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Abstract

In Western democracies, recent decades have seen a transformation of the relationship between citizens and their representatives towards greater accountability, transparency, and anti-corruption efforts. However, such developments are sometimes suspected of paradoxically fueling populism and diminishing political trust. We investigate the extent to which a new public institution tasked with monitoring the integrity of elected officials is likely to attract popular support and restore citizens' trust in democracy. We focus on France and its main anti-corruption agency, the High Authority for the Transparency of Public Life (HATVP), set up in 2013. We run a survey among 3,000 representative citizens and 33 experts, and augment it with an experimental treatment where we randomly provide simple, concise information on the HATVP's activity and track record. Our results first show a large divergence between the opinions of the average citizen and the more optimistic views of experts about the state and dynamics of political integrity in France. Second, we find that citizens have heterogeneous beliefs and that those most distrustful of politicians are not only more likely to vote for populist candidates or abstain, but are also the least informed about the anti-corruption agency. Third, our information provision experiment has meaningful, positive impacts on citizens' perceptions of the HATVP, political transparency, and representative democracy. We show that some of the greatest impacts are found among initially distrustful and poorly informed citizens, underscoring the potential for communication and information to change the political perceptions and attitudes of disillusioned citizens.

Keywords: integrity; corruption; political trust; populism; survey experiment

JEL codes: C99; D72; M48; P37

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, most democracies have experienced a shift in the relationship between citizens and their elected officials. Democratic regimes have gradually moved away from traditional representative democracy, where citizens select public officials through elections to represent their interests while in office, to a more demanding relationship of tighter control and increased political accountability (Rosanvallon, 2008). Benefiting from easier access to information and more channels to voice their demands, citizens can now better observe the characteristics and daily behavior of their elected officials, and use this information to exert both greater scrutiny and increased influence over their actions (e.g., activism, lobbying, recall procedures, etc.). These developments also allow citizens to select and discipline their representatives to act with integrity, which is a key demand among voters.[2] In France for instance, 40% of citizens declare that the trait they value most among elected officials is their honesty, almost double the percentage for competency or promise-keeping (Cevipof, 2020). Individual characteristics like integrity have also probably become prominent criteria among voters in reaction to both globalization (Hellwig and Samuels, 2007)—which has imposed new constraints on government policies and reduced accountability for economic outcomes—and ideological convergence among mainstream parties (Fieschi and Heywood, 2004).

Accountability often operates directly between voters and representatives, as formalized by classical principal–agent models (Besley, 2006). But it also operates indirectly by delegating the supervision of elected officials to specialized third-party institutions, such as the media, the legal system, non-governmental organizations,[3] and anti-corruption agencies. Prominent examples of such public agencies set up recently include the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) in the United Kingdom and the High Authority for the Transparency of Public Life (HATVP in French) in France.[4] In the presence of costly and asymmetric information, such institutions serve as a delegation mechanism to produce information for imperfectly informed citizens (the principal) to help them better select and control public officials (the agents). For example, anti-corruption agencies typically collect and publish data on politicians' activities and financial interests, thus enabling voters to learn about their "type" in terms of integrity or competence (reducing adverse selection) and to track their activity and enforce accountability (reducing moral hazard).

Alongside these growing demands for accountability from citizens, many Western democracies are also experiencing a process of "democratic deconsolidation" undermining

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[2] Although partisanship can moderate citizens' preferences for non-corrupt politicians (Eggers, 2014).

[3] An increasing number of NGOs worldwide track lobbying and moonlighting among ministers, EU commissioners, or parliamentarians (like Transparency International), and ever more web platforms track parliamentary activity or public procurement, etc.

[4] The Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) was created in 2009 after the famous "expenses scandal" in the British Parliament. The High Authority for the Transparency of Public Life (HATVP) in France was set up in 2013 after the Cahuzac scandal.

some of the foundations of liberal democracy. According to Mounk (2018), this process is fostered by rising inequalities, the end of the monopoly on information, and a diversification of the population. These changes are accompanied by rises in populism, political distrust, "tabloidization" of the media, and greater public sensitivity to political scandals (Fieschi and Heywood, 2004; Nieuwenburg, 2007). Many explanations for populism have been offered, from the role of economic disruptions following 21st century globalization and the Great Recession (Rodrik, 2018, 2021; Guriev and Papaioannou, 2022), to a cultural "counter-revolution" (Ignazi, 1992; Inglehart and Norris, 2016), and a crisis of trust at both the institutional (Algan et al., 2017) and interpersonal (Algan et al., 2019) levels. A key aspect of populist attitudes is citizens' distrust of high-ranking politicians who are predominantly perceived as self-interested, untrustworthy, or corrupt, to a far higher degree than local officials (François and Méon, 2021). As an example, more than 50% of U.S. citizens have declared every year since 2010 that they have very little to no confidence in the U.S. Congress, up from about 20% in the early 2000s.[5] Similarly "between Lyndon Johnson in 1964 and Barack Obama in 2012, the percentage of people who felt the government was being run for the benefit of all slumped from 64 to 19 percent" (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018, 123). In the UK, trust in Parliament has not recovered since the 2009 parliamentary expenses scandal: less than 30% of British citizens express general trust in their MPs (Quilter-Pinner et al., 2021). Similarly, in France, six to seven citizens out of ten do not trust their MP or MEP (Cheufra and Chanvril, 2019).

The so-called "integrity paradox" refers to this situation in which increased transparency obtained from the media, internet, and third-party institutions, although potentially effective at curbing corruption, can backlash by increasing the probability of detecting and publicly exposing wrongdoing, thereby making corruption more salient. Recent studies show that such scandals are socially damaging and contagious. In Italy, for example, Gulino and Mazera (2023) find that shoplifting from supermarkets increases immediately after coverage of political scandals in local newspapers. Scandals also reinforce citizens' disillusionment, distrust, and anti-system attitudes, i.e., exit and voice strategies (Hirschman, 1970). For instance, when exposed to local cases of political corruption in Italy, citizens are less likely to run for office, less likely to vote, and more likely to opt for populist parties (Giommoni, 2021). Foresta (2020) also shows on Italian data that the exposure of *local* corruption scandals increases the share of the *national* vote share for the *Lega Nord* populist party. In France, cities exposed to scandals of poor public management (toxic loans contracted by the municipality) see more populist candidates running in the next municipal elections, and greater vote shares for these candidates (Sartre and Daniele, 2022). In an influential study in Brazil, Ferraz and Finan (2008) also show that local corruption scandals detected through random audits are severely sanctioned by voters: mayors who are exposed as corrupt before

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the next election are 7 percentage points less likely to be reelected than those exposed after the election date. This effect is concentrated in areas with local media coverage.

In this paper, we take a slightly different approach by shifting the focus from electoral outcomes to public perceptions of anti-corruption institutions. Specifically we investigate whether third-party institutions providing transparency with respect to political corruption are able to revitalize citizens' trust in the political system. In other words, we ask whether these institutions can foster political trust and reduce the (actual or perceived) divide between citizens and political elites. To our knowledge, such questions have not been investigated empirically in the literature.

With the rise of political distrust and populist attitudes among the electorate, it is tempting to assume that such institutions designed by incumbent elites are unable to secure popular support and improve citizens' attitudes towards representative democracy. Empirically, Towfigh et al. (2016) show that citizens are less likely to accept the outcome of institutions and expert committees, relative to direct-democracy mechanisms, when the issue at stake is important to them. Thus, a crucial condition for such institutions to succeed is that they manage to build a good reputation in the eyes of the general public. Anti-corruption agencies should generate public confidence in their own integrity, competency, and effectiveness, especially when facing citizens who endorse a populist worldview of necessarily corrupt elites. In addition, citizens should be convinced that these third-party institutions share with them common conceptions of the "public interest" (Downs, 1957). But in a heterogenous and polarized electorate, such third-party institutions may also prove to be neutral for the effective functioning of democracy, especially if voters are disillusioned and do not pay attention, like the Hobbits famously portrayed by Brennan (2016). The activities of these institutions may even backfire if they are perceived as illegitimate or if transparency reveals more scandals, fueling resentment by citizens and so unleashing Brennan's Hooligans.[6]

To examine the extent to which a third-party institution in charge of monitoring the integrity of elected officials is likely to restore citizens' confidence in the democratic system, France provides an excellent case-study. The French multiparty system has recently experienced an unprecedented rise of anti-system or populist parties, on both right and left. Corruption scandals have been headline news in France in the last decade. A key case was the Cahuzac scandal in late 2012, when the Finance minister was accused and convicted of offshore tax fraud and money laundering. In the aftermath of that scandal, a public anti-corruption agency was established in France in 2013, the High Authority for the Transparency of Public Life (HATVP). The HATVP is now the main public institution for overseeing French politicians' integrity and enabling civil society scrutiny through open data.

