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Working Paper

How Does Information About Inequalities Affect Fairness Views and Policy Preferences? Evidence from a Randomized Survey Experiment

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How Does Information about Inequalities Affect Fairness Views and Policy Preferences? Evidence from a Randomized Survey Experiment

Julia Baarck, Mathias Dolls, Lisa Windsteiger*

October 31, 2025

Abstract

This study investigates how information about intergenerational and intragenerational inequality shapes fairness views and policy preferences. Using a large-scale randomized survey experiment with 4,900 respondents in Germany, we test how exposure to information on wealth and age disparities affects (i) perceptions of distributive and intergenerational fairness, and (ii) support for redistributive and future-oriented policies. We find that respondents generally underestimate existing inequalities. Moreover, providing accurate information about the extent of age and wealth disparities has little impact on left-leaning and centrist individuals but elicits a backlash among right-leaning respondents: the information increases their perceived fairness of the status quo and lowers their support for redistributive and future-oriented measures. We attribute these counterintuitive responses to skepticism about the credibility and neutrality of the provided information. Overall, the findings highlight the limits of informational interventions and the potential for factual communication to backfire in politically polarized contexts.

JEL classification codes: D63, D72, J48, D83, D91, H23

Keywords: Fairness Views, Inequality, Policy Preferences, Survey Experiment

Ethics clearance: Ethics Commission, Department of Economics, University of Munich, Project 2021-16

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1 MOTIVATION

Questions of intergenerational and intragenerational inequality have become central to public and political debates in many advanced economies. Population aging raises concerns that the interests of younger cohorts may be underrepresented in political processes – for example, in the design of social security systems or the distribution of fiscal burdens (European Commission, 2019). At the same time, persistent and often rising wealth disparities within generations have heightened attention to distributive justice (ICAEW, 2021; OECD, 2021). Fairness views and perceptions of inequality are key determinants of individuals’ political preferences and their support for policies addressing social inequalities (Gimpelson and Treisman, 2018; Hauser and Norton, 2017; Stantcheva, 2021a). Understanding these perceptions is not only important for explaining political behavior but also for assessing the scope and limits of (public support for) policy interventions aimed at redistribution and social cohesion (OECD, 2025). It is therefore essential to study subjective perceptions of distributive justice alongside traditional analyses based on objective measures of inequality.

Against this background, this paper analyzes fairness views and policy preferences, examining how these are affected by information about existing inequalities in society through a large-scale randomized online survey experiment conducted with 4,900 respondents in Germany. We hypothesize that our information treatments about inter- and intragenerational inequalities generate exogenous variation in fairness views. As people tend to underestimate inequalities on average (Kiatpongsan and Norton, 2014; Norton and Ariely, 2011), we expect the experiment to reduce perceived distributive or intergenerational fairness among treated individuals. In turn, this should increase support for policies aimed at mitigating these inequalities.

In the experiment, we employ a between-subject design and randomly assign respondents into three groups of equal size. While the control group receives no information treatment, the first treatment group receives information about the unequal age distribution of eligible voters in Germany, showing that 48% of eligible voters are 55 years and older and 10% are 25 years or younger. This is combined with a hint that a large share of older voters might bias political priorities to the disadvantage of the young (‘Intergenerational Justice’, T1). The second treatment group is confronted with information about the unequal wealth distribution in Germany, showing that the top 10% in the wealth distribution own 67% of total wealth, whereas the bottom 50% own 1% of total wealth (‘Distributive Justice’, T2).

Our main results from the survey experiment are as follows. The information treatments hardly affect fairness views and policy preferences of respondents who are politically left-leaning or who identify with the political center. Surprisingly, and contrary to our

hypotheses, we find that for politically right-leaning respondents our treatments tend to *strengthen* perceived distributive and intergenerational justice and to *lower* support for policies aimed at counteracting inter- and intragenerational inequalities. We rationalize these findings with evidence from our post-experimental questions, suggesting that right-leaning respondents dismiss the provided information as not credible and tend to judge the survey as politically biased to the left. Finally, we perform a causal mediation analysis and find evidence that perceived intragenerational fairness is a mediator for the effect of the Distributive Justice treatment. Our results hold important implications for political communication as they show that factually correct information interventions can backfire and lead to defiance reactions of voters.

Our paper relates to a growing strand of literature that uses survey experiments to study fairness perceptions and political attitudes and how people react to information about inequalities (Alesina et al., 2024, 2023, 2018; Balcells et al., 2015; Bublitz, 2022; Cruces et al., 2013; Douenne and Fabre, 2022; Henkel et al., 2025; Kuziemko et al., 2015). A common finding in this literature is that informational treatments can reduce misperceptions about the extent or structure of inequality, but that such corrections often have limited effects on policy preferences. We contribute to this literature by showing that information about inequality can, under certain conditions, shift policy preferences in the *opposite* direction to that intended by the treatment, highlighting the potential for informational interventions to backfire. This pattern resonates with evidence from the literature on populist and anti-elite attitudes, which shows that individuals with stronger populist or anti-elite orientations are more likely to question scientific and expert consensus, particularly on politicized issues such as climate change or vaccination (Algan et al., 2021; Clulow and Reiner, 2024; Kulin and Johansson Sevä, 2024; Marino et al., 2024; Merkley, 2020). We relate to this literature by showing how distrust in provided information about inter- and intragenerational inequalities can lower receptiveness to factual information.

Our results are consistent with the theory of *motivated beliefs*, which suggests that individuals derive practical benefits from maintaining certain views. Motivated reasoning refers to the inclination to give greater weight to arguments that support desired conclusions than to those that challenge them (Kunda, 1990). This cognitive process is a key factor underlying the well-documented *confirmation bias* (Charness and Dave, 2017; Faia et al., 2024; Little, 2025; Nickerson, 1998). In our setup, right-leaning respondents' tendency to reject the information on inequalities provided by the study while simultaneously perceiving the study as politically biased is compatible with motivated reasoning, as they discount (or even disregard) evidence that contradicts their prior convictions, preferring to maintain their belief that society is fundamentally fair and that hard work ensures everyone a chance at success (Bénabou and Tirole, 2016; Landau et al., 2015).

Recent survey experiments that find evidence of motivated reasoning include Dolls et al. (2025) on rent control policies, Douenne and Fabre (2022) on carbon taxes, and Alesina et al. (2024) on policies alleviating racial inequality. The latter study even documents an adverse effect (“backlash”) similar to ours – in that case for white Republicans in 2020, who react to information treatments about racial gaps by lowering their support for affirmative action toward blacks.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 describes our survey, the experimental design, and our hypotheses. Results are presented in Section 3. Section 4 concludes.

2 DATA AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Data

We fielded a large-scale online survey between October 25 and November 11, 2021, with 4,900 participants aged 18 to 69 in Germany. The sample was stratified by income (5 categories), age (5 categories), and East and West Germany (cross-quotas), as well as by education, gender, and federal state. We present key descriptive statistics for our sample as well as for the general German population in Appendix Table A.1. Individuals in our sample have slightly lower equivalized household income than the German population on average. In all other observable aspects, differences compared to the general German population are minor.

Our survey included an information provision experiment (Haaland et al., 2023; Stantcheva, 2023), described in Section 2.3. An obfuscated follow-up survey, in which 4,004 of the 4,900 respondents from the initial survey participated, took place between November 16 and November 25, 2021.

The professional survey company Bilendi & respondi, which is widely used in the social sciences (Haaland et al., 2023), programmed the online survey and recruited the participants. Participants were invited to participate via Bilendi & respondi’s email distribution list. At the beginning of the survey, participants were informed about its approximate length, but not about the topic. The median time for full completion was 21 minutes for the main survey and eight minutes for the follow-up survey. The participants in our sample completed the survey in full, meaning that individuals who dropped out during the survey are not included in our sample.

We adopted common practices to enhance data quality (Stantcheva, 2023): (i) We cleaned our sample by dropping 461 inattentive respondents who failed an attention check question.¹ (ii) We randomized the order of the survey questions eliciting fairness views

¹The attention check question was: “In how many big cities with more than 500.000 inhabitants have you lived? In surveys like ours, there are sometimes participants who do not read the questions carefully

and policy preferences to prevent order bias, which might arise when all respondents view the questions in the same order.

2.2 Structure of the survey

The questionnaire was structured as follows. At the beginning of the survey, respondents were asked to provide socio-demographic characteristics such as age, gender, household income, education, and region of residence, which were used for the quotas. In the second part of the survey, we elicited attitudinal variables for heterogeneity analyses. In the third part, respondents were randomly allocated into one control and two treatment groups. Prior beliefs were elicited in all three groups. We denote the two treated groups as the ‘Intergenerational Justice’ (T1) and the ‘Distributive Justice’ (T2) treatment groups. Both treatment groups received an information treatment, whereas respondents in the control group did not receive any information intervention.

The fourth part of our survey contained the outcome questions. We elicited respondents’ agreement with the following statements to estimate the effect of the Intergenerational Justice treatment (T1) on intergenerational fairness views: *(i) Young people in Germany will, by and large, have better opportunities in the labor market than their parents’ generation. (ii) Young people in Germany will, by and large, achieve a higher level of prosperity than their parents’ generation. (iii) The effects on young and future generations are adequately taken into account in political decisions.* For the Distributive Justice treatment (T2), we elicited intragenerational fairness views: *(i) The differences in rank between people are acceptable because they essentially reflect what one has made of one’s opportunities. (ii) In Germany, people are remunerated according to their performance. (iii) I find the social differences in our country, by and large, to be fair. (iv) Economic gains in Germany are, by and large, distributed fairly today.* In addition, we asked respondents about their attitudes towards policies addressing intergenerational inequalities (climate policy, public pensions, public debt) and intragenerational inequalities (income and wealth redistribution).

In the final part of our survey, we elicited posterior beliefs about the information provided in the information treatments, further socio-demographic characteristics, as well as post-experimental questions on the perceived credibility of the information treatments and the perceived neutrality of the survey. In the obfuscated follow-up survey roughly two weeks after the main survey, posterior beliefs were elicited again.

The following outlines the structure of the questionnaire:

and simply click through the survey quickly. This means that there are many random answers that affect the results of research studies. To show that you have read our questions carefully, please enter ‘33’ as your answer to this question.”

1. Socio-demographic characteristics.
2. Pre-Treatment questions: attitudinal questions.
3. Random allocation of respondents into control and treatment groups.
4. Elicitation of prior beliefs.
5. Information Treatment (only respondents who are in one of the two treatment groups).
6. Outcome questions: Fairness views, policy preferences.
7. Elicitation of posterior beliefs.
8. Post-experimental questions on perceived credibility and neutrality/socio-demographic characteristics.
9. Follow-up survey (posterior beliefs).

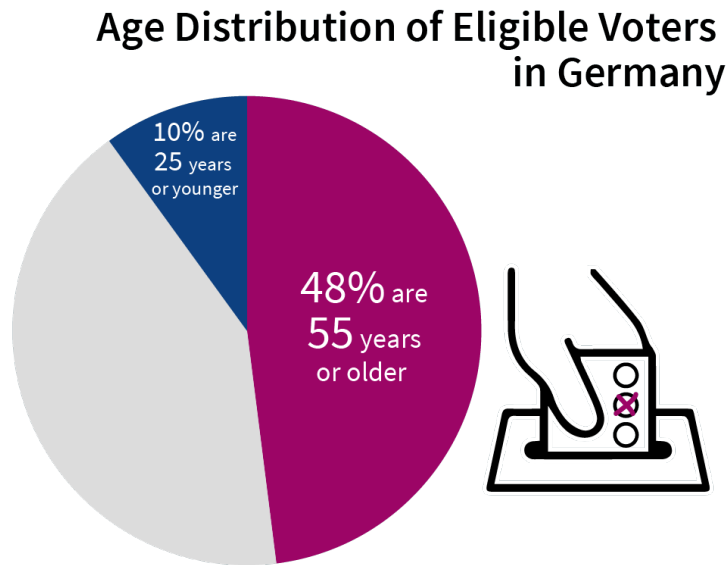
2.3 Experimental design

Our experimental design consists of the random assignment of respondents into three groups of equal size: two treatment groups and one control group. Before any treatment occurred, all three groups indicated their prior beliefs regarding the two pieces of information later explored in the experiments: the age distribution of the electorate (T1), and the level of wealth inequality (T2). This design prevents confounding the treatment effect through “priming”, that is, the effect of prompting participants to think about topics that are subsequently investigated. Thus, differences in the outcome variables between the treatment and control groups can be causally attributed solely to the information provided and not to priming.²

After eliciting prior beliefs, each treatment group received one information treatment: The first treatment group was informed about the age distribution of eligible voters in Germany (T1). A pie chart illustrated that voters aged 25 and under make up 10 percent of the electorate, while those aged 55 and older account for 48 percent (see Figure 1). In addition, an information text explained that many political decisions made today have consequences that will only be felt in the future and that a large share of older voters could cause a situation in which the interests of young and future generations are not sufficiently taken into account by policy-makers.

²An alternative experimental design would have been to collect the prior beliefs only in the treatment groups (or in the control group only after the outcome questions). This would have potentially led to greater differences between the control and treatment groups in the outcome variables, as no priming would have taken place in the control group. A disadvantage of this alternative approach is that the ‘information effect’ of the treatments cannot be separated from the ‘priming effect’, whereas treatment effects in the approach we have chosen are solely attributable to the information provided.

