

# What Drives Citizen Support for Electoral Reform?

## Disentangling Partisan, Local, and Fairness Considerations

Thomas Gschwend\*      Lisa-Marie Müller†      Oliver Rittmann‡

### Abstract

Previous research has explained citizens' support for electoral reform with partisan self-interest and perceived procedural fairness. However, electoral reforms also affect the geographic distribution of officeholders, raising questions about whether voters value local representation when evaluating reforms. We theorize that public opinion may be shaped by partisan, geographic, and fairness-based considerations. To disentangle these motives empirically, we study Germany's highly controversial 2025 electoral reform, which generated meaningful variation in district-level representation outcomes and was publicly criticized as unfair. However, using pre-registered observational and experimental data from over 3,400 respondents, we find no evidence that geographic or fairness considerations significantly influence public opinion towards the electoral reform. Instead, attitudes are primarily shaped by partisanship. Notably, disapproval often reflects mere opposition to the parties responsible for the reform, rather than a strategic evaluation of its partisan consequences. These findings suggest that partisan identity, rather than strategic or fairness-based reasoning, is the dominant force behind public attitudes toward electoral reform.

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\*School of Social Sciences, University of Mannheim. E-mail: [gschwend@uni-mannheim.de](mailto:gschwend@uni-mannheim.de)

†School of Social Sciences, University of Mannheim. E-mail: [lisa-marie.mueller@uni-mannheim.de](mailto:lisa-marie.mueller@uni-mannheim.de)

‡Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES), University of Mannheim. E-mail: [oliver.rittmann@uni-mannheim.de](mailto:oliver.rittmann@uni-mannheim.de)

# 1 Introduction

How do citizens evaluate electoral reforms? Competitive elections are the key instruments of democracy (Powell, 2000). The respective rules provide a systematic mechanism through which citizens can participate in policy making. Efforts to change electoral rules are often justified on normative or technical grounds, enhancing fairness, improving representation, or efficiency. But the legitimacy of electoral reforms ultimately hinges on public acceptance. When they are perceived as unfair or overly complex, reforms can erode trust in the electoral process, the involved political actors and democratic institutions. Therefore, understanding how and why citizens support or oppose electoral reforms is crucial in democracies that rely on public trust in their democratic institutions.

Previous research has explained citizens’ support for electoral reform primarily in terms of partisan self-interest and perceptions of procedural fairness. This work generally assumes that voters prefer reforms that benefit their preferred party and that they perceive as fair. However, electoral reforms also shape the geographic distribution of elected officials, raising important questions about local representation, e.g., whether citizens care about their own district’s representation. If citizens are motivated by self-interest and value local representation, they may favor electoral reforms that not only enhance their preferred party’s chances of success but also increase the number of representatives from their own district relative to others.

We argue that citizens form attitudes toward electoral reform by weighing three motives: partisan self-interest (the prospect of more or less seats for one’s preferred party), geographic self-interest (the prospect of more or less seats for one’s electoral district), and fairness considerations (resistance to any disproportional advantage). Citizens who prioritize local representation will respond differently to an electoral reform than citizens whose primary concern is party power or procedural fairness. By modeling opinion formation as a weighted sum of these three considerations, we can form testable expectations of which citizens will support what kind of reform.

We test these expectations in a pre-registered study, examining responses of citizens to a recent electoral reform in Germany.<sup>1</sup> Under the new rules, district candidates can fail to win a seat in the Bundestag even if they receive the most votes in their electoral district. This reform introduces quasi-random variation in outcomes across districts, providing a unique opportunity to disentangle local representation concerns from partisan preferences and fairness considerations. Empirically, we draw on a wave of the German Internet Panel (GIP) conducted in March 2025—immediately following the federal election—when the new electoral rules and their consequences were top of mind. In addition to questions

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<sup>1</sup>We pre-registered our research design at the Open Science Foundation repository: [osf.io/634pm](https://osf.io/634pm).

on satisfaction with democracy, political efficacy, and vote choice, the survey included an experiment with three vignettes: a geographic vignette highlighting which electoral districts lost their directly elected representative, a party vignette showing how many direct representatives each party lost due to the reform, and a neutral control. After exposure to treatment, all respondents answered identical questions about their satisfaction with the electoral reform. This design allows us to measure associations between respondents' own district and party outcomes and their attitudes, test whether making geographic or partisan consequences salient shifts those attitudes, and examine whether treatment effects vary conditional on being in a negatively affected district or supporting a disadvantaged party.

We summarize our results as follows: First, we find no evidence for geographic and fairness-based considerations to be a meaningful driver of support or opposition to the 2025 electoral reform in Germany. Respondents living in geographically disadvantaged districts do not express more negative opinions towards the electoral reform, even after this disadvantage has been made salient to them. Similarly, respondents do not react more negatively when exposed to information about the reform's uneven partisan or geographic consequences. These findings challenge prominent public narratives suggesting that voters would oppose the reform and lose trust in the electoral system due to its allegedly unfair impact on certain districts. Second, partisanship is a reliable predictor of public opinion towards the electoral reform. However, voters appear to rely less on strategic assessments of the reform's impact on their preferred party and more on partisan cues: they are more likely to support the reform if it was implemented by a party they support and to oppose it if it was implemented by rival parties.

These findings advance our theoretical understanding of opinion formation on institutional change in three ways. First, they demonstrate that geographic self-interest plays a surprisingly limited role in shaping reform preferences, even when local winners are denied parliamentary seats. Second, the results confirm that partisan considerations are potent drivers of support and opposition to electoral reforms. However, our analysis also shows that public opinion on the 2025 electoral reform in Germany seems to be much less polarized than what the elite discourse would suggest. Third, the results point towards two mechanism behind partisan-driven opposition towards electoral reforms: voters may object to a reform because they believe it disadvantages their preferred party, or because they oppose the parties responsible for enacting it, regardless of its substantive effects.

Our paper makes an important contribution to the broader literature on representation by disentangling partisan, geographic, and fairness considerations. By disentangling these three dimensions in an actual reform context, our paper offers a more nuanced framework for understanding when and why voters support or resist changes to the rules of democracy.

## 2 How Do Citizens Evaluate Election Reforms?

Electoral reforms in established democracies occur frequently, are rarely consensual, and span a wide range of changes, from seemingly fundamental alterations to minor or highly technical adjustments (Bowler and Donovan, 2013). But how do such reforms matter to citizens?

A substantial literature has investigated how citizens evaluate political institutions and their decisions, including changes to electoral rules. Two prominent explanatory frameworks have emerged. The first emphasizes partisan self-interest: citizens are more likely to support reforms they believe will improve their preferred party’s electoral prospects (e.g., Anderson et al., 2005; Bytzek, 2020). A range of studies supports the notion that citizens approach electoral reforms through a partisan lens. Individuals aligned with opposition parties are generally more supportive of reforms that would enhance their party’s influence or chances of gaining office (e.g., Anderson et al., 2005; Banducci and Karp, 1999; Smith, Tolbert and Keller, 2010). These patterns are typically interpreted as reflecting partisan self-interest. In an experimental study, Biggers (2019) shows that individuals systematically increase or decrease their support for policies such as early voting or voter ID requirements depending on whether the reform is framed as benefiting their party.

The second explanatory framework highlights procedural fairness—that is, the perceived neutrality and integrity of democratic decision-making processes—as distinct from partisan considerations. This perspective suggests that citizens’ attitudes toward institutional change are shaped or at least constrained by fairness considerations. Drawing on psychological theories of justice and legitimacy, this literature (e.g., Gangl, 2003; Tyler, 2006; Wilking, 2011) finds that citizens are more likely to accept political decisions when those decisions are seen as procedurally fair, even if they do not benefit them personally. For instance, Esaiasson et al. (2019) find that perceptions of fairness increase the likelihood that citizens accept political decisions, although whether a citizen or their party benefits from the outcome remains relevant. While this line of work affirms the importance of fairness considerations, it also acknowledges that there might be other considerations as well.

A study that explicitly contrasts the observable implications of both frameworks is Biggers and Bowler (2022), who use a two-wave panel experiment to examine whether citizens’ fairness judgments constrain their partisan considerations. They find that proposals previously rated as unfair (e.g., requiring a civics test or paying a poll tax as a voting prerequisite) still receive increased support when framed as enhancing the electoral prospects of the respondent’s preferred party. In a related experimental study, Biggers and Bowler (2023) show that priming fairness considerations reduces the effect of parti-

san considerations for evaluations of an electoral reform, but does not override it entirely. This suggests that partisan considerations continue to shape attitudes to some extent, even when reforms are perceived as procedurally unfair.

Taken together, existing research suggests that citizens, much like political elites (Boix, 1999; Bowler, Donovan and Karp, 2006), often evaluate proposals for electoral reform through partisan lenses. Additionally, even though fairness considerations matter, they are not appear entirely resistant to partisan influence.

While partisan and procedural fairness considerations have received the most sustained empirical attention, electoral reform proposals are likely to also affect representation at the local level in addition to the national level. This follows from how electoral systems structure the voting process and determine how votes are translated into parliamentary seats. First, with the exception of pure proportional representation systems such as those in Israel or the Netherlands, citizens typically cast their votes within electoral districts smaller than the entire country. Second, most electoral systems allow for some form of nominal voting for individual candidates (e.g., Kedar, Harsgor and Sheinerman, 2016; Rittmann, Sohnius and Gschwend, 2023; Shugart, Valdini and Suominen, 2005).

