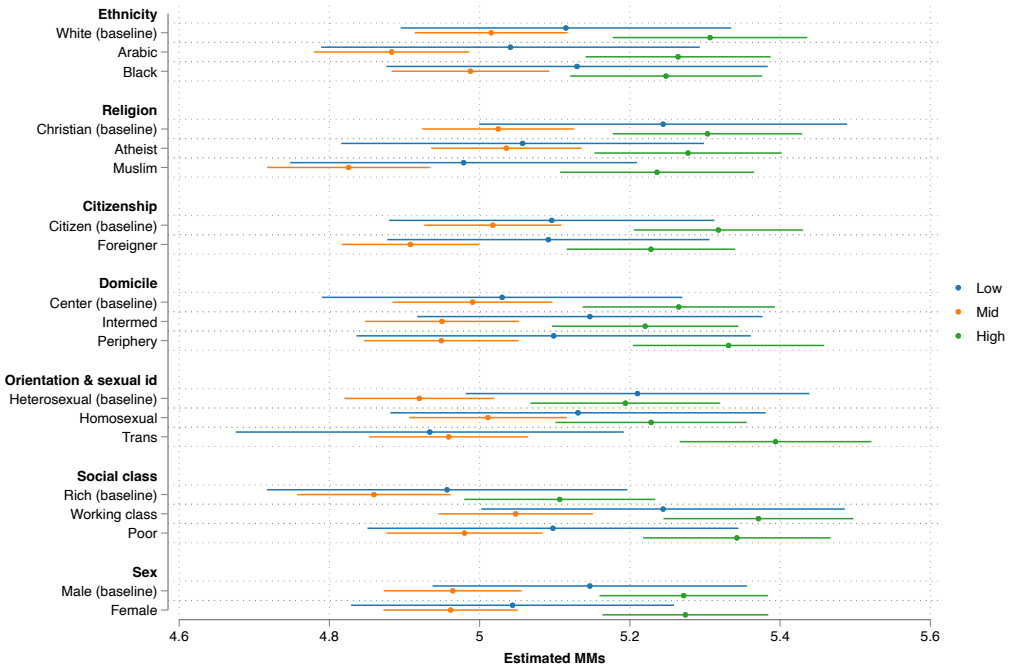


Figure B.29 Perceived minority status per AMCE by ideology

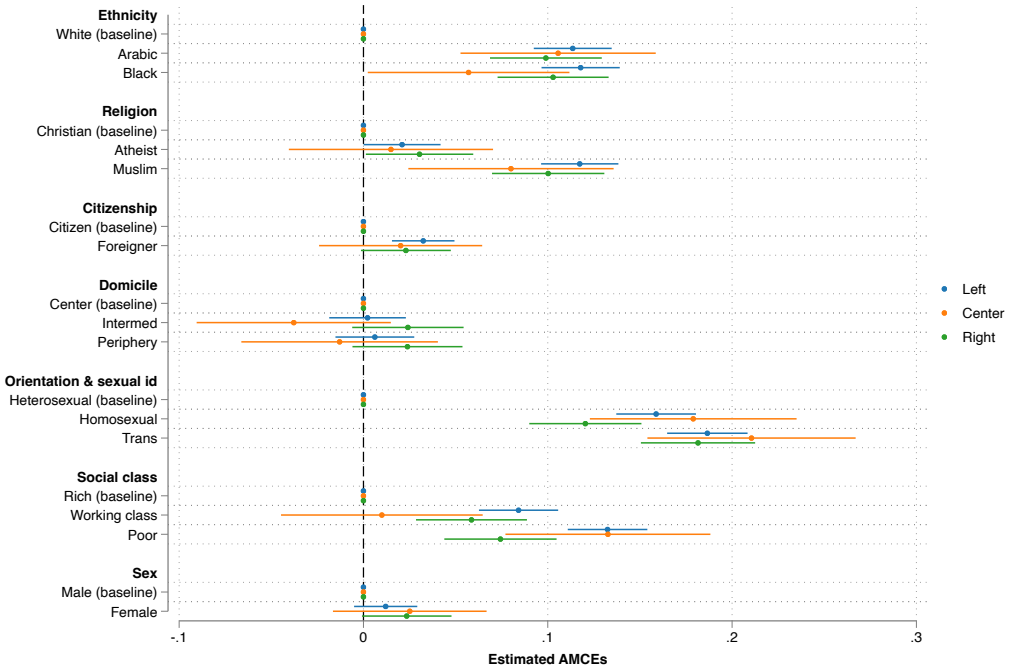


Figure B.30 Perceived minority status per MM by ideology

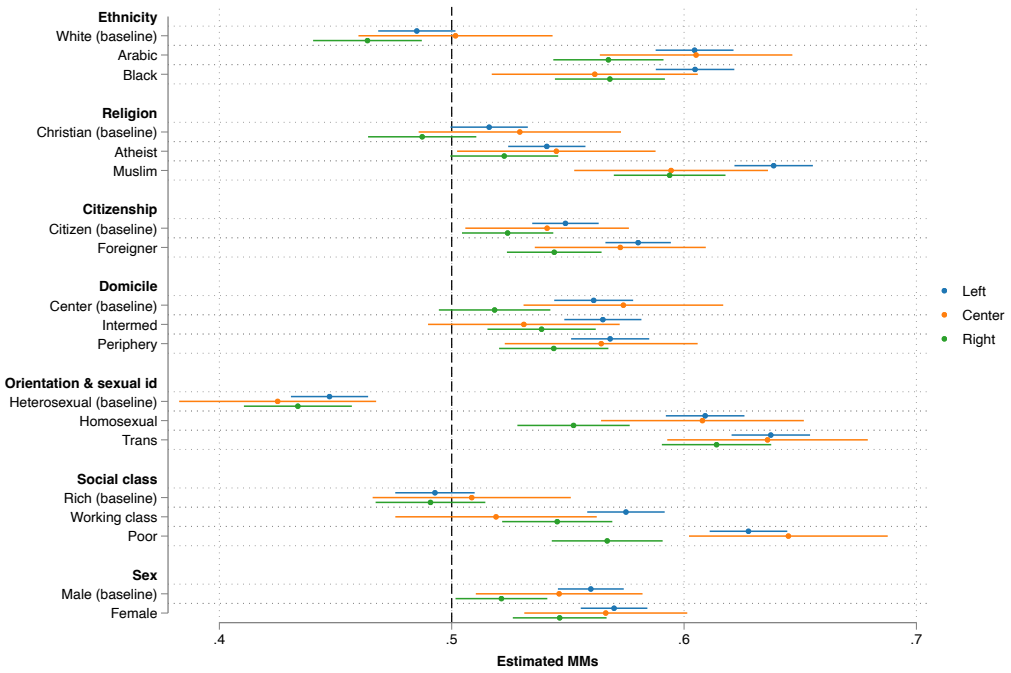


Figure B.31 Perceived deservingness of protection per AMCE by ideology

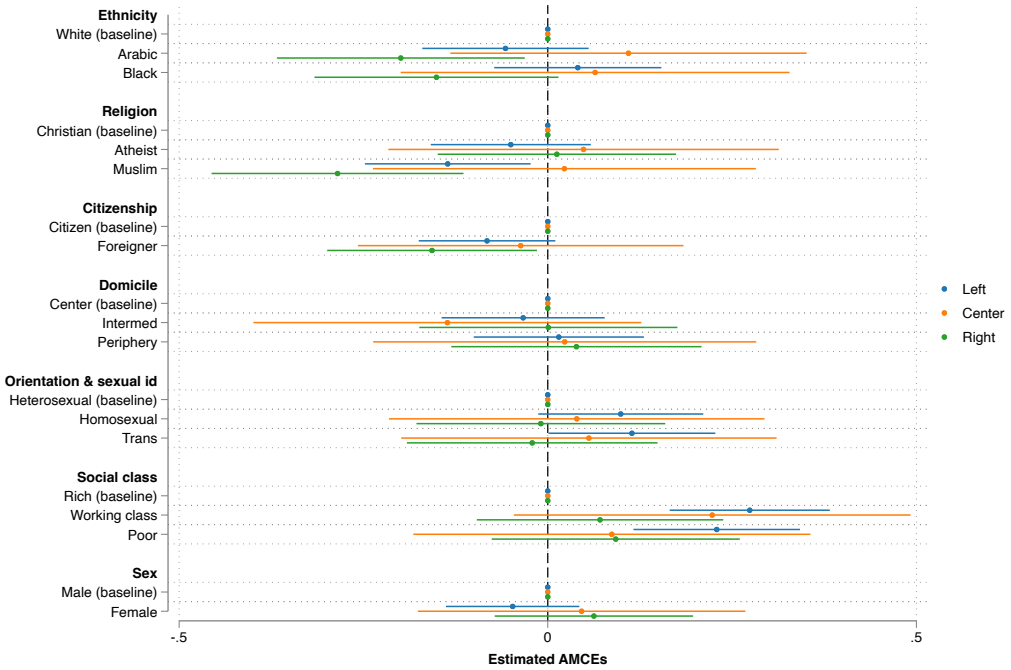
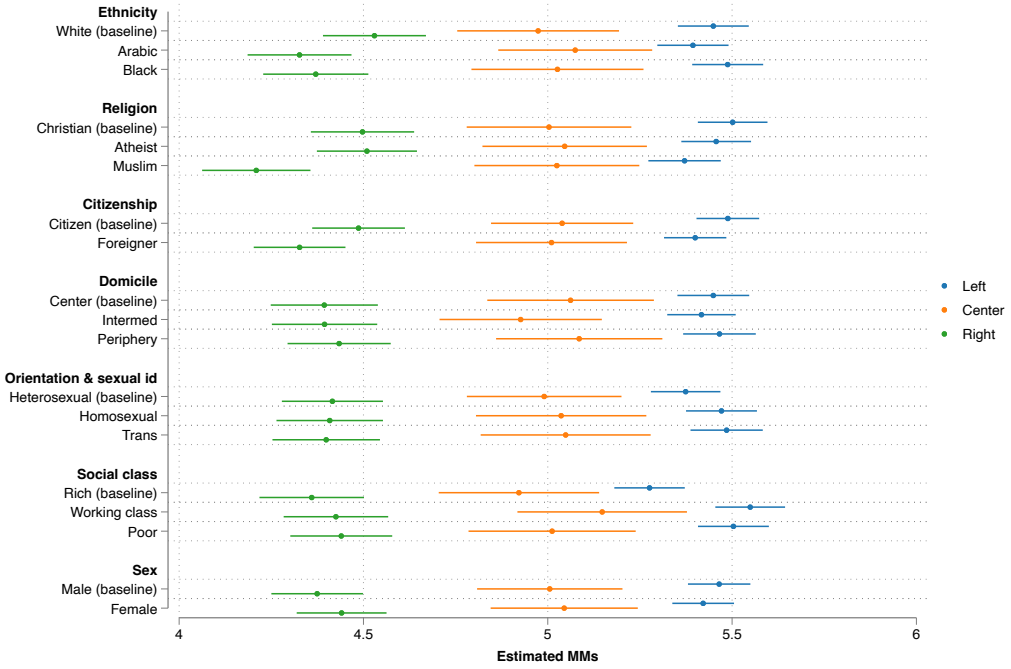


Figure B.32 Perceived deservingness of protection per MM by ideology



4

Study III
Democratic Volatility & Conditionality: Citizens' Inconsistent Commitment to Democratic Rights[1]

4.1 Introduction

The last decade has been marked by intense debate regarding the extent to which citizens living in established democracies still consider democracy to be the best political system. Some scholars argue that support for democracy has declined, particularly among younger generations (Denemark et al., 2016; Foa & Mounk, 2016, 2017). According to this view, citizens in established democracies no longer endorse democracy as unequivocally as previous generations did. However, these findings remain contested (Voeten, 2016). Recent studies in Europe suggest that support for democracy remains widespread (Wuttke et al., 2022). Yet this apparent consensus masks an important puzzle: citizens who express strong support for democracy often simultaneously endorse attitudes and policies that conflict with core democratic principles (Ferrín & Kriesi, 2025; Kirsch & Welzel, 2019).

This paper argues that understanding this apparent contradiction requires moving beyond abstract support for democracy and examining citizens' commitment to specific democratic rights. In particular, commitment to democratic rights such as minority-rights protection and protection from hate speech should be assessed in the context of competing democratic principles, namely majority rule and freedom of expression. Furthermore, commitment to democratic rights should be examined both in the abstract and when those rights are applied to specific social groups, such as women or Muslims. Citizens may endorse democratic rights in principle while becoming less supportive when

[1] This study was co-authored with Enrique Hernández, Sergi Ferrer, and Enrique Prada.

those same rights are extended to particular groups or come into conflict with other democratic values. Only by considering both levels of abstraction can we accurately assess citizens' commitment to democratic rights.

In doing so, we contribute to a strand of the political culture literature that has increasingly focused on citizens' preferences for democracy (see König et al., 2022, for an excellent review).[2] This literature has extensively investigated the extent to which citizens believe that particular rights and principles are essential components of democracy, or the importance they attribute to them. A key finding is that citizens tend to hold broad conceptions of democracy and assign high importance to most democratic rights and principles, ranging from free and fair elections to political equality and the protection of minority rights (Ferrín & Kriesi, 2016; Norris, 2011). In other words, citizens appear highly supportive not only of democracy in the abstract, but also of the rights and principles that constitute it.

While this literature has contributed greatly to our understanding of democratic attitudes, it suffers from two important limitations. First, most studies measure support for democratic rights in an *unconstrained* manner (c.f. Claassen et al., 2024). That is, they assess support for a given right or principle in isolation, without considering competing principles with which it may come into conflict. This approach likely overestimates support, as citizens' commitment to democratic rights may weaken when those rights are pitted against other desirable considerations (Graham & Svolik, 2020). Second, most studies examine democratic rights at a high level of abstraction (e.g., Ferrín & Kriesi, 2016). Yet research has long shown that support for democratic principles tends to be strongest when those principles are framed in abstract or normative terms (Gibson & Bingham, 1982). Such measures may therefore obscure important fluctuations in citizens' commitment to democratic rights arising from instrumental or group-based considerations (Stefanelli et al., 2025). Although democratic rights are abstract principles, their implementation in practice almost always concerns specific groups and concrete situations.

To address these shortcomings, we employ original survey items that use a tradeoff framing to pit the protection of minority rights and protection from hate speech against potentially competing democratic principles.[3] Furthermore, we randomly associate these rights with particular social groups

[2] Earlier political culture studies also examined citizens' understandings of democracy and their preferences regarding specific democratic rights and principles (see, e.g., Kornberg & Clarke, 1994; Norris, 2011).

(e.g., transgender individuals). This allows us to examine two forms of inconsistency in citizens' commitment to democratic rights. First, we examine within-individual *volatility*, defined as the absolute change between support for democratic rights in the abstract and support for the same rights when applied to specific social groups. Second, we examine *conditionality*, defined as variation in support for democratic rights across social groups arising from affective and value-based evaluations of those groups.

Our analyses draw on original survey data collected in 15 countries (Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom). We find that political knowledge decreases volatility, making support for democratic rights more consistent across levels of abstraction, as expected. By contrast, political interest and support for democracy increase volatility, contrary to our theoretical expectations. While we find some evidence that stronger commitments to fundamental human rights reduce volatility, this relationship is not robust across model specifications. With respect to conditionality, the findings are largely consistent with our theoretical arguments. Both value-based and affective evaluations influence support for democratic rights, although the latter exert a substantially stronger effect. Moreover, the interaction between these two considerations differs from our expectations. Rather than value-based considerations taking precedence, we find that perceptions of vulnerability and deservingness matter little when the target group is strongly disliked.

4.2 Theory

Citizens' high levels of abstract support for democracy and its constitutive rights and principles coexist with growing evidence that they may nevertheless support candidates and policies that violate core democratic norms (Frederiksen, 2022; Gessler & Wunsch, 2023; Graham & Svolik, 2020). Recent episodes of democratic backsliding in countries such as Poland and Hungary have occurred despite high—and in some cases increasing—public support for democratic rights (Hernández, 2025). These observations suggest that support for democratic rights may be less robust than abstract measures imply. Citizens may endorse democratic principles in principle while applying them instrumentally

[3] The design and hypotheses of this study were pre-registered with OSF. See https://shorturl.at/putQ6 for further details.

when they conflict with other desirable goals, such as advancing the interests of their in-group (Graham & Svolik, 2020; Landwehr & Harms, 2020).

To reconcile these seemingly contradictory findings, we argue that citizens' commitment to democratic rights must be examined under the conditions in which such rights are most likely to be tested. First, democratic rights do not exist in isolation. Democracies are characterized by tradeoffs, and "all good things may not go together" (Diamond & Morlino, 2005). Democratic rights can conflict with other desirable outcomes and even with other democratic principles. Consequently, citizens' commitment to a right can only be fully assessed when they are required to weigh it against competing considerations, as they often must in real-world politics. Second, the realization of democratic rights is rarely abstract. Rights are typically applied to particular social groups, making evaluations of those groups an important source of variation in support. As a result, citizens who agree on the importance of democratic rights in the abstract may nevertheless differ substantially in their willingness to extend those same rights to specific groups. Understanding citizens' commitment to democratic rights therefore requires examining both how they respond to democratic tradeoffs and how they evaluate the groups to whom those rights apply.

In fact, a closely related strand of research on political tolerance has consistently shown that citizens are only weakly principled when it comes to extending rights and liberties to disliked out-groups (Armstrong & Wronski, 2019; Brandt et al., 2015; Crawford, 2014; Gibson, 2006b; Ivarsflaten & Sniderman, 2022; Peffley et al., 2024). We build on and extend this literature in several ways. First, we explicitly distinguish, theorize, and analyze the *volatility* of democratic attitudes when moving from abstract commitments to support for specific manifestations of democratic rights. Volatility can be understood as a form of *vertical inconsistency*, whereby support changes as one moves down the ladder of abstraction from general principles to concrete applications. Second, we examine variation in support for democratic rights across the social groups to which those rights are applied. This form of *conditionality* can be understood as a *horizontal inconsistency*, whereby support varies across groups at the same level of abstraction. In doing so, we move beyond purely affective explanations based on how much citizens like or dislike a group by incorporating value-based considerations related to whether a group is perceived as a political minority and therefore deserving of protection. This distinction is important because these two considerations imply different mechanisms. Citizens

may oppose extending rights to a group because they dislike it, or because they do not regard it as vulnerable, disadvantaged, or legitimately entitled to special protections.

4.2.1 Volatility

We begin by focusing on volatility, that is, the absolute change in support for democratic rights when they are considered in the abstract versus when they are applied to specific social groups. We depart from the observation that citizens are often weakly principled in the sense that there is a substantial gap between their endorsement of democratic values in the abstract and their willingness to uphold those same values in practice (Bartels & Johnston, 2020; Stefanelli et al., 2025). As the seminal study by Prothro and Grigg, 1960 demonstrates, most citizens endorse democratic principles such as protecting minority rights when asked in abstract terms. Yet this consensus largely disappears when the same principles are applied to specific minorities in concrete situations (Prothro & Grigg, 1960). Such findings suggest that citizens interpret and apply democratic principles selectively, adapting them to fit particular contexts and preferences. This slippage between principle and practice, along with similar forms of what has been termed "discrepant outlooks," has been extensively discussed in the political tolerance and consensus literatures.[4] However, only a limited number of studies directly compare support for the same democratic right in the abstract and when applied to specific groups or situations (Lindner & Nosek, 2009; Prothro & Grigg, 1960; Stefanelli et al., 2025). This makes it difficult to systematically examine what we define here as *volatility* (Stouffer, 1992).

We argue that volatility is rooted in the structure of citizens' belief systems (Bartels & Johnston, 2020). A belief system consists of interconnected cognitions—ideas, values, and beliefs about the political and social world—that are linked through varying degrees of constraint or functional interdependence (Converse, 1964). Belief systems matter because they provide individuals with heuristics and interpretive frameworks that shape how they process information and form judgments. Research has shown that belief systems influence a wide range of political behaviors, including how police officers enforce laws (Farris & Holman, 2017), how judges render decisions (Zorn & Bowie, 2010), and how citizens vote (Fleury & Lewis-Beck, 1993). They can therefore be understood as mental

[4] See, for instance, Gibson, 2006a; Marcus, 2002; McClosky, 1964; McClosky and Brill, 1983; McClosky and Zaller, 1984; Simonovits et al., 2022; Sniderman et al., 1989.

roadmaps that help individuals make sense of complex political realities. Because democratic principles are embedded within broader belief systems rather than held in isolation, support for a right in the abstract may not translate directly into support for its application in specific contexts. When democratic rights are applied to particular groups or situations, additional considerations become salient, potentially altering the balance of cognitions within an individual's belief system and producing volatility in expressed support.

Accordingly, citizens may sincerely endorse abstract democratic rights while failing to draw upon those commitments when evaluating specific actors, groups, or situations. A key mechanism that may explain this pattern concerns the degree of constraint, or structural coherence, within an individual's belief system. Attitudinal constraint is defined as "the success we would have in predicting, given initial knowledge that an individual holds a specified attitude, that he holds certain further ideas and attitudes" (Converse, 1964, p. 207). Constraint is therefore a relational property of attitudes, reflecting the extent to which beliefs within a given political domain are interconnected and form a coherent whole (Hernández, 2019).

Connecting abstract democratic rights to their concrete manifestations is cognitively demanding because it requires individuals to move along a ladder of abstraction. This task should be easier for those whose belief systems are more constrained, tightly linked, or coherently structured. Across a wide range of policy domains, research has consistently shown that politically sophisticated individuals possess more constrained belief systems, characterized by stronger connections between cognitions located at different levels of abstraction (Ares et al., 2020; Freeze & Montgomery, 2016; Hernández, 2019; Rohrschneider, 2004). This is because politically sophisticated citizens are exposed to more political information and are better able to comprehend and integrate it, while opportunities and capacities for political learning are crucial for the development of structured attitudes (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). As a result, politically sophisticated individuals should find it easier to connect abstract democratic rights with their specific manifestations, making their support for these rights more consistent across levels of abstraction. These considerations inform our first hypothesis regarding the volatility of support for democratic rights.

Hypothesis 1.1: Individuals who are less politically sophisticated will be more volatile in their support for democratic rights and principles.

Beyond political sophistication, the salience and centrality of a given issue within a belief system are also likely to promote greater consistency between attitudes located at different levels of abstraction. When an issue such as democracy occupies a central position in an individual's belief system, general attitudes toward democracy are more likely to anchor specific attitudes related to that issue. Conversely, when democratic principles are less central, attitudes toward their specific manifestations may be shaped by other considerations that are more salient.

Accordingly, the second mechanism we propose concerns the relative centrality of democratic rights within an individual's belief system. While citizens may endorse democratic rights in the abstract, these rights may not be sufficiently salient to guide evaluations of their specific manifestations. Instead, other considerations—such as social identities, partisan attachments, or group loyalties—may exert greater influence (Achen & Bartels, 2017; Huckfeldt et al., 1999; Nicholson & Hansford, 2014). When forming opinions, individuals tend to rely on considerations that are most immediately accessible (Zaller, 1992). General values and beliefs that occupy a central position within a belief system are easier to retrieve and are therefore more likely to come "top-of-mind" when evaluating specific political issues (Goren, 2013; Zaller, 1992).

We therefore expect democratic rights to play a greater role in opinion formation among individuals who attach greater importance to democracy and fundamental human rights. Democracy and rights are closely intertwined (Dahl, 1971). Consequently, abstract commitments to principles such as minority-rights protection and protection from hate speech should occupy a more central position within the belief systems of those who place greater value on democracy and human rights. Because these abstract commitments are more accessible, such individuals should be better able to connect specific manifestations of democratic rights to the underlying principles they reflect, resulting in lower levels of volatility. These arguments lead to our final two hypotheses regarding democratic volatility.

Hypothesis 1.2: Individuals who are less supportive of democracy will be more volatile in their support for democratic rights and principles.

Hypothesis 1.3: Individuals who attribute a lower importance to the protection of fundamental rights will be more volatile in their support for democratic rights and principles.

4.2.2 Value- and affect-laden conditionality

We now turn to conditionality: variation in citizens' support for specific manifestations of democratic rights depending on the social group to which those rights are applied. For example, an individual might support restricting media content to protect Jews from antisemitic hate speech, while opposing similar restrictions aimed at protecting Muslims from Islamophobic hate speech. In both cases, the democratic right under consideration is the same and operates at the same level of abstraction. The key difference lies in the group involved. Likewise, in both cases, the publication of such content could be defended on the grounds of freedom of expression. What is of interest here is whether citizens are equally willing to accept such justifications across groups, or whether support for democratic rights varies depending on who stands to benefit from them.

To explain such variation, we propose a two-pronged account based on value-laden and affect-laden considerations. Value-laden considerations concern the degree to which a group is perceived as deserving of democratic protections, while affect-laden considerations concern the extent to which a group is liked or disliked. Returning to the previous example, are citizens more supportive of protecting Jews than Muslims because Jews are perceived as more vulnerable or deserving of protection? Or does this difference primarily reflect more favorable affective evaluations of one group relative to the other? Distinguishing between these two mechanisms is crucial, as they imply different sources of conditionality in citizens' commitment to democratic rights.

We argue that citizens' evaluations of democratic rights are influenced by beliefs about fairness and justice. Prior research has shown, for example, that people often accept court rulings that run counter to their policy preferences or partisan interests when they perceive the decision-making process as fair and legitimate (Tyler, 2006; Tyler & Rasinski, 1991). Consequently, much of the legitimacy of courts and the broader principle of the rule of law rests on perceptions of procedural fairness. These findings are consistent with moral foundations theory, which identifies fairness as a central moral concern shaping political judgments (Haidt & Graham, 2007).[5] More generally, people are

often concerned not simply with obtaining favorable outcomes, but with whether those outcomes are perceived as fair and deserved (Adams, 1965; Walster et al., 1973).

Perceptions of deservingness have also been shown to influence political tolerance. For instance, when individuals are experimentally portrayed as morally reprehensible, participants become more willing to tolerate violations of their human rights (Drolet et al., 2016). We build on the opposite side of this logic and argue that some social groups may be perceived as especially deserving of democratic protections because they are viewed as vulnerable, disadvantaged, or at greater risk of injustice. Citizens may therefore support extending democratic rights to particular groups not because doing so serves their own interests, but because they view such protections as fair and warranted given the circumstances faced by those groups.

Such a rationale likely applies to minority groups. Minorities are often perceived as being more vulnerable to discrimination, marginalization, and injustice. Consequently, they should also be viewed as more deserving of democratic protections in order to ensure equal treatment and opportunities within society, consistent with the moral foundation of fairness (Dahl, 1989). However, for this line of reasoning to apply, a social group must first be perceived as a political minority. Otherwise, granting certain groups special rights or protections may itself be viewed as unfair. Indeed, perceptions of unfairness have been identified as a key factor underlying public backlash against affirmative action policies (Edsall & Edsall, 1992; Sniderman & Piazza, 2009). Taken together, these arguments lead to our first hypothesis regarding democratic conditionality.

Hypothesis 2: Individuals' support for democratic rights will be higher when they recognize the groups covered by these rights as minorities.

Beyond value-laden considerations, we also expect affect to influence support for specific manifestations of democratic rights. Prior research has shown that social and political identities, such as partisanship, shape democratic judgments (Achen & Bartels, 2017; Kingzette et al., 2021). For instance, citizens are less likely to hold elected officials accountable for undemocratic behavior when those officials are co-partisans (Graham & Svolik, 2020). Similarly, individuals are more willing to tolerate

[5] See also Haidt's (2012) article in TIME Magazine.

democratic transgressions when committed by political actors with whom they identify (Seligman et al., 1996).

Importantly, the biases associated with in-group attachment are often accompanied by biases toward out-groups (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015). Citizens have repeatedly been shown to withhold democratic rights and liberties from political groups they dislike, particularly in the domain of political tolerance (e.g., Duch & Gibson, 1992; Peffley & Rohrschneider, 2003; Peffley et al., 2024). Negative affect toward racial, ethnic, and social groups has likewise been found to shape support for democratic norms and principles (Kane & Whipkey, 2009; Kluegel & Smith, 1983; Şaşmaz et al., 2022). Citizens are also more likely to deny rights to groups they fear or perceive as threatening (Davis, 2009; Sullivan et al., 1981). These dynamics may be particularly pronounced in contemporary democracies, where increasingly salient cultural and political conflicts generate stronger affective divisions between social groups (Hetherington & Weiler, 2010).

Taken together, the existing literature suggests that affective evaluations play an important role in shaping support for the application of democratic rights to specific groups. Citizens may therefore adjust their willingness to extend democratic protections depending on how positively or negatively they feel toward the groups concerned. Consequently, we formulate our second hypothesis regarding democratic conditionality as follows:

Hypothesis 3: Individuals' support for democratic rights will be higher the more positively individuals feel toward the groups covered by these democratic rights.

One aspect that distinguishes our study from previous work, particularly research on political tolerance, is its joint consideration of value- and affect-laden factors. Both types of considerations are likely to influence citizens' support for specific manifestations of democratic rights, and they may at times point toward different conclusions. When this occurs, one set of considerations is likely to exert a stronger influence on opinion formation than the other.

We argue that value-laden considerations may often take precedence over affect-laden considerations when citizens evaluate whether specific groups should receive democratic protections. Research has shown that values differ in their relative importance and that competing value priorities can offset

one another's influence on political judgments (Schwartz, 1992, 1994). In the present context, perceptions that a group is vulnerable, disadvantaged, or deserving of protection may activate broader values related to fairness and social justice, which frequently underpin arguments for extending rights to minorities (Goodin & Pettit, 2019). Indeed, recent evidence suggests that deontological considerations often outweigh utilitarian reasoning in the formation of policy preferences (Rudolph et al., 2024). We therefore expect that affective evaluations will play a weaker role when a group is perceived as a legitimate minority deserving of protection. In such cases, support for democratic rights may be guided primarily by considerations of fairness and justice, regardless of how positively or negatively the group is viewed. By contrast, when a group is not perceived as deserving of special protections, affective evaluations should play a larger role in shaping support for democratic rights. Hence, our final hypothesis regarding democratic conditionality:

Hypothesis 4: The impact of positive or negative affect on support for democratic rights will be weaker when individuals recognize the groups covered by these democratic rights as political minorities.

4.3 Data & Methods

4.3.1 Data

To test our hypotheses, we draw on original data from an online survey fielded in 15 countries: Belgium, Czechia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. The final dataset contains 23,758 respondents.[6] The survey was fielded through the online panels of the commercial firm Bilendi using nationally representative quotas on gender, education, age, and region in each country.

We measure commitment to democratic rights by focusing on support for protecting minority rights and protecting individuals from hate speech. For each principle, we assess both abstract

[6] We exclude respondents who failed at least one of the two general attention checks included in the survey, "speeders" (i.e., those who completed the survey in less than five minutes), and "straight-liners" (i.e., those who provided the same response in at least 75 percent of the survey batteries).

Table 4.1 Wording of items

General: Minority rights	Specific: Minority rights
When talking about democracy there are different points of view. Distribute 10 points between these two options. Give more points to the option that best reflects your opinion.	*When talking about democracy there are different points of view. Distribute 10 points between these two options. Give more points to the option that best reflects your opinion.*
Government policies should reflect what the majority of citizens want, even if this goes against the rights of **minorities**.	Government policies should reflect what the majority of citizens want, even if this goes against the rights of **Muslims**.
The rights of **minorities** should be protected, even if this prevents government policies from reflecting what the majority of citizens want.	The rights of **Muslims** should be protected, even if this prevents government policies from reflecting what the majority of citizens want.
General: Hate speech	**Specific: Hate speech**
When talking about democracy there are different points of view. Distribute 10 points between these two options. Give more points to the option that best reflects your opinion.	*When talking about democracy there are different points of view. Distribute 10 points between these two options. Give more points to the option that best reflects your opinion.*
Everyone should be free to express what they think, even if this limits **people's** protection from offensive language and **hate speech**.	Everyone should be free to express what they think, even if this limits **Jews'** protection from offensive language and **antisemitic speech**.
People must be protected from offensive language and **hate speech**, even if this limits freedom of expression.	**Jews** must be protected from offensive language and **antisemitic speech**, even if this limits freedom of expression.

and group-specific support using the items presented in Table 4.1. All items employ a tradeoff framing designed to highlight tensions between mutually desirable but potentially competing democratic rights and principles. In the first set of questions, respondents weigh the protection of minority rights against implementing the will of the majority. In the second, they weigh protection from offensive language and hate speech against freedom of expression. Respondents allocate a total of 10 points between two opposing statements, each of which prioritizes one principle at the direct expense of the other. The number of points assigned to minority-rights protection and protection from hate speech serves as the basis for the volatility measure described below.

To differentiate between abstract and specific support for democratic rights, we use two versions of the same question. The abstract version employs generic terms, whereas the specific version refers to particular social groups. Importantly, the wording remains identical across versions, with the only difference being the substitution of the abstract category with a specific group. For example, in the minority-rights item, the abstract version refers to "minorities," whereas the specific version may in-

Table 4.2 Specific groups used for each of the grounded or specified items

Protecting rights	Protecting from hate speech
Transgender people	Women - sexist speech
Muslims	Homosexuals - homophobic speech
The youth	Immigrants - racist speech
Hist. cult. minority	Christians - blasphemic speech
	Muslims - Islamophobic speech
	Jews - antisemitic speech

stead refer to "Muslims," without explicitly describing them as a minority. Because the only change is the group referenced in the question, any differences in support can be attributed to the particular group under consideration rather than to variation in framing or question wording. This design allows us to examine whether support for democratic rights remains stable when citizens move from abstract principles to specific social groups.

For each democratic right, we examine several social groups, as shown in Table 4.2. These groups are randomly assigned to the question wording through piped text with equal probability. For the hate-speech items, the type of speech is also adapted to the group in question (e.g., homophobic speech in the case of homosexuals). While the set of groups included in the study is not exhaustive, it was selected on the basis of previous research and contemporary political debates.[7]

4.3.2 Methods

For the first part of our study, we use a within-subject design that allows us to generate a 'volatility index" for each respondent. The volatility index is computed, following equation (1), as the absolute value of the difference between support for the abstract principle *i* and support for the corresponding specific principle *i*. Half the sample is randomly assigned to the minority rights items, while the other half is assigned to the hate speech items, with equal probability. This allows us to calculate a volatility index for each respondent, which serves as our first dependent variable (without distinguishing between the particular principle the index relates to). Higher values indicate greater inconsistency between support for a democratic right in the abstract and support for its application to a specific social group.

[7] See, for instance, reporting by the BBC, The Atlantic, and the United Nations, as well as Chong et al., 2024; Harell, 2010; Ivarsflaten and Sniderman, 2022; Prothro and Grigg, 1960.

$$Volatility = |\text{Abstract support}_i - \text{Specific support}_i| \quad (4.1)$$

For the second part of our study, we generate two dependent variables that measure support for specific manifestations of each democratic right, as applied to particular social groups. We use these variables independently and implement a between-subjects design.

In terms of the explanatory variables pertaining to volatility, we first generate a linear additive index gauging political knowledge based on respondents' answers to two political knowledge questions: one asking respondents to identify a minister in the country's government at the time of the survey's fieldwork and another related to the number of Members of Parliament in the country's legislative chamber. The questions are adapted to each country. Next, we create a linear index to measure respondents' support for democracy using a two-item battery. The first item gauges support for having a strong leader who is not constrained by parliament and elections, while the second gauges support for having a democratic political system. The resulting index ranges from 1 to 7, with higher values corresponding to greater support for democracy. Lastly, we gauge the importance respondents attribute to the protection of fundamental human rights by asking them to rank four items in a post-materialist battery according to perceived importance. Our variable takes the value of the position at which "protecting the rights of people" was ranked by each respondent, such that higher values indicate greater support.

In the analysis of conditionality, we focus on value- and affect-laden considerations. To measure value-laden considerations, we use a question that asks respondents whether they consider the corresponding group to be a political minority. This variable takes the value 1 if the respondent considers the group a minority and 0 otherwise. To measure affect-laden considerations, we use a question that asks how much the respondent likes or dislikes the group, with 0 indicating that the respondent does not like the group at all and 10 indicating that they like the group a great deal.

Having operationalized all our variables of interest, we estimate OLS regression models to test our hypotheses. Specifically, we use three outcome variables in these estimations: (i) the volatility of individuals' support for democratic rights; (ii) specific support for the protection of minority rights; and (iii) specific support for protection from hate speech. In each model, the outcome variables are regressed on our independent variables. In all estimations, we include country fixed effects and control

for age, sex, and education. All numerical predictors are rescaled so that a one-unit increase represents a change of two standard deviations in the corresponding variable, allowing them to be directly compared with categorical predictors (Gelman, 2008).