Figure 1 – Information Treatment on the Age Distribution of Eligible Voters

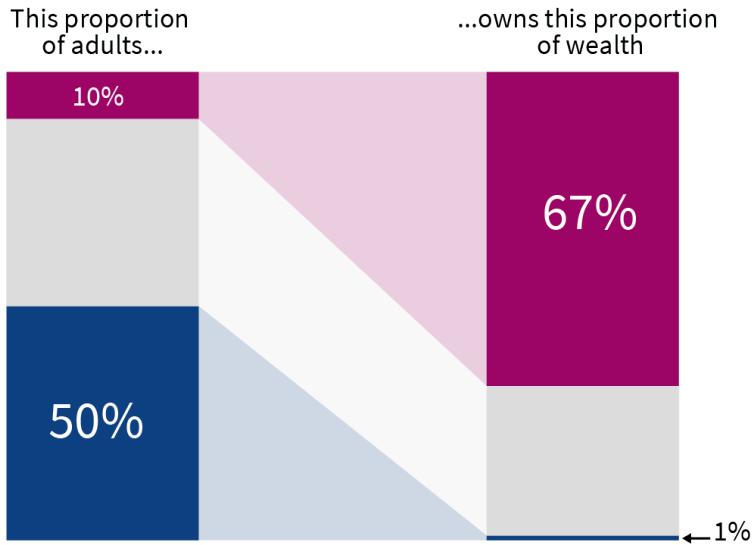


Notes: Intergenerational Justice Treatment (T1) (text in graphic translated to English). Along with the pie chart, respondents were informed whether they had underestimated or overestimated the respective percentages. Furthermore, the following additional text was provided: “Many political decisions made today will have effects that will only become apparent in the future. This is the case, for example, with measures to combat climate change, investments in public infrastructure, or the long-term sustainability of the pension system. A high share of older voters may lead to the concerns of younger and future generations being insufficiently taken into account in political decision-making.”

The second treatment group was informed about the extent of wealth inequality in Germany (T2). A bar chart illustrated that the richest 10 percent of adults in Germany hold 67 percent of total wealth, whereas the poorest 50 percent own only 1 percent (see Figure 2). Along with the respective figures, respondents in each treatment arm were provided with information about the true values and whether they had previously underestimated, overestimated, or correctly estimated the respective percentages.

Figure 2 – Information Treatment on Wealth Inequality in Germany

Wealth Distribution in Germany



Notes: Distributive Justice Treatment (T2) (text in graphic translated to English). Along with the bar chart, respondents were informed whether they had underestimated or overestimated the respective percentages.

2.4 Hypotheses

Both information treatments were designed to create exogenous variation in the perception of (intergenerational or intragenerational) fairness. In other words, the treatments aimed to shift fairness perceptions among randomly selected participants relative to the control group. This section briefly sketches our hypotheses on the expected effects of our information treatments.

In general, we would expect differential treatment effects depending on whether respondents' beliefs are corrected upwards or downwards. However, based on previous evidence (see e.g. Cruces et al., 2013; Kiatpongsan and Norton, 2014; Norton and Ariely, 2011), we expect that these inequalities will be underestimated on average. We therefore formulate the following hypotheses under that assumption and show in Section 3.2 that it holds for our study.

H1: On average, both the 'Intergenerational Justice' (T1) and the 'Distributive Justice' (T2) treatments increase perceived unfairness. T1 induces a downward shift in intergenerational fairness views. T2 induces a downward shift in intragenerational fairness views.

H2: T1 shifts political attitudes towards a stronger support for the interests of the young and future generations. T2 shifts political attitudes towards a stronger support for the interests of the poor.

Moreover, we conjecture that our information treatments have differential effects depending on respondents’ political orientation. Political orientation shapes not only perceptions and normative views about inequality but also how individuals reason about policies addressing inequalities (Chambers et al., 2014; Stantcheva, 2021b). Information highlighting the extent of intragenerational inequality—such as the concentration of wealth—may reinforce existing fairness concerns among left-leaning respondents and increase their support for redistribution, but may be discounted or regarded as justified by right-leaning respondents who perceive inequality as a natural outcome of effort and market rewards. Information about intergenerational inequality, in contrast, may cut across ideological lines to some extent: while it resonates with distributive concerns on the left, it can also appeal to family-oriented and meritocratic values on the right.

2.5 Identification

To examine average treatment effects, we estimate the following regression:

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta T_i + \gamma X_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

where Y_i is one of our outcome variables, T_i is a treatment dummy and X_i is an optional vector of individual controls - such as age, gender, education, and household income.³ In this regression, β provides an estimate of the ATE.

To check for treatment effect heterogeneity we estimate an extended model interacting treatment status with the respective heterogeneity variable of interest:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 T_i + \beta_2 H_i + \beta_3 T_i \times H_i + \beta_4 X_i + \varepsilon_i, \quad (2)$$

where H_i is the heterogeneity variable of interest.

3 RESULTS

In the following, we present the results of the inequality information experiment. We first report the overall treatment effects on fairness views and support for policies to mitigate intergenerational and intragenerational inequalities. Second, we document significant

³While the main text reports results without controls, Appendix Tables D.2-D.5 report results including covariates.

treatment effect heterogeneity by political orientation, outlining a backlash effect to information on inequality among politically right-leaning respondents. Third, we provide a potential explanation for the observed backlash, showing that the study is discounted as less credible among those respondents. Finally, we run a mediation analysis and find evidence that perceived intragenerational fairness mediates a significant share of the treatment effect of treatment T2 among politically right-leaning respondents, whereas fairness concerns seem to play a minor role in the context of intergenerational inequalities (T1).

3.1 Treatment effects

Estimating our baseline specification (1), we do not find significant average treatment effects of T1 and T2 on fairness views or policy preferences (Appendix Tables B.1-B.2).

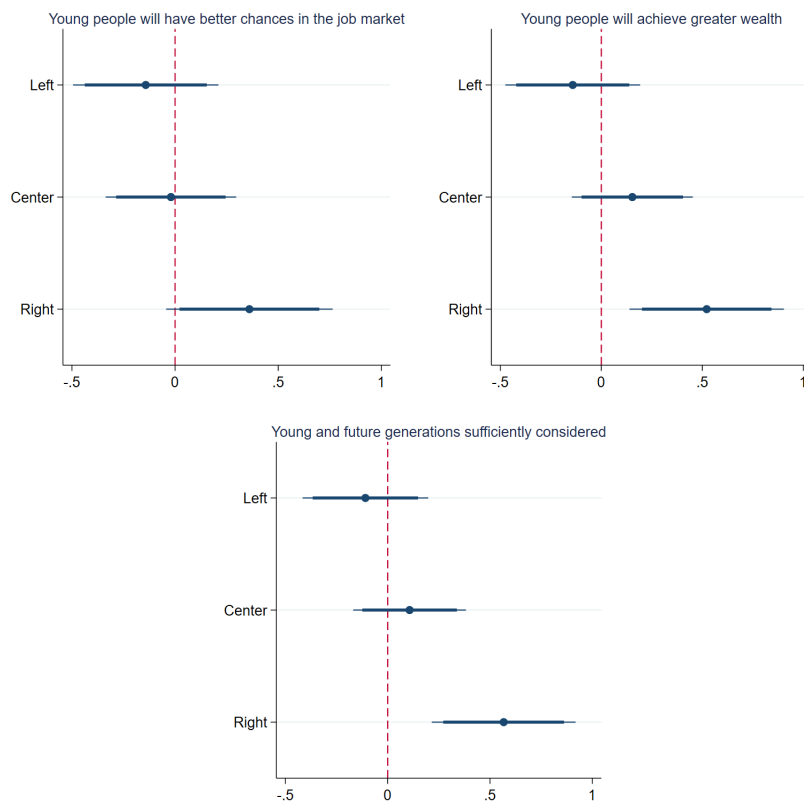
However, it turns out that the effects of our information treatments vary significantly depending on the political orientation of the respondents (specification (2)).⁴⁵ Among those who self-identify as politically left-leaning or neutral, no significant effects on perceptions of fairness or policy preferences are observed. Among politically right-leaning respondents, however, the treatment has unexpected effects. Upon receiving information about the unequal age structure of the electorate (T1) – showing that a large share of eligible voters are older than 55 and only a small share are younger than 25 – together with an indication of potential disadvantages for young and future generations, politically right-leaning respondents assess the current state of intergenerational fairness *more positively* than their counterparts in the control group who did not receive this information (see Figure 3 and Appendix Table B.3). This holds for all three variables eliciting intergenerational fairness views.

How does this shift in intergenerational fairness perceptions affect policy preferences? In line with the positive effect of T1 on intergenerational fairness perceptions among politically right-leaning respondents, we find that T1 tends to *reduce* their likelihood to support policies lowering the (financial) burden for future generations (see Figure 4 and Appendix Table B.3). After receiving the Intergenerational Justice Treatment, politically right-leaning respondents are less likely to agree with the statements that benefits from

⁴We also check for treatment effect heterogeneity with respect to all other socio-demographics, but find no notable differences (results available upon request).

⁵The participants in our survey were asked about their political orientation on a scale from 0 to 10 (0 = left, 10 = right) as well as about the party they voted for in the 2021 federal election. We first report treatment effects by political orientation, then by party voted for in the 2021 federal election. Respondents who indicated values between 0 and 4 are classified as left-leaning, while those who selected 5 are considered politically neutral (center). Respondents who reported values between 6 and 10 are categorized as right-leaning. Appendix Figure A.1 displays the percentage of voters from each party in the German parliament (legislative period 2021–2025) who self-identify as politically left, neutral, or right.

Figure 3 – Treatment Effect of the Intergenerational Justice Treatment (T1) on Intergenerational Fairness Views by Political Orientation

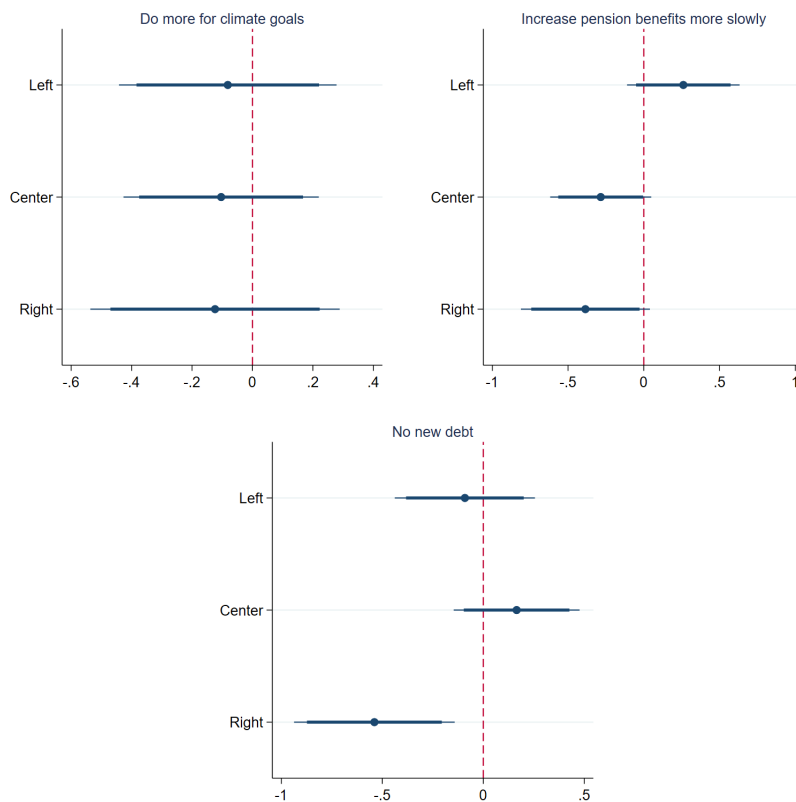


Notes: The figure shows the treatment effect of T1 (intergenerational justice) by political orientation on the agreement with the following statements: (i) Young people in Germany will, by and large, have better opportunities in the labor market than their parents' generation. (ii) Young people in Germany will, by and large, achieve a higher level of prosperity than their parents' generation. (iii) The effects on young and future generations are adequately taken into account in political decisions. The response scale ranges from 0 (do not agree at all) to 10 (fully agree). The effects are calculated separately for respondents who identify as politically left-leaning, centrist, or right-leaning, always in comparison to the control group with the same political orientation. The thick lines represent the 90% confidence interval, while the thinner lines indicate the 95% confidence interval.

the statutory pension system should increase at a slower rate than wages and salaries, and that the government should operate without new debt, even if this requires spending cuts or higher taxes and contributions. We do not find treatment effect heterogeneity with respect to political orientation for the statement that the government should do more to achieve climate targets.

Similarly, left-leaning and centrist respondents' distributive fairness views do not react to the Distributive Justice Treatment (T2), while politically right-leaning participants are *more* likely to perceive differences in rank as acceptable, wages as reflecting performance, and social differences as fair following exposure to information about the wealth distribution in Germany (see Figure 5 and Appendix Table B.4). Again, the defiance reaction of

Figure 4 – Treatment Effect of the Intergenerational Justice Treatment (T1) on Policy Preferences by Political Orientation

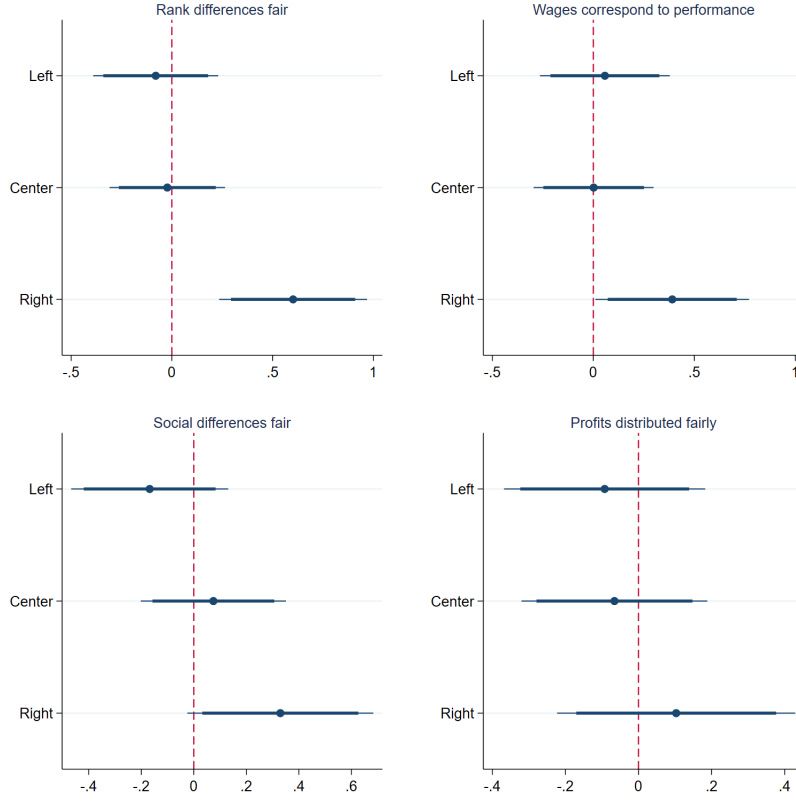


Notes: The figure shows the treatment effect of T1 (intergenerational justice) by political orientation on the agreement with the following statements: (i) The government should do more to achieve climate targets. (ii) Benefits from the statutory pension system should increase at a slower rate than wages and salaries. (iii) The government should operate without new debt, even if this requires spending cuts or higher taxes and contributions. The response scale ranges from 0 (do not agree at all) to 10 (fully agree). The effects are calculated separately for respondents who identify as politically left-leaning, centrist, or right-leaning, always in comparison to the control group with the same political orientation. The thick lines represent the 90% confidence interval, while the thinner lines indicate the 95% confidence interval.

right-leaning voters is also visible in policy preferences. Right-leaning participants treated with T2 agree less with statements that the state should work to reduce the gap between rich and poor, that more redistribution is currently needed in Germany, that high earners should pay higher income taxes than they do now, and that the wealthy should pay wealth taxes once their assets exceed a certain threshold, compared to their counterparts in the control group (see Figure 6 and Appendix Table B.4).