At the elite level, such institutional features create incentives for candidates to provide party-independent information and, as district incumbents, to advocate for district-specific interests in parliament (e.g., Bol et al., 2021; Gschwend and Zittel, 2018; Heitshusen, Young and Wood, 2005). At the voter level, electoral systems often motivate citizens to form preferences not only over parties at the national level but also over individual candidates in their local districts. Geographically motivated considerations—such as who is best suited to represent district-specific interests—can thus shape vote choice independently of partisan considerations. The comparative literature consistently finds that voters often express strong preferences for candidates who are perceived as “local” or geographically proximate, viewing them as more responsive, trustworthy, or better attuned to represent the community needs in parliament (e.g., Carella and Eggers, 2024; Cowley, 2013; Campbell and Cowley, 2014; Evans et al., 2017; Jankowski, 2016). Voters may develop preferences and cast personal votes (Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina, 1987; Gschwend and Zittel, 2015) for local candidates, even when those candidates do not belong to their preferred party. In low-information environments where we do not assume that voters actually can develop meaningful preferences over local candidates, an easy available decision heuristic is to vote for someone from the district because they are assumed to know and are therefore more likely to share district-specific interests (Panagopoulos, Leighley and Hamel, 2017).

The relevance of geographic considerations for citizens can be further seen in how they understand political representation. Using data from the German Longitudinal Election

Study (GLES) covering the 2013, 2017, and 2021 federal elections, Allinger (2025) analyzes how voters think about representation at the district level. He finds that respondents prefer politicians to represent the views of voters or residents in their local district rather than those of their party or the national electorate. Geographic considerations, whether as a fully developed preference or as a simple heuristic, appear to matter for how voters believe their interests should be represented in parliament. We therefore expect that such considerations also shape how citizens evaluate elite decisions, including proposals for electoral reform.

Electoral reforms can alter the extent to which citizens feel their local interests are represented in national politics. For example, they can change district boundaries, modify district magnitude, or reshape the geographic representativeness of the national parliament. In such cases, citizens may support or oppose reforms not because they benefit their preferred party or conform to fairness norms, but because they care about the visibility or influence of their own district. Despite this potential importance, geographic considerations have rarely been treated as analytically distinct from partisan or fairness considerations in the literature on electoral reform.

In sum, electoral reforms frequently affect both partisan and geographic representation simultaneously. Changes to district magnitude or redistricting rules, for example, can shift the partisan balance of power while also redistributing representational weight across regions. The existing literature remains limited in its ability to disentangle these effects: it is often unclear whether citizens support a given reform because it improves their party's prospects or because it enhances local representation. Moreover, while fairness and partisan considerations are commonly studied in tension, geographic considerations are typically either overlooked or implicitly subsumed under the partisan dimensions. This raises the question of how citizens prioritize geographic representation when it conflicts with other normative or instrumental concerns. We address this limitation by examining citizen responses to a recent electoral reform in Germany, introduced in the following section.

### 3 Case Selection: Electoral Reform in Germany

Germany uses a mixed-member proportional representation system to elect members of the national parliament (*Bundestag*). Voters have two votes: a candidate vote (*Erststimme*) and a party vote (*Zweitstimme*). In order to understand the impact of the electoral reform implemented for the 2025 election, we look at the previous electoral law. Until the election in 2025, the candidate vote was used to elect a district candidate in each of the 299 electoral districts. These district winners, the candidates who received

the most votes in a district, were guaranteed a seat in the national parliament. The more important party vote was used to determine the overall proportion of seats each party gets in the parliament. With their party vote, voters choose a party list in their state and the nationwide party-vote percentages determine the parties' number of seats in parliament. Parties that received less than five percent of party votes did not get any seats. The assigned seats to the party were then first filled with the parties' district winners. The remaining seats were filled with the parties' list candidates in each state. If a party had more district winners than seats according to the party-vote share, this party could keep those additional seats (*Überhangmandate*). To keep the seat shares proportional to the party-vote shares, the other parties would then get additional compensatory seats (*Ausgleichsmandate*) until proportionality is accomplished. This electoral law resulted in a national parliament that was often larger than intended (e.g., 733 in 2021, 709 in 2017; intended was 598).

In 2023, an electoral reform was passed that keeps the national parliament at a fixed number of 630 seats (Behnke, 2022). The most important part of this reform is that *Überhang-* and *Ausgleichsmandate* do not longer exist. The number of seats is now fixed to 630 and parties only get seats according to their party vote shares. If a party wins more districts than allocated seats in a particular state, only the district winners with the highest candidate-vote shares retain their seats. Thus, there will be potentially district winners who do not get a seat despite winning their district. The new electoral law can result in electoral districts that do not have nominally-elected representatives in parliament. However, given that almost all elected party-list candidates also run in a district, in most districts there are one or more such candidates from other parties that can represent such a district in parliament.

This reform, passed by the coalition of SPD, Green Party (B90/Die Grünen), and FDP, was massively criticized by the CDU/CSU who suspected being especially affected by it. In interviews, CDU/CSU-politicians called the reform “*unacceptable for our democracy*”, “*unfair*”, and an “*attack on democracy*”. They said that citizens “*cannot understand*” the reform and that the reform is a “*support program for political discontent and radicals*”.<sup>2</sup>

In the 2025 election, there have been 23 electoral districts in which the district winner did not enter parliament. Four of these districts do not have any representative in parliament, whereas the other 19 electoral districts have representatives from other parties who entered parliament through their party lists. 18 of the district winners who did not enter

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<sup>2</sup>Süddeutsche Zeitung online, 04/10/2025, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/bundestagswahl-abgeordnete-wahlrecht-verwaiste-wahlkreise-tuebingen-li.3233018;tagesschau online, 02/21/2025, https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/bundestagswahl/wahlsystem/wahlrechtsreform-direktmandate-folgen-100.html; Zeit online, 03/20/2024, https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2023-03/wahlrechtsreform-bundestag-ampel-koalition-csu-linke-faq>

parliament are from the CDU/CSU, four are from the AfD, and one is from the SPD. To be clear, this does not mean that the CDU/CSU now has 18 seats less than they would have without the reform, while the other parties are not affected. Under the old electoral law, other parties would have gotten compensatory seats to ensure proportionality. These compensatory seats are abolished by the reform, and the share (but not the number) of seats each party gets remains the same. The affected districts spread over ten federal states, with the most affected districts being located in Hesse, Baden-Württemberg (both six affected districts), Bavaria, and Rhineland-Palatine (both three affected districts). Figure 2 in Section 5 also presents a map showing the geographic distribution.

While we are focusing on a real electoral reform, previous research on voter attitudes toward electoral reform in Germany employs hypothetical reform proposals. This work finds conflicting evidence regarding the role of party considerations, while neglecting fairness and geographic factors (Bytzek, 2020; Gschwend, Rittmann and Werner, 2023; Haffert, Langenbach and Rommel, 2024; Jankowski, Linhart and Tepe, 2019; Sohnius, Gschwend and Rittmann, 2022).

## 4 Theoretical Model

In our pre-registered theoretical model, voters’ attitudes toward the electoral reform arise from an opinion formation process that incorporates partisan, geographic, and fairness considerations. A voter’s attitude is given by a weighted combination of these three considerations, with higher weights associated with considerations that are more important to the voter.

**Partisan considerations.** When considering partisan motives, voters prefer electoral systems that benefit their preferred party: They prefer electoral systems that maximize the number of (locally elected) representatives from their party relative to the number of representatives of other parties. Partisan considerations affect a voter’s opinion of the electoral reform by a combination of three factors: The strength of the partisan motive, whether the reform affects the voter’s preferred party in a positive or negative way, and the salience of this effect. Let  $\omega_P$  denote the strength of a voter’s partisan motivation,  $p_i$  denote whether the reform affects the voter’s preferred party positively ( $p_i > 0$ ) or negatively ( $p_i < 0$ ), and  $\delta_P$  denote the salience of this effect.

**Geographic considerations.** When considering geographic motives, voters prefer electoral systems that benefit the electoral district in which they live: They prefer electoral systems that maximize the number of representatives from their electoral district relative to representatives from other electoral districts, irrespective of the party affiliation of these representatives. Geographic considerations affect a voter’s opinion of the electoral



reform by a combination of three factors: The strength of the geographic motive, whether the reform affects the number of representatives from the voter’s electoral district in a positive or negative way, and the salience of this effect. Let  $\omega_G$  denote the strength of a voter’s geographic motivation,  $g_i$  denote whether the reform affects the voter’s electoral district positively ( $g_i > 0$ ) or negatively ( $g_i < 0$ ), and  $\delta_G$  denote the salience of this effect.

**Fairness considerations.** When considering fairness (or procedural) motives, voters dislike electoral systems that create either partisan or geographic benefits for certain parties or electoral districts. Fairness considerations affect a voter’s opinion of the electoral reform by a combination of three factors: The strength of the fairness motive ( $\omega_F$ ), and the degree to which voters are aware of the partisan or geographic disproportionalities created by an electoral reform ( $\delta_P$  and  $\delta_G$ ).

We model a respondent’s opinion towards the electoral reform,  $Y_i$ , as a combination of these three considerations:

$$Y_i(p_i, g_i) = \underbrace{\omega_P \delta_P p_i}_{\text{Partisan consideration}} + \underbrace{\omega_G \delta_G g_i}_{\text{Geographic consideration}} - \underbrace{\omega_F \frac{\delta_P + \delta_G}{2}}_{\text{Fairness consideration}} \quad (1)$$

This model does not require voters to consider all three motives. If they do consider a motive, the associated weight  $\omega$  is positive. If they do not consider a motive, the associated weight  $\omega$  equals zero. Our goal is to study the extent to which voters consider the three motives. If voters consider only partisan motives, and partisan disproportionality is salient ( $\omega_P \delta_P > 0$ ), then their opinion towards the electoral reform varies conditional on how the preferred party is affected by the electoral reform. If voters only consider geographic motives and geographic disproportionality is salient ( $\omega_G \delta_G > 0$ ), then their opinion on the electoral reform only varies conditional on how their electoral district is affected by the electoral reform.

If we do not find that voters’ opinion on the electoral reform vary with their party preference or how their district is affected, then this result can either indicate that respondents are purely motivated by fairness considerations, or that they are simply unaware of the electoral reforms’ consequences for their preferred party and their electoral district ( $\delta_P = \delta_G = 0$ ), or that none of the considerations plays a role ( $\omega_P = \omega_G = \omega_F = 0$ ).

To disentangle these possibilities, we design two survey experimental interventions that increase the salience of the geographic and partisan consequences of the electoral reform, respectively. Let  $D_P$  denote an indicator for a vignette that highlights the reform’s partisan impact ( $D_P \in 0, 1$ ), and let  $D_G$  denote an indicator for a vignette that highlights its geographic impact ( $D_G \in 0, 1$ ). The effective post-treatment salience of the reform’s

partisan and geographic effects for each respondent in our survey experiment is thus a function of their baseline awareness and their exposure to the corresponding vignette treatment. The salience of the reform’s partisan impact is given by  $\delta_P + D_P$ , while the salience of its geographic impact is then given by  $\delta_G + D_G$ .

Let  $Y_i(\mathbf{D})$  denote the potential outcome of a respondent’s opinion towards the electoral reform given treatment realization  $\mathbf{D} = (D_P, D_G)$ . We model this as a function of the three types of considerations and the treatment realization:

$$Y_i(\mathbf{D}|p_i, g_i) = \underbrace{\omega_P(\delta_P + D_P)p_i}_{\text{Partisan consideration}} + \underbrace{\omega_G(\delta_G + D_G)g_i}_{\text{Geographic consideration}} - \underbrace{\omega_F\left(\frac{\delta_P + \delta_G}{2} + D_P + D_G\right)}_{\text{Fairness consideration}} \quad (2)$$

As before,  $p_i$  and  $g_i$  indicate whether respondent  $i$ ’s preferred party or electoral district, respectively, is disproportionately disadvantaged by the reform. The weights  $\omega_P$ ,  $\omega_G$ , and  $\omega_F$ , capture the relative importance of partisan, geographic, and fairness considerations in shaping individual attitudes. In the following section, we build on this model to derive testable expectations that allow us to infer the relative strength of partisan, geographic, and fairness considerations in shaping respondents’ opinions toward the electoral reform.

## 4.1 Hypotheses

We begin by considering the possibility that geographic considerations shape voters’ attitudes and that the electoral reform’s uneven geographic impact is sufficiently salient for it to influence opinion, even without any experimental intervention (i.e.,  $\omega_G\delta_G > 0$ ). Furthermore, we assume that dissatisfaction with the reform is associated with lower satisfaction with democracy and diminished political efficacy. This leads to the following hypotheses:

- H1a:** Respondents who live in an affected district are less satisfied with democracy.
- H1b:** Respondents who live in an affected district show lower political efficacy.
- H1c:** Respondents who live in an affected district are less satisfied with the electoral reform.

Next, we assume that partisan considerations shape voter attitudes, and that the reform’s uneven partisan impact is sufficiently salient in the absence of any intervention (i.e.,  $\omega_P\delta_P > 0$ ). This yields the following hypotheses:

- H2a:** Respondents who support a disproportionately affected party are less satisfied with democracy.
- H2b:** Respondents who support a disproportionately affected party show lower political efficacy.
- H2c:** Respondents who support a disproportionately affected party are less satisfied with the electoral reform.

We now turn to the expectations derived from our vignette experiment. We assume that the treatments increase the salience of either the reform’s geographic or partisan effects, and that voters’ attitudes are shaped primarily by fairness considerations. Under these conditions, we formulate the following hypotheses:

- H3:** Respondents in the geographic treatment condition are less satisfied with the electoral reform than respondents in the control condition.
- H4:** Respondents in the partisan treatment condition are less satisfied with the electoral reform than respondents in the control condition.

If geographic rather than fairness considerations are the dominant driver of attitudes, we refine Hypothesis 3 as follows:

- H5:** Respondents in the geographic treatment condition are less satisfied with the electoral reform than respondents in the control condition, but this difference varies conditional on whether they live in a disproportionately affected region.

Conversely, if partisan rather than fairness considerations dominate, we refine Hypothesis 4:

- H6:** Respondents in the partisan treatment condition are less satisfied with the electoral reform than respondents in the control condition, but this difference varies conditional on whether they support a disproportionately affected party.

Naturally, the three types of considerations can be combined in more ways than the specific configurations outlined above. Our theoretical model, as formalized in equation 4, is sufficiently flexible to generate predictions for any combination of consideration weights and salience levels. Depending on the particular configuration of these parameters, different subsets of our hypotheses may receive empirical support. In the analysis that follows, we test each hypothesis individually and then return to our theoretical framework to evaluate the relative influence of partisan, geographic, and fairness considerations in shaping public opinion on the electoral reform.

## 5 Data and Research Design

We fielded an original survey experiment in Wave 76 of the German Internet Panel (GIP) in March 2025 (Blom, Gathmann and Krieger, 2015; University of Mannheim, 2025), immediately following the national election in February 2025. The GIP is a longitudinal online panel of the general adult population in Germany. It is based on multi-stage, regionally clustered random samples of individuals aged 16 to 75 living in private households. Respondents were recruited through a combination of face-to-face interviews (2012, 2014) and postal invitations (2018), with internet access and devices provided where needed. Our sample consists of 3,433 respondents. Compared to the general electorate, our sample overrepresents Green voters and underrepresents AfD-voters (self-reported vote recall), while the distribution of other voters closely matches the official election results. The sample also skews toward higher educational attainment and self-reported turnout (see Table A1 in the Appendix).

The survey followed a pre-registered design and consisted of three parts (see Figure 1): pre-treatment questions, a randomized experimental intervention, and post-treatment items.

Pre-treatment measures included satisfaction with democracy, political efficacy, prior awareness of the electoral reform, and knowledge about respondents' district representatives. To ensure minimal prior understanding of the reform, respondents received a brief factual explanation and an attention check. Most respondents reported moderate to high satisfaction with democracy (median = 7 on an 11-point scale) and high political efficacy (median = 4 on a 5-point scale). A large majority correctly answered the factual attention check, and most had already heard about the reform prior to the survey.

The core of our design is the randomized experimental intervention with three groups: a control group (50%) received no additional information, while two treatment groups (each 25%) were exposed to short vignettes designed to activate geographic or partisan considerations. The geographic vignette showed a map of Germany, indicating which districts were affected by the reform, emphasizing regional disparities. The partisan vignette displayed a bar chart illustrating how many candidates from each party were affected by the reform, highlighting its disproportionate partisan effects. Figure 2 presents the vignettes as shown to the respondents.

Post-treatment outcomes include five items capturing attitudes toward the electoral reform, followed by manipulation checks for the intervention. Overall, respondents expressed strong support for limiting the size of the Bundestag (median = 5 on a 5-point scale), but also considerable attachment to the principle that district winners should always receive a seat in parliament (median = 4). However, support for the principle

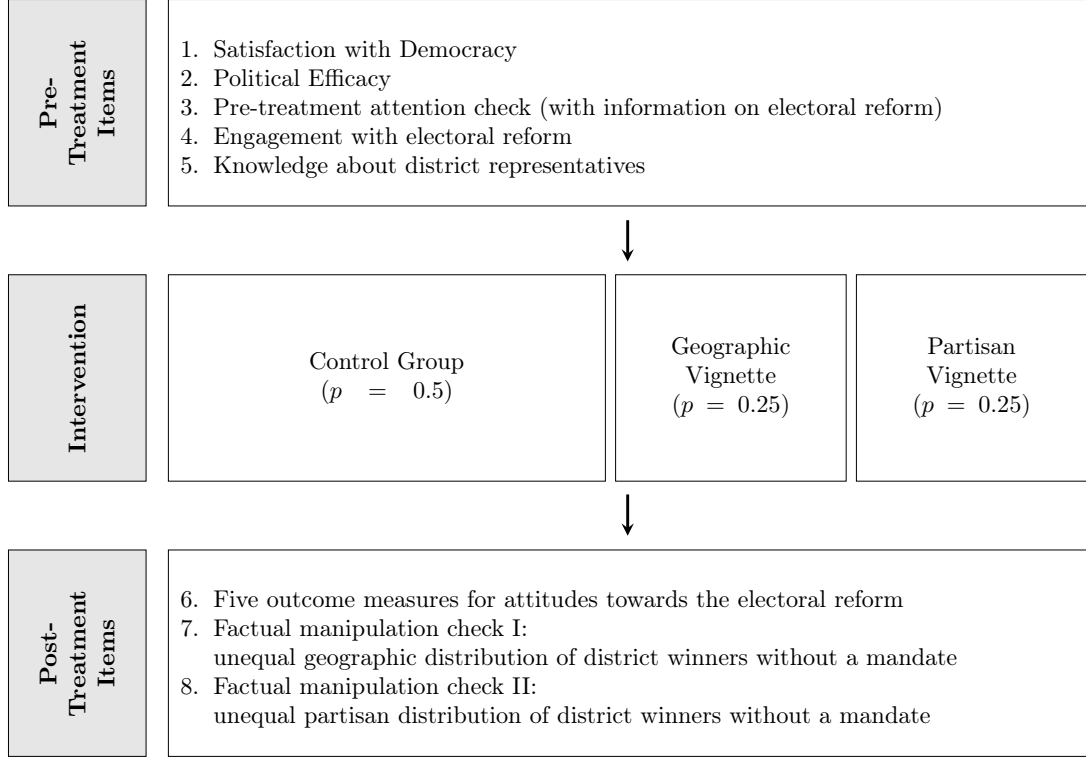


Figure 1: Survey Design

decreases when district winners receive only a small share of the vote (median = 3). Most voters would prefer a system with fewer electoral districts in which all district winners receive a seat in parliament, rather than the current reform (median = 4). At the same time, most respondents did not expect the reform to erode trust in politics (median = 2), and a majority expressed overall satisfaction with the reform (median = 4). However, a relatively large share of respondents selected “I don’t know” on the post-treatment items.

Importantly, we can link all respondents to their electoral districts, and we use their previously reported party list and candidate votes (from another questionnaire in the same GIP wave) to examine heterogeneity by vote choice and local impact.

## 6 Results

We structure our analysis in two parts. First, we conduct an observational analysis, examining how respondents’ satisfaction with democracy, political efficacy, and views on the electoral reform after the 2025 German federal election vary by party support and by whether they reside in an electoral district where the winning candidate did not receive a seat. Second, we draw on our survey experiment to compare satisfaction with the electoral reform across the three treatment conditions.

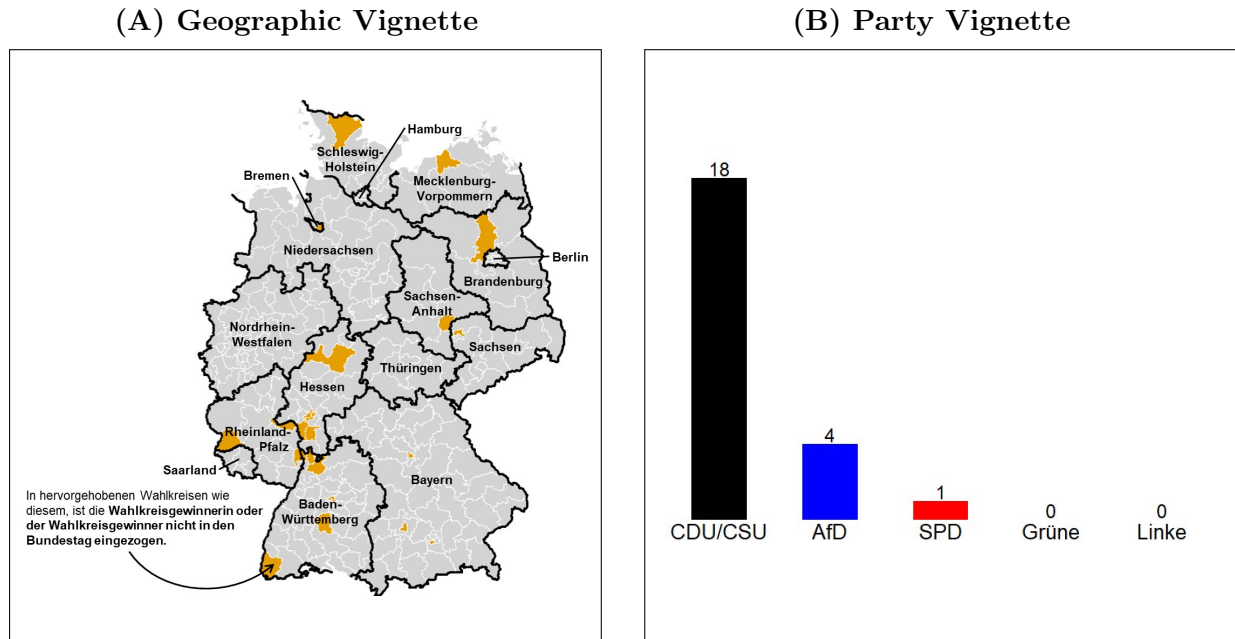


Figure 2: Survey vignettes. Panel A shows the geographic vignette; panel B shows the party vignette.

## 6.1 Observational Results

### Public Opinion by Geographic Location

We begin by investigating whether there is observational evidence supporting the claim that geographic factors shape voters' attitudes toward electoral reform. Specifically, we examine respondents' satisfaction with democracy, political efficacy, and satisfaction with the electoral reform conditional on whether they live in an electoral district whose winner, despite obtaining most candidate votes, did not receive a seat in the Bundestag. Hypotheses 1a through 1c predict that respondents in such districts will report lower satisfaction with democracy, reduced political efficacy, and greater dissatisfaction with the electoral reform.

Figure 3 presents mean comparisons between respondents in districts where the winning candidate did and did not receive a seat. While there is a modest tendency for respondents in districts whose winner did not obtain a mandate to be less satisfied with the electoral reform, we find no statistically significant differences across any of our outcome variables.<sup>3</sup> This constitutes initial evidence against the notion that geographic factors alone drive public attitudes toward the electoral reform. However, it remains possible

<sup>3</sup>As outlined in our preregistration, we acknowledge that districts where the winner did and did not receive a seat may differ systematically on politically relevant covariates. In future iterations of the paper, we will address this by matching districts with similar pre-election probabilities of producing a seatless winner, as well as by comparing districts where the winner narrowly received a seat to those where the winner narrowly did not.

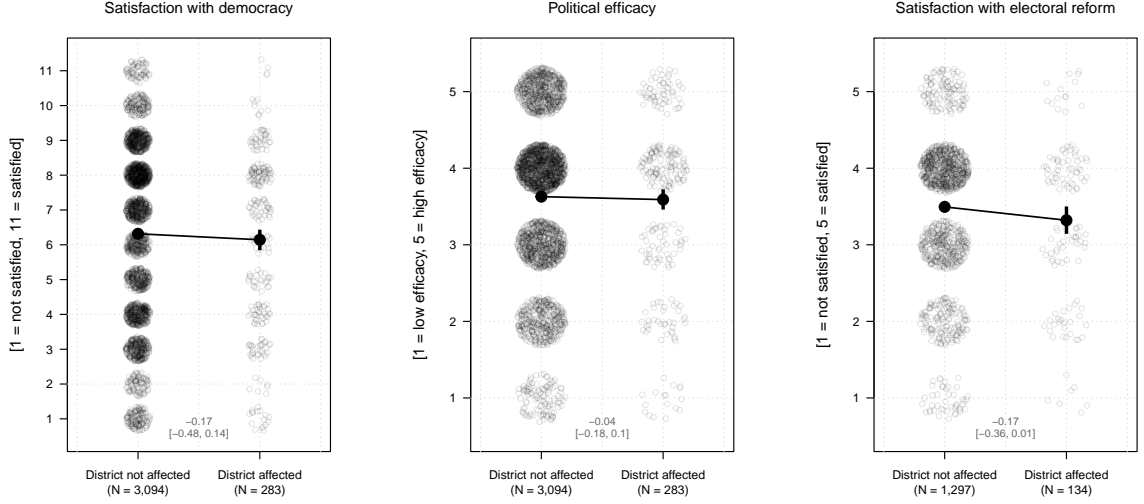


Figure 3: Satisfaction with democracy, political efficacy, and satisfaction with the electoral reform conditional on whether a respondent lives in a district whose district winner received a mandate (*District not affected*), or did not receive a mandate (*District affected*).

*Note:* In-plot annotations report the difference in means estimate and 95% confidence interval between respondents living in districts that are affected versus not affected by the electoral reform.

that geographic motives interact with partisan motives. Specifically, respondents may express more negative attitudes only when they both reside in a district where the winning candidate failed to obtain a seat and support that candidate. In contrast, those who do not support the excluded winner may remain indifferent. We explore this possibility in subsequent sections.

## Public Opinion by Vote Choice

Having found no observational evidence for purely geographic motives, we now turn to partisan motives as potential drivers of attitudes toward the electoral reform. Hypotheses 2a through 2c posit that respondents who voted for candidates from disproportionately affected parties, that is, parties with many district winners who did not receive a seat, will report lower satisfaction with democracy, reduced political efficacy, and greater dissatisfaction with the electoral reform. As shown in panel B of figure 2, this is the case most clearly for the CDU/CSU, who had 18 district winners who did not get a seat in the Bundestag. The AfD and SPD had four and one of such cases, respectively, which makes them fare much better than the CDU/CSU, but slightly worse than the Green and Left parties, whose district winners all received a seat in the Bundestag.

Figure 4 displays our outcome variables by respondents' candidate vote. All outcomes reveal similar patterns. Most notably, AfD voters report significantly lower levels of

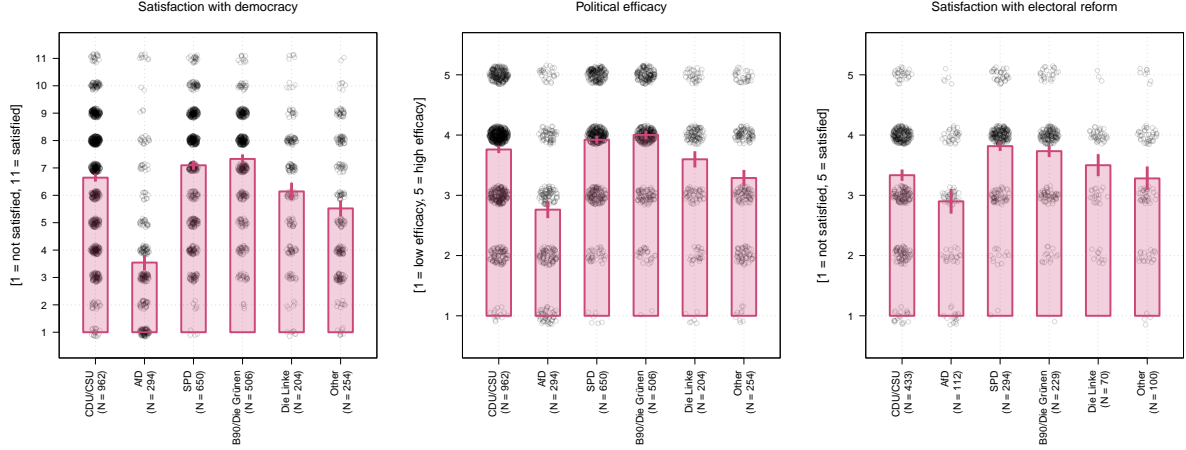


Figure 4: Satisfaction with democracy, political efficacy, and satisfaction with the electoral reform conditional on respondents' candidate vote. Coloured bars depict average values and 95% confidence intervals.

satisfaction with democracy, political efficacy, and satisfaction with the electoral reform compared to supporters of the CDU/CSU, SPD, Greens, and Left Party. The magnitude of the differences in satisfaction with democracy and political efficacy suggests that they are unlikely to be explained solely by attitudes toward the electoral reform. Rather, they reflect a broader sense of political dissatisfaction among AfD voters. Similarly, the AfD's relative dissatisfaction with the reform is unlikely to stem from partisan self-interest, as the party was not the most disadvantaged by the reform. Instead, these attitudes likely reflect broader skepticism toward the parties responsible for designing and implementing the reform.

Second, consistent with our expectations, we find that supporters of the CDU/CSU, the party most negatively affected by the reform, are, on average, less satisfied with the electoral reform than supporters of the SPD ( $p < 0.001$ ) and the Green Party ( $p < 0.001$ ). However, despite this relative dissatisfaction, CDU/CSU voters do not express outright disapproval of the reform. While SPD and Green voters report average satisfaction levels of 3.82 and 3.74, respectively, CDU/CSU supporters report an average of 3.34, which remains above the midpoint of the scale. Although this lower level of satisfaction among CDU/CSU voters is consistent with partisan considerations in opinion formation, the observational data alone do not allow us to distinguish between two potential mechanisms: whether dissatisfaction stems from opposition to the parties responsible for designing and implementing the reform (i.e., the SPD and the Greens), or from disapproval of the content of the reform itself. Our survey experiment will address this ambiguity.



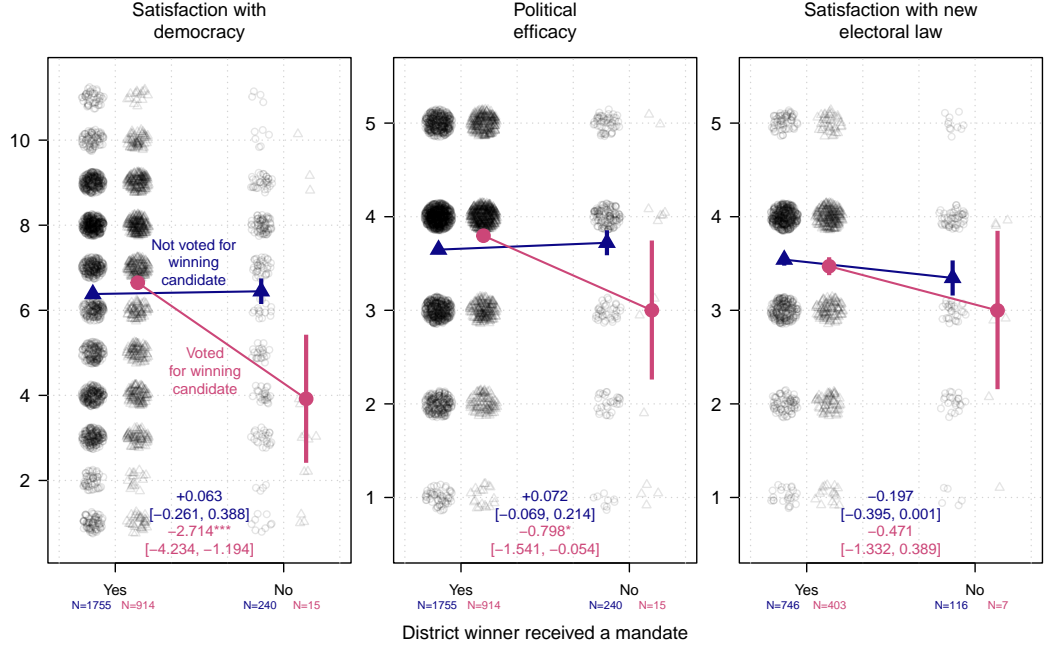


Figure 5: Satisfaction with democracy, political efficacy, and satisfaction with the electoral reform conditional on whether a respondent lives in a district whose district winner received a seat (*District not affected*), or did not receive a seat (*District affected*), and whether the respondent voted for the district winner or not.

*Note:* In-plot annotations report the difference in means estimate and 95% confidence interval between respondents living in districts that are affected versus not affected by the electoral reform, conditional on whether a respondent voted for the district winner or not. Regression models are documented in the appendix (table A2).

## Public Opinion by Geographic Location and Vote Choice

Finally, we examine the interaction between partisan and geographic motivations. This extends our previous hypotheses by exploring whether respondents express more negative attitudes only when they both reside in a district where the winning candidate failed to obtain a seat and supported that candidate. Figure 5 provides initial evidence in support of this claim, particularly regarding satisfaction with democracy and political efficacy. Respondents who voted for a district-winning candidate are, on average, slightly more satisfied with democracy and report higher political efficacy than those who supported a losing candidate, but only when the winning candidate actually received a seat. In contrast, when the winning candidate did not obtain a seat, these same respondents exhibit lower satisfaction with democracy and reduced political efficacy.

These results, however, are subject to two important limitations. First, they are based on a relatively small number of observations, as only a few respondents in our sample voted for district winners who ultimately did not receive a seat. This limitation is particularly relevant for our findings on satisfaction with the electoral reform, which are based solely on

Outcome	Voted for district winner	Marginal effect	Std. Error	Pr(>  z )
Satisfaction with democracy	No	−0.197	0.101	0.052
	Yes	−0.471	0.439	0.283
Political efficacy	No	−0.109	0.148	0.460
	Yes	−1.270	0.737	0.085
Satisfaction with electoral reform	No	0.016	0.068	0.816
	Yes	−0.331	0.281	0.239

Table 1: Marginal effects of living in a district whose district winner did not receive a seat, conditional on voting for the district winner. Marginal effects are calculated based on models 2, 4, and 6 in table A2, all controlling for the party of respondent’s candidate vote choice.

respondents in the control condition. Second, voters who supported winning candidates that did not receive a seat differ systematically from other voters. Most notably, they are more likely to support the CDU/CSU and the AfD. To address this concern, we estimate additional regression models that include party fixed effects (i.e., the party affiliation of the candidate a respondent voted for). Table 1 presents the marginal effects of living in an affected district, conditional on having voted for the winning candidate, after controlling for party. While we continue to observe negative effects of living in an affected district among these respondents, the magnitude of the effects is substantially reduced and no longer reaches statistical significance.

Taken together, we find at best weak evidence for the claim that voters who supported a district-winning candidate who did not receive a seat are less satisfied with democracy, exhibit lower political efficacy, and are more dissatisfied with the electoral reform. Yet, despite limited evidence for causal effects, our findings suggest that the reform negatively affected voters who were already dissatisfied, which can be seen as a problem by and in itself. Additional data is necessary to draw more definitive conclusions.

## 6.2 Survey-Experimental Results

Our initial observational analysis revealed that satisfaction with the electoral reform varies systematically with voting behavior: voters of parties other than those that implemented the reform tend to be less satisfied than supporters of the governing parties. While these parties partially overlap with those that were disproportionately disadvantaged by the reform (i. e., the CDU/CSU), they are not identical. This makes it difficult to determine whether dissatisfaction among voters of disadvantaged parties stems from partisan opposi-

tion to the reforming parties or from disapproval of the reform’s substantive consequences. Moreover, we found little evidence that geographic considerations drive attitudes toward the reform. However, this may be due to limited public awareness of its geographic effects. We now turn to the analysis of our vignette experiment to address both of these shortcomings.

## Manipulation Check

Before analyzing the substantive results of our survey experiment, we first assess the effectiveness of our interventions by examining whether the vignettes increased respondents’ awareness of the electoral reform’s disproportionate impact on parties and electoral districts, respectively. To do so, we study the effect of the geographic and party vignette on respondents’ likelihood to correctly answer our two factual manipulation checks (FMCs), which we asked at the very end of our survey, *after* our four substantive outcome measures. The first FMC question asks whether all states in Germany are equally affected by district representatives who do not receive a seat despite winning their district. Since respondents in the geographic vignette condition saw a map that illustrated the geographic distribution of electoral districts whose district winner did not receive a seat (figure 2, panel A), they should be more likely to correctly answer that not all states are equally affected by such cases than those in the control or party vignette condition. The second FMC asks whether all parties are equally affected by district winners who do not receive a seat. Since respondents in the party vignette condition saw a bar chart that illustrated how many district winners from each party did not receive a seat (figure 2, panel B), they should be more likely to correctly answer that not all parties are equally affected by such cases than those in the control or party vignette condition.

Figure 6 presents the results of our factual manipulation checks. Consistent with our expectations, respondents exposed to the geographic vignette were significantly more likely to answer the first FMC question correctly compared to those in the control group ( $\hat{\tau} = 0.13, p < 0.001$ ), whereas respondents in the party vignette condition showed no such difference ( $p = 0.16$ ). This indicates that the geographic vignette effectively increased the awareness of geographic inequalities in the distribution of districts where the winner did not receive a seat. Likewise, respondents in the party vignette condition were significantly more likely than the control group to answer the second FMC question correctly ( $\hat{\tau} = 0.09, p < 0.001$ ), while no significant difference was observed for respondents in the geographic vignette condition ( $p = 0.46$ ). This indicates that the party vignette effectively increased the awareness of inequalities between parties in the distribution of district winners who did not receive a seat.

Taken together, our manipulation checks confirm that the experimental interventions

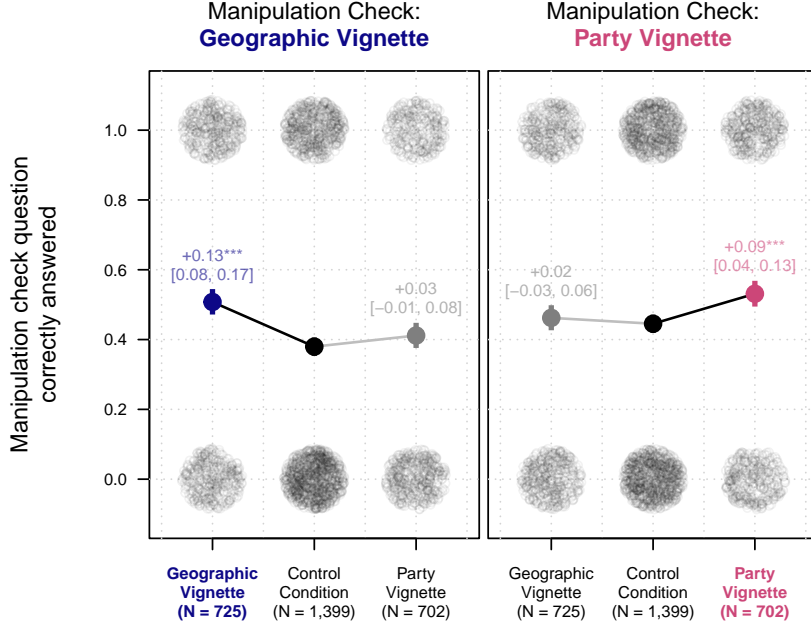


Figure 6: Manipulation check result.

*Note:* Annotations display point estimates and 95% confidence intervals for the average treatment effects of the geographic and party vignettes on the probability of correctly answering the corresponding manipulation check questions, relative to the control group. Estimates are based on linear probability models and heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors. Respondents exposed to the geographic vignette were significantly more likely to answer the geographic manipulation check correctly ( $p < 0.001$ ), but showed no improvement on the party manipulation check. In contrast, those who saw the party vignette were significantly more likely to answer the party manipulation check correctly ( $p < 0.001$ ), but not the geographic one.

successfully increased respondents' awareness of the disproportionate impact of the electoral reform on different electoral districts and parties, respectively.<sup>4</sup> However, it is important to mention the magnitude of these effects. The geographic vignette increased the share of respondents who correctly answered the first FMC question by 13 percentage points, while the party vignette led to a 9-percentage-point increase in correct responses to the second FMC question, both relative to the control group. These results indicate that not all respondents in the treatment conditions developed heightened awareness of the respective inequalities. Two factors may help explain this. First, the map used in the geographic vignette, being based on the result of the 2025 Bundestag election, does not depict stark regional contrasts. As a result, even if respondents correctly processed the visual information, they may not have perceived the geographic distribution of dis-

<sup>4</sup>In Appendix B, we present additional evidence showing that this results holds across voters of all parties. This is an important finding, as our subsequent analysis examines treatment effect heterogeneity conditional on candidate vote choice.

trict winners without a seat as highly unequal. Second, five attitudinal questions were presented between the vignette and the FMC questions, which may have attenuated treatment effects compared to a design in which the FMC questions immediately followed the vignette.

### Average Treatment Effects

Having established that the vignettes successfully increased respondents' awareness of the disproportionate impact of the electoral reform on different electoral districts and parties, we now turn to examining how these interventions affect respondents' attitudes toward the reform itself. We begin by testing Hypotheses 3 and 4, which assess the average treatment effects of the geographic and party vignettes on satisfaction with the electoral reform.

Figure 7 presents the average treatment effects of both vignettes on respondents' satisfaction with the electoral reform. We find precise null effects for both the geographic vignette ( $\tau = 0.03$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.05, 0.11]$ ) and the party vignette ( $\tau = 0.04$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.04, 0.12]$ ). These results indicate that, on average, heightened awareness of the reform's disproportionate effects does not translate into changes in overall satisfaction with the reform. This finding runs counter to the fairness-based expectation that awareness for the disparate impacts of the reform would reduce support. Yet, this average finding may mask important heterogeneity among respondents from different districts and with different party preferences, which would be informative for the partisan and geographic motivations underlying opinion formation.

### Conditional Average Treatment Effects

We now turn to the test of Hypothesis 5, which investigates whether respondents respond differently to the geographic vignette depending on whether they live in a district where the district winner did or did not receive a seat. If voters are geographically motivated, we would expect negative treatment effects among respondents from districts where the winner did not receive a seat, but not among those from districts where the winner did.

To test this, we estimate conditional average treatment effects by interacting the geographic vignette treatment indicator with a variable indicating whether a respondent resides in an affected district, i.e., a district where the winner did not receive a seat in parliament. Figure 8 displays the estimated conditional effects for both groups. We again find precise null effects: for respondents in districts where the winner received a seat ( $\tau = 0.02$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.06, 0.11]$ ) and for those in districts where the winner did not receive a seat ( $\tau = 0.04$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.26, 0.35]$ ).

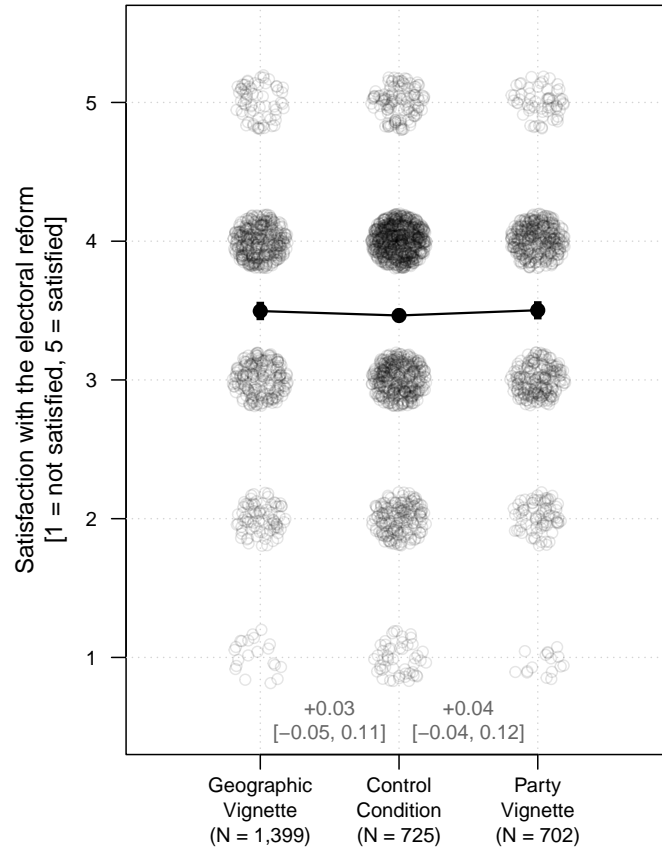


Figure 7: Average treatment effects of the geographic vignette and the party vignette on respondents' satisfaction with the new electoral law. On average, neither of the vignettes significantly shifts respondents' satisfaction with the electoral reform.

*Note:* Estimates and confidence intervals are based on linear regression models and heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors.

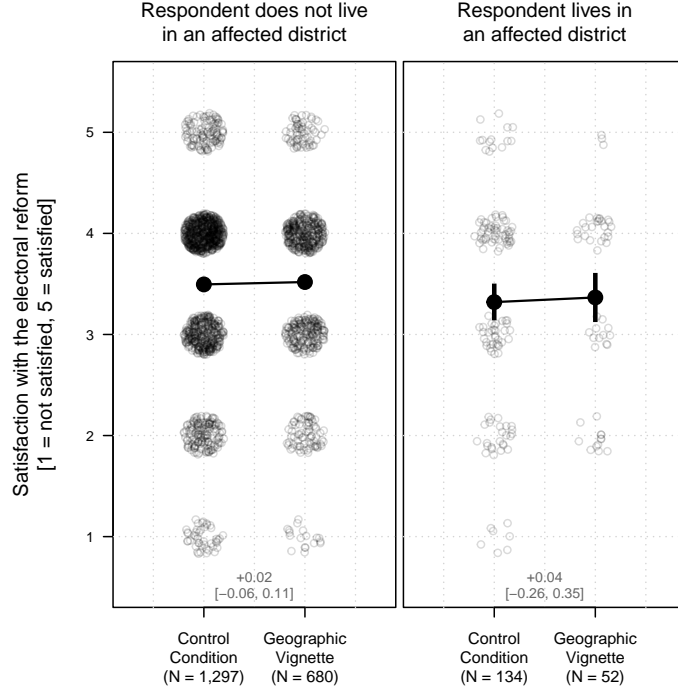


Figure 8: Average treatment effects of the geographic vignette on respondents' satisfaction with the new electoral law, conditional on whether they voted in a district where the winner received a Bundestag mandate or not.

*Note:* Estimates and confidence intervals are based on linear regression models and heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors.

These findings provide evidence *against* geographically motivated attitude formation. If such motivation were present, we would expect respondents who learned that their district winner failed to receive a seat in parliament to express lower satisfaction with the electoral reform, an effect not supported by the data. Instead, voter satisfaction with the reform appears unrelated to the geographic distribution of affected districts. Being directly affected (i.e., living in a district where the local winner did not receive a seat) does not, on average, influence support for the electoral reform.

Next, we test Hypothesis 6, which examines whether respondents react differently to the party vignette depending on whether they support a party that is positively or negatively affected by the electoral reform. In relative terms, the CDU/CSU is by far the most negatively affected party, leading to the expectation that respondents who voted for a CDU/CSU candidate in their district would respond more negatively to the party vignette than others. While the AfD and SPD are also negatively affected relative to the Greens, the Left, and other parties, they remain advantaged relative to the CDU/CSU (see Figure 2, panel B).

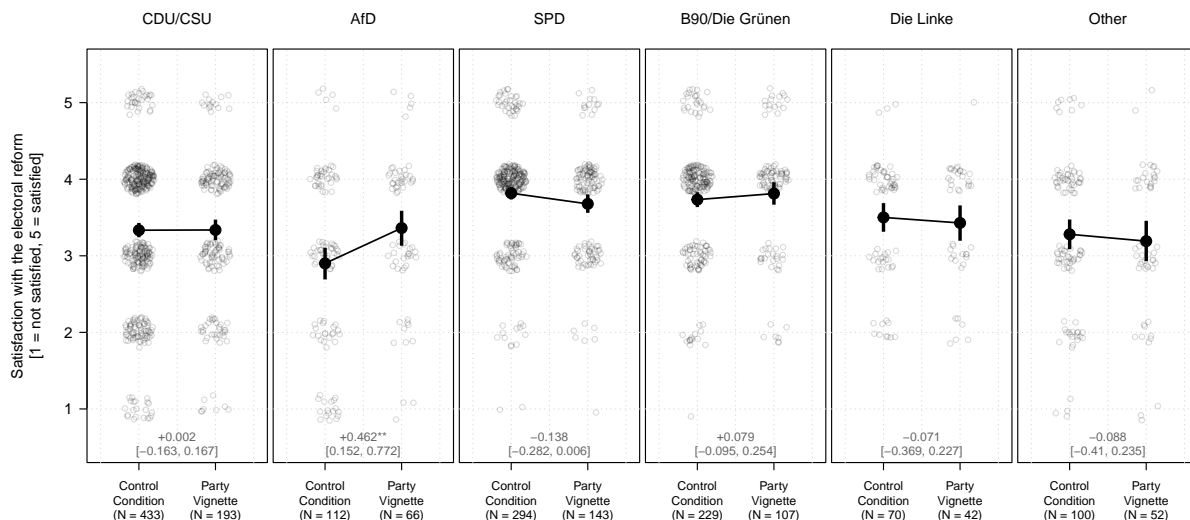


Figure 9: Average treatment effects of the party vignette on respondents' satisfaction with the new electoral law, conditional on their candidate vote.

*Note:* Estimates and confidence intervals are based on linear regression models and heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors.

To assess treatment effect heterogeneity based on candidate vote choice, we interact the party vignette treatment indicator with indicator variables for respondents' district-level vote choice. Figure 9 displays the conditional average treatment effects for voters of the CDU/CSU, AfD, SPD, Greens (B90/Die Grünen), the Left (Die Linke), and other parties. Contrary to expectations, we do not find that CDU/CSU voters are less satisfied with the electoral reform after being shown that their party is the most negatively affected. We also do not observe increased satisfaction among supporters of parties that benefit relative to the CDU/CSU—namely, the SPD, Greens, Left, and others.

However, we do find a notable increase in satisfaction among AfD voters, who were initially among the most skeptical of the reform, after being exposed to the party vignette ( $\tau = 0.462, p < 0.01$ ). This is particularly striking given that the vignette also highlights that four AfD district winners failed to receive a mandate. A plausible interpretation is that AfD supporters view the CDU/CSU's disproportionate losses as a politically favorable outcome while interpreting the reform's impact through a partisan lens. In this sense, the result aligns with party-motivated opinion formation among AfD voters. Thus, the results suggest that only AfD supporters exhibit opinion formation consistent with partisan motivations when confronted with information about the reform's party-specific consequences, but not supporters of other parties.



## 7 Discussion

Taken together, what do our results reveal about the relative importance of partisan, geographic, and fairness considerations in shaping public opinion on the electoral reform? In this section, we relate our empirical findings back to our theoretical model and hypotheses to assess how each of these factors contributes to voters' evaluations.

**Geographic considerations.** We found no support for Hypotheses 1a through 1c, which predicted that respondents living in geographically disadvantaged electoral districts would express more negative attitudes. This suggests that either geographic factors do not significantly influence voters' opinion formation, or that the geographic disadvantage is not sufficiently salient to affect their evaluations. However, even when we explicitly highlighted the unequal geographic impact of the reform in our vignette experiment, we did not observe more negative views among respondents in disadvantaged districts (Hypothesis 5). Taken together, geographic considerations do not appear to be a meaningful driver of public opinion toward the electoral reform in Germany. This challenges a prominent public narrative promoted by reform opponents, who argued that the absence of a locally elected district representative generates voter dissatisfaction.

**Partisan considerations.** We find that partisanship meaningfully shapes voters' opinions toward the electoral reform, though in more complex ways than initially anticipated. In line with Hypotheses 2a through 2c, respondents who voted for a CDU/CSU district candidate (the party most negatively affected by the reform) expressed more negative views than voters of SPD and Bündnis 90/Die Grünen candidates (the parties that implemented the reform and were only marginally or not at all disadvantaged by it). However, we also observe more negative attitudes among voters of opposition parties that were not, or were only slightly, disadvantaged by the reform. This is particularly evident among AfD voters, even though the AfD was significantly less negatively affected than the CDU/CSU. This pattern suggests that dissatisfaction with the reform may stem not only from disapproval of its partisan consequences, but also from general opposition to the parties responsible for its design and implementation.

When AfD voters were exposed to our party vignette, which showed that the AfD benefited from the reform relative to the CDU/CSU, they expressed considerably less dissatisfaction. This constitutes evidence for the relevance of (strategic) partisan considerations among AfD voters in their opinion formation process, even though these considerations may not have been salient in the control condition, probably due to missing knowledge or incorrect assumptions about the disparate partisan impact of the reform. We do not find, however, that CDU/CSU voters became less favorable of the reform opinions after seeing the vignette, nor that the voters of SPD or B90/Die Grünen became more supportive.

This suggests that the partisan consequences of the reform were less relevant to their evaluations than their broader support for or opposition to the reforming parties.

**Fairness considerations.** We do not find evidence that fairness considerations are the primary driver of voters’ opinions toward the electoral reform in Germany, though we acknowledge that our design sets a high bar for detecting such effects. For fairness concerns to emerge as the dominant factor, we would expect voters across all parties, including those advantaged by the reform, to express more negative attitudes after being exposed to either vignette emphasizing the reform’s unequal geographic or partisan impact (Hypotheses 3 and 4). Our findings are not consistent with this pattern.

However, one possible interpretation that aligns with our results is that the null effect of the partisan vignette among SPD and B90/Die Grünen voters reflects a balancing of opposing forces: partisan considerations increases support for the reform, while fairness concerns reduce it, resulting in no net change. This interpretation, however, raises a further puzzle: if voters weigh fairness alongside partisan interest, why do we not observe stronger negative reactions among CDU/CSU voters in response to the same vignette? Both, fairness and partisan considerations, should, in their case, lead to more critical evaluations. This suggests that fairness may play only a secondary or conditional role in shaping voter attitudes, subordinate to partisan cues.

## 8 Conclusion

What drives citizens support for electoral reforms? The material content of such reforms, and their potential implications for representation, enhancing a fair and efficient process are certainly only slow to digest for citizens at best. Normatively, this is unfortunate, as institutional changes can simultaneously reshape partisan fortunes, procedural fairness, and balance of local and national representation. Given that such electoral reforms are often hotly debated by partisan elites, it is likely that if citizens are not particularly motivated and interested in the electoral reform, simply take cues from their preferred party when following the public narrative.

In contrast to much of previous research, we deal with an actual reform that was implemented for the 2025 election in Germany to reduce the number of seats in parliament and not with a treatment involving a hypothetical reform. The overarching goal of the electoral reform we study is achieved. The number of seats in parliament is reduced to 630. The German Bundestag is still one of the largest democratically elected parliaments in the world. We therefore can leverage a more realistic scenario that should increase also the external validity of our findings.

We provide a new view on citizen’s opinion formation towards electoral reforms and model it as a weighted average of three different considerations: partisan, geographic and fairness motives. Based on this theory, we derive several testable expectations as to how citizens form an opinion about such a reform. We did not only rely on observational data, even if this reform introduces quasi-random variation that we leverage. We also implemented survey experiments to disentangle observationally equivalent interpretations and to distinguish different mechanisms to clarify which type of considerations are at play when citizens form their opinion about an electoral reform.

When looking at the observational evidence, we find no systematic differences across any of our three outcome variables (satisfaction with democracy, political efficacy, satisfaction with electoral reform) between respondents in districts where the winning candidate did and not win a seat, hence no support for geographic considerations. However, we find systematic lower values on all of our outcome variables for voters of parties in the opposition consistent with the idea that partisan considerations shape voters’ opinions towards electoral reform. In order to distinguish whether these lower values are driven by disapproval of the reform’s material consequences and making sure that respondents know about them or by simply supporting an opposition party we designed a vignette survey experiment.

Our experimental results provide no evidence for any fairness-based expectations because heightening respondents awareness of the disparate impacts of the reform does not reduce support for the reform. This also does not change, when respondents live in an affected district or not. When analyzing the treatment effect heterogeneity of the party vignette, we neither find systematic negative effects for supporters of parties that initiated the reform nor for supporters of the opposition parties.

Thus, neither geographic nor fairness considerations appear to be a meaningful driver of public opinion, at least toward this particular electoral reform. This challenges the prominent public narrative promoted by reform opponents, who argue that the absence of a locally elected district representative generates voter dissatisfaction rather than pointing out their partisan self-interest. In this regard, the public narrative couched in non-partisan arguments seems to be rather typical by comparative standards (e.g., Bowler and Donovan, 2013).

The results regarding partisan considerations can provide more food for thought for future research. While we find partisan considerations are at work—citizens who vote for opposition parties are less satisfied with the reform than those who voted for the governmental parties—they seemed not to be fueled by evaluating the partisan consequences of that reform. Instead, the patterns we find point to a different mechanism. Citizens, when evaluating a reform, seem to take cues from the party they vote for and the position of

this party on the electoral reform. Only voters of the AfD responded in line with our expectations based on partisan self-interest and rated the reform more favorably after learning that their party was among those less negatively affected by the reform.

While showing null or weak effects of an electoral reform may appear less compelling at first sight than providing evidence consistent with the “Institutions matter, stupid!” movement, we argue that these null effects are both robust and substantively meaningful. Our pre-registered research design explicitly anticipated the possibility of null effects and incorporated several safeguards to ensure they would be informative rather than inconclusive. These include factual manipulation checks, pre-treatment attention filters, and measures of prior exposure to the reform (Kane, 2024). The evidence from these checks make us confident that the estimated Null effects reflect a genuine absence of effects rather than being the product of alternative explanations rooted in limitations of our research design.

Nevertheless, our study has also limitations. So far, we have only analyzed the short-term effect of this electoral reform on how voters form an opinion about it. The effect of the electoral reform on how citizens evaluate it might take some more time before citizens realize its consequences and for geographic and fairness considerations to fully kick-in. It is therefore conceivable that we stack the deck against finding evidence for geographic and fairness considerations by analyzing citizens’ opinion right after the election for which the reform was implemented. A potential new wave to leverage the panel design of the GIP might help study medium- and long-term effects on opinion formation of citizens.

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## Online Appendices:

### What Drives Citizen Support for Electoral Reform? Disentangling Partisan, Local, and Fairness Considerations

Thomas Gschwend, *University of Mannheim*.

Lisa-Marie Müller, *University of Mannheim*.

Oliver Rittmann, *University of Mannheim, MZES*.

<b>A</b>	<b>Balance Table</b>	<b>S1</b>
<b>B</b>	<b>Manipulation Check by Candidate Vote</b>	<b>S2</b>
<b>C</b>	<b>Regression Tables</b>	<b>S3</b>



# A Balance Table

Variable	(Eligible) Voters/ Population	Whole Sample	Control Group	Geographic-Vignette Group	Partisan-Vignette Group	t-value Voters/Population vs. Whole Sample (p-value)	t-value Control Group vs. Geographic-Vignette Group (p-value)	t-value Control Group vs. Partisan-Vignette Group (p-value)
N	60510631/ 83555478	3433	1717	862	860	X	X	X
Female (%)	50.7	47.6	47.3	48.5	47.4	-3.6575* (0.000)	-0.5312 (0.595)	-0.0558 (0.955)
Year of birth categories (mean)	X	7.42	7.43	7.35	7.47	X	0.6079 (0.543)	-0.3271 (0.744)
University degree (%)	18.5	21.5	21.8	21.9	20.1	4.2348* (0.000)	-0.0714 (0.943)	0.997 (0.319)
Voted in 2025 election (%)	82.5	97.1	97.6	96.6	96.5	50.1542* (0.000)	-1.3635 (0.173)	-1.5272 (0.127)
Candidate vote CDU/CSU (%)	32.1	33.5	33.7	34.6	31.5	1.5769 (0.115)	-0.4215 (0.673)	0.9927 (0.321)
Candidate vote AfD (%)	20.6	10.3	9.9	9.8	11.7	-18.2702* (0.000)	0.1197 (0.905)	-1.1944 (0.233)
Candidate vote SPD (%)	20.1	22.6	22.9	23	21.7	3.2712* (0.001)	-0.0792 (0.937)	0.5897 (0.555)
Candidate vote Grüne (%)	11	17.6	18.1	17	17.6	9.3319* (0.000)	0.6929 (0.488)	0.3431 (0.732)
Candidate vote Linke (%)	7.9	7.1	6.7	7.6	7.2	-1.7287* (0.084)	-0.7497 (0.454)	-0.3963 (0.692)
Candidate vote BSW (%)	0.6	1.6	1.7	0.8	2	4.1487* (0.000)	1.819* (0.069)	-0.4425 (0.658)
Candidate vote FDP (%)	3.3	3.6	3.3	3.2	4.4	0.7422 (0.458)	0.1807 (0.857)	-1.1577 (0.247)
Candidate vote Sonstige (%)	4.3	3.8	3.6	4	3.9	-1.4162 (0.157)	-0.4713 (0.637)	-0.3945 (0.693)
Party list vote CDU/CSU (%)	28.6	28.6	28.1	31.2	26.7	-0.0223 (0.982)	-1.5382 (0.124)	0.6656 (0.506)
Party list vote AfD (%)	20.8	10.9	10.7	9.6	12.7	-17.1608* (0.000)	0.8289 (0.407)	-1.3262 (0.185)
Party list vote SPD (%)	16.4	18.7	20	17.9	16.6	3.1307* (0.002)	1.1628 (0.245)	1.904* (0.057)
Party list vote Grüne (%)	11.6	20.5	21.1	20.8	19.3	11.8659* (0.000)	0.2486 (0.804)	1.0805 (0.28)
Party list vote Linke (%)	8.8	8.9	8.7	8.3	10.1	0.2245 (0.822)	0.3071 (0.759)	-1.056 (0.291)
Party list vote BSW (%)	5	4	3.7	4.5	3.9	-2.8731* (0.004)	-0.9461 (0.344)	-0.2714 (0.786)
Party list vote FDP (%)	4.3	5.3	4.8	4.3	7.1	2.336* (0.020)	0.6047 (0.545)	-2.0615* (0.039)
Party list vote Sonstige (%)	4.4	3.2	2.9	3.4	3.6	-3.5409* (0.000)	-0.637 (0.524)	-0.855 (0.393)
Voter in affected district (%)	8.0	8.4	9.4	7.1	X	0.7973 (0.425)	1.8478* (0.065)	X
Affected voter in affected district (%)	2.3	0.5	X	X	X	-13.5892* (0.000)	X	X
Left-right selfplacement (mean)	X	5.36	5.33	5.43	5.35	X	-1.2563 (0.209)	-0.2735 (0.785)
Satisfaction with democracy (mean)	X	6.25	6.2	6.33	6.28	X	-1.2193 (0.223)	-0.7841 (0.433)
Political efficacy (mean)	X	3.6	3.58	3.65	3.59	X	-1.5028 (0.133)	-0.1435 (0.886)
Political knowledge 1 (% correct)	X	80.1	80.1	80.3	79.6	X	-0.2029 (0.839)	0.2432 (0.808)
Political knowledge 2 (mean)	X	2.63	2.63	2.6	2.65	X	0.9309 (0.352)	-0.5222 (0.602)

\* p-value < 0.1.

Table A1: Comparison of variables in the German population/eligible voters and the GIP-sample. Official election results from [bundeswahlleiterin.de](https://www.bundeswahlleiterin.de); population data from [destatis.de](https://www.destatis.de)

## B Manipulation Check by Candidate Vote

In the main text, we demonstrated the effectiveness of our vignette treatments by presenting average treatment effects on respondents' likelihood of correctly answering the factual manipulation check (FMC) questions. However, since our subsequent analysis conditions on respondents' candidate vote choice, an important concern is whether the vignettes were equally effective in increasing the salience of the reform's disparate geographic and partisan consequences across voters of all parties. For instance, it is possible that supporters of CDU/CSU candidates were already aware of the reform's partisan implications, leading to a reduced effectiveness of the partisan vignette for this group.

To investigate this possibility, we estimate multilevel models with varying intercepts and slopes for the treatment indicator by candidate vote choice. Figure A1 displays the results. In the control condition, voters of Green district candidates were the most likely to correctly answer both FMC questions, while voters of AfD candidates were the least likely. Importantly, however, the vignette treatments increased the probability of correctly answering the relevant FMC question across voters of all parties, indicating that the manipulations were broadly effective regardless of prior knowledge.

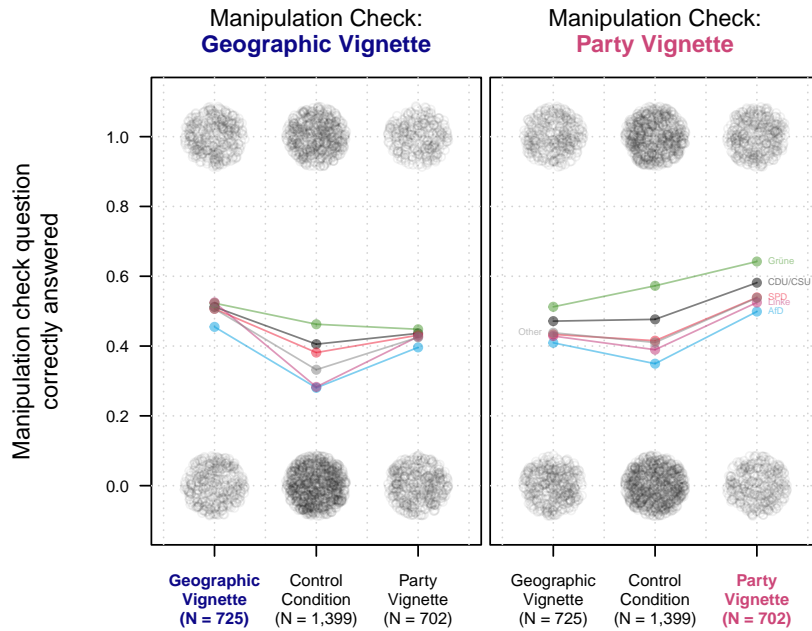


Figure A1: Manipulation check by candidate vote result.

*Note:* The plot displays predicted probabilities based on a linear multilevel model estimating the likelihood that a respondent correctly answered a factual manipulation check question, conditional on treatment assignment. To assess heterogeneity by candidate vote choice, the model includes varying intercepts and varying slopes for the treatment indicator across candidate vote groups.

## C Regression Tables

	Sat. Dem. (1)	Sat. Dem. (2)	Pol. Eff. (3)	Pol. Eff. (4)	Sat. Reform (5)	Sat. Reform (6)
(Intercept)	6.38*	3.55*	3.65*	2.70*	3.54*	2.92*
	[6.26; 6.50]	[3.25; 3.85]	[3.60; 3.70]	[2.56; 2.84]	[3.48; 3.60]	[2.70; 3.14]
Voted for district winner	0.27*	0.23*	0.15*	0.15*	-0.07	0.07
	[0.07; 0.46]	[0.02; 0.44]	[0.07; 0.23]	[0.06; 0.24]	[-0.19; 0.04]	[-0.05; 0.19]
District affected	0.06	-0.11	0.07	0.02	-0.20	-0.17
	[-0.26; 0.39]	[-0.40; 0.18]	[-0.07; 0.21]	[-0.12; 0.15]	[-0.39; 0.00]	[-0.36; 0.02]
Voted for district winner × District affected	-2.78*	-1.16	-0.87*	-0.35	-0.27	0.05
	[-4.33; -1.22]	[-2.64; 0.31]	[-1.63; -0.11]	[-0.92; 0.22]	[-1.16; 0.61]	[-0.78; 0.89]
Control for vote choice		✓		✓		✓
R <sup>2</sup>	0.01	0.19	0.01	0.14	0.01	0.09
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.01	0.19	0.01	0.13	0.00	0.08
Num. obs.	2924	2924	2924	2924	1272	1272
RMSE	2.48	2.24	1.02	0.95	0.93	0.89

\* Null hypothesis value outside the confidence interval.

Table A2: Statistical models. Dependent Variables: Satisfaction with democracy (Sat. Dem.), political efficacy (Pol. Eff.), and satisfaction with the electoral reform (Sat. Reform).