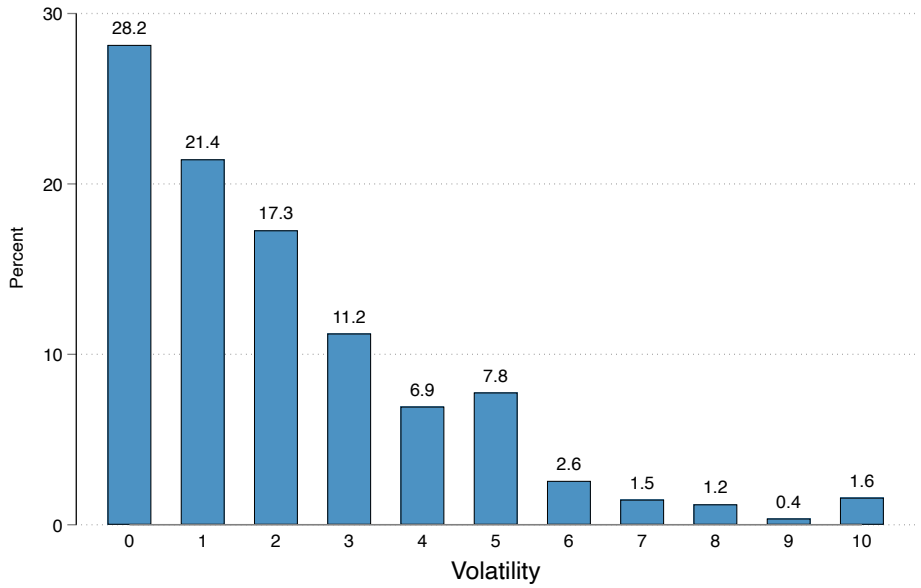
4.4 Results

4.4.1 Volatility

Before analyzing its determinants, it is worth briefly examining the distribution of what we call *volatility*. Figure 4.1 reveals that the distribution of our first dependent variable is positively skewed, with most values clustered toward the left side of the distribution. This suggests that—overall—people tend to be more consistent than volatile when it comes to their support for democratic rights. In fact, just under a third of our sample has a volatility score of 0, which corresponds to expressing the exact same level of support for a democratic right when it is presented in abstract terms as when it is presented in specific terms (i.e., linked to particular social groups). This is not to say that these are "good" or "bad" democrats, per se. For instance, a respondent could conceivably believe that the rights of minorities are irrelevant and, as such, should not be considered when designing and implementing policy—whether we speak of "minorities" in abstract terms or "Arabs" in particular. Such a position is clearly incompatible with standard liberal conceptions of democracy. Thus, while we might consider this individual illiberal, their volatility score would nevertheless be low because they are consistent in their illiberal attitudes.

On the other hand, about two thirds of the sample display at least some degree of volatility. This means that their commitment to abstract democratic rights—be it high or low to begin with—changes when discussing specific manifestations involving particular groups. This is precisely the inconsistency we attempt to explain in the analyses to come. First, however, we must address the fact that, due to the way it is coded, an individual's volatility score is conditioned by their generic support for a given democratic right. For example, someone who assigns 5 points to the protection of minority rights when asked in an abstract way can have a maximum volatility score of 5. Conversely, someone who assigns 0 or 10 points to the same abstract principle can have a volatility score of up to

Figure 4.1 Levels of democratic volatility

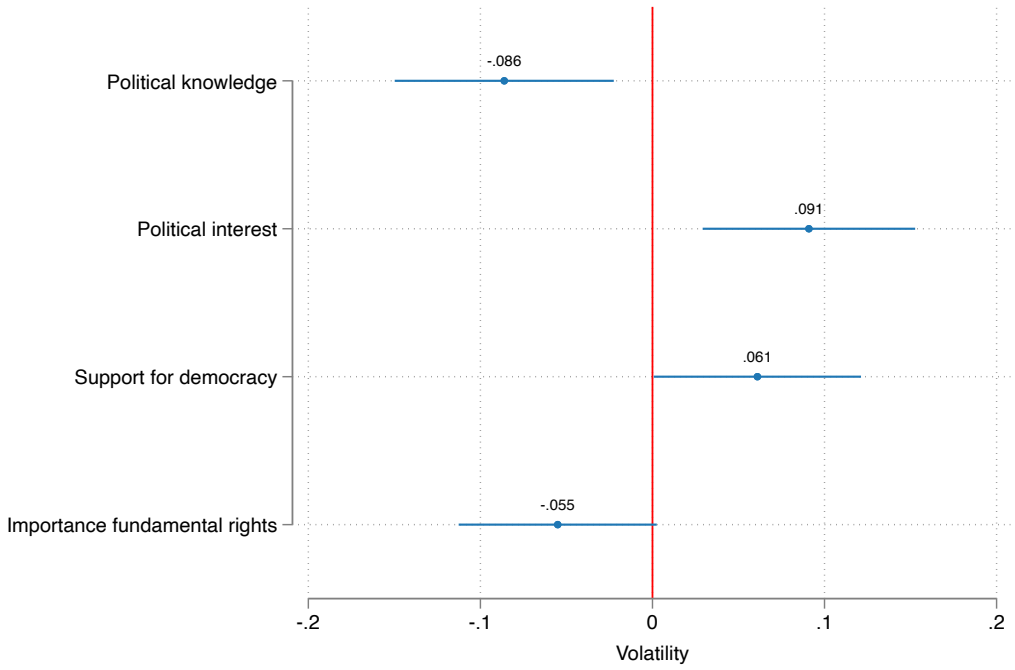


Note: Volatility is calculated for the democratic right respondents were randomly assigned to. M = 2.1, SD = 2.2, N = 23,794

10. This could result in a type of ceiling effect for those with moderate support for abstract democratic rights. This would be particularly problematic if there were systematic differences in volatility scores as a function of support for an abstract democratic right or principle. However, we find no evidence of such bias. Figure C.1 in Appendix C presents respondents' volatility scores by their level of support for abstract democratic rights. The figure shows that respondents who assign 5 points to an abstract principle do not systematically exhibit lower volatility scores than those who assign 0 or 10 points. Nevertheless, we replicate our analyses while controlling for respondents' support for abstract rights (denoted as 'General support democratic right') and its quadratic term (to account for a potential curvilinear relationship). The volatility analyses reported below are based on models that control for both general support and its quadratic term, while Table C.1 in Appendix C presents the remaining specifications.

We now turn to the factors that may explain volatility Figure 4.2 summarizes the results of a regression model in which we regress volatility on political knowledge, political interest, support for democracy, and the importance placed on fundamental human rights. A summary of the full model can be found in Table C.1 in Appendix C.[8] The model controls for respondents' support for the ab-

Figure 4.2 Determinants of democratic volatility



Note: Based on OLS estimation of Model 3 summarized in Table C.1 of Appendix C. Specification includes additional controls for age, sex, general support for democratic right, general support for democratic right squared and country-fixed effects. Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals. N = 23,792

stract right and its quadratic term, age, education, sex, and country fixed effects. However, we exclude these coefficients since they are of no theoretical interest.

With respect to our first hypothesis, which maintains that individuals who are less politically sophisticated will be more volatile in their support for democratic rights, we find mixed results. Specifically, we observe that the more politically knowledgeable an individual is, the less volatile their support for democratic rights—as expected. The effect is statistically significant, albeit substantively modest. On the other hand, while the influence of political interest on volatility is also statistically significant, it is unexpectedly positive, meaning that individuals who are more politically interested tend to be more volatile. Moreover, this effect is slightly stronger than that of political knowledge. Therefore, the evidence provides only partial support for Hypothesis 1.1.

The unexpected finding that political knowledge and political interest influence volatility in opposing ways merits further investigation. If we disaggregate the volatility variable into its constituent parts, as per Figure C.3 in Appendix C, we can see that the relationship between political knowledge

[8] Figure C.2 in Appendix C summarizes the coefficients of the base model without controlling for support for the abstract rights or its quadratic term.

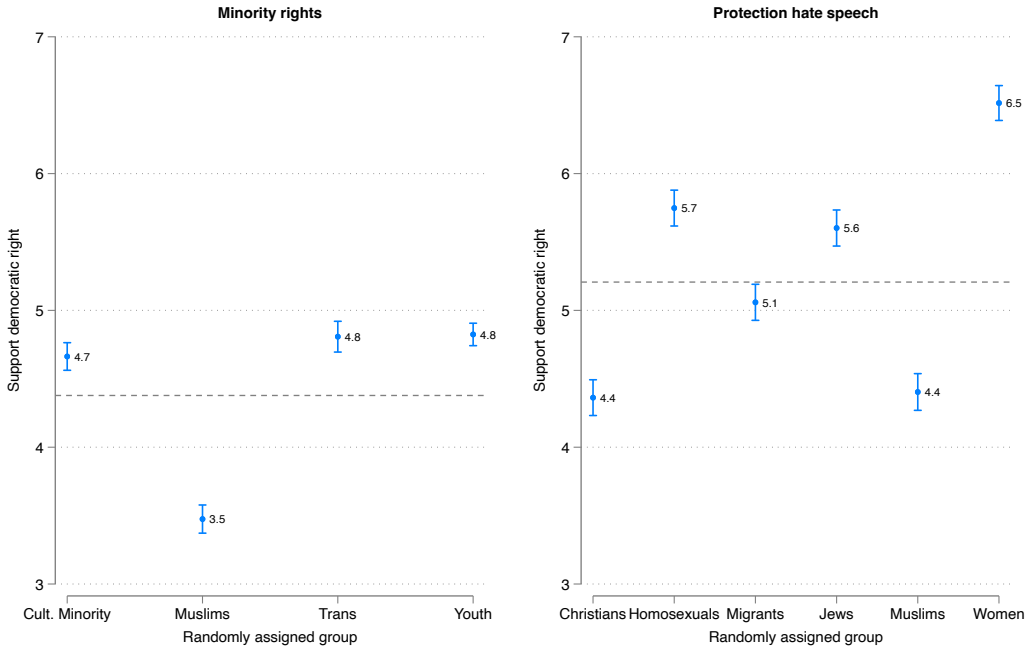
and support for democratic rights in the abstract and when applied to specific groups differs from the relationship between political interest and support for these rights. When presented with a trade-off framing, people who are more politically knowledgeable are slightly less likely to support democratic rights in the abstract. However, more politically knowledgeable respondents remain consistent in their commitment and do not alter it when considering specific groups. This may be because they recognize that, in a democracy, not all democratic principles can be simultaneously maximized. Conversely, individuals who are more politically interested are more likely to support democratic rights—especially when they are applied to specific groups. This results in greater volatility. One possible explanation is that politically interested individuals are more engaged with real-world political conflicts and therefore respond more strongly when rights are attached to concrete groups because cognitions related to these groups are more central or salient to their belief systems. Importantly, greater volatility in both cases reflects an increase in support when rights are attached to specific groups rather than a decrease in support relative to abstract principles.

Returning to Figure 4.2 and focusing now on democratic support, we see that while the coefficient is statistically significant, the effect is positive. Thus, contrary to our expectations, citizens who are more supportive of democracy are also slightly more volatile in their support for democratic rights and principles. Therefore, we do not find evidence for Hypothesis 1.2.

This unexpected finding also warrants further examination. Figure C.4 in Appendix C shows that, on average, beyond being more supportive of democratic rights in general, strong supporters of democracy are also more likely to increase their support for the corresponding right when it is applied to specific groups. Similar to what we observed among the politically interested, this tendency makes committed democrats more volatile. One possible interpretation is that strong democrats are particularly responsive to the circumstances under which rights are exercised.

Returning to Figure 4.2, we can see that valuing fundamental human rights does not have a statistically significant effect on volatility. It is worth noting that Table C.1 and Figure C.2 in Appendix C show that valuing fundamental human rights has a negative and statistically significant effect on volatility, as expected, in the base model and in the model that controls only for general support for the democratic principle. However, given that the statistical significance of this variable is not robust

Figure 4.3 Average support for specific realizations of democratic rights by group randomly assigned to and democratic right



Note: Dashed horizontal line represents average abstract support for the democratic right in each country. That is, the support for the same right when asked in the abstract and not related to a particular group. Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals around the mean for each subgroup.

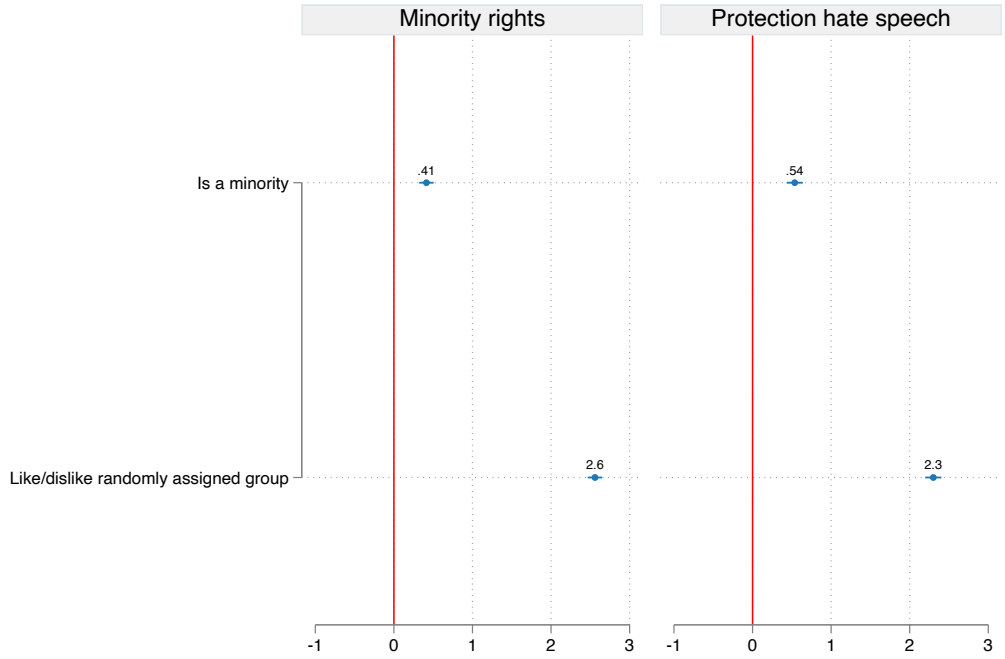
to specifications that additionally control for general support and its quadratic term specifications, we do not find convincing evidence in support of Hypothesis 1.3.

Examining the components of the volatility measure separately, as per **??** in Appendix C, we can see that those who value fundamental human rights are more supportive of both abstract and specific democratic rights. For the most part, there are no significant differences in the amount of support expressed for abstract and specific principles across different levels of fundamental human rights endorsement. While we observe some differences in specific versus abstract support among those who most strongly value fundamental human rights, this small difference does not translate into an overall statistically significant coefficient in Figure 4.2.

4.4.2 Value- and affect-laden conditionality

We now turn to value- and affect-laden conditionality. Figure 4.3 displays the average support respondents give to specific democratic rights depending on the randomly allocated group to which

Figure 4.4 Influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for specific realizations of democratic rights



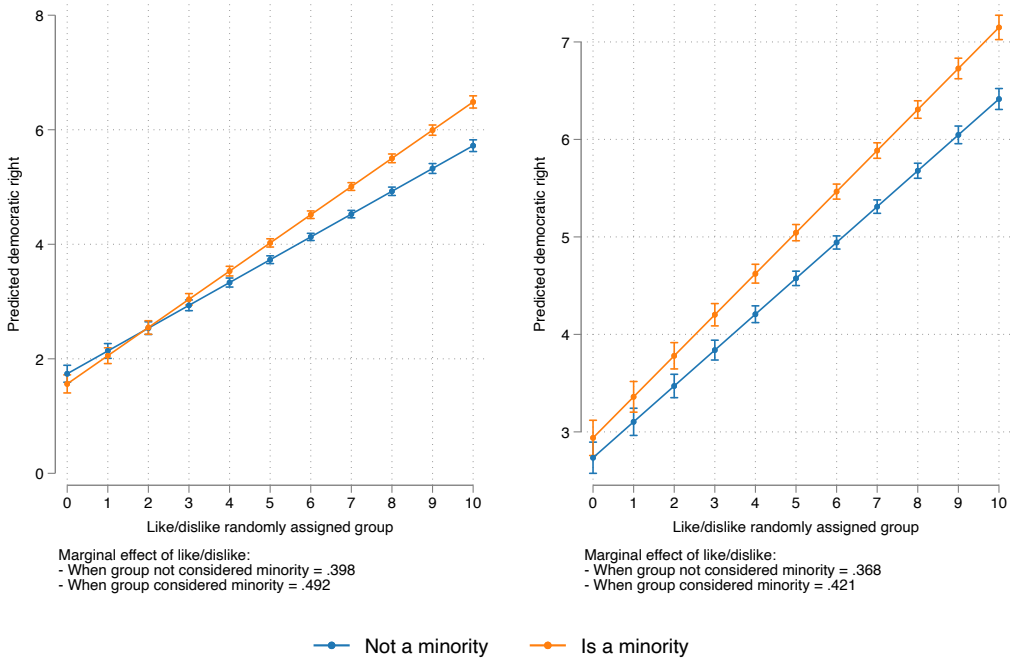
Note: OLS estimations based on models 1 and 2 of Table C.3 and Table C.4, summarized in Appendix C. Coefficient for "Like/dislike randomly assigned group" represents a change in two standard deviations in the variable measuring the like/dislike score of the group randomly assigned to. All models include the education, sex, and age of respondents as additional covariates, as well as country fixed-effects. Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals.

each right is applied. Figure 4.3 also contains dashed horizontal lines that represent the average support given to the corresponding democratic right when asked in abstract terms (i.e., when not assigned to any particular group).[9] Beginning with the protection of minority rights (the left-hand panel of Figure 4.3), we can see that support is relatively low regardless of how it is measured. Abstract support for protecting minorities has a mean of 4.37 and a standard deviation of 2.35 on a 0-to-10 scale. Support increases slightly when this democratic right is applied to cultural minorities, transgender individuals, and young people, although in none of these cases does support reach the midpoint of 5. Conversely, support for protecting minority rights drops significantly when applied to Muslims. Thus, even though abstract support for protecting the rights of minorities is low to begin with, it declines by approximately 20% when applied to Muslims.

Turning to the panel on the right of Figure 4.3, we can see that support for protection from hate speech tends to be higher, both in terms of abstract support (with a mean of 5.22 and a standard

[9] Figure C.7 in Appendix C shows average abstract and specific support for protecting minority rights and protection from hate speech without distinguishing between groups.

Figure 4.5 Average linear prediction of support for each specific democratic right by like/dislike and minority status of groups the right is randomly linked to



Note: OLS estimations based on model 3 of Table C.3 and Table C.4, summarized in Appendix C. All models include the education, sex, and age of respondents as additional covariates, as well as country fixed-effects. Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals.

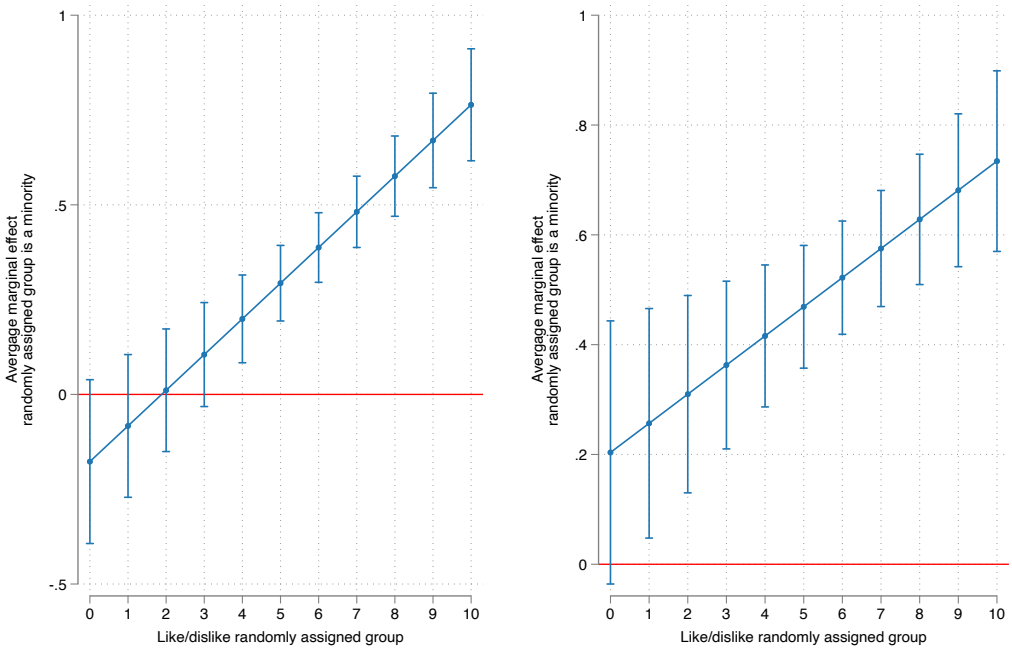
deviation of 2.68) and when applied to specific groups. Support for protection from hate speech declines when applied to Christians, migrants, and Muslims. Conversely, support for this principle appears to increase when applied to homosexuals, Jews, and women, with women being the only group for which support for this right exceeds the 6-point mark. In sum, we can clearly see that support for specific democratic rights changes depending on the group to which they are applied. This is precisely the *conditionality* that we now seek to explain.[10]

Moving on to our main analyses, we examine the influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for specific manifestations of democratic rights. Figure 4.4 summarizes the results of the OLS models fitted to examine the influence of considering a particular group to be a minority (i.e., value-laden considerations) and liking or disliking that group (i.e., affect-laden considerations) on support for minority-rights protection and protection from hate speech.[11] As we can see, people

[10] Figure C.8 and Figure C.9 contain the results of country-level analyses.

[11] See Appendix C for all models and corresponding figures: base models, models controlling for correlates of volatility, models controlling for general support, and models controlling for general support squared. The results do not change significantly.

Figure 4.6 Marginal effect of considering a group a minority on support for democratic rights by like/dislike of that group.



Note: OLS estimations based on model 3 of Table C.3, Table C.4, summarized in Appendix C. All models include the education, sex, and age of respondents as additional covariates, as well as country fixed-effects. Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals.

are consistently more likely to support specific democratic rights involving groups they consider political minorities. This evidence is consistent with Hypothesis 2. While the effect is always statistically significant, its size varies slightly depending on the democratic right being considered. Value-laden considerations are somewhat more influential when it comes to protecting specific groups from hate speech. In this case, considering the randomly assigned group a minority leads to an average increase of 0.54 points on the 0-to-10 scale measuring support for that democratic right. The size of the effect decreases by approximately one quarter when it comes to protecting minority rights. In either case, however, the effect is substantively modest. Thus, although perceptions of minority status matter, they explain only a limited portion of the variation in support for democratic rights, suggesting that other considerations may play a more substantial role.

Affect-laden considerations also consistently influence support for specific manifestations of democratic rights involving particular groups. This evidence is consistent with Hypothesis 3, which posits that individuals' support for democratic rights is higher when they like the group to which the right

is applied.[12] The effect is also substantively large, as an increase of two standard deviations in the variable measuring respondents' like/dislike score for the group randomly assigned to a right results in an increase of 2.3–2.6 units on a 0-to-10 scale. Furthermore, the effect of affect-laden considerations is, on average, about five times greater than that of value-laden considerations. Support for democratic rights therefore appears to depend far more on how citizens feel about a group than on whether they regard that group as a deserving minority.

Finally, we move to examining a potential interaction between value- and affect-laden considerations when it comes to supporting specific manifestations of democratic rights involving particular groups. Figure 4.5 contains average linear predictions of support for each democratic right given how much a group is liked and whether or not it is perceived as a minority.[13] We can see that there is an interaction in both cases: the positive effect of liking the group to which the right is applied is stronger when that group is also considered a minority. This finding is the opposite of what Hypothesis 4 predicts. Rather than attenuating the influence of affect on support for democratic rights, minority status appears to amplify it.

To further examine this interaction, we can look at Figure 4.6.[14] Here we plot the marginal effects of considering a group a minority on support for democratic rights by like/dislike scores for that group. The panel on the left corresponds to protecting minority rights, while the panel on the right corresponds to protecting individuals from hate speech. We can clearly see that the marginal effect of considering a disliked group a minority on support for democratic rights is statistically insignificant. Thus, while citizens recognize that certain groups are more in need of and deserving of having their democratic rights protected, they only apply this consideration to groups they like. Recognition of minority status is therefore insufficient to generate support for democratic rights in the absence of positive affect toward the group in question. For disliked social groups—who may be the most vulnerable to discrimination to begin with—it does not matter whether they are recognized as minorities. Hence, perceptions of deservingness do not overcome affective biases. Rather, they operate through them.

[12] In Table C.5, we present models that incorporate attitudes toward "feminists" instead of "women," as these attitudes could differ substantially. However, we do not observe major differences across these models.
[13] See Appendix C for corresponding figures from alternative model specifications.
[14] See Appendix C for corresponding figures from alternative model specifications.

4.5 Conclusion

In this paper, we examined inconsistencies in citizens' commitment to democratic rights and principles. First, we implemented a novel trade-off framing that pits democratic rights against potentially conflicting democratic principles as a stringent test of respondents' commitment to these rights. Next, we empirically investigated within-individual changes in support for democratic rights when presented in abstract terms versus as specific manifestations involving particular social groups—what we call *volatility*. Finally, we examined differences in citizens' support for specific manifestations of democratic rights depending on the particular social group to which they are connected—what we group-based *conditionality*.

Drawing on original data from 15 countries, we found that a considerable proportion of respondents exhibit some degree of volatility and conditionality in their support for democratic rights and principles. In line with our expectations, politically knowledgeable individuals were less volatile. Conversely, political interest and democratic support were associated with higher levels of volatility, contrary to our expectations. Finally, while we found some evidence that placing greater importance on fundamental human rights reduces volatility, as expected, this effect was not robust across model specifications. Taken together, these findings suggest that volatility may capture not only inconsistency in democratic attitudes but also sensitivity to the contexts in which democratic rights are exercised.

With respect to conditionality, we found that support for specific manifestations of democratic rights varies significantly as a function of the particular group affected by these rights. In line with prior research, we observed an anti-Muslim bias (Ivarsflaten & Sniderman, 2022; Spruyt & Elchardus, 2012; Strabac et al., 2014). However, we also found relatively low support for protecting Christians from hate speech, suggesting that citizens may be generally reluctant to restrict expression on behalf of religious groups. These findings add nuance to the notion of 'discriminatory rejection,' or double standards involving greater intolerance toward Muslims and their religious practices than toward Christians and their religious practices (Dangubić et al., 2020; Hurwitz & Mondak, 2002).

Conversely, we found that respondents are most supportive of protection from hate speech when it involves protecting women from sexist speech. In light of recent dynamics of gender backlash and

increasing modern sexism (Anduiza & Rico, 2024), this finding lends itself to a comparatively positive interpretation. Modern sexism involves the denial of women's discrimination and opposition to measures intended to reduce it (Swim & Cohen, 1997; Swim et al., 1995). Yet, if citizens support protecting women from sexist speech at the expense of reducing freedom of expression, this may reflect a recognition that women are frequent targets of sexist speech. Granted, this is only one possible interpretation of the findings. Further research may wish to explore the reasoning underlying support for this specific democratic right, perhaps through open-ended survey questions or qualitative approaches.

In line with our expectations, we found that both value- and affect-laden considerations influence citizens' commitment to specific democratic rights. Citizens are more supportive of democratic rights when they are applied to groups they perceive as minorities, presumably because they view such groups as more deserving of protection. However, these considerations are substantially outweighed by citizens' feelings toward those groups. Indeed, when these two factors interact, we find that affect-laden considerations take precedence, contrary to our expectations. These findings have more pessimistic implications for democratic citizenship. We argued that considerations of fairness and justice would take precedence over group like/dislike when citizens evaluate democratic rights. Instead, perceptions of deservingness appear to matter only when citizens already hold positive feelings toward the group in question. For disliked groups, considerations of fairness and justice quickly dissipate. Hence, perceptions of deservingness do not overcome affective biases; they operate through them. As a result, affective double standards appear to be a central driver of citizens' conditional commitment to democratic rights.

This study contributes to our understanding of democratic attitudes by theoretically bridging the literature on citizens' support for democracy and its constituent elements (Claassen et al., 2024; Ferrín & Kriesi, 2025; König et al., 2022) with the literature on political (in)tolerance (Armstrong & Wronski, 2019; Duch & Gibson, 1992; Gibson, 2006b; Marcus, 2002; Sullivan et al., 1981). Our empirical results support arguments developed in both literature strands while also illustrating the importance of considering potential tensions between democratic rights and principles, as well as different levels of abstraction, when measuring democratic attitudes (Diamond & Morlino, 2005; Graham & Svolik, 2020). In doing so, we also offer new methodological tools for empirically testing

arguments derived from classic works on discrepant attitudes (McClosky, 1964; Prothro & Grigg, 1960). Future research may apply these measurement strategies to investigate citizens' commitment to other democratic rights and principles, allowing for further exploration of democratic volatility, which has proven to be a particularly complex phenomenon.

Future research may also consider further unpacking the influence of political interest and support for democracy on democratic attitudes. Our additional analyses revealed that individuals with high levels of political interest and support for democracy are more supportive of abstract democratic rights in general, as expected. Yet, when these rights are applied to specific groups, they become even more supportive, resulting in greater volatility. Contrary to the weakened commitment that often characterizes citizens' endorsement of democratic principles when applied to specific circumstances (Bartels & Johnston, 2020; Stefanelli et al., 2025), these individuals appear to double down on their commitment. Hence, they may be among the most committed supporters of democratic rights (Gandhi & Ong, 2019). Rather than reflecting weak democratic commitments, their volatility may indicate a form of democratic idealism. In this sense, they may be better understood as "idealistic democrats." Recall that our models control for political knowledge. Thus, their volatility suggests a desire for all good things to go together in a democracy—something that may not always be possible in practice. When democratic institutions inevitably require tradeoffs, such expectations may generate democratic disappointment.

Finally, this study carries important implications for how we understand and study support for democracy and its constituent rights and principles. Civic support for democratic values may not be nearly as fixed and orderly as previously believed (Almond & Verba, 1963; Inglehart, 1977). Instead, it appears to be volatile and conditional, even among those ostensibly most committed to democratic principles. Understanding these dynamics may help explain how citizens can express strong support for democratic rights in principle while applying them selectively in practice.

References

Achen, C. H., & Bartels, L. M. (2017). *Democracy for realists: Why elections do not produce responsive government*. Princeton University Press.

Adams, J. S. (1965). Inequity In Social Exchange. In *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (pp. 267–299, Vol. 2). Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60108-2

Almond, G. A., & Verba, S. (1963). *The civic culture: Political attitudes and democracy in five nations* (New ed.). Sage Publications.

Anduiza, E., & Rico, G. (2024). Sexism and the Far-Right Vote: The Individual Dynamics of Gender Backlash. *American Journal of Political Science*, *68*(2), 478–493. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12759

Ares, M., Enggist, M., Häusermann, S., & Pinggera, M. (2020). Attitudinal constraint in welfare priorities: Political interest and welfare publics. *Working paper*, 35.

Armstrong, G. M., & Wronski, J. (2019). Framing hate: Moral foundations, party cues, and (in)tolerance of offensive speech. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, *7*(2), 695–725. https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.v7i2.1006

Bartels, B. L., & Johnston, C. D. (2020, August). *Curbing the Court: Why the Public Constrains Judicial Independence* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316979754

Blais, A., & Gélineau, F. (2007). Winning, Losing and Satisfaction with Democracy. *Political Studies*, *55*(2), 425–441. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2007.00659.x

Brandt, M. J., Chambers, J. R., Crawford, J. T., Wetherell, G., & Reyna, C. (2015). Bounded openness: The effect of openness to experience on intolerance is moderated by target group conventionality. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *109*(3), 549–568. https://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000055

Chong, D., Citrin, J., & Levy, M. (2024). The Realignment of Political Tolerance in the United States. *Perspectives on Politics*, *22*(1), 131–152. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592722002079

Claassen, C., Ackermann, K., Bertsou, E., Borba, L., Carlin, R. E., Cavari, A., Dahlum, S., Gherghina, S., Hawkins, D., Lelkes, Y., Magalhães, P. C., Mattes, R., Meijers, M. J., Neundorf, A., Oross, D., Öztürk, A., Sarsfield, R., Self, D., Stanley, B., … Zechmeister, E. J. (2024). Conceptualizing and Measuring Support for Democracy: A New Approach. *Comparative Political Studies*, 00104140241259458. https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140241259458

Converse, P. E. (1964). The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Public. In D. E. Apter (Ed.), *Ideology and discontent.* Free Press, New York.

Crawford, J. T. (2014). Ideological symmetries and asymmetries in political intolerance and prejudice toward political activist groups. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *55*, 284–298. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2014.08.002

Curini, L., Jou, W., & Memoli, V. (2012). Satisfaction with Democracy and the Winner/Loser Debate: The Role of Policy Preferences and Past Experience. *British Journal of Political Science*, *42*(2), 241–261. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123411000275

Dahl, R. A. (1971). *Polyarchy: Participation and opposition*. Yale university press.

Dahl, R. A. (1989). *Democracy and its critics* (Nachdr.). Yale University Press.

Dangubić, M., Verkuyten, M., & Stark, T. H. (2020). Rejecting Muslim or Christian religious practices in five West European countries: A case of discriminatory rejection? *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *43*(16), 306–326. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2020.1792525

Davis, D. W. (2009). *Negative Liberty: Public Opinion and the Terrorist Attacks on America: Public Opinion and the Terrorist Attacks on America*. Russell Sage Foundation.

Delli Carpini, M. X., & Keeter, S. (1996). *What Americans know about politics and why it matters*. Yale University Press.

Denemark, D., Donovan, T., Mattes, R., & Niemi, R. G. (Eds.). (2016). *Growing Up Democratic: Does It Make a Difference?* Lynne Rienner Publishers. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781626375567

Diamond, L., & Morlino, L. (Eds.). (2005). *Assessing the quality of democracy*. Hopkins Univ. Press.

Drolet, C. E., Hafer, C. L., & Heuer, L. (2016). The Role of Perceived Deservingness in the Toleration of Human Rights Violations. *Social Justice Research*, *29*(4), 429–455. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11211-016-0273-y

Duch, R. M., & Gibson, J. L. (1992). "Putting Up With" Fascists in Western Europe: A Comparative, Cross-Level Analysis of Political Tolerance. *Western Political Quarterly*, *45*(1), 237–273. https://doi.org/10.1177/106591299204500116

Edsall, T. B., & Edsall, M. D. (1992). *Chain reaction: The impact of race, rights, and taxes on American politics; with a new afterword* (1. publ). Norton.

Farris, E. M., & Holman, M. R. (2017). All Politics Is Local? County Sheriffs and Localized Policies of Immigration Enforcement. *Political Research Quarterly*, *70*(1), 142–154. https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912916680035

Ferrín, M., & Kriesi, H. (Eds.). (2016, March). *How Europeans View and Evaluate Democracy*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198766902.001.0001

Ferrín, M., & Kriesi, H. (Eds.). (2025, February). *How Europeans View and Evaluate Democracy Revisited: Ten Years Later* (1st ed.). Oxford University PressOxford. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198883319.001.0001

Fleury, C. J., & Lewis-Beck, M. S. (1993). Anchoring the French Voter: Ideology versus Party. *The Journal of Politics*, *55*(4), 1100–1109. https://doi.org/10.2307/2131950

Foa, R. S., & Mounk, Y. (2016). The Democratic Disconnect. *Journal of Democracy*, *27*(3), 5–17. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0049

Foa, R. S., & Mounk, Y. (2017). The Signs of Deconsolidation. *Journal of Democracy*, *28*(1), 5–15. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0000

Frederiksen, K. V. S. (2022). When democratic experience distorts democracy: Citizen reactions to undemocratic incumbent behaviour [Number: 1 _eprint: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/1475-6765.12465]. *European Journal of Political Research*, *61*(1), 281–292. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12465

Freeze, M., & Montgomery, J. M. (2016). Static Stability and Evolving Constraint: Preference Stability and Ideological Structure in the Mass Public. *American Politics Research*, *44*(3), 415–447. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X15607299

Gandhi, J., & Ong, E. (2019). Committed or Conditional Democrats? Opposition Dynamics in Electoral Autocracies. *American Journal of Political Science*, *63*(4), 948–963. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12441

Gelman, A. (2008). Scaling regression inputs by dividing by two standard deviations. *Statistics in Medicine*, *27*(15), 2865–2873. https://doi.org/10.1002/sim.3107

Gessler, T., & Wunsch, N. (2023, February). A new regime divide? Partisan affect and attitudes towards democratic backsliding. https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/nbwmj

Gibson, J. L. (2006a). Enigmas of Intolerance: Fifty Years after Stouffer's Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties. *Perspectives on Politics*, *4*(01). https://doi.org/10.1017/S153759270606004X

Gibson, J. L. (2006b). Do Strong Group Identities Fuel Intolerance? Evidence From the South African Case. *Political Psychology*, *27*(5), 665–705. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2006.00528.x

Gibson, J. L., & Bingham, R. D. (1982). On the Conceptualization and Measurement of Political Tolerance. *American Political Science Review*, *76*(3), 603–620. https://doi.org/10.2307/1963734

Goodin, R. E., & Pettit, P. (2019). *Contemporary political philosophy* (3rd ed). John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.