Finally, we repeat the treatment heterogeneity analysis using respondents' reported party vote in the 2021 federal election instead of their broader left–right political orientation (see Appendix Figures B.1–B.4). This allows us to obtain additional understanding of the backlash effect of inequality information on respondents' fairness views and policy preferences by political party. Figures B.1–B.2 reveal that unexpected, positive (negative)

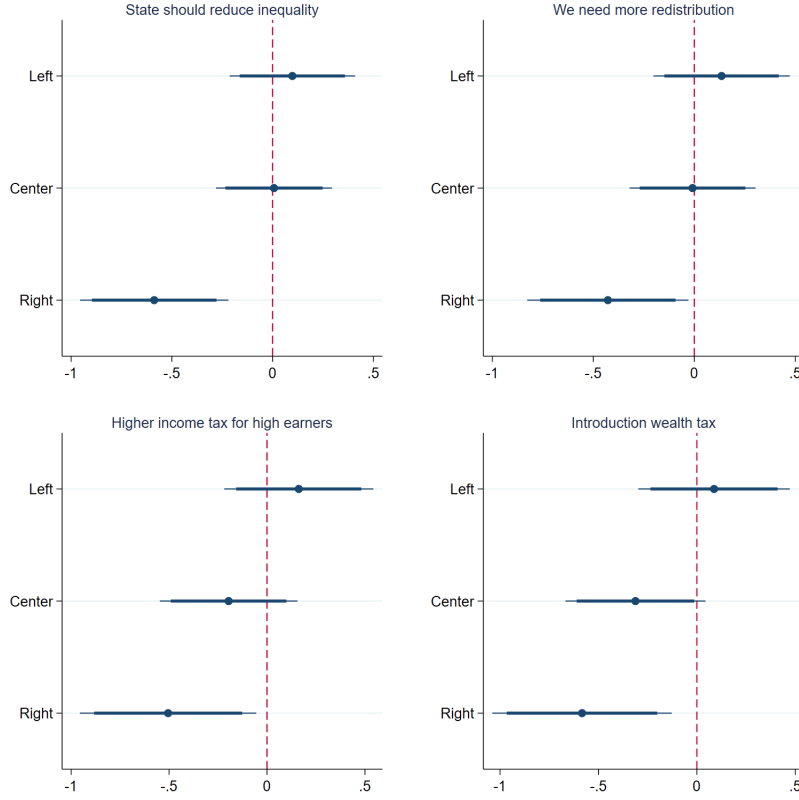
Figure 5 – Treatment Effect of the Distributive Justice Treatment (T2) on Intragenerational Fairness Views by Political Orientation



Notes: The figure shows the treatment effect of T2 (Distributive Justice) by political orientation on the agreement with the following statements: (i) The differences in rank between people are acceptable because they essentially reflect what one has made of one's opportunities. (ii) In Germany, people are remunerated according to their performance. (iii) I find the social differences in our country, by and large, to be fair. (iv) Economic gains in Germany are, by and large, distributed fairly today. The response scale ranges from 0 (do not agree at all) to 10 (fully agree). The effects are calculated separately for respondents who identify as politically left-leaning, centrist, or right-leaning, always in comparison to the control group with the same political orientation. The thick lines represent the 90% confidence interval, while the thinner lines indicate the 95% confidence interval.

treatment effects of T1 on intergenerational fairness views (policies addressing intergenerational fairness) are primarily driven by respondents who voted for the right-wing populist *AfD*, and - for attitudes toward climate policy - by respondents who voted for the left-wing populist *Die Linke*. Conversely, we find unexpected, positive (negative) treatment effects of T2 on intragenerational fairness views (policies addressing intragenerational fairness) mainly for voters of the liberal, free market-oriented *FDP*, as shown in Figures B.3-B.4.

Figure 6 – Treatment Effect of the Distributive Justice Treatment (T2) on Policy Preferences by Political Orientation



Notes: The figure shows the treatment effect of T2 (Distributive Justice) by political orientation on the agreement with the following statements: (i) The state should work to reduce the gap between rich and poor. (ii) In Germany, we currently need more redistribution from the rich to the poor. (iii) High earners in Germany should pay higher income taxes than they do now. (iv) In Germany, the wealthy should pay wealth taxes once their assets exceed a certain threshold. The response scale ranges from 0 (do not agree at all) to 10 (fully agree). The effects are calculated separately for respondents who identify as politically left-leaning, centrist, or right-leaning, always in comparison to the control group with the same political orientation. The thick lines represent the 90% confidence interval, while the thinner lines indicate the 95% confidence interval.

3.2 Beliefs, Perceived Credibility and Neutrality

In this section, we explore how the treatments affect beliefs about the inequalities featured in the information treatments, and how respondents assess the study's credibility and neutrality. We further explore how these measures differ by political orientation, to gain more insights into the backlash effect among right-leaning respondents described in the previous section.

These effects initially appear surprising, and an analysis of prior beliefs does not provide a direct explanation of the mechanism at play. Appendix Figures C.1 and C.2 illustrate how respondents in our sample perceive the age inequality among the eligible

voting population and the level of wealth inequality.⁶ The two figures show respondents’ beliefs by political orientation in the treatment groups before and after they received information on the level of age inequality in the eligible voting population (Figure C.1) and on the level of wealth inequality (Figure C.2) during the main survey (prior and posterior beliefs). Additionally, the figures include beliefs expressed by respondents in the follow-up survey (posterior beliefs wave 2).

A priori, participants on average underestimate both the dominance of older voters in the electorate compared to younger voters (intergenerational inequality) and the extent of wealth (intragenerational) inequality (see prior beliefs in Figures C.1-C.2). Among respondents who self-identify as politically right-leaning, these misperceptions tend to be even stronger than among those who identify as politically left-leaning, particularly regarding the age structure of the electorate. One might therefore expect that these respondents, after the information interventions, would perceive intergenerational and distributive justice as lower (compared to individuals in the control group with the same political orientation), leading them to show stronger support for policies addressing inter- and intragenerational inequalities. However, we observe the opposite effect.

What could be the reason for this? At first glance, all participants appear to significantly update their beliefs after the information interventions. By the end of the survey, all respondents in the respective treatment groups, regardless of their political orientation, provide similar “informed” posterior beliefs, which are close to the true values we provided in the interventions. However, the repeated elicitation of beliefs – once after participants had already been informed about the true values – could have been perceived as an attention check rather than a reflection of their actual beliefs at the end of the survey. This impression is reinforced when examining the posterior beliefs collected in the obfuscated follow-up survey two weeks later. Posterior beliefs elicited in the follow-up survey revert to the prior beliefs from the main survey as if respondents had never received any information. Since the follow-up survey did not include any information interventions, the reported posterior beliefs from that survey cannot be interpreted as an attention test, but rather as a reflection of participants’ actual convictions. Beliefs have returned to their initial levels, and politically right-leaning respondents again underestimate both the level of age inequality in the electorate and the level of wealth inequality more than left-leaning respondents. Thus, the information treatments had no sustainable effect on respondents’ beliefs. This provides supporting evidence for our conjecture that the beliefs expressed

⁶We calculate age inequality in the eligible voting population as the difference between the proportion of eligible voters who are 55 years or older (48 percent) and the proportion of eligible voters who are 25 years or younger (10 percent). The resulting difference is 38 percentage points. In a similar vein, wealth inequality is calculated as the difference between the wealth share of the richest ten percent (67 percent) and the wealth share of the poorest 50 percent (1 percent). The resulting difference is 66 percentage points.

immediately after the treatments serve more as an attention check than as an indication of whether we successfully convinced respondents of the information provided.

Moreover, an analysis of our post-experimental questions reveals that respondents on the right of the political spectrum tend to perceive the information provided in the survey regarding the age structure of the electorate and the wealth distribution as less credible compared to left-leaning respondents (see Figure C.3).⁷ On the one hand, this could be due to the fact that the prior beliefs of politically right-leaning respondents tend to deviate more strongly from the provided information than those of politically left-leaning respondents. As a result, they could be more inclined to question the accuracy of the provided information compared to respondents whose estimates are more aligned with the information and thus tend to feel validated and confirmed by it.⁸ On the other hand, this could also be related to the fact that the survey itself is perceived as rather left-leaning, regardless of the political orientation of the respondents—since it addresses and provides information on inequality, a topic that is generally associated with the left-leaning political agenda (see Figure C.4).⁹ This perceived left-leaning bias may lead politically right-leaning respondents to view the provided information with skepticism. If these respondents feel that the survey might have the purpose to influence their political attitudes and convince them of the high level of (inter- and intragenerational) inequality and the need for political measures, this could—as observed in our case—result in a reaction contrary to expectations. As a result, their perception of fairness may actually increase, and demand for redistribution may decrease, possibly also as an act of defiance.

The insignificant effect of our information interventions on politically left-leaning respondents might be explained by the fact that they have, on average, already more negative fairness perceptions (in particular concerning distributive justice, see Appendix Figure C.5), and are more likely to support ambitious climate policies and measures to increase distributive justice compared to politically right-leaning respondents (Appendix Figures C.6-C.7). They may therefore feel validated in their views and thus see no need to adjust their policy preferences.

⁷The respondents in the treatment groups were provided with the following response scale: 1 = Very untrustworthy, 2 = Rather untrustworthy, 3 = Rather trustworthy, 4 = Very trustworthy.

⁸This relationship is also evident for individuals with a neutral political orientation ("center"): this group also deviates more strongly in their prior beliefs from the actual values and rates the information provided as less credible compared to politically left-leaning individuals.

⁹Figure C.4 shows that the estimated mean value for the question on perceived neutrality is below 3 in both the treatment groups and the control group. The following response scale was available: 1 = Very left-leaning, 2 = Rather left-leaning, 3 = Balanced, 4 = Rather right-leaning, 5 = Very right-leaning.

3.3 Causal mediation analysis

To understand the channels via which our information treatments influence respondents' policy preferences, we explore potential mechanisms. Specifically, we focus on fairness views: perceived intergenerational fairness may mediate the effects of T1 on policy preferences, whereas perceived intragenerational fairness may mediate the effects of T2.

To formally evaluate the mediating role of these variables, we conduct causal mediation analysis following the potential outcomes framework. This method allows us to decompose the total effect of each treatment (T) on the outcome (Y , policy preferences) into two components: (i) the *Natural Indirect Effect* (NIE), representing the portion of the effect that operates through a given mediator (M); and (ii) the *Natural Direct Effect* (NDE), capturing the effect that remains after accounting for mediation.¹⁰

Total, Direct, and Indirect Effects In causal mediation analysis, we aim to decompose the total effect of a treatment into its constituent direct and indirect components. Let $Y_i(t)$ denote the potential outcome for individual i under treatment level $t \in \{0, 1\}$. For a binary treatment, the total effect can be expressed as the difference in potential outcomes:

$$\tau = \mathbb{E}[Y_i(1)] - \mathbb{E}[Y_i(0)] = \mathbb{E}[Y_i(1, M_i(1))] - \mathbb{E}[Y_i(0, M_i(0))],$$

where $M_i(t)$ is the potential value of the mediator under treatment t .

To isolate the mechanisms through which the treatment exerts its effect, we define the natural indirect and direct effects. These contrasts utilize potential outcomes that combine treatment and mediator values from different treatment assignments.

The *natural indirect effect* (NIE), capturing the portion of the effect mediated through M , is defined as:

$$\delta(t) = \mathbb{E}[Y_i(t, M_i(1))] - \mathbb{E}[Y_i(t, M_i(0))], \quad t \in \{0, 1\}.$$

This quantifies the change in the outcome when the mediator changes from its value under control to its value under treatment, holding the treatment constant. This natural indirect effect is also sometimes referred to as the causal mediation effect (Imai et al., 2010). The *natural direct effect* (NDE), representing the effect of the treatment not mediated by M , is given by:

$$\zeta(t) = \mathbb{E}[Y_i(1, M_i(t))] - \mathbb{E}[Y_i(0, M_i(t))], \quad t \in \{0, 1\}.$$

¹⁰We perform Causal Mediation Analysis (instead of IV estimation) because we allow for the possibility that our treatments affect policy preferences not only indirectly through the mediating variable, but also directly. This is the important difference to the model underlying IV estimation, where no direct effect of T on Y is allowed (exclusion restriction).

This reflects the impact of switching the treatment while fixing the mediator at the level it would attain under treatment t .¹¹

For T2, we find evidence that perceived intragenerational fairness mediates a significant share of the treatment effect among politically right-leaning respondents (see Table 2). The treatment increases perceived intragenerational fairness, and this in turn leads to lower support for policies aimed at ameliorating intragenerational inequality. In contrast, perceived intergenerational fairness seems to play only a marginal mediating role for T1 (again among politically right-leaning individuals). Table 1 shows that the NIEs in this case are statistically insignificant or small relative to the total treatment effect, indicating that fairness considerations are less central for the support of future-oriented policies.