To investigate French citizens' trust in the fight against political corruption, our method relies on a survey experiment conducted in late April 2021 among a large representative

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[6] Brennan depict hobbits as "mostly apathetic and ignorant about politics", lacking "strong, fixed opinions about most political issues" or having " no opinions at all"; while hooligans have "strong and largely fixed worldviews", "can present arguments for their belief" and "consume political information, although in a biased way" (2016, p. 4-5).

sample of citizens in France (N=3000). Our survey first collects respondents' perceptions of corruption as well as their knowledge and trust of the HATVP. We show that, overall, citizens are highly skeptical of the integrity of top politicians, they view corruption as a rising trend, and they place greater trust in the integrity of local elected officials (e.g., small-town mayors). However, perceptions of corruption differ widely in the population and reflect consistent dividing lines, as illustrated by a Multiple Correspondence Analysis. Importantly, perceptions on this topic strongly correlate with political attitudes and behavior (vote during 2017 presidential elections, interest in politics). The survey also shows that only 38% of citizens have heard of the HATVP although it was launched almost a decade ago, and most of them declare that they know little about it. Unsurprisingly citizens' trust in the HATVP is therefore limited. The responses of lay citizens contrast markedly with those of a panel of French experts in the field (N=33) who completed the same questionnaire, suggesting that information matters.

In the next phase of the survey experiment, we therefore randomly provide half of participants with more information about the HATVP's activities and its judicial record since it was set up in 2013. We then estimate how providing simple, concise, and factual information about this anti-corruption institution affects citizens' perceptions of the HATVP's usefulness, effectiveness, and legitimacy. We find that the provision of information has large positive effects on citizens' perceptions of the usefulness and effectiveness of the HATVP. Treated individuals are about 10 percentage points more likely to declare the HATVP plays a beneficial role in making the private interests of elected officials more transparent and in promoting their integrity. However, some of the treatment effects are heterogeneous in the population. Overall the largest beneficial effects of information provision are found among citizens who were *ex-ante* the most pessimistic about politicians' integrity—i.e., those who think that political corruption is pervasive and increasing in France. Interestingly we also observe that the experimental treatment does not affect the perceived legitimacy of the HATVP in sanctioning misbehaving politicians, relative to the justice system or to voters.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides a presentation of the institutional setting in France. Section 3 describes the methodology of both the survey and the experiment. Section 4 provides descriptive results regarding citizens' prior beliefs about corruption and the HATVP as well as a comparison with experts' opinions. Section 5 sets out the results of our information provision experiment, reporting on average treatment effects as well as heterogeneity in the population. Section 6 briefly discusses the implications of our results for public policy and for normative theories of democracy.

2. Institutional setting

Corruption of political elites, whether actual or perceived, is a salient issue in most political systems, despite institutional differences. Symptomatically, during the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, candidate Trump called his democratic opponent "Hillary the Crook" and campaigned to "drain the swamp" of Washington politics. The tendency toward politicization

of corruption, which is not the prerogative of populist parties (Engler, 2020), has proven effective in Europe in the last decade (Bågenholm and Charron, 2014). Anti-corruption programs are also a preferred strategy of populist parties in post-Soviet countries (Hoppe, 2022). Such a process of politicization is facilitated by the revelation of worldwide scandals: as an example, more than a hundred politicians, from 50 countries across all continents, were caught up in the Panama papers scandal. However, some contexts are more interesting to study than others because of their historical specificities, recent trends, and new institutional arrangements. We argue, for three main reasons, that France provides an excellent setting for studying citizens' attitudes towards public integrity and for inquiring into how information shapes political beliefs.

First, the French multiparty system has experienced a gradual rise in both right-wing (*Le Rassemblement National*, among others[7]) and left-wing (*La France Insoumise*) anti-system or populist parties. They won more than 50% of the votes cast in the first round of the 2022 presidential election, up from an already large 40% vote share in 2017. These parties are characterized by their repudiation of incumbent political elites, a desire for strong leadership, and a greater readiness to resort to direct democracy (e.g., referendums, citizen assemblies) or even to usher in a new Constitution. In addition, the anti-elite and anti-establishment rhetoric was used by the traditional right-wing party (*Les Républicains*) as well as by Macron's centrist campaign as he won the presidency in 2017 (Dijkstra et al., 2020).[8] As a consequence, a massive wave of Macron-sponsored candidates with no previous political experience were elected as MPs in 2017, entered Government, and pushed many incumbents out of office. This led to a historical turnover of 72% in the National Assembly.

Second, France has witnessed several major political scandals in recent years, leading to the fall of the poll-leading right-wing candidate for the 2017 presidential election (François Fillon), the resignation of several Ministers (Jérôme Cahuzac, Jean-Paul Delevoye, Alain Griset, etc.), and the conviction and incarceration of other high-profile politicians (MP Patrick Balkany, etc.). Even the former French President Nicolas Sarkozy was convicted in 2021 for illegal financing of his 2012 electoral campaign. Hence, high-profile politicians' corruption and lack of integrity, which are core elements of the populist ideology,[9] have remained in the news headlines in France in the last decade. As a paradigmatic example, Cahuzac was none other than a Finance minister accused and then convicted of offshore tax fraud and money laundering in 2012.

Third, French political institutions have changed markedly since 2012 in the aftermath of the Cahuzac scandal. Many new rules emerged to prohibit suspect behavior (e.g., employing family members as parliamentary assistants or directing subsidies as MPs). More resources were granted to enhance controls (e.g., regarding office expenses at the National

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[7] In addition to the "Rassemblement National" of Marine Le Pen (originally the "Front National"), several other populist right-wing parties are or have been popular ("Reconquête" of Eric Zemmour, "Debout la France" of Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, etc.).

[8] Macron's party, *La République en Marche*, was created in 2017 and initially scored as high as the Hungarian party Fidesz on "anti-elite and anti-establishment rhetoric" rankings (Dijkstra et al., 2020, 743).

[9] On this matter, see Muller (2016), Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017), and Urbinati (2019).

Assembly). Most importantly, a new third-party institution was launched in 2013, the High Authority for the Transparency of Public Life (HATVP), to "promote integrity and exemplarity among public officials." The HATVP now employs 65 agents and has a budget of €7.9 million. The institution oversees more than 15,000 public officials, from the President to city mayors. This independent anti-corruption authority is notably in charge of collecting elected officials' declarations of interests, activities, and wealth, both as they enter and as they leave office. These declarations are mandatory and increasingly stringent for high-profile national politicians (members of the government, parliamentarians, etc.). The agency reviews and publishes these declarations online as open data so they are easily accessible to citizens, NGOs, and journalists. Through these controls, the HATVP acts as a "watchdog agency" (Bautista-Beauchesne, 2021) and transfers suspicious cases to the legal system (total of 130 cases from 2013 to 2022). Many of these cases are then prosecuted by the newly-created National Finance Prosecutor's Office, serving as a "guard-dog agency", and eventually lead to convictions.

In order to fight corruption and conflicts of interest, the HATVP is also in charge of controlling movements between the public and private sectors for top officials and their staff (e.g., ex-members of ministerial cabinets recruited by private companies),[10] and it keeps a public record of lobbying activities to track potential interferences with policymaking. In addition to the creation of the HATVP, a 2017 law "for trust in political life" established new rules on ineligibility penalties to further prevent conflicts of interests. The Council of Ministers declared on that occasion that "transparency towards citizens, the probity of elected officials, and the exemplarity of their behavior are fundamental democratic requirements. They contribute to strengthening the bond between citizens and their representatives, as well as the foundations of the social contract,"[11] which has been destabilized as evidenced by a growing political distrust throughout Western democracies.

Studying whether the HATVP, as a third-party institution designed to grant transparency against political corruption, is able to revitalize citizens' trust in the political system also appears particularly interesting regarding recent polls on political issues in France. While in 2014, 77% of citizens thought that elected officials were corrupt, this fraction was down to 65% in 2021 (Cevipof, 2021). Some 40% consider that honesty is the main characteristic they value among elected officials, far exceeding competency or representativeness (Cevipof, 2020).

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[10] For instance, in April 2022, the HATVP pointed out the "substantial ethical risks" in former Minister of Transport and Ecology Jean-Baptiste Djebbari's plan to become executive vice-president of the space division of the leading company of the CMA-CGM group, a French shipping concern.

[11] https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000035567974/

3. Design of the survey experiment

3. 1. General methodology

We proceed with a survey experiment conducted on a representative sample of 3,000 citizens in France. The survey was run online in late April 2021 and is representative of the French metropolitan population in terms of gender, age, socio-professional category, region, and city size.[12] Simultaneously, we ran the same online survey among a multidisciplinary group of 33 French scholars[13] who specialize in political integrity and are all members of the main think-tank on the topic in France (*The Observatory of Public Ethics*[14]). The two samples are referred to as "citizens" (N=3,000) and "experts" (N=33).

Our questionnaire mixes traditional survey questions (Part 1) and an experimental design with a randomized provision of information for half of the sample (Part 2). The full transcript of the questionnaire is available in Web Appendix 1. The order of answers was randomized across respondents wherever appropriate to reduce ordering effects.

First, we gather basic socio-demographic information (gender, age, socio-professional category, zip code) and we measure respondents' attitudes to and beliefs about politics in France, in particular on the importance they attach to elected officials' integrity (Q1), the perceived frequency of dishonest behavior at four tiers of political power, from mayoral (Q2-1) to presidential (Q2-4), the current state and recent trend in MPs' integrity (Q3 and Q4), as well as the effectiveness of the current resources for fighting political corruption in France (Q5). We use these first questions (Q1–Q5) to build a score of political distrust (see below). Then, we ask respondents whether they have ever heard of the High Authority for the Transparency of Public Life (HATVP) and if so how much they know about it (Q6 and Q6B). After a brief explanation of the HATVP's role to all respondents,[15] we ask about their level of trust in the HATVP (Q7).

The second part of the survey involves an information provision experiment.

