
UNEQUAL DEMOCRACIES

Working paper n°25

September, 2021

Trust, Information and Redistributive Attitudes in Pandemic Italy

Francesco Colombo
(European University Institute)
francesco.colombo@eui.eu

Ari Ray
(University of Geneva)
ari.ray@unige.ch



ABSTRACT:

This paper examines how information on collective action affects the social policy preferences of voters, in context of the unfolding COVID-19 crisis. What happens to the social policy preferences of voters when their expectations concerning collective behavior are met, or even exceeded? And what conversely occurs when these expectations are unmet, and their trust is thereby breached? Leveraging a quasi-experimental survey directed to a representative sample of the Italian voting age population, this paper examines the extent to which information on lockdown compliance rates affects the social policy preferences of voters, conditional on pre-treatment levels of displayed trust. In examining voter attitudes towards a range of social policy dimensions, we find that trust is most closely linked to attitudes on social transfer generosity, as opposed to policy universalism and conditionality. Moreover, we uncover that the effect of trust is moderated primarily by the material concerns of voters, where those that stand to benefit directly by the disbursement of social transfers are less affected by our trust treatment.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

The research design of this paper has undergone ethics review by the School of Social Sciences at the University of Geneva (Cert No: CER-SDS-26-2020) and has been pre-registered on the Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP) registry. The research for paper was funded by the Special COVID-19 Fund of the European University Institute and the Unequal Democracies Project at the University of Geneva (European Research Council Advanced Grant no. 741538). Previous versions of the paper have been presented at the doc/postdoc political science colloquium at the University of Geneva, the Political Behavior and SPARKS Colloquiums at the European University Institute and the 2021 meetings of the European Political Science Association (EPSA), the Italian Political Science Association (SISP) and the Swiss Political Science Association (SVPW/ASSP). For helpful discussions and advice, the authors are particularly grateful to Reto Bürgisser, Elias Dinas, Nathalie Giger, Simon Hug, Davy-Kim Lascombes, Jonas Pontusson and Elisa Volpi.

1 Introduction

When Mario Draghi took office as Prime Minister of Italy in February 2021, his first speech was followed by a standing ovation from the Italian senate: ‘*Today,*’, he proclaimed, ‘*unity is not an option—unity is a duty*’ (Horowitz, 2021). The duty he referred to was relatively clear. After a year of COVID-19, Italian infection rates were again rising and the country was on the cusp of a third wave. To stem the tide of rising hospitalization numbers, Italians were being obliged to adhere to a second lockdown: one in which their mobility was regionally restricted; where they were no longer allowed entry into public institutions such as museums and libraries, and where they could no longer send their children to school (ECDC, 2021).

Successive Italian COVID-19 lock-downs have highlighted the importance of collective action, or ‘unity’, in face of societal crises. And they have done so in more ways than one. Most obviously, civic obligations have manifested themselves in a requirement of all persons—regardless of risk status—to sacrifice economic gains and social exchange to abate the spread of the virus. But as the Italian economy continues to plunge further into recession, unity among voters will have to be exercised not only by means of them restricting their own mobility. Economic hardship among Italian inhabitants is on the rise as a result of the pandemic. Consequently, a rising number of families now require access to social transfers in order to make ends meet (IFQ, 2021; avv, 2021). While the Italian state has launched significant fiscal interventions targeting these people in need, distributive conflict concerning the overall form and function of state support is growing heated (Valoti, 2021; Vitale, 2021). As always, the political feasibility of effective redistributive action in the aftermath of crisis, is

contingent voters willing to display solidarity towards those strongly affected.

In this paper, we scrutinize a driver often highlighted as crucial to the success of retaining public support for redistributive action: voters' trust. Without trust in the community as well as in the state, a range of work as suggested that voters grow less likely to support generous and expansive welfare provision. Negative perceptions of welfare recipients as free-riders that cheat or exploit system loopholes in order to retain state benefits, it is argued, inhibit the desire of individuals to contribute to collective social transfer schemes.

'Cheating', or free-riding behavior, has been the topic of much debate during the pandemic in Italy. Lockdowns only function to reduce infection rates when large shares of people within a community comply with mobility restrictions—even when these place huge burdens on individual community members. Especially during the first Italian lockdown in the spring of 2020, however, there were numerous reports of non-compliance to lockdown ordinance ([Giuffrida, 2020](#); [Horowitz, 2020](#)). These reports call attention to a trait that pandemic management shares with many other collaborative dilemmas: individuals can decide to comply with efforts to attain a long-run common goal, but will in doing so frequently suffer from short-term losses that are significant in nature. In other words: lock-downs are contexts in which free-riding incentives are high, generating significant impediments to collective action.

In this paper, we examine the relationship between trust and social policy, conceiving of trust as a behavioural expectation. We focus on the role played by individual beliefs—more precisely, on beliefs concerning others' trustworthiness—asking how this is associated with voters' support for different dimensions of social policy. Drawing on the first Italian COVID-19 lockdown as a massive exercise in collective

action, we manipulate voters' trust by manipulating voters' expectations on community compliance with the lockdown, to ascertain whether this causally affects voters' attitudes towards social policy. We do this in a comprehensive manner, leveraging a novel survey directed to a representative sample of the Italian voting-age population, which probed voters' preferences towards a range of different policy dimensions: social policy generosity, universalism and conditionality.

In concurrence with theory, we find that higher levels of trust in lockdown compliance is positively associated with favoring social policy generosity, as well as universalism—but not with conditionality. Moreover, experimental evidence suggests that voters are responsive to information and update their expectations concerning others' trustworthiness. However, treatment affects mainly voters' support for social policy generosity. Causal effects are more limited and ambiguous when it comes to support for universal access to social transfers, as well as to conditionality attached to transfer disbursement. Finally, we also test a range of factors theorized to moderate the role of trust. In doing this we find that treatment is less strongly absorbed by potential recipients of social benefits, who stand to benefit directly from transfers. In these instance, we conjecture that material concerns outweigh other concerns of voters, as postulated previously in the literature ([Cavaille, 2015](#); [Rueda, 2018](#)).

In the section that follows we present our contributions, develop our theoretical argument and posit a number of testable hypotheses. In section two, we introduce our research design and empirical strategy. The third section presents an overview of our results, where we also validate our methodological choices. The final section concludes and discusses interpretations of our findings.

2 Theory

The academic debate on the determinants of social policy preferences has in past decades been strongly rooted in an interest-based perspective, where voters are conceptualized to be income maximizing.¹ Yet, a range of work has uncovered that this process of opinion formation relies not solely on material circumstances, but also on voters' beliefs concerning fairness and social justice (see e.g. [Kumlin \(2007\)](#) for an overview). A large subset of this literature has focused on the relationship between social policy and voters' trust. In political economy, trust is conceived of as a core precondition for any form of collective action and cooperative behaviour ([Fukuyama, 1995](#); [Ostrom, 2009](#); [Ostrom and Ahn, 2009](#); [Sønderskov, 2009](#)). This, the cooperative behavior of political actors, lies at the very core of welfare state functioning and expansion. For without collaborative intent on the part of voters to contribute to the formation and maintenance of transfer schemes, welfare states grow unable to retain popular support for social policy agendas ([Rothstein, 2001, 2000](#)).

In political science, trust has been discussed in two main forms: interpersonal or social trust, conceived of as voters' trust in other members of their community ([Nannestad, 2008](#)) and institutional trust, which is conceptualized as voters' trust in their community's public institutions ([Levi and Stoker, 2000](#); [Rothstein, 2001, 2000](#)). The two concepts are distinct, but closely interrelated. To the extent that voters trust that their peers will engage in good behavior, this trust is often rooted in the belief that the state is fair, competent, credible and transparent ([Sønderskov and](#)

¹See e.g. [Beramendi and Rehm \(2016\)](#); [Burgoon and Dekker \(2010\)](#); [Cusack et al. \(2006\)](#); [Fossati \(2018a,b\)](#); [Häusermann et al. \(2019, 2015\)](#); [Iversen and Soskice \(2001\)](#); [Margalit \(2013\)](#); [Rehm \(2011, 2009\)](#); [Rehm et al. \(2012\)](#); [Rueda \(2006\)](#); [Schwander and Häusermann \(2013\)](#); [Thewissen and Rueda \(2019\)](#); [Walter \(2010, 2017\)](#)

Dinesen, 2016); a belief that reassures individuals that the state will intervene to specifically reprimand and sanction bad behavior. Unsurprisingly, extant work has thus found both forms of trust to be correlated with a range of welfare state outcomes: both on welfare institutional set-ups as well as with individual support redistribution (Rothstein, 2001, 2000; Levi and Stoker, 2000).

Trust and social policy strengthen each other, making it difficult to disentangling causal links from each other. On the one hand, trust is considered a precondition for the formation of social welfare schemes. Simultaneously, however, comprehensive welfare institutions may work to engender trust (Rothstein and Stolle, 2008; Rothstein, 1998, 2001). Empirical work utilizing historical identification strategies has squared in on the latter chain of causality (Bergh and Bjørnskov, 2011, 2014; Bjørnskov and Svendsen, 2013; Jensen and Svendsen, 2011). Leveraging a cultural conception of trust based on the assumption that trust is inherited, these papers show that trust seemingly generates more generous and universal welfare arrangements. Moreover, additional work has scrutinized the micro-level implications of this evidence. With a similar cultural conception of trust, exploiting exogenous variation in trust levels among voters with migrant parents, Daniele and Geys (2015) show that trusting voters are more likely to support redistribution.

While highly informative, aforementioned work on trust and welfare state outcomes suffer from two main limitations. First, the idea that trust is only inherited, an idea that has been empirically disproved (Nannestad et al., 2014; Dinesen, 2012). Second, the focus on public opinion support and welfare institutions as uni-dimensional concepts, ignoring the multi-dimensional nature of contemporary welfare states (Bonoli and Natali, 2012; Beramendi et al., 2015).

With regard to the former, a vast bulk of literature treats trust as largely time-invariant and historically stable. This builds on a shared idea that trust is fundamentally an ‘inherited cultural variable’ (Guiso et al., 2006, p. 29), passed on across generations and sticky in nature (Guiso et al., 2006). While this may in part hold, empirical work has shown that trust levels among voters vary not only across regions and communities, but also over time. For example, trust patterns have been documented to change rapidly after large-scale socio-political events, such as the 9/11 terrorist attack (Gross et al., 2004), the Catalan independence crisis (Bjørnskov et al., 2019) and—most recently—in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis (Daniele et al., 2020). Moreover, new evidence have weakened the cultural claim, by showing that migrants moving from one country to another update their expectations regarding others’ trustworthiness (Nannestad et al., 2014; Dinesen, 2012). This process is theorized to occur automatically as individuals respond to external stimuli and thus proceed to update their expectations concerning the trustworthiness of their peers and their government (Axelrod and Hamilton, 1981; Axelrod and Dion, 1988; Alt et al., 2016; Armantier et al., 2016).

In our work we build on these evidence showing that trust can be updated, and we define it following Gambetta (1988, p.217), who defines trust as a behavioral expectation: *‘a particular level of the subjective probability with which a [voter a] assesses that another actor or group of actors, b, will perform a particular action’*. Employing our information treatment we manipulate voters’ expectations, estimating the effect of trust—in its behavioural nature—on social policy preferences.

In this paper, we contribute to aforementioned work in multiple ways. First, we examine whether ideologically neutral information on the prevalence of free-riding

behavior can alter voters' trust levels and, in extension, attitudes towards social policy. However, we predict that the direction of attitude changes will be moderated by prior expectations of voters. In other words: when voters uncover that cheating behavior is less prevalent in their community than they typically estimate, they should grow more likely to favor redistributive social policy. Equally, those who over-estimate the prevalence of cheating behavior in their community should grow more positive towards redistributive action in light of new information.

Second, we extend on extant work by moving away from how trust is associated with generalized support for the welfare state: i.e. on welfare spending or support for redistribution. In doing this, we attempt to account for a growing field in welfare politics, which has convincingly argued that redistributive conflicts surrounding the welfare state are more closely associated with specific dimensions of social policy (Beramendi et al., 2015; Bonoli and Natali, 2012). While most voters in advanced economies favour welfare provision in general terms, their opinions differ more strongly on how widely accessible welfare should be, and what the core economic objectives of welfare provision are (Bremer and Bürgisser, 2017; Busemeyer and Garritzmann, 2017; Häusermann et al., 2019). To retain a better understanding of exactly how trust impacts social policy attitudes, we therefore posit hypotheses that links trust with voters' attitudes across a range of social policy dimensions.

2.1 Hypotheses

There are a number of ways in which welfare policy can be inclusive and/or extensive. For one, welfare policies vary in terms of their overall *generosity*: i.e. the level of financial resources they grant to individual beneficiaries. Second, via eligibility

criteria, social transfers may be attainable by larger or smaller shares of society in general. This policy dimension is typically referred to as *universalism*. Finally, direct recipients of social transfers are most often obliged to adhere to behavioral conditions, to retain access to benefits. This policy *conditionality* can take different forms and bound recipients at varying degrees. Trust may affect the preferences of voters towards all or any of these policy dimensions.

As the first outcome of interest, we wish to see whether information affects how *generous* voters think that social policy provision should be: i.e. what they perceive to be a fair and optimal transfer size to direct beneficiaries of a given social policy. As extant work suggests that high trust is associated with higher social spending ([Bergh and Bjørnskov, 2011](#); [Bjørnskov and Svendsen, 2013](#); [Daniele and Geys, 2015](#)) as well as stronger pro-redistributive preferences among voters ([Daniele and Geys, 2015](#)), we thus posit that:

H1: Individuals who are informed that their trust has been met (breached) will be more (less) supportive of social assistance generosity.

Social transfers can be universally accessed by voters or they can be means-tested—only a limited subset of citizens who meet specific needs criteria are eligible. This process of targeting reduces the overall need for fiscal resources needed to maintain a specific social policy. However, it grants benefits to a more limited portion of society.

Previous work has provided mixed evidence on the association between trust and social policy universalism. On the one hand, [Borisova et al. \(2018\)](#) suggest that trust is negatively correlated with favoring universalism. Low trust individuals are more likely to support the universal dissemination of social transfers, as they believe

the state is unable to effectively monitor eligibility criteria. Contrariwise, other work suggests that trust facilitates the formation of universal welfare state institutions, while lower or familistic forms of trust lead to highly targeted welfare policies and institutional fragmentation (Bergh and Bjørnskov, 2011; Jensen and Svendsen, 2011). Testing the latter claim, we hypothesize that:

H2: Individuals who are informed that their trust has been met (breached) will be more (less) supportive of universally distributed social assistance.²

Finally, the continuous disbursement of welfare transfer typically places distinct responsibilities on transfer beneficiaries, as it comes attached to specific behavioral conditions (Fossati, 2018b,a; Daguerre, 2007). As this *conditionality* can be subject to dramatic differences, we are interested in whether information on collective action can serve to update the views of voters on what level and type of conditionality should be maintained by the state. Previous work has shown that free-riding perceptions among individuals are closely associated with their preferences concerning welfare entitlement (Aarøe and Petersen, 2014; Attewell, 2020; Van Oorschot, 2000, 2006). We thus predict that trust should be negatively correlated with positive attitudes towards conditionality, as trusting voters should find monitoring less important. In light of new information on collective behavior, we predict that:

H3: Individuals who are informed that their trust has been met (breached) will be less (more) supportive of conditionality attached to the disbursement of social assistance.