Goren, P. (2013). *On voter competence*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195396140.001.0001

Graham, M. H., & Svolik, M. W. (2020). Democracy in America? Partisanship, Polarization, and the Robustness of Support for Democracy in the United States [Number: 2]. *American Political Science Review*, *114*(2), 392–409. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055420000052

Haidt, J., & Graham, J. (2007). When Morality Opposes Justice: Conservatives Have Moral Intuitions that Liberals may not Recognize. *Social Justice Research*, *20*(1), 98–116. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11211-007-0034-z

Harell, A. (2010). The Limits of Tolerance in Diverse Societies: Hate Speech and Political Tolerance Norms Among Youth. *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, *43*(2), 407–432. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423910000107

Hernández, E. (2019). Democracy belief systems in Europe: Cognitive availability and attitudinal constraint. *European Political Science Review*, *11*(4), 485–502. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773919000286

Hernández, E. (2025, February). Stability and change in Europeans' views of democracy. In M. Ferrín & H. Kriesi (Eds.), *How Europeans View and Evaluate Democracy Revisited* (1st ed., pp. 55–78). Oxford University PressOxford. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198883319.003.0003

Hetherington, M. J., & Weiler, J. D. (2010). *Authoritarianism and polarization in American politics* (Repr). Cambridge Univ. Press.

Huckfeldt, R., Levine, J., Morgan, W., & Sprague, J. (1999). Accessibility and the Political Utility of Partisan and Ideological Orientations. *American Journal of Political Science*, *43*(3), 888. https://doi.org/10.2307/2991839

Hurwitz, J., & Mondak, J. J. (2002). Democratic Principles, Discrimination and Political Intolerance. *British Journal of Political Science*, *32*(01). https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123402000042

Inglehart, R. (1977). *The silent revolution: Changing values and political styles among western publics*. Princeton Univ. Press.

Ivarsflaten, E., & Sniderman, P. M. (2022). *The struggle for inclusion: Muslim minorities and the democratic ethos*. University of Chicago Press.

Iyengar, S., & Westwood, S. J. (2015). Fear and Loathing across Party Lines: New Evidence on Group Polarization. *American Journal of Political Science*, *59*(3), 690–707. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12152

Kane, E. W., & Whipkey, K. J. (2009). Predictors of Public Support for Gender-Related Affirmative Action. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *73*(2), 233–254. https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfp019

Kingzette, J., Druckman, J. N., Klar, S., Krupnikov, Y., Levendusky, M., & Ryan, J. B. (2021). How Affective Polarization Undermines Support for Democratic Norms. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *85*(2), 663–677. https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfab029

Kirsch, H., & Welzel, C. (2019). Democracy Misunderstood: Authoritarian Notions of Democracy around the Globe. *Social Forces*, *98*(1), 59–92. https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soy114

Kluegel, J. R., & Smith, E. R. (1983). Affirmative Action Attitudes: Effects of Self-Interest, Racial Affect, and Stratification Beliefs on Whites' Views. *Social Forces*, *61*(3), 797. https://doi.org/10.2307/2578135

König, P. D., Siewert, M. B., & Ackermann, K. (2022). Conceptualizing and Measuring Citizens' Preferences for Democracy: Taking Stock of Three Decades of Research in a Fragmented Field. *Comparative Political Studies*, *55*(12), 2015–2049. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414021066213

Kornberg, A., & Clarke, H. D. (1994). Beliefs About Democracy and Satisfaction with Democratic Government: The Canadian Case. *Political Research Quarterly*, *47*(3), 537–563. https://doi.org/10.1177/106591299404700301

Kymlicka, W. (1995). *Multicultural citizenship: A liberal theory of minority rights*. Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press.

Kymlicka, W. (2000). Nation-building and minority rights: Comparing West and East. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *26*(2), 183–212. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183005002276 7

Landwehr, C., & Harms, P. (2020). Preferences for Referenda: Intrinsic or Instrumental? Evidence from a Survey Experiment. *Political Studies*, *68*(4), 875–894. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321719879619

Lindner, N. M., & Nosek, B. A. (2009). Alienable Speech: Ideological Variations in the Application of Free-Speech Principles. *Political Psychology*, *30*(1), 67–92. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2008.00681.x

Marcus, G. E. (Ed.). (2002). *With malice toward some: How people make civil liberties judgments* (Digital printing [der Ausg.] 1995). Cambridge University Press.

McClosky, H. (1964). Consensus and Ideology in American Politics. *American Political Science Review*, *58*(2), 361–382. https://doi.org/10.2307/1952868

McClosky, H., & Brill, A. (1983). *Dimensions of tolerance: What Americans believe about civil liberties*. Russell Sage foundation.

McClosky, H., & Zaller, J. (1984). *The American ethos: Public attitudes toward capitalism and democracy*. Harvard Univ. Press.

Nicholson, S. P., & Hansford, T. G. (2014). Partisans in Robes: Party Cues and Public Acceptance of Supreme Court Decisions. *American Journal of Political Science*, *58*(3), 620–636. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12091

Norris, P. (2011). *Democratic deficit: Critical citizens revisited*. Cambridge University Press.

Peffley, M., & Rohrschneider, R. (2003). Democratization and Political Tolerance in Seventeen Countries: A Multi-level Model of Democratic Learning. *Political Research Quarterly*, *56*(3), 243–257. https://doi.org/10.1177/106591290305600301

Peffley, M., Yair, O., & Hutchison, M. L. (2024). Left-Right Social Identity and the Polarization of Political Tolerance. *Political Research Quarterly*, *77*(1), 30–44. https://doi.org/10.1177/10659129231189759

Prothro, J. W., & Grigg, C. M. (1960). Fundamental Principles of Democracy: Bases of Agreement and Disagreement. *The Journal of Politics*, *22*(2), 276–294. https://doi.org/10.2307/2127359

Rohrschneider, R. (2004). *Learning democracy: Democratic and economic values in unified Germany*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198295174.001.0001

Rudolph, L., Freitag, M., & Thurner, P. W. (2024). Deontological and consequentialist preferences towards arms exports: A comparative conjoint experiment in France and Germany. *European Journal of Political Research*, *63*(2), 705–728. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12617

Şaşmaz, A., Yagci, A. H., & Ziblatt, D. (2022). How Voters Respond to Presidential Assaults on Checks and Balances: Evidence from a Survey Experiment in Turkey. *Comparative Political Studies*, *55*(11), 1947–1980. https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140211066216

Schwartz, S. H. (1992). Universals in the Content and Structure of Values: Theoretical Advances and Empirical Tests in 20 Countries. In *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (pp. 1–65, Vol. 25). Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60281-6

Schwartz, S. H. (1994). Are There Universal Aspects in the Structure and Contents of Human Values? *Journal of Social Issues*, *50*(4), 19–45. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1994.tb01196.x

Seligman, C., Olson, J. M., & Zanna, M. P. (1996). *The psychology of values: The Ontario symposium, volume 8 [symposium held in London, Canada, August 18-19, 1993]*. L. Erlbaum.

Simon, R. J. (1993). Old Minorities, New Immigrants: Aspirations, Hopes, and Fears. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *530*(1), 61–73. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716293530001005

Simonovits, G., McCoy, J., & Littvay, L. (2022). Democratic Hypocrisy and Out-Group Threat: Explaining Citizen Support for Democratic Erosion. *The Journal of Politics*, *84*(3), 1806–1811. https://doi.org/10.1086/719009

Singh, S. P. (2023). Compulsory Voting Diminishes the Relationship between Winning and Satisfaction with Democracy. *The Journal of Politics*, *85*(3), 1079–1093. https://doi.org/10.1086/723815

Sniderman, P. M., & Piazza, T. (2009, June). *The Scar of Race*. Harvard University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1smjnkw

Sniderman, P. M., Tetlock, P. E., Glaser, J. M., Green, D. P., & Hout, M. (1989). Principled Tolerance and the American Mass Public. *British Journal of Political Science*, *19*(1), 25–45. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123400005305

Spruyt, B., & Elchardus, M. (2012). Are anti-Muslim feelings more widespread than anti-foreigner feelings? Evidence from two split-sample experiments. *Ethnicities*, *12*(6), 800–820. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796812449707

Stefanelli, A., Abts, K., & Meuleman, B. (2025). Freedom for all? Populism and the instrumental support of freedom of speech. *West European Politics*, *48*(7), 1629–1652. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2024.2434798

Stouffer, S. A. (1992). *Communism, conformity, and civil liberties: A cross-section of the nation speaks its mind*. Transaction Publishers.

Strabac, Z., Aalberg, T., & Valenta, M. (2014). Attitudes towards Muslim Immigrants: Evidence from Survey Experiments across Four Countries. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *40*(1), 100–118. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2013.831542

Sullivan, J. L., Marcus, G. E., Feldman, S., & Piereson, J. E. (1981). The Sources of Political Tolerance: A Multivariate Analysis. *American Political Science Review*, *75*(1), 92–106. https://doi.org/10.2307/1962161

Swim, J. K., Aikin, K. J., Hall, W. S., & Hunter, B. A. (1995). Sexism and racism: Old-fashioned and modern prejudices. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *68*(2), 199–214. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.68.2.199

Swim, J. K., & Cohen, L. L. (1997). Overt, Covert, And Subtle Sexism: A Comparison Between the Attitudes Toward Women and Modern Sexism Scales. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *21*(1), 103–118. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1997.tb00103.x

Tyler, T. R. (2006). Psychological Perspectives on Legitimacy and Legitimation. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *57*(1), 375–400. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.57.102904.190038

Tyler, T. R., & Rasinski, K. (1991). Procedural Justice, Institutional Legitimacy, and the Acceptance of Unpopular U.S. Supreme Court Decisions: A Reply to Gibson. *Law & Society Review*, *25*(3), 621–630. https://doi.org/10.2307/3053729

Voeten, E. (2016). Are People Really Turning Away from Democracy? *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2882878

Walster, E., Berscheid, E., & Walster, G. W. (1973). New directions in equity research. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *25*(2), 151–176. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0033967

Wuttke, A., Gavras, K., & Schoen, H. (2022). Have Europeans Grown Tired of Democracy? New Evidence from Eighteen Consolidated Democracies, 1981–2018. *British Journal of Political Science*, *52*(1), 416–428. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123420000149

Zaller, J. (1992). *The nature and origins of mass opinion*. Cambridge University Press.

Zorn, C., & Bowie, J. B. (2010). Ideological Influences on Decision Making in the Federal Judicial Hierarchy: An Empirical Assessment. *The Journal of Politics*, *72*(4), 1212–1221. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381610000630

Appendix C: Supplementary materials

C.1 Additional results and robustness checks

Volatility

Figure C.1 Levels of democratic volatility by general support for the corresponding democratic right



Note: Plots summarize the fraction of respondents with a given level of volatility by the general support for the corresponding democratic right respondents were randomly assigned to. For example, the first panel "0" summarizes the levels of volatility for those who gave a value of 0 in the general question about the democratic right they were randomly assigned to. N = 23,749.

Table C.1 OLS estimation to examine determinants of volatility

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Political knowledge	-0.08*	-0.08*	-0.09**
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Political interest	0.13***	0.13***	0.09**
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Support for democracy	0.09**	0.08*	0.06*
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Importance fundamental rights	-0.07*	-0.08**	-0.06
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Age	0.06	0.06	0.05
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Male	-0.16	-0.14	0.08
	(0.37)	(0.37)	(0.36)
Female	-0.08	-0.07	0.18
	(0.37)	(0.37)	(0.36)
Upper secondary education	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Tertiary education	-0.08	-0.08	-0.08
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
General support democratic right		0.02***	-0.37***
		(0.01)	(0.02)
General support democratic right^2			0.04***
			(0.00)
Constant	1.87***	1.78***	2.37***
	(0.38)	(0.38)	(0.38)
Observations	23792	23792	23792
Country fixed effects	✓	✓	✓

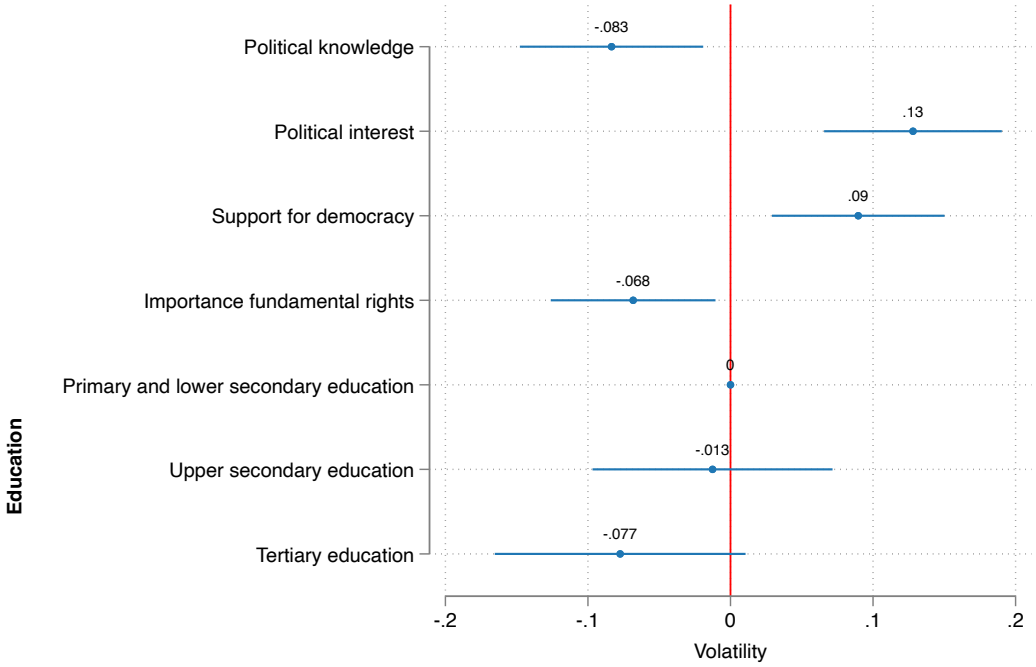
Standard errors in parentheses

Reference category for Education is primary and lower secondary

Reference category for Sex is other

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Figure C.2 Determinants of democratic volatility without controlling for general support for corresponding democratic right



Note: Based on OLS estimation of Model 1 summarized in Table C.1. Specification includes additional controls for sex and country-fixed effects. Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals. N = 23,792.

Figure C.3 General and specific support for democratic rights and principles as a function of politcal knowledge and political intetest

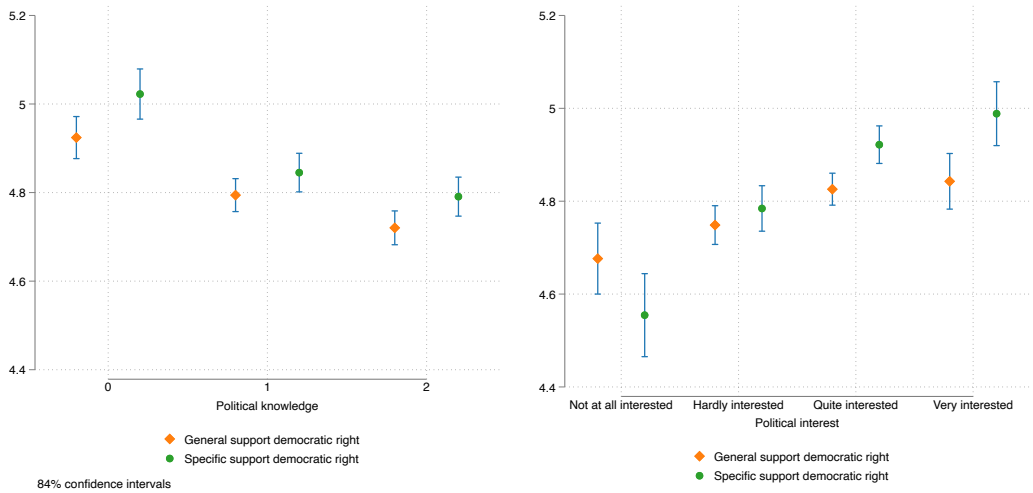


Figure C.4 General and specific support for democratic rights and principles as a function of support for democracy

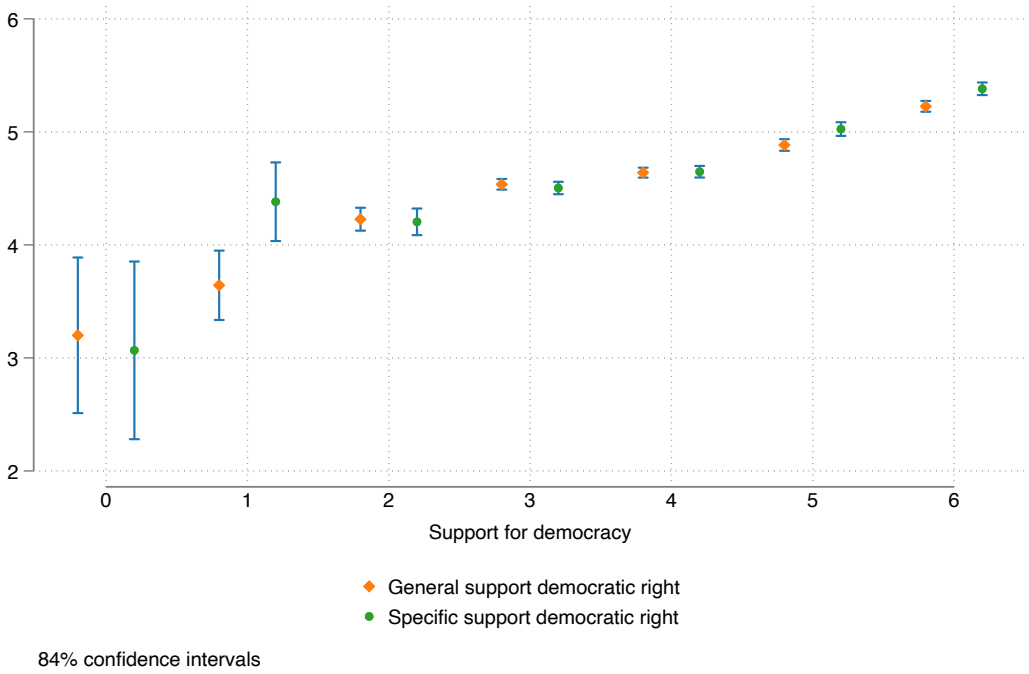


Figure C.5 General and specific support for democratic rights and principles as a function of support for fundamental human rights

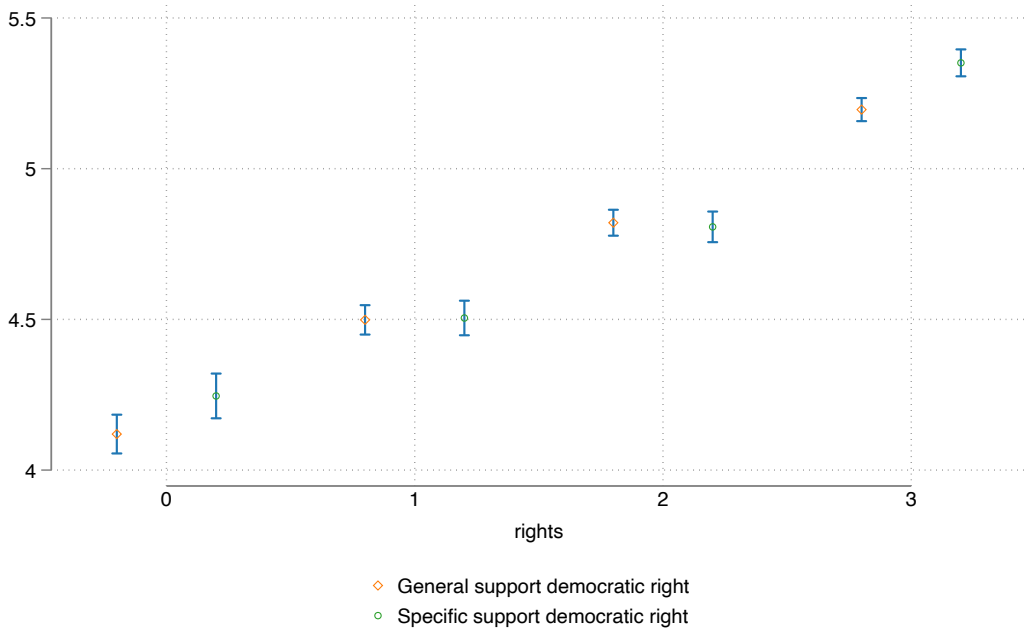
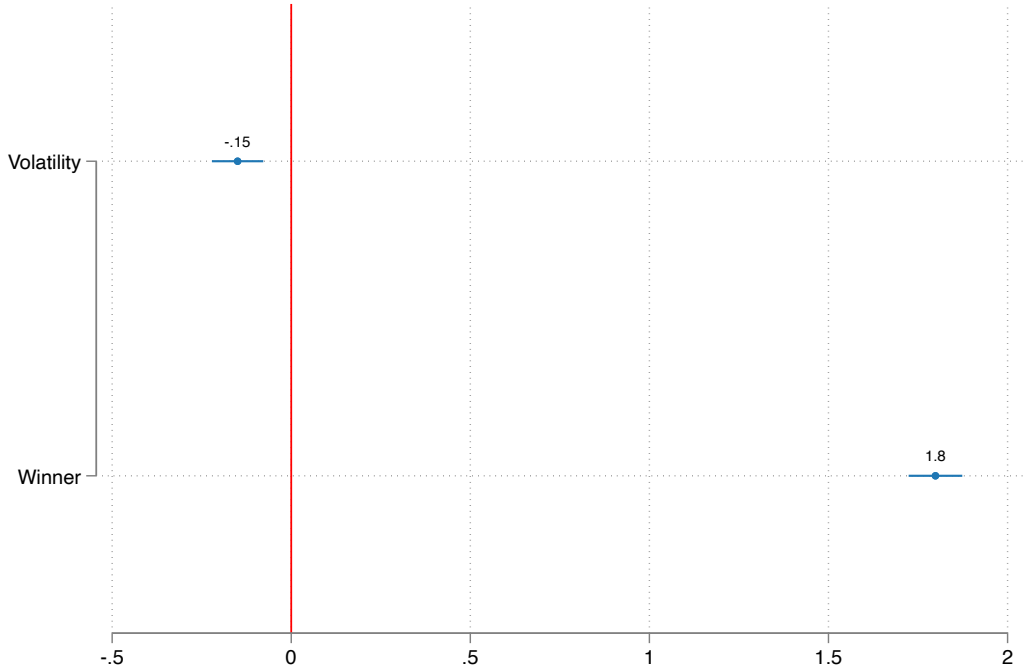


Figure C.6 Volatility and satisfaction with democracy



Note: "Winner" is a dichotomous variable that captures a respondent's status as an electoral winner or loser. Respondents who voted for a governing party are coded as 1, while everyone else is coded as 0. This variable is included in the model to serve as a reference point, as winner/loser status is well documented in the literature as an important individual-level determinant of satisfaction with democracy (Blais & Gélineau, 2007; Curini et al., 2012; Singh, 2023).

Table C.2 OLS estimation to examine effect of volatility on satisfaction with democracy

	(1)
Volatility	-0.15***
	(0.04)
Winner	1.80***
	(0.04)
Age	0.45***
	(0.04)
Male	1.39**
	(0.46)
Female	1.24**
	(0.46)
Upper secondary education	-0.39***
	(0.06)
Tertiary education	-0.19**
	(0.06)
Constant	2.53***
	(0.47)
Observations	17898
Country fixed effects	

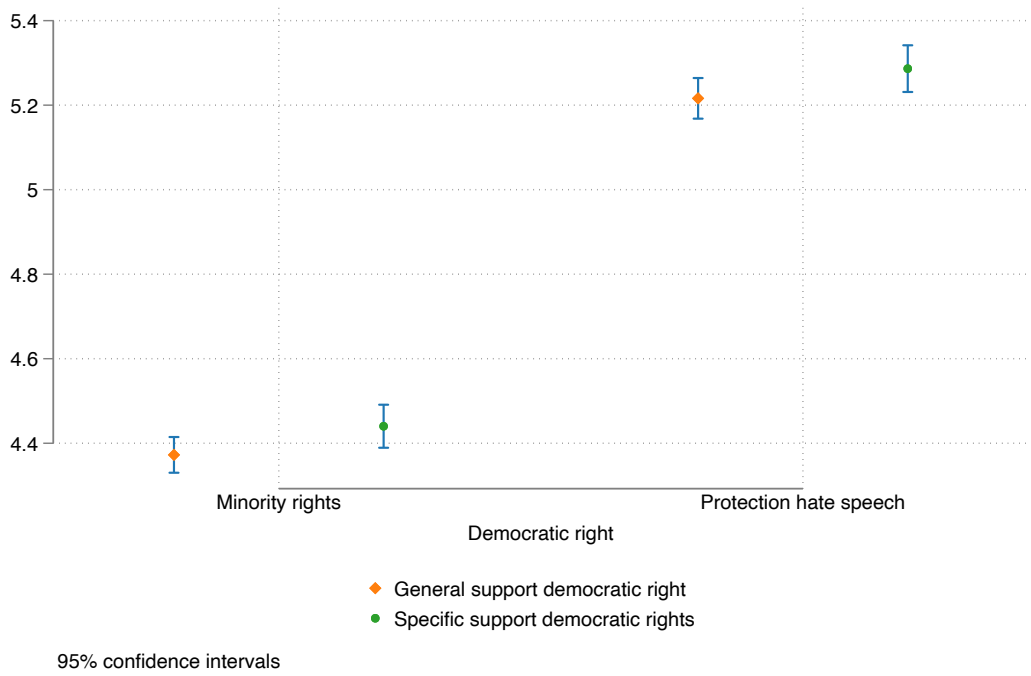
Standard errors in parentheses

Reference category for Education is primary and lower secondary

Reference category for Sex is other

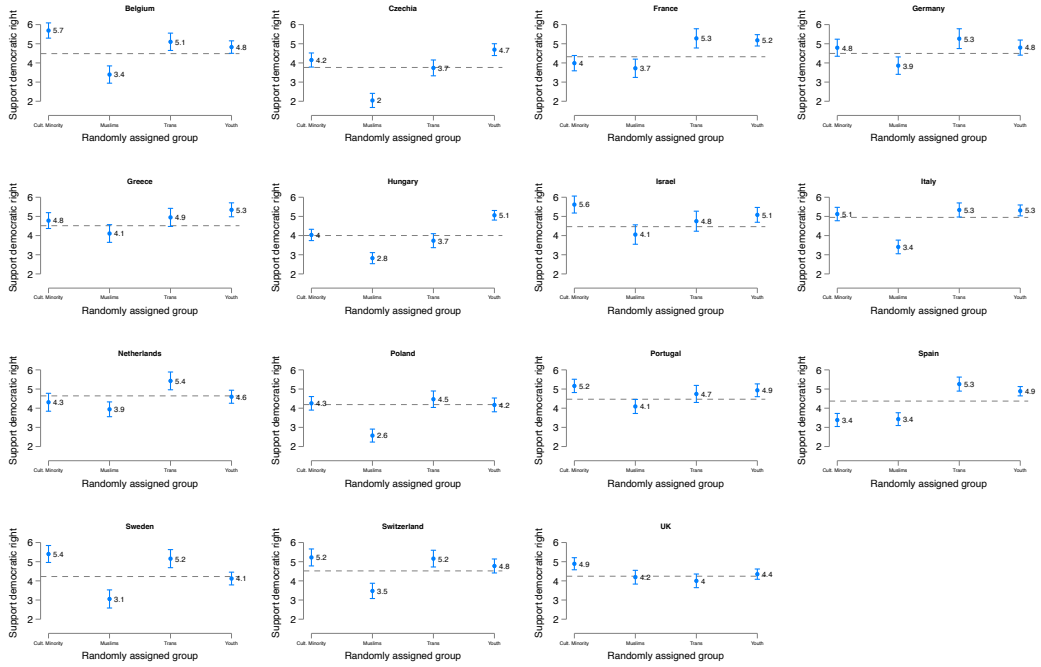
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Figure C.7 Average support protecting minority rights and protection from hate speech in abstract terms and when applied to specific groups



Conditionality

Figure C.8 Average support for the protection of the rights of minorities by group randomly assigned to and democratic right



Note: Dashed horizontal line represents average abstract support for the protection of the rights of minorities in each country. That is, the support for the same right when asked in the abstract and not related to a particular group. Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals around the mean for each subgroup.

Table C.3 OLS estimation to examine influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for minority rights

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Is a minority	0.43***	0.41***	-0.18
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.11)
Like/dislike randomly assigned group		2.56***	2.30***
		(0.05)	(0.06)
Is a minority X Like/dislike randomly assigned group			0.54***
			(0.09)
Upper secondary education	0.26***	0.26***	0.26***
	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Tertiary education	0.49***	0.40***	0.40***
	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Age	-0.34***	-0.33***	-0.32***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Male	-0.15	0.17	0.13
	(0.72)	(0.64)	(0.64)
Female	0.24	0.30	0.25
	(0.72)	(0.64)	(0.64)
Constant	4.66***	1.71**	2.00**
	(0.73)	(0.66)	(0.66)
Observations	11815	11807	11807
Country fixed effects	✓	✓	✓

Standard errors in parentheses

Reference category for Education is primary and lower secondary

Reference category for Sex is other

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table C.4 OLS estimation to examine influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for protection against hate speech

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Is a minority	0.47***	0.54***	0.20
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.12)
Like/dislike randomly assigned group		2.30***	2.17***
		(0.05)	(0.07)
Is a minority X Like/dislike randomly assigned group			0.31**
			(0.10)
Upper secondary education	0.22**	0.36***	0.37***
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Tertiary education	0.41***	0.44***	0.44***
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Age	0.01	0.05	0.05
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Male	-1.01	-1.07	-1.05
	(0.66)	(0.61)	(0.61)
Female	-0.38	-0.59	-0.57
	(0.66)	(0.61)	(0.61)
Constant	5.82***	3.28***	3.39***
	(0.67)	(0.63)	(0.63)
Observations	11822	11814	11814
Country fixed effects	✓	✓	✓

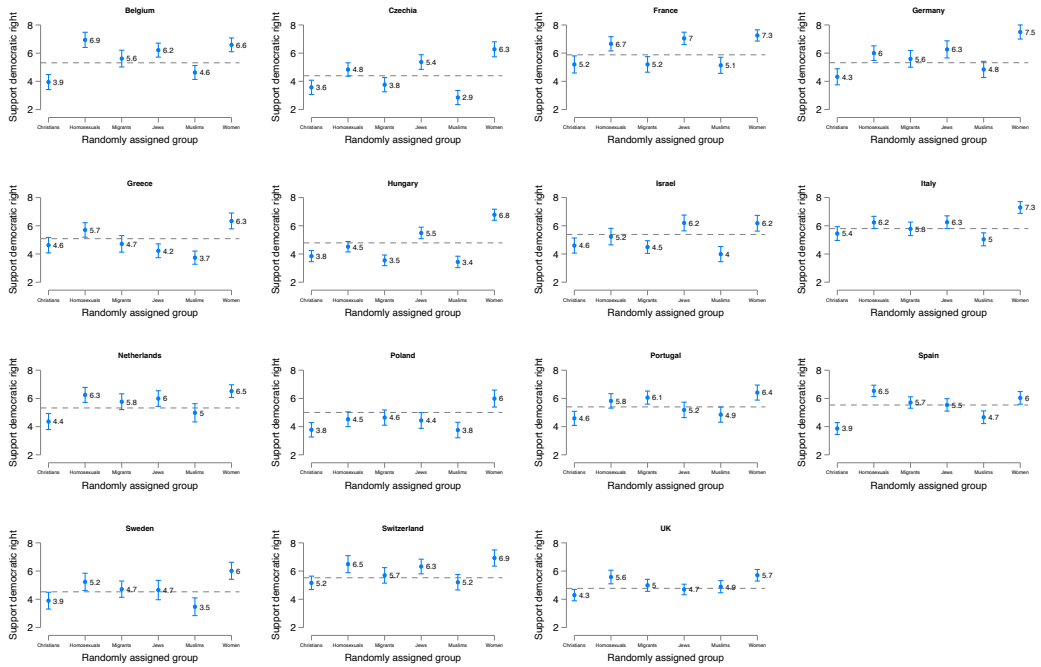
Standard errors in parentheses

Reference category for Education is primary and lower secondary

Reference category for Sex is other

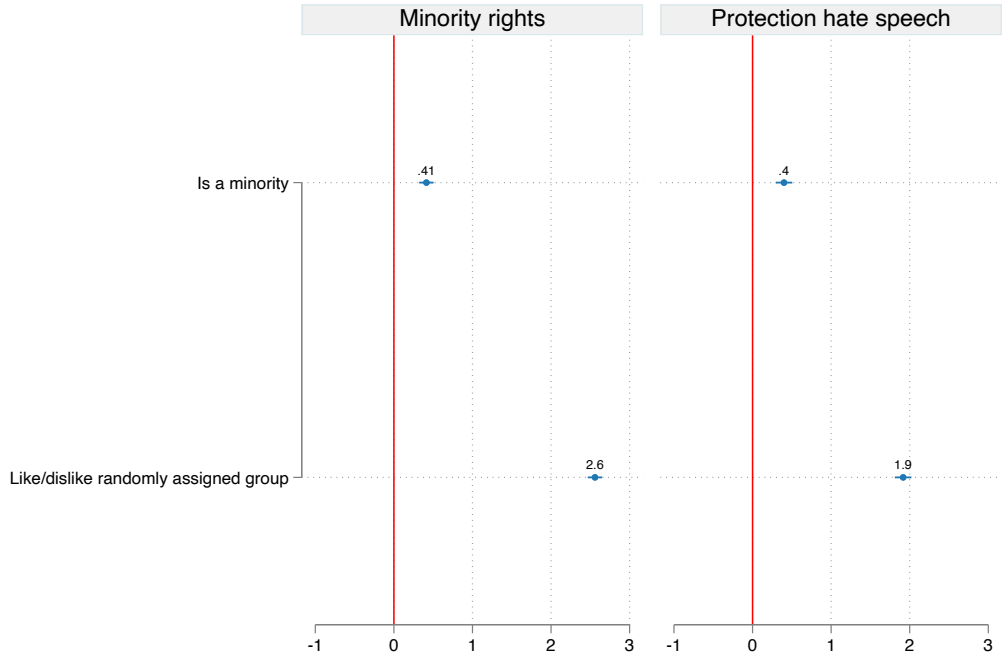
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Figure C.9 Average support for protection against hate speech by group randomly assigned to and democratic right



Note: Dashed horizontal line represents average abstract support for the protection against hate speech in each country. That is, the support for the same right when asked in the abstract and not related to a particular group. Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals around the mean for each subgroup.

Figure C.10 Influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for specific realizations of democratic rights using affect towards feminists



Note: OLS estimations based on model 3 of Table C.3 and model 3 of Table C.5. Coefficient for "Like/dislike randomly assigned group" represents a change in two standard deviations in the variable measuring the like/dislike score of the group randomly assigned to. All models include education, sex and age, as additional covariates, as well as country fixed-effects. Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals.

Conditionality using like feminists instead of women

Table C.5 OLS estimation to examine influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for protection against hate speech using affect towards feminists

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Is a minority	0.47***	0.40***	-0.16
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.12)
Like/dislike randomly assigned group		1.92***	1.67***
		(0.05)	(0.07)
Is a minority X Like/dislike randomly assigned group			0.56***
			(0.11)
Upper secondary education	0.22**	0.34***	0.35***
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Tertiary education	0.41***	0.42***	0.43***
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Age	0.01	0.05	0.06
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Male	-1.01	-0.87	-0.84
	(0.66)	(0.62)	(0.62)
Female	-0.38	-0.45	-0.42
	(0.66)	(0.62)	(0.62)
Constant	5.82***	3.74***	3.93***
	(0.67)	(0.64)	(0.64)
Observations	11823	11815	11815
Country fixed effects	✓	✓	✓

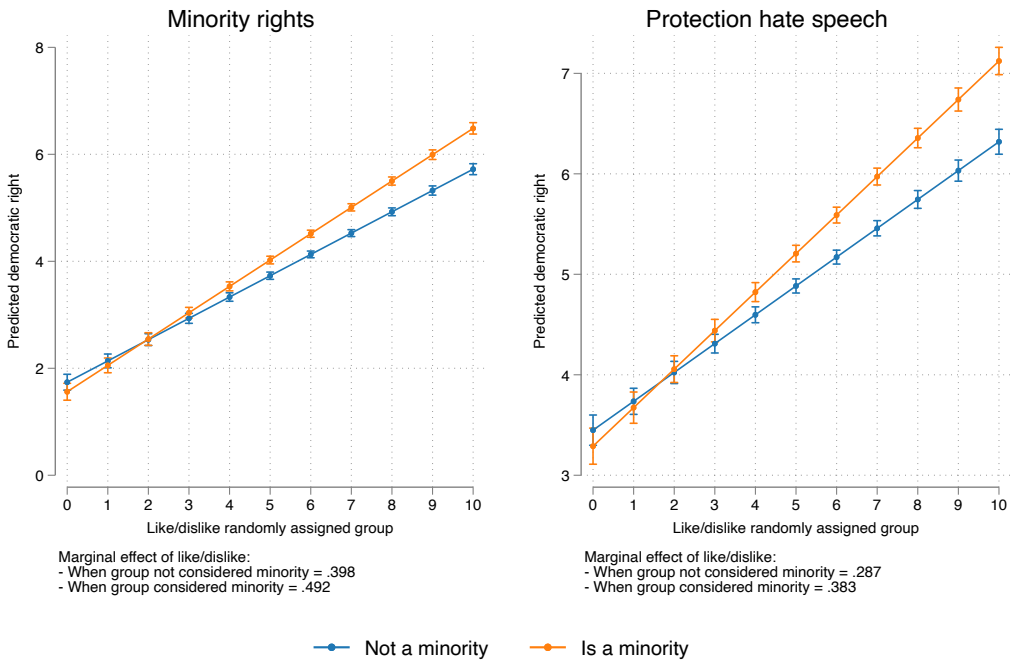
Standard errors in parentheses

Reference category for Education is primary and lower secondary

Reference category for Sex is other

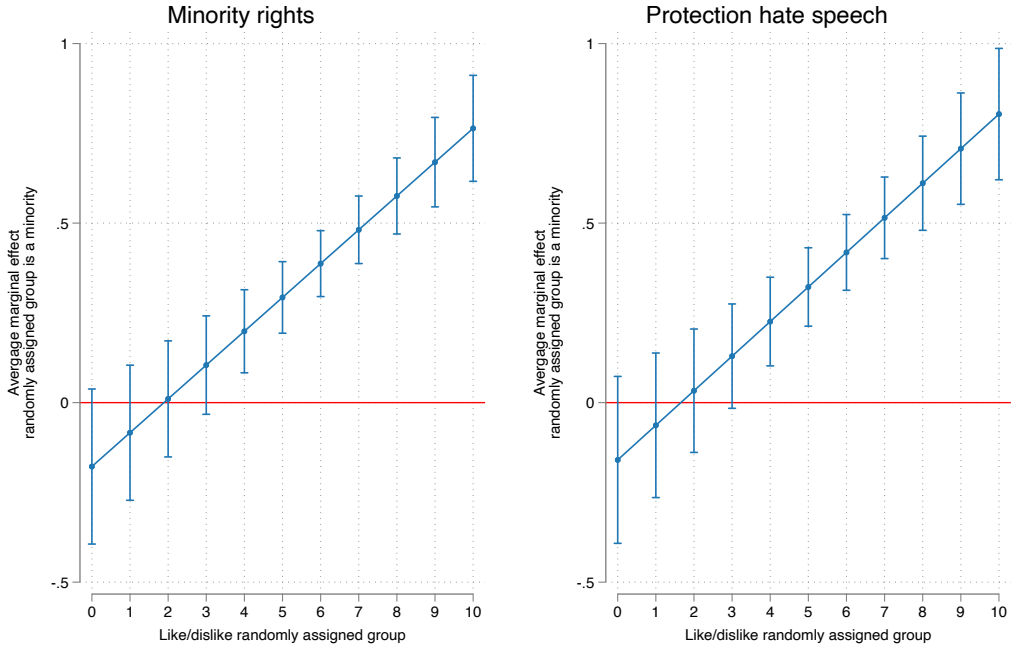
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Figure C.11 Average linear prediction of support for each specific democratic right by like/dislike and minority status of groups the right is randomly linked to using affect towards feminists



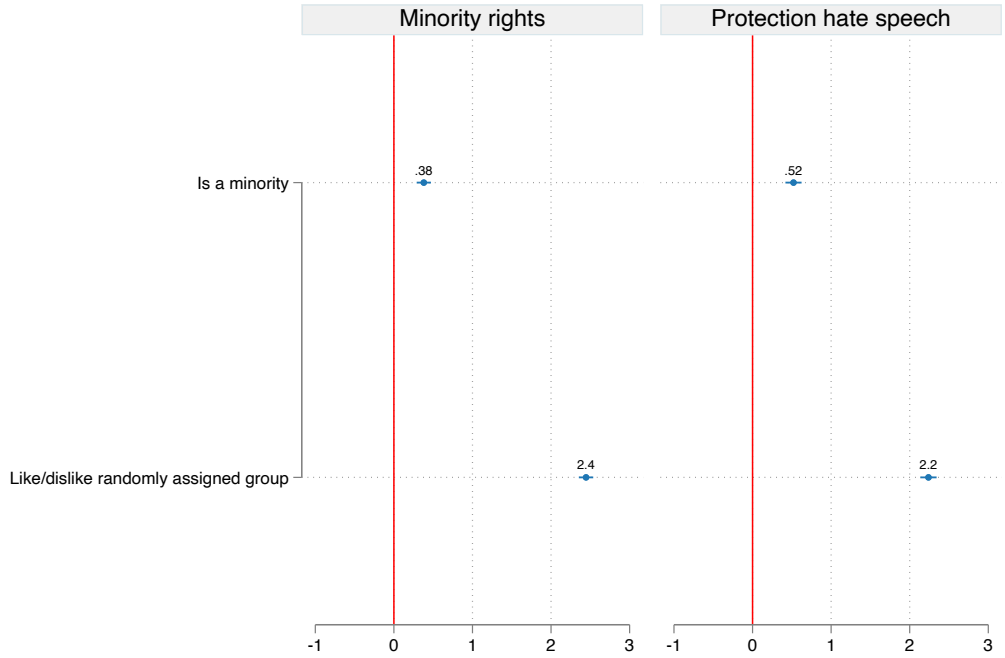
Note: OLS estimations based on model 3 of Table C.3 and model 3 of Table C.5. All models include education, sex, age, as well as country fixed-effects. Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals.

Figure C.12 Marginal effect of considering a group a minority on support for democratic rights by like/dislike of that group using affect towards feminists



Note: OLS estimations based on model 3 of Table C.3 and model 3 of Table C.5. All models include education, sex, age, as well as country fixed-effects. Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals.

Figure C.13 Influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for specific realizations of democratic rights with additional controls



Note: OLS estimations based on model 3 of Table C.6, Table C.7, summarized in Appendix C. Coefficient for "Like/dislike randomly assigned group" represents a change in two standard deviations in the variable measuring the like/dislike score of the group randomly assigned to. All models include education, sex, age, political knowledge, political interest, support for democracy, and the importance of fundamental rights as additional covariates, as well as country fixed-effects. Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals.

Conditionality controlling for correlates of volatility

Table C.6 OLS estimation to examine influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for minority rights controlling for correlates of volatility

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Is a minority	0.37***	0.38***	-0.20
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.11)
Like/dislike randomly assigned group		2.45***	2.19***
		(0.05)	(0.06)
Is a minority X Like/dislike randomly assigned group			0.53***
			(0.09)
Upper secondary education	0.08	0.15*	0.16*
	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Tertiary education	0.18*	0.23**	0.23**
	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Age	-0.38***	-0.34***	-0.33***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Male	0.23	0.41	0.36
	(0.71)	(0.64)	(0.64)
Female	0.62	0.53	0.47
	(0.71)	(0.64)	(0.64)
Political knowledge	-0.05	-0.13*	-0.13*
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Political interest	0.19***	0.10*	0.10*
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Support for democracy	0.68***	0.45***	0.44***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Importance fundamental rights	0.76***	0.47***	0.47***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Constant	2.51***	0.51	0.80
	(0.73)	(0.66)	(0.66)
Observations	11815	11807	11807
Country fixed effects	✓	✓	✓

Standard errors in parentheses

Reference category for Education is primary education

Reference category for Sex is other

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table C.7 OLS estimation to examine influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for protection against hate speech controlling for correlates of volatility

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Is a minority	0.44***	0.52***	0.21
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.12)
Like/dislike randomly assigned group		2.24***	2.11***
		(0.05)	(0.07)
Is a minority X Like/dislike randomly assigned group			0.30**
			(0.10)
Upper secondary education	0.09	0.29***	0.29***
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Tertiary education	0.17	0.31***	0.31***
	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Age	-0.02	0.05	0.05
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Male	-0.77	-0.92	-0.90
	(0.65)	(0.61)	(0.61)
Female	-0.14	-0.45	-0.44
	(0.65)	(0.61)	(0.61)
Political knowledge	-0.15*	-0.21***	-0.21***
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Political interest	0.12*	0.05	0.05
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Support for democracy	0.63***	0.45***	0.45***
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Importance fundamental rights	0.43***	0.19***	0.19***
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Constant	4.28***	2.44***	2.55***
	(0.68)	(0.63)	(0.63)
Observations	11822	11814	11814
Country fixed effects	✓	✓	✓

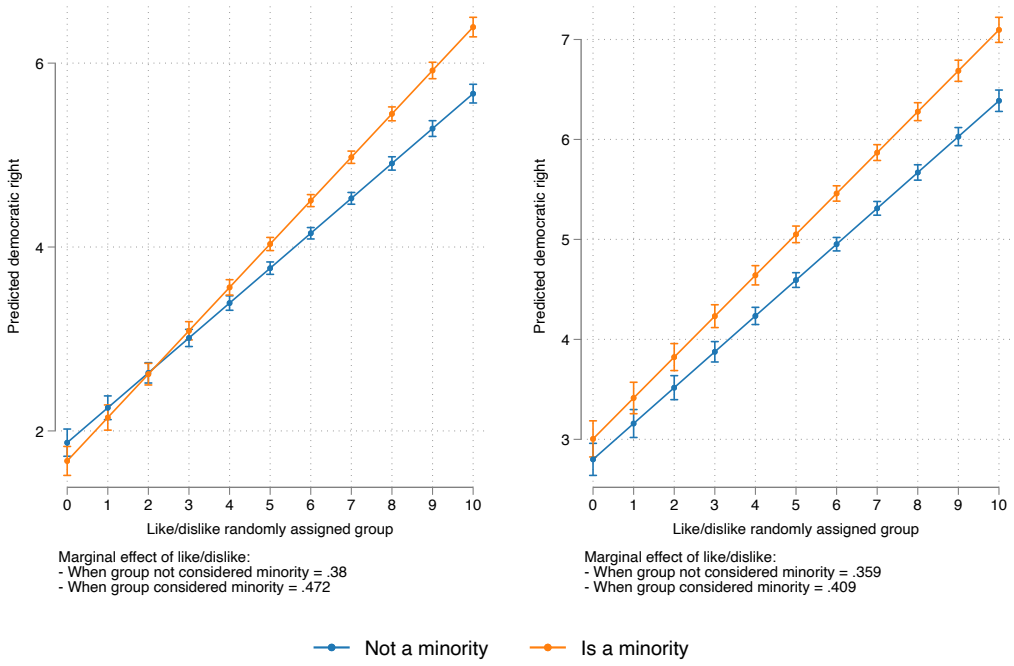
Standard errors in parentheses

Reference category for Education is primary education

Reference category for Sex is other

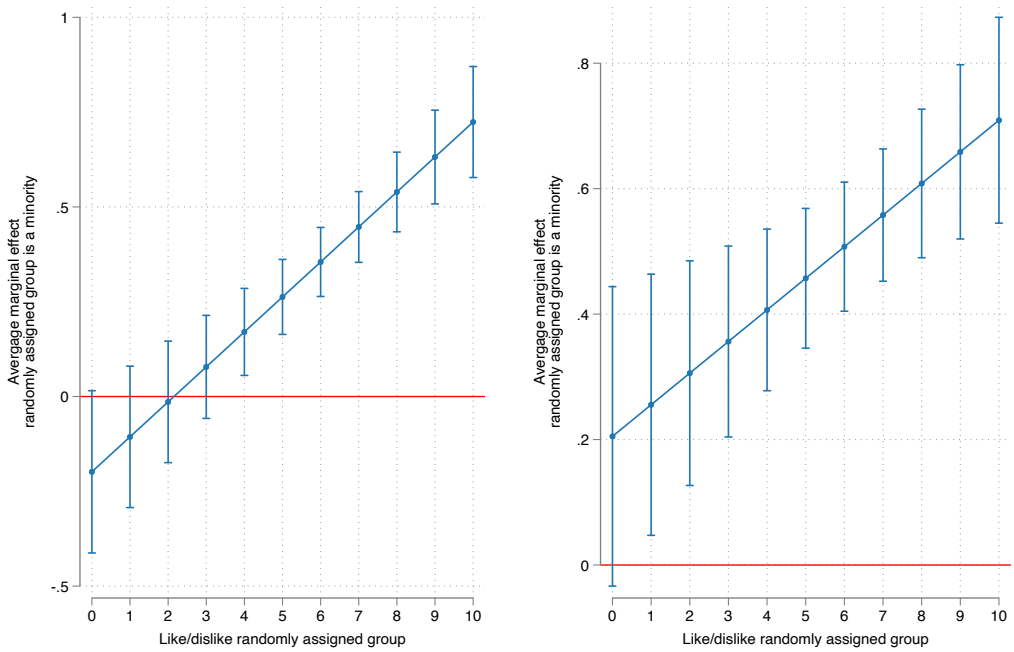
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Figure C.14 Average linear prediction of support for each specific democratic right by like/dislike and minority status of groups the right is randomly linked to including additional controls



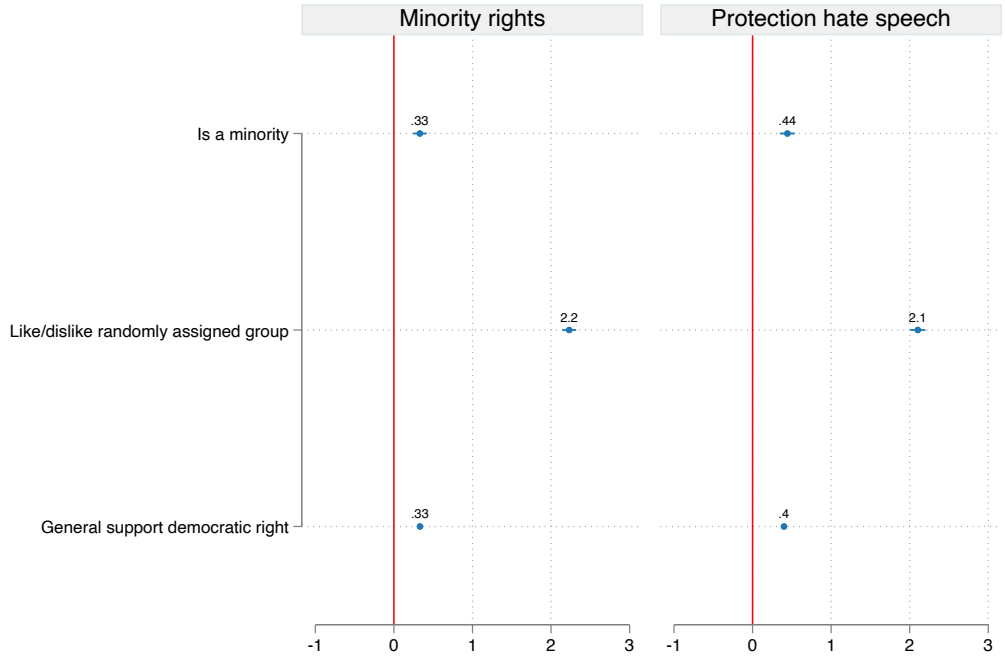
Note: OLS estimations based on model 3 of Table C.6, Table C.7, summarized in Appendix C. All models include education, sex, age, political knowledge, political interest, support for democracy, and the importance of fundamental rights as additional covariates, as well as country fixed-effects. Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals.

Figure C.15 Marginal effect of considering a group a minority on support for democratic rights by like/dislike of that group including additional controls.



Note: OLS estimations based on model 3 of Table C.6, Table C.7, summarized in Appendix C. All models include education, sex, age, political knowledge, political interest, support for democracy, and the importance of fundamental rights as additional covariates, as well as country fixed-effects. Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals.

Figure C.16 Influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for specific realizations of democratic rights with additional controls + general support



Note: OLS estimations based on model 3 of Table C.8, Table C.9, summarized in Appendix C. Coefficient for "Like/dislike randomly assigned group" represents a change in two standard deviations in the variable measuring the like/dislike score of the group randomly assigned to. All models include education, sex, age, political knowledge, political interest, support for democracy, the importance of fundamental rights and general support for democratic rights as additional covariates, as well as country fixed-effects. Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals. Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals.

Conditionality controlling for correlates of volatility + General support

Table C.8 OLS estimation to examine influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for minority rights controlling for correlates of volatility + general support

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Is a minority	0.31***	0.33***	-0.15
	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.10)
Like/dislike randomly assigned group		2.23***	2.02***
		(0.05)	(0.06)
Is a minority X Like/dislike randomly assigned group			0.45***
			(0.09)
Upper secondary education	0.10	0.16*	0.17**
	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Tertiary education	0.12	0.17*	0.18**
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Age	-0.26***	-0.24***	-0.23***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Male	0.65	0.74	0.70
	(0.67)	(0.61)	(0.61)
Female	0.91	0.78	0.74
	(0.67)	(0.61)	(0.61)
Political knowledge	0.01	-0.07	-0.07
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Political interest	0.13*	0.06	0.06
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Support for democracy	0.46***	0.29***	0.28***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Importance fundamental rights	0.42***	0.21***	0.21***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
General support democratic right	0.40***	0.33***	0.33***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Constant	0.97	-0.60	-0.35
	(0.69)	(0.63)	(0.63)
Observations	11815	11807	11807
Country fixed effects	✓	✓	✓

Standard errors in parentheses
Reference category for Education is primary education
Reference category for Sex is other
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table C.9 OLS estimation to examine influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for protection against hate speech controlling for correlates of volatility + general support

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Is a minority	0.36***	0.44***	0.22*
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.11)
Like/dislike randomly assigned group		2.10***	2.01***
		(0.05)	(0.06)
Is a minority X Like/dislike randomly assigned group			0.21*
			(0.10)
Upper secondary education	0.03	0.22**	0.22**
	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Tertiary education	0.06	0.20**	0.20**
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Age	-0.11*	-0.04	-0.04
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Male	-0.26	-0.42	-0.41
	(0.61)	(0.56)	(0.56)
Female	0.16	-0.15	-0.14
	(0.60)	(0.56)	(0.56)
Political knowledge	-0.08	-0.14**	-0.14**
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Political interest	0.13*	0.06	0.06
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Support for democracy	0.37***	0.22***	0.22***
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Importance fundamental rights	0.31***	0.09	0.08
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
General support democratic right	0.42***	0.40***	0.40***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Constant	2.33***	0.71	0.79
	(0.63)	(0.59)	(0.59)
Observations	11822	11814	11814
Country fixed effects	✓	✓	✓

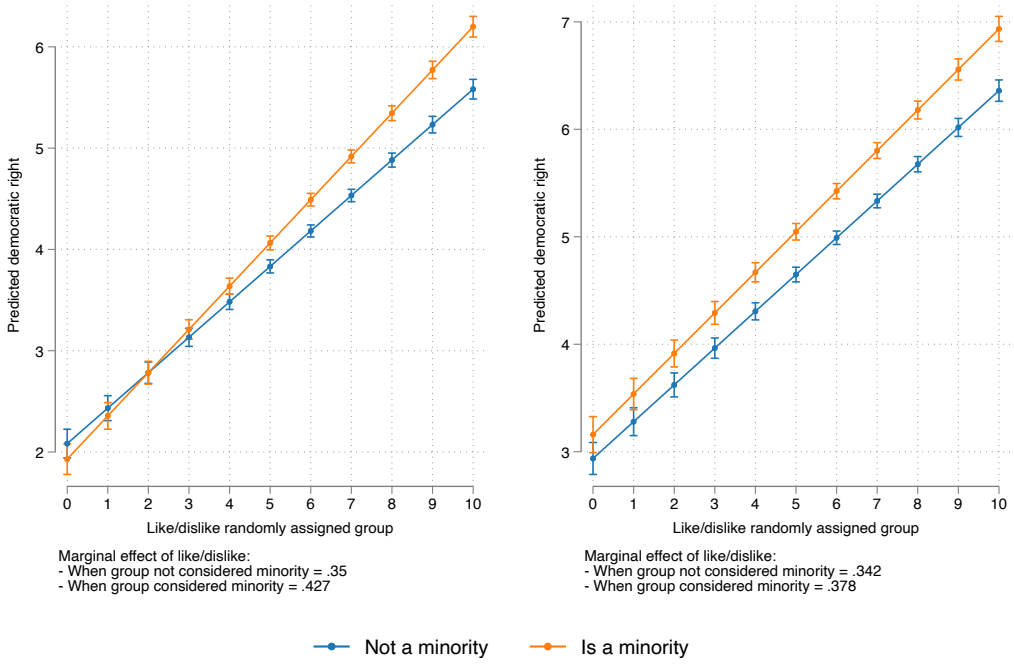
Standard errors in parentheses

Reference category for Education is primary education

Reference category for Sex is other

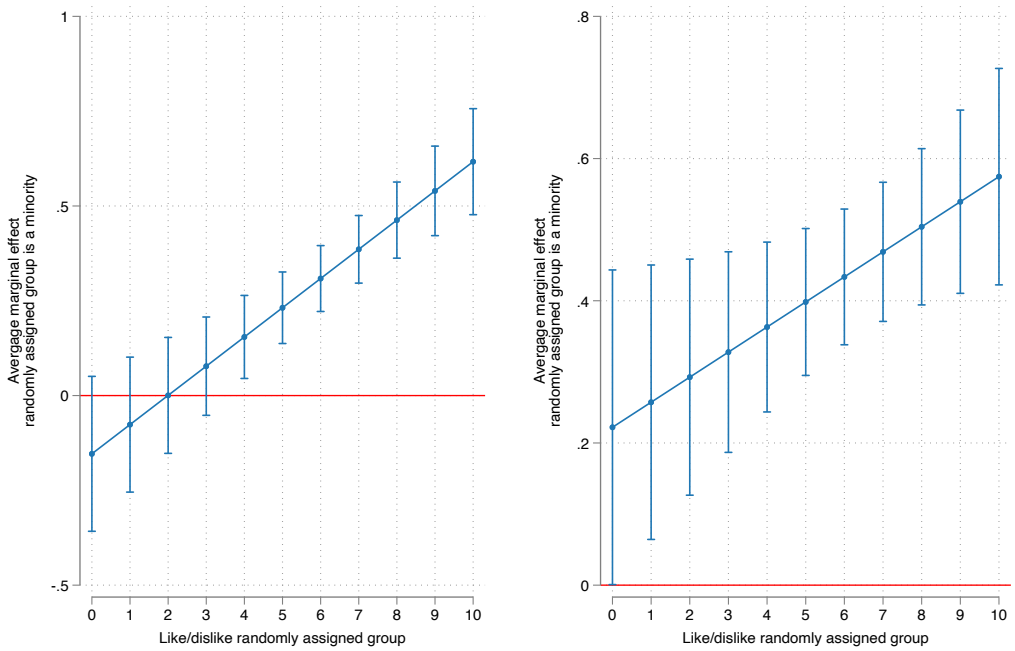
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Figure C.17 Average linear prediction of support for each specific democratic right by like/dislike and minority status of groups the right is randomly linked to including additional controls + general support



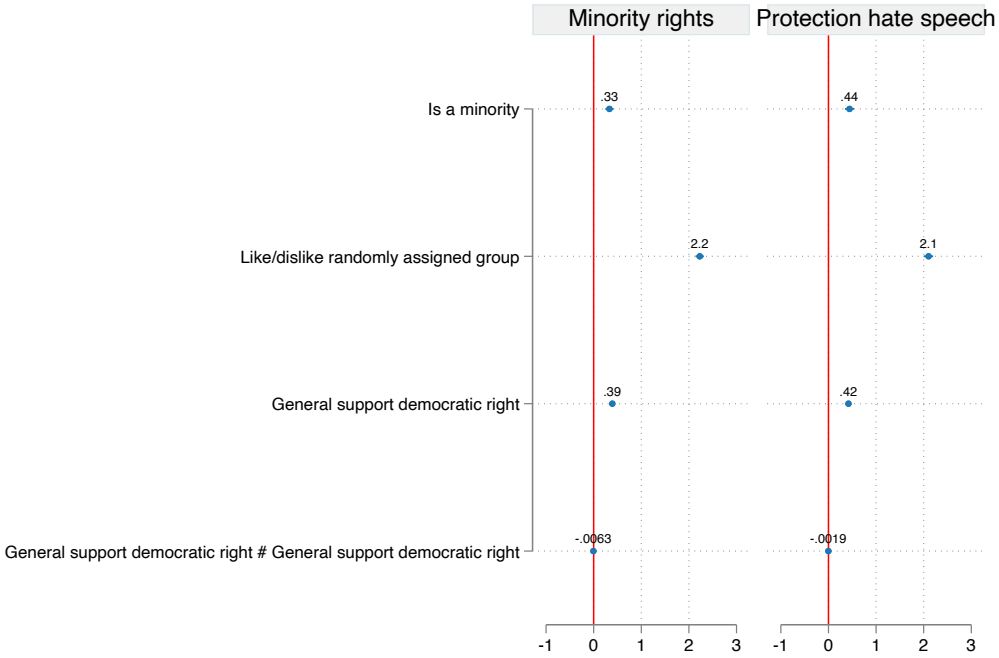
Note: OLS estimations based on model 3 of Table C.8, Table C.9, summarized in Appendix C. All models include education, sex, age, political knowledge, political interest, support for democracy, the importance of fundamental rights and general support for democratic rights as additional covariates, as well as country fixed-effects. Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals.

Figure C.18 Marginal effect of considering a group a minority on support for democratic rights by like/dislike of that group including additional controls+ general support



Note: OLS estimations based on model 3 of Table C.8, Table C.9, summarized in Appendix C. All models include education, sex, age, political knowledge, political interest, support for democracy, the importance of fundamental rights and general support for democratic rights as additional covariates, as well as country fixed-effects. Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals. Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals.

Figure C.19 Influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for specific realizations of democratic rights with additional controls + general support squared



Note: OLS estimations based on model 3 of Table C.10, Table C.11, summarized in Appendix C. Coefficient for "Like/dislike randomly assigned group" represents a change in two standard deviations in the variable measuring the like/dislike score of the group randomly assigned to. All models include education, sex, age, political knowledge, political interest, support for democracy, and the importance of fundamental rights, general support and general support squared as additional covariates, as well as country fixed-effects. Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals.

Conditionality controlling for correlates of volatility + General support squared

Table C.10 OLS estimation to examine influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for minority rights controlling for correlates of volatility + general support squared

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Is a minority	0.32***	0.33***	-0.16
	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.10)
Like/dislike randomly assigned group		2.23***	2.02***
		(0.05)	(0.06)
Is a minority X Like/dislike randomly assigned group			0.45***
			(0.09)
Upper secondary education	0.10	0.16*	0.17*
	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Tertiary education	0.12	0.17*	0.18**
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Age	-0.26***	-0.24***	-0.23***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Male	0.57	0.69	0.65
	(0.67)	(0.61)	(0.61)
Female	0.83	0.73	0.69
	(0.67)	(0.61)	(0.61)
Political knowledge	0.01	-0.07	-0.07
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Political interest	0.14*	0.06	0.06
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Support for democracy	0.46***	0.29***	0.29***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Importance fundamental rights	0.41***	0.21***	0.21***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
General support democratic right	0.50***	0.39***	0.39***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
General support democratic right X General support democratic right	-0.01***	-0.01*	-0.01*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Constant	0.85	-0.67	-0.42
	(0.69)	(0.63)	(0.63)
Observations	11815	11807	11807
Country fixed effects	✓	✓	✓

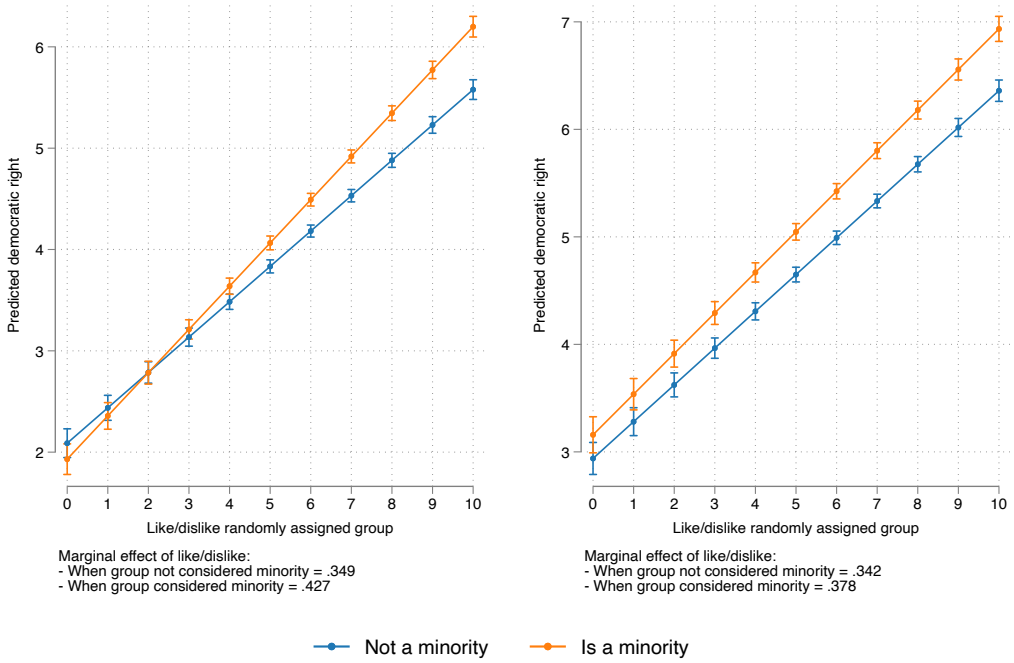
Standard errors in parentheses
Reference category for Education is primary education
Reference category for Sex is other
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table C.11 OLS estimation to examine influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for protection against hate speech controlling for correlates of volatility + general support squared

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Is a minority	0.36***	0.44***	0.22
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.11)
Like/dislike randomly assigned group		2.10***	2.01***
		(0.05)	(0.06)
Is a minority X Like/dislike randomly assigned group			0.21*
			(0.10)
Upper secondary education	0.03	0.22**	0.22**
	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Tertiary education	0.06	0.20**	0.20**
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Age	-0.11*	-0.04	-0.04
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Male	-0.28	-0.43	-0.42
	(0.61)	(0.56)	(0.56)
Female	0.14	-0.16	-0.15
	(0.60)	(0.56)	(0.56)
Political knowledge	-0.08	-0.14**	-0.14**
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Political interest	0.13*	0.06	0.06
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Support for democracy	0.37***	0.22***	0.22***
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Importance fundamental rights	0.31***	0.09	0.08
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
General support democratic right	0.47***	0.42***	0.42***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
General support democratic right X General support democratic right	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Constant	2.25***	0.67	0.75
	(0.63)	(0.59)	(0.59)
Observations	11822	11814	11814
Country fixed effects	✓	✓	✓

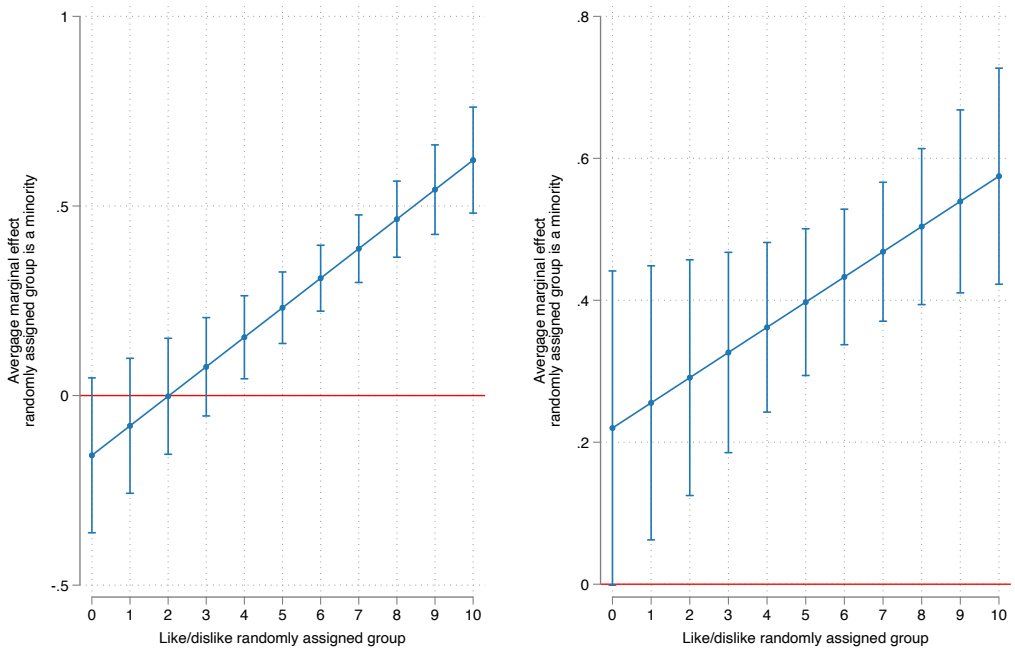
Standard errors in parentheses
Reference category for Education is primary education
Reference category for Sex is other
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Figure C.20 Average linear prediction of support for each specific democratic right by like/dislike and minority status of groups the right is randomly linked to including additional controls + general support squared



Note: OLS estimations based on model 3 of Table C.10, Table C.11, summarized in Appendix C. All models include education, sex, age, political knowledge, political interest, support for democracy, and the importance of fundamental rights, general support and general support squared as additional covariates, as well as country fixed-effects. Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals.

Figure C.21 Marginal effect of considering a group a minority on support for democratic rights by like/dislike of that group including additional controls+ general support squared



Note: OLS estimations based on model 3 of Table C.10, Table C.11, summarized in **??**. All models include education, sex, age, political knowledge, political interest, support for democracy, and the importance of fundamental rights, general support and general support squared as additional covariates, as well as country fixed-effects. Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals.

C.2 Historical cultural minorities

We define 'Historical Cultural Minorities' (HCMs) as individuals with long-standing cultural traditions and identities that unite them and distinguish them from the cultural majority of their nation-state. Unlike modern immigrants, they predate the current border delineation of their nation-state and have, in many instances, advocated for greater cultural protection or political autonomy. The notion of historical cultural minorities was inspired by what the literature sometimes refers to as 'old,' 'traditional' or 'historical' minorities (Kymlicka, 1995, 2000; Simon, 1993). Historical cultural minorities are adapted to each country and include, for instance, Catalans in Spain and Scots in England. See Table C.12 below for the historical cultural minority pertaining to each country in our survey).

Table C.12 Historical cultural minority per country

Country	Historical cultural minority
Germany	East Germans
Italy	Sardinians
Portugal	Azoreans
Israel	Druze
Netherlands	Frisians
Czech Republic	Silesians
Sweden	Sami
Hungary	Swabians (Germans)
Switzerland	Romansch
France	Corsicans
Belgium	Belgian German-Speakers
Greece	Pomaks
Poland	Silesians
UK	Scots
Spain	Catalans

C.3 Deviations from pre-registration

Deviation log

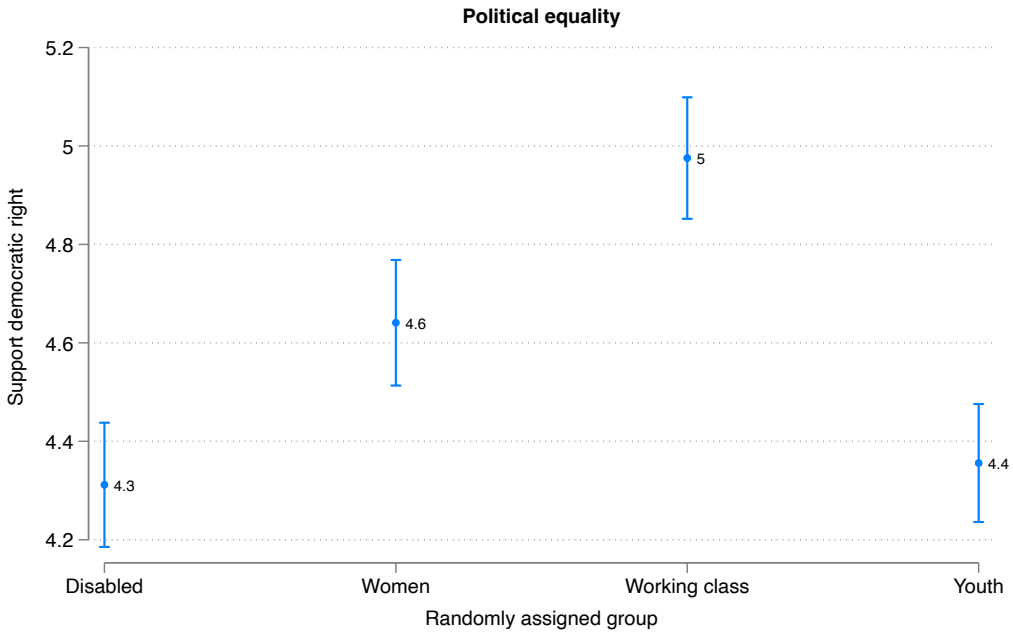
In the pre-registration we had communicated our original intention of investigating conditionality by analyzing specific commitment protecting rights, protection from hate speech and representation via quotas. In the paper we ultimately opted to focus only on protecting rights and protecting people from hate speech, leaving commitment to representation via quotas for reasons related to consistency across degrees of abstraction. The table below shows the specific groups we had originally planned on using to evaluate commitment to representation via quotas.

Analyses from Preregistration

Table C.13 Specific groups intended to be used for the specified item of representation via quotas

Representation via quotas
Women
The youth
The working class
People with disabilities

Figure C.22 Average support for specific realizations of representation via quotas by randomly assigned group



Note: Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals around the mean for each subgroup.

Table C.14 OLS estimation to examine influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for promotiong of political equality through quotas

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Is a minority	0.53***	0.53***	0.25
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.25)
Like/dislike randomly assigned group		0.73***	0.68***
		(0.06)	(0.08)
Is a minority X Like/dislike randomly assigned group			0.15
			(0.13)
Upper secondary education	0.10	0.11	0.11
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Tertiary education	-0.47***	-0.46***	-0.46***
	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Age	-0.32***	-0.36***	-0.36***
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Male	-0.53	-0.65	-0.65
	(0.80)	(0.80)	(0.80)
Female	0.43	0.28	0.29
	(0.80)	(0.80)	(0.80)
Constant	4.84***	3.66***	3.75***
	(0.82)	(0.82)	(0.83)
Observations	9416	9414	9414
Country fixed effects	✓	✓	✓

Standard errors in parentheses

Reference category for Education is primary and lower secondary

Reference category for Sex is other

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table C.15 OLS estimation to examine influence of value- and affect-laden considerations on support for representations via quotas controlling for correlates of volatility

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Is a minority	0.53***	0.52***	0.26
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.25)
Like/dislike randomly assigned group		0.81***	0.76***
		(0.06)	(0.08)
Is a minority X Like/dislike randomly assigned group			0.14
			(0.13)
Upper secondary education	0.18	0.21*	0.21*
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Tertiary education	-0.29**	-0.23*	-0.23*
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
Age	-0.15*	-0.18**	-0.17**
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Male	-0.43	-0.58	-0.57
	(0.80)	(0.79)	(0.79)
Female	0.40	0.19	0.20
	(0.80)	(0.79)	(0.79)
Political knowledge	-0.56***	-0.58***	-0.58***
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Political interest	-0.22**	-0.28***	-0.28***
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Support for democracy	-0.11	-0.19**	-0.19**
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Importance fundamental rights	0.17**	0.12	0.12
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Constant	5.18***	4.14***	4.22***
	(0.83)	(0.83)	(0.83)
Observations	9416	9414	9414
Country fixed effects	✓	✓	✓

Standard errors in parentheses

Reference category for Education is primary education

Reference category for Sex is other

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

5

Study IV
Normalizing illiberalism: How perceived public consensus erodes support for minority rights

5.1 Introduction

Democratic decline continues to trouble several countries around the world (Haggard & Kaufman, 2021; Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019). While much of the research on democratic backsliding has focused on executive aggrandizement (e.g., Bermeo, 2016; Svolik, 2015), many of these episodes are driven by illiberal actors who appear equally intent on eroding the rights and freedoms of immigrants and other minorities as they are on consolidating their power (Bernhard, 2021; Bichay, 2024; Haggard & Kaufman, 2021; Svolik et al., 2023).[1] Despite the fact that the socio-political inclusion of minorities and the protection of their rights are core democratic principles that are increasingly under attack (Merkel, 2004; OHCHR, 2010; Rovny, 2024; Young, 2000), relatively little attention has been paid to understanding whether citizens are willing to defend these principles when they come under pressure.[2]

Traditionally, a robust civic culture in which citizens are committed to democratic principles has been considered the best defense against illiberal actors and their intolerant policies (e.g., Almond & Verba, 1963; Easton, 1965). As such, much of the literature on attitudes toward immigrants and minorities has focused on identifying factors that explain variation in support for these rights (Bremmer, 1994; L. J. Diamond, 1995; Hechter, 1978; Kokkonen & Linde, 2021; Sullivan et al., 1981). Despite some differences, citizens appear broadly supportive of protecting minority rights (Ferrín & Kriesi,

[1] See Montague, 2025 and Primecz and Pelyhe, 2024 for recent examples from the US and Hungary.
[2] See Valentim, 2024b for a relevant exception.

2016; Hernández, 2025). Taken together, these findings offer limited insight into why citizens often fail to resist efforts to erode minority rights.

Departing from research showing that political attitudes are often weakly structured and responsive to contextual information (Converse, 1962; Lippmann, 1922; Zaller, 1992), I argue that citizens' support for complex and abstract liberal-democratic principles, such as minority-rights protection, can shift in response to external cues. If such cues cause adjustments in support for minority rights in the same direction across large segments of the population, the citizenry as a whole may become more or less tolerant of efforts to undermine these rights. This may help explain why citizens tolerate illiberal behavior in some contexts while resisting it in others (as per Dahl, 1971; Schmitter & Karl, 1991).

I adapt two theories of public-opinion formation to explain how external cues may shift citizens' commitment to protecting minorities. A thermostatic model would suggest a negative-feedback mechanism whereby citizens become more supportive of minority rights following an erosion of these rights, while becoming less supportive following their reinforcement (Claassen, 2018; Wlezien, 1995). Conversely, a norm-based model would suggest a positive-feedback mechanism whereby a cue signaling that the general public is not particularly supportive of protecting minority rights causes a decrease in individuals' support for this principle. Alternatively, if the cue signals that public support is high, individuals' endorsement of this principle should strengthen. In either case, the norm-based model proposes that a desire to conform drives individuals to update their support for minority-rights protection so that it more closely aligns with perceived public consensus.

To empirically adjudicate between these two models, I run a priming vignette experiment embedded in an online survey fielded in Switzerland that leverages referenda as a methodological tool to simultaneously manipulate perceived levels of minority-rights protection and prime respondents' perceptions of public consensus on minority rights. The results provide support for the norm-based model. Referenda that diminish minority rights significantly decrease respondents' support for minority rights. The effect, however, is asymmetrical. Referenda that improve minority rights have no effect on support for this principle. To probe the robustness of these findings, I investigate potential heterogeneous effects based on respondents' initial support for protecting minority rights, party affiliation, self-identified minority status, and affect toward the groups affected by each referendum. The

results show that respondents consistently decrease their support for minority rights in the negative treatment, regardless of differences along these dimensions.

Taken together, the findings of this study suggest that citizens' commitment to key liberal principles is responsive to external cues. A cue indicative of majoritarian support for reducing minority-rights protection leads individuals to decrease their support for this principle. On the one hand, those who were less supportive of minority rights to begin with appear to appear to double down on their opposition to minority-rights protection following the validation of public consensus. On the other hand, those who were more supportive of minority rights to begin with recalibrate their support for this principle to more closely align with the rest of society. Thus, citizens' instinct to conform may be stronger than their commitment to democratic principles. The fact that these dynamics operate only in the downward direction reveals the possibility of a self-reinforcing loop whereby an elite-initiated erosion of minority rights under the pretense of public consensus can reduce citizens' support for minority rights, which in turn facilitates further erosion of these rights. If this is the case, citizens may not merely be unreliable safeguards against liberal erosion; they may also become complicit in it.

5.2 Theory

5.2.1 Public opinion & minority rights

There are several prominent models of public-opinion formation. For instance, the classic rational-choice model is based on the premise that citizens are self-interested actors seeking to maximize utility and benefits (Downs, 1957). Public opinion thus reflects what lies in the interests of the majority of citizens. The deliberative model refines this mechanism by proposing that citizens engage in rational deliberation as a way of finding middle ground among different interests (Habermas et al., 1992, 2015). Public opinion thereby reflects a collectively reasoned compromise among competing interests. However, critics of such models argue that they oversimplify reality while overestimating citizens' political sophistication, willingness to deliberate, and capacity to make judicious judgments regarding complex political phenomena (Achen & Bartels, 2017; Caplan, 2011).

Other models focus more explicitly on the role of cues as heuristics for opinion formation. For one, the Michigan model, which emerged as a rejection of the rational-choice model, argues that party identification anchors political attitudes such that citizens' positions on policy issues are strongly shaped by partisan attachments and the cues associated with them. are (Campbell et al., 1980). Complementing this model, Converse, 1962, 1964 argues that citizens' ideological preferences are informed by their belief systems—cognitive configurations about the world that influence which cues citizens notice and how they respond to them. Cue-taking from political elites and the media is also central to the RAS (Receive-Accept-Sample) model (Zaller, 1992), as well as to agenda-setting models (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

When it comes specifically to citizens' attitudes toward minorities and their rights, existing research has extensively examined what has been referred to as the "primary ingredients" of public opinion (Kinder, 1998; Leeper & Slothuus, 2014). These attitudinal predispositions include psychological factors such as worldviews and ideological orientations (e.g., (Evans & Need, 2002; Kokkonen & Linde, 2021; McIntosh et al., 1995; Scheepers, 2002)). Other explanations focus on threats (real or perceived) and competition between groups, in line with rational-choice accounts (Bremmer, 1994; LeVine & Campbell, 1972; Quillian, 1995; Sullivan et al., 1981).

However, as McGraw, 2000 and Leeper and Slothuus, 2014 suggest, predispositions and the factors that shape them may account for only part of the story. Citizens do not form political opinions in a vacuum but rather within a complex political environment. As such, predispositions make citizens more or less inclined to hold a given position, but the exact position they take on a particular issue is also influenced by contextual factors.

Contextual factors such as cues are likely to be particularly important when it comes to complex political phenomena, as they offer shortcuts to opinion formation that sidestep the cognitive burden of reasoning and deliberation. As Fiske and Taylor, 1984 argue, citizens are cognitive misers who try to "save" on cognitive costs whenever possible. The notion that cues may pull or push opinion in different directions may help explain why citizens' orientations toward complex political phenomena often display inconsistency (Converse, 1962; Lippmann, 1922; Zaller, 1992). When cues systematically pull opinion in one direction across large segments of the public, the citizenry can be thought of as marching together in the same liberal or conservative direction, citizens can be thought of as march-

ing together in the same liberal or conservative direction, producing what Stimson, 1991 describes as changes in "policy mood."

Given that minority-rights protection is an abstract democratic principle that is implemented in complex ways, support for this principle is likely influenced by contextual factors such as cues. Among these "secondary ingredients" of public opinion, existing studies have extensively examined the role of the media and political parties. As such, I shift attention to two other sources of influence: policy output and social norms.

5.2.2 Thermostatic-based model

Beginning with policy-output cues, Page and Shapiro, 1992 argue that one explanation for collective shifts in policy sentiment is that citizens adjust their preferences in response to observed policy outputs. This pattern has been observed in citizens' attitudes toward defense spending (Page & Shapiro, 1992), with the dominant explanation being the thermostatic model (Wlezien, 1995). The thermostatic model is based on the idea that the public adjusts its preferences for comparatively "more" or "less" policy implementation in response to what policymakers actually do (i.e., the amount and type of policies they implement).

Regardless of whether citizens possess fixed "ideal" levels of policy implementation, this model treats public preferences as a median position on the issue in question that moves in one direction or another, akin to the logic of the median-voter model. If the actual level of policy differs from the public's preferred level, voters signal a corresponding desire for policy change—either more or less policy. For instance, when it comes to government spending on defense, if the citizenry's preferred level exceeds the government's current level, citizens signal a desire for more spending. A responsive government should then increase spending to more closely approximate public preferences. If—or when—the government overshoots the electorate's preferred level of spending, voters signal a desire for less spending. In this way, the public behaves like a "thermostat," signaling its preferred policy "temperature" relative to the actual policy "temperature." Policy output thus serves as a cue that citizens use as a benchmark when forming political preferences.

Prior research has identified thermostatic dynamics across party-identification groups and sociodemographic characteristics (Soroka & Wlezien, 2010). Moreover, thermostatic effects have been

observed in Congressional and presidential elections in the United States (Bølstad, 2012; Erikson et al., 2001; Grossmann & Wlezien, 2024; Wlezien, 2017). Claassen, 2018 even applied this model to the relationship between support for democracy and the actual level of democracy in a country, ultimately concluding that when democracy is low, citizens express higher support for democracy, and vice versa. Somewhat in passing, Claassen, 2018 offers two theoretical explanations for this finding: either citizens experience autocratic nostalgia following a country's democratization, or they struggle to accept the "minoritarian" component of liberal democracy. Given that protecting the rights of minorities is a core "minoritarian" component of liberal democracy (Dahl, 1971), I directly build on this work. This extension is particularly relevant because minority-rights protection constitutes one of the core liberal-democratic dimensions examined by (Claassen et al., 2024).

I present two arguments for why thermostatic dynamics should apply to citizens' attitudes toward minority-rights protection. First, thermostatic dynamics seem to manifest when it is difficult for citizens to articulate absolute preferences regarding complex phenomena. For instance, it is cognitively demanding to form and articulate precise preferences for defense spending in dollars or as a percentage of GDP. Conversely, it is much easier to express preferences in relative terms (e.g., "more" or "less"). The same mechanism may to minority-rights protection. After all, this is an abstract democratic principle that is not easily translated into specific policies. As such, citizens are unlikely to possess clear preferences regarding the appropriate degree of protection. Instead, their preferences are likely to be relative to existing levels of protection.

Second, thermostatic dynamics seem to emerge in zero-sum contexts as a means of maintaining a state of equilibrium. Returning to the example of defense spending, the greater the share of the annual federal budget allocated to defense, the less funding remains available for other purposes (e.g., housing or education). If education suffers as a consequence of increased defense expenditure, support for defense spending may decrease in order to redirect resources elsewhere. Such negative-feedback dynamics are common in biological systems as a means of maintaining equilibrium (Cinquin & Demongeot, 2002; Khoo, 2018; Procopio et al., 2025; Sauro, 2017).

Analogously, liberal democracies may present quasi-zero-sum contexts characterized by tradeoffs between competing principles that require balancing. Namely, minority-rights protection may enter into tension with other democratic principles (e.g., popular sovereignty), such that the more one is

implemented, the less another can be implemented (L. Diamond & Morlino, 2005; Hidalgo, 2019; Lauth, 2016; Lauth & Schlenkrich, 2018). Nevertheless, these principles must remain in a state of equilibrium to maintain the integrity of the system as a whole (Arrow, 1985; Dahl, 1989). This may result in citizens' attitudes toward minority-rights protection exhibiting thermostatic dynamics.

If a thermostatic model applies to support for minority rights, we would expect an erosion of minority rights to lead to an increase in citizens' support for protecting minority rights. Conversely, we would expect the reinforcement of minority rights in a country to lead to a decrease in citizens' support for this principle. Accordingly, policy-output cues should generate corrective shifts in support for minority rights.

Before moving on, it should be acknowledged that the latter relationship may be partially driven (or reinforced) by a related mechanism pertaining to opinion backlash. Backlash refers to a reaction by members of dominant groups to challenges to their status that is driven by a desire to maintain existing power arrangements (Lipset & Raab, 1980; Sanbonmatsu, 2008). Backlash has been extensively studied in the context of disadvantaged groups (including minorities) making policy gains, albeit with mixed empirical findings (Anduiza & Rico, 2024; Bishin et al., 2016; Bratton, 2002; Fejes, 2008). If this mechanism were at play, we would also expect a negative-feedback dynamic whereby an increase in the degree to which minority rights are protected causes a decrease in support for minority-rights protection (at least among members of majority groups). In this case, the "equilibrium" in question is the status quo or existing power arrangement that majority-group members seek to preserve because it operates to their advantage. Conversely, minorities should become more supportive of minority-rights protection when those rights are eroded, following a similar pushback mechanism motivated by a desire to restore a more favorable status quo.

Before moving on, it is worth acknowledging that the relationship described above may also be partially driven by a related mechanism: opinion backlash. Backlash refers to reactions by members of dominant groups to perceived challenges to their status and existing power arrangements (Lipset & Raab, 1980; Sanbonmatsu, 2008). It has been extensively studied in the context of disadvantaged groups, including minorities, making policy gains, although empirical findings remain mixed (Anduiza & Rico, 2024; Bishin et al., 2016; Bratton, 2002; Fejes, 2008). If backlash were at play, increases in minority-rights protection could generate a decrease in support for these rights among members

of majority groups seeking to preserve the status quo. Importantly, although backlash and thermostatic dynamics may produce similar aggregate patterns, they imply different underlying motivations: the former is driven by the defense of existing status hierarchies, whereas the latter reflects a broader tendency to seek equilibrium.

5.2.3 Norm-based model

There is, however, another model that could explain how cues influence citizens' attitudes toward minority rights. Page and Shapiro, 1992 maintain that collective "policy sentiment" shifts could alternatively be characterized by the gradual emergence of social conformity as individuals' policy preferences coalesce around liberal or conservative positions. Such a mechanism would apply if support for minority rights were underpinned by a social norm.

A norm is typically defined as an informal rule (i.e., an "unwritten law") that individuals follow if and when they believe others follow it, others believe it *ought* to be followed, and others would disapprove of it not being followed (Bicchieri, 2017). In other words, norms represent what is typical or normal within a group or situation (Prentice & Miller, 1993). Some researchers follow Cialdini et al., 1990 and distinguish between descriptive norms (based on the prevalence of attitudes and behaviors) and prescriptive or injunctive norms (based on the perceived appropriateness or morality of attitudes and behaviors). Others argue that it is difficult to disentangle these interpretations in practice and instead distinguish between actual norms and perceived norms (Tankard & Paluck, 2016). The reason is that most individuals do not possess accurate information about the true prevalence of behaviors and opinions in their community, while judgments about morality are themselves socially constructed and contested. Consequently, it is individuals' subjective *perceptions* of norms that matter most for shaping attitudes and behavior.[3]

It is well established that humans comply with norms (Asch, 1955; Sherif, 1937). Even if individuals do not necessarily agree with a norm in private, they may still comply because deviating from a norm is liable to incur social sanctions (Fehr & Gächter, 2000, 2002; Griffith et al., 1956; Kuran, 1995). The mechanism underlying norm adherence (and sanction aversion) has been studied exten-

[3] Henceforth, I use the term "norms" for the sake of brevity, although what I am referring to is citizens' subjective perceptions of norms, unless explicitly stated otherwise.

sively by social psychologists.[4] This mechanism departs from the notion that human beings, as members of a gregarious species, have evolved a strong tendency to seek acceptance from their peers. This is because, in ancestral settings, those who were perceived as too different (i.e., abnormal) were more likely to be ostracized by their group, directly jeopardizing their survival and reproductive prospects (Armitage & Schwartz, 2000; Claidière & Whiten, 2012; Clark et al., 2019; Silk et al., 2003). To gain social approval and acceptance, individuals continuously observe those around them and adapt their opinions, revise their beliefs, or change their behavior to more closely align with others (Heckathorn, 1988; Van Kleef et al., 2015). Social influence and the compulsion to conform are so powerful that individuals have been found to provide clearly incorrect responses on perceptual tasks simply to align with a majority (Asch, 1955; Moscovici & Personnaz, 1980).

Norms influence a wide array of attitudes and behaviors, including healthy eating habits (Pedersen et al., 2015), alcohol consumption (Rimal & Real, 2005), and voting (Gerber et al., 2008). More recent scholarship has begun applying norm-based explanations to civic culture and support for democracy. Researchers have investigated norms that prescribe support for democratic government over autocratic alternatives (Bischof et al., 2024; Goldstein, 2022) and norms that proscribe support for political actors whose positions are at odds with liberal-democratic values (Valentim, 2024b). Changes in norm perceptions have even been implicated in major political developments such as the rise of the radical right in Europe (Valentim, 2024a).

However, norm perception and compliance are complex psychological phenomena that extend beyond simple observational learning and behavioral mimicry (Bandura, 1977; Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). This is because individuals do not interact with everyone in their community, nor are they likely to interact with every member of their community to the same degree. This limits their ability to perceive norms through direct observation. As such, individuals rely on cues to inform their perceptions of norms. Tankard and Paluck, 2016 argue that three cues are particularly relevant to norm perception. The first centers on the opinions and behaviors of individuals with a disproportionate influence on their social surroundings (i.e., social referents). The second consists of group summary information (e.g., statistics, reports, or marketing campaigns). The third pertains to institutions (e.g., court rulings or school curricula).

[4] See Asch, 1956; Freedman and Fraser, 1966; Milgram, 1973; Sherif, 1936, 1937 and Bandura, 1977 for seminal works in the discipline.

In line with this literature, norms may underpin citizens' support for specific liberal-democratic principles such as protecting the rights of minorities. Individuals may support minority rights because they believe that most others support this principle, particularly if they perceive such support as morally appropriate. However, perceptions of this norm may change if cues from social referents, group summary information, or institutions suggest that support for minority rights is lower than previously believed. In such a case, individuals who were privately less supportive of minority rights may become more willing to openly express previously concealed opposition to minority-rights protection (following Kuran, 1987, 1995). Meanwhile, those who are genuinely supportive of minority rights may moderate their expressed support in order to conform to perceived public consensus (Andreoni et al., 2021; Chierchia et al., 2020).

While norms have been implicated in a wide range of opinions and behaviors, there is a theoretical argument for why a norm-based model would apply specifically to attitudes toward minority-rights protection. Scholars generally agree that modern norms against Fascism and far-right ideologies emerged following the Second World War (Billig, 1991; Rydgren, 2005; Sniderman et al., 1991; Valentim, 2024a). These norms likely developed, in part, through institutional cues such as denazification policies that banned Nazi organizations, prohibited Nazi symbols, and criminalized the advocacy of National Socialist ideas. A similar process may have occurred with minority rights. Following the First World War, minority-rights protection was institutionalized through the League of Nations Minority Treaties. After the Second World War, the atrocities committed against ethnic, religious, and other minority groups, together with the Nuremberg Trials and the subsequent development of the international human-rights regime, further elevated minority protection as a normative and legal principle. Over time, these institutional developments may have contributed to the emergence and reinforcement of social norms favoring the protection of minorities and their rights.

If a norm-based model applies to support for minority rights, we would expect to observe a positive-feedback mechanism between norm perceptions and support for minority rights. More specifically, we would expect a cue indicating that public support for minority rights is high to strengthen perceived norms supporting minority rights and lead individuals to increase their support for this principle due to social conformity. Conversely, we would expect a cue indicating that public support for minority rights is low to weaken perceived norms supporting minority rights and lead individuals to

decrease their support for this principle in order to more closely align with the perceived consensus. Unlike the thermostatic model, norm-based dynamics therefore predict opinion change in the same direction as the cue.

5.3 Research Design

The preceding discussion has provided theoretical arguments for why and how both a thermostatic model and a norm-based model could apply to citizens' support for protecting minority rights. While both are theoretically plausible, they are based on opposing dynamics that yield conflicting expectations. To empirically adjudicate between these two models, I employ a priming vignette experiment embedded in an online survey fielded in Switzerland. In this experiment, referenda are used as a methodological tool that allows for testing both the thermostatic and norm-based models. Furthermore, this design improves ecological validity by relying on real-world referenda rather than fictitious vignettes (McDonald, 2020).

Given the design of this study, Switzerland presents an ideal case. The country has a long-standing tradition of direct democracy dating back to at least the nineteenth century. On up to four occasions per year, Swiss citizens are called upon to vote on multiple referendum proposals. These include mandatory referenda (e.g., constitutional amendments or joining international organizations), facultative referenda (e.g., challenges to laws passed by parliament), and popular initiatives (e.g., constitutional amendments proposed directly by citizens). Beyond national referenda, citizens may also vote in cantonal and municipal referenda. Over 80% of citizens participate in referenda at least occasionally, with approximately 15% always voting, 66% voting selectively, and just under 20% rarely or never voting (Kriesi, 1993; Leininger & Heyne, 2017; Qvortrup, 2014; Sciarini et al., 2016). As such, Swiss citizens are, on the whole, highly familiar with referenda and the direct-democratic process.

Referenda allow for testing a thermostatic model because they have the potential to strengthen or weaken the rights of minorities. While there is some debate in the literature regarding whether direct-democratic institutions such as referenda are, by their very nature, detrimental to minorities due to the power they grant numerical majorities, most studies acknowledge that they certainly have the *potential* to harm minorities (Bochsler & Hug, 2015; Bowler & Donovan, 1998; Haider-Markel

et al., 2007; Schaub, 2012; Vatter et al., 2014). For the purposes at hand, I draw on specific referenda held in Switzerland that affected minority rights either positively or negatively. This allows me to use referendum outcomes as cues that provide information about policy outputs affecting the degree to which minority rights are protected.

Importantly, the same referendum outcomes also provide a means of testing a norm-based model. Due to their majoritarian nature, referenda gauge public sentiment on a given issue (Donovan & Karp, 2006). As such, referendum outcomes provide summary information about public consensus regarding minority rights. This summary information is further reinforced by the institutional legitimacy of the referendum itself as a direct-democratic instrument (Esaiasson et al., 2012), thereby combining two cues that inform norm perceptions (Tankard & Paluck, 2016).

Before proceeding, it is worth considering the representativeness of referenda and how citizens perceive them. Given that turnout in Swiss referenda varies substantially—from roughly 30% to 80% (Leininger & Heyne, 2017)—one may question the extent to which referendum outcomes accurately reflect majority opinion. Leininger and Heyne, 2017 address this question directly by comparing actual referendum outcomes to post-referendum survey estimates of how non-voters would have voted. They find that Swiss referenda are remarkably representative: increased turnout only marginally improves representativeness, and just 2.9% of 148 national referenda were classified as "unrepresentative outcomes." These findings complement research showing that citizens perceive referendum outcomes as legitimate and representative of public opinion (Bowler et al., 2007; Esaiasson et al., 2012; Ferrín & Kriesi, 2016). Indeed, political elites have at times leveraged referenda to legitimize contentious proposals (Morel, 2007; Qvortrup, 2014). In sum, irrespective of whether referendum outcomes perfectly reflect public opinion, citizens generally perceive them as doing so.

To conduct the study, Swiss respondents were recruited through the online panels of the commercial firm Bilendi using nationally representative quotas for gender, education, age, and region. After completing the online survey (and the experiment embedded within it), respondents who failed at least one of the two general attention checks included in the survey, "speeders" (i.e., those who completed the survey in less than five minutes), and "straight-liners" (i.e., those who gave the exact same answer in at least 75 percent of the survey batteries) were excluded from the final effective sample, which consists of 1,505 respondents. Fieldwork was conducted between May and July 2024.[5]

Before being exposed to the experimental treatments, respondents completed a pre-treatment questionnaire containing several items used in subsequent analyses. Given the within-subject (i.e., repeated-measures) design, respondents were presented with an item gauging their support for protecting minority rights both before and after exposure to the treatments (see Table 5.2 for the exact wording). Figure D.1 in Appendix D presents the distribution of respondents' initial support for minority-rights protection. Consistent with previous studies (Hernández, 2025; Kokkonen & Linde, 2021), the distribution indicates that most respondents are, at baseline, quite supportive of protecting minority rights. An additional item measuring the perceived degree of minority-rights protection in Switzerland was also administered before and after the treatments.[6]

Exploratory subgroup analyses draw on additional measures capturing affect toward the groups involved in the referenda, party affiliation, and self-reported identification as a member of a minority. These variables are used to examine whether treatment effects vary according to respondents' prior dispositions toward the affected groups, their political affiliations, or their own minority status.

Following completion of the pre-treatment questionnaire, respondents entered the experimental procedure. Respondents were randomly assigned, with equal probability, to one of four experimental groups (one control group and three treatment groups) without knowing to which group they had been assigned.[7] Respondents were then presented with the headline and subheading of a newspaper article.[8] The newspaper headlines and subheadings were drawn from real newspaper articles published by Swiss media outlets and were slightly modified to make them more concise and consistent in format across treatments, thereby minimizing the likelihood of unintended violations of information-equivalence assumptions (Dafoe et al., 2018).

Respondents assigned to the control group were exposed to a placebo newspaper headline about sourdough bread (see Table 5.1). The purpose of the control condition was to expose respondents to arbitrary information unrelated to the variables involved in the mechanisms under investigation while accounting for nonspecific effects and ancillary factors associated with treatment delivery that may be overlooked when using pure no-treatment controls (Nickerson, 2005; Porter & Velez, 2022).

[5] This study was reviewed and approved by the Commission for Ethics in Animal and Human Experimentation (CEEAH) of the Autonomous University of Barcelona on February 16, 2024, under decision number CEEAH 6801.
[6] See Table D.1 in Appendix D for the exact wording.
[7] Statistical-power considerations limited the number of experimental groups to four.
[8] See Table D.2 in Appendix D for an example of what respondents actually saw. This example is taken from the French version of the survey.

Table 5.1 Treatments per experimental arm

	Introductory text
Intro	We will now ask you to read a short newspaper article and ask you a few questions about it. Click on → when you are ready.
	Control
Headline	**Has Sourdough Bread Become a Scam?**
Sub Head	Many artisans and manufacturers use ready-made yeast to save time. Welcome to the jungle of definitions of what is becoming an increasingly popular bread.
	Treatment 1
Headline	**Switzerland Votes to Ease Citizenship for Third-Generation Immigrants**
Sub Head	Swiss Voters have supported a referendum proposal to make it easier for third-generation immigrants to become citizens.
	Treatment 2
Headline	**Switzerland Votes To Approve Legislation Protecting LGBTQ+ Rights**
Sub Head	Swiss voters have supported a referendum proposal to extend anti-discrimination legislation to include sexual orientation.
	Treatment 3
Headline	**Switzerland Votes to Ban Mosque Minarets**
Sub Head	Swiss voters have supported a referendum proposal to Ban the building of minarets.

Respondents assigned to the experimental arms were presented with newspaper headlines reporting the outcomes of real Swiss referenda that either expanded or restricted minority rights. Respondents assigned to Treatment 1 were presented a newspaper headline reporting the outcome of a referendum conducted in 2017 that made it easier for third-generation immigrants to naturalize (i.e., become citizens). Because the outcome of this referendum expanded the rights (the right to naturalization) of a minority (the decedents of immigrants), it is used as a positive treatment.[9]

Respondents assigned to Treatment 2 were presented a newspaper headline reporting the outcome of a referendum conducted in 2020 that resulted in the approval of legislation to protect LGB rights. The proposal involved expanding existing legislation (that previously prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, ethnic origin or religion) to include discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Given that the outcome of this referendum expanded the rights (the right to legal protection against discrimination) of a minority (sexual minorities), it is used as a positive treatment.

Finally, respondents assigned to Treatment 3 were presented a newspaper headline reporting on the 2009 Swiss minaret referendum, which resulted in a constitutional amendment that banned the

[9] See Appendix D for more information on the referenda used in the treatments, including the general context, turnout and the result.

Table 5.2 Support for minority rights protection item

Now we are going to ask you some questions about democracy. We want you to think about democracy in general.

Do you think that in a democracy….

	Never										Always
Minority rights should be protected.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

construction of minarets (a type of tower typically built into or adjacent to mosques). Given that the outcome of this referendum reduced the rights (the right to religious freedom) of a minority (religious minorities), it is used as a negative treatment.

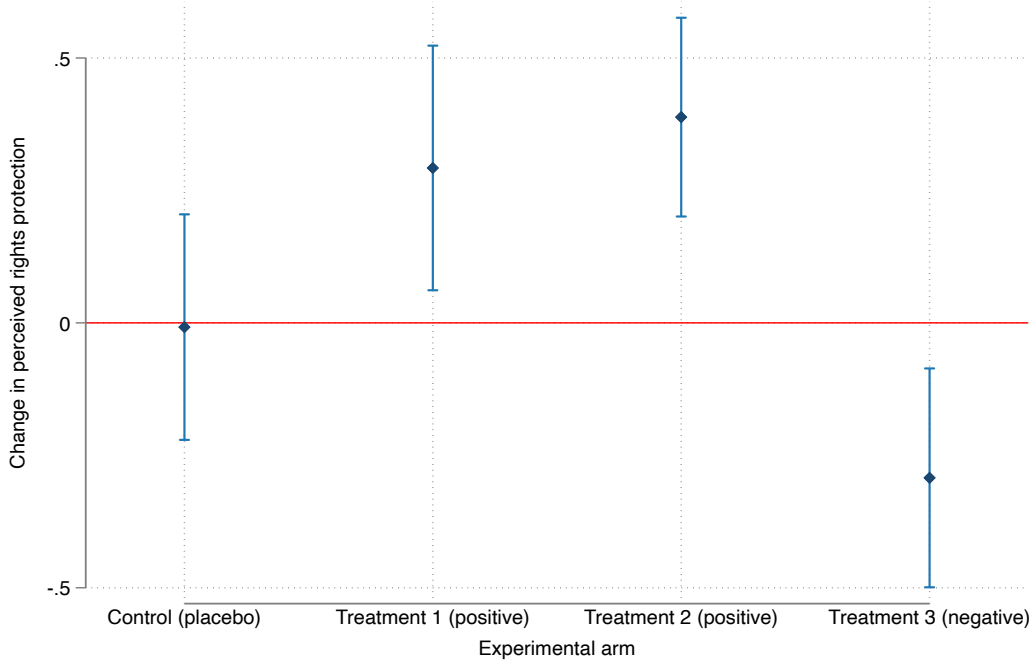
Following exposure to the treatment (or placebo), respondents were asked how important protecting the rights of minorities is to democracy and how protected the rights of minorities are in Switzerland.[10] The main dependent variable captures within-individual change in support for minority-rights protection by subtracting pre-treatment support from post-treatment support. As such, negative values indicate a decrease in support for minority-rights protection, while positive values indicate an increase following exposure to the treatment. OLS models are then estimated in which within-individual change is regressed on a categorical treatment variable, with the control group serving as the reference category.

Before moving to the results, one final consideration is worth noting. As discussed previously, referenda are effective tools for testing the norm-based model because their outcomes provide legitimate summary information about public opinion on a given issue, which citizens may use as a heuristic when updating their perceptions of social norms (Tankard & Paluck, 2016, 2017). Indeed, Jung and Tavits, 2021 demonstrate this empirically in the context of the 2018 referendum on repealing the Eighth Amendment of the Irish Constitution (i.e., the Irish abortion referendum). The referendum resulted in a victory for the "Yes" campaign, effectively ending the constitutional ban on abortion.[11]

[10] Note that the wording of these items is identical to that used in the pre-treatment questionnaire (see Table 5.2 and Table D.1 in Appendix D).

[11] The referendum outcome paved the way for the Irish Parliament to pass legislation allowing abortion up to 12 weeks of pregnancy and in cases involving fatal fetal abnormalities.

Figure 5.1 Average change in perceived minority rights protection per experimental arm



Note: Coefplot with 95% confidence intervals.

Using panel data, the authors find a positive within-individual change in perceptions of public support for abortion.

Conversely, while previous research demonstrates that referendum outcomes can shape perceptions of public consensus, there is no equivalent evidence that citizens perceive referendum outcomes affecting minority rights as altering the level of minority-rights protection in their country. Yet such perceptions are a necessary condition for thermostatic dynamics to emerge. Therefore, I first conduct a manipulation check to verify that the treatments are interpreted in this way.

Figure 5.1 displays the average change in perceived minority-rights protection across experimental arms. On average, the change in perceived minority-rights protection among respondents in the control group is statistically indistinguishable from zero (as expected). In other words, exposure to the placebo had no overall effect on respondents' perceptions of the degree to which minority rights are protected in Switzerland. Conversely, we observe a positive average change in perceived minority-rights protection among respondents in Treatments 1 and 2. This indicates that respondents in the positive treatment arms perceived minority rights as being more protected following exposure to the treatments. Finally, we observe a negative average change in perceived minority-rights protection

among respondents in Treatment 3. This indicates that respondents in the negative treatment arm perceived minority rights as being less protected in Switzerland following exposure to the treatment. In sum, the treatments successfully manipulated respondents' perceptions of minority-rights protection as intended, a necessary condition for testing the thermostatic model.

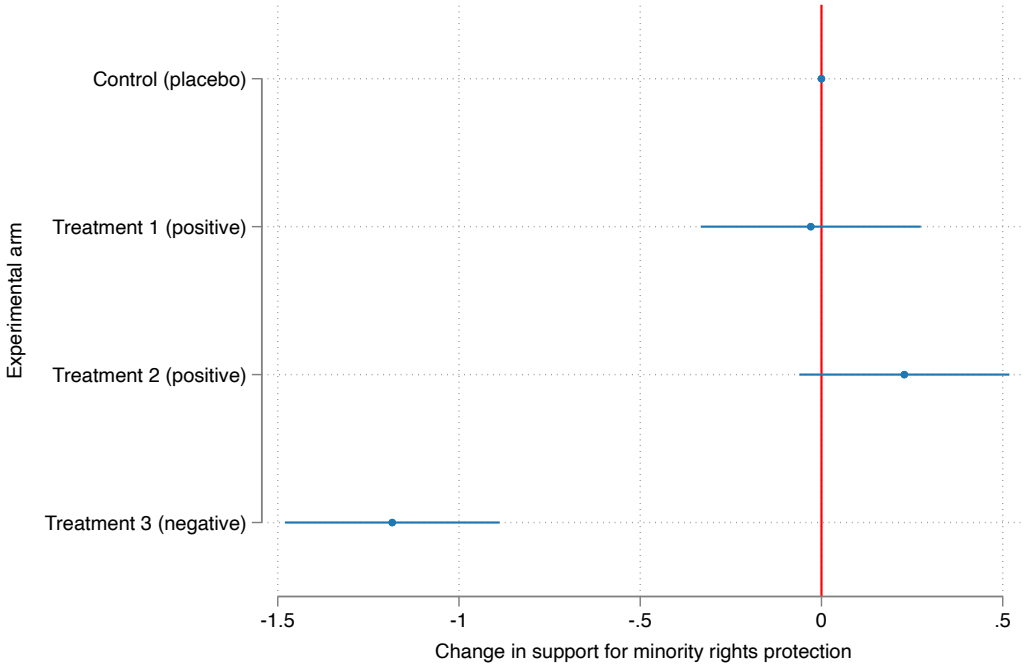
Lastly, balance checks were conducted to ensure that the random allocation of respondents to experimental arms worked as intended and that the groups do not differ along relevant characteristics that could potentially confound treatment effects and bias estimates (Muñoz et al., 2020). Table D.5 and Table D.6 in Appendix D summarize OLS models regressing relevant variables on the treatment indicator (i.e., the categorical variable comparing each treatment group to the control group). Respondents in the treatment groups do not differ statistically from those in the control group in terms of sex, age, initial support for minority-rights protection, political interest, or political knowledge.[12] However, respondents in Treatment 1 appear to be, on average, slightly more educated than those in the control group. Accordingly, the analyses are replicated using additional specifications that control for education where applicable.

5.4 Results

To empirically adjudicate between the thermostatic model and the norm-based model of citizens' support for minority rights, Figure 5.2 displays the coefficients from an OLS specification in which within-individual change in support for protecting minority rights is regressed on treatment assignment, using the control group as the reference category.[13] Positive treatments (i.e., Treatments 1 and 2) do not have a statistically significant effect on changes in support for protecting minority rights. In other words, referendum outcomes that are beneficial to minorities do not make individuals either more or less supportive of minority-rights protection. At least in the positive direction, these findings are inconsistent with both models, each of which predicts some degree of opinion change following exposure to a cue.

[12] See Table D.3 and Table D.4 in Appendix D for the questions used to measure political knowledge.
[13] See Table D.7 for models with and without controls for education.

Figure 5.2 Regression model coeficients of within individual change in support for minority rights protection per experimental arm

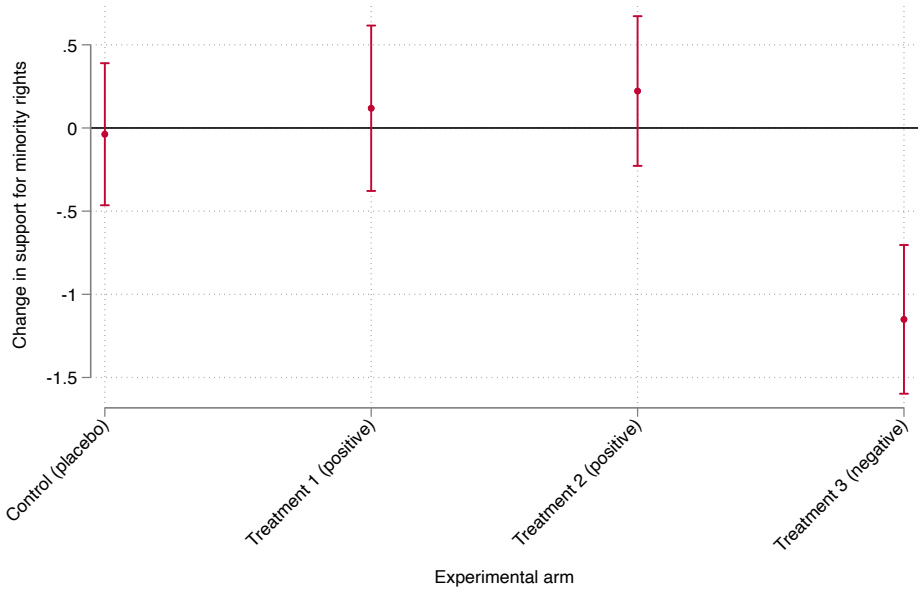


Note: OLS estimation. 95% confidence intervals presented. Positive values indicate an increase in support for minority rights, while negative values indicate a decrease in support for minority rights. Based on Table D.7 in Appendix D.

Treatment 3, on the other hand, has a negative and statistically significant effect on support for minority-rights protection. This effect is also substantively meaningful: it amounts to a within-individual decrease of more than 10% on the scale used to measure support for minority rights and corresponds to more than half a standard deviation of the dependent variable. This result implies that referendum outcomes that are detrimental to minorities make people *less* supportive of minority rights. Recall that the thermostatic model predicts that a decrease in perceived minority-rights protection should lead to an increase in support for minority rights, whereas the norm-based model predicts that a cue signaling weak public support for minority rights should lead respondents to reduce their own support for this principle. Therefore, Figure 5.2 provides initial evidence in favor of the norm-based model over the thermostatic model, albeit only in the negative direction. Importantly, this evidence is asymmetric: respondents react to information indicating that minority rights have been curtailed, but not to information indicating that they have been expanded.

Before rejecting the thermostatic model outright, however, it is worth acknowledging that a decrease in support following the negative treatment is not necessarily inconsistent with thermostatic

Figure 5.3 Treatment effects for respondents with matched perceived-desired minroity protection scores



Note: Predicted margins based on OLS estimation with 95% confidence intervals. Based on Table D.8 summarized in Appendix D.

dynamics. Individuals who already believe minority rights are overprotected may interpret the referendum outcome as moving policy in the right direction while still falling short of their preferred level. I examine this possibility by drawing on Ferrín and Kriesi, 2016. An individual's pre-treatment support for minority rights can be interpreted as indicative of the level of minority-rights protection they desire or believe there *ought* to be (i.e., their preferred level). Subtracting the perceived level of minority-rights protection from this preferred level generates a "mismatch" variable in which negative values indicate a desire for less protection than respondents believe currently exists, whereas positive values indicate a desire for more protection. Most importantly for the present analysis, a value of 0 indicates a perfect match between the degree to which respondents believe minority rights *are* protected and the degree to which they believe they *ought* to be protected. Examining how these individuals respond to the treatments offers a more fine-grained test of the thermostatic model vis-à-vis the norm-based model.[14]

Figure 5.3 displays changes in support for minority rights across experimental arms among respondents with "matched" perceived-desired scores (i.e., those whose perceived level of minority-

[14] See Figure D.2 in Appendix D for the distribution of this mismatch variable.

rights protection perfectly aligns with their preferred level). These respondents constitute the clearest test of thermostatic dynamics because any deviation from their preferred level should generate a corrective response. Respondents in the control group do not change their support for minority rights (i.e., the average change is statistically indistinguishable from 0), as expected. Respondents in the positive treatment groups (Treatments 1 and 2) also do not change their support (i.e., the average change is statistically indistinguishable from both 0 and the control group). According to the thermostatic model, these respondents should decrease their support in order to signal that minority-rights protection ought to return to their preferred level. However, this does not occur. In the negative treatment group (Treatment 3), respondents decrease their support for minority rights (i.e., the difference is statistically significant relative to both 0 and the control group). The thermostatic model predicts the opposite pattern: these respondents should increase their support in order to signal that minority-rights protection ought to return to their preferred level. Yet this does not occur either. Taken together, these results do not support the thermostatic model, even among respondents whose preferred and perceived levels of minority-rights protection are perfectly aligned.[15]

In what follows, several additional analyses are conducted to identify where the effect observed in Treatment 3 originates. Figure 5.4 depicts change in support for minority rights across experimental arms as a function of respondents' initial support for minority rights.[16]

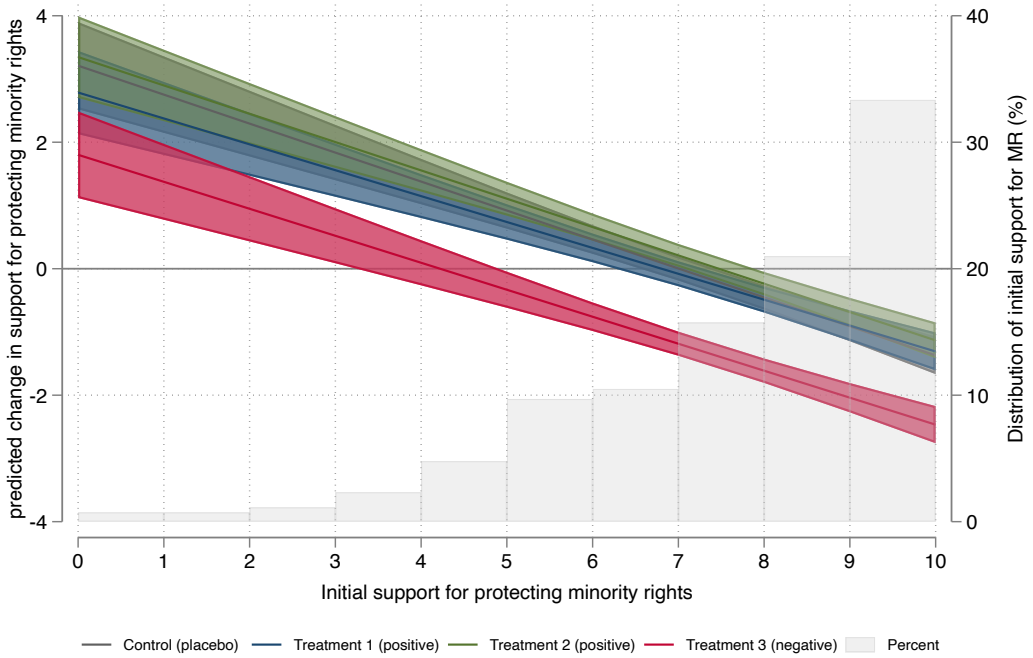
Across all experimental groups, respondents with very low initial support tend to increase their support when asked a second time, whereas respondents with very high initial support tend to decrease it. This pattern likely reflects mechanical effects associated with repeated-measures designs, such as learning or range effects (Charness et al., 2012). Importantly, these dynamics are virtually identical in the control group and the two positive treatment groups.

The negative treatment group (Treatment 3), however, diverges from this pattern. From moderate levels of initial support onward, respondents exposed to the negative treatment exhibit systematically larger decreases in support for minority rights than respondents in the other experimental arms. This divergence becomes particularly evident among respondents with initial support levels above 5, where the vast majority of the sample is located. Thus, while minor mechanical effects are

[15] See Figure D.3 in Appendix D for predicted margins across the full distribution of mismatch scores, along with Table D.8 in Appendix D for models with and without controls for education.

[16] See Figure D.4 in Appendix D for a similar analysis using marginal effects, as well as Table D.9 for the corresponding models.

Figure 5.4 Predicted margins of change in support for protecting minority rights per initial support



Note: Predicted margins based on OLS estimation with 95% confidence intervals. Based on Table D.9 in Appendix D. The histogram in the background summarizes the distribution of respondents' initial support for protecting minority rights.

present across all experimental groups, the decline observed in Treatment 3 cannot be attributed to these effects alone and instead reflects a response to the treatment itself.

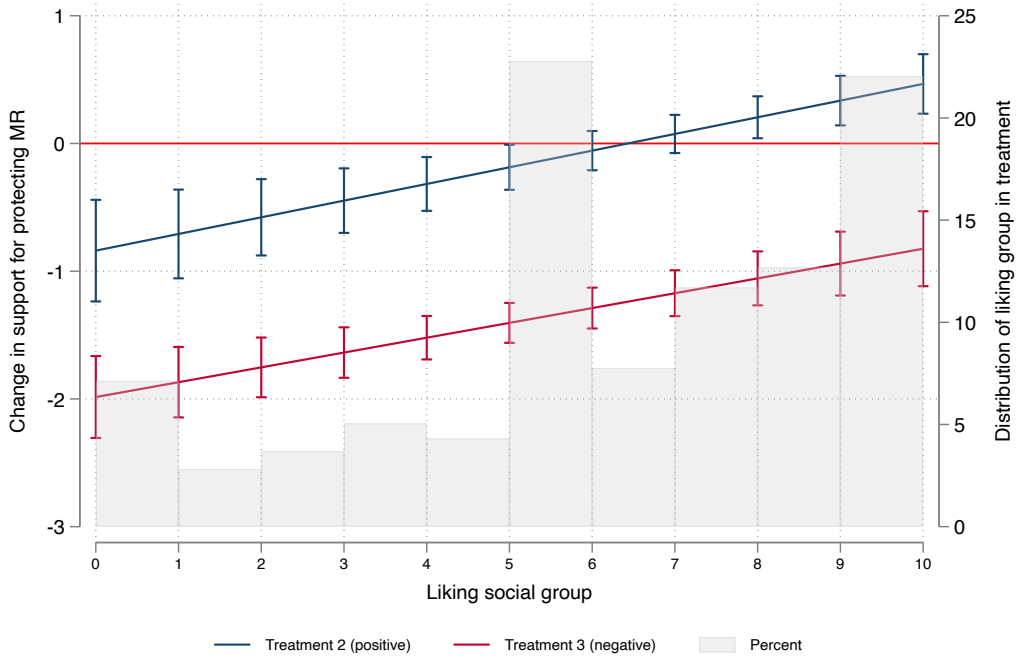
It is also important to assess whether differences in the minority groups affected by each referendum confound the treatment effects. Treatment 2 involves homosexuals, whereas Treatment 3 involves Muslims. Because attitudes toward these groups may differ substantially, any observed differences between treatments could potentially reflect group-specific affect rather than reactions to the referendum cues themselves. To address this possibility, I examine whether treatment effects vary according to respondents' affect toward the group involved in the referendum.[17]

As shown in Figure D.5 in Appendix D, affect toward homosexuals is, on average, more positive than affect toward Muslims among Swiss respondents. Figure 5.5 further shows that respondents who like the group involved in the referendum are somewhat more likely to increase their support for minority rights, whereas those who dislike the group are somewhat more likely to decrease it.[18] Thus,

[17] Given that the control condition does not involve a social group, affect comparisons can only be conducted across treatment groups.

[18] See Table D.10 and Figure D.6 in Appendix D for the corresponding analyses.

Figure 5.5 Predicted means of treatment effects per like/dislike of group



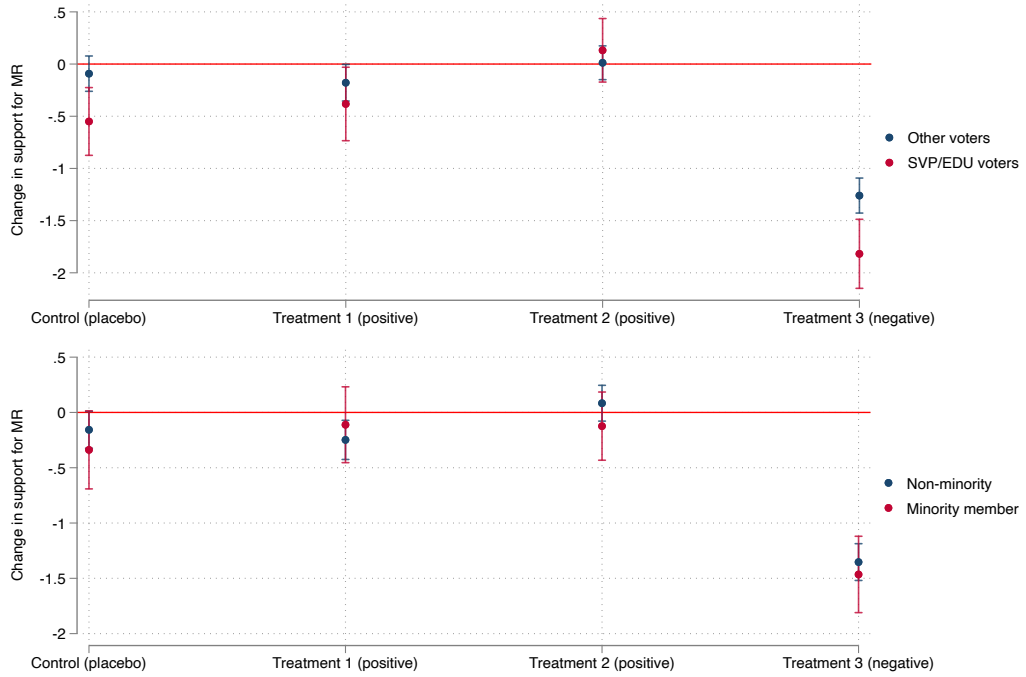
Note: Predicted margins based on OLS estimation. 84% confidence intervals are used to more easily discern differences between treatments visually. Based on Table D.10 in Appendix D.

affect toward particular minority groups influences respondents' baseline propensity to increase or decrease support for minority rights.

Importantly, this pattern does not explain the effect observed in Treatment 3. In Treatment 2, these opposing tendencies largely cancel each other out, producing a null average effect. In Treatment 3, by contrast, respondents decrease their support for minority rights regardless of how much they like Muslims. Taken together, these findings suggest that the negative treatment effect is not simply an artifact of anti-Muslim sentiment.

To further unpack how the norm-based model influences support for minority rights in substantive terms, I compare respondents with characteristics that predispose them to be more or less supportive of protecting minority rights to begin with. As discussed in greater detail in Appendix D, the Swiss People's Party (SVP) and the Federal Democratic Union of Switzerland (EDU) endorsed and advocated for the position that went against the interests of minorities in each of the three referenda used in the experimental treatments. As shown in Table D.11 and Figure D.7 in Appendix D, SVP/EDU voters have lower pre-treatment support for minority rights than other respondents. Conversely, respondents who self-identify as members of a minority express higher levels of support, as

Figure 5.6 Sub-group analysis: Predicted means of treatment effects for SVP/EDU voters & self-identified minorities



Note: Predicted margins based on OLS estimation. 84% confidence intervals are used to more easily discern differences between treatments visually. Based on Table D.12 in Appendix D.

might be expected from self-interest or instrumental considerations (Sears & Funk, 1991; Tajfel, 1978; Verkuyten, 2005). For different reasons, both groups are likely to hold more crystallized attitudes toward minority rights: minority respondents because of the direct relevance of these rights to their own circumstances, and SVP/EDU voters because of their ideological commitments. Examining how these groups respond to the treatments therefore provides a particularly demanding test of the norm-based mechanism.

The top panel in Figure 5.6 compares SVP/EDU voters to supporters of other parties across experimental arms. Neither SVP/EDU voters nor supporters of other parties significantly change their support for minority rights in the control or positive treatment groups.[19] By contrast, both supporters of other parties and SVP/EDU voters decrease their support for minority rights in the negative treatment, and this decline is both statistically and substantively significant. These results suggest that individuals who are less supportive of minority rights to begin with (i.e., SVP/EDU voters) rein-

[19] Although SVP/EDU voters display a statistically significant decrease in support for minority rights in the control group, this decline is substantively negligible and remains statistically indistinguishable from that observed among supporters of other parties both in the control group and across the positive treatments.

force their pre-existing opposition to minority rights. This finding is consistent with the notion that perceived public consensus can reinforce pre-existing illiberal predispositions.

The bottom panel in Figure 5.6 compares respondents who self-identify as members of a minority to those who do not across experimental arms. For the most part, both minorities and non-minorities do not change their support for minority rights in the control or positive treatment groups (i.e., their within-individual change is statistically indistinguishable from 0).[20] However, both minorities and non-minorities reduce their support for minority rights in the negative treatment.[21] These findings suggest that the influence of perceived public consensus extends even to respondents who have a direct stake in minority-rights protection. Thus, the tendency to align with perceived majority opinion may, at least in some circumstances, outweigh considerations of group self-interest.

5.5 Conclusion

This study has investigated how citizens' support for minority rights protecting can shift, irrespective of their initial predispositions towards this democratic principle, in response to external cues. Two prominent models of public opinion formation have been adapted and applied to these orientations: a thermostatic-based model and a norm-based model. While both models could apply theoretically, they yield conflicting expectations. The thermostatic-based model suggests a negative feedback mechanism by which a cue that policy output increases the degree to which minority rights are protected leads to a decrease in support for protecting minorities among citizens, and vice versa. Conversely, a norm-based model suggests a positive-feedback mechanism whereby a information summary cue indicating that the public is not particularly supportive of protecting minority rights causes individuals to reduce their support for this principle to more closely algin with public consensus, and vice versa.

To empirically adjudicate between these two models, a priming experiment was fielded in Switzerland in which the outcomes of actual referenda are used as a methodological tool to simultaneously manipulate perceived minority rights protection and to signal public consensus in favor or against minority rights. The results of a within-individual design offer no evidence in favor of the thermostatic-

[20] Non-minorities do exhibit a slight decrease in support in Treatment 1. However, this change is substantively small and statistically indistinguishable from that observed in the control group.

[21] See Figure D.8 and Figure D.9 in Appendix D for corresponding analyses using marginal effects.

based model and partial support for a norm-based model. While respondents exposed to positive treatments (involving referenda that expanded minority rights) exhibited no change in their support for minority rights relative to the control group, those exposed to the negative treatment (involving a referendum that reduced minority rights) significantly and substantively decreased their support for minority rights. Most notably, respondents reacted to information indicating that minority rights had been curtailed, but not to information indicating that they had been expanded. Robustness checks and subgroup analyses show that this effect persists across a variety of respondent characteristics. While those who were originally less supportive of minority rights and dislike the group affected by a referendum further reduce their support for minority rights, so too do those who were originally very supportive of minority rights and liked the group affected by the referendum. These findings are broadly consistent with Myers and Bishop, 1970 who find that racially prejudiced individuals become even bolder in their attitudes after interacting with one another, as well as with the notion conforming to dominant opinions so as not to stand out from the majority (Asch, 1955; Noelle-Neumann, 1974).

These findings contribute to several strands of literature. First, they speak to debates surrounding the thermostatic model of democratic support. Even if thermostatic dynamics help explain fluctuations in support for democracy (Claassen, 2018), the present findings suggest that such dynamics are unlikely to operate through fluctuations in support for "minoritarian" principles such as minority-rights protection. Instead, alternative mechanisms, such as autocratic nostalgia, may play a more important role (Hu et al., 2022, 2023; Neundorf et al., 2024; Tannenberg, 2022).

Second, the findings contribute to a growing literature on democratic norms and their influence on political attitudes and behavior (Axelsen, 2024; Bischof et al., 2024; Dinas et al., 2024; Valentim, 2024a). More broadly, they respond to calls to study support for democracy through citizens' commitment to specific democratic principles rather than generic support for "democracy," thereby helping overcome some of the measurement challenges associated with broad democracy-support items (Claassen et al., 2024; König et al., 2022; Schedler & Sarsfield, 2007).

Finally, the study sheds additional light on citizens' apparent acceptance of democratic backsliding. Existing research suggests that citizens may tolerate democratic erosion because they trade off democratic principles against competing considerations such as partisanship, policy preferences, or

economic outcomes (Adserà et al., 2023; Graham & Svolik, 2020; Neundorf et al., 2024; Svolik, 2019); because their conceptions of democracy exclude certain democratic principles (Wunsch et al., 2022); or because they rationalize what is and is not democratic in order to avoid cognitive dissonance (Krishnarajan, 2022). The findings of this study point to a fourth mechanism: citizens may temper their commitment to liberal-democratic principles in response to perceived public consensus. In this sense, social conformity may contribute to the erosion of democratic commitments even among individuals who are initially supportive of those principles.

There are, however, several limitations to this study that should be acknowledged. First, while focusing on Switzerland offers a number of advantages, it also comes with certain drawbacks. On the one hand, Switzerland provides an ideal setting for implementing the research design used in this study, allowing two competing mechanisms to be tested simultaneously. Moreover, because referenda are a common feature of Swiss politics, real referendum outcomes can be used to enhance realism and strengthen internal validity (McDonald, 2020). On the other hand, focusing on a single country necessarily limits external validity. The use of real referenda also constrains the pool of potential treatments. In this study, the treatments involve different minority groups (i.e., third-generation immigrants, sexual minorities, and Muslims), toward which attitudes may differ substantially. Although I conduct additional analyses showing that treatment effects persist across different levels of affect toward these groups, I cannot entirely rule out the possibility that group-specific attitudes contribute to the observed effects.

Several additional limitations stem from the design itself. First, it is difficult to determine the durability of the observed attitude change. Research on norm perceptions suggests that they are dynamic and responsive to new information (Paluck et al., 2016; Tankard & Paluck, 2016). Consequently, Treatment 3 may have induced only a temporary shift in perceived norms and support for minority rights, which could subsequently be revised in response to competing cues. Second, the present design cannot conclusively determine whether the observed decline in support for minority rights reflects genuine preference change or merely the public expression of conformity. Noelle-Neumann, 1974 argues that individuals may conceal their true views when they perceive themselves to be in the minority and instead express opinions that align with prevailing social norms. Research on preference falsification and survey-response bias similarly suggests that expressed attitudes may

diverge from privately held beliefs (Bischof et al., 2024; Kuran, 1987; Malik & Siddiqui, 2024; Valentim & Dinas, 2020). As a result, the present findings demonstrate that perceived public consensus influences expressed support for minority rights, but they cannot definitively establish whether this influence reflects genuine attitude change, strategic self-censorship, or some combination of the two.

Given these limitations, future research could extend this study in several ways. First, the design could be replicated in other countries to assess the generalizability of the findings. Such studies need not rely exclusively on real referenda. Fictitious referenda would allow researchers to hold the minority group constant while varying only whether a proposal expands or restricts that group's rights. If multiple groups are included, parallel positive and negative treatments for each group would help address concerns about group-specific confounds. The main challenge inherent to such designs is ensuring that the treatments remain sufficiently credible, as cues must be perceived as believable to influence norm perceptions (Tankard & Paluck, 2016). Second, future studies could employ other forms of institutional cues, such as legislation, court rulings, constitutional amendments, or policy changes affecting minority rights. Alternatively, perceived norms could be manipulated directly through summary information about public opinion, such as fictitious polling results. Finally, future research could move beyond single-shot treatments and examine the effects of repeated exposure to negative cues. Such designs would help determine whether support for minority rights continues to decline, eventually stabilizes, or perhaps even reverses as exposure accumulates.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that only the negative treatment produced a meaningful effect. One possible explanation is a ceiling effect: support for minority rights is relatively high, making it easier to decrease support than to increase it. However, this interpretation is difficult to reconcile with the fact that respondents who were initially less supportive of minority rights (e.g., SVP/EDU voters) also failed to increase their support following the positive treatments. A more plausible interpretation may be what contact theorists describe as *intergroup valence asymmetry*: the tendency for negative experiences involving out-groups to produce larger attitudinal changes than positive experiences (Barlow et al., 2012; Paolini et al., 2010). By analogy, cues indicating that fellow citizens are unsupportive of minorities and their rights may exert a stronger influence than cues indicating support. If so, public opinion may be more susceptible to the normalization of exclusion than to the normalization of inclusion. Future research should investigate this possibility more directly and ex-

plore interventions capable of increasing support for minority rights, perhaps through civic education (Eroglu et al., 2025).

In sum, the results of this study demonstrate that a relatively simple cue containing summary and institutional information about public consensus can lead citizens to decrease their support for minority-rights protection—a core liberal-democratic principle. Even if the strength of this effect varies across minority groups, it offers important insights into how illiberal actors may erode minority rights with relatively limited resistance from the electorate. By shaping perceptions of what the broader public believes, political actors, media organizations, and institutions may weaken perceived norms supporting minority rights and thereby reduce citizens' willingness to defend them. Whether this conformity reflects genuine attitude change or merely the public expression of socially acceptable views, the political consequences may be similar: fewer individuals openly challenge efforts to curtail minority rights. In turn, as anti-minority attitudes become more publicly visible, perceptions of social consensus may shift further, potentially creating a self-reinforcing process through which support for minority rights gradually erodes. Hence, if democratic principles depend in part on citizens' perceptions of what others believe, protecting democracy may require protecting the norms that sustain it.

References

Achen, C. H., & Bartels, L. M. (2017). *Democracy for realists: Why elections do not produce responsive government*. Princeton University Press.

Adserà, A., Arenas, A., & Boix, C. (2023). Estimating the value of democracy relative to other institutional and economic outcomes among citizens in Brazil, France, and the United States. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *120*(48), e2306168120. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2306168120

Almond, G. A., & Verba, S. (1963). *The civic culture: Political attitudes and democracy in five nations* (New ed.). Sage Publications.

Andreoni, J., Nikiforakis, N., & Siegenthaler, S. (2021). Predicting social tipping and norm change in controlled experiments. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *118*(16), e2014893118. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2014893118

Anduiza, E., & Rico, G. (2024). Sexism and the Far-Right Vote: The Individual Dynamics of Gender Backlash. *American Journal of Political Science*, *68*(2), 478–493. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12759

Armitage, K. B., & Schwartz, O. A. (2000). Social enhancement of fitness in yellow-bellied marmots. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *97*(22), 12149–12152. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.200196097

Arrow, K. J. (1985). *Social choice and individual values* (2. ed., [18. print.]). Yale Univ. Press.

Asch, S. E. (1955). Opinions and Social Pressure. *Scientific American*, *193*(5), 31–35. https://doi.org/10.1038/scientificamerican1155-31

Asch, S. E. (1956). Studies of independence and conformity: I. A minority of one against a unanimous majority. *Psychological Monographs: General and Applied*, *70*(9), 1–70. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0093718

Axelsen, J. E. (2024). The cordon sanitaire: A social norm-based model. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, *34*(2), 277–297. https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2023.2168272

Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Prentice-Hall.

Barlow, F. K., Paolini, S., Pedersen, A., Hornsey, M. J., Radke, H. R. M., Harwood, J., Rubin, M., & Sibley, C. G. (2012). The Contact Caveat: Negative Contact Predicts Increased Prejudice More Than Positive Contact Predicts Reduced Prejudice. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *38*(12), 1629–1643. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167212457953

Bermeo, N. (2016). On Democratic Backsliding. *Journal of Democracy*, *27*(1), 5–19. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0012

Bernhard, M. (2021). Democratic Backsliding in Poland and Hungary. *Slavic Review*, *80*(3), 585–607. https://doi.org/10.1017/slr.2021.145

Bicchieri, C. (2017, February). *Norms in the Wild: How to Diagnose, Measure, and Change Social Norms*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190622046.001.0001

Bichay, N. (2024). Populist radical-right junior coalition partners and liberal democracy in Europe. *Party Politics*, *30*(2), 236–246. https://doi.org/10.1177/13540688221144698

Billig, M. (1991). *Ideology and opinions: Studies in rhetorical psychology* (1. publ). Sage Publications.

Bischof, D., Allinger, T., Juratic, M. L. C., & Frederiksen, K. V. S. (2024). How Citizens Perceive Others: The Role of Social Norms for Democracies. *osf.io*.

Bishin, B. G., Hayes, T. J., Incantalupo, M. B., & Smith, C. A. (2016). Opinion Backlash and Public Attitudes: Are Political Advances in Gay Rights Counterproductive? *American Journal of Political Science*, *60*(3), 625–648. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12181

Bochsler, D., & Hug, S. (2015). How minorities fare under referendums: A cross-national study. *Electoral Studies*, *38*, 206–216. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2015.02.005

Bølstad, J. (2012). Thermostatic Voting: Presidential Elections in Light of New Policy Data. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, *45*(1), 44–50. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096511001697

Bowler, S., & Donovan, T. (1998). *Demanding Choices: Opinion, Voting, and Direct Democracy*. University of Michigan Press. https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.15428

Bowler, S., Donovan, T., & Karp, J. A. (2007). Enraged or Engaged? Preferences for Direct Citizen Participation in Affluent Democracies. *Political Research Quarterly*, *60*(3), 351–362. https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912907304108

Bratton, K. A. (2002). The Effect of Legislative Diversity on Agenda Setting: Evidence from Six State Legislatures. *American Politics Research*, *30*(2), 115–142. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X02030002001

Bremmer, I. (1994). The politics of ethnicity: Russians in the New Ukraine. *Europe-Asia Studies*, *46*(2), 261–283. https://doi.org/10.1080/09668139408412161

Campbell, A., University of Michigan, & University of Michigan (Eds.). (1980). *The American voter* (Unabridged ed). University of Chicago Press.

Caplan, B. D. (2011). *The Myth of the Rational Voter: Why Democracies Choose Bad Policies - New Edition*. Princeton University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400828821

Charness, G., Gneezy, U., & Kuhn, M. A. (2012). Experimental methods: Between-subject and within-subject design. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, *81*(1), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2011.08.009

Chartrand, T. L., & Bargh, J. A. (1999). The chameleon effect: The perception–behavior link and social interaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *76*(6), 893–910. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.76.6.893

Chierchia, G., Piera Pi-Sunyer, B., & Blakemore, S.-J. (2020). Prosocial Influence and Opportunistic Conformity in Adolescents and Young Adults. *Psychological Science*, *31*(12), 1585–1601. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797620957625

Cialdini, R. B., Reno, R. R., & Kallgren, C. A. (1990). A focus theory of normative conduct: Recycling the concept of norms to reduce littering in public places. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *58*(6), 1015–1026. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.58.6.1015

Cinquin, O., & Demongeot, J. (2002). Roles of positive and negative feedback in biological systems. *Comptes Rendus. Biologies*, *325*(11), 1085–1095. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1631-0691(02)01533-0

Claassen, C. (2018). In the Mood for Democracy? Democratic Support as Thermostatic Opinion. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3194554

Claassen, C., Ackermann, K., Bertsou, E., Borba, L., Carlin, R. E., Cavari, A., Dahlum, S., Gherghina, S., Hawkins, D., Lelkes, Y., Magalhães, P. C., Mattes, R., Meijers, M. J., Neundorf, A., Oross, D., Öztürk, A., Sarsfield, R., Self, D., Stanley, B., … Zechmeister, E. J. (2024). Conceptualizing and Measuring Support for Democracy: A New Approach. *Comparative Political Studies*, 00104140241259458. https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140241259458

Claidière, N., & Whiten, A. (2012). Integrating the study of conformity and culture in humans and nonhuman animals. *Psychological Bulletin*, *138*(1), 126–145. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025868

Clark, C. J., Liu, B. S., Winegard, B. M., & Ditto, P. H. (2019). Tribalism Is Human Nature. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *28*(6), 587–592. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721419862289

Converse, P. E. (1962). Information Flow and the Stability of Partisan Attitudes. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *26*(4), 578. https://doi.org/10.1086/267129

Converse, P. E. (1964). The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Public. In D. E. Apter (Ed.), *Ideology and discontent.* Free Press, New York.

Dafoe, A., Zhang, B., & Caughey, D. (2018). Information Equivalence in Survey Experiments. *Political Analysis*, *26*(4), 399–416. https://doi.org/10.1017/pan.2018.9

Dahl, R. A. (1971). *Polyarchy: Participation and opposition*. Yale university press.

Dahl, R. A. (1989). *Democracy and its critics* (Nachdr.). Yale University Press.

Diamond, L., & Morlino, L. (Eds.). (2005). *Assessing the quality of democracy*. Hopkins Univ. Press.

Diamond, L. J. (Ed.). (1995). *Nationalism, ethnic conflict, and democracy* (2. [print.]). Johns Hopkins Univ. Press.

Dinas, E., Martínez, S., & Valentim, V. (2024). Social Norm Change, Political Symbols, and Expression of Stigmatized Preferences. *The Journal of Politics*, *86*(2), 488–506. https://doi.org/10.1086/726951

Donovan, T., & Karp, J. A. (2006). Popular Support for Direct Democracy. *Party Politics*, *12*(5), 671–688. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068806066793

Downs, A. (1957). *An economic theory of democracy*. Harper Collins.

Easton, D. (1965). *A systems analysis of political life*. Wiley.

Erikson, R. S., Mackuen, M. B., & Stimson, J. A. (2001, January). *The Macro Polity* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139086912

Eroglu, M. H., Finkel, S. E., Neundorf, A., Öztürk, A., & Rascón Ramírez, E. G. (2025). Choosing Democracy Over Party? How Civic Education Can Mitigate the Anti-Democratic Effects of Partisan Polarization. *British Journal of Political Science*, *55*, e65. https://doi.org/10.1017/S000712342500016X

Esaiasson, P., Gilljam, M., & Persson, M. (2012). Which decision-making arrangements generate the strongest legitimacy beliefs? Evidence from a randomised field experiment. *European Journal of Political Research*, *51*(6), 785–808. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2011.02052.x

Evans, G., & Need, A. (2002). Explaining ethnic polarization over attitudes towards minority rights in Eastern Europe: A multilevel analysis. *Social Science Research*, *31*(4), 653–680. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0049-089X(02)00018-2

Fehr, E., & Gächter, S. (2000). Cooperation and Punishment in Public Goods Experiments. *American Economic Review*, *90*(4), 980–994. https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.90.4.980

Fehr, E., & Gächter, S. (2002). Altruistic punishment in humans. *Nature*, *415*(6868), 137–140. https://doi.org/10.1038/415137a

Fejes, F. (2008). *Gay rights and moral panic: The origins of America's debate on homosexuality*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Ferrín, M., & Kriesi, H. (Eds.). (2016). *How Europeans view and evaluate democracy* (First edition). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198766902.001.0001

Fiske, S. T., & Taylor, S. E. (1984). *Social cognition*. Addison-Wesley.

Freedman, J. L., & Fraser, S. C. (1966). Compliance without pressure: The foot-in-the-door technique. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *4*(2), 195–202. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0023552

Gerber, A. S., Green, D. P., & Larimer, C. W. (2008). Social Pressure and Voter Turnout: Evidence from a Large-Scale Field Experiment. *American Political Science Review*, *102*(1), 33–48. https://doi.org/10.1017/S000305540808009X

Goldstein, D. A. N. (2022). The Social Foundations of Democratic Norms. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4314977

Graham, M. H., & Svolik, M. W. (2020). Democracy in America? Partisanship, Polarization, and the Robustness of Support for Democracy in the United States [Number: 2]. *American Political Science Review*, *114*(2), 392–409. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055420000052

Griffith, E. S., Plamenatz, J., & Pennock, J. R. (1956). Cultural Prerequisites to a Successfully Functioning Democracy: A Symposium. *American Political Science Review*, *50*(1), 101–137. https://doi.org/10.2307/1951601

Grossmann, M., & Wlezien, C. (2024). A Thermostatic Model of Congressional Elections. *American Politics Research*, *52*(4), 355–366. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X241253813

Habermas, J., Burger, T., & Lawrence, F. (1992). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. The MIT press.

Habermas, J., Rehg, W., & Habermas, J. (2015). *Between facts and norms: Contributions to a discourse theory of law and democracy* (Reprinted). Polity Press.

Haggard, S., & Kaufman, R. R. (2021). *Backsliding: Democratic regress in the contemporary world*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108957809

Haider-Markel, D. P., Querze, A., & Lindaman, K. (2007). Lose, Win, or Draw? A Reexamination of Direct Democracy and Minority Rights. *Political Research Quarterly*, *60*(2), 304–314. https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912907301984

Hechter, M. (1978). Group Formation and the Cultural Division of Labor. *American Journal of Sociology*, *84*(2), 293–318. https://doi.org/10.1086/226785

Heckathorn, D. D. (1988). Collective Sanctions and the Creation of Prisoner's Dilemma Norms. *American Journal of Sociology*, *94*(3), 535–562. https://doi.org/10.1086/229029

Hernández, E. (2025, February). Stability and change in Europeans' views of democracy. In M. Ferrín & H. Kriesi (Eds.), *How Europeans View and Evaluate Democracy Revisited* (1st ed., pp. 55–78). Oxford University PressOxford. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198883319.003.0003

Hidalgo, O. (2019). The Theory of Democratic Antinomies and the Identification of Value Trade-Offs in Political Practice [Number: 4]. *Politics and Governance*, *7*(4), 264–274. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v7i4.2243

Hu, Y., Tai, Y. C., Ko, H., Woo, B.-D., & Solt, F. (2023, February). Support for Democracy Is Multidimensional: Why Unidimensional Latent Variable Measures of Democratic Support Are Invalid. https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/rym8g

Hu, Y., Tai, Y. C., & Solt, F. (2022, June). On Data 'Janitor Work' in Political Science: The Case of Thermostatic Support for Democracy. https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/kd7mu

Jung, J.-H., & Tavits, M. (2021). Do referendum results change norm perceptions and personal opinions? *Electoral Studies*, *71*, 102307. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2021.102307

Khoo, M. C. (2018). *Physiological control systems: Analysis, simulation, and estimation* (Second Edition). IEEE Press [u.a.]

Kinder, D. (1998). Opinion and action in the realm of politics. In *The Handbook of Social Psychology* (4th, pp. 778–867). McGraw-Hill.

Kokkonen, A., & Linde, J. (2021). Nativist attitudes and opportunistic support for democracy [Number: 0 _eprint: https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2021.2007459]. *West European Politics*, *0*(0), 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2021.2007459

König, P. D., Siewert, M. B., & Ackermann, K. (2022). Conceptualizing and Measuring Citizens' Preferences for Democracy: Taking Stock of Three Decades of Research in a Fragmented Field. *Comparative Political Studies*, *55*(12), 2015–2049. https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140211066213

Kriesi, H. (1993). *Citoyenneté et démocratie directe: Compétence, participation et décision des cotoyens et citoyennes suisses*. Ed. Seismo.

Krishnarajan, S. (2022). Rationalizing Democracy: The Perceptual Bias and (Un)Democratic Behavior. *American Political Science Review*, 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055422000806

Kuran, T. (1987). Preference Falsification, Policy Continuity and Collective Conservatism. *The Economic Journal*, *97*(387), 642. https://doi.org/10.2307/2232928

Kuran, T. (1995). *Private truths, public lies: The social consequences of preference falsification*. Harvard University Press.

Lauth, H.-J. (2016). The internal relationships of the dimensions of democracy: The relevance of trade-offs for measuring the quality of democracy. *International Political Science Review*, *37*(5), 606–617. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512116667630

Lauth, H.-J., & Schlenkrich, O. (2018). Making Trade-Offs Visible: Theoretical and Methodological Considerations about the Relationship between Dimensions and Institutions of Democracy and Empirical Findings [Number: 1]. *Politics and Governance*, *6*(1), 78–91. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v6i1.1200

Leeper, T. J., & Slothuus, R. (2014). Political Parties, Motivated Reasoning, and Public Opinion Formation. *Political Psychology*, *35*(S1), 129–156. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12164

Leininger, A., & Heyne, L. (2017). How representative are referendums? Evidence from 20 years of Swiss referendums. *Electoral Studies*, *48*, 84–97. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2017.05.006

LeVine, R. A., & Campbell, D. T. (1972). *Ethnocentrism: Theories of conflict, ethnic attitudes, and group behavior*. Wiley.

Lippmann, W. (1922). *Public Opinion* (1st ed.). New York: Harcourt, Brace; Company. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315127736

Lipset, S. M., & Raab, E. (1980). *The politics of unreason: Right-wing extremism in America, 1790 - 1977* (2. ed). Univ. of Chicago Press.

Lührmann, A., & Lindberg, S. I. (2019). A third wave of autocratization is here: What is new about it? *Democratization*, *26*(7), 1095–1113. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2019.1582029

Malik, M., & Siddiqui, N. (2024). Third Party Presence and the Political Salience of Ethnicity in Survey Data. *The Journal of Politics*, *86*(1), 364–368. https://doi.org/10.1086/726937

McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *36*(2), 176. https://doi.org/10.1086/267990

McDonald, J. (2020). Avoiding the Hypothetical: Why "Mirror Experiments" are an Essential Part of Survey Research. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, *32*(2), 266–283. https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edz027

McGraw, K. M. (2000). Contributions of the Cognitive Approach to Political Psychology. *Political Psychology*, *21*(4), 805–832. https://doi.org/10.1111/0162-895X.00217

McIntosh, M. E., Iver, M. A. M., Abele, D. G., & Nolle, D. B. (1995). Minority Rights and Majority Rule: Ethnic Tolerance in Romania and Bulgaria. *Social Forces*, *73*(3), 939. https://doi.org/10.2307/2580553

Merkel, W. (2004). Embedded and defective democracies. *Democratization*, *11*(5), 33–58. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510340412331304598

Milgram, S. (1973). *Obedience to authority: An experimental view*. Harper, Row.

Montague, Z. (2025). Trump's Cuts to N.I.H. Grants Focused on Minority Groups Are Illegal, Judge Rules. *The New York Times*.

Morel, L. (2007). The Rise of 'Politically Obligatory' Referendums: The 2005 French Referendum in Comparative Perspective. *West European Politics*, *30*(5), 1041–1067. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402380701617449

Moscovici, S., & Personnaz, B. (1980). Studies in social influence. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *16*(3), 270–282. https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-1031(80)90070-0

Muñoz, J., Falcó-Gimeno, A., & Hernández, E. (2020). Unexpected Event during Survey Design: Promise and Pitfalls for Causal Inference. *Political Analysis*, *28*(2), 186–206. https://doi.org/10.1017/pan.2019.27

Myers, D. G., & Bishop, G. D. (1970). Discussion Effects on Racial Attitudes. *Science*, *169*(3947), 778–779. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.169.3947.778

Neundorf, A., Dahlum, S., Frederiksen, K. V. S., & Ozturk, A. (2024). The appeal of electoral autocracy: Assessing citizens' revealed societal preferences. *OSF Preprints*.

Nickerson, D. W. (2005). Scalable Protocols Offer Efficient Design for Field Experiments. *Political Analysis*, *13*(3), 233–252. https://doi.org/10.1093/pan/mpi015

Noelle-Neumann, E. (1974). The Spiral of Silence a Theory of Public Opinion. *Journal of Communication*, *24*(2), 43–51. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1974.tb00367.x

OHCHR. (2010). Minority Rights: International Standards and Guidance for Implementation.

Page, B. I., & Shapiro, R. Y. (1992). *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences*. University of Chicago Press.

Paluck, E. L., Shepherd, H., & Aronow, P. M. (2016). Changing climates of conflict: A social network experiment in 56 schools. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *113*(3), 566–571. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1514483113

Paolini, S., Harwood, J., & Rubin, M. (2010). Negative Intergroup Contact Makes Group Memberships Salient: Explaining Why Intergroup Conflict Endures. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *36*(12), 1723–1738. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167210388667

Pedersen, S., Grønhøj, A., & Thøgersen, J. (2015). Following family or friends. Social norms in adolescent healthy eating. *Appetite*, *86*, 54–60. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2014.07.030

Porter, E., & Velez, Y. R. (2022). Placebo Selection in Survey Experiments: An Agnostic Approach. *Political Analysis*, *30*(4), 481–494. https://doi.org/10.1017/pan.2021.16

Prentice, D. A., & Miller, D. T. (1993). Pluralistic ignorance and alcohol use on campus: Some consequences of misperceiving the social norm. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *64*(2), 243–256. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.64.2.243

Primecz, H., & Pelyhe, V. (2024). Hungary as a precarious context for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community. Interviews with transgender people. *Gender, Work & Organization*, *31*(5), 1812–1827. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.13038

Procopio, A., Tedesco, A., Regio, F. L., Cesarelli, G., Donisi, L., Ricciardi, C., Merola, A., Ponsiglione, A. M., Romano, M., Montefusco, F., Cosentino, C., & Amato, F. (2025). A General Framework for Closed Loop Negative Feedback Multivariable Physiological Control Systems: Existence, Uniqueness, and Stability of Homeostatic Equilibrium Points. *IEEE Access*, *13*, 17630–17651. https://doi.org/10.1109/ACCESS.2025.3532846

Quillian, L. (1995). Prejudice as a Response to Perceived Group Threat: Population Composition and Anti-Immigrant and Racial Prejudice in Europe. *American Sociological Review*, *60*(4), 586. https://doi.org/10.2307/2096296

Qvortrup, M. (2014). *Referendums around the world: The continued growth of direct democracy*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Rimal, R. N., & Real, K. (2005). How Behaviors are Influenced by Perceived Norms: A Test of the Theory of Normative Social Behavior. *Communication Research*, *32*(3), 389–414. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650205275385

Rovny, J. (2024). *Ethnic minorities, political competition, and democracy: Circumstantial liberals*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/9780198906742.001.0001

Rydgren, J. (2005). Is extreme right-wing populism contagious? Explaining the emergence of a new party family. *European Journal of Political Research*, *44*(3), 413–437. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2005.00233.x

Sanbonmatsu, K. (2008). Gender Backlash in American Politics? *Politics & Gender*, *4*(4), 634–642. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X08000512

Sauro, H. M. (2017). Control and regulation of pathways via negative feedback. *Journal of The Royal Society Interface*, *14*(127), 20160848. https://doi.org/10.1098/rsif.2016.0848

Schaub, H.-P. (2012). Maximising Direct Democracy – by Popular Assemblies or by Ballot Votes? *Swiss Political Science Review*, *18*(3), 305–331. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1662-6370.2012.02075.x

Schedler, A., & Sarsfield, R. (2007). Democrats with adjectives: Linking direct and indirect measures of democratic support. *European Journal of Political Research*, *46*(5), 637–659. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2007.00708.x

Scheepers, P. (2002). Ethnic Exclusionism in European Countries. Public Opposition to Civil Rights for Legal Migrants as a Response to Perceived Ethnic Threat. *European Sociological Review*, *18*(1), 17–34. https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/18.1.17

Schmitter, P. C., & Karl, T. L. (1991). What Democracy Is. . . and Is Not. *Journal of Democracy*, *2*(3), 75–88. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1991.0033

Sciarini, P., Cappelletti, F., Goldberg, A. C., & Lanz, S. (2016). The Underexplored Species: Selective Participation in Direct Democratic Votes. *Swiss Political Science Review*, *22*(1), 75–94. https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12178

Sears, D. O., & Funk, C. L. (1991). The Role of Self-Interest in Social and Political Attitudes. In *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (pp. 1–91, Vol. 24). Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60327-5

Sherif, M. (1936). *The psychology of social norms*. Harper.

Sherif, M. (1937). An Experimental Approach to the Study of Attitudes. *Sociometry*, *1*(1/2), 90. https://doi.org/10.2307/2785261

Silk, J. B., Alberts, S. C., & Altmann, J. (2003). Social Bonds of Female Baboons Enhance Infant Survival. *Science*, *302*(5648), 1231–1234. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1088580

Sniderman, P. M., Piazza, T., Tetlock, P. E., & Kendrick, A. (1991). The New Racism. *American Journal of Political Science*, *35*(2), 423. https://doi.org/10.2307/2111369

Soroka, S. N., & Wlezien, C. (2010). *Degrees of democracy: Politics, public opinion, and policy*. Cambridge University Press.

Stimson, J. A. (1991). *Public opinion in America: Moods, cycles, and swings*. Westview.

Sullivan, J. L., Marcus, G. E., Feldman, S., & Piereson, J. E. (1981). The Sources of Political Tolerance: A Multivariate Analysis. *American Political Science Review*, *75*(1), 92–106. https://doi.org/10.2307/1962161

Svolik, M. W. (2015). Which Democracies Will Last? Coups, Incumbent Takeovers, and the Dynamic of Democratic Consolidation. *British Journal of Political Science*, *45*(4), 715–738. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123413000550

Svolik, M. W. (2019). Polarization versus Democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, *30*(3), 20–32. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0039

Svolik, M. W., Avramovska, E., Lutz, J., & Milaèiæ, F. (2023). In Europe, Democracy Erodes from the Right. *Journal of Democracy*, *34*(1), 5–20. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2023.0000

Tajfel, H. (Ed.). (1978). *Differentiation between social groups: Studies in the social psychology of intergroup relations*. Academic Press.

Tankard, M. E., & Paluck, E. L. (2016). Norm Perception as a Vehicle for Social Change. *Social Issues and Policy Review*, *10*(1), 181–211. https://doi.org/10.1111/sipr.12022

Tankard, M. E., & Paluck, E. L. (2017). The Effect of a Supreme Court Decision Regarding Gay Marriage on Social Norms and Personal Attitudes. *Psychological Science*, *28*(9), 1334–1344. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797617709594

Tannenberg, M. (2022). The autocratic bias: Self-censorship of regime support. *Democratization*, *29*(4), 591–610. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2021.1981867

Valentim, V. (2024a, September). *The Normalization of the Radical Right: A Norms Theory of Political Supply and Demand* (1st ed.). Oxford University PressOxford. https://doi.org/10.1093/9780198926740.001.0001

Valentim, V. (2024b). Norms of Democracy, Staged Democrats, and Supply of Exclusionary Ideology. *Comparative Political Studies*, 00104140241283009. https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140241283009

Valentim, V., & Dinas, E. (2020, February). Does Party-System Fragmentation Affect the Quality of Democracy? [Issue: 3533378]. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3533378

Van Kleef, G. A., Wanders, F., Stamkou, E., & Homan, A. C. (2015). The social dynamics of breaking the rules: Antecedents and consequences of norm-violating behavior. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *6*, 25–31. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2015.03.013

Vatter, A., Stadelmann-Steffen, I., & Danaci, D. (2014). Who supports minority rights in popular votes? Empirical evidence from Switzerland. *Electoral Studies*, *36*, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2014.06.008

Verkuyten, M. (2005). Ethnic Group Identification and Group Evaluation Among Minority and Majority Groups: Testing the Multiculturalism Hypothesis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *88*(1), 121–138. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.88.1.121

Wlezien, C. (1995). The Public as Thermostat: Dynamics of Preferences for Spending. *American Journal of Political Science*, *39*(4), 981. https://doi.org/10.2307/2111666

Wlezien, C. (2017). Policy (Mis) Representation and the Cost of Ruling: U.S. Presidential Elections in Comparative Perspective. *Comparative Political Studies*, *50*(6), 711–738. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414015626446

Wunsch, N., Jacob, M., & Derksen, L. (2022, January). *The Demand Side of Democratic Backsliding: How Divergent Understandings of Democracy Shape Political Choice* (tech. rep.) (type: article). OSF Preprints. https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/c64gf

Young, I. M. (2000). *Inclusion and democracy*. Oxford University Press.

Zaller, J. (1992). *The nature and origins of mass opinion*. Cambridge University Press.

Appendix D: Supplementary materials

D.1 Referenda descriptions

2017 Referendum on easing naturalization for third-generation immigrants

Prior to the referendum, strict naturalization rules resulted in nearly a quarter of the Swiss population being registered as "foreign," which is relatively high compared to neighboring countries. The proposed amendment applied mostly to children of "secondos" (i.e., second-generation immigrants), who were born in Switzerland and whose parents and grandparents were Swiss residents. The proposed amendment involved excepting children of "secondos" from interviews and tests that formed part of the naturalization process.

Advocates of the proposed amendment argued that requiring someone who was born and raised in Switzerland to prove their integration into Swiss culture using standardized tests was unnecessary, inefficient and discriminatory—especially given how expensive these test could be. Meanwhile, opponents (mostly from the Swiss People's Party) argued that the new proposal would allow over two million foreigners to suddenly become citizens and create a legal loophole that could be exploited by future immigrants who refuse to integrate into Swiss culture, which would ultimately result in an erosion of traditional values, an "Islamization" of the country and even a security threat. Correspondingly, the "No" campaign mounted a poster campaign featured a woman in a black niqab with the slogan "Reject uncontrolled citizenship." In reality, fewer than 25,000 Swiss inhabitants actually qualified as third-generation citizens-the majority of which were of Italian descent, followed by Balkan and Turkish descendants. Nevertheless, three previous attempts to relax the citizenship rules were defeated.

On Febuary 12, 2017, 2,482,471 registered voters cast their ballots in the national referendum. This represented a turnout of approximately 46.8% of registered Swiss voters. Approximately 60.4% of these voters voted in favor of the amendment and approximately 39.6% voted against it. As a result, the proposed constitutional amendment to ease naturalization for third-generation immigrants.[22]

2020 Referendum on banning discrimination based on sexual orientation

Prior to the referendum, only discrimination based on race, religion or ethnicity was explicitly prohibited by law. Following a 2010 Supreme Court ruling that found that homosexuals and bisexuals lack the sufficient legal means to fight against discrimination based on sexual orientation, the Swiss parliament called for a reform to the existing legislation at the time. The proposed legislation would prohibit public statements or actions that violate the human dignity of a person or group on the basis of sexual orientation. It would also be an offense to refuse to provide someone with a service that is publicly on offer because of their sexual orientation.

However, the Federal Democratic Union, with the support of the Swiss People's Party, collected enough signatures to force a nationwide referendum on the proposed amendment. The "No" campaign argued that the amendment would undermine the right to free speech by legally restricting what could and could not be said in public, and that the LBG community was not in need of additional legal protection.

On February 9, 2020, 2,241,395 registered voters cast their ballots in the national referendum. This represented a turnout of approximately 41.7% of registered Swiss voters. Approximately 63.1%

[22] See Swiss Federal Department of Justice and Police for more information on this referendum.

of these voters voted in favor of the amendment and approximately 36.9% voted against it. As a result, the proposed constitutional amendment to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation was approved.[23]

2009 Referendum on banning construction of minarets

The controversy began in 2005 in a small municipality in the northern part of Switzerland when a Turkish cultural association in Wangen bei Olten applied for a construction permit to erect a 6-meter-high minaret on the roof of its Islamic community center. Surrounding residents had formed a group to prevent the tower's erection. Following a number of disputes, the minaret was finally constructed.

In 2007, in response to their "defeat," the Egerkinger committee (consisting of members Swiss People's Party and the Federal Democratic Union) launched a federal popular initiative against minarets. At the time of the referendum, there were four minarets in Switzerland, attached to mosques in Zürich, Geneva, Winterthur and Wangen bei Olten-which would not be affected by the amendment.

On November 29, 2009, 2,709,287 registered voters cast their ballots in the national referendum. This represented a turnout of approximately 53.76% of registered Swiss voters. Approximately 57.5% of these voters voted in favor of the amendment and approximately 42.5% voted against it. As a result, the proposed constitutional amendment banning the construction of new minarets.[24]

[23] See Swiss Federal Department of Justice and Police for more information on this referendum.
[24] See Swiss Federal Department of Justice and Police for more information on this referendum.

5.6 Survey items

Table D.1 Perceived minority rights protection item

Now we want you to think about the situation in Switzerland.

Nowadays, do you think that in Switzerland...

	Never										Always
Minority rights are protected	0 ○	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○	9 ○	10 ○

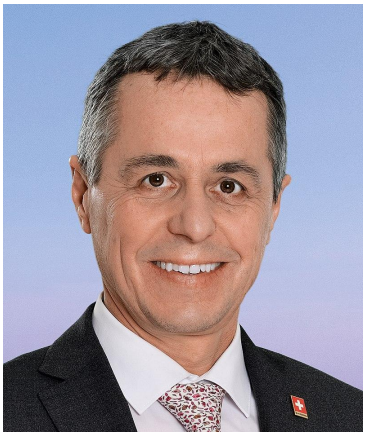
Table D.2 Example of treatment

La Suisse vote en faveur d'une législation protégeant les droits des personnes LGBTQ+

Les électeurs suisses ont soutenu une proposition de référendum visant à étendre la législation antidiscrimination aux discriminations fondée sur l'orientation sexuelle.

Table D.3 Political knowledge question 1

What position does the person in the photo hold?



1. Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research
2. **Federal Department of Foreign Affairs**
3. Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research
4. Federal Department of Home Affairs
5. I don't know

Note: Bold text indicates correct response.

Table D.4 Political knowledge question 2

How many national advisors are there in Federal Assembly?

1. More than 300
2. Between 250 and 299
3. **Between 200 and 249**
4. Between 150 and 199
5. I don't know

Note: Bold text indicates correct response.

5.7 Additional analyses

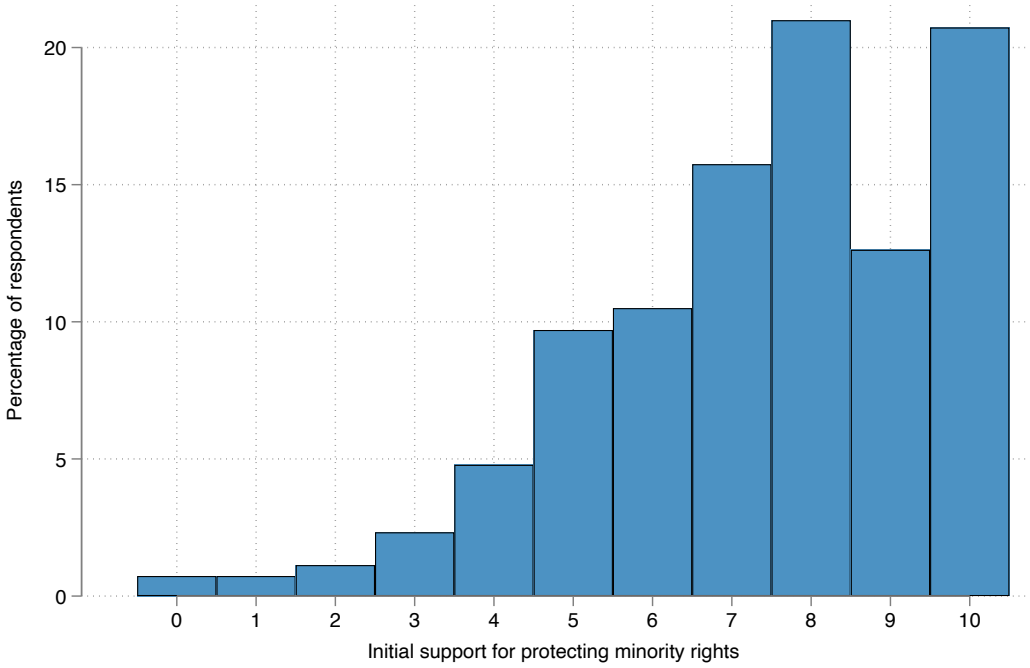
Table D.5 Balance tests across treatment arms for socio-demographic characteristics

	(1) Education	(2) Female	(3) Age
Control (placebo)	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(.)	(.)	(.)
Treatment 1 (positive)	0.10*	-0.05	-0.12
	(0.05)	(0.04)	(1.27)
Treatment 2 (positive)	0.04	-0.06	-1.32
	(0.05)	(0.04)	(1.21)
Treatment 3 (negative)	-0.02	0.02	-0.44
	(0.05)	(0.04)	(1.24)
Constant	1.27**	0.53**	48.86**
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.88)
Observations	1504	1505	1505
R^2	0.005	0.005	0.001

Standard errors in parentheses

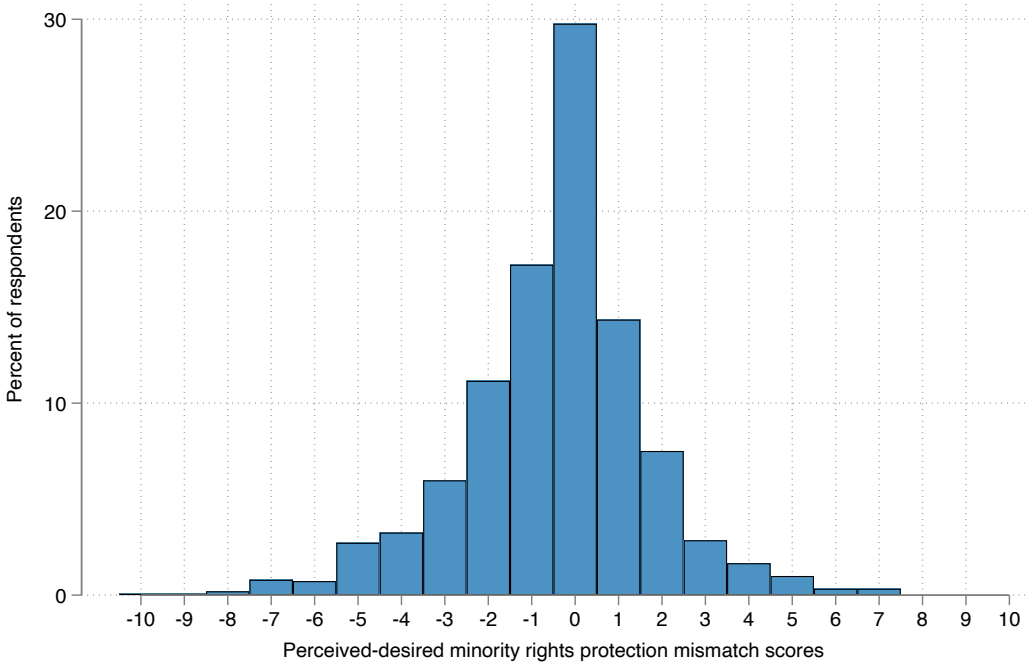
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Figure D.1 Distribution of initial support for minority rights



Note: Mean value is 7.40 with a standard deviation of 2.15. N = 1,505.

Figure D.2 Distribution of perceived-desired minority rights protection mismatch scores



Note: Values greater than zero indicate a desire for more minority rights, while negative values indicate a desire for less minority rights. The mean value is -0.43 with a standard deviation of 2.14. N= 1,505.

Table D.6 Balance tests across treatment arms for potential confounders

	(1) Support MR	(2) Knowledge	(3) Interest
Control (placebo)	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(.)	(.)	(.)
Treatment 1 (positive)	-0.08	0.01	0.02
	(0.16)	(0.04)	(0.06)
Treatment 2 (positive)	-0.04	0.02	0.10
	(0.15)	(0.03)	(0.06)
Treatment 3 (negative)	0.02	0.01	0.03
	(0.16)	(0.04)	(0.06)
Constant	7.42**	0.37**	2.77**
	(0.11)	(0.03)	(0.04)
Observations	1505	1505	1505
R^2	0.000	0.000	0.003

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

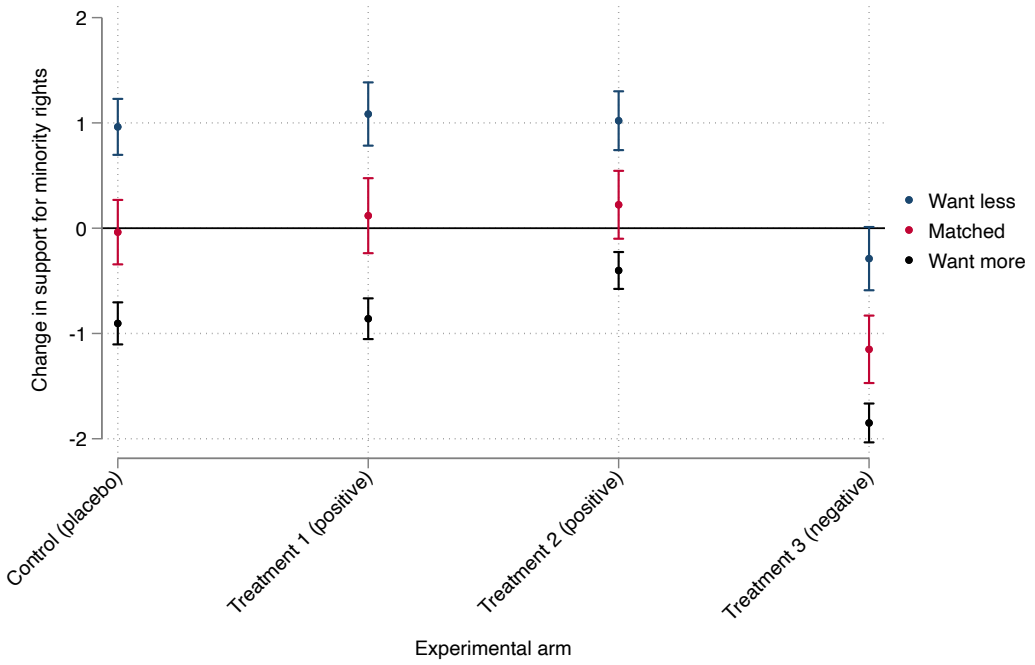
Table D.7 Main models

	(1) MR support change	(2) Education
Treatment 1 (positive)	-0.03	-0.05
	(0.15)	(0.15)
Treatment 2 (positive)	0.23	0.22
	(0.15)	(0.15)
Treatment 3 (negative)	-1.18**	-1.19**
	(0.15)	(0.15)
education		0.20*
		(0.08)
Constant	-0.19	-0.44**
	(0.11)	(0.15)
Observations	1505	1504
R^2	0.067	0.072

Standard errors in parentheses

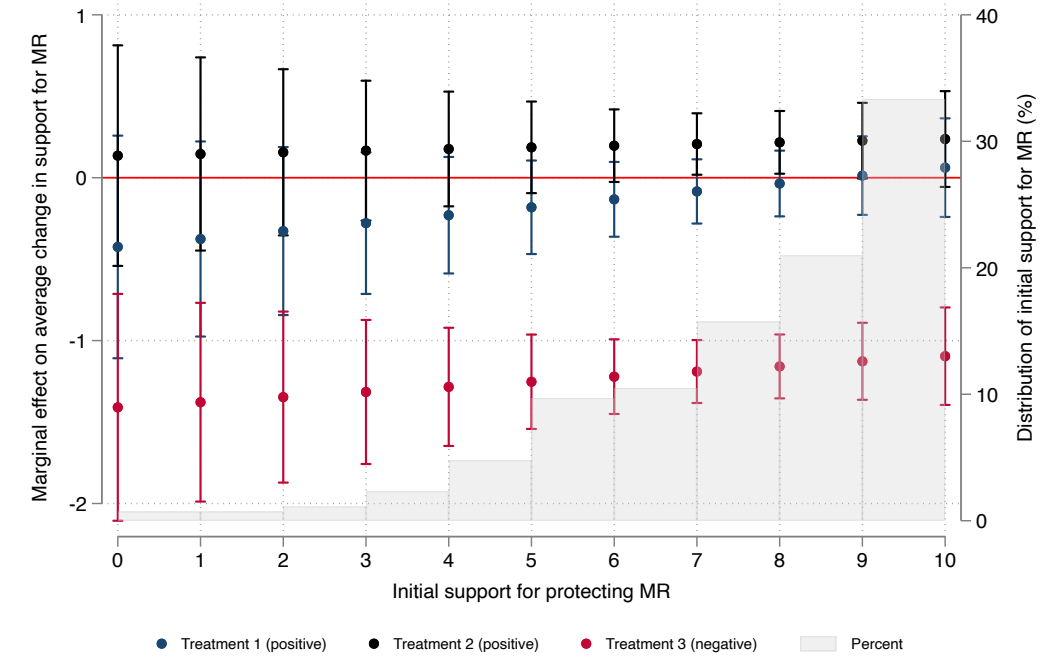
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Figure D.3 Predicted margins of treatment effects per (all categories of) perceived-desired mismatch scores



Note: Predicted margins based on OLS estimation. 84% confidence intervals are used to more easily discern differences between mismatch categories visually. Based on Table D.8.

Figure D.4 Marginal effect of change in support for protecting minority rights per treatment arm



Note: Marginal effects based on 84% confidence intervals are used to more easily discern differences between treatments visually.

Table D.8 Predicted margins of treatment effects per perceived-desired mismatch scores

	(1) MR support change	(2) W education
Control (placebo)	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)
Treatment 1 (positive)	0.12 (0.29)	0.11 (0.28)
Treatment 2 (positive)	0.06 (0.27)	0.06 (0.27)
Treatment 3 (negative)	-1.25** (0.29)	-1.27** (0.29)
Want less	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)
Matched	-1.00** (0.29)	-0.98** (0.29)
Want more	-1.87** (0.24)	-1.86** (0.24)
Control (placebo) × Want less	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)
Control (placebo) × Matched	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)
Control (placebo) × Want more	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)
Treatment 1 (positive) × Want less	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)
Treatment 1 (positive) × Matched	0.03 (0.44)	0.01 (0.44)
Treatment 1 (positive) × Want more	-0.08 (0.35)	-0.08 (0.35)
Treatment 2 (positive) × Want less	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)
Treatment 2 (positive) × Matched	0.20 (0.42)	0.17 (0.42)
Treatment 2 (positive) × Want more	0.44 (0.33)	0.44 (0.33)
Treatment 3 (negative) × Want less	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)
Treatment 3 (negative) × Matched	0.14 (0.43)	0.15 (0.43)
Treatment 3 (negative) × Want more	0.31 (0.34)	0.33 (0.34)
education		0.19* (0.08)
Constant	0.96** (0.19)	0.71** (0.21)
Observations	1504	1503
R^2	0.178	0.181

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

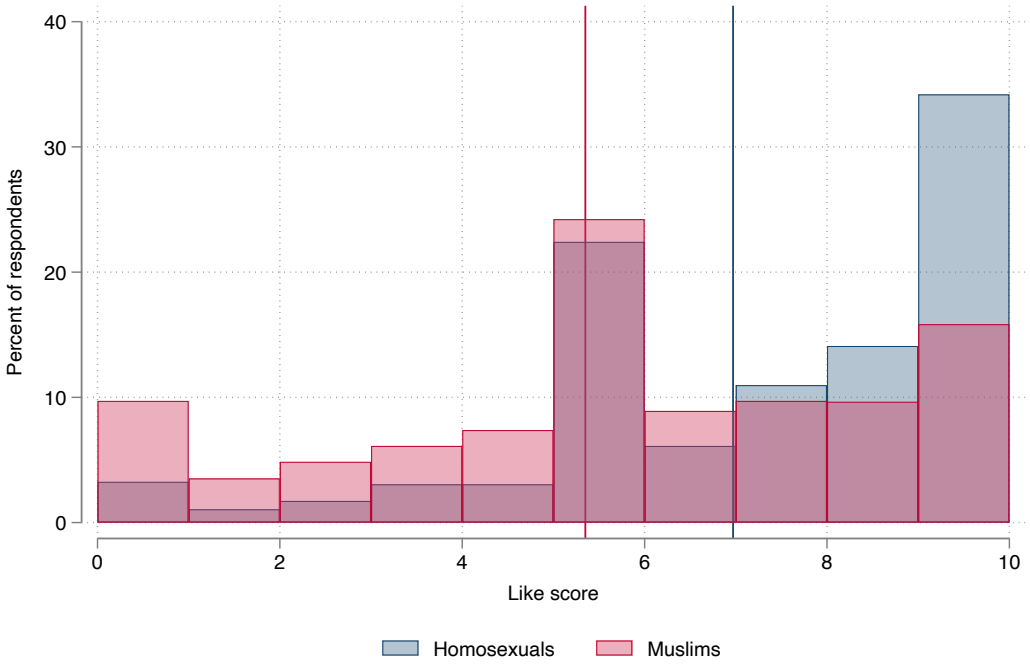
Table D.9 Interaction with change in support for MR× initial support

	(1) MR support change	(2) W education
Control (placebo)	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)
Treatment 1 (positive)	-0.42 (0.49)	-0.42 (0.48)
Treatment 2 (positive)	0.14 (0.48)	0.14 (0.48)
Treatment 3 (negative)	-1.41** (0.50)	-1.39** (0.49)
initial_support	-0.46** (0.05)	-0.46** (0.05)
Control (placebo) × initial_support	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)
Treatment 1 (positive) × initial_support	0.05 (0.06)	0.05 (0.06)
Treatment 2 (positive) × initial_support	0.01 (0.06)	0.01 (0.06)
Treatment 3 (negative) × initial_support	0.03 (0.06)	0.03 (0.06)
education		0.24** (0.07)
Constant	3.21** (0.35)	2.91** (0.36)
Observations	1505	1504
R^2	0.259	0.265

Standard errors in parentheses

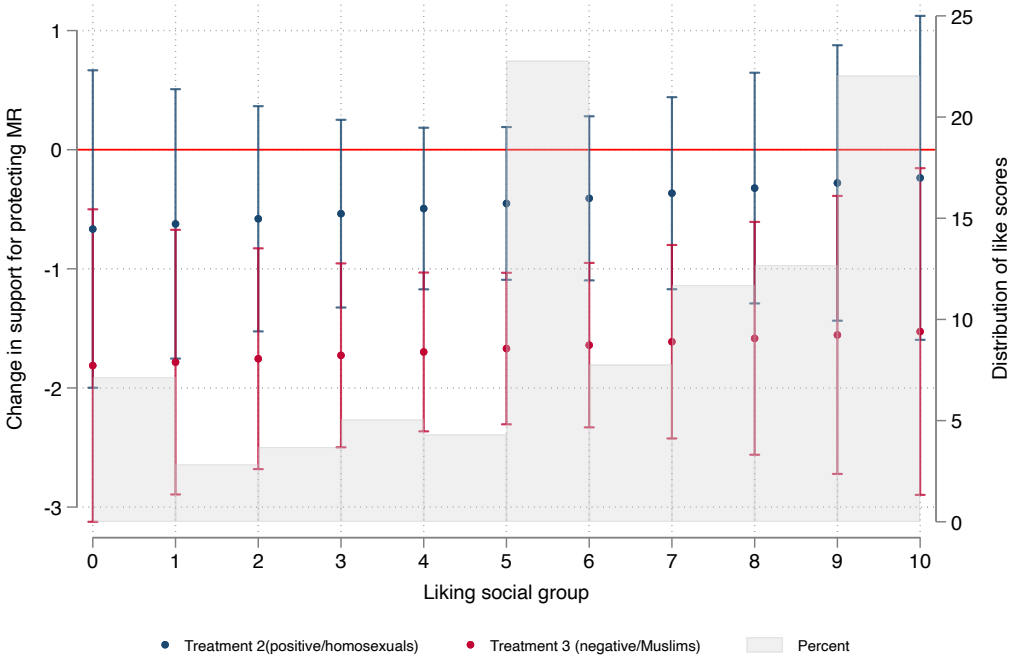
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Figure D.5 Distribution of affect towards groups used in Treatments 2 and 3



Note: Vertical lines indicate mean scores. In blue, the mean like score for homosexuals is 6.97 with standard deviation of 2.62. In blue, the mean like score for Muslims is 5.35 with standard deviation of 2.93. These groups are displayed as they are used in subsequent analyses.

Figure D.6 Treatment effects per like/dislike of group



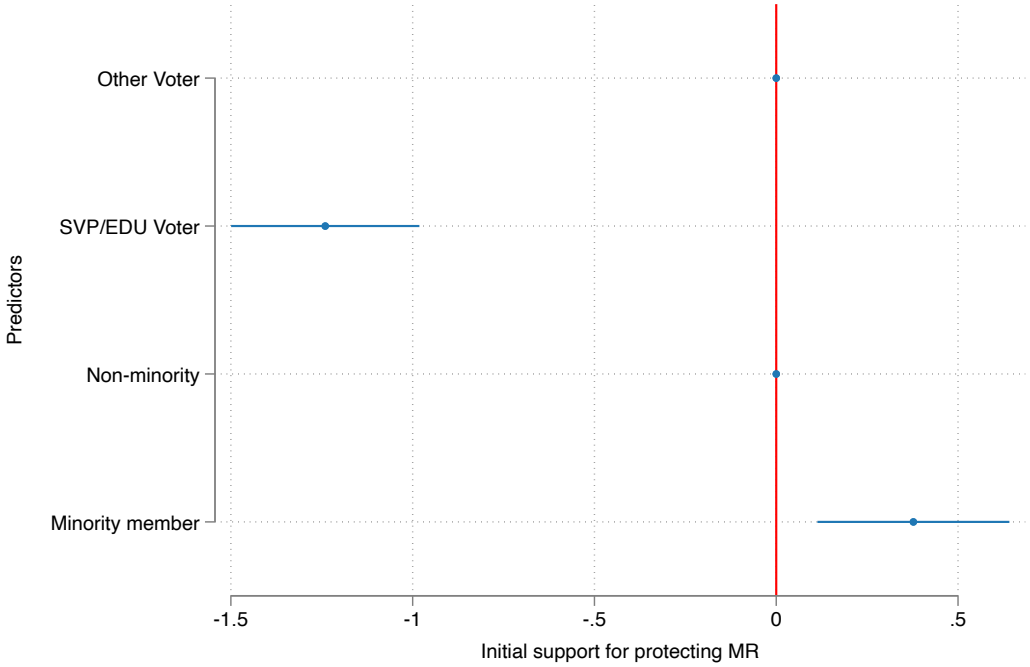
Note: Marginal effects with 95% confidence intervals based on Table D.10. The histogram in the background summarizes the distribution of like scores corresponding to the social group respondents saw in their respective treatments (homosexuals in Treatment 2 and Muslims in Treatment 3).

Table D.10 Effects of treatments × liking group on change in support for MR

	(1) MR support change	(2) W education
Treatment 2 (positive)	-0.67 (0.95)	-0.74 (0.95)
Treatment 3 (negative)	-1.81 (0.93)	-1.85* (0.93)
like_minority	0.09 (0.16)	0.07 (0.16)
Treatment 2 (positive) × like_minority	0.04 (0.17)	0.06 (0.17)
Treatment 3 (negative) × like_minority	0.03 (0.17)	0.04 (0.17)
education		0.18 (0.12)
Constant	-0.17 (0.90)	-0.33 (0.91)
Observations	812	811
R^2	0.120	0.124

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Figure D.7 Initial support for protecting minority rights among SVP/EDU voters and self-identified minorities



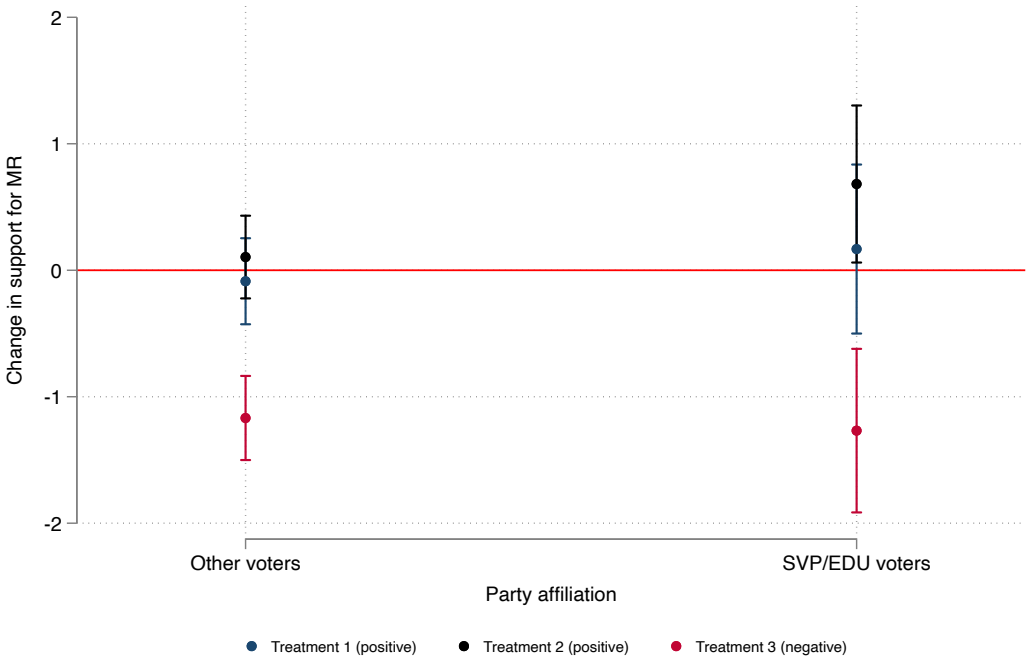
Note: OLS estimation. 95% confidence intervals. Based on Table D.11.

Table D.11 Initial support for protecting minority rights per party affiliation and minority self-identification

	(1) Initial MR support
SVP/EDU Voter	-1.24**
	(0.13)
Minority member	0.38**
	(0.13)
Constant	7.58**
	(0.07)
Observations	1505
R^2	0.061

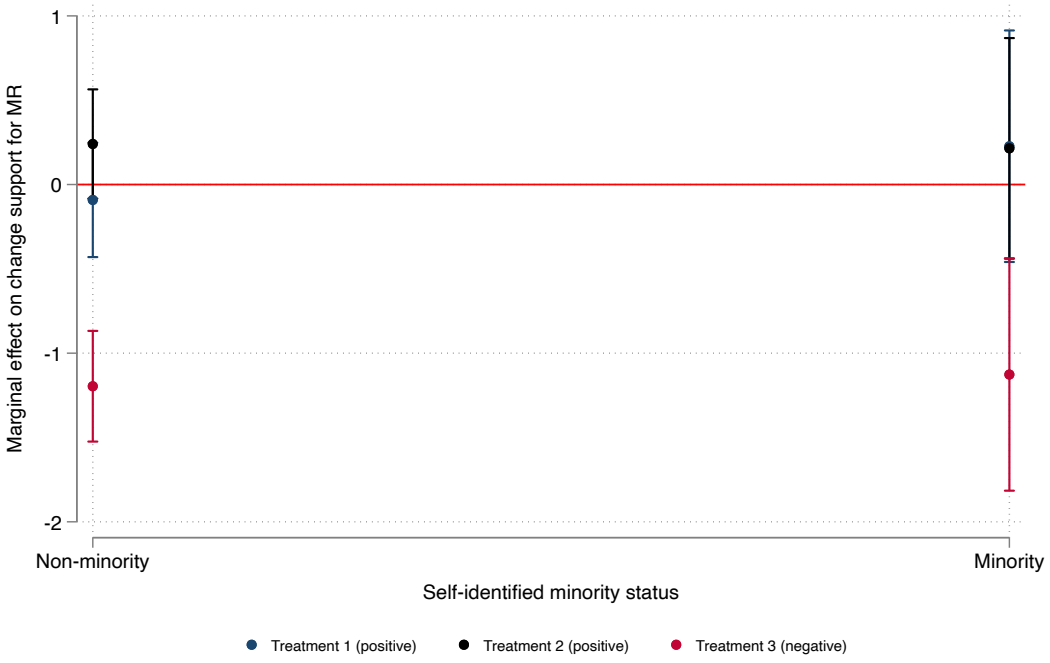
Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Figure D.8 Change in support for protecting minority rights per party affiliation × treatment



Note: 95% confidence intervals. Marginal effects based on Table D.12.

Figure D.9 Change in support for protecting minority rights per minority self-identification × treatment



Note: 95% confidence intervals. Marginal effects based on Table D.12.

Table D.12 Effects of treatments × party affiliation and minority self-identification on change in support for MR

	(1) MR support change	(2) W education	(3) MR support change	(4) W education
Treatment 1 (positive)	-0.09	-0.11	-0.09	-0.11
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)
Treatment 2 (positive)	0.10	0.10	0.24	0.23
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.16)
Treatment 3 (negative)	-1.17**	-1.18**	-1.20**	-1.19**
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)
SVP/EDU voters	-0.46	-0.43		
	(0.26)	(0.26)		
Treatment 1 (positive) × SVP/EDU voters	0.25	0.26		
	(0.38)	(0.38)		
Treatment 2 (positive) × SVP/EDU voters	0.58	0.58		
	(0.36)	(0.36)		
Treatment 3 (negative) × SVP/EDU voters	-0.10	-0.07		
	(0.37)	(0.37)		
education		0.18*		0.19*
		(0.08)		(0.08)
Minority member			-0.18	-0.16
			(0.28)	(0.28)
Treatment 1 (positive) × Minority member			0.32	0.29
			(0.39)	(0.39)
Treatment 2 (positive) × Minority member			-0.03	-0.02
			(0.37)	(0.37)
Treatment 3 (negative) × Minority member			0.07	0.03
			(0.39)	(0.39)
Constant	-0.09	-0.32*	-0.16	-0.41*
	(0.12)	(0.16)	(0.12)	(0.16)
Observations	1505	1504	1505	1504
R^2	0.072	0.076	0.068	0.072

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

6

Conclusion

6.1 Overview

The central question motivating this dissertation is why citizens who express support for minority-rights protection nevertheless tolerate—and sometimes support—its erosion. Existing research generally paints an optimistic picture of public commitment to liberal-democratic principles. Across democracies, citizens routinely express support for protecting minorities and other fundamental rights. This support is expected to serve a safeguard against illiberal actors. Yet, contemporary democratic politics presents a striking contradiction. Political actors who challenge minority rights continue to attract electoral support, while restrictions on those rights often encounter relatively limited public resistance.

This dissertation has argued that resolving this puzzle requires moving beyond the assumption that support for minority rights constitutes a fixed democratic commitment. Instead, support for minority-rights protection is frequently conditional. Citizens do not evaluate minority rights in isolation, but in relation to competing democratic principles, evaluations of the groups affected by those rights, and the social environments in which political judgments are formed. Because minority-rights protection is a complex and abstract democratic principle, it is unlikely to occupy a central position in the belief systems of many citizens. As a result, competing cognitive, affective, and social considerations often shape how this principle is interpreted and applied across contexts. Across four studies employing observational and experimental methods in fifteen countries, this dissertation demonstrates that support for minority rights is more volatile, context-dependent, and susceptible to external influences than conventional understandings of democratic support suggest. Taken together, the findings challenge classic civic-culture perspectives that portray democratic commitments as stable, coherent, and broadly internalized among citizens.

The remainder of this conclusion proceeds as follows. First, it synthesizes the main empirical findings of the dissertation around several key takeaways and their specific implications. Second, it discusses how these findings contribute to research on democratic support, minority rights, and democratic backsliding—concluding with the broader implication of dissertation. Third, it considers the limitations of the present research and identifies promising avenues for future research. Finally, it reflects on what these findings imply for the resilience of liberal democracy in contemporary societies.

6.2 Main takeaways

The first and most important takeaway of this dissertation is that citizens support minority rights in principle, but not unconditionally. Across multiple studies, respondents consistently expressed support for minority-rights protection when the principle was presented in isolation and in abstract terms (as per conventional measures). However, support became substantially weaker once minority rights were embedded in the political circumstances under which they are actually realized. Taken together, these findings suggest that conventional survey measures likely overestimate citizens' commitment to minority-rights protection by measuring support for the principle in abstraction from the contexts in which it is applied.

The second takeaway is that democratic commitments are shaped by tradeoffs between competing democratic principles. Citizens do not evaluate minority rights in isolation, but alongside other democratic considerations, particularly majority rule. Because majority rule is itself a democratic principle, support for democracy can, somewhat paradoxically, contribute to the erosion of liberal-democratic protections. Illiberal actors who frame restrictions on minority rights as expressions of the popular will may therefore be able to legitimize illiberal outcomes on seemingly democratic grounds. The findings of this dissertation suggest that democratic backsliding does not always require citizens to reject democratic principles; rather, it can emerge from conflicts between different democratic principles.

The third takeaway is that support for minority rights depends heavily on who is perceived to be the minority in question. Citizens frequently understand minority status in ways that diverge from theoretical and legal definitions, and these perceptions have important consequences for democratic

attitudes. Groups that are perceived as minorities receive somewhat greater support for their rights. Yet affective evaluations are even more influential. Across empirical studies, citizens were consistently more supportive of protecting the rights of groups they liked and less supportive of protecting the rights of groups they disliked. Importantly, considerations of deservingness did not neutralize these affective biases—rather, they operated through them. Thus, support for minority rights is not only conditional on conflicting abstract principles, but also on citizens' feelings toward the groups whose rights are at stake.

Finally, the findings demonstrate that commitment to minority rights is socially malleable. Citizens do not merely rely on their prior beliefs when evaluating democratic principles, they also look to their social environment for cues about what others believe. The referendum experiment of study IV showed that perceived public consensus can influence support for minority rights even among individuals who are initially supportive of this principle (in abstract and unconstrained terms). This suggests that democratic commitments are shaped not only by internal predispositions, but also by social influence. As a result, support for minority rights is vulnerable not only to ideological and affective considerations, but also to changes in perceived social norms.

6.3 Contributions to the literature

The findings of this dissertation contribute to several debates concerning democratic support, minority rights, political tolerance, and democratic backsliding. Most broadly, they respond to and reinforce recent calls to move beyond generic measures of support for democracy when assessing citizens' commitment to democratic governance (Claassen et al., 2024). For decades, political scientists have relied on different variants of two survey items to gauge support for democracy: one asking how important it is to live in a democracy and another asking how satisfied respondents are with the way democracy functions in their country. These items are commonly used to measure diffuse and specific support for democracy, respectively (Anderson, 2007; Claassen, 2019; Foa & Mounk, 2016, 2017; Wuttke et al., 2020). Yet citizens hold markedly different understandings of what democracy entails (Ferrín & Kriesi, 2016). Consequently, examining support for the specific principles and insti-

tutions that constitute democracy may provide a more valid assessment of democratic commitment than generic measures of democratic support alone.

In doing so, this dissertation also contributes to a growing body of research seeking to understand how citizens evaluate democracy under real-world conditions. Existing work has largely focused on tradeoffs between democracy and non-democratic considerations such as partisanship, economic interests, or security concerns (Adserà et al., 2023; Graham & Svolik, 2020; Neundorf et al., 2026; Svolik, 2019). This dissertation demonstrates that democratic commitments can also be conditioned by tradeoffs within democracy itself. Citizens may support democracy while simultaneously accepting restrictions on minority rights when such restrictions are perceived to advance another democratic principle, particularly majority rule. As such, the findings bring us closer to understanding how citizens evaluate democratic principles in practice rather than in abstraction.

More specifically, the findings build on research showing that citizens hold different conceptions of democracy and disagree about what democratic governance ought to entail (Gessler & Wunsch, 2023; Wunsch, 2025; Wunsch et al., 2022). For example, Grossman et al., 2022 argues that majoritarian conceptions of democracy can pose challenges to the liberal-democratic order, while Krishnarajan, 2022 demonstrates that citizens often rationalize undemocratic behavior in ways that align with their interests to avoid cognitive dissonance. The evidence presented here brings these insights together by suggesting that tradeoffs between competing democratic principles provide a particularly powerful justification for accepting illiberal outcomes. Citizens may tolerate restrictions on minority rights not because they reject democracy, but because they understand such restrictions as serving another democratic principle, namely majority rule.

More than six decades ago, Prothro and Grigg, 1960 demonstrated that support for abstract democratic principles often diverges from support for applying those principles to specific groups. The present research extends this insight to contemporary debates on democratic backsliding by showing that inconsistencies between abstract commitments and concrete applications are not merely a feature of political tolerance. They may also constitute an important mechanism through which minority rights become vulnerable to erosion despite widespread professed support for democratic values.

Beyond individual predispositions, this dissertation also contributes to emerging research on democratic norms and social influence (Bischof et al., 2024; Dinas et al., 2024; Valentim, 2024; Valentim & Dinas, 2020). While democratic attitudes are often treated as relatively stable individual orientations, the findings demonstrate that support for minority rights is responsive to perceptions of public consensus. This suggests that democratic commitments are not merely individual attributes but are also socially embedded, shaped by citizens' perceptions of what others believe and support. Consequently, support for minority rights may be vulnerable not only to ideological and affective considerations but also to shifts in perceived social consensus.

Taken together, these contributions challenge the notion that democratic commitments are stable, coherent, and consistently applied. Rather than representing fixed orientations, democratic attitudes appear to be embedded within broader cognitive, affective, and social processes that shape how citizens understand, evaluate, and apply democratic principles across contexts.

The overarching implication of the findings and contributions presented in this dissertation is that illiberal actors may be able to exploit the conditional nature of citizens' support for minority rights to advance their agendas with relatively limited resistance from the electorate. Expressions of support for minority rights should therefore not be interpreted as evidence that citizens will consistently defend those rights when they come under political pressure. The findings suggest that democratic resilience depends not only on citizens expressing support for liberal-democratic principles in the abstract, but also on their willingness to uphold those principles when they conflict with competing considerations. One potential way of strengthening such commitment is by reinforcing norms supporting minority-rights protection through institutional safeguards, civic education, and public discourse. At the same time, efforts to protect minority rights should avoid framing minority-rights protection and majority rule as inherently zero-sum principles. Such framing may inadvertently reinforce the very tradeoffs that citizens use to justify restrictions on minority rights. Instead, civic education initiatives may benefit from emphasizing both the tensions and complementarities that exist within liberal democracy, as well as the importance of maintaining a balance among its constituent principles.

6.4 Limitations & future research

This dissertation has several limitations that should be acknowledged and that may serve as starting points for future research. The first concerns generalizability. Studies I and III draw on data from fifteen countries, providing substantial cross-national coverage but falling short of global representation. Most countries in the sample are established European democracies, which raises questions about the extent to which the findings generalize to other regions such as Asia, Africa, or Latin America. Moreover, Study II focuses on four countries, while Study IV relies on a single-country case study in Switzerland. Future research should therefore seek to replicate these analyses across a broader range of political and cultural contexts, particularly given evidence that citizens hold markedly different understandings of democracy across countries and regime histories (Oser & Hooghe, 2018; Ridge, 2024; Wu & Wu, 2022).

This limitation, however, points to a promising avenue for future research on cross-national and longitudinal variation in democratic conditionality. An important unresolved question is whether citizens are equally susceptible to conditioning their support for minority rights across different political and institutional contexts. Comparative research could examine whether democratic conditionality varies systematically across regions and regime types, such as between Eastern and Western Europe, post-communist and post-fascist societies, majoritarian and consensual democracies, or liberal democracies, electoral democracies, electoral autocracies, and closed autocracies. One possible approach would be to employ multilevel models that link individual-level attitudes to broader institutional and historical contexts. Such research could help determine whether conditional support for minority rights constitutes a general feature of democratic citizenship or whether it is particularly pronounced in contexts where liberal-democratic institutions have weakened or come under sustained political challenge.

Another limitation is that the data is cross-sectional, making it difficult to disentangle causes from consequences. This is particularly true of Studies I, II, and III. For instance, the finding that Hungarian citizens significantly reduce their support for minority-rights protection when it is framed in zero-sum terms against majority rule raises an important research question: Has Fidesz under Orbán remained in power for so long because Hungarians were already particularly susceptible to tolerating

illiberal actions in the name of majoritarianism (e.g., due to historical legacies or cultural norms), or did citizens gradually become more tolerant of such behavior over the course of sixteen years of elite rhetoric and party cues framing these transgressions as democratically legitimate? Panel data would be very valuable in tracking how attitudes towards minority-rights protection and tradeoff preferences change over time. They would also allow for an examination of whether these differences between countries reflect long-standing cultural and institutional legacies or whether they emerge through sustained exposure to elite rhetoric and political cues. While study IV somewhat overcomes this issue using an experimental design, it is not clear how long the detects effects last. Panel data would also help here.

The analyses presented in this dissertation have primarily focused on the demand side of minority-rights protection, namely citizens' attitudes and preferences. Yet the supply side is equally important. Political actors do not merely respond to public opinion; they also shape it through rhetoric, framing, and the strategic justification of policies. Future research should therefore examine how political parties, media actors, and other elites frame democratic tradeoffs and legitimize restrictions on minority rights. Such work could help identify the conditions under which illiberal policies become politically acceptable to citizens. Methodologically, this agenda could be pursued through expert surveys, quantitative text analysis of party manifestos and political speeches, or comparative studies of elite discourse across countries and over time.

A second limitation concerns measurement. Although Studies II and III reduce the level of abstraction by applying minority-rights protection to specific groups, the principle itself remains relatively abstract. The findings of this dissertation suggest that citizens' support for minority rights may vary considerably depending on the specific policies, legal protections, or constitutional reforms under consideration. At the same time, focusing exclusively on policies may come at the cost of broader generalizability. Future research should therefore examine support for minority rights across different levels of abstraction, comparing support for abstract principles with support for specific rights, policies, and minority groups. Such work would help clarify the extent to which democratic commitments depend on how minority-rights protection is framed and operationalized. More broadly, such research could help determine whether the conditionality documented throughout this dissertation

reflects a feature of minority-rights protection specifically or a more general characteristic of support for democratic principles.

Finally, one of the broader questions emerging from this dissertation concerns the extent to which different preferences regarding democratic tradeoffs are themselves democratically legitimate. Liberal democracies require balancing competing principles, yet it remains unclear at what point prioritizing one principle over another becomes democratically destabilizing. Throughout this dissertation, extreme tradeoff preferences—such as allocating all support to one democratic principle while denying support to another—have been treated as potentially problematic because they imply the absence of balance between competing democratic values. However, the precise threshold at which democratic preferences become democratically destabilizing remains unclear. Future research should therefore seek to identify which tradeoff profiles are associated with support for illiberal policies, democratic transgressions, or anti-democratic candidates. One possible approach would involve classifying respondents according to their tradeoff profiles and examining how these relate to support for illiberal actions using conjoint experiments similar to those employed by Wunsch, 2025. Such work would help distinguish between democratic disagreement over priorities and preferences that may undermine the functioning of liberal democracy. More broadly, identifying these thresholds could inform civic-education initiatives aimed at strengthening citizens' understanding of democratic tradeoffs and the importance of balancing competing democratic principles (Eroglu et al., 2025).

Despite these limitations, this dissertation helps explain why citizens who express support for minority-rights protection nevertheless tolerate—or even support—political actors who challenge these rights. The findings suggest that support for minority rights is not a fixed democratic commitment but a conditional one, shaped by competing democratic principles, attitudes toward the groups involved, and perceptions of what others believe. As a result, citizens may not always serve as the steadfast guardians of liberal democracy envisioned by classic civic-culture theories. Under certain circumstances, they may themselves become willing participants in the erosion of liberal-democratic protections.

More broadly, the findings suggest that the resilience of liberal democracy depends on more than the existence of democratic institutions or the public endorsement of democratic values in the abstract. It also depends on citizens' willingness to uphold democratic principles when those principles

become politically contested, socially unpopular, or costly to defend. Understanding when citizens defend minority rights—and when they do not—is therefore not only a question about minority rights. It is ultimately a question about the resilience of liberal democracy itself.

References

Adserà, A., Arenas, A., & Boix, C. (2023). Estimating the value of democracy relative to other institutional and economic outcomes among citizens in Brazil, France, and the United States. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *120*(48), e2306168120. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2306168120

Anderson, C. (Ed.). (2007). *Losers' consent: Elections and democratic legitimacy* (1. publ. in paperback). Oxford University Press.

Bischof, D., Allinger, T., Juratic, M. L. C., & Frederiksen, K. V. S. (2024). How Citizens Perceive Others: The Role of Social Norms for Democracies. *osf.io*.

Claassen, C. (2019). Does Public Support Help Democracy Survive? [Number: 0]. *American Journal of Political Science*, *0*(0). https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12452

Claassen, C., Ackermann, K., Bertsou, E., Borba, L., Carlin, R. E., Cavari, A., Dahlum, S., Gherghina, S., Hawkins, D., Lelkes, Y., Magalhães, P. C., Mattes, R., Meijers, M. J., Neundorf, A., Oross, D., Öztürk, A., Sarsfield, R., Self, D., Stanley, B., … Zechmeister, E. J. (2024). Conceptualizing and Measuring Support for Democracy: A New Approach. *Comparative Political Studies*, 00104140241259458. https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140241259458

Dinas, E., Martínez, S., & Valentim, V. (2024). Social Norm Change, Political Symbols, and Expression of Stigmatized Preferences. *The Journal of Politics*, *86*(2), 488–506. https://doi.org/10.1086/726951

Eroglu, M. H., Finkel, S. E., Neundorf, A., Öztürk, A., & Rascón Ramírez, E. G. (2025). Choosing Democracy Over Party? How Civic Education Can Mitigate the Anti-Democratic Effects of Partisan Polarization. *British Journal of Political Science*, *55*, e65. https://doi.org/10.1017/S000712342500016X

Ferrín, M., & Kriesi, H. (Eds.). (2016). *How Europeans view and evaluate democracy* (First edition). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198766902.001.0001

Foa, R. S., & Mounk, Y. (2016). The Democratic Disconnect. *Journal of Democracy*, *27*(3), 5–17. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0049

Foa, R. S., & Mounk, Y. (2017). The Signs of Deconsolidation. *Journal of Democracy*, *28*(1), 5–15. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0000

Gessler, T., & Wunsch, N. (2023, February). A new regime divide? Partisan affect and attitudes towards democratic backsliding. https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/nbwmj

Graham, M. H., & Svolik, M. W. (2020). Democracy in America? Partisanship, Polarization, and the Robustness of Support for Democracy in the United States [Number: 2]. *American Political Science Review*, *114*(2), 392–409. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055420000052

Grossman, G., Kronick, D., Levendusky, M., & Meredith, M. (2022). The Majoritarian Threat to Liberal Democracy. *Journal of Experimental Political Science*, *9*(1), 36–45. https://doi.org/10.1017/XPS.2020.44

Krishnarajan, S. (2022). Rationalizing Democracy: The Perceptual Bias and (Un)Democratic Behavior. *American Political Science Review*, 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055422000806

Neundorf, A., Dahlum, S., Skaaning Frederiksen, K. V., & Öztürk, A. (2026). Elections Without Constraints? The Appeal of Electoral Autocracy Across the World. *British Journal of Political Science*, *56*, e1. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123425101129

Oser, J., & Hooghe, M. (2018). Democratic ideals and levels of political participation: The role of political and social conceptualisations of democracy [Number: 3]. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, *20*(3), 711–730. https://doi.org/10.1177/1369148118768140

Prothro, J. W., & Grigg, C. M. (1960). Fundamental Principles of Democracy: Bases of Agreement and Disagreement. *The Journal of Politics*, *22*(2), 276–294. https://doi.org/10.2307/2127359

Ridge, H. M. (2024). The d-word: Surveying democracy in America. *Democratization*, *31*(4), 852–870. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2023.2284279

Svolik, M. W. (2019). Polarization versus Democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, *30*(3), 20–32. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0039

Valentim, V. (2024, September). *The Normalization of the Radical Right: A Norms Theory of Political Supply and Demand* (1st ed.). Oxford University PressOxford. https://doi.org/10.1093/9780198926740.001.0001

Valentim, V., & Dinas, E. (2020, February). Does Party-System Fragmentation Affect the Quality of Democracy? [Issue: 3533378]. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3533378

Wu, C.-Y., & Wu, C.-e. (2022). Regime types and winner-loser Gaps in support for democracy in East Asia. *Democratization*, *29*(6), 1157–1175. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2022.2036721

Wunsch, N. (2025). *Democratic commitment: Why citizens tolerate democratic backsliding*. Oxford University Press.

Wunsch, N., Jacob, M., & Derksen, L. (2022, January). *The Demand Side of Democratic Backsliding: How Divergent Understandings of Democracy Shape Political Choice* (tech. rep.) (type: article). OSF Preprints. https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/c64gf

Wuttke, A., Gavras, K., & Schoen, H. (2020). Have Europeans Grown Tired of Democracy? New Evidence from Eighteen Consolidated Democracies, 1981–2018. *British Journal of Political Science*, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123420000149

The Conditionality of Citizens' Commitment to Minority-Rights Protection

Why do citizens who support minority rights so often tolerate their erosion?

This question relates to contemporary concerns about democratic backsliding. Across a number of liberal democracies, governments have restricted minority rights while facing relatively limited public opposition. Elsewhere, political parties whose agendas challenge liberal-democratic principles continue to gain electoral support. Yet surveys consistently show that citizens support minority rights and, according to conventional wisdom, should therefore act as safeguards against illiberal behaviour. This dissertation investigates the apparent contradiction between citizens' professed commitment to minority-rights protection and their willingness to accept the erosion of those rights.

The central argument is that support for minority-rights protection is conditional rather than fixed. Citizens do not evaluate minority rights in isolation. Instead, they weigh them against competing democratic principles, apply them unevenly across different social groups, and adjust their attitudes in response to cues about what others believe.

Drawing on original survey data from fifteen countries and combining observational and experimental methods, this dissertation identifies several sources of this conditionality. Citizens become less supportive of minority rights when these rights are framed as being in conflict with majority rule. They are also more willing to protect the rights of some minorities than others, depending on how minority status is understood and how positively or negatively particular groups are viewed. Finally, support for minority rights responds to perceived public consensus, suggesting that democratic commitments are shaped not only by individual beliefs but also by social norms.

The findings reveal that citizens' commitment to minority rights is more fragile and context-dependent than conventional measures suggest. More broadly, they indicate that democratic erosion may emerge not only because citizens reject democratic principles, but also because they apply those principles inconsistently. Understanding when citizens defend minority rights—and when they do not—is therefore essential for understanding the resilience of liberal democracy itself.

UAB Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

erc European Research Council
Established by the European Commission

DEC Democracy Elections & Citizenship