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[12] Besides representativity on socio-demographics, one might still be concerned by endogenous self-selection of respondents based on the topic of the questionnaire. However, we can safely exclude this possibility for two reasons: first, respondents do not know anything about the questionnaire (except for its length) before clicking to open it; second, fewer than 60 individuals (2%) dropped out and did not complete the survey after opening it (usually very early on).

[13] From a pool of 75 scholars contacted (response rate of 44%). Unfortunately we lack individual information to test for self-selection of respondents among the group of experts.

[14] The Observatory of Public Ethics is a non-partisan think-tank made up of academics and Members of Parliament interested in political integrity. According to its website, the Observatory "aims to contribute to the progress of transparency and deontology, both in the field of scientific knowledge and in the field of political practices." https://www.observatoireethiquepublique.com/

[15] Question 7 is preceded by this paragraph: "*The HATVP is an institution whose mission is to ensure transparency of elected officials' interests in France, notably members of the National Assembly and senators. It collects and controls their declarations of interests, activities, and wealth to prevent any conflict of interest or unjustified personal enrichment while in office.*"

3. 2. The survey experiment (Part 2)

The second part corresponds to an information provision experiment in order to assess the role of information regarding anti-corruption institutions on the attitudes and opinions expressed by citizens. Following the guidelines of Haaland et al. (2023), the experiment is conducted only after we have measured respondents' core political beliefs and their pre-treatment knowledge of the HATVP[16] (Part 1).

The experimental treatment consists in randomly displaying one extra paragraph to half of the sample after Question 7 (the other half does not see any text). The two random groups, called "Treatment" and "Control", have identical sociodemographic characteristics by design and are also balanced in terms of their answers to pre-treatment questions from Part 1 of the survey.[17] By providing information about the anti-corruption institution exogenously to some respondents (N=1,500) but not to others (N=1,500), we can estimate the impact of such information on respondents' perceptions and attitudes. The informative paragraph reads as follows:

"The HATVP was launched in 2013 after the Cahuzac scandal (former minister convicted of tax fraud). Since then, this independent institution has detected and enabled the prosecution of more than 70 cases relating to the integrity of French public officials, such as MP Patrick Balkany, former ministers Thomas Thevenoud and Jean-Paul Delevoye, or current minister Alain Griset."

This additional text mentions several major scandals in France from 2013 to 2020 (tax evasion, conflict of interests, extortion). The cases refer to ex-Ministers or MPs from various political parties (left, center, right) in order to reduce respondents' partisan rationalization aimed at avoiding cognitive dissonance (Achen and Bartels, 2017, 269). In each of these cases, the HATVP played a key role in detecting wrongdoing (or enabling others to detect it), exposing the cases to the public, and sending them to court.

Our experiment first seeks to determine whether providing basic factual information about the judicial record of the HATVP on actual cases of corruption (or lack of integrity) can change citizens' perceptions of political corruption and representative democracy. This type of experiment is particularly relevant in our context where this institution is little known to the public. Indeed, only 38% of respondents in our survey had already heard of the HATVP (Q6), and only 9% said they knew it "well" or "very well".

After the experimental treatment, the survey continues with questions about our outcomes of interest. They relate to citizens' perceptions of the usefulness of the HATVP for improving political transparency and integrity (Q8-1 and Q8-2), increasing people's trust in elected officials and democracy (Q8-3 and Q8-4), the HATVP's capacity to deter and punish wrongdoing (Q9-1 and Q9-2) and to publicly disclose relevant information to make public

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[16] "Eliciting prior beliefs is, therefore, necessary to make a directional prediction about how different groups should update their beliefs and change their behavior in response to the information" (Haaland et al., 2023).

[17] Randomization was stratified by gender, age, socio-professional category, region, and city size, to be sure that the treatment and control groups are homogeneous on all observable characteristics. As expected, our statistical tests show no evidence of significant differences in terms of pre-treatment questions, e.g., perceived frequency of unethical behavior and knowledge of the HATVP.

officials accountable (Q9-3).[18] The next post-treatment questions measure the perceived legitimacy of the HATVP, as opposed to courts or voters, to sanction dishonest politicians (Q10), how respondents would react to a new hypothetical scandal revealed by the HATVP (Q11), and whether their sensitivity to political integrity has changed over the last decade (Q12).

The final set of questions records respondents' level of interest in politics (Q13), their vote in the 2017 Presidential election (Q14), and their current party affinity as of April 2021 (Q15). We do not expect any effect of our experiment on this final set of questions and indeed find no significant treatment effect, which serves as a form of placebo test.

Figure 1 summarizes the timeline of our survey experiment.

Figure 1. Timeline of the survey experiment
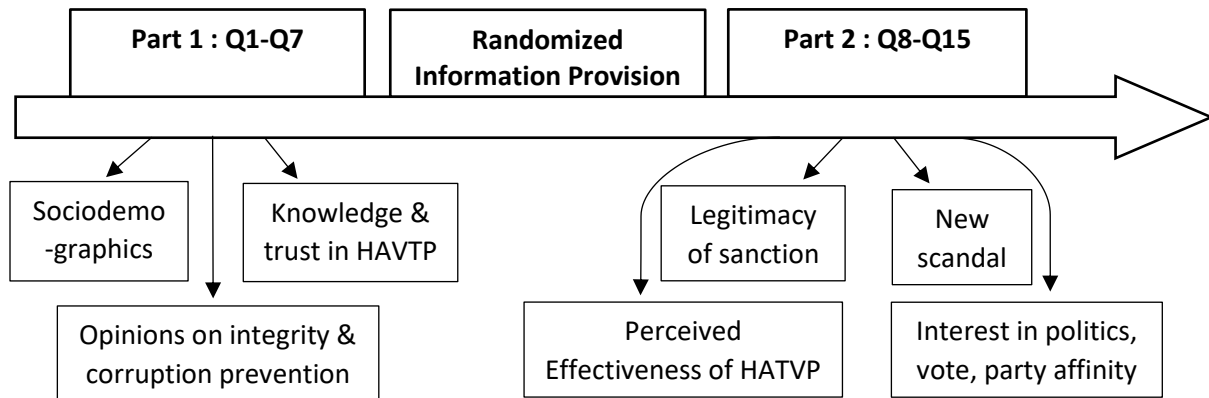
In addition to exploring the effect of information provision on our outcome variables of interest, the large sample of our survey experiment also allows us to investigate whether individual reactions to information are heterogeneous across groups of citizens, notably according to their predetermined degree of political distrust. We may expect the same information to affect citizens differently with or without populist attitudes, or between left-wing and right-wing voters. Similarly, simple Bayesian updating predicts that the magnitude of citizens' changes in beliefs should vary according to their prior level of knowledge: well-informed citizens, and *a fortiori* experts, may well not react to our treatment as they learn little, whereas uninformed respondents should react the most—unless they somehow "resist" our treatment.[19] Using our pre-treatment questions, we test for such heterogeneous effects using a Conditional Average Treatment Effect (CATE) algorithm and find some evidence of treatment effect heterogeneity.

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[18] Following Haaland et al. (2023), we decided not to ask the same question about respondents' trust in the HATVP (or any other question) before and after the experimental treatment so as to avoid demand effects.

[19] For example, some citizens may not react to our experimental manipulation if they do not trust the information we provide, or if they ignore it to preserve their prior beliefs (a case of motivated reasoning).

4. What do citizens and experts think of corruption and the HATVP?

In this section, we present the main descriptive results of our survey focusing on the pre-treatment questions (Part 1) measuring perceptions of corruption and knowledge of the HATVP among citizens (N=3000) and experts (N=33). The distributions of answers in the two samples appear in Table 1. We then turn to Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) to capture the key features of heterogeneity among citizens.

4. 1. Survey answers among citizens and experts (Part 1)

First, it is noteworthy that almost 90% of citizens and 100% of experts declare that political integrity is an important topic for them as citizens. However, their perceptions of the current situation in France are very contrasted and often significantly different according to chi-squared tests (final column of Table 1).

On the one hand, citizens have rather optimistic views about the frequency of unethical behavior by small-town mayors but conversely think that lack of integrity is pervasive at higher levels of government (e.g., very frequent among Members of Parliament for 39% of them). This is consistent with earlier work by François and Méon (2021). On the other hand, experts view unethical behavior as quite rare at all levels of government (only about 10% choose the "very frequent" option).

Therefore the overall assessment by citizens and experts of the current state and recent trends in political integrity are extremely polarized: 94% of experts view the trend in the last 10 years as positive (improved integrity), compared to only one in four citizens. Some 60% of citizens even state that the situation has deteriorated over time.

The relative pessimism of citizens compared to experts also appears in terms of knowledge of and trust in the HATVP. Only 9% of citizens have good knowledge of the main anti-corruption agency while 62% have never heard of it. As expected, all the experts surveyed know the HATVP, either well or very well for most of them. While 90% of experts express trust in the HATVP to accomplish its mission ("very high" or "high"), only 35% of citizens do. It should be noted, however, that 17% of citizens expressed no opinion pre-treatment regarding trust. This non-response rate is much larger than for previous questions, suggesting that many citizens feel they are too ill-informed to make hard and fast judgments about the French anti-corruption agency. Accordingly these results support the relevance of running an information provision experiment in Part 2 of the survey.

4. 2. Multiple Correspondence Analysis: affirmativeness and political distrust

In order to better grasp the heterogeneity of pre-treatment beliefs across citizens, we run a Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) on questions 1 to 5 (for a total of eight questions when considering the four versions of Q2). MCA allows us to reduce dimensionality

Table 1. Answers to the survey (Part 1) by citizens and experts

| Questions	Distribution of answers given by citizens (bold) and by experts (italics)					p-value
1. Importance of political integrity as a citizen	<u>Very important</u>	<u>Fairly important</u>	<u>Fairly unimportant</u>	<u>Not at all important</u>	<u>Don't know</u> **5.5%**	0.137
	64.4%	**24.4%**	**4.1%**	**1.6%**	*0.0%*	
	84.9%	*15.2%*	*0.0%*	*0.0%*		
2. Frequency of unethical behavior among…	<u>Very frequent</u>	<u>Frequent</u>	<u>Infrequent</u>	<u>Rare</u>	<u>Don't know</u>	
- Small-town, rural mayors	**7.7%**	**24.0%**	**42.4%**	**16.9%**	**9.0%**	0.486
	12.1%	*27.3%*	*30.3%*	*24.2%*	*6.1%*	
- Big-city elected officials	**24.1%**	**48.1%**	**17.3%**	**3.0%**	**7.4%**	0.101
	9.1%	*54.6%*	*21.2%*	*9.1%*	*6.1%*	
- Members of Parliament	**39.4%**	**37.7%**	**12.3%**	**3.4%**	**7.1%**	0.000
	9.1%	*30.3%*	*48.5%*	*9.1%*	*3.0%*	
- Members of national government	**44.2%**	**30.5%**	**14.3%**	**4.4%**	**6.6%**	0.000
	9.1%	*33.3%*	*48.5%*	*6.1%*	*3.0%*	
3. Current situation of parliamentary integrity	<u>Very satisfactory</u> **1.3%**	<u>Satisfactory</u> **19.1%**	<u>Unsatisfactory</u>	<u>Very unsatisfactory</u>	<u>Don't know</u> **6.0%**	0.001
	3.0%	*45.5%*	**46.1%** *39.4%*	**27.5%** *6.1%*	*6.1%*	
4. Trend in last 10 years	<u>Very positive</u>	<u>Positive</u> **22.2%** *42.4%*	<u>Negative</u> **29.1%** *3.0%*	<u>Very negative</u> **31.5%**	<u>Don't know</u> **14.9%**	0.000
	2.3% *48.5%*			*0.0%*	*6.1%*	
5. Enough public efforts against corruption	<u>Yes certainly</u> **2.2%**	<u>Yes probably</u> **13.9%**	<u>Probably not</u> **40.7%**	<u>Certainly not</u> **38.2%**	<u>Don't know</u> **5.0%**	0.032
	6.1%	*30.3%*	*36.4%*	*24.2%*	*3.0%*	
6. Knowledge of HATVP	<u>Very good</u> **0.9%**	<u>Good</u> **8.4%**	<u>Poor</u> **28.9%**	<u>None</u> **55.7%**	<u>Don't know</u> **6.1%**	0.000
	27.3%	*54.5%*	*18.2%*	*0.0%*	*0.0%*	
7. Trust in HATVP	<u>Very high</u> **3.0%**	<u>High</u> **32.1%**	<u>Low</u> **35.8%**	<u>None</u> **12.2%**	<u>Don't know</u> **16.9%**	0.000
	35.5%	*54.8%*	*9.7%*	*0.0%*	*0.0%*	

Notes: the p-values in the final column are based on chi-squared tests of equal distributions between citizens (N=3000) and experts (N=33).

by summarizing the main differences across respondents into just two synthetic variables (or dimensions), which facilitates subgroup analyses.

The main results are reported with a coordinate plot (panel A of Figure 2). The first two dimensions of the MCA capture 76% of overall variance and represent two highly consistent attitudes toward political integrity and perceptions on the level of political corruption in

France. The first dimension (capturing 52% of the variance) reflects certainty/uncertainty on the part of respondents, contrasting those who provide substantive answers and those who prefer not to express firm and final opinions ("don't know" answers). We call this dimension the *affirmativeness score*. In panel A of Figure 2, we can clearly see that answers on the right correspond to affirmative choices while those on the left correspond to "don't know" answers.

Figure 2. Results from Multiple Correspondence Analysis for questions 1 to 5

(A) MCA coordinate plot

(B) MCA scores for citizens and experts
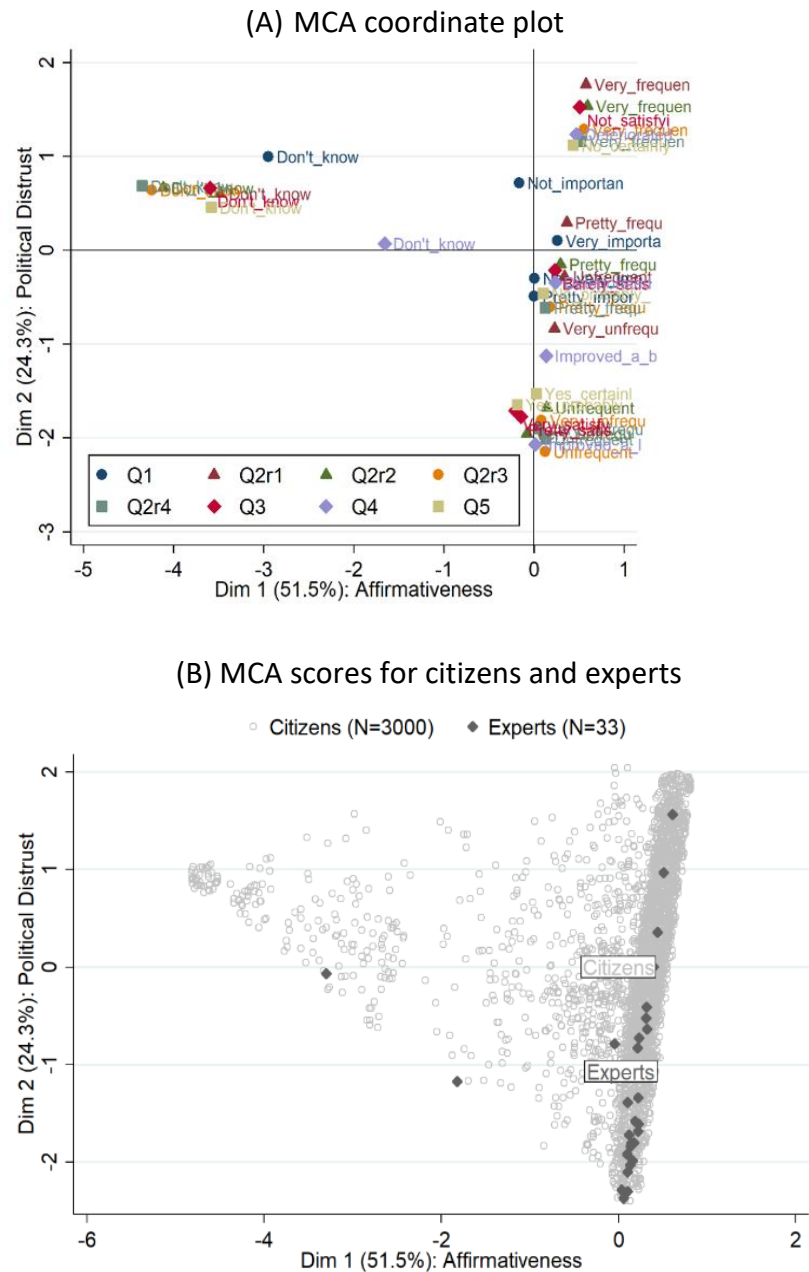
Notes: in panel A, each question appears with its own symbol and color to facilitate interpretation. In panel B, the coordinates of citizens are represented with circles and experts with diamonds. The boxes "Citizens" and "Experts" correspond to the average location of each group.

The second dimension (24%) captures optimistic/pessimistic views of the extent of perceived corruption across the different tiers of government, on the recent trend in

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corruption, and on the public efforts to reduce it. Answers located at the top correspond to pessimistic beliefs regarding corruption (high frequency of corruption, rising trend, etc.), whereas answers located at the bottom consistently correspond to optimistic views. We refer to this second dimension as the *score of political distrust* toward the current political institutions and elites.[20] As with any MCA, the two scores are uncorrelated and centered around 0 by design.

Using our MCA from the citizen sample, we compute the scores of affirmativeness and political distrust for our sample of experts (N=33). Panel B of Figure 2 shows the scatterplot of our 3,033 observations (circles), as well as the mean levels for citizens and experts (boxes). Experts do not differ from citizens in terms of expressing firm opinions or choosing "don't know" answers (t-test p-value = 0.875). However, experts score much lower in terms of political distrust with a mean score of -1.1 versus 0 among citizens (t-test p-value = 0.000). This large gap in perceptions between citizens and experts of more than one standard deviation is consistent with the stark differences observed in Table 1.

4.3. Political distrust, political attitudes, and voting behavior

The score for political distrust (dimension 2 of our MCA) correlates with a number of individual characteristics and political attitudes. First of all, it correlates significantly with a lack of knowledge of the HATVP. Figure 3 shows the average levels of political distrust (red) and affirmativeness (blue) depending on citizens' knowledge of the anti-corruption agency. Well-informed citizens score significantly lower on political distrust than those who know little about the HATVP (t-test p-value = 0.000). As expected, Figure 3 also shows that respondents who know about the HATVP are more affirmative on other questions as well.

Figure 3. Knowledge of the HATVP, affirmativeness, and political distrust

Notes: the scores of Affirmativeness and Political Distrust are obtained by MCA. N = 3000 citizens.

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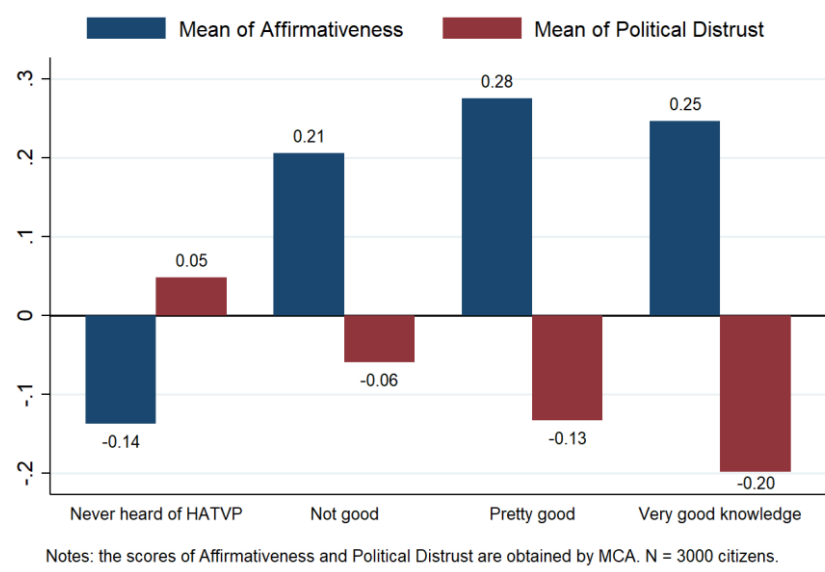
[20] This is the dominant meaning of "political trust" in the literature (Algan et al., 2017), even if the concept could also refer to trust in policy outcomes (Geurkink et al., 2020) rather than trust in political institutions.

Second, our score for political distrust is unsurprisingly highly correlated with trust in the HATVP to accomplish its mission. Citizens who are very trustful of the HATVP score very low on political distrust (average score of -0.90) whereas citizens who do not trust the agency at all have a very high score for political distrust (average score of 0.98).

Third, the score of political distrust also correlates with interest in politics. Citizens who declare no interest at all in politics have an average score of political distrust (0.36), which is significantly higher than citizens who show some interest in politics.

Finally, the score of political distrust is strongly correlated with voting behavior, as depicted in Figure 4. The average scores for political distrust are very high among citizens voting for far-right populist parties (Le Pen, Dupont-Aignan), among non-voters (abstention) and protest voters (blank/null vote), and to a lesser extent among radical-left voters (Mélenchon, Poutou). Conversely political distrust is much lower among voters of mainstream parties and candidates (Macron, Fillon, Hamon). These results align with prior research on the relationship between trust, whether political or interpersonal, and electoral behaviors such as populist voting (Algan et al., 2017, 2019; Levi and Stoker, 2000).

Figure 4. Scores for political distrust and vote in the 2017 presidential election
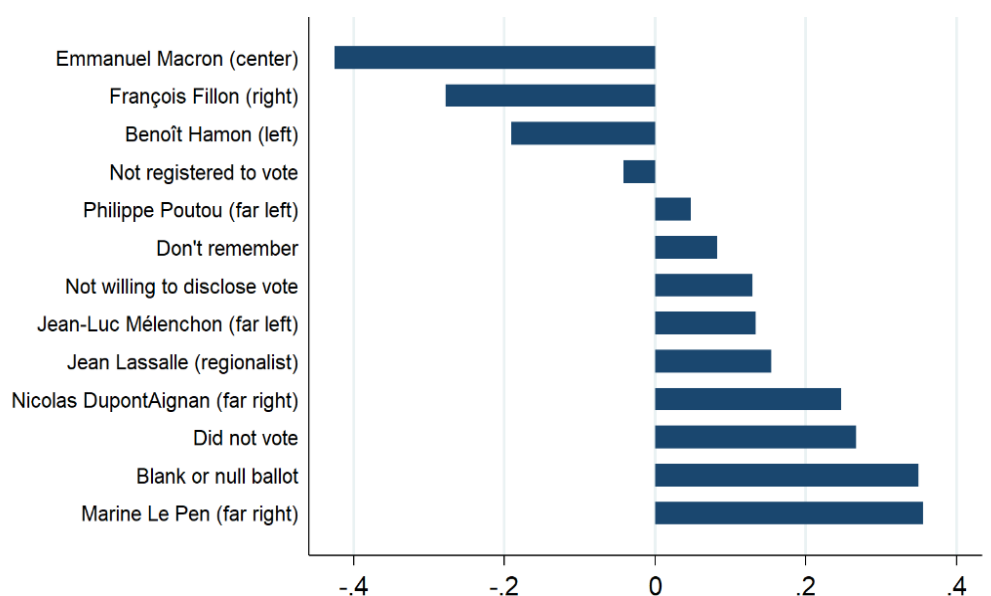
Notes: average scores from Dimension 2 of our MCA (24.3% of overall variance). Minor candidates (N<20 in the sample) are not represented (Arthaud, Asselineau and Cheminade).

In Appendix (Table A1), we use linear regressions to further study the determinants of political distrust. In addition to voting behavior, we include socio-demographic characteristics in our models. Such regressions confirm the strong correlations between political distrust and voting behavior while controlling for gender, age (squared), and socio-professional category (high, medium, or low). In particular, respondents who voted for Macron in 2017 (the centrist candidate who eventually won the presidential election) rank 0.5 units or standard deviations lower on our score of political distrust than those who chose not to disclose their vote (the reference category). Conversely, voters for Le Pen (far right) and those who abstained or voted

blank/null show large positive coefficients (about +0.3 unit), i.e., significantly more pessimistic views of politicians' integrity. Consequently there is a gap of almost 1 standard deviation in political distrust, conditional on gender, age, and socio-professional category, between centrist and far-right voters. This correlation is consistent with evidence from other countries (Akkerman et al., 2014).

However correlated, one should not amalgamate such a score of political distrust with populist attitudes (Castanho Silva et al., 2020; Marcos-Marne et al., 2022). Distrust and rebuttal of a "corrupt elite" is only one element of populist attitudes, along with other elements such as "the people-centeredness of populism, its antagonistic nature, or the general will" (Geurkink et al., 2020, 251). Finally our regressions also show that on average and everything held constant, women have significantly more pessimistic views about corruption than men[21] (higher score by 0.15 units or 0.15 standard deviations), and that political distrust is concave over age and peaks around 45 years old.

4.4. Perceptions of the HATVP by citizens and experts (Part 2)

In Table 2, we report the distribution of answers to questions 8 to 11 related to the role, effectiveness, and legitimacy of the HATVP. Since these questions are post-treatment outcomes, we focus on the citizens from the control group (N=1500) who did not receive any extra information on the record of the HATVP in order to compare the prior beliefs of lay citizens and experts.

Consistently with the differences observed in Part 1 of the survey, citizens and experts hold very different views about the usefulness and effectiveness of the HATVP in curbing unethical behavior by politicians. Only 31% of citizens agree that the HATVP allows greater transparency of elected officials' private interests, compared to 94% of experts. Three quarters of experts agree that the anti-corruption agency has a positive impact on the integrity and honesty of elected officials, compared to only 27% of citizens. Experts are also slightly more optimistic than citizens about the HATVP's capacity to improve trust in democracy (32% of experts agree compared to 24% of citizens) and trust in elected officials (33% versus 23%). We also find sizeable differences in the perceived effectiveness of the HATVP to detect and prevent unethical behavior by politicians. In terms of legitimacy to sanction, 62% of citizens and 85% of experts state that institutions such as the HATVP and the legal system should be able to sanction dishonest officials, including ineligibility sentences. Finally, if a new hypothetical scandal were to occur after HATVP checks, 45% of citizens would interpret it as evidence that the checks are effective (79% among experts), 32% as evidence that politicians are corrupt (15% among experts), while 21% would disregard it since checks are viewed as political (6% of experts).

These differences in perceptions between experts and lay citizens suggest that information plays a key role in assessing the usefulness and effectiveness of the HATVP. This interpretation is also consistent with the fact that a large fraction of citizens choose the "don't

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[21] On the differences between women and men regarding tolerance of corruption, see Guerra and Zhuravleva (2022).

know" option for these HATVP-specific questions. However, the large divide between citizens and experts that we measure may simply reflect composition effects or selection effects, in the sense that experts can differ on many characteristics and traits from lay citizens (educational level, political orientation, etc.), hence differences in information levels may not be the source of the divide. Therefore, we now turn to our information provision experiment conducted on the other half of citizens (N=1500), allowing us to test whether providing more information about the HATVP has a causal impact on citizens' beliefs and can shift their views closer to the more optimistic experts.

Table 2. Answers to the survey (Part 2) by citizens and experts

Questions	Distribution of answers given by citizens (bold) and by experts (italics)					p-value
8. Positive impact of HATVP on…	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	
- Transparency of officials' interests	**4.7%**	**26.7%**	**28.6%**	**16.2%**	**23.9%**	0.000
	30.3%	*63.6%*	*6.1%*	*0.0%*	*0.0%*	
- Integrity and honesty of elected officials	**3.4%**	**23.3%**	**31.7%**	**17.9%**	**23.7%**	0.000
	12.1%	*63.6%*	*24.2%*	*0.0%*	*0.0%*	
- Citizens' trust in elected officials	**3.0%**	**20.2%**	**34.7%**	**18.4%**	**23.7%**	0.043
	3.0%	*30.3%*	*51.5%*	*6.1%*	*9.1%*	
- Citizens' trust in democracy	**2.7%**	**21.0%**	**34.9%**	**17.5%**	**23.9%**	0.033
	9.1%	*24.2%*	*48.5%*	*9.1%*	*9.1%*	
9. HATVP can efficiently…	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	
- Detect and sanction dishonest behavior	**11.5%**	**30.6%**	*27.3%*	**11.5%**	**19.1%**	0.015
	3.0%	*48.5%*	*39.4%*	*6.1%*	*3.0%*	
- Prevent and deter dishonest behavior	**9.9%**	**32.2%**	**24.7%**	**11.8%**	**21.4%**	0.002
	12.1%	*63.6%*	*15.2%*	*6.1%*	*3.0%*	
- Make information public and accessible	**9.7%**	**33.7%**	**24.6%**	**10.9%**	**21.1%**	0.138
	12.1%	*51.5%*	*21.2%*	*9.1%*	*6.1%*	
10. Who should control and sanction lack of integrity	Institutions	Voters	Institutions should not deal with integrity		Don't know	
	61.7%	**20.0%**	**3.2%**		**15.1%**	0.056
	84.9%	*9.1%*	*0.0%*		*6.1%*	
11. Reaction to new scandal	Checks are effective	Officials are corrupt	None, checks are politicized **21.1%**		Don't know	
	45.0%	**32.1%**	*6.1%*		**1.8%**	0.002
	78.8%	*15.2%*			*0.0%*	

Notes: the p-values in the final column are based on chi-squared tests of equal distributions between citizens (N=1500) and experts (N=33).

5. Can mere information provision change attitudes?

In this section, we present the results of our information provision experiment where half of the citizens (N = 1500) received basic information about the judicial record of the HATVP since it was set up in 2013 (see subsection 3.2 for details) while the control group received none, thus being a pure control group (N = 1500).[22]

5.1. General results of the experiment

The treatment has positive and sizeable effects on citizens' perceptions of both the usefulness and the effectiveness of the HATVP (Figures 5 and 6). Overall, providing basic information about the HATVP and its record significantly shifts the distribution of answers among citizens (p-values of chi-square tests are equal to 0.001 or lower), towards significantly more favorable perceptions of the anti-corruption agency. On all outcomes, the fraction of "don't know" answers significantly diminishes, generally from about 24% to 17%, negative opinions stay constant or diminish slightly (although rarely significantly), and positive opinions increase significantly, usually by about 10 percentage points.

Such positive average treatment effects materialize for outcome variables related to the perceived usefulness of the HATVP to make private interests more transparent, promote integrity, or restore citizens' trust (Figure 5), as well as its effectiveness in detecting and deterring unethical behavior, and in making private interests more transparent for the general public (Figure 6).

However, the experimental treatment does not affect the perceived legitimacy of the anti-corruption agency to sanction corrupt politicians (question 10). A large majority of citizens declare that the HATVP and the legal system should be able to sanction offenders, including ineligibility sentences (65% in the treatment group and 62% in the control group). The distributions of answers are not significantly different between the two groups (chi-square test p-value of 0.255).

Interestingly the treatment tends to increase the fraction of citizens who would interpret a new scandal as evidence that politicians are corrupt (+ 4 points, from 32% to 36%). Conversely, the treatment reduces the probability of reacting to a new scandal by stating that the detection mechanisms are effective (- 4 points, from 45% to 41%). The distributions of answers to question 11 are statistically different between the two groups at the 10% threshold (chi-square test p-value of 0.081). This result points toward the existence of an integrity paradox: informing respondents of the current record of the HATVP in detecting and sanctioning dishonest behavior seems to induce more reprimanding reactions to new scandals. This may be because the HATVP's current record, although perceived rather positively by respondents, tends to make dishonest behavior by politicians more salient among respondents. Plus, the fact that a new scandal may still occur might provide further evidence that politicians deliberately serve their own interests and disregard moral or legal rules.

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[22] We do not report the treatment effects for experts because the sample is too small and all estimates are close to zero and insignificant, as expected for this sample of already well informed individuals.

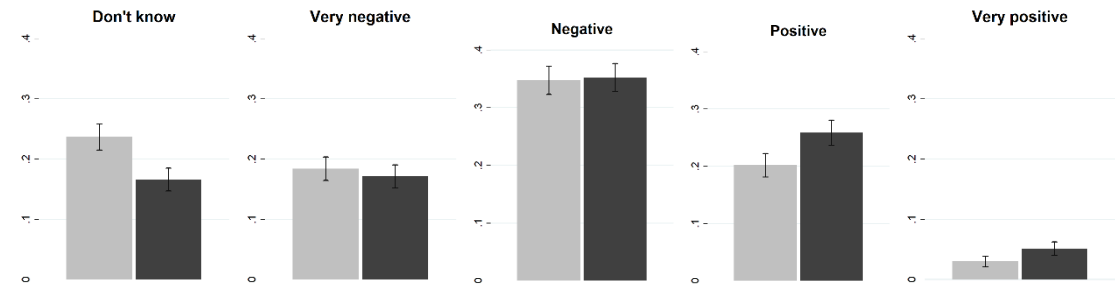## Figure 5. Perceptions of the HATVP's usefulness among the treatment (black) and control groups (grey)

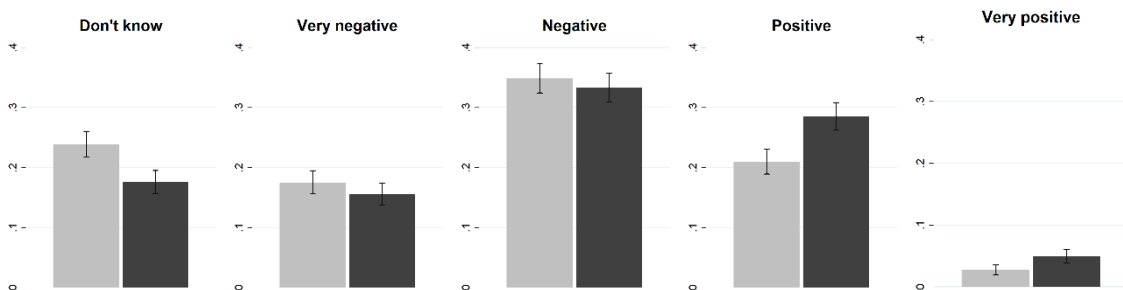### (A) Transparency of Representatives' Private Interests (Q8r1)
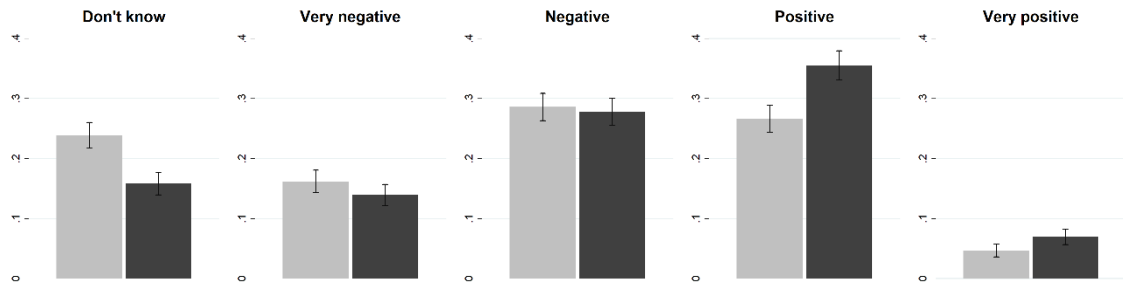
(B) Integrity and Honesty of Representatives (Q8r2)
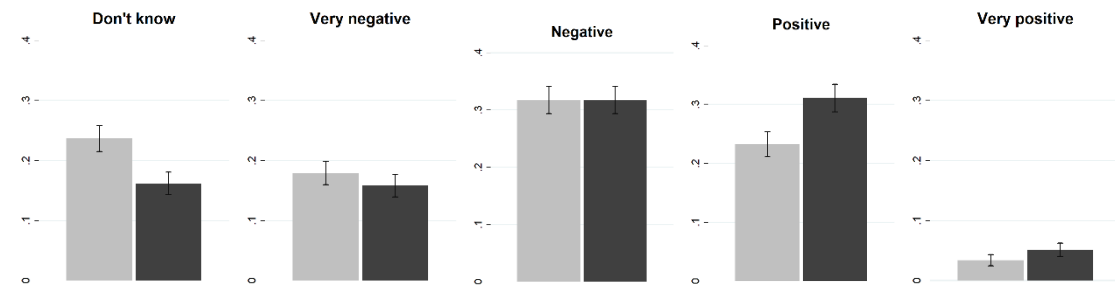
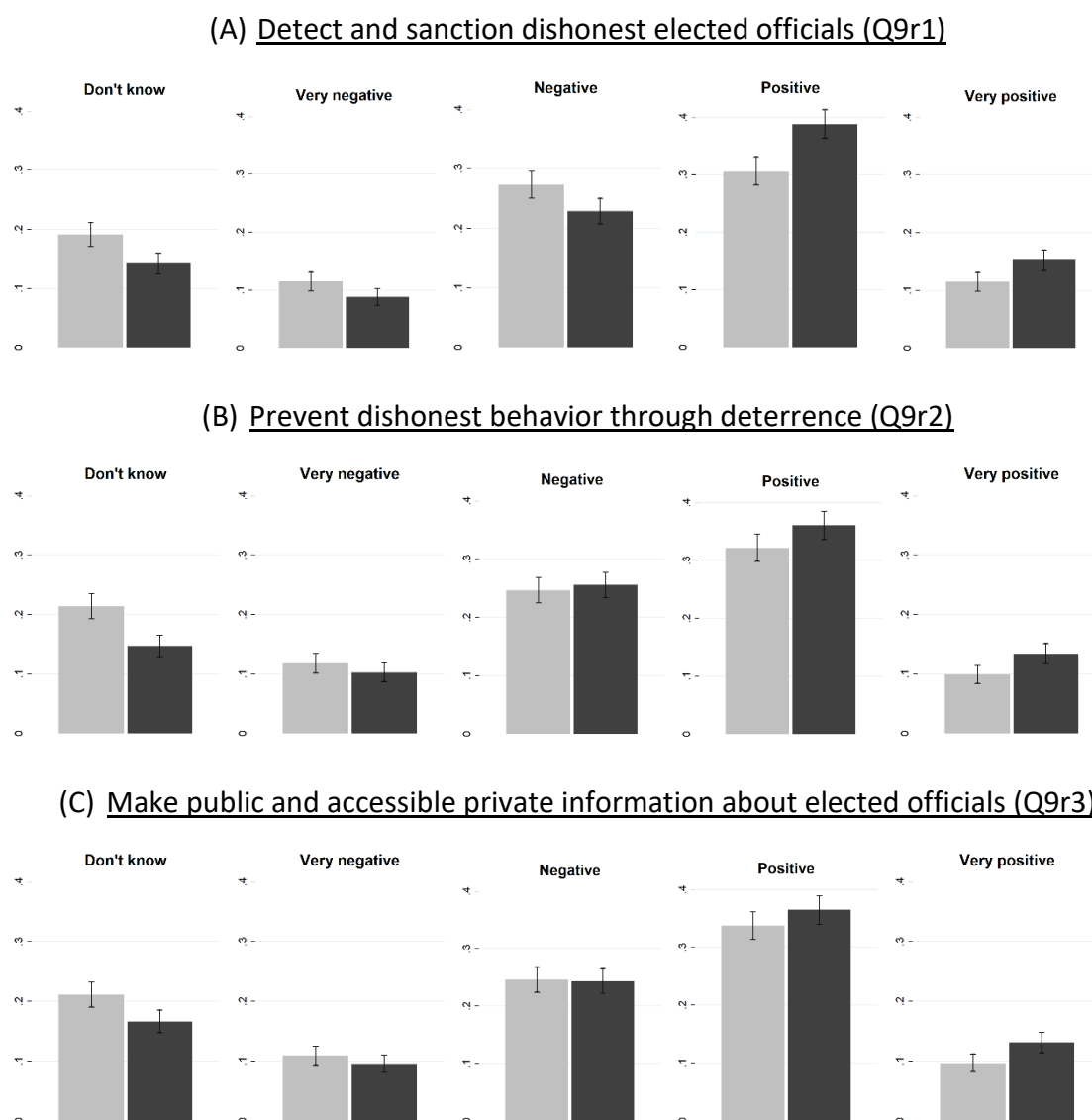### (C) Citizens' Trust in their Elected Officials (Q8r3)

(D) Citizens' Trust in Democracy (Q8r4)

Note: bars in grey (control) and black (treatment) represent fractions of answers among each group of size 1500. Confidence intervals at 95% are depicted.

Figure 6. Perceptions of the HATVP's effectiveness among the treatment (black) and control groups (grey)

(A) Detect and sanction dishonest elected officials (Q9r1)

(B) Prevent dishonest behavior through deterrence (Q9r2)

(C) Make public and accessible private information about elected officials (Q9r3)

Note: bars in grey (control) and black (treatment) represent fractions of answers among each group of size 1500. Confidence intervals at 95% are depicted.

In terms of robustness, all these results obtained by two-group comparisons are qualitatively similar when we regress linear models or multinomial logit models controlling for respondents' observable characteristics (socio-demographics, vote in the last presidential election, etc.). In addition, we can summarize all the outcome variables using MCA and estimate the treatment effect on the first two scores (the first one capturing affirmativeness again, the second one positive assessments of the HATVP): the average effect of providing information is large, significant and close to +0.2 standard deviations for both scores. Thus, the treatment strongly increases citizens' propensity to provide answers (instead of choosing "don't know") and citizens' positive assessments of the HATVP, bridging part of the gap with experts.

5.2 Heterogeneous effects by scores of political distrust and affirmativeness

As explained before, the large sample of our survey experiment allows us to investigate whether individual reactions to information are heterogeneous across groups of citizens, notably according to their predetermined degree of affirmativeness (score 1) and political distrust (score 2). We test for such heterogeneous effects using the Conditional Average Treatment Effect (CATE) algorithm of Lee et al. (2017) and report the main results in Figure 6.

Overall, we find that most of the positive effects of providing information on citizens' perceptions are broad-based and apply quite homogeneously to all citizens, whatever their initial level of affirmativeness or political distrust. In Figure 7, the CATE functions for the effect of the treatment on trust in democracy and in political elites appear quite flat with respect to political distrust (panels C and D). This homogeneity is noteworthy as we might have expected that distrustful citizens would neglect and disregard the information provided, compared to more trustful citizens. Our findings show that perceptions regarding the usefulness and effectiveness of the HATVP are malleable across a wide spectrum of the electorate.

For a few outcomes, however, we find evidence of heterogeneous effects (panels A and B of Figure 7). For questions 8-1 and 8-2 in particular, regarding the HATVP's capacity to improve transparency and promote integrity among politicians, our results suggest that the positive impacts of information provision are essentially concentrated on citizens with high scores of political distrust. Conversely people who already had quite optimistic views about corruption in politics do not seem to react much to the information provided (point estimates are close to zero and insignificant).

The fact that bringing information to the most distrustful citizens can increase their confidence in the effectiveness of third-party institutions to promote political integrity is noteworthy. First, it stresses the divergence between political distrust and populism as an ideology, confirming that "if an individual has less political trust, this does not necessarily entail an antagonistic relationship between the people and the political elite, something that is integral to populism" (Geurkink, 2020, 251). Second, this result echoes research on populist attitudes finding that such attitudes can be moderated by factual information (Morisi and Wagner, 2021; Marcos-Marne et al., 2022).

We do not find much evidence of heterogeneity in treatment effects according to affirmativeness (score 1) or party affinity. One notable exception is the fact that citizens who score low on affirmativeness (i.e., many "don't know" answers in Part 1 of the survey) are much more likely to react to the treatment by interpreting the emergence of a new scandal as evidence that the checks by the HATVP are effective, and far less likely to interpret it as a signal of widespread corruption among politicians (Figure 8). This result might suggest that citizens who do not hold strong positions and are more neutral or dubious (low affirmativeness score) are more eager to interpret information about the HATVP's record positively, and less likely to use it to confirm their ex-ante negative beliefs about politicians (Williams, 2022).

Figure 7: Heterogeneity in treatment effects over score for political distrust

A) Transparency of private interests

B) Integrity and honesty

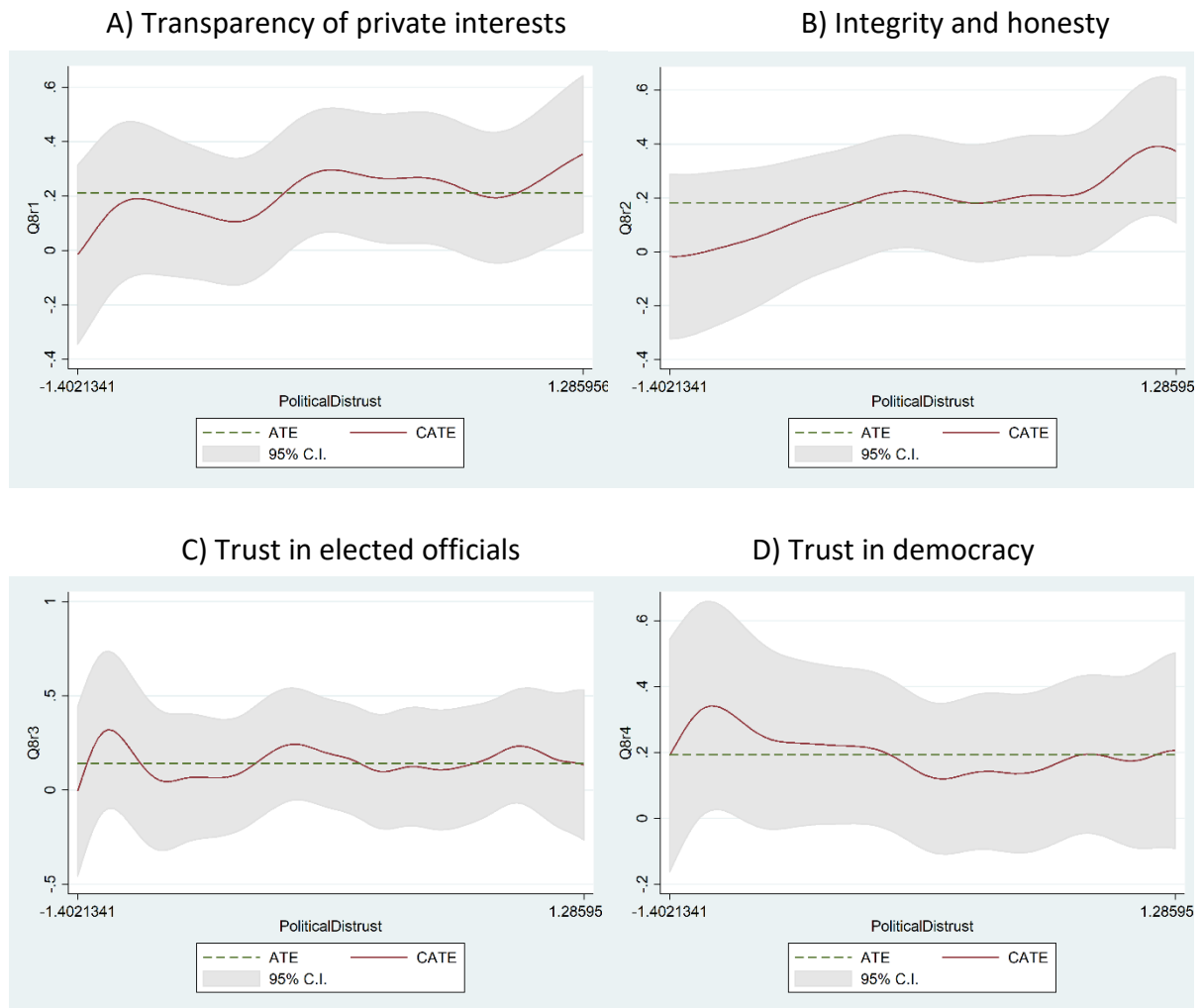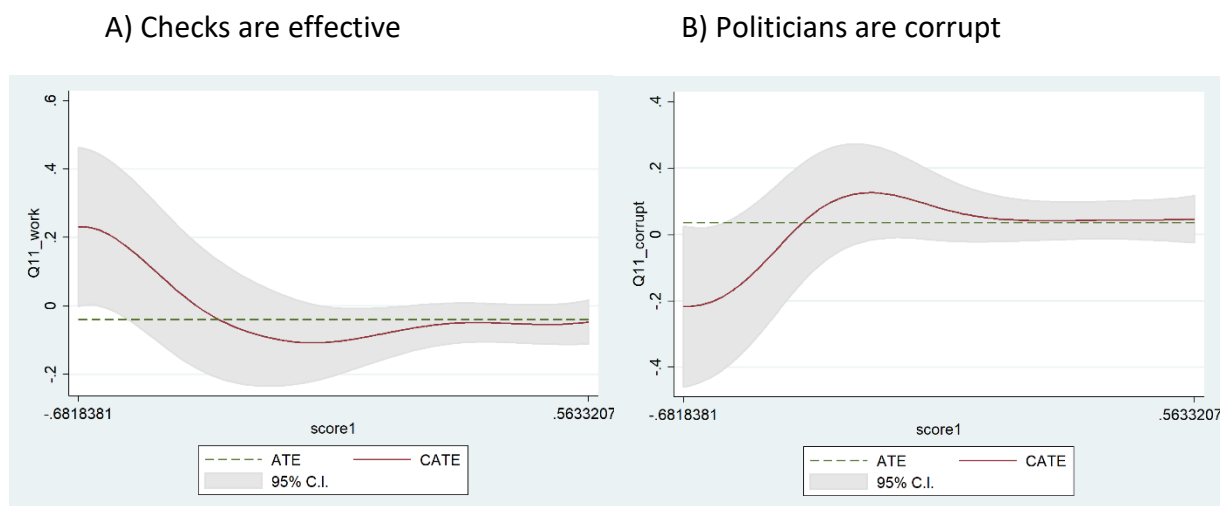
C) Trust in elected officials

D) Trust in democracy

Figure 8. Heterogeneity in treatment effects over affirmativeness score

Q11. Occurrence of a new scandal would be viewed as evidence that…

A) Checks are effective

B) Politicians are corrupt

In terms of heterogeneity depending on the initial level of knowledge of the HATVP, many of the positive impacts of providing information on the assessment of the HATVP are smaller and reach virtually zero among respondents who already knew the agency "well" or "very well." This pattern is consistent with some form of Bayesian updating: well-informed citizens do not learn much from our experiment and so do not adjust their perceptions; conversely, poorly-informed citizens revise their beliefs after information is provided.

6. Discussion and conclusion

The rise of populism and extreme parties in most Western democracies has shed light on the growing disconnect and distrust between citizens and political elites. This lack of trust originates from several causes, but a prominent explanation is political integrity: many citizens consider politicians to be dishonest, unethical, or downright corrupt. In order to restore political trust, important new legislation and institutions have emerged in the last decade or so, notably in France in the aftermath of a major political scandal.

However, almost ten years after the launch of the High Authority for the Transparency of Public Life in France, most citizens still do not know about the HATVP and only 9% claim to know it well or very well. Our survey of 3,000 citizens further shows that public perceptions of corruption, while heterogeneous and strongly correlated with broader political attitudes, are quite pessimistic overall. Conversely, the experts we surveyed (N=33) have more positive views about political integrity, predominantly considering that France is headed in the right direction and that the HATVP is an effective tool for promoting integrity. Furthermore, our information provision experiment shows that providing basic information about the HATVP's activities and record can have substantial beneficial effects on several dimensions of citizens' beliefs towards anti-corruption efforts and trust in democratic institutions. Importantly these impacts are especially large among citizens with little prior knowledge and negative views of politicians' integrity, who often happen to support populist parties or abstain. One implication of our findings is that anti-corruption institutions should not only set up effective checks and promote civil-society scrutiny, but they also need to communicate about their existence, activities, and track record to the general public.

We can also draw broader lessons from our findings for the dynamic contemporary discussions on democracy and epistocracy (Brennan and Landemore, 2021). In the famous typology proposed by Brennan (2016, p. 4-5), citizens in a democracy behave either like Hobbits—who are "mostly apathetic and ignorant about politics" or "have no opinions at all"—or like Hooligans—who have "strong and largely fixed worldviews" and "consume political information, although in a biased way." This depiction contradicts the assumption of enlightened citizens that is so central in normative theories of democracy, namely the idea that a majority of citizens "maintain and revise their political beliefs in ways that are free from significant distortion by bias and other forms of irrationality" (Ancell, 2020). The Brennian typology naturally leads to an epistemic critique of democracy and to the promotion of epistocratic mechanisms to counter such ignorance and irrationality among citizens (Brennan, 2016; Somin, 2010; Caplan, 2006). However, our survey results show that, although many citizens appear to firmly hold certain beliefs about the integrity of politicians and the

trustworthiness of public institutions, which strongly correlate with their behavior during elections, providing simple and concise information can still alter the views of a sizeable fraction of citizens and bridge part of the gap with experts in the field. Our results even show that such revision of beliefs can be stronger among apparently disillusioned citizens who were initially characterized by high political distrust, poor institutional knowledge, and little interest in politics.

Of course, this general result does not mean that some people do not manifest information-processing biases or reluctance to revise their priors (Williams, 2022). Besides, even if some beliefs are revised positively, e.g., on the usefulness of the HATVP, the paper also shows that more information does not necessarily change citizens' opinions on more normative issues, such as the legitimacy of the HATVP regarding sanctions. This distinction in reactions to positive versus normative issues opens areas for future research, notably in order to better understand which ingredients of institutions—independence, competency, representativeness, openness, etc.—are most crucial for affecting citizens' judgments and political behavior.

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APPENDIX

<u>Table A1. OLS Regressions of the Political Distrust Score (MCA dimension 2)</u>

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Sociodemographics			
Female	0.15***		0.13***
	0.037		0.036
Age in years	0.055***		0.045***
	0.0078		0.0078
Age squared	-0.00062***		-0.00049***
	0.000085		0.000084
Socioprofessional category: middle (reference)	Ref.		Ref.
High	-0.064		0.031
	0.058		0.058
Low	0.060		0.032
	0.057		0.056
Vote in 2017 presidential election			
Not willing to disclose vote (reference)		Ref.	Ref.
Emmanuel Macron (center)		-0.55***	-0.51***
		0.074	0.074
Marine Le Pen (far right)		0.23**	0.23**
		0.076	0.076
François Fillon (right)		-0.41***	-0.29***
		0.082	0.085
Jean-Luc Mélenchon (far left)		0.0035	0.012
		0.081	0.080
Benoît Hamon (left)		-0.32***	-0.30**
		0.093	0.093
Nicolas Dupont-Aignan (far right)		0.12	0.14
		0.11	0.11
Jean Lassalle (regionalist)		0.025	0.055
		0.17	0.17
Philippe Poutou (far left)		-0.083	-0.092
		0.17	0.17
Blank or null ballot		0.22*	0.20*
		0.098	0.097
Did not vote		0.14	0.15
		0.098	0.097
Not registered to vote		-0.17+	-0.048
		0.089	0.092
Don't remember		-0.047	-0.078
		0.13	0.13
Constant	-1.09***	0.13*	-0.88***
	0.15	0.062	0.17
Observations	2960	2960	2960
Adjusted R^2	0.039	0.080	0.100

Standard errors in parentheses. Voters for minor candidates (N<20) are excluded.
+ p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001.