

No Need for Revenge: Public Opinion and the Restoration of Democracy

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Abstract

Numerous studies testify to citizens' involvement in democratic backsliding. We shed light on public opinion in the reverted process: democratic restoration. We do so using the case of Poland, where the pro-democratic alliance led by Donald Tusk gained an electoral shock-win in 2023 after eight years of democratic backsliding under the Law and Justice Party. We use original panel survey data to demonstrate that winners responded without vengeful, anti-democratic sentiment to the election result. However, we leverage elite-cue survey experiments to show that pro-democratic elites risk jeopardizing such attitudes, and the opportunity to restore democracy altogether, by attempting to restore in an aggressive, harsh manner. The findings have important implications for pro-democratic forces seeking to restore democracy looking forward.

1 Introduction

After eight years of democratic backsliding under the Law and Justice (PiS) party, democratic observers around the globe could breathe a sigh of relief when Donald Tusk's pro-democratic coalition won a narrow majority in the Polish 2023 parliamentary election. This seemingly surprising outcome provided the new government with a daunting task: Undo the damage done by Law and Justice and

restore liberal democracy.¹ It was also an unprecedented task; Tusk had nowhere to look for inspiration as to how such severe institutional damage to the courts and media could possibly be undone. The world had seen would-be autocrats such as Donald Trump or Jair Bolsonaro lose elections, but not in contexts as severely affected by incumbent subversion of democracy as in Poland (Haggard and Kaufman 2021). The new feeble government—formed by three parties agreeing on little else than their negative affect toward PiS—had to create and define a strategy to restore liberal democracy in their country.

Although a large and burgeoning literature sheds light on citizens' role in democratic backsliding (e.g., Graham and Svobik 2020; Krishnarajan 2023; Fredriksen 2022; Clayton et al. 2021), we do not know much about the dynamics of public opinion in such processes of democratic restoration. While we for example know that citizens may trade off democracy for political gains (Graham and Svobik 2020) or rationalize the meaning of democracy to make it fit their tolerance of undemocratic behavior (Krishnarajan 2023), we argue that the important questions to ask are fundamentally different when it comes to democratic restoration. In particular: Do former opposition voters embrace the opportunity to restore democratic institutions or rather seek revenge to strike back using equally undemocratic means? What about voters of the authoritarian government leaving office? And finally, how do voters respond to the chosen strategy of the new government to restore democracy?

In this paper, we shed light on public opinion in the restoration process using the ideal case of Poland. We first leverage a three-wave panel survey with 10,927 interviews in total—one wave before and two waves after the election—to examine how public opinion responded to the shock-win of the pro-democratic alliance in terms of anti-democratic attitudes, support for violence,

1. Poland's status fell from a liberal to an electoral democracy during PiS' time in government according to the RoW-measure (Lührmann, Tannenberg, and Lindberg 2018).

anti-establishment attitudes, and election denial (Iyengar, Lelkes, and Westwood 2023; Uscinski et al. 2021). The panel survey enables us to examine whether voters supporting the outgoing PiS party moderated or became more extreme in their attitudes after the election loss and, most importantly, whether voters supporting the pro-democratic alliance stayed democratic or let vengeful grievances translate to more extreme attitudes. The results show that PiS voters “only” spiked in anti-system attitudes and especially election denial, while the attitudes of voters supporting the pro-democratic alliance even improved modestly without any signs of seeking revenge.

Having gotten this fairly clear mandate from their voters to restore democracy, Donald Tusk and his government faced dilemmas which we argue are central for actors seeking to restore democracy: First, should democracy be carefully restored, fully in line with both the law and democratic norms, or should one move aggressively, pushing the limits of both the law and norms, to undo the damage made by Law and Justice as swiftly as possible? Whereas the first option may be seen as disregarding public demand for restoration, the second option may be perceived as an act of revenge, ambiguous who are actually anti-democratic, and ultimately risk driving up willingness to behave anti-democratically among otherwise pro-democratic voters. Second, should Tusk remind voters of Law and Justice’s wrongdoings to justify the new government’s strategy? Doing so may indeed help justify the strategy, but may also further galvanize vengeful sentiment and/or anti-democratic attitudes toward the restoration process.