²This hypothesis has been updated since pre-registration.

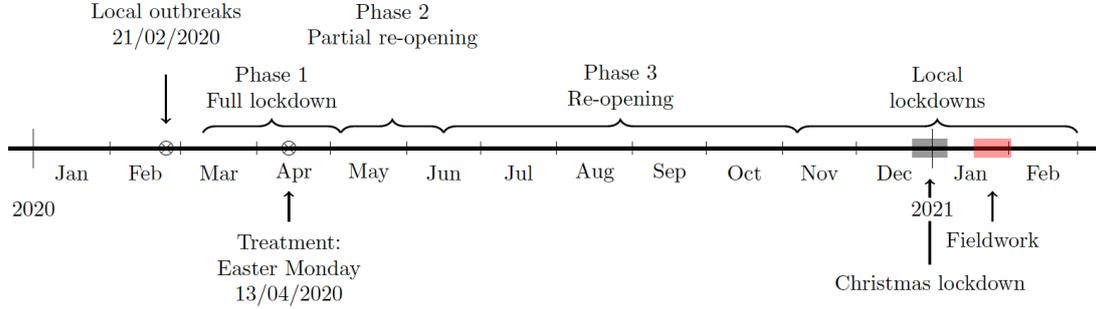
3 Research design

To address our questions of interest, we exploit the implementation of the first nationwide lockdown adopted by the Italian government in response to COVID-19 in 2020. This massive exercise in collective action represents a unique testing ground, allowing us to examine individual-level expectations concerning free-riding behaviour. Upon a wave of localized COVID-19 outbreaks during February 2020, the Italian government installed a first national lockdown on 9 March 2020. This lockdown required Italians to stay at home, permitting them to leave their residency only for reasons related to essential work or family emergency needs (Sylvers and Legorano, 2020; BBC News, 2020). Enforcement of lockdown rules became the responsibility of local and national police and defiance of mobility restrictions was subject to notable fines. In spite of this, mobility data attained from cell phone signals suggests that rule compliance during this period was subject to strong variation, as many people moved either between households or excessively between their own homes and grocery/convenience stores (?). The nation-wide lockdown was in place until June 2020, after which state-enacted mobility restrictions grew less stringent and became primarily region-specific.³

To test our hypotheses, we utilize a between-subject experimental design. We run the experiment by means of a large-scale internet-based survey taken by a representative sample of the Italian electorate in the period between the 17 January and 1 February 2021 ($N = 2690$). Figure 1 provides a scaled timeline for the evolution of Italian lockdown measures during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the information pertaining critical elements of our survey design.

³This was the case until time of writing (September 2021).

Figure 1: Timeline of Italian COVID-19 lockdown measures, 2020-2021



Note: Timeline scaled to reflect actual time distance between events.

We randomly assigned half of survey participants to a treatment condition, providing them with accurate information on mobility patterns among Italian citizens during a specific day of the country’s first COVID-19 lockdown. The other half of respondents was assigned to a control condition and did not receive this informational cue. While all respondents, both in treatment and control groups, were asked to estimate Italian lockdown compliance rates during the given day, only those assigned to treatment attained information the correct rate of compliance. Similar designs have been leveraged by e.g. [Balcells et al. \(2015\)](#), [Fernández-Albertos and Kuo \(2018\)](#) and [Armingeon and Bürgisser \(2021\)](#). In our case, the set up allows us to estimate the causal effect of information concerning collective action on the social policy preferences of Italian voters. In the sections that follow we elaborate on our survey design, variable operationalization and modelling choices.

3.1 Survey design

Our survey consisted of five or six short blocks. All respondents were assigned to the first block containing the items measuring their attitudes towards lock-down

measures, their knowledge of the pandemic and their behaviour during the lockdown. These questions were posited to gain a better understanding of how salient the COVID-19 pandemic was to individual respondents. The knowledge question specifically asked respondents to state the number of COVID-19 cases registered the day prior to respondents taking the survey (see Table A.8 in appendix): a Figure that was reported daily by the media at the time of the survey. Using this survey item, we derive a measure of individual-level salience that is partly behavioral and less subject to social desirability bias than what can be attained by using survey items on self-assessed salience.

More central to our theory, block one also asked respondents to what extent they deemed that their fellow Italians could generally be trusted to follow a strict stay at home rule, such as the highly stringent one that was in place during the national lockdown in the spring of 2020.⁴ This was done in order to retain a pre-treatment estimate of individual-level community trust, and to do this we employed a standard survey item formulation commonly used to measure community trust.⁵ We adjusted it, however, to anchor it in the specific context that we are interested in: namely Italy during the COVID-19 epidemic.

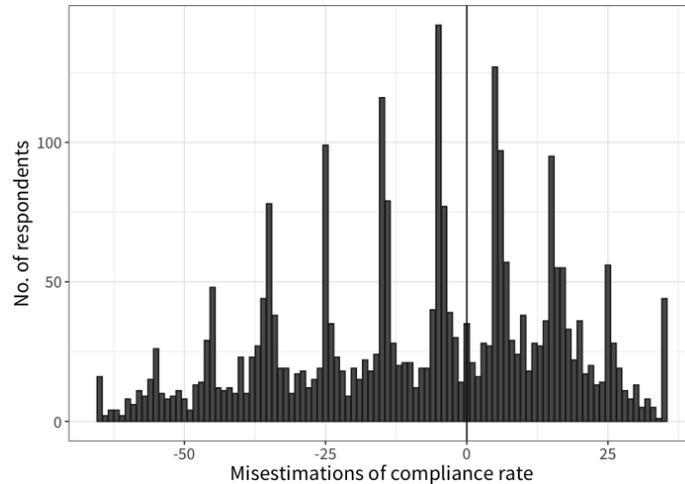
In block two, subjects were given the task to assess compliance with mobility restriction measures in Italy. Here respondents were asked to estimate the rate of persons that remained at home on a specific and well-known day that took place dur-

⁴*Lock-downs during epidemics only work when everybody in a community follows the rules, and stay at home as much as possible. But not all people follow the rules. Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted to follow a ‘stay at home’ rule, or that you can’t be too careful when trusting others to follow this rule? Please tell us on a score of 0 to 10, where 0 means you can’t be too careful and 10 means that most people can be trusted’*

⁵For a review of the concept and measurement of trust and community trust see [Bauer and Freitag \(2017\)](#).

ing the first Italian lockdown: Easter Monday 2020 (for exact question wording see Table A.4 in appendix). In Italy, Easter Monday is festive day typically celebrated outdoors across religious and political divides. We selected this culturally significant, yet apolitical day for the task, to facilitate recall among respondents without influencing their estimates towards a given direction. In our analysis we leverage respondent estimates of compliance rates as an implicit measure of trust to reduce the prevalence of social desirability bias.⁶ The distribution of survey responses is displayed below in Figure 2. The near-normal distribution of response estimations, allows us to categorize individuals into two groups: those whose trust was breached—i.e. those who over-estimated lockdown compliance rate—and those whose trust was met—i.e. those who underestimated it.

Figure 2: Distribution of responses to compliance task



In block three, respondents were randomly assigned to either a treatment or

⁶In our robustness checks we find that responses to the item are statistically correlated with those survey participants provide to an explicit question of trust in COVID-19 compliance ($coef=0.45$; $p < 0.01$), but uncorrelated with left-right self-identification ($coef=0.01$; $p = 0.48$).

control condition.⁷ The treatment group received corrective information on the actual compliance rate on Easter Monday 2020, while the control group moved straight on to block four. Treatment itself was a prompt designed to inform subjects on real-life collective action patterns, just after they had been asked to form their expectations. The message is displayed below in Figure 3. The prompt provided two informational cues to subjects assigned to treatment: his or her own compliance rate estimate, as well as the real compliance rate.

Our treatment set-up allows us to disentangle survey design effect—which stems from respondents having to solve our lock-down compliance task—from the main effect of interest: the extent to which receiving accurate compliance information affects welfare attitudes. The distinction is important, as extant work suggests that increasing the salience of the COVID-19 pandemic causally affects the redistributive attitudes of voters (Daniele et al., 2020).

Figure 3: Information treatment

**You guessed $\${q://QID154/TotalSum}\%$
of Italians stayed at home on Easter Monday.**

In reality, 65%
of Italians stayed at home on Easter Monday.

This estimate is based on cell phone mobility data.

Note: Bracketed text signifies compliance estimate of the respondent, piped from response to compliance task.

⁷Balance checks of treatment assignment are provided in section B of the appendix.

Survey block four was displayed to all respondents and consisted of two manipulation checks, designed to examine whether our information treatment indeed affected community trust. First, an emotive response item, where respondents were asked to reflect on how they felt when thinking about compliance behaviour (if assigned control) or upon reading the true lock-down compliance on Easter Monday 2020 (if assigned to treatment). Second, the battery also contained a repeat formulation of the pre-treatment item used to gauge self-stated community trust, where respondents were allowed to alter their former responses in light of new information received.⁸

Block five, displayed to all respondents, consisted of several items measuring our outcomes of interest: attitudes concerning social policy generosity, universalism and conditionality. We based our questions on the current structure of the *Reddito di Cittadinanza*—a novel guaranteed minimum income scheme introduced in 2019—with regard to the eligibility criteria and the benefit’s amount. This social assistance scheme is designed to be a ‘last resort’ policy, for persons in poverty that have no access to unemployment benefits or other forms of social transfers. It is strongly redistributive in nature and subject to specific needs-based eligibility criteria as well as job search requirements (Giuffrida, 2019). This is a residual policy, but with several eligibility criteria in place, which allow us to measure different degrees of support for more universal safety nets.

Concerning social assistance generosity, we asked respondents to express their preference for an optimal amount that should be disbursed to social assistance recipients. To anchor their responses to a real-world setting, we presented them with information on the *real* amount attainable by an Italian social assistance recipient

⁸Exact item formulation is provided in Table A.6 in the appendix.

who displays a specific set of socio-demographic characteristics and then ask them their preferred amount among six options: three below the current amount and three above it. For the exact question wording see Table [A.1](#) in Appendix.

Second, we measured voters attitudes towards policy universalism, by asking them of their general opinion on existing financial eligibility criteria in place for attaining social assistance benefits. The first criterion concerns flexible financial assets. We asked respondents to what degree they support the current limit of 6.000 euros in savings as eligibility criterion. Second, we ask to what extent they support the fixed assets criterion, now set at 30.000 euro. For the question wording see Table [A.2](#). Instead of examining support across a range of policies that differ in the degree to which they are universally distributed, we focus on attitudes towards a specific policy, which can be designed to be more or less universal in nature. We opt for this approach to minimize the risk of confounding effects, which grow larger when looking at cross-policy attitudes.

Third, we presented respondents with four statements concerning different conditions attached to the disbursement of social assistance, in order measure their preferences towards conditionality: i.e. obligations that recipients must meet in order to keep their benefit. First, a condition that requires recipients to take up jobs in a different region from the one of residence if offered one. Second, a requirement of 30 hours of social work per month. Third, a condition stipulating that recipients show proof of at least two job applications per week. Last, a requirement that recipients must participate in counselling meetings every 14 days.⁹

Finally, the last block was a covariate battery. It first contained an item asking

⁹The exact wording of the questions is shown in Table [A.3](#).

respondents whether or not they believed that they were currently eligible to receive social assistance.¹⁰ It then moved on to ask about a range of socio-demographic characteristics, including information about age, gender, employment status, income level, educational attainment and province of residence. For a full list of covariate questions asked, see Table A.10 in Appendix.

3.2 Empirical strategy

In our analysis, we are interested in attaining treatment effects of receiving information concerning collective action, on attitudes towards a range of social policy dimensions—i.e., generosity, universalism and conditionality. More specifically, we expect treatment effects to be moderated by respondents’ trust priors. To attain these causal estimates, we employ three sets of OLS regression models.

First, we estimate the average treatment effect (ATE) of the information treatment on the whole sample, regardless of one’s prior expectations. In these models, we expect treatment effects to approach zero, as—on average—the effect for those whose trust is met should be cancelled out by those whose trust as conversely been breached. To do this, we estimated the following model:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{information}_i + e_i \tag{1}$$

where Y_i represents our outcomes of interest, as displayed in Table A.12; β_1 signifies the average treatment effect (ATE) of receiving corrective compliance rate information.

¹⁰We opted for this formulation as opposed to directly asking respondents about their beneficiary status, as the policy is very new and the pandemic led to a surge in economic difficulties.

Second, we run the specification below in order to attain conditional average treatment effects (CATEs) of receiving information of lockdown compliance:

$$\begin{aligned}
Y_i = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{information}_i + \beta_2 \text{trust met}_i + \\
& \beta_3 \text{information}_i \times \text{trust met}_i + e_i
\end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

where, as before, Y_i represents our outcomes of interest; and β_1 , β_2 and β_3 represent parameters of interest. The CATE of information on collective action for those whose trust has been breached results from the parameter β_1 ; while the CATE of information for those whose trust has been met is given by the sum $\beta_1 + \beta_3$. In this model, we operationalize *trust_met* as a dummy, indicating whether a respondent over-estimated the actual lock-down compliance rate on Easter Monday (0) or not (1).

Third, we account for the fact that treatment effects may well vary depending on how accurate respondents are in assessing lockdown compliance behaviour. More specifically, we expect effects to be larger among individuals who are poor estimators of the compliance rate, as an update of their expectations should be higher in magnitude. To account for this, we run a second set of ‘dosage models’:

$$\begin{aligned}
Y_i = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{information}_i + \beta_2 \text{trust met}_i + \beta_3 \text{misestimation}_i + \\
& \beta_4 \text{information}_i \times \text{trust met}_i + \\
& \beta_5 \text{information}_i \times \text{misestimation}_i + \\
& \beta_6 \text{trust met}_i \times \text{misestimation}_i + \\
& \beta_7 \text{information}_i \times \text{trust met}_i \times \text{misestimation}_i + e_i
\end{aligned} \tag{3}$$

where *misestimation* is operationalized as a continuous variable, capturing the absolute difference between the compliance rate estimated by a respondent and the real lockdown compliance rate. The triple interaction allows us to estimate how CATEs vary as function of the size of a potential information update, while still accounting for the fact that negative and positive updates may affect respondents differently.

To account for potential heteroscedasticity all models described in this section are run with robust standard errors.¹¹

4 Results

We now turn to reviewing the results of our analysis, and we present this evidence in four sections. First, we discuss correlational results where we examine the extent to which our operationalization of latent trust—i.e., estimated lockdown compliance rates provided by Italian voters—is associated with a range of social policy attitudes, when controlling for treatment assignment and a range of socio-economic covariates. We then proceed to elaborate on the findings of our survey experiment, looking first at a) whether our information treatment was effective in altering trust levels among voters, as well as b) whether the intervention indeed shifted voters’ attitudes towards social welfare provision. Finally, we test two factors that we predict will moderate the effect of treatment of social policy attitudes: namely, the beneficiary status of individual voters, as well as the salience of the COVID-19 pandemic among them.

¹¹We opt for this as opposed to clustered standard errors, as we refrain from engaging in block-randomization in our study design.

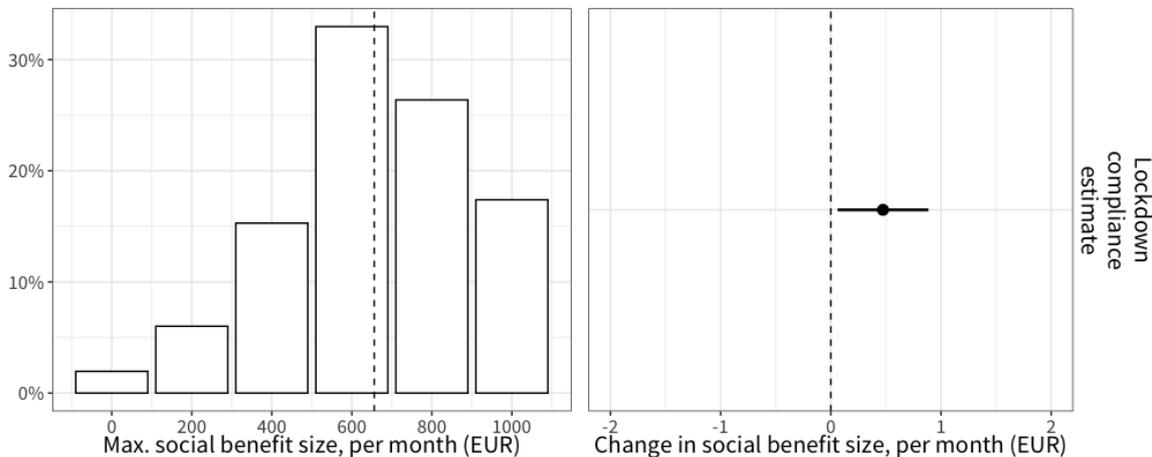
4.1 Correlates of trust in lockdown compliance

As highlighted in our theoretical discussion, extant work suggests that higher levels of trust are associated with stronger support for expansive social welfare provision among voters (Daniele and Geys, 2015). We run a series of correlational tests on our own data, to probe whether this hypothesis can be upheld. In these tests we examine whether voters’ trust—operationalized as voters’ expectations of lockdown compliance—is correlated with a range of social policy attitudes. The tests concern social policy preferences across the three dimensions presented in our theory section.

To begin with, we explore voters’ attitudes towards social assistance generosity. Figure 4 depicts how voters position themselves towards different social assistance benefit sizes, as well as how these attitudes are associated with our trust measure, when controlling for treatment assignment and a range of socio-economic covariates. Overall, we find electoral support for hardship-alleviating social transfers to be very strong. The Italian median voter seemingly favors an increase to the currently maximum attainable transfer size of social assistance recipients: while this benefit cap is set to 500 EUR/month for a single-person household, voters would on average like to see this raised to 656 EUR/month. We also detect that trusting voters are significantly more likely to want social welfare benefits that are larger in size. More specifically, a 1 percentage point increase in a person’s lockdown compliance estimate is associated with a 0.5 euro increase in her most preferred transfer size level ($p < 0.05$). In line with theory posited by a broader range of extant work (Bergh and Bjørnskov, 2011, 2014; Bjørnskov and Svendsen, 2013; Daniele and Geys, 2015), we thus find that higher trust among voters is indeed correlated with higher support for

generous welfare transfers.

Figure 4: Generosity



Note: Bar plot (right panel) presents response distribution of respondents assigned to control in our survey experiment ($N = 1380$), where the dashed line demarcates the sample average response. Coefficient plot presents results from an OLS specification performed on the full respondent sample ($N = 2626$), which controls for treatment assignment, gender, age, province of residence, employment status, education and income levels.

Second, we examine attitudes towards social policy universalism. Accounting for this we uncover that while Italian voters are supportive of more generous social transfers, they still favor the enforcement of need-based eligibility criteria. We also find that high-trust voters are—to a moderate extent—more likely to support the universal distribution of social benefits.

Bar plots in Figure 5, display the extent to which voters support current financial eligibility criteria for the disbursement of social assistance. Among other things, these need-based criteria prohibit individuals in possession of fluid financial assets (e.g. savings or stocks) valued above 6.000 euro from being able to access social assistance, as well as those in possession of fixed financial assets (e.g. property) valued to more than 30.000 euro (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, 2021). Since

relinquishing fixed assets is noticeably more difficult than making use of savings or divesting stocks—oftentimes fixed assets stem from ownership of a family house—we consider the real estate item to be the more stringent of the two eligibility criteria. This is also reflected in how voters position themselves to the two criteria. Voters are, on average, notably more opposed to making the disbursement of social assistance contingent on real estate assets, than making it dependent on absence of private savings.

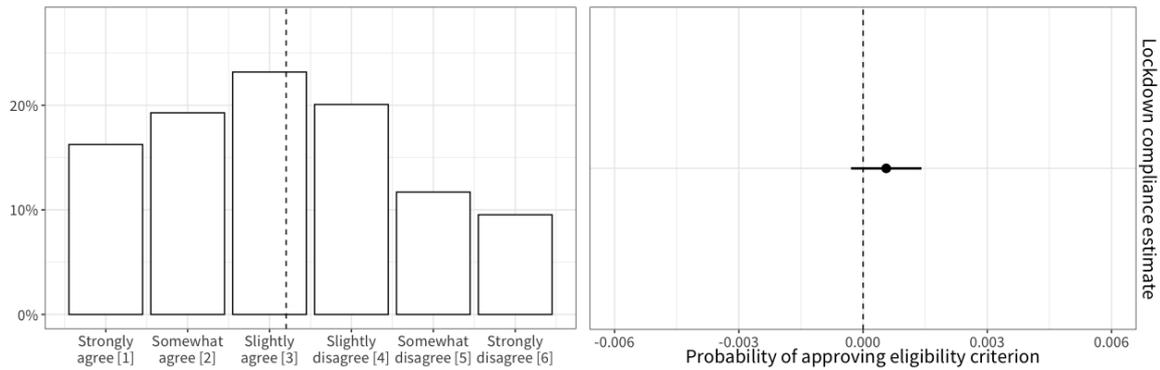
It is also only with regards to real estate criteria, where differences between high and low trust voters are statistically significant. Coefficient plots in Figure 5 display how trust is correlated with voters' disapproval of the two eligibility criteria, where outcome variables have been dichotomized (0=Supportive; 1=Opposed). Results suggest that trust is statistically uncorrelated with the existing eligibility criterion concerning savings criteria, but that a 1 percentage point increase in the lockdown compliance estimate of a respondent is associated with a 0.1 percentage point increase in her likelihood of rejecting the notion that individuals in possession of real estate assets should be excluded from attaining social benefits ($p < 0.05$). The magnitude of this correlation, however, is very small: all else constant, a voter that provides a lockdown compliance estimate of 90% is only 8 percentage points more likely to oppose stringent eligibility criteria, than an otherwise similar voter who provides a compliance estimate of 10%.

Still, these findings run contrary to those uncovered by some researchers, who have suggested that trust is positively associated with a stronger desire to see merit-based criteria attached to social transfers ([Borisova et al., 2018](#)). Instead, our evidence give credence to theories that posit individual-level trust to be correlated with a

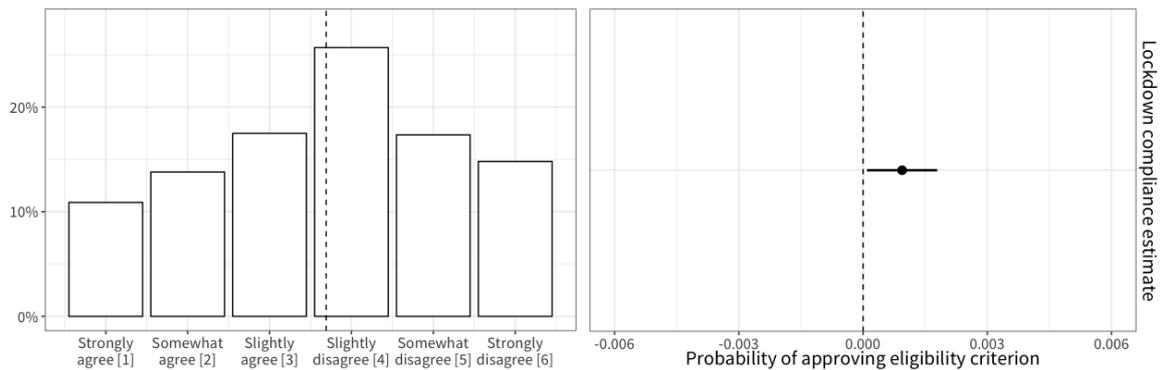
preference for more universally distributed social policy (Jensen and Svendsen, 2011; Nannestad, 2008). This link, however, appears weaker than is frequently highlighted in extant work, and trust seemingly plays a more critical role in shaping attitudes towards highly stringent eligibility criteria.

Figure 5: Universalism

(a) Savings-related eligibility criterion



(b) Real estate-related eligibility criterion



Note: Bar plots (right panels) present response distributions of respondents assigned to control in our survey experiment ($N = 1378$), where dashed lines demarcates sample average responses. Coefficient plots present results from OLS models performed on the full respondent sample ($N = 2628$), where outcome variables have been dichotomized to simplify interpretation. Regression specifications control for treatment assignment, gender, age, province of residence, employment status, education and income levels.

Finally, we examine voters' policy attitudes towards social assistance conditional-

ity. In doing this, we find that voters, overall, strongly favor behavioral and monitoring conditions attached to the disbursement of social assistance. Much like findings on universalism attitudes, this support grows weaker for conditions that are more stringent in nature. However, we fail to uncover any statistically significant association between attitudes toward conditionality and individual level trust.

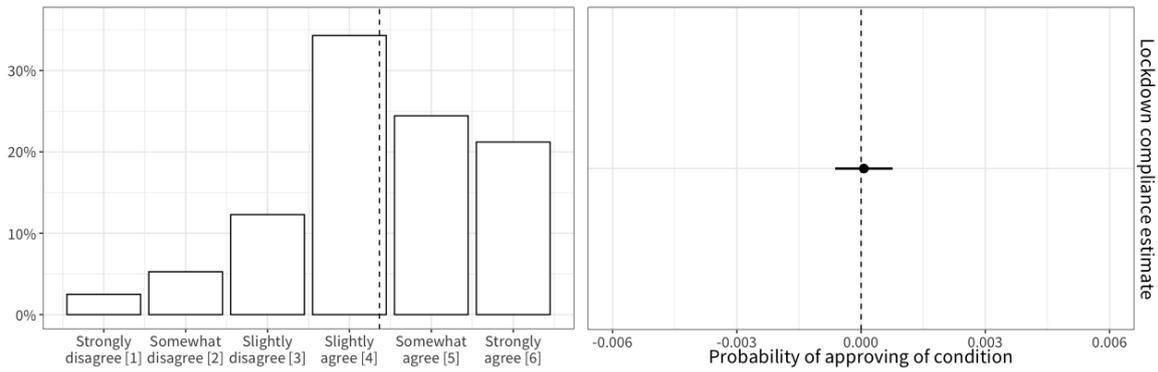
Figures 6 and 7 display the overall attitudes of Italian voters, with regards to a range of job search and employment conditions. As displayed in Figure 6, the vast majority of surveyed voters favored direct job search conditions concerning application efforts (80%) and counselling meetings (83%). We fail, however, to uncover any statistically significant associations between these preferences and voters' trust. Surprisingly, as shown in Figure 7, we uncover that obligations to engage in social work is the most supported condition among voters, as it is favored by 86% of respondents. A second stringent condition, availability to relocate in order to gain employment, is the least favored condition, supported only by 61% of the respondents. Correlations between voters' trust and individual support for these two conditions is statistically insignificant.

We find statistical insignificance between trust and attitudes towards conditionality puzzling, as the logic of maintaining conditionality is specifically to reduce the prevalence of free-riding behavior. A possible explanation for these types of behavioral conditions are strongly favored among Italian voters, is that they draw on social justice principles sooner than cheating concerns when shaping their opinions towards them. Conditionality is arguably the dimension of social policy where the reciprocity of social transfers is directly apparent to voters. In other words, Italian voters—a majority of whom are strongly supportive of generous welfare transfers—may well

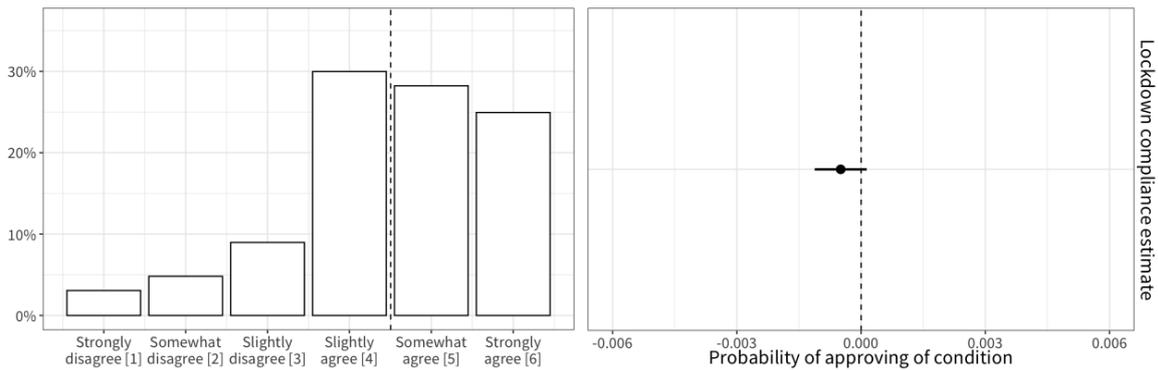
consider displayed efforts on the part of direct beneficiaries of social policy, as fair returns for retaining benefit access, regardless of their expectations concerning cheating.

Figure 6: Conditionality: Pt. I

(a) Numerical criterion for job applications



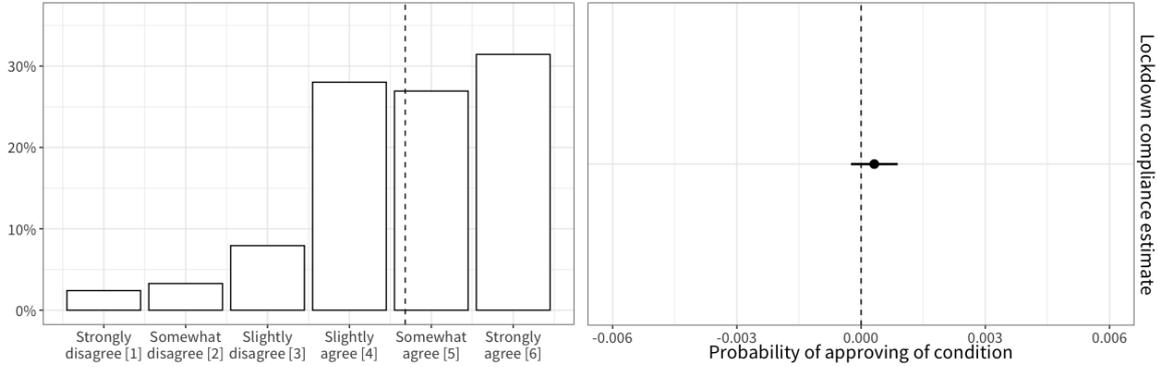
(b) Numerical criterion for job counselling meetings



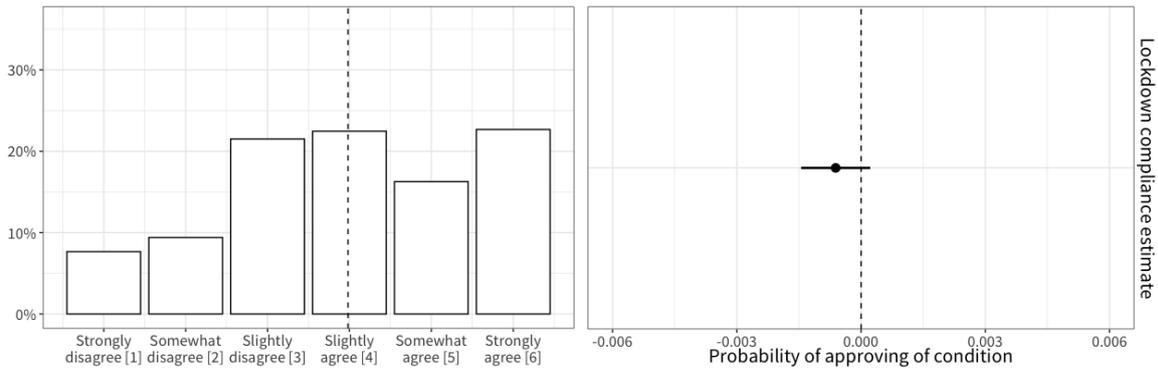
Note: Bar plots (right panels) present response distributions of respondents assigned to control in our survey experiment ($N = 1367$), where dashed lines demarcates sample average responses. Coefficient plots present results from OLS models performed on the full respondent sample ($N = 2600$), where outcome variables have been dichotomized to simplify interpretation. Regression specifications control for treatment assignment, gender, age, province of residence, employment status, education and income levels.

Figure 7: Conditionality (Pt. II)

(a) Social work criterion



(b) Relocation condition



Note: Bar plots (right panels) present response distributions of respondents assigned to control in our survey experiment ($N = 1367$), where dashed lines demarcates sample average responses. Coefficient plots present results from OLS models performed on the full respondent sample ($N = 2600$), where outcome variables have been dichotomized to simplify interpretation. Regression specifications control for treatment assignment, gender, age, province of residence, employment status, education and income levels.

4.2 Effects of information on trust in lockdown compliance

Given that trust is indeed associated with specific types of welfare state support, we proceed to examine whether trust changes in response to new information on lockdown compliance behavior. For this we leverage a between- and within-subject experimental

designs, enabled by the fact that our survey asked voters to state the degree to which they trusted their peers to adhere to lockdown restrictions in two instances: first prior to completing any compliance task, and second directly after having done so and, if assigned to treatment, after having received corrective compliance information. Figure 8 plots conditional average treatment effects of our dosage model specification, where our main outcome of interest is the extent to which respondents updated their trust scores in light of new information. In the specification, positive (negative) values indicate upward (downward) revisions of trust scores that respondents provided on a 0-to-10-point scale. The dosage model allows us account for differential effects between those who had their trust met vs. those who had their trust breached, while simultaneously accounting for the fact that the size of respondent compliance, their ‘misestimation’, may additionally moderate effect sizes.

On average, we find that voters that were treated with information on lockdown compliance rates updated their trust scores in light of new information. Voters who had their trust met—i.e. underestimated compliance rates—made upward revisions of their trust scores of magnitudes ranging between 1 to 1.5 points on the 10-point trust scale (see left panel of Figure 8). Similarly, voters who had their trust breached—i.e. overestimated compliance with lockdown rules—made downward revisions of magnitudes ranging between 0.5 to 1.25 points (right panel of Figure 8). Importantly, those who were assigned control refrained from making any revisions. Treatment effects are thus consistently highly statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). This suggests to us, that the compliance information itself, as opposed to the pure act of contemplating lockdown behavior affected individual level trust.

Figure 8: Effects of treatment on trust score updates



Note: Bandwidths indicate 95% confidence intervals; $N = 2684$.

We also perform a second manipulation check, to provide additional supportive evidence of the fact that the treatment indeed worked to alter voters' trust levels. Here, we test whether voters that retained corrective information on lockdown compliance rates grew more likely to experience negative emotions post-treatment. We predict this to occur as a range of work in social psychology has shown that beaches of trust are associated with negative feelings of e.g. anger, sadness and disgust (Chen et al., 2011). In the survey, voters assigned to the control group were asked to state which feelings they felt, when contemplating compliance behavior among Italians during the first lockdown, while those assigned to treatment were asked how they felt after having received information on the correct compliance rate. Given this set-up,

it is expected that respondents have a non-zero probability of experiencing a negative emotion if they are assigned to the control condition, as they are still being primed to think of the pandemic. However, these emotional reactions should diverge noticeably from those experienced by treated voters who are made aware of the fact that their compliance expectations were either breached, met or exceeded.

In line with our expectations, we find that treated respondents whose expectations were met, were significantly less likely of reporting negative emotions compared to their counterparts assigned to control. Differences between the groups become highly statistically significant already when respondents underestimate compliance rates by 20 percentage points ($p < 0.05$). At this point, informed voters grow 25% less likely to experience a negative emotion.

Figure 9: Effects of treatment on the probability of experiencing negative emotions



Note: Bandwidths indicate 95% confidence intervals; $N = 2684$.

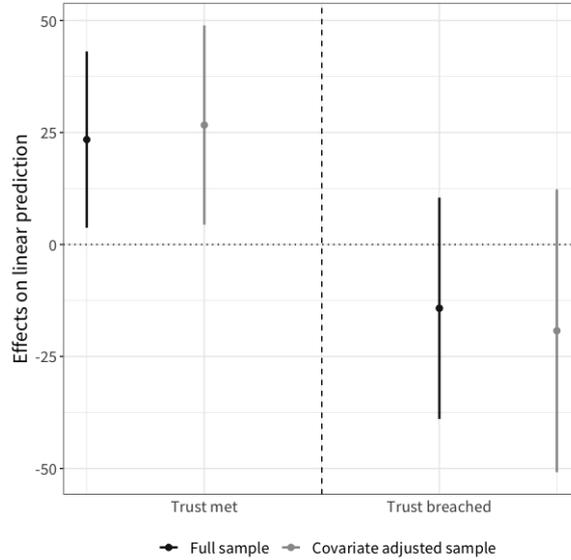
4.3 Effects of information on social policy attitudes

we now turn to evaluating how our information treatment on lockdown compliance affected the social policy attitudes of voters that we surveyed. In figures 10 and D.11, we present marginal treatment effects across our different outcomes of interest. In each plot, left-side estimates are average treatment effects, conditional on having one’s trust met. Conversely, right-side estimates are conditional on having one’s trust being breached. We leverage this dichotomous operationalization of trust met vs. trust breached in order to bolster statistical power. Moreover, given that pre-treatment trust is not randomly assigned, we present estimates from models run on two different samples. First, the full respondent sample, and second, a covariate-adjusted sample derived by means of entropy balancing.¹²

First, we discuss how our information treatment affects voters’ attitudes towards social assistance generosity, conditional on whether voters’ trust is met or breached. In this instance, we hypothesize that treatment will have a positive effect on generosity preferences among those whose trust is met and a negative effect on voters whose trust is breached. We find only partial support for our hypothesis. As depicted in Figure 10, our results suggest that individuals whose trust is met are responsive to treatment: when informed, they favor on average roughly 25 EUR higher monthly benefit sizes, than their uninformed counterparts. These effects are statistically significant at a 90% confidence interval, and in model specifications run both on full and covariates balanced samples. Among voters whose trust is breached, treatment effects are slightly smaller in magnitude, but negative in direction (approx. –15 EUR). Treatment effects here, however, are statistically insignificant ($p \approx 0.3$).

¹²See [Hainmueller \(2012\)](#) for details on this balancing procedure.

Figure 10: Marginal treatment effects of treatment on attitudes towards generosity



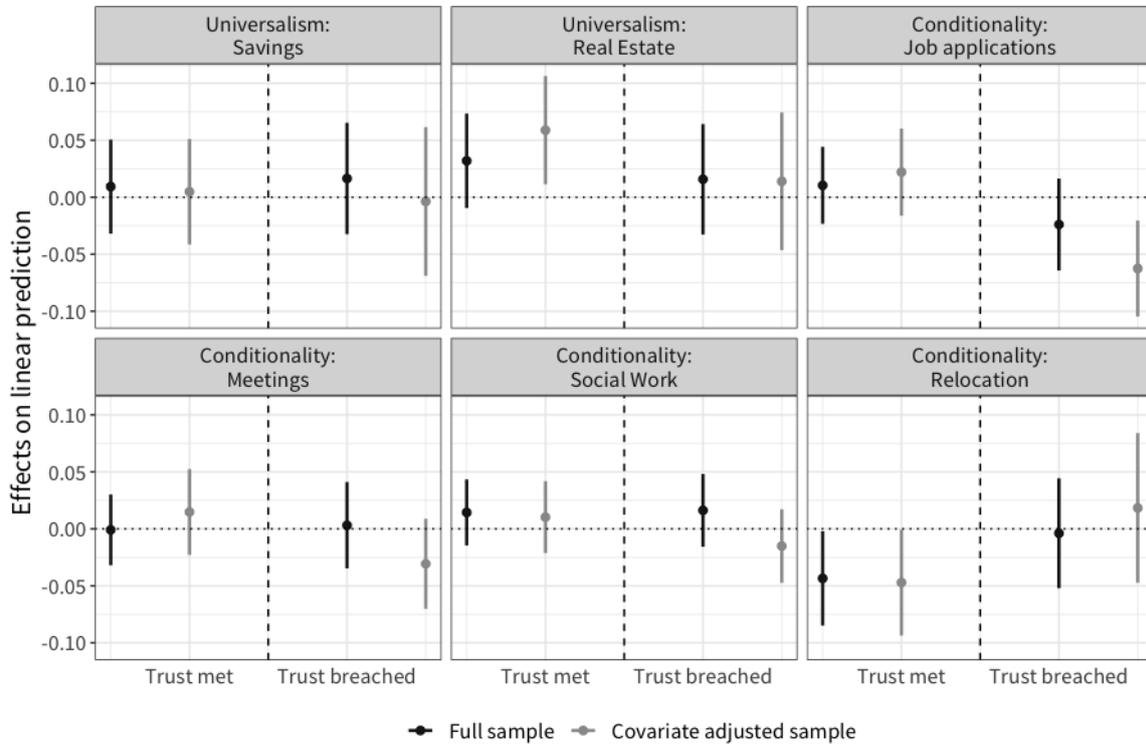
Note: Bandwidths indicate 90% confidence intervals; $N > 2600$.

Second, we identify conditional average treatment effects of compliance rate information on support for universalism (see the first two plots of Figure D.11). Here we find that, while information clearly has no effect on attitudes for means-based criteria based on savings, evidence is more ambiguous regarding attitudes towards criteria based on real estate assets. The CATE on support for universal access regardless of real estate assets is positive for those whose trust is met: the magnitude of this change ranges between three and six percentage points, but is only statistically significant when our analysis is run on covariate-balanced sample ($p < 0.05$). In contrast, effects for individuals whose trust is breached are near-null and statistically insignificant. This results square with our correlational results, which suggest that trust is only linked to fixed asset eligibility criteria. But overall, preferences towards universalism seem less strongly responsive to informational cues, than are attitudes towards transfer generosity.

Finally, we turn to examining how compliance information affects preferences towards conditionality (see the last four plots of Figure D.11). In our correlational analysis we find evidence of widespread support for conditionality: a tendency visible across all conditionality criteria we asked voters about, with the exception of conditions that oblige direct benefit recipients to relocate in order to gain employment. While trust is not strongly associated with support for the different conditionality criteria in correlational results, experimental results look slightly different.

When being made aware of the fact that their trust has been breached, voters seem less likely to support conditionality measures requiring benefit recipients to apply for a specific number of jobs. At six percentage points, this effect is however only statistically significant when we balance control and treatment groups based on observables ($p < 0.05$), which reduces our confidence in this finding. More importantly, we see that in the case of the least popular conditionality measure—where attitudes are more divided—individuals are responsive to informational feedback. Having one’s trust met reduces the probability of supporting relocation conditions of around five percentage points ($p < 0.1$). Just as when analyzing generosity outcomes, treatment effects are statistically insignificant when one’s trust has been breached.

Figure 11: Marginal treatment effects of treatment on attitudes towards universalism and conditionality



Note: Bandwidths indicate 90% confidence intervals; $N > 2600$.

4.4 Testing moderators

As a last test of theory, we examine heterogeneous treatment effects, where we run a series of regressions conditioning on additional moderating variables. This part of our analysis is exploratory, meaning that it was not fully specified in our pre-analysis plan. However, we include it to better elucidate on the scope conditions of our theory.

As our main analysis suggests that our theory of trust only systematically holds when examining attitudes towards social policy generosity, we focus our moderation tests on this outcome variable. That said, we have also performed a series of tests on

universalism and conditionality attitudes: the results of these are largely statistically insignificant, but included in our appendix (see appendix, sections D).

One set of potential moderators that have been discussed in extant work delve deeper into the material interests of voters. Scholars such as [Cavallé \(2015\)](#) as well [Rueda \(2018\)](#) have both posited that concerns such as deservingness and trustworthiness perceptions function mainly to steer the redistributive attitudes of persons that earn higher levels income, and/or do not stand to benefit directly from social transfers. The logic of their argument is summarized succinctly by the title of Rueda’s paper: ‘*Food first, then morals*’. In brief, those who struggle to make ends meet will prioritize material concerns more than those who are well off, as the immediate priority of voters is to ensure the financial stability of their own household.

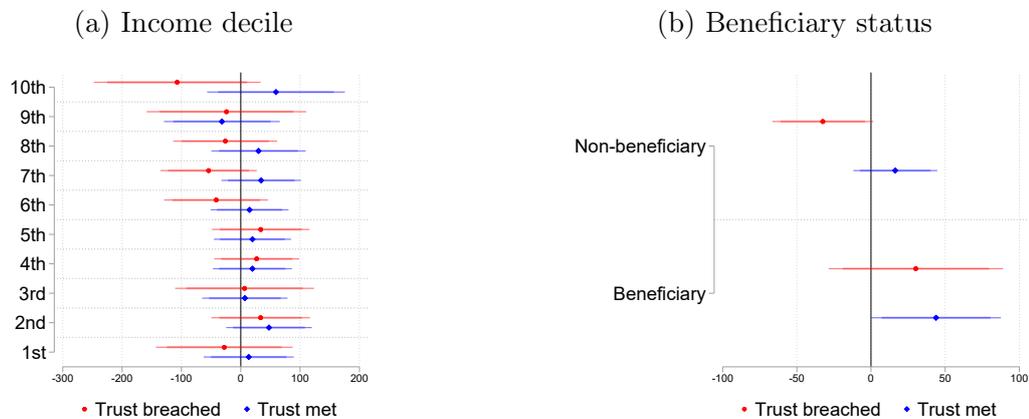
To test this notion, we proceed by running a set of triple interaction OLS regression models where we condition treatment effects on the income status of voters. We measure income status in two ways: by their self-stated income decile, as well as their perceived beneficiary status (i.e. whether individual voters assess themselves to be eligible for the *Reddito di Cittadinanza*). Our results are presented in [Figure 12](#).

As displayed in [Subfigure ??](#), we uncover a tendency suggesting that CATE are smaller in size as well as less strongly conditional on trust, when voters belong to lower income brackets. While this tendency squares with the ‘*Food first, then morals*’ hypothesis, it fails to provide definitive evidence. Given that a smaller share of voters belong to higher income brackets, the analysis grows under-powered and confidence intervals thereby overlap noticeably when examining subgroup attitudes across income deciles.

As a simpler test of theory—which allows us to retain statistical power—[Subfigure](#)

?? simply distinguishes between the perceived beneficiary status of voters. Here the results fall more clearly in line with the ‘Food first, then morals’ hypothesis. First, (potential) beneficiaries of the Reddito di Cittadinanza are all positively affected by our treatment regardless of whether their trust is met or not. Treatment induces all of them to want benefit sizes that are 30-50 EUR higher, suggesting that material concerns outweigh issues of deservingness and trust among this voters category. In contrast, non-beneficiaries are asymmetrically affected by our treatment as directly posited by our baseline theory: treatment makes voters whose trust is breached desire a benefit size that is roughly 30 EUR lower than their uninformed counterparts. The same treatment, however, has a positive effect on voters whose trust is met. On average, voters assigned to treatment want a benefit size that is approx. 15 EUR higher than those assigned to control.

Figure 12: Marginal effects of treatment on attitudes towards benefit generosity, by trust and material attributes



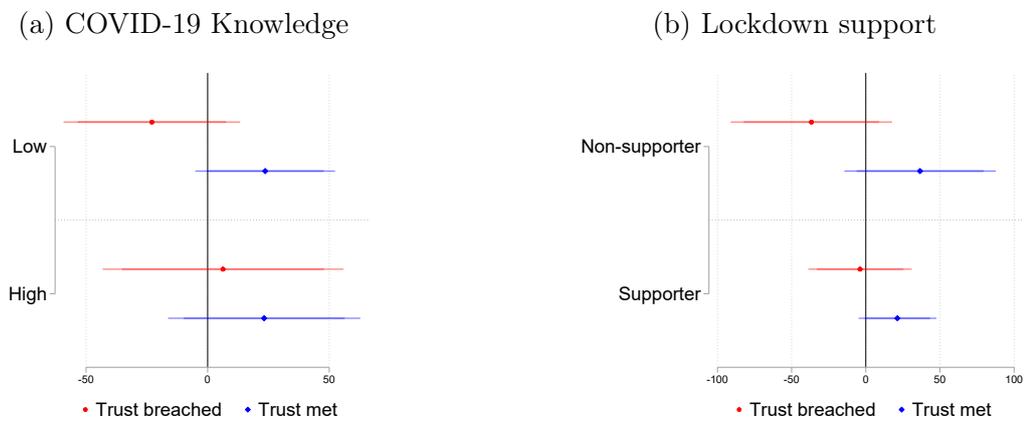
Note: Bandwidths indicate 90% and 95% confidence intervals.

Alternative to voters’ material concerns, behavioral-attitudinal variables surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic may also work to moderate our information treatment. To examine this notion, we run another set of models conditioning on a) voters’

knowledge of the COVID-19 pandemic and b) their support for COVID-19 mobility restrictions. As we had no clear hypotheses about the moderating effects of these variables this analysis is best treated as exploratory. Figure 13 displays the results of our analysis. While results are statistically insignificant, the effects are somewhat surprising in both cases: both COVID-19 knowledge as well as lockdown support seem to reduce the importance of trust in shaping treatment effects.

We suggest that the moderators—COVID-19 knowledge and lockdown support—might best be understood as indicators of attitude strength on the COVID-19 issue. Maintaining strong attitudinal priors tend to make voters inflexible, and less responsive to new information. Given the statistical insignificance of our estimates, however, further testing would be required to properly examine this theoretical intuition.

Figure 13: Marginal effects of treatment on attitudes towards benefit generosity, by trust and attitudinal variables



Note: Bandwidths indicate 90% and 95% confidence intervals.

5 Discussion

Focusing on the case of pandemic Italy, this paper scrutinizes the relationship between trust and social policy preferences. It examines how trust is statistically associated with attitudes towards three different social policy dimensions: generosity, universalism and conditionality. Moreover, the study tests the effect of information concerning patterns of collective action on policy preferences, investigating in particular how effects are attributable to changes in voter-level trust.

Descriptive findings suggest that Italians are strongly in favour of social assistance measures, such as the newly introduced *Reddito di Cittadinanza*. In fact, they would desire to see benefit generosity increased for this policy. Moreover, voters generally favour need-based access to social assistance in line with the eligibility criteria currently in force. That said, voters desire to see the adoption of more stringent conditionality criteria attached to social assistance. Attitudes towards conditionality show us that voters particularly support requirements obliging recipients to reciprocate by actively looking for employment, as well as to participate in community work programs. Support for conditionality that impose relocation obligations on transfer beneficiaries is noticeably weaker.

Trust—operationalized as lockdown compliance expectations—is found to be positively correlated with voters’ support for social policy generosity, and universalism, but not with conditionality. In this instance, it is important to recall that labor market conditionality is in no way unique to social benefit recipients. Italians that have access to unemployment benefit—and that are thereby excluded from access to social benefits—are also obliged to commit to job search and coaching criteria. With

this in mind, it grows less surprising that a majority of Italian voters favor that labor market conditionality also be attached to the disbursement of poverty-alleviating income transfers. In this instance, we therefore conjecture that voters' deservingness perceptions are rooted more strongly in fairness and/or reciprocity concerns, rather than their assessments of free-riding in welfare attainment.

Experimental results suggest that voters are responsive to prompts on community lockdown compliance, as they update their behavioral expectations in light of receiving non-ideological, fact-based information. Indeed, this information also generates strong emotional responses among them. Importantly, we uncover specific spillover effects of informational cues concerning collective action from the realm of the pandemic's management to the realm of social policy. More specifically, when voters are informed that their trust has been met or exceeded, they become more supportive of generous social assistance. They also grow less supportive of conditionality criteria based on relocation. However, treatment effects are insignificant for attitudes concerning social policy universalism, as well as other types of labor market conditionality.

Finally, we detect that information on collective action affects primarily voters that are financially well-off, in relative terms. This suggests that while trust matters for large sets of the population, material concerns outweigh deservingness perceptions in shaping attitudes towards redistributive attitudes when voters find themselves in financially precarious positions.

In sum, we posit that voters' social policy preferences are partly based on a person's trust, understood as a behavioural expectation concerning others' propensity to cooperate or free-ride. However, the extent to which preferences are based on trust

depends on a) the social policy dimension that researchers examine and b) the personal financial situation of voters. Trust seems to be more relevant in determining social policy attitudes that do not directly prime voters on reciprocity concerns, such as generosity. And it matters less for voters that are struggling to make ends meet.

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Online Appendix

A Variable operationalization and transformation

A.1 Outcome variables

Table A.1: Attitudes towards social policy generosity

Question
<p>Many are suffering from unemployment and income loss as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. Some have suggested that the Italian state help improve the financial situation of these persons, by spending more on social assistance.</p> <p>Social assistance is designed specifically to support people who are unemployed and — for various reasons — unable to access unemployment benefits. We can think of it as a last safety net.</p> <p>The current system allows a single childless adult to attain a maximum of approx. 500 euros per month. How low or high do you think this maximum amount should be?</p>
<p><i>Response categories [Recode values]</i> 0 euro/month [1]; 200 euro/month [2]; 400 euro/month [3]; 600 euro/month [4]; 800 euro/month [5]; 1000 euro/month [6]</p>

Table A.2: Attitudes towards social policy universalism

Question
<p>Not all unemployed people can access social assistance. For instance, people that have savings or wealth are not eligible to receive social assistance benefits.</p> <p>Below you see some statements regarding these eligibility criteria.</p> <p>To what extent do you agree or disagree with them?</p> <p>To receive social assistance, an applicant...</p> <p>a) ...must own less than 6.000 euros in savings.</p> <p>c) ...cannot own a house worth more than 30.000 euros.</p>
<p><i>Response categories [Recode values]</i> Strongly agree [1]; Generally agree [2]; Slightly agree [3]; Slightly disagree [4]; Generally disagree [5]; Strongly disagree [6]</p>

Table A.3: Attitudes towards social policy conditionality

Question
<p> Policymakers have also discussed a number of conditions that people must meet in order to receive social assistance. Below you see some statements regarding these conditions. To what extent do you agree or disagree with them? Social assistance recipients should... a) ...lose access to benefits if they refuse job offers in other regions than where they reside. b) ...have to engage in community service at least 30 hours per month. c)have to complete at least 2 job applications per week. d) ...have to report to a job centre every 14 days. </p>
<p> <i>Response categories [Recode values]</i> Strongly agree [6]; Generally agree [5]; Slightly agree [4]; Slightly disagree [3]; Generally disagree [2]; Strongly disagree [1] </p>

A.2 Moderating variables

Table A.4: Pre-treatment trust, as measured by a compliance task item

Compliance task
<p> Cell-phone data from the lock down period suggests that there were big differences across countries in how much people stayed at home. How many percent of Italians do you trust stayed at home during Easter Monday 2020? <i>Note: Easter Monday took place on April 13th in 2020, i.e. in the midst of the Italian lock down.</i> </p>
<p> <i>Response categories [Recode values]</i> 0% - 100% [0-100] </p>

Note: Respondents provided their answers on a slider bar scaled from 0-100%. To avoid biasing responses towards a given direction, the initial placement of the bar is randomly assigned to a value between 0 and 100%. Respondents were obliged to move or click the bar in order to proceed in the survey.

Table A.5: Pre-treatment interpersonal trust

Pre-treatment trust, as measured by community trust item
<p>Lock-downs during epidemics only work when everybody in a community follows the rules, and stay at home as much as possible. But not all people follow the rules. Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted to follow a 'stay at home' rule, or that you can't be too careful when trusting others to follow this rule? Please tell us on a score of 0 to 10, where 0 means you can't be too careful and 10 means that most people can be trusted.</p>
<p><i>Response categories</i> 0-10 scale</p>

Table A.6: Post-treatment interpersonal trust

Post-treatment trust, as measured by community trust item
<p>Having thought about the Italian lockdown more carefully, would you say that most people can be trusted to follow a 'stay at home' rule, or that you can't be too careful when trusting others to follow this rule? Please tell us on a score of 0 to 10, where 0 means you can't be too careful and 10 means that most people can be trusted.</p>
<p><i>Response categories</i> 0-10 scale</p>

Table A.7: Eligibility to receive the *Reddito di Cittadinanza*

Social transfer beneficiary status
<p>Do you think you may be eligible to benefit from social assistance today?</p>
<p><i>Response categories</i> Yes [1]; No [0].</p>

Table A.8: Knowledge of COVID-19 pandemic

COVID-19 knowledge
Every day, the Italian state provides information on newly detected COVID-19 cases. Approximately how many cases of COVID-19 were identified in Italy yesterday?
<i>Response categories</i> [Textbox in which respondents are obliged to provide any positive numeric response]; I do not know [0]; I do not care [0]; COVID-19 is not a real threat [0].

Table A.9: Lockdown support

Support for mobility restrictions
To dampen the spread of the COVID-19 outbreak, the Italian government introduced strict 'lock down' measures starting on March 9th, 2020. These measures heavily restricted the ability of people to leave their homes for non-essential purposes. Do you feel that the lock-down measures where too strict or too relaxed?
<i>Response categories</i> Far too strict [1]; Somewhat too strict [2]; Neither too strict, nor too relaxed [3]; Somewhat too relaxed [4]; Far too relaxed [5]

A.3 Control variables

Table A.10: Survey items used to measure socio-demographic variables

I.1	Gender <i>Male [0], Female [1]</i>
I.2	In which province do you currently reside? <i>Choice of 109 official provinces in Italy, or [‘I don’t reside in Italy’.]</i>
I.4	How old are you? <i>Self-stated age, in range of 16 to 99.</i>
I.5	What is the highest degree that you have attained? <i>Still in school; Left school without a diploma; Primary school degree; Lower secondary school degree; Upper secondary school degree; High School degree</i>
I.6	Are you currently employed? Which of the following categories apply best to you? <i>Fixed-term contract employee, Open-ended contract employee, Self-employed, Student, Retiree; Unemployed looking for a job,; Unemployed not looking for a job; Unable to Work.</i>
I.8	What is the total annual income of your household, net of taxes and compulsory deductions, counting all income sources? <i>I have no income in my household [1]; Under 500€ [2]; 500€ - 999€ [3]; 1000€ - 1499€ [4]; 1500€ - 1999€ [5]; 2000€ - 2499€ [6]; 2500€ - 2999€ [7]; 3000€ - 3999€ [8]; 4000€ - 4999€ [9]; 5000€ or more [10].</i>

A.4 Variable transformations

Table A.11: Treatment and moderating variables: Operationalization and transformations

Variable	Operationalization	Transformation
Manipulated variables:		
Information treatment	Dichotomous	
List treatment	Dichotomous	
Moderating variables		
Compliance task	Continuous	
Compliance task (<i>dichotomous</i>)	Dummy variable	Recode of Likert scale
Misexpectation	Continuous	[De facto compliance rate — Response to <i>Compliance task</i>]
Explicit trust (LD compliance)	10 point ordinal scale	
Income	10 distribution deciles	
Social benefit recipient	Dummy variable [recipient-non recipient]	
Support for mobility restrictions	Dummy variable	Recode of Likert scale
COVID-19 knowledge	Dummy variable	

Table A.12: Outcome variables: Operationalization and transformations

Outcome	Operationalization	Transformation
Generosity		
Generosity measure	0, 200, 400, 600, 800, 1000 €/month	Ordinal [0-1000]
Conditionality		
Condition 1: Relocation	six point likert scale	dummy [approve-disapprove]
Condition 2: Social work	six point likert scale	dummy [approve-disapprove]
Condition 3: Job applications	six point likert scale	dummy [approve-disapprove]
Condition 4: Counsellor meeting	six point likert scale	dummy [approve-disapprove]
Universalism		
Requirement 1: Savings	six point likert scale	dummy [approve-disapprove]
Requirement 2: Real estates	six point likert scale	dummy [approve-disapprove]

B Balance checks

Table B.1: Covariate balance by trust

	Trust breached	Trust met	All	Min	Max
Female	0.50	0.52	0.51	0	1
18-24	0.09	0.13	0.12	0	1
25-34	0.14	0.13	0.13	0	1
35-44	0.16	0.17	0.17	0	1
45-54	0.19	0.16	0.17	0	1
55-64	0.20	0.19	0.19	0	1
65+	0.22	0.21	0.22	0	1
No degree	0.01	0.00	0.01	0	1
Elementary school	0.01	0.01	0.01	0	1
Middle school	0.15	0.13	0.14	0	1
High school	0.55	0.56	0.55	0	1
University degree	0.29	0.29	0.29	0	1
1st decile	0.10	0.14	0.13	0	1
2nd decile	0.11	0.13	0.12	0	1
3rd decile	0.07	0.09	0.09	0	1
4th decile	0.14	0.12	0.13	0	1
5th decile	0.14	0.12	0.12	0	1
6th decile	0.10	0.12	0.11	0	1
7th decile	0.13	0.10	0.11	0	1
8th decile	0.10	0.08	0.08	0	1
9th decile	0.05	0.06	0.05	0	1
10th decile	0.06	0.04	0.05	0	1
Fixed-term employee	0.11	0.09	0.10	0	1
Open-end employee	0.27	0.25	0.26	0	1
Self-employed	0.14	0.11	0.12	0	1
Student	0.05	0.08	0.07	0	1
Unemployed, not looking for a job	0.07	0.07	0.07	0	1
Retired	0.21	0.20	0.20	0	1
Unemployed, looking for a job	0.13	0.15	0.14	0	1
Else	0.04	0.03	0.03	0	1
Observations	1124	1567	2691	2691	2691

Table B.2: Covariate balance by treatment assignment

	Control	Treatment	All	Population	Min	Max
Female	0.52	0.51	0.51	0.52	0	1
18-24	0.12	0.11	0.12	0.08	0	1
25-34	0.13	0.14	0.13	0.13	0	1
35-44	0.15	0.18	0.17	0.15	0	1
45-54	0.18	0.17	0.17	0.19	0	1
55-64	0.20	0.19	0.19	0.17	0	1
65+	0.22	0.21	0.22	0.28	0	1
No degree	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.09	0	1
Elementary school	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.20	0	1
Middle school	0.13	0.15	0.14	0.30	0	1
High school	0.56	0.55	0.55	0.30	0	1
University degree	0.30	0.28	0.29	0.11	0	1
1st decile	0.13	0.12	0.13		0	1
2nd decile	0.12	0.12	0.12		0	1
3rd decile	0.08	0.09	0.09		0	1
4th decile	0.13	0.13	0.13		0	1
5th decile	0.13	0.12	0.12		0	1
6th decile	0.11	0.11	0.11		0	1
7th decile	0.11	0.12	0.11		0	1
8th decile	0.09	0.08	0.08		0	1
9th decile	0.05	0.06	0.05		0	1
10th decile	0.05	0.05	0.05		0	1
Fixed-term employee	0.10	0.09	0.10		0	1
Open-end employee	0.26	0.26	0.26		0	1
Self-employed	0.12	0.12	0.12		0	1
Student	0.07	0.07	0.07		0	1
Unemployed, not looking for a job	0.06	0.08	0.07		0	1
Retired	0.21	0.19	0.20		0	1
Unemployed, looking for a job	0.14	0.15	0.14		0	1
Else	0.03	0.03	0.03		0	1
Observations	1389	1302	2691	2691	2691	

C Additional regression results

C.1 ATE: Effect of information treatment (regardless of priors)

Figure C.1: ATE of information on support for generous benefit

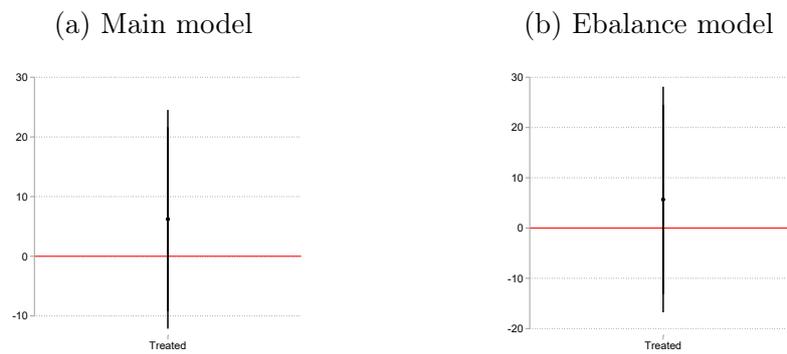


Figure C.2: ATE of information on support for benefit universalism

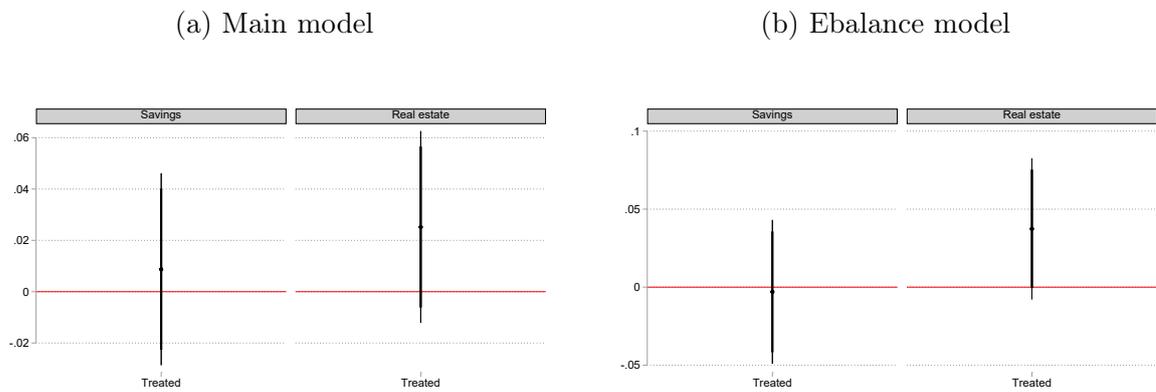
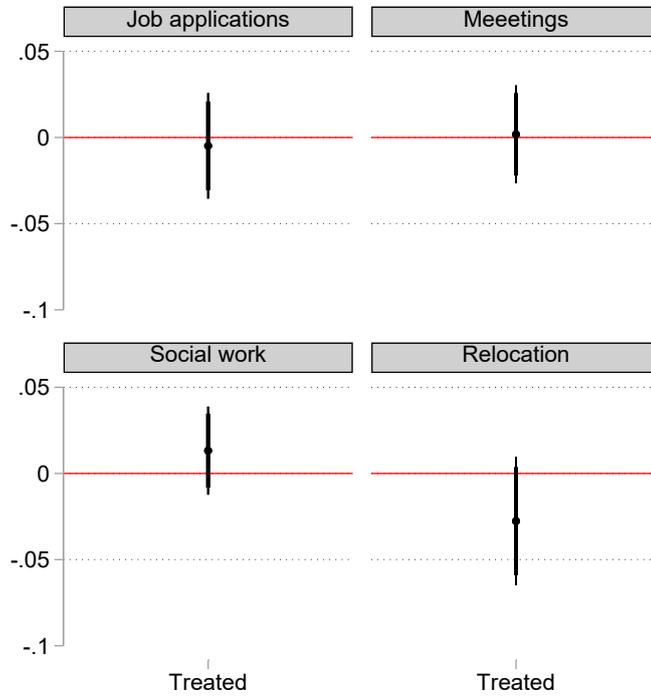
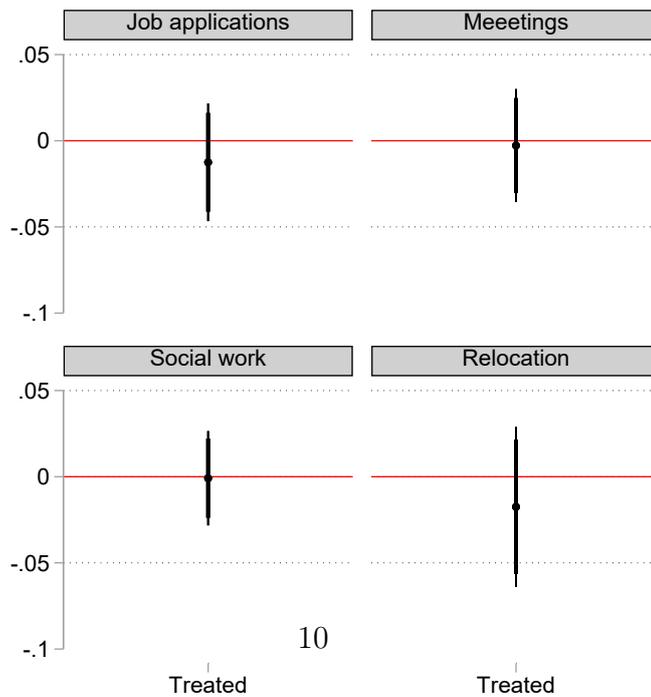


Figure C.3: ATE of information on support for benefit conditionality

(a) Main model



(b) Ebalance model



C.2 Dosage model specifications

Figure C.4: Generosity: Dosage treatment models

(a) Main model

(b) Ebalance

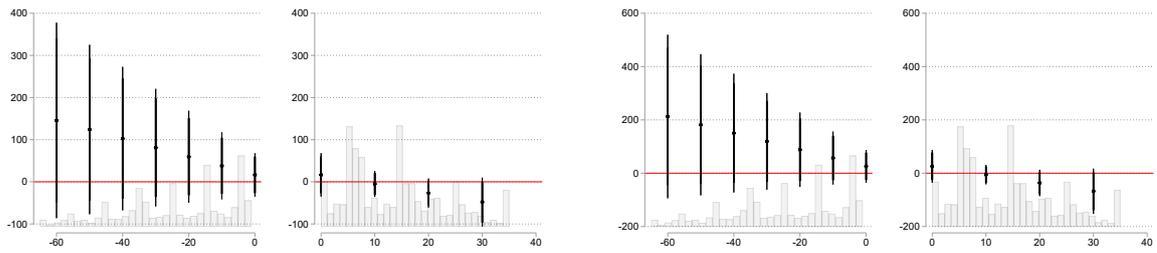
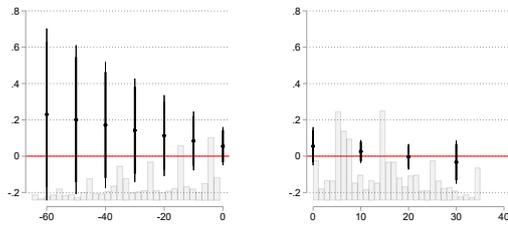
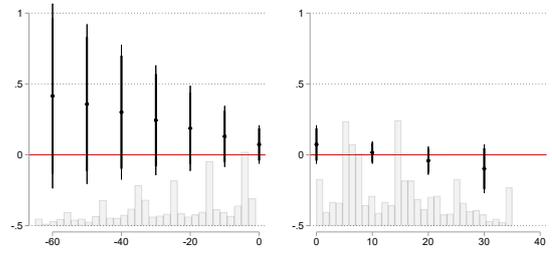


Figure C.5: Universalism: Dosage treatment models

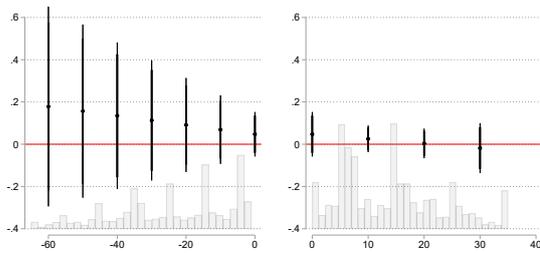
(a) Savings: main



(b) Savings: ebalance



(c) Real estate: main



(d) Real estate: ebalance

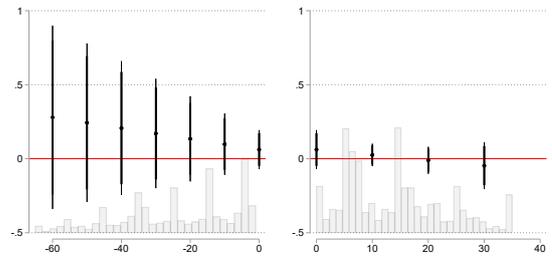
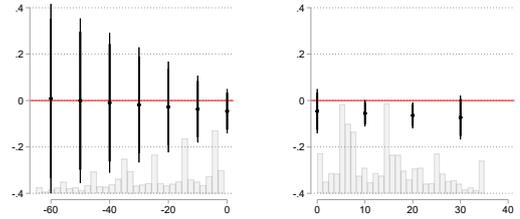
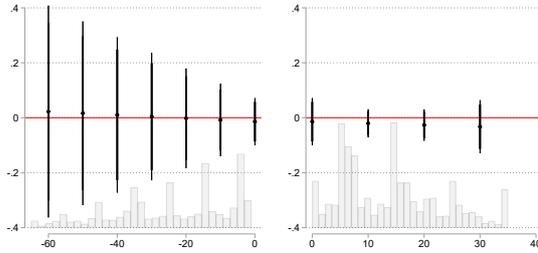


Figure C.6: Conditionality pt.1: Dosage treatment models

(a) Job applications: main

(b) Job applications: ebalance



(c) Meetings: main

(d) Meetings: ebalance

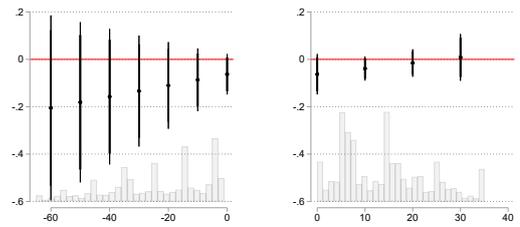
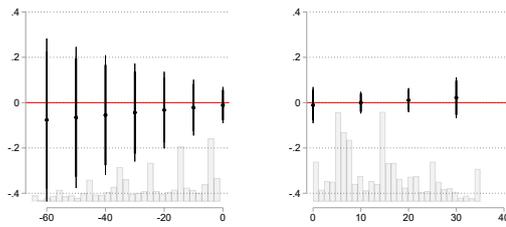
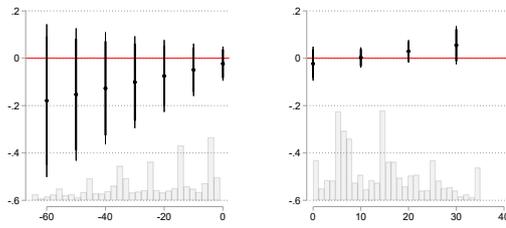
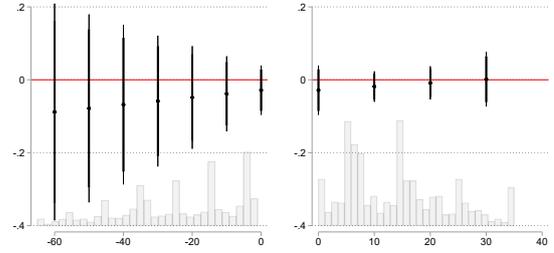


Figure C.7: Conditionality pt.2: Dosage treatment models

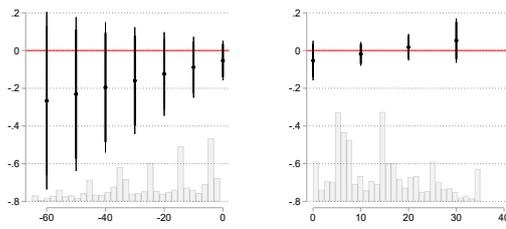
(a) Social work: main



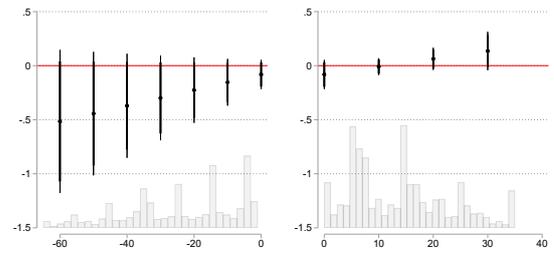
(b) Social work: ebalance



(c) Relocation: main



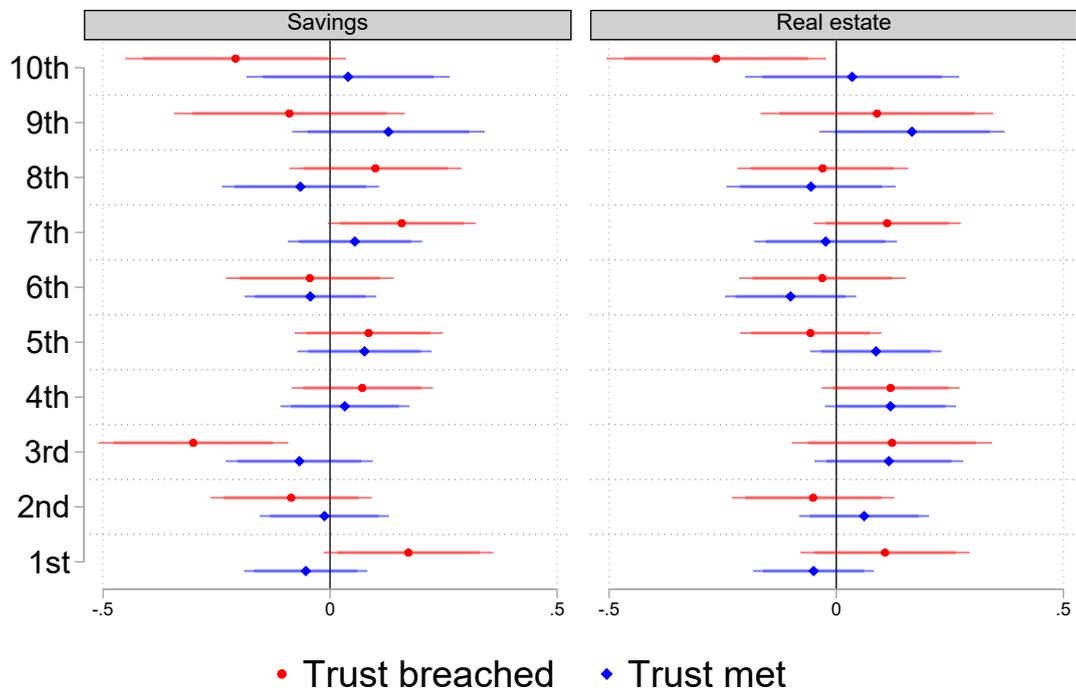
(d) Relocation: ebalance



D Treatment moderators: Additional outcome variables and model specifications

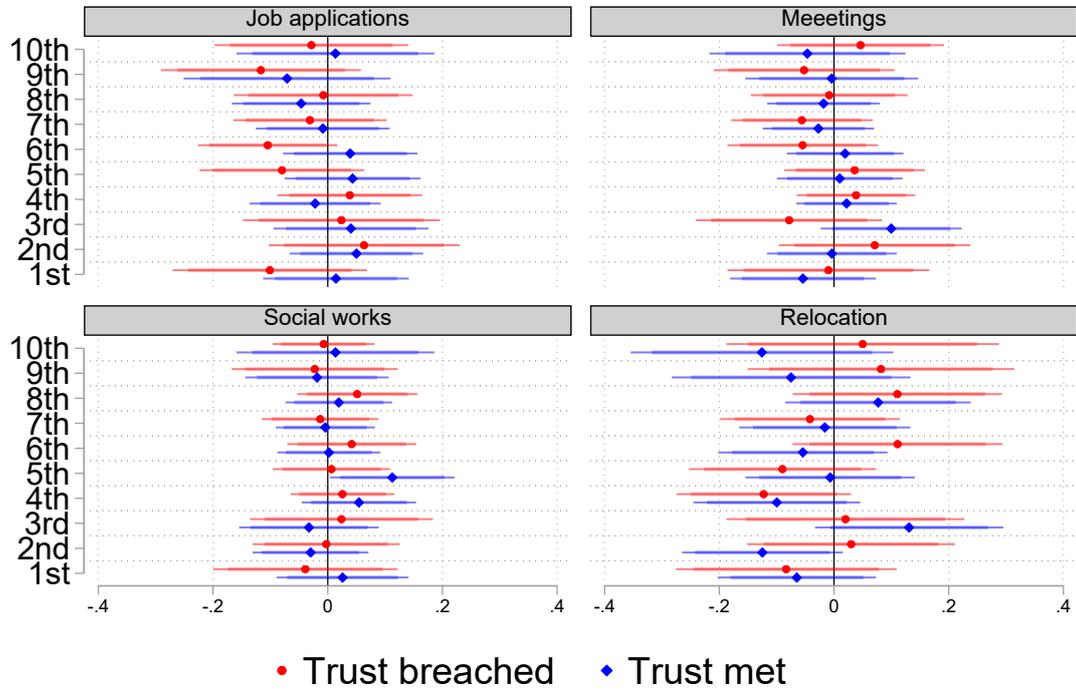
D.1 Income level

Figure D.1: Marginal treatment effect of treatment on attitudes towards benefit universalism



Note: Bandwidths indicate 90% and 95% confidence intervals.

Figure D.2: Marginal treatment effect of treatment on attitudes towards benefit conditionality



Note: Bandwidths indicate 90% and 95% confidence intervals.

D.1.1 Robustness checks

Figure D.3: Marginal treatment effect of treatment on attitudes towards benefit universalism

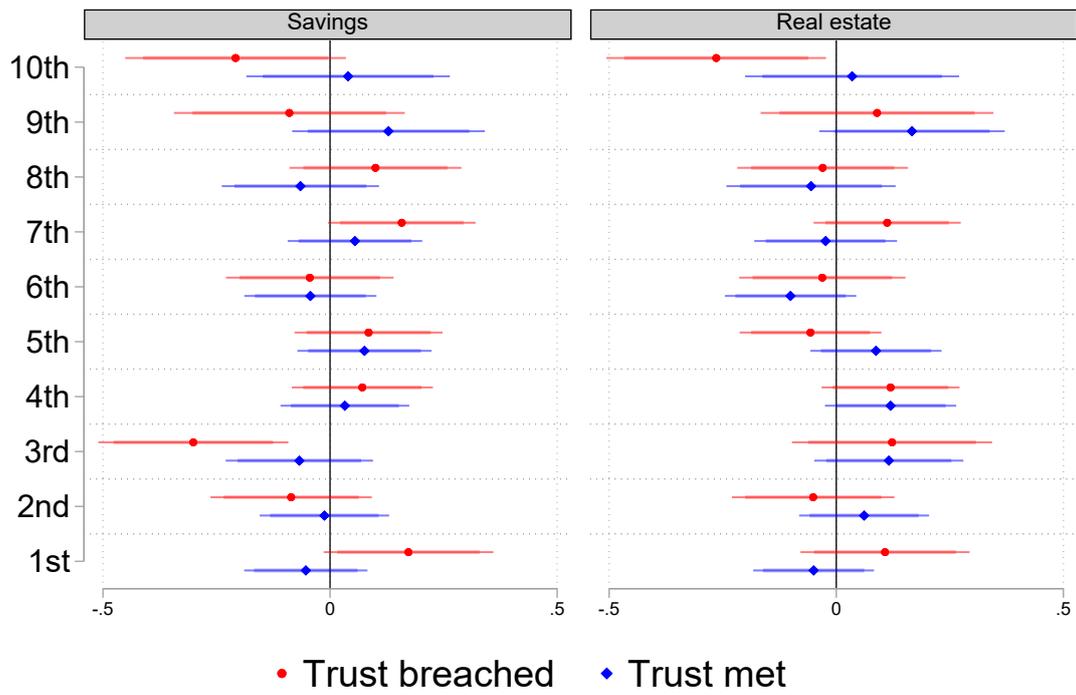
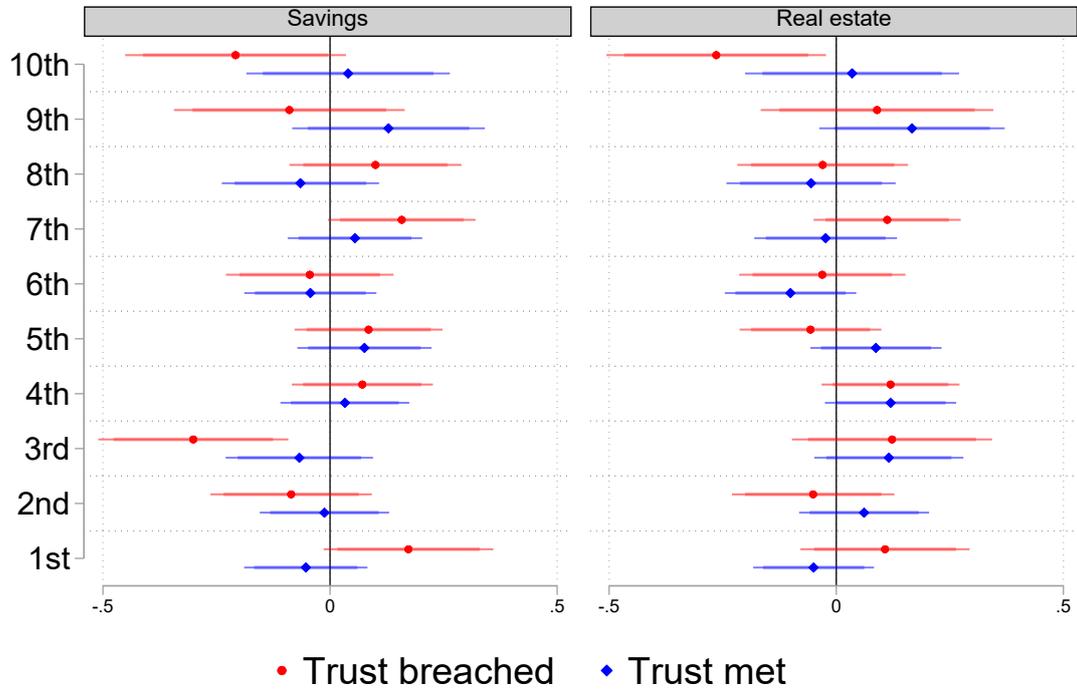
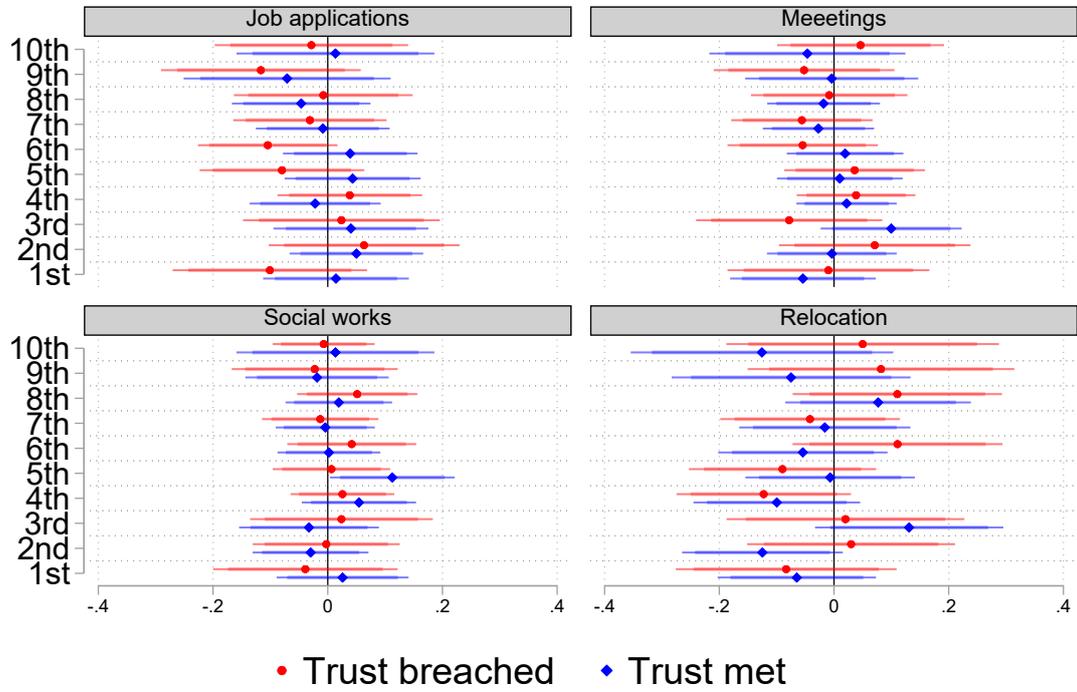


Figure D.4: Marginal treatment effect of treatment on attitudes towards benefit universalism



Note: Bandwidths indicate 90% and 95% confidence intervals.

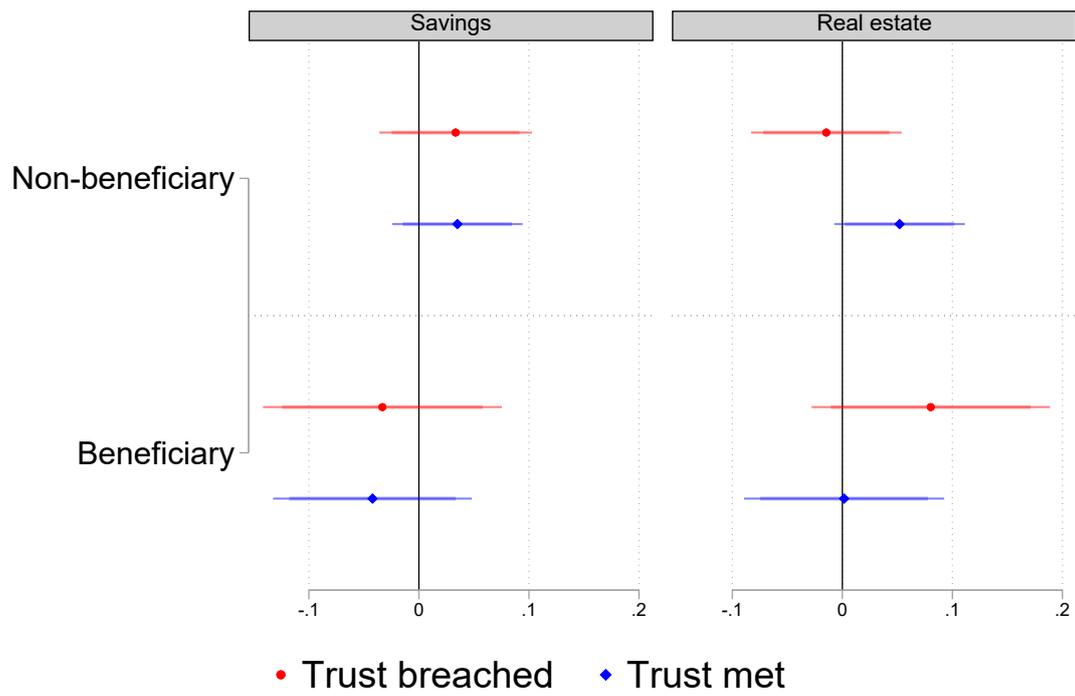
Figure D.5: Marginal treatment effect of treatment on attitudes towards benefit conditionality



Note: Bandwidths indicate 90% and 95% confidence intervals.

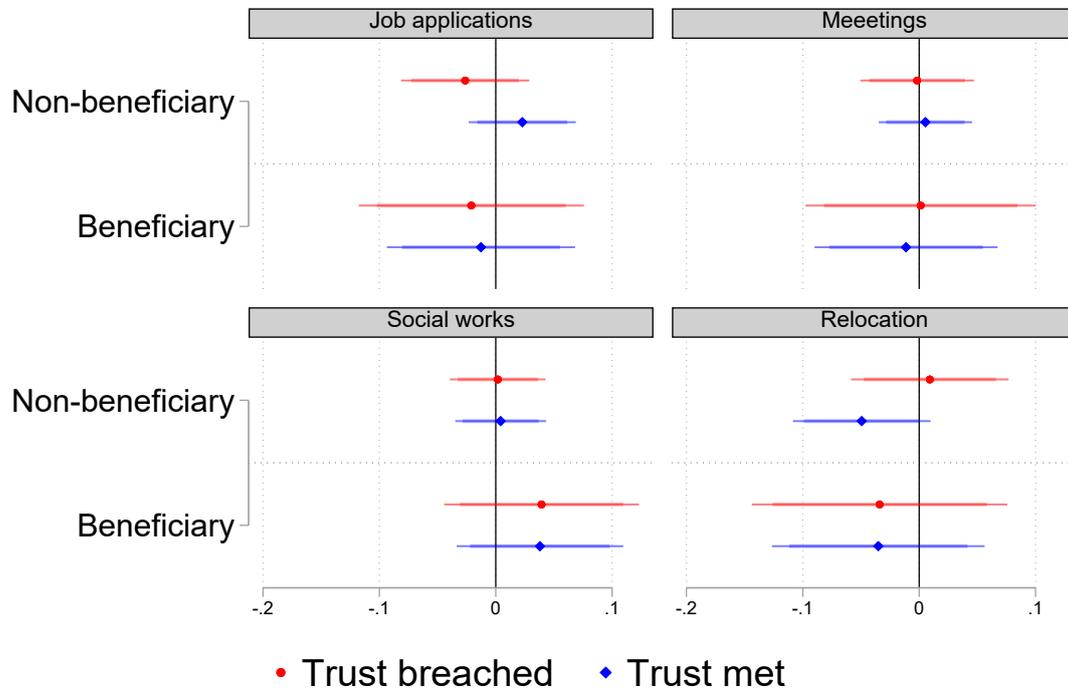
D.2 Beneficiary status

Figure D.6: Marginal treatment effect of treatment on attitudes towards benefit universalism



Note: Bandwidths indicate 90% and 95% confidence intervals.

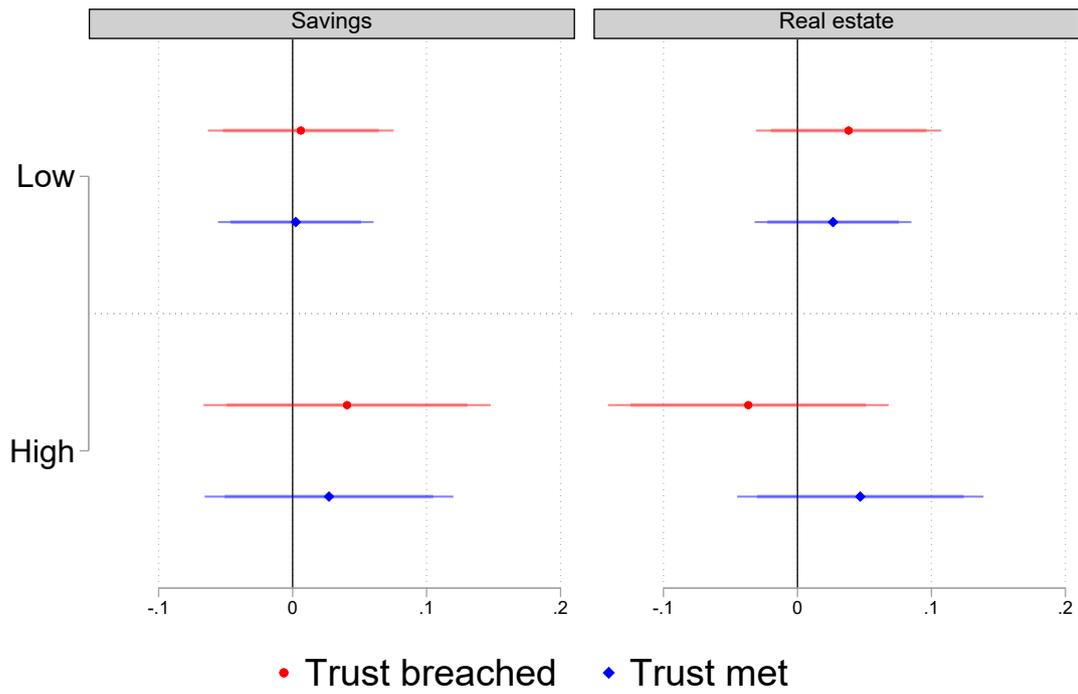
Figure D.7: Marginal treatment effect of treatment on attitudes towards benefit conditionality



Note: Bandwidths indicate 90% and 95% confidence intervals.

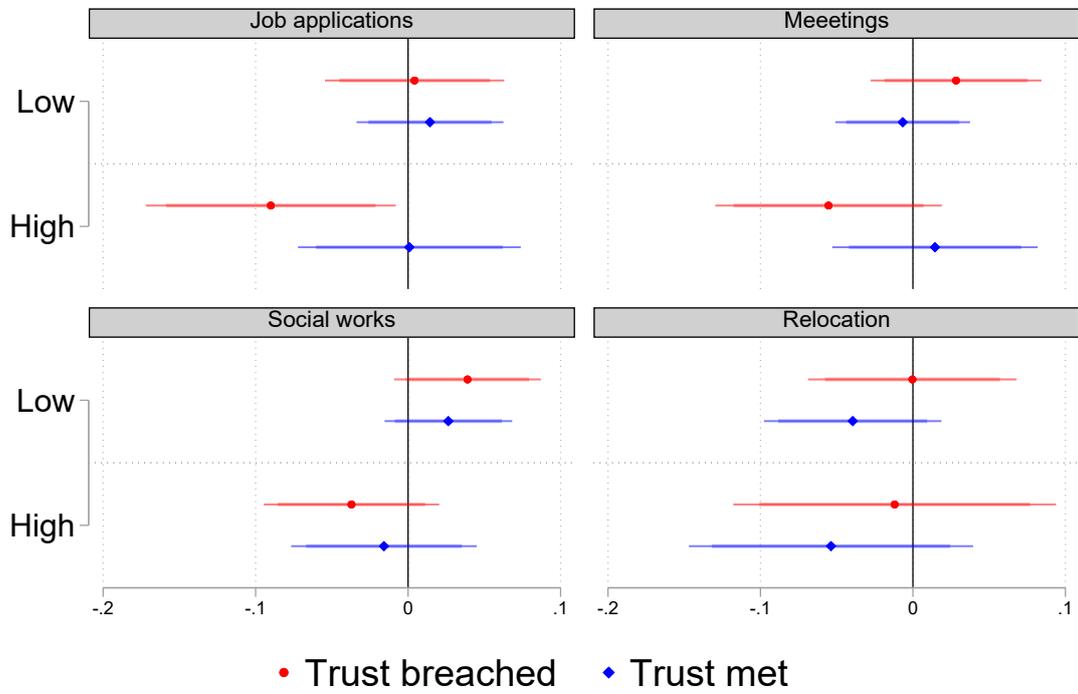
D.3 COVID-19 knowledge

Figure D.8: Marginal treatment effect of treatment on attitudes towards benefit universalism



Note: Bandwidths indicate 90% and 95% confidence intervals.

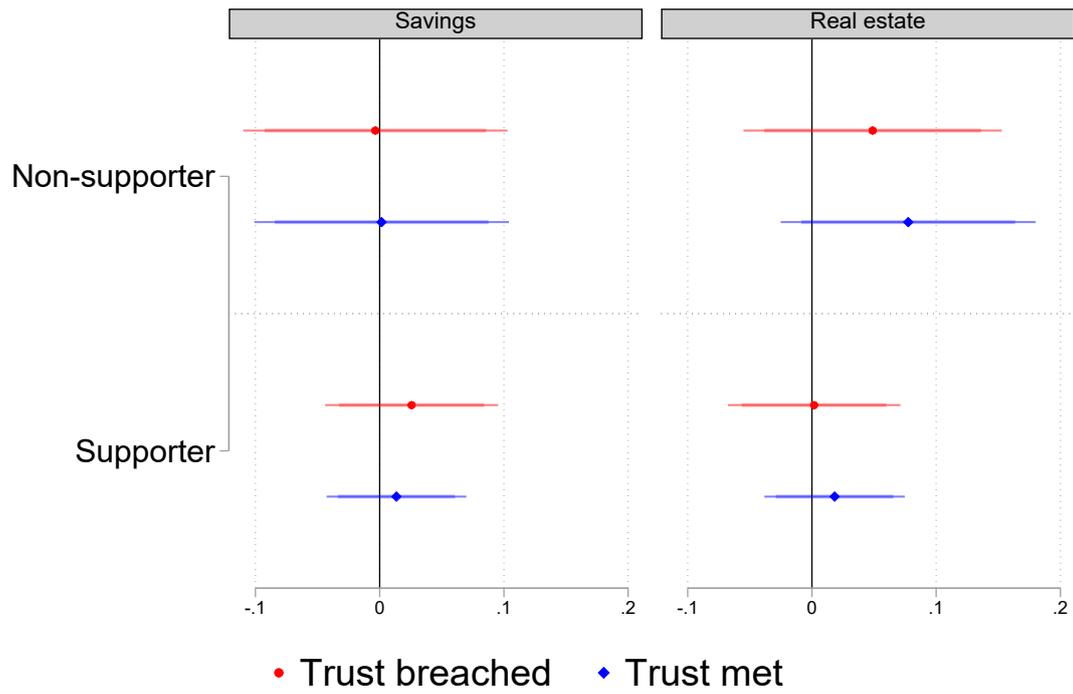
Figure D.9: Marginal treatment effect of treatment on attitudes towards benefit conditionality



Note: Bandwidths indicate 90% and 95% confidence intervals.

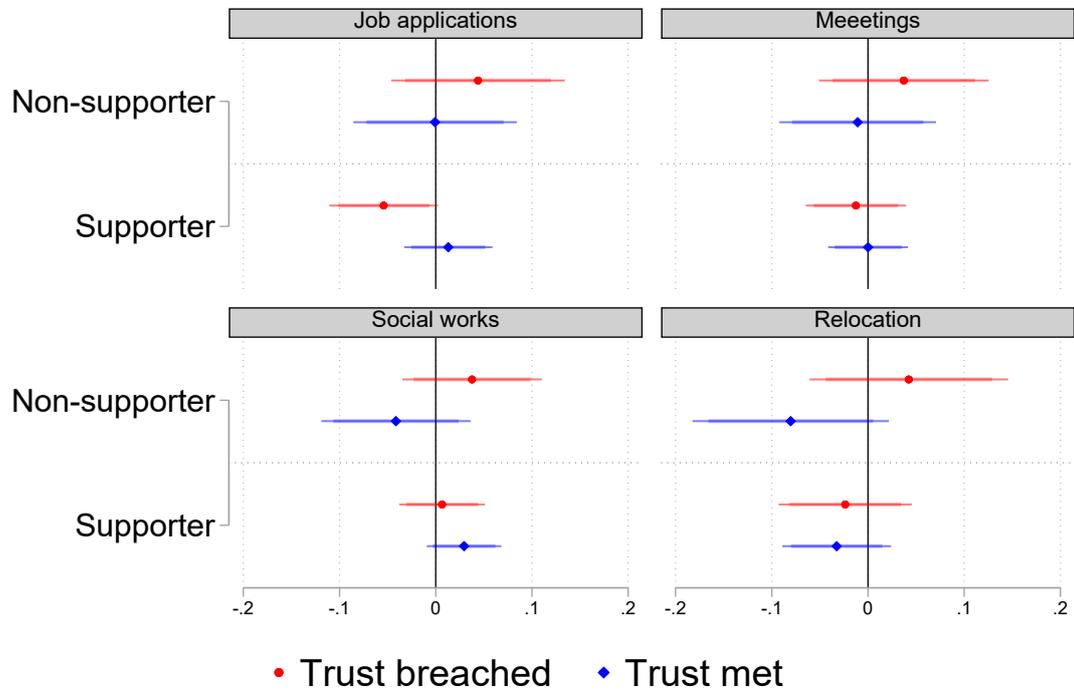
D.4 Lockdown support

Figure D.10: Marginal treatment effect of treatment on attitudes towards benefit universalism



Note: Bandwidths indicate 90% and 95% confidence intervals.

Figure D.11: Marginal treatment effect of treatment on attitudes towards benefit conditionality



Note: Bandwidths indicate 90% and 95% confidence intervals.