Table 1 – Mediation Analysis for intergenerational fairness views on T1

	(1) Do more for climate goals	(2) Increase pension benefits more slowly	(3) No new debt
NIE	0.0348 (0.048)	0.0706 (0.048)	0.0848* (0.047)
NDE	-0.159 (0.250)	-0.456** (0.230)	-0.624*** (0.222)
TE	-0.124 (0.244)	-0.386* (0.226)	-0.539** (0.220)
Observations	711	711	711

Note: Sample: Politically right-leaning respondents in T1 and control group. **NIE (Natural Indirect Effect)** measures the treatment effect on the outcomes (Column (1): agreement with the statement that the state should do more to achieve the climate goals, Column (2): agreement with the statement that pension benefits should increase more slowly, Column (3): agreement with the statement that no new public debt should be taken on) through the mediator (perceived intergenerational fairness, defined as the average of the three intergenerational fairness views shown in Figure 3). **NDE (Natural Direct Effect)** captures the treatment effect independent of the mediator. **TE (Total Effect)** is the combined effect (NIE + NDE). Standard errors in parentheses. Significance levels: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

¹¹These definitions are based on the potential outcomes framework and require assumptions such as sequential ignorability to identify causal effects (Imai et al., 2010). We cannot empirically test for the (non-)presence of reverse causality in our setup, but theoretical considerations mitigate concerns about reverse causality. The measures we regard as mediators reflect respondents’ (inter- or intragenerational) fairness views and are more plausibly shaped by the information treatments than by post hoc rationalization of policy preferences (i.e., respondents supporting certain policies then adopting certain fairness views ex post to rationalize their policy choices). The direction of causality is further supported by the treatments’ design, which directly targets beliefs about inter- and intragenerational inequality, not policy preferences themselves. Thus, we interpret variation in the examined variables as mediating the treatment effect on policy preferences, rather than as a consequence of those preferences.

Table 2 – Mediation Analysis of intragenerational fairness on T2

	(1) State should reduce inequality	(2) We need more redistribution	(3) Higher income tax for high earners	(4) Introduction wealth tax
NIE	-0.263** (0.121)	-0.275** (0.127)	-0.198** (0.096)	-0.212** (0.101)
NDE	-0.324* (0.192)	-0.153 (0.207)	-0.307 (0.246)	-0.372 (0.246)
TE	-0.588*** (0.225)	-0.428* (0.240)	-0.505* (0.262)	-0.583** (0.266)
Observations	703	703	703	703

Note: Sample: Politically right-leaning respondents in T2 and control group. **NIE (Natural Indirect Effect)** measures the treatment effect on the outcomes through the mediator (perceived intragenerational fairness, defined as the average of the four distributive fairness views shown in Figure 5). **NDE (Natural Direct Effect)** captures the treatment effect independent of the mediator. **TE (Total Effect)** is the combined effect (NIE + NDE). Standard errors in parentheses. Significance levels: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

3.4 Robustness Check

The main identifying assumption of our analysis is that the random assignment of respondents into the three groups worked properly. Appendix Table D.1 shows that treatment and control groups are well balanced across key socio-demographic characteristics including age, gender, education, equivalized household income, residence in Eastern or Western Germany, and political orientation, confirming that randomization worked well. Appendix Tables D.2-D.5 show that our results are robust to the inclusion of covariates, supporting the validity of our randomization strategy.

4 CONCLUSION

In this paper, we explore how information about inequality influences individuals’ fairness views and policy preferences. Drawing on a large-scale randomized online survey of 4,900 respondents in Germany, we investigate the effects of providing information about either intergenerational or intragenerational disparities on the extent of perceived fairness and support for measures aimed at mitigating these disparities.

Our results show that information treatments can have paradoxical effects. When respondents perceive the provided information as being aligned with a particular political perspective that goes against their own political convictions, it may lead to its content being regarded as less credible or even biased. In such cases, the information may either have no effect on attitudes and policy preferences or may even trigger opposite reactions. In our experiment, which was on average perceived as “left-leaning” (potentially because we informed respondents about the extent of inequalities), we observe such a “defiance reaction” among politically right-leaning respondents. Conversely, for topics traditionally perceived as “right-leaning” (such as free trade), one might expect politically left-leaning

individuals to react paradoxically, while the effects on right-leaning individuals might remain moderate.

These insights are relevant for political communication across the entire political spectrum. The key takeaway is that information about a topic – no matter how well-researched – does not necessarily change public attitudes. People’s views are more fundamentally shaped by values and deep-seated convictions than by a purely rational evaluation of facts. If the presented facts are perceived as reflecting a political agenda and therefore appear biased, they may produce effects opposite to those intended. This underscores the need for caution in political communication. Successful communication strategies are likely those that challenge established agenda-setting and avoid one-sidedness by incorporating diverse and even conflicting perspectives on an issue.

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APPENDIX

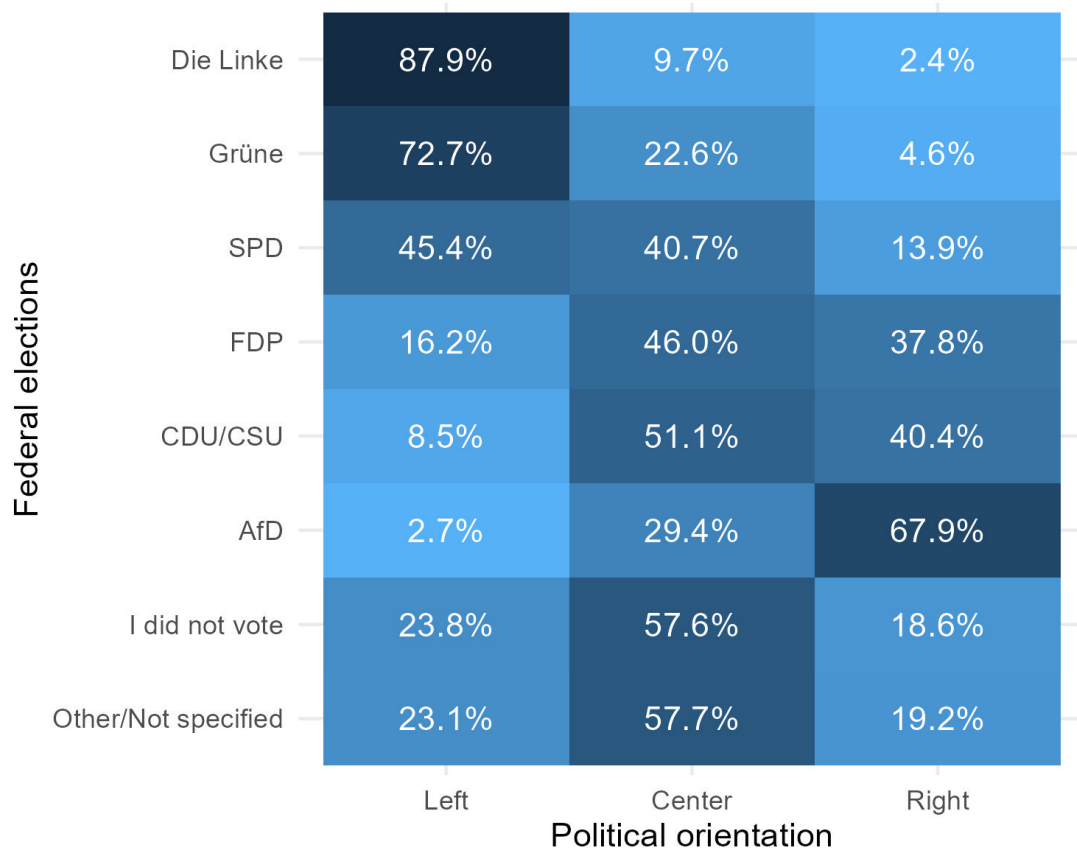
A DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table A.1 – Descriptive Statistics

	Germany	Analysis sample		
	Mean	Mean	Median	SD
Age	44.30	44.75	46	14.50
Female	0.51	0.49	0	0.50
University degree	0.20	0.20	0	0.40
Monthly income (eq.)	2425.50	2008.52	1944	969.69
East Germany	0.19	0.19	0	0.39

Notes: The table shows key descriptive statistics for our full sample of respondents (Survey Sample) as well as population averages (Germany). Sources for population averages: German Statistical Office (Destatis) for [monthly income](#); [Census 2022](#) for age, gender, [university degree](#), and [East/West Germany](#).

Figure A.1 – Relationship between political orientation and the party voted for in the 2021 federal election



Notes: The figure shows the percentage of voters of a party who identify as politically left, neutral, or right. Political orientation was measured on a scale from 0 to 10 (0 = left, 10 = right); the "left" category thus includes respondents who indicated values from 0 to 4, the political center corresponds to the value 5, and "right" includes values from 6 to 10.

B TREATMENT EFFECTS

B.1 Average Treatment Effects

Table B.1 – ATE: Treatment Effect of the Intergenerational Justice Treatment (T1) on Intergenerational Fairness Views and Policy Preferences

	Fairness Views			Policy Preferences		
	(1) Young people will have better chances in the job market	(2) Young people will achieve greater wealth	(3) Young and future generations sufficiently considered	(4) Do more for climate goals	(5) Increase pension benefits more slowly	(6) No new debt
Treatment intergenerational	0.0364 (0.104)	0.150 (0.098)	0.164* (0.092)	-0.136 (0.114)	-0.134 (0.110)	-0.0993 (0.102)
Mean dep. var.	4.573	4.173	3.328	6.828	2.939	3.821
Observations	2805	2805	2805	2805	2805	2805

Notes: The table shows the treatment effect of T1 (intergenerational justice) on the agreement with the following statements: (i) Young people in Germany will, by and large, have better opportunities in the labor market than their parents' generation. (ii) Young people in Germany will, by and large, achieve a higher level of prosperity than their parents' generation. (iii) The effects on young and future generations are adequately taken into account in political decisions. (iv) The government should do more to achieve climate targets. (v) Benefits from the statutory pension system should increase at a slower rate than wages and salaries. (vi) The government should operate without new debt, even if this requires spending cuts or higher taxes and contributions. The response scale ranges from 0 (do not agree at all) to 10 (fully agree). Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.010$.

Table B.2 – ATE: Treatment Effect of the Distributive Justice Treatment (T2) on Intragenerational Fairness Views and Policy Preferences

	Fairness Views				Policy Preferences			
	(1) Rank differences fair	(2) Wages correspond to performance	(3) Social differences fair	(4) Profits distributed fairly	(5) State should reduce inequality	(6) We need more redistribution	(7) Higher income tax for high earners	(8) Introduction wealth tax
Treatment distributive	0.0986 (0.096)	0.112 (0.097)	0.0421 (0.092)	-0.0382 (0.083)	-0.0918 (0.098)	-0.0447 (0.106)	-0.133 (0.117)	-0.226* (0.119)
Mean dep. var.	3.944	3.751	3.080	2.675	7.220	6.742	6.797	7.296
Observations	2842	2842	2842	2842	2842	2842	2842	2842

Notes: The table shows the treatment effect of T2 (Distributive Justice) on the agreement with the following statements: (i) The differences in rank between people are acceptable because they essentially reflect what one has made of one's opportunities. (ii) In Germany, people are remunerated according to their performance. (iii) I find the social differences in our country, by and large, to be fair. (iv) Economic gains in Germany are, by and large, distributed fairly today. (v) The state should work to reduce the gap between rich and poor. (vi) In Germany, we currently need more redistribution from the rich to the poor. (vii) High earners in Germany should pay higher income taxes than they do now. (viii) In Germany, the wealthy should pay wealth taxes once their assets exceed a certain threshold. The response scale ranges from 0 (do not agree at all) to 10 (fully agree). Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.010$.

B.2 Treatment Effect Heterogeneity by Political Orientation

Table B.3 – Treatment Effect Heterogeneity with respect to Political Orientation of the Intergenerational Justice Treatment (T1) on Intergenerational Fairness Views and Policy Preferences

	Fairness Views			Policy Preferences		
	(1) Young people will have better chances in the job market	(2) Young people will achieve greater wealth	(3) Young and future generations sufficiently considered	(4) Do more for climate goals	(5) Increase pension benefits more slowly	(6) No new debt
Treatment (of ref. cat.: Right)						
Treatment intergenerational	0.360* (0.206)	0.522*** (0.195)	0.567*** (0.179)	-0.124 (0.210)	-0.386* (0.217)	-0.539*** (0.203)
Political Orientation (ref. cat.: Right)						
Left	0.0778 (0.191)	0.297 (0.181)	-0.676*** (0.167)	2.888*** (0.195)	-0.158 (0.202)	-0.527*** (0.189)
Center	0.0180 (0.185)	0.227 (0.175)	-0.222 (0.161)	1.266*** (0.189)	-0.254 (0.195)	-0.779*** (0.182)
Interaction (ref. cat.: Right)						
Treatment intergenerational×Left	-0.503* (0.273)	-0.663** (0.259)	-0.676*** (0.238)	0.0422 (0.279)	0.647** (0.288)	0.448* (0.269)
Treatment intergenerational×Center	-0.380 (0.262)	-0.368 (0.248)	-0.460** (0.228)	0.0202 (0.267)	0.101 (0.276)	0.704*** (0.258)
Mean dep. var.	4.573	4.173	3.328	6.828	2.939	3.821
Observations	2805	2805	2805	2805	2805	2805

Notes: The table shows treatment effect heterogeneity with respect to political orientation (left/center/right) for T1 (intergenerational justice) on the agreement with the following statements: (i) Young people in Germany will, by and large, have better opportunities in the labor market than their parents' generation. (ii) Young people in Germany will, by and large, achieve a higher level of prosperity than their parents' generation. (iii) The effects on young and future generations are adequately taken into account in political decisions. (iv) The government should do more to achieve climate targets. (v) Benefits from the statutory pension system should increase at a slower rate than wages and salaries. (vi) The government should operate without new debt, even if this requires spending cuts or higher taxes and contributions. The response scale ranges from 0 (do not agree at all) to 10 (fully agree). Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.010$.

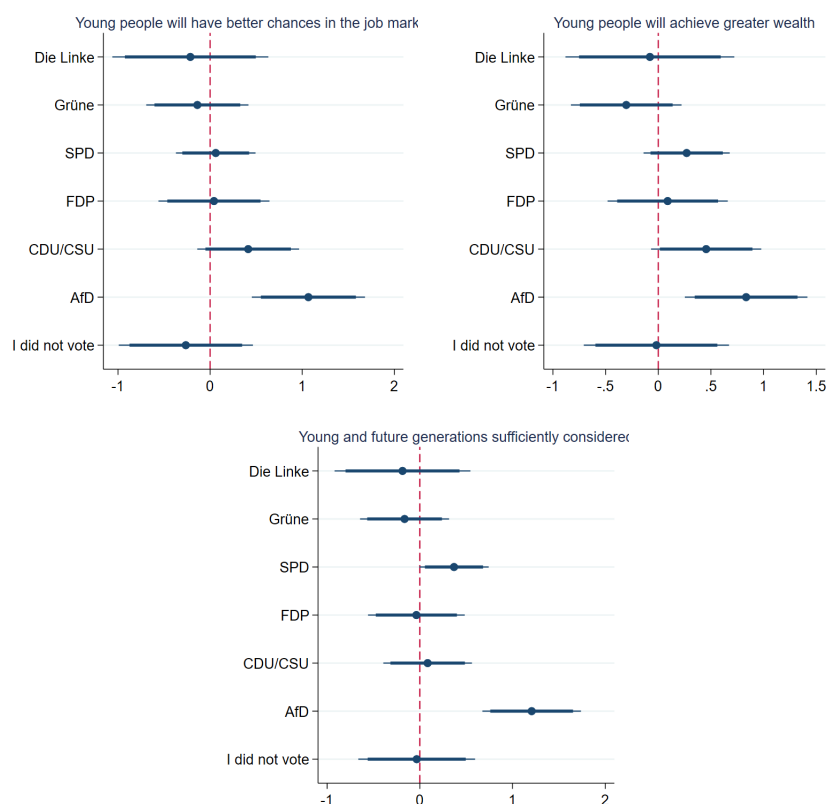
Table B.4 – Treatment Effect Heterogeneity with respect to Political Orientation of the Distributive Justice Treatment (T2) on Intragenerational Fairness Views and Policy Preferences

	Fairness Views				Policy Preferences			
	(1) Rank differences fair	(2) Wages correspond to performance	(3) Social differences fair	(4) Profits distributed fairly	(5) State should reduce inequality	(6) We need more redistribution	(7) Higher income tax for high earners	(8) Introduction wealth tax
Treatment (of ref. cat.: Right)								
Treatment distributive	0.602*** (0.187)	0.391** (0.194)	0.330* (0.181)	0.103 (0.166)	-0.588*** (0.188)	-0.428** (0.204)	-0.505** (0.230)	-0.583** (0.232)
Political Orientation (ref. cat.: Right)								
Left	-1.265*** (0.173)	-0.455** (0.179)	-1.140*** (0.167)	-0.490*** (0.154)	1.666*** (0.174)	1.867*** (0.188)	1.497*** (0.212)	1.459*** (0.215)
Center	-0.587*** (0.167)	-0.424** (0.173)	-0.916*** (0.161)	-0.266* (0.148)	0.884*** (0.168)	0.998*** (0.182)	0.568*** (0.205)	0.638*** (0.207)
Interaction (ref. cat.: Right)								
Treatment distributive×Left	-0.682*** (0.245)	-0.334 (0.254)	-0.498** (0.236)	-0.196 (0.218)	0.686*** (0.246)	0.563** (0.267)	0.667** (0.301)	0.671** (0.304)
Treatment distributive×Center	-0.624*** (0.238)	-0.389 (0.246)	-0.255 (0.229)	-0.169 (0.211)	0.595** (0.238)	0.419 (0.258)	0.309 (0.291)	0.271 (0.295)
Mean dep. var.	3.944	3.751	3.080	2.675	7.220	6.742	6.797	7.296
Observations	2842	2842	2842	2842	2842	2842	2842	2842

Notes: The table shows treatment effect heterogeneity with respect to political orientation (left/center/right) for T2 (Distributive Justice) on the agreement with the following statements: (i) The differences in rank between people are acceptable because they essentially reflect what one has made of one's opportunities. (ii) In Germany, people are remunerated according to their performance. (iii) I find the social differences in our country, by and large, to be fair. (iv) Economic gains in Germany are, by and large, distributed fairly today. (v) The state should work to reduce the gap between rich and poor. (vi) In Germany, we currently need more redistribution from the rich to the poor. (vii) High earners in Germany should pay higher income taxes than they do now. (viii) In Germany, the wealthy should pay wealth taxes once their assets exceed a certain threshold. The response scale ranges from 0 (do not agree at all) to 10 (fully agree). Standard errors in parentheses. * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.010.

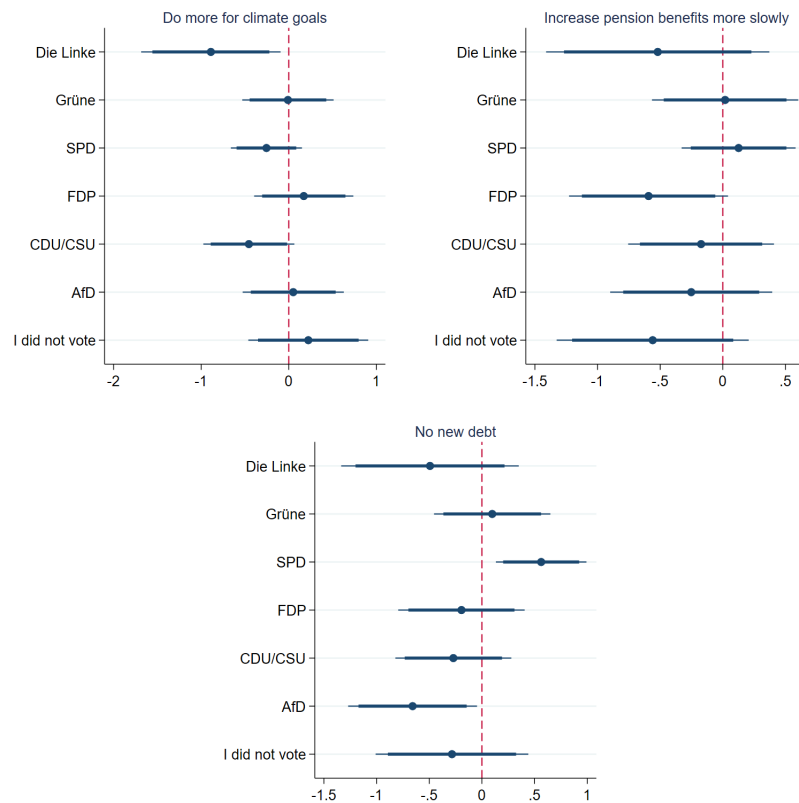
B.3 Treatment Effect Heterogeneity by Political Party at Federal Election 2021

Figure B.1 – Treatment Effect of the Intergenerational Justice Treatment (T1) on Intergenerational Fairness Views by Political Party



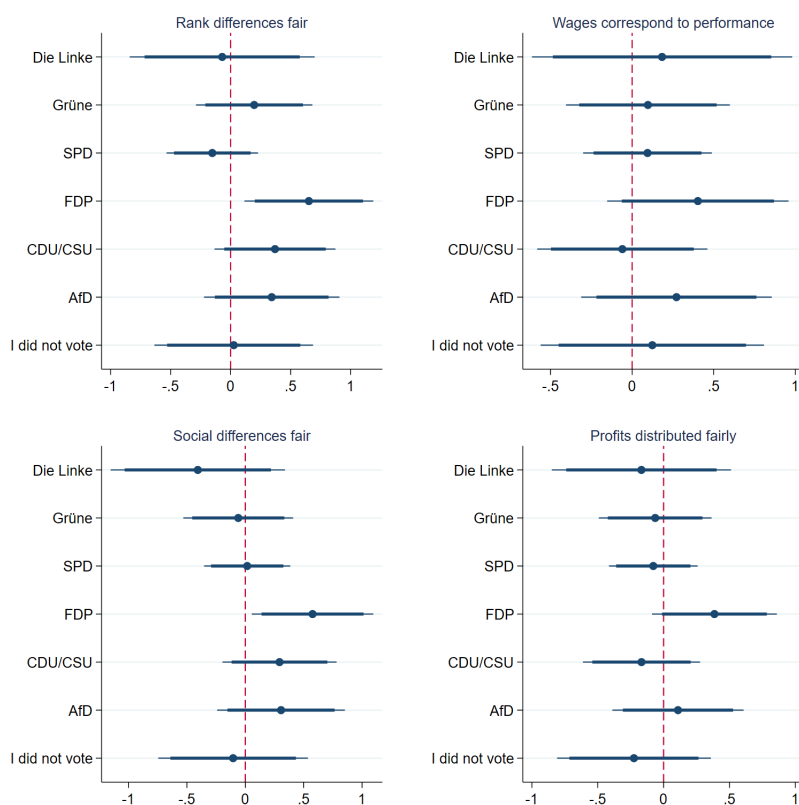
Notes: The figure shows the treatment effect of T1 (intergenerational justice) by political orientation on the agreement with the following statements: (i) Young people in Germany will, by and large, have better opportunities in the labor market than their parents' generation. (ii) Young people in Germany will, by and large, achieve a higher level of prosperity than their parents' generation. (iii) The effects on young and future generations are adequately taken into account in political decisions. The response scale ranges from 0 (do not agree at all) to 10 (fully agree). The effects are calculated separately for respondents who voted for a certain political party in the 2021 federal election, always in comparison to the control group with the same political orientation. The thick lines represent the 90% confidence interval, while the thinner lines indicate the 95% confidence interval.

Figure B.2 – Treatment Effect of the Intergenerational Justice Treatment (T1) on Policy Preferences by Political Party



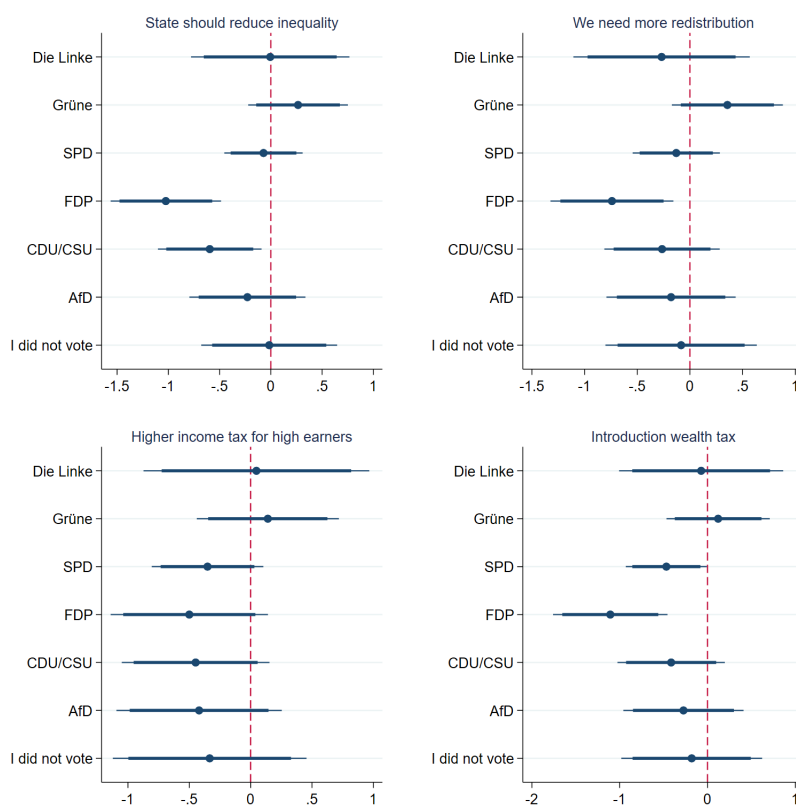
Notes: The figure shows the treatment effect of T1 (intergenerational justice) by political orientation on the agreement with the following statements: (i) Benefits from the statutory pension system should increase at a slower rate than wages and salaries. (ii) The government should operate without new debt, even if this requires spending cuts or higher taxes and contributions. The response scale ranges from 0 (do not agree at all) to 10 (fully agree). The effects are calculated separately for respondents who voted for a certain political party in the 2021 federal election, always in comparison to the control group with the same political orientation. The thick lines represent the 90% confidence interval, while the thinner lines indicate the 95% confidence interval.

Figure B.3 – Treatment Effect of the Distributive Justice Treatment (T2) on Intragenerational Fairness Views by Political Party



Notes: The figure shows the treatment effect of T2 (Distributive Justice) by political orientation on the agreement with the following statements: (i) The differences in rank between people are acceptable because they essentially reflect what one has made of one's opportunities. (ii) In Germany, people are remunerated according to their performance. (iii) I find the social differences in our country, by and large, to be fair. (iv) Economic gains in Germany are, by and large, distributed fairly today. The response scale ranges from 0 (do not agree at all) to 10 (fully agree). The effects are calculated separately for respondents who voted for a certain political party in the 2021 federal election, always in comparison to the control group with the same political orientation. The thick lines represent the 90% confidence interval, while the thinner lines indicate the 95% confidence interval.

Figure B.4 – Treatment Effect of the Distributive Justice Treatment (T2) on Policy Preferences by Political Party

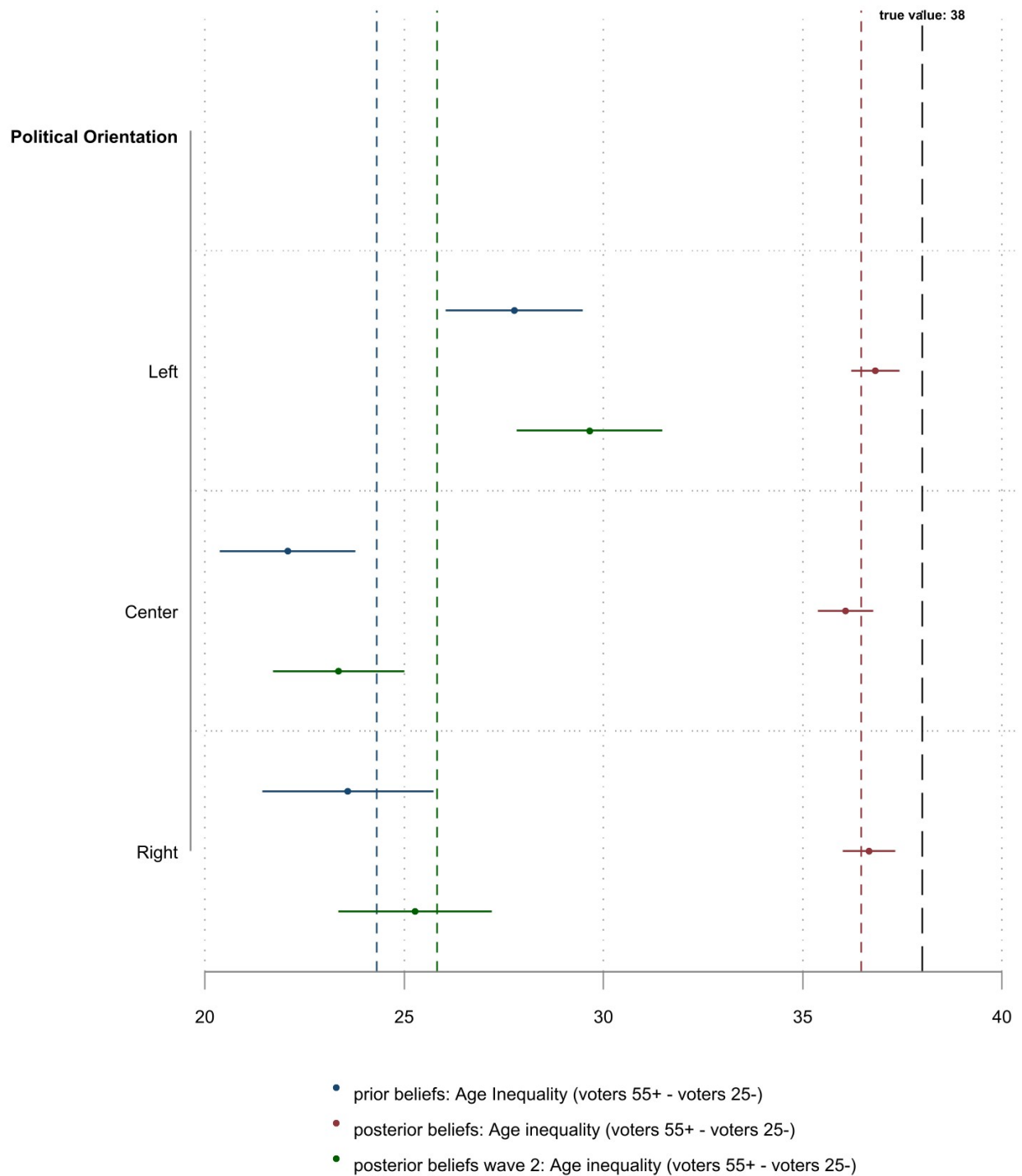


Notes: The figure shows the treatment effect of T2 (Distributive Justice) by political orientation on the agreement with the following statements: (i) The state should work to reduce the gap between rich and poor. (ii) In Germany, we currently need more redistribution from the rich to the poor. (iii) High earners in Germany should pay higher income taxes than they do now. (iv) In Germany, the wealthy should pay wealth taxes once their assets exceed a certain threshold. The response scale ranges from 0 (do not agree at all) to 10 (fully agree). The effects are calculated separately for respondents who voted for a certain political party in the 2021 federal election, always in comparison to the control group with the same political orientation. The thick lines represent the 90% confidence interval, while the thinner lines indicate the 95% confidence interval.

C ADDITIONAL ANALYSES

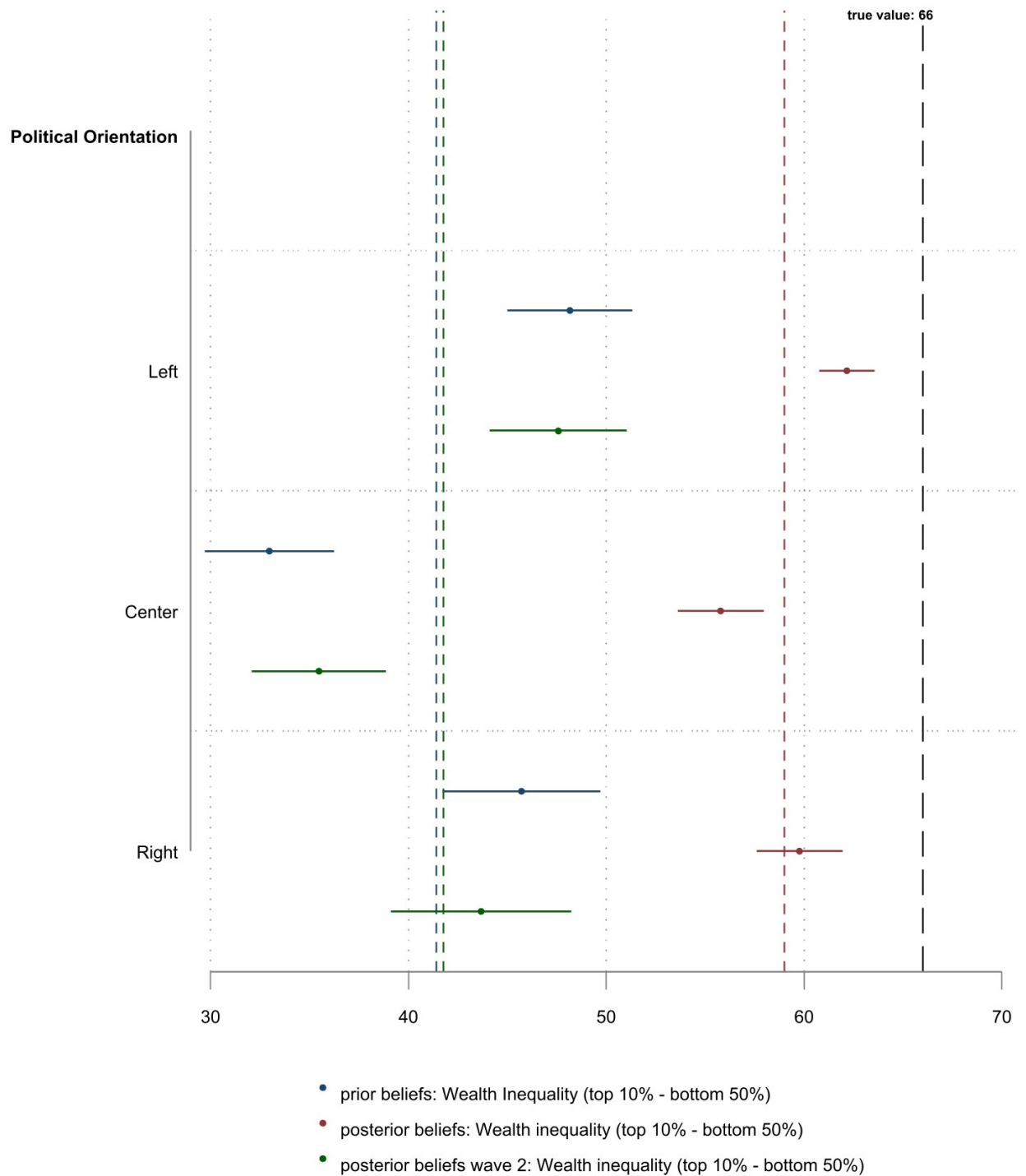
C.1 Beliefs, Perceived Credibility and Neutrality

Figure C.1 – Prior and Posterior Beliefs on Age Inequality in the Electorate



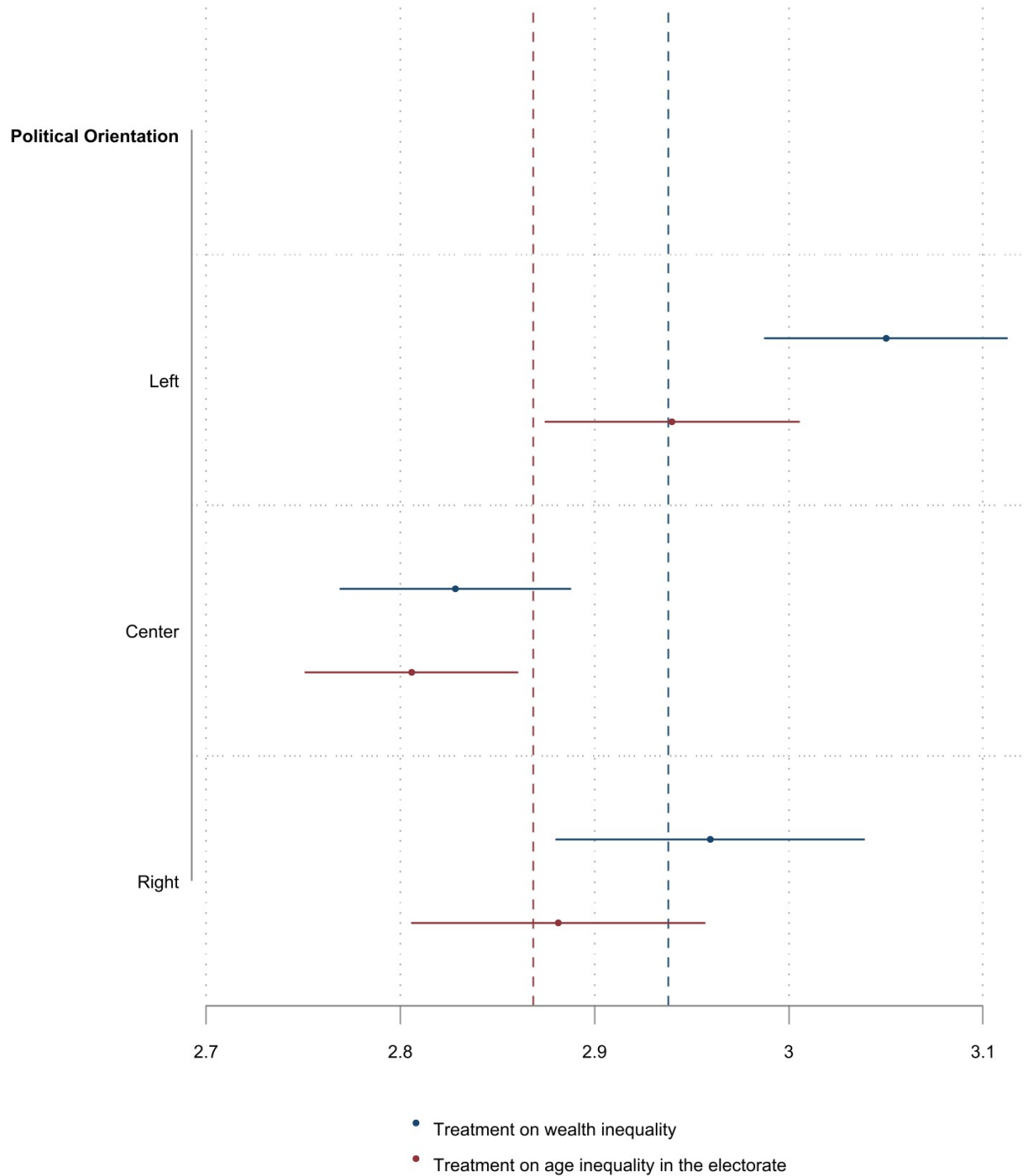
Notes: The figure shows the prior and posterior beliefs of respondents in the first treatment group (T1: Intergenerational Justice Treatment) regarding age inequality in the eligible voting population, estimated using a regression analysis. Vertical lines represent the average beliefs. Age inequality in the electorate is calculated as the difference between the proportion of voters aged 55 and older (48%) and those aged 25 and younger (10%). The gray line represents the true value (38 percentage points).

Figure C.2 – Prior and Posterior Beliefs on Wealth Inequality



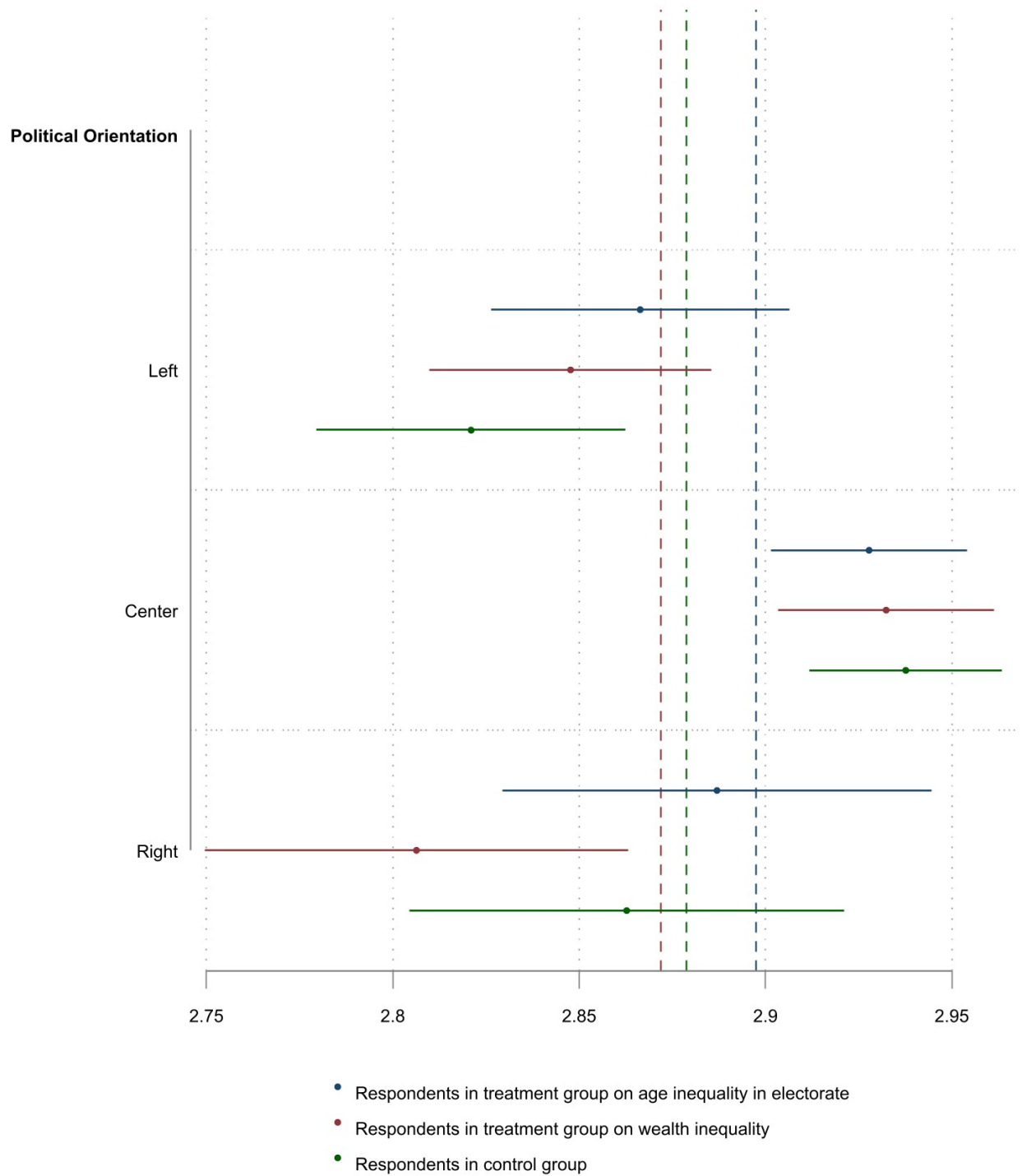
Notes: The figure shows the prior and posterior beliefs of respondents in the second treatment group (T2: Distributive Justice Treatment) regarding wealth inequality, estimated using a regression analysis. Vertical lines represent the average beliefs. Wealth inequality is calculated as the difference between the wealth share of the top 10 percent (67%) and the bottom 50 percent (1%). The gray line represents the true value (66 percentage points).

Figure C.3 – Perceived Credibility of the Provided Information on Age Inequality in the Electorate and Wealth Inequality



Notes: The figure shows the perceived credibility of the provided information on age inequality in the electorate and wealth inequality, estimated using a regression analysis. Vertical lines represent the average perceived credibility of the two information treatments. The credibility question was asked only to participants who received the respective information (respondents in the treatment groups). Response scale: 1 = Very untrustworthy 2 = Rather untrustworthy 3 = Rather trustworthy 4 = Very trustworthy

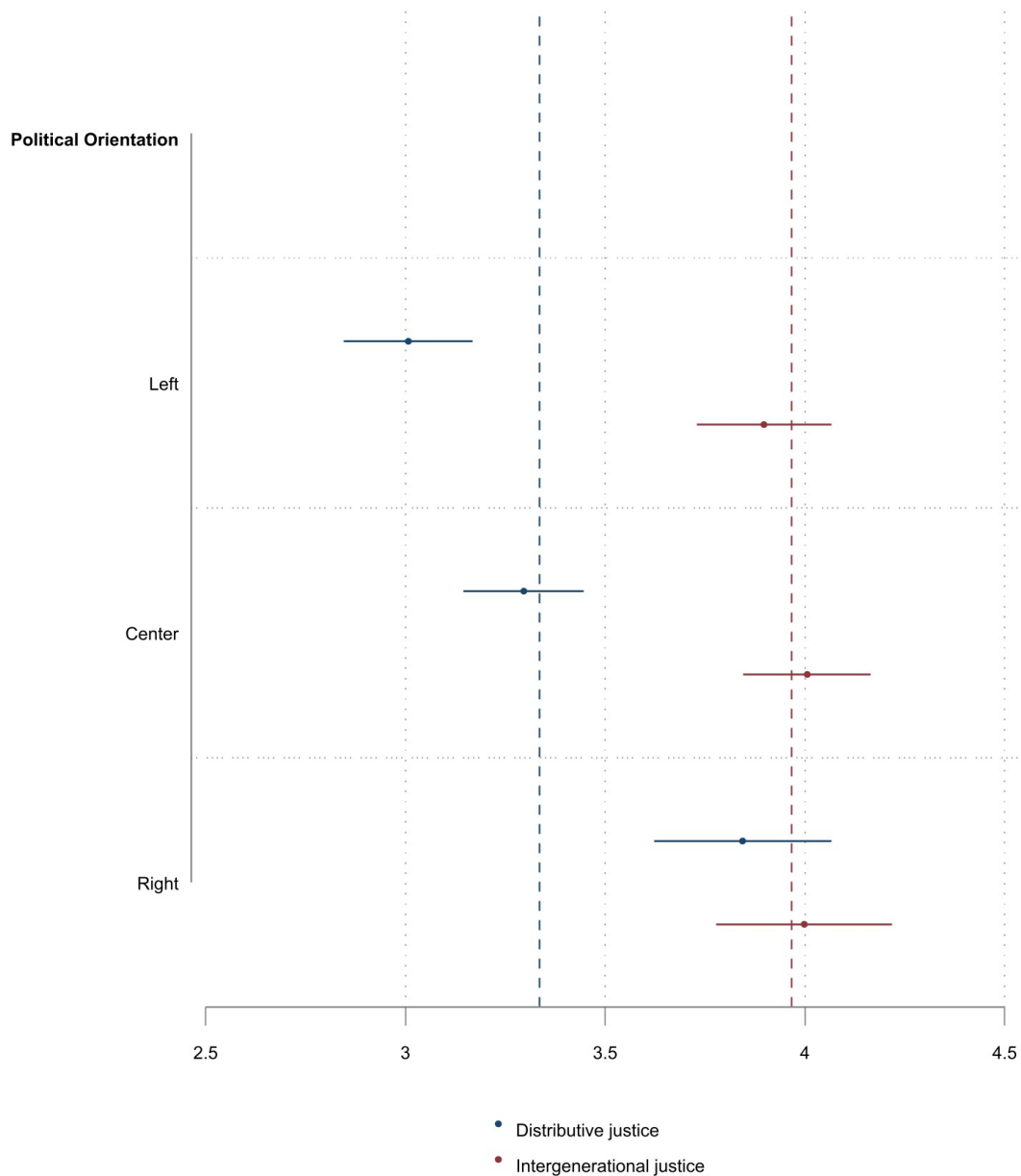
Figure C.4 – Perceived Neutrality of the Survey



Notes: The figure shows the perceived neutrality of the survey, separately for respondents in the two treatment groups and the control group, estimated using a regression analysis. Vertical lines represent the average perceived neutrality of the survey. Response scale: 1 = Very left-leaning 2 = Rather left-leaning 3 = Balanced 4 = Rather right-leaning 5 = Very right-leaning

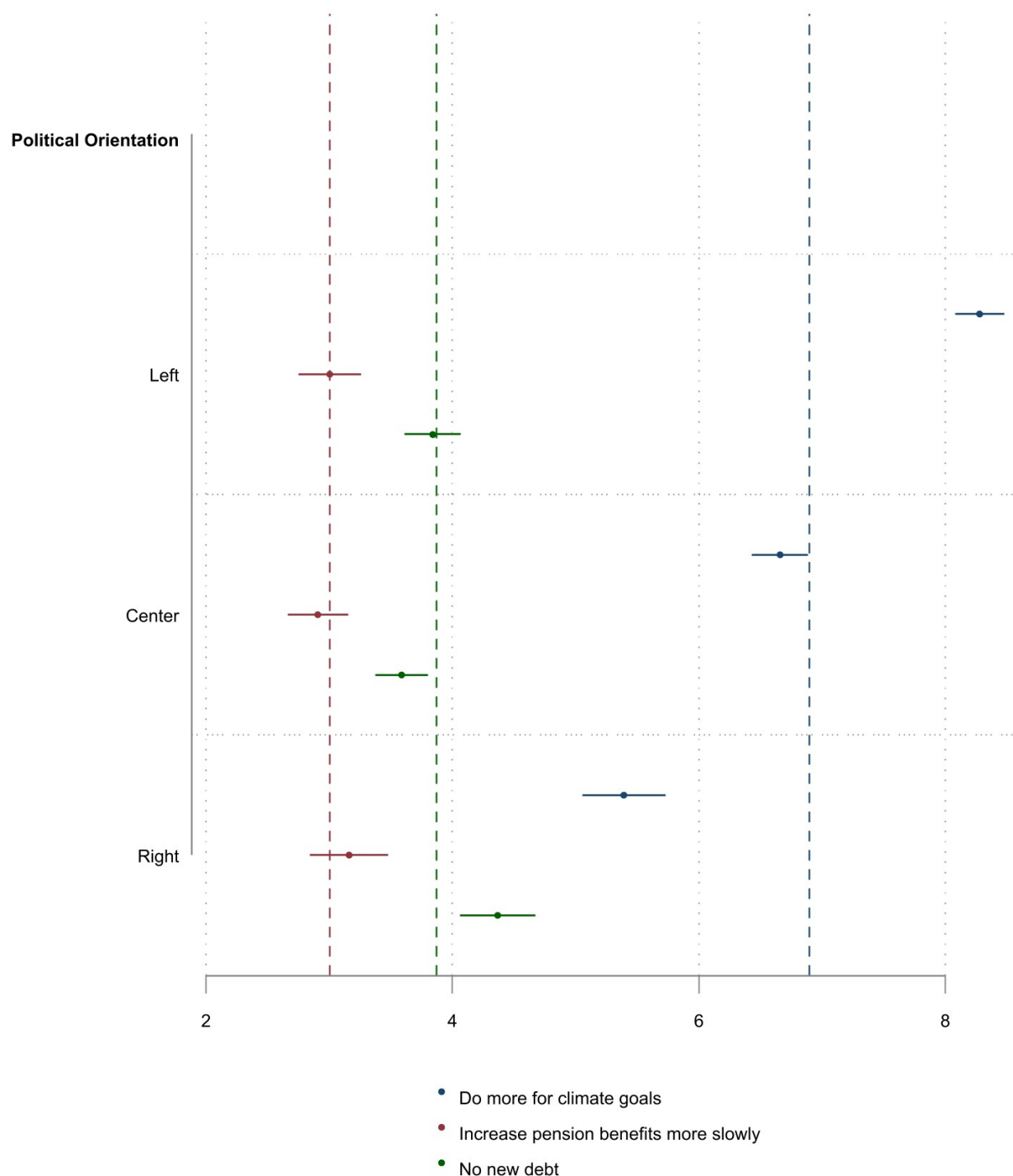
C.2 Fairness Views and Policy Preferences

Figure C.5 – Perceptions of Intergenerational and Distributive Justice



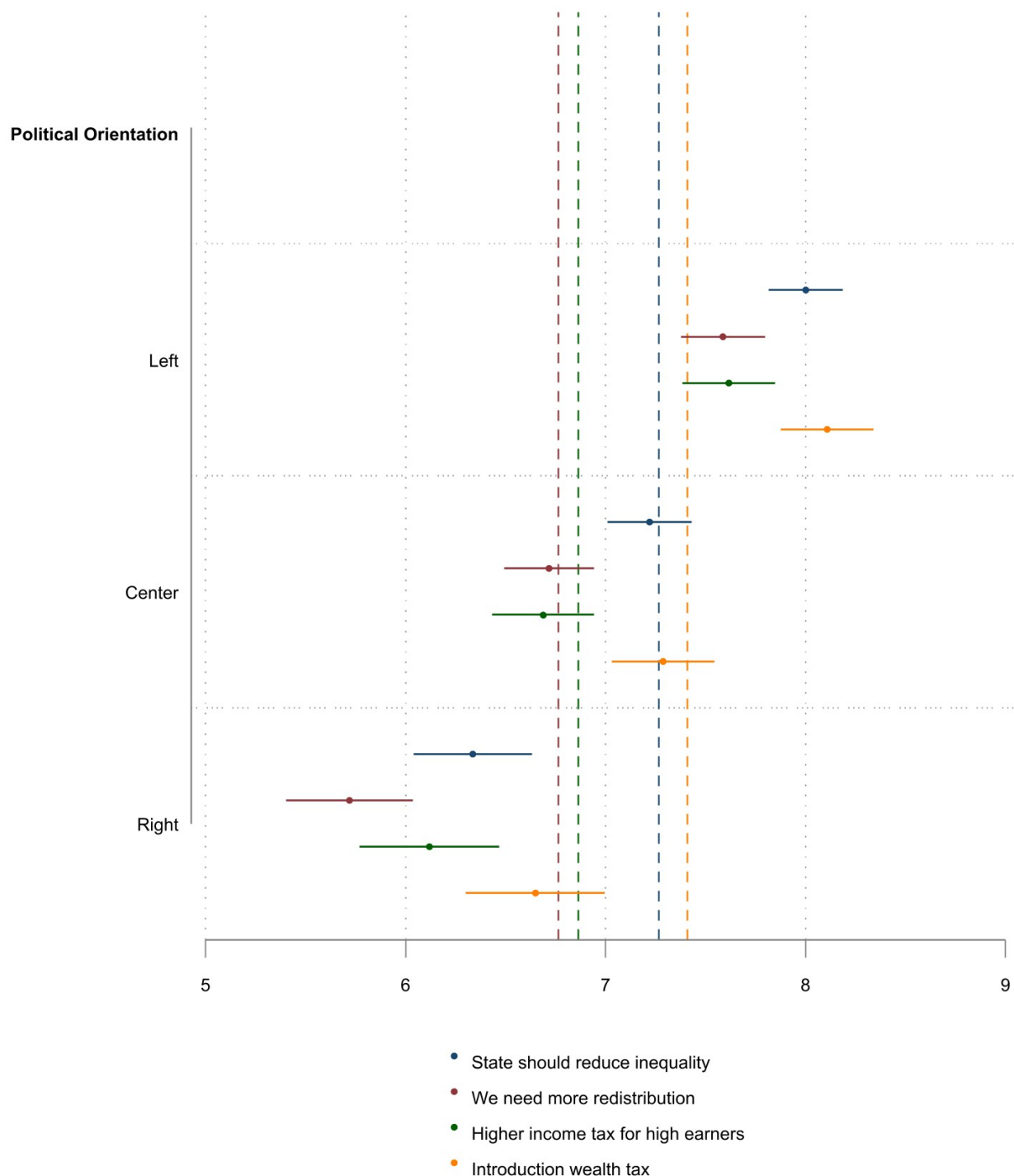
Notes: The figure shows perceptions of distributive and intergenerational justice, by political orientation, for respondents in the control group. ‘Distributive justice (general)’ (DJ) and ‘Intergenerational justice’ (IJ) are calculated as the mean value of the responses to the following survey questions, all on a 0-10 scale with 0 indicating lowest and 10 highest perceived justice. DJ: (i) I find the social differences in our country largely fair. (ii) In Germany, people are compensated according to their performance. (iii) Economic gains in Germany are largely distributed fairly today. (iv) The differences in rank between people are acceptable because they essentially reflect what one has made of one’s opportunities. IJ: (i) Young people in Germany will, by and large, have better opportunities in the labor market than their parents’ generation. (ii) Young people in Germany will, by and large, achieve a higher level of prosperity than their parents’ generation. (iii) The effects on young and future generations are adequately taken into account in political decisions.

Figure C.6 – Attitudes Towards Policies Addressing Intergenerational Fairness



Notes: The figure shows mean agreement levels with policies addressing intergenerational fairness, by political orientation, for respondents in the control group. Vertical lines represent the average values for the individual statements. The response scale for the underlying statements ranges from 0 (do not agree at all) to 10 (fully agree).

Figure C.7 – Attitudes Towards Policies Addressing Intragenerational Fairness



Notes: The figure shows mean agreement levels with policies addressing intragenerational fairness, by political orientation, for respondents in the control group. Vertical lines represent the average values for the individual statements. The response scale for the underlying statements ranges from 0 (do not agree at all) to 10 (fully agree).

D ROBUSTNESS CHECK: BALANCE TABLE AND REGRESSIONS INCLUDING CONTROL VARIABLES

Table D.1 – Balance table

	Control	T1 (intergenerational)	T2 (income)	p-value T1	p-value T2
Age	44.79	45.07	44.41	0.61	0.48
Female	0.49	0.49	0.48	0.97	0.57
University degree	0.19	0.22	0.20	0.16	0.49
Monthly income (eq.)	1998.28	2004.39	2022.77	0.87	0.50
East Germany	0.19	0.19	0.20	0.76	0.68
Political Orientation	4.75	4.78	4.69	0.70	0.39

Notes: The table shows averages in socio-demographic characteristics for the control and treatment groups (T1: Intergenerational Justice, T2: Distributive Justice).

Table D.2 – ATE: Treatment Effect of the Intergenerational Justice Treatment (T1) on Intergenerational Fairness Views and Policy Preferences, with controls

	Fairness Views			Policy Preferences		
	(1) Young people will have better chances in the job market	(2) Young people will achieve greater wealth	(3) Young and future generations sufficiently considered	(4) Do more for climate goals	(5) Increase pension benefits more slowly	(6) No new debt
Treatment intergenerational	0.0323 (0.103)	0.146 (0.098)	0.161* (0.091)	-0.154 (0.113)	-0.121 (0.102)	-0.110 (0.102)
Female	-0.320*** (0.105)	-0.446*** (0.100)	-0.376*** (0.093)	0.273** (0.116)	-0.121 (0.104)	-0.436*** (0.104)
Age	0.00289 (0.004)	0.0115*** (0.004)	0.00453 (0.003)	0.00655 (0.004)	-0.0724*** (0.004)	0.000510 (0.004)
Equivalized income (in 1000€)	0.202*** (0.059)	0.126** (0.055)	0.156*** (0.052)	-0.0693 (0.064)	0.0384 (0.058)	0.118** (0.058)
Low sec. school/no degree (yet)	0 (.)	0 (.)	0 (.)	0 (.)	0 (.)	0 (.)
Medium/high sec. school	0.164 (0.134)	0.130 (0.127)	-0.271** (0.119)	0.341** (0.148)	-0.0443 (0.133)	-0.156 (0.133)
University degree/PhD	0.232 (0.176)	0.0686 (0.166)	-0.250 (0.155)	1.066*** (0.193)	0.281 (0.174)	0.284 (0.174)
Mean dep. var.	4.573	4.173	3.328	6.828	2.939	3.821
Observations	2805	2805	2805	2805	2805	2805

Notes: The table shows the treatment effect of T1 (intergenerational justice) on the agreement with the following statements, including controls for age, gender, education, and household income: (i) Young people in Germany will, by and large, have better opportunities in the labor market than their parents' generation. (ii) Young people in Germany will, by and large, achieve a higher level of prosperity than their parents' generation. (iii) The effects on young and future generations are adequately taken into account in political decisions. (iv) The government should do more to achieve climate targets. (v) Benefits from the statutory pension system should increase at a slower rate than wages and salaries. (vi) The government should operate without new debt, even if this requires spending cuts or higher taxes and contributions. The response scale ranges from 0 (do not agree at all) to 10 (fully agree). Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.010$.

Table D.3 – ATE: Treatment Effect of the Distributive Justice Treatment (T2) on Intragenerational Fairness Views and Policy Preferences, with controls

	Fairness Views				Policy Preferences			
	(1) Rank differences fair	(2) Wages correspond to performance	(3) Social differences fair	(4) Profits distributed fairly	(5) State should reduce inequality	(6) We need more redistribution	(7) Higher income tax for high earners	(8) Introduction wealth tax
Treatment distributive	0.0829 (0.094)	0.0894 (0.094)	0.0165 (0.089)	-0.0574 (0.081)	-0.0720 (0.095)	-0.0204 (0.103)	-0.104 (0.113)	-0.192* (0.114)
Female	-0.356*** (0.097)	-0.724*** (0.097)	-0.386*** (0.091)	-0.0441 (0.083)	0.103 (0.097)	-0.0222 (0.105)	-0.450*** (0.116)	-0.0577 (0.117)
Age	-0.000653 (0.004)	-0.00395 (0.004)	-0.0146*** (0.003)	-0.0204*** (0.003)	0.00529 (0.004)	0.0217*** (0.004)	0.0355*** (0.004)	0.0442*** (0.004)
Equivalized income (in 1000€)	0.426*** (0.054)	0.268*** (0.054)	0.469*** (0.050)	0.267*** (0.046)	-0.546*** (0.054)	-0.597*** (0.058)	-0.620*** (0.064)	-0.515*** (0.065)
Low sec. school/no degree (yet)	0 (.)	0 (.)	0 (.)	0 (.)	0 (.)	0 (.)	0 (.)	0 (.)
Medium/high sec. school	-0.196 (0.122)	-0.0931 (0.122)	0.0693 (0.115)	0.0731 (0.105)	-0.0639 (0.123)	0.102 (0.133)	0.225 (0.146)	0.0742 (0.148)
University degree/PhD	-0.0346 (0.161)	0.614*** (0.161)	0.490*** (0.132)	0.480*** (0.138)	-0.378** (0.162)	-0.0784 (0.176)	-0.249 (0.193)	-0.396** (0.195)
Mean dep. var.	3.944	3.751	3.080	2.675	7.220	6.742	6.797	7.296
Observations	2842	2842	2842	2842	2842	2842	2842	2842

Notes: The table shows the treatment effect of T2 (Distributive Justice) on the agreement with the following statements, including controls for age, gender, education, and household income: (i) The differences in rank between people are acceptable because they essentially reflect what one has made of one's opportunities. (ii) In Germany, people are remunerated according to their performance. (iii) I find the social differences in our country, by and large, to be fair. (iv) Economic gains in Germany are, by and large, distributed fairly today. (v) The state should work to reduce the gap between rich and poor. (vi) In Germany, we currently need more redistribution from the rich to the poor. (vii) High earners in Germany should pay higher income taxes than they do now. (viii) In Germany, the wealthy should pay wealth taxes once their assets exceed a certain threshold. The response scale ranges from 0 (do not agree at all) to 10 (fully agree). Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.010$.

Table D.4 – Treatment Effect Heterogeneity with respect to Political Orientation of the Intergenerational Justice Treatment (T1) on Intergenerational Fairness Views and Policy Preferences, with controls

	Fairness Views			Policy Preferences		
	(1) Young people will have better chances in the job market	(2) Young people will achieve greater wealth	(3) Young and future generations sufficiently considered	(4) Do more for climate goals	(5) Increase pension benefits more slowly	(6) No new debt
Treatment (of ref. cat.: Right)						
Treatment intergenerational	0.334 (0.205)	0.492** (0.194)	0.553*** (0.179)	-0.150 (0.210)	-0.327 (0.203)	-0.561*** (0.202)
Political Orientation (ref. cat.: Right)						
Left	0.129 (0.191)	0.377** (0.181)	-0.605*** (0.167)	2.863*** (0.196)	-0.261 (0.189)	-0.469** (0.188)
Center	0.137 (0.186)	0.342* (0.175)	-0.144 (0.162)	1.276*** (0.190)	-0.114 (0.184)	-0.667*** (0.183)
Interaction (ref. cat.: Right)						
Treatment intergenerational×Left	-0.466* (0.272)	-0.608** (0.257)	-0.647*** (0.237)	0.0454 (0.278)	0.508* (0.269)	0.465* (0.268)
Treatment intergenerational×Center	-0.357 (0.260)	-0.348 (0.246)	-0.457** (0.227)	0.0430 (0.266)	0.0901 (0.257)	0.717*** (0.256)
Female	-0.313*** (0.107)	-0.465*** (0.101)	-0.325*** (0.093)	0.105 (0.109)	-0.115 (0.105)	-0.397*** (0.105)
Age	0.00265 (0.004)	0.0111*** (0.004)	0.00348 (0.003)	0.00888** (0.004)	-0.0721*** (0.004)	0.000909 (0.004)
Equivalized income (in 1000€)	0.197*** (0.059)	0.128** (0.056)	0.124** (0.051)	0.0243 (0.060)	0.0396 (0.058)	0.107* (0.058)
Low sec. school/no degree (yet)	0 (.)	0 (.)	0 (.)	0 (.)	0 (.)	0 (.)
Medium/high sec. school	0.166 (0.135)	0.136 (0.128)	-0.219* (0.118)	0.179 (0.138)	-0.0500 (0.134)	-0.158 (0.133)
University degree/PhD	0.244 (0.177)	0.0820 (0.168)	-0.135 (0.155)	0.728*** (0.181)	0.266 (0.175)	0.290* (0.175)
Mean dep. var.	4.573	4.173	3.328	6.828	2.939	3.821
Observations	2805	2805	2805	2805	2805	2805

Notes: The table shows treatment effect heterogeneity with respect to political orientation of T1 (intergenerational justice) on the agreement with the following statements, including controls for age, gender, education, and household income: (i) Young people in Germany will, by and large, have better opportunities in the labor market than their parents' generation. (ii) Young people in Germany will, by and large, achieve a higher level of prosperity than their parents' generation. (iii) The effects on young and future generations are adequately taken into account in political decisions. (iv) The government should do more to achieve climate targets. (v) Benefits from the statutory pension system should increase at a slower rate than wages and salaries. (vi) The government should operate without new debt, even if this requires spending cuts or higher taxes and contributions. The response scale ranges from 0 (do not agree at all) to 10 (fully agree). Standard errors in parentheses. * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.010.

Table D.5 – Treatment Effect Heterogeneity with respect to Political Orientation of the Distributive Justice Treatment (T2) on Intragenerational Fairness Views and Policy Preferences, with controls

	Fairness Views				Policy Preferences			
	(1) Rank differences fair	(2) Wages correspond to performance	(3) Social differences fair	(4) Profits distributed fairly	(5) State should reduce inequality	(6) We need more redistribution	(7) Higher income tax for high earners	(8) Introduction wealth tax
Treatment (of ref. cat.: Right)								
Treatment distributive	0.559*** (0.185)	0.317* (0.190)	0.269 (0.175)	0.0682 (0.162)	-0.535*** (0.183)	-0.393** (0.198)	-0.473** (0.221)	-0.543** (0.223)
Political Orientation (ref. cat.: Right)								
Left	-1.189*** (0.171)	-0.367** (0.176)	-1.101*** (0.163)	-0.512*** (0.151)	1.642*** (0.170)	1.865*** (0.184)	1.560*** (0.205)	1.511*** (0.207)
Center	-0.442*** (0.166)	-0.197 (0.171)	-0.711*** (0.158)	-0.150 (0.146)	0.740*** (0.165)	0.863*** (0.179)	0.474** (0.199)	0.466** (0.201)
Interaction (ref. cat.: Right)								
Treatment distributive×Left	-0.644*** (0.242)	-0.275 (0.248)	-0.440* (0.229)	-0.155 (0.213)	0.632*** (0.240)	0.514** (0.259)	0.607** (0.289)	0.610** (0.292)
Treatment distributive×Center	-0.589** (0.235)	-0.312 (0.241)	-0.215 (0.222)	-0.164 (0.206)	0.555** (0.232)	0.429* (0.252)	0.349 (0.280)	0.303 (0.284)
Female	-0.273*** (0.095)	-0.680*** (0.098)	-0.289*** (0.090)	-0.0198 (0.084)	-0.0139 (0.094)	-0.145 (0.102)	-0.513*** (0.114)	-0.117 (0.115)
Age	-0.000750 (0.004)	-0.00396 (0.004)	-0.0144*** (0.003)	-0.0205*** (0.003)	0.00529 (0.003)	0.0216*** (0.004)	0.0356*** (0.004)	0.0443*** (0.004)
Equalized income (in 1000€)	0.382*** (0.052)	0.253*** (0.054)	0.429*** (0.050)	0.251*** (0.046)	-0.489*** (0.052)	-0.535*** (0.056)	-0.568*** (0.062)	-0.464*** (0.063)
Low sec. school/no degree (yet)	0 (.)	0 (.)	0 (.)	0 (.)	0 (.)	0 (.)	0 (.)	0 (.)
Medium/high sec. school	-0.0917 (0.120)	-0.0739 (0.123)	0.143 (0.113)	0.121 (0.105)	-0.193 (0.118)	-0.0427 (0.128)	0.0571 (0.143)	-0.0927 (0.144)
University degree/PhD	0.0994 (0.158)	0.637*** (0.162)	0.586*** (0.150)	0.544*** (0.139)	-0.546*** (0.156)	-0.268 (0.169)	-0.470** (0.189)	-0.616*** (0.191)
Mean dep. var.	3.944	3.751	3.080	2.675	7.220	6.742	6.797	7.296
Observations	2842	2842	2842	2842	2842	2842	2842	2842

Notes: The table shows treatment effect heterogeneity with respect to political orientation of T2 (Distributive Justice) on the agreement with the following statements, including controls for age, gender, education, and household income: (i) The differences in rank between people are acceptable because they essentially reflect what one has made of one's opportunities. (ii) In Germany, people are remunerated according to their performance. (iii) I find the social differences in our country, by and large, to be fair. (iv) Economic gains in Germany are, by and large, distributed fairly today. (v) The state should work to reduce the gap between rich and poor. (vi) In Germany, we currently need more redistribution from the rich to the poor. (vii) High earners in Germany should pay higher income taxes than they do now. (viii) In Germany, the wealthy should pay wealth taxes once their assets exceed a certain threshold. The response scale ranges from 0 (do not agree at all) to 10 (fully agree). Standard errors in parentheses. * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.010.