The new government ended up leaning toward an aggressive strategy: Tusk liquidated state media, endorsed the prosecution of two PiS MPs, and frequently attacked PiS verbally (Brzeziński 2023; Henley and Piasecka 2023). We leverage two original survey experiments—one embedded in the third panel wave and an out-of-panel replication—to explore effects of this strategy on public opinion. Our experiments demonstrate that voters of the otherwise pro-democratic alliance fol-

low suit and increase in willingness to use the same anti-democratic tricks as PiS did when in government if the restorers push the boundaries of laws and norms. In other words, Donald Tusk and his government risk wasting the opportunity to restore democracy by moving forward aggressively. We also find that, consistent with the panel results, these effects are not driven by needs for retribution—rather, voters seem to follow elites in a more hollow fashion.²

Whereas a large and recent stream of research sheds light on democratic backsliding and public opinion (e.g., Krishnarajan 2023; Graham and Svobik 2020; Frederiksen 2022; Clayton et al. 2021), we contribute with the first-ever study of the role of public opinion in the reverted process: democratic restoration. Whereas citizens’ responses to the behaviors of anti-democratic elites and would-be authoritarians are key in explaining processes of backsliding, we focus on pro-democratic elites as the main agents in processes of restoration. These elites need to thread carefully to make sure public opinion remains in a restoration mood.

2 Restoring Democracy

We focus on restoring democracy as a process in which damage to democratic institutions are (attempted to be) undone. In particular, we are interested in the liberal aspects of democracy separating the most robust democracies from the rest (Diamond 1999). These are the aspects often meddled with in processes of “democratic backsliding” (Haggard and Kaufman 2021), including checks on the executive and (depending on the system) an independent judiciary (Coppedge et al. 2022).

2. The panel waves and experiments were all pre-registered. The pre-registrations are appended to the submission, and we disclose relevant considerations in relation to reading them in Appendix G.

2.1 Restoring Polish Democracy

The content of democratic backsliding under Law and Justice’s rule—almost personally led by Jarosław Kaczyński—from 2015-2023 has been extensively covered by scholars and in media (e.g., Pirro and Stanley 2022; Wunsch, Jacob, and Derksen 2022). In brief, PiS packed the Constitutional Tribunal shortly after coming to power (15 out of 15 members were loyal to PiS by the end of 2016), allowing subsequent backsliding acts to be labelled “constitutional”, and slowly captured state media to create a propaganda machine favoring the ruling party between and in elections. The restoration of these two core institutions of liberal democracy is also our core focus.

Poland’s eight year spell of backsliding ended abruptly with Law and Justice’s election loss on October 15, 2023. Donald Tusk—leading an unusual three-party coalition between his liberal centre-right Civic Platform (PO), agrarian-conservative Third Way (TD), and socialist New Left (NL)—immediately declared “the end of evil times” when the first exit polls came rolling in on election eve (Picheta 2024). Tusk quickly signalled that he was “hellbent on restoring democracy” (Walker 2023), and the entire coalition—though disagreeing substantially on other issues, especially abortion—unanimously supported him in this endeavour. They were, first and foremost, on a mission to “dePiSify” Poland (Picheta 2024). Following this election of strong democratic relief, PiS-loyalist President Andrzej Duda postponed the formation of the new government³ for two months until December 15, where the new government could form and Donald Tusk finally be appointed Prime Minister (Henley and Piasecka 2023; Brzeziński 2023).

The new government moved swiftly from there. By the end of 2023, it had purged state media employees—hitherto packed with PiS-loyalists—and, after failing to agree with President Duda on a spending bill, liquidated Polish state

3. He first gave outgoing Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki a hopeless mandate to form government again, deliberately dragging out the process.

media altogether, resulting in a 14 days closure period (Brzeziński 2023). Chaotic pictures of state media employees capturing TV offices in protest and refusal to leave flourished, and suddenly, the tables had turned, such that PiS now accused the new government of violating democratic principles and the constitution itself. Although acknowledging the need for reforms, the new government was so swift with respect to its approach to state media reforms that Polish NGOs expressed concerns about legality (Brzeziński 2023).

Conflict over other issues quickly got entangled with the media battle. After hiding out in President Duda's palace, PiS MPs and former cabinet members Mariusz Kamiński and Maciej Wasik were arrested on January 10, 2024 inside the palace for power abuse during PiS' earlier brief rule from 2005-2007. Large-scale protests against Tusk's government broke out in Warsaw shortly after. Kamiński and Wasik were released from prison, but nevertheless lost their seats in parliament and, consequently, attempted to storm the parliament backed by other Law and Justice MPs on February 7. To be sure, Tusk did occasionally express himself in a more careful and reconciliatory tone (e.g., Cienski and Hülsemann 2023), but such instances were fairly infrequent.

2.2 Why Poland?

We see Poland as the ideal context to study democratic restoration in because Poland had a high initial level of democracy and suffered substantial institutional damage during the backsliding period (e.g., fell from being categorized as a liberal to an electoral democracy (Lührmann, Tannenber, and Lindberg 2018)). The case has important implications for comparatively similar cases, which nevertheless are less optimal to study democratic restoration in.

Especially two other countries come to mind when theorizing processes of democratic restoration: Brazil after the rule of former President Jair Bolsonaro and the United States following Donald Trump's first presidential term. Although

potentially useful to understand parts of the process, we see these cases as less ideal than Poland to study democratic restoration in. The main reason is that Brazil under Bolsonaro and the United States under Trump did not suffer the same level of damage to *formal* institutions as Poland under Law and Justice (Haggard and Kaufman 2021). This is reflected in the fact that the United States has not lost its status as a liberal democracy, whereas Brazil has consistently been categorized as an electoral democracy (Lührmann, Tannenber, and Lindberg 2018). As mentioned above, the capture of the Polish state media and the constitutional court resulted in the country being relegated from a liberal to an electoral democracy. The lesser damage to formal institutions is plausibly also the reason why existing theories of rebuilding democracy in the United States are exclusively focused on norms or *preserving* formal institutions under pressure (Ginsburg and Huq 2022).

However, lessons about democratic restoration in Poland hold important implications for other country cases. The United States and Brazil might, in the future, suffer institutional damage to the same—or a greater—extent than Poland, and opportunities to rebuild such institutions may be informed by lessons from Poland. This is the case for other frequently mentioned backsliding country cases as well. Additionally, the restoration process in Poland may help understand what could have happened in backsliding cases such as Hungary or Turkey had a last-ditch restoration opportunity presented itself before Viktor Orbán cemented Fidesz’ rule at the 2022 parliamentary election or Recep Tayyip Erdoğan cemented his rule at the 2018 presidential election.

3 Theoretical Expectations

We are interested in two overarching empirical questions. First, how did voters respond to the electoral shock-win of the pro-democratic alliance? Second, how did voters—particularly those supporting the pro-democratic alliance—respond to the aggressive aspects of the new government’s restoration strategy? Whereas we

have clear expectations for the latter question, competing considerations hamper straightforward propositions for the former question.⁴

3.1 Responses to the 2023 Election

How voters respond to winning and losing elections is well-documented. In brief, losing makes one more negative toward the political system whereas winning makes one more positive, and this effect is moderated by institutional design—particularly whether the country is a majoritarian or consensus democracy—and other macro-level factors such as age of democracy (e.g., Anderson and Tverdova 2001; Anderson and Guillory 1997). Poland is neither a particularly young nor particularly old democracy while being moderately consensus-based (Ferrín and Hernández 2021), which means that negative and positive effects on attitudes toward the system—which we later operationalize as anti-establishment attitudes (Uscinski et al. 2021) and trust in elections—for losers and winners, respectively, are expected but should not be particularly pronounced.

When democracy itself is at stake, however, the picture is more complicated than that. One recent study examined voters’ response to Jair Bolsonaro’s victory at the 2018 presidential election in Brazil (Cohen et al. 2022). Despite obvious similarities in the relevance to democracy, the 2018 election in Brazil represents a reverse scenario to what happened in Poland in 2023: a would-be autocrat and outsider came to power after years of democratic stability. This study demonstrates that, despite developments in system attitudes consistent with earlier studies on the matter (e.g., Anderson and Guillory 1997), the election win exacerbated anti-democratic sentiment and opportunism among Bolsonaro supporters. Meanwhile, Bolsonaro opponents remained pro-democratic.

This is highly informative for theorizing expected responses to the 2023

4. This is also reflected in our pre-registrations, where we have derived clear hypotheses for the experimental effects of the restoration strategy but not for the attitudinal responses to the election.

election in Poland preceding a reverted process of democratic restoration. First, voters of authoritarian Jarosław Kaczyński and PiS should not necessarily spike in support for anti-democratic practices after the election loss. This is because the opportunity to exercise democratic backsliding through anti-democratic acts is suddenly lost—contrary to when Bolsonaro-voters gained such opportunities in 2018 (Cohen et al. 2022). Second, there is no guarantee that voters of the pro-democratic alliance remain pro-democratic as the election win may be seen as an opportunity to simply turn the tables institutionally using the same backsliding tactics as PiS did when in government. Fundamental psychological needs for revenge after having suffered repression underscore that voters of Tusk’s alliance may respond to the election win with increased anti-democratic sentiment (e.g., Price 2009; Bartusevičius, Leeuwen, and Petersen 2023).

In sum, how voters responded to the result of the 2023 election is a fairly open empirical question, although system attitude responses are more predictable—winners become more pro-system, losers become more anti-system—than responses related to anti-democratic sentiment. Of core interest to us is whether the election amplified such sentiment among those who came back to power after years of democratic backsliding by providing an opportunity for revenge.

3.2 Theorizing Effects of Restoration Strategy

Exactly needs for retribution are central for our expectations to the effects of elite restoration strategy on public opinion (e.g., Price 2009; Bartusevičius, Leeuwen, and Petersen 2023). As mentioned earlier, restoring agents, such as Donald Tusk’s government, face two key dilemmas: Should justification of restoration acts be anchored in reminders of wrongdoings during backsliding, and should one move forward carefully to ensure compliance with norms and law oneself or aggressively at all costs to undo any institutional damage as swiftly as possible?

We expect both reminding voters of the former government’s wrongdo-

ings and acting harshly to restore democracy to have adverse effects on voters' democratic attitudes. Specifically, both strategy aspects may increase willingness to strike back using comparable tactics to the former, democracy-violating government. Reminding of wrongdoings may increase a need for retribution by awakening negative feelings felt during backsliding among former opposition voters (Bartusevičius, Leeuwen, and Petersen 2023; Price 2009). Moreover, acting harshly and aggressively may be perceived as an act of revenge that voters of the pro-democratic alliance can recognize.

Beyond the revenge explanation, a simple elite-cue effect may also add to these expectations (Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991; Clayton et al. 2021; Clayton and Willer 2023). Pro-democratic voters may simply take a rather misguided cue to support restoring democracy with anti-democratic means when restoring elites proceed harshly—even though the new government does not behave undemocratically strictly speaking. The fact that democratic institutions constitute a fairly complex issue underscores why simply following the new government's lead would be a plausible behavior for voters (e.g., Coffé 2017). We therefore derive the following two (pre-registered) hypotheses (we label all formal hypotheses “e” to indicate that they concern the experimental findings later in the paper):

- H1e: Harsh, retaliating behavior by Tusk's pro-democratic government alliance increases undemocratic attitudes among government supporters.
- H2e: Reminding people of the former, anti-democratic PiS-government's wrongdoings increases undemocratic attitudes among government supporters.

Revenge psychology emphasizes the feelings anger, satisfaction, and happiness. Specifically, should the effects covered by H1e-H2e be driven by needs for retribution as suggested above, we should expect reminding of wrongdoings during

backsliding to awaken negative feelings—particularly anger—while achieving revenge in the form of acting harshly should induce immediate satisfaction but more generally decrease happiness (Price 2009). We therefore derive the following hypotheses testing a revenge psychology explanation:

- H3e: Harsh, retaliating behavior by Tusk’s pro-democratic government alliance increases immediate satisfaction among government supporters.
- H4e: Harsh, retaliating behavior by Tusk’s pro-democratic government alliance decreases general happiness among government supporters.
- H5e: Reminding people of the former, anti-democratic PiS-government’s wrongdoings increases anger among government supporters.

4 Election Panel

We fielded an original three-wave election panel survey with Cint between October 2023 and March 2024, enabling us to examine how voters responded to the electoral shock-win of the pro-democratic alliance in Poland on October 15, and how attitudes developed during the initial steps of the restoration process.

The first wave was collected in the week preceding the election and terminated on October 13 as Poland has a 24 hour election silence law. 5,718 individuals representative of the adult Polish population on age and gender completed the survey. The second wave was fielded on October 27 when the election result and the implications of it had become clear, including that Tusk’s PO-TD-NL alliance would eventually form government (Walker 2023), and ran until November 21. 3,093 individuals participated in the survey, corresponding to a re-interviewing rate of 54%. The vast majority of these respondents—85%—completed the survey before the end of October (i.e., within 4 days of fielding).

The third wave was deliberately fielded with distance to the early waves to capture attitude changes in response to the restoration process unfolding after

the election. Specifically, we fielded wave three on February 7, which was after Tusk purged and liquidated the state media, after the arrests of PiS MPs Mariusz Kamiński and Maciej Wasik, and after the Warsaw January 10 protests. We therefore consider wave three as reflecting a heated moment of the restoration process. 2,116 individuals participated in the third wave, which corresponds to a re-interview rate of 37% compared with the first wave from which all participants were invited. The third wave was allowed to run until March 18, but again, the vast majority of respondents took the survey within the first days of fielding (82% within the first week).

In sum, our three-wave dataset may be examined as a panel with 1,526 consistently participating individuals or a repeated cross-section with 10,927 responses in total. We report the panel results in the main paper and the repeated cross-section results—which yields the same findings but with higher statistical certainty—in Appendix C. We provide details on attrition in Appendix B, showing that socio-demographic sample composition did not change significantly between waves.

4.1 Panel Measures

We tracked four core constructs to explore how voters responded to the October 2023 election: support for violence, undemocratic attitudes, election denial, and anti-establishment attitudes. We drew inspiration from prior studies anchored in the context of the United States and adapted the measures to the Polish multi-party context (Iyengar, Lelkes, and Westwood 2023; Druckman 2023; Clayton and Willer 2023; Uscinski et al. 2021). All items were measured on 7-point scales, but we rescale the final indices/scales from 0-1.

The support for violence scale consists of four items tapping into whether people think it is acceptable to intimidate or harass out-party members or use violence to advance political goals or in response to an election loss ($\alpha = .93$). The

undemocratic attitudes scale consists of four items measuring whether the number of polling stations in out-party areas should be reduced, unfavorable Supreme Court rulings should be ignored (unlike the Constitutional Tribunal, PiS did not manage to pack the Supreme Court), journalists critical of the in-party should be prosecuted, and the in-party should decline to concede if losing an election ($\alpha = .72$).⁵

Election denial was measured with two items regarding trust in the vote count and result legitimacy (in Polish *legalny*, which both means legal and legitimate) of the 2023 election ($\alpha = .83$). In the pre-election wave, the question wordings for the election denial items were phrased prospectively as expectations, and then phrased retrospectively in the later waves. Finally, anti-establishment attitudes were measured with six items tapping into trust in the political system, politicians, and beliefs that going outside the system is necessary to get things done ($\alpha = .87$).

We also measured need for chaos (essentially a desire to watch the political world burn, see Petersen, Osmundsen, and Arceneaux 2023), in- and out-party meta-perceptions of support for violence and undemocratic attitudes (Braley et al. 2023; Pasek et al. 2022), and experienced online hostility using item scales ($\alpha = .79-.96$) to further explore attitudinal, behavioral, and perceptual change, but consider these constructs as secondary and instead report them in Appendix D, because our main focus is on sentiment toward the political system and democracy itself. In continuation of that, it is relevant to highlight that we did not include measures of support for democracy as such, simply due to recent, well-founded skepticism about what “abstract” support for democracy actually reflects (e.g.,

5. We use a vote intention measure from the first wave to define in-party and out-party status as well as categorize voters in the actual analysis. PiS was defined as the out-party for voters supporting Civic Platform (PO), New Left (NL), or Third Way (TD). PO was defined as the out-party for PiS voters. Finally, NL was defined as the out-party for voters supporting far-right Konfederacja. Voters with missing data on the vote intentions measure were assigned a random out-party for the item batteries.

Svolik 2019; Wuttke 2022).

4.2 Panel Results

Figures 1-2 illustrate attitude change in relation to the Polish 2023 election for the two core voter groups, namely, those voting for the pro-democratic alliance parties (PO, NL, and TD) and those voting for Law and Justice (PiS).⁶ Whereas Figure 1 plots simple group means, Figure 2 shows the raw distributions by measure, group, and wave using ridgeplots (Naqvi 2023). As discussed earlier, attitudes toward the workings of the system (i.e., anti-establishment attitudes and election denial/trust in the election) should be more predictable than attitudes directly incompatible with democracy (i.e., support for violence and anti-democratic attitudes).

4.2.1 Malleable System Attitudes

Changes were rather dramatic in election denial and anti-establishment attitudes. Voters of the pro-democratic alliance—plausibly due to extensive democratic backsliding under Law and Justice’s eight-year rule—seemingly expected a rigged election on October 15, but evaluated the election as fair, decreasing from .54 to .19 between waves one and three on the 0-1 election denial scale. Law and Justice voters, on the other hand, expected a clean election but evaluated it as substantively more rigged, increasing from .22 to .48. These results underscore that the election result shocked voters. The patterns for general trust in elections in Poland, which we show results for in Appendix D, are similar though less dramatic.

For anti-establishment attitudes, Figures 1-2 first and foremost show that

6. We specifically estimate a linear regression with an interaction term between voter group (Pro-Democratic Alliance versus PiS) and wave with standard errors clustered on the respondent level for each of the four outcomes. 1,163 consistently participating panel participants are included in the main results. The remaining 363 consistently participating panelists are voters of other parties or non-voters. We show in Appendix D that panel results for these participants tend to be most similar with pro-democratic alliance voters.

Polish voters are quite anti-system, as all means land above .5 on the scale and the distributions lean toward high values. However, the two voter groups are plausibly anti-system for different reasons: Whereas people voting for the populist Law and Justice are anti-establishment by ideology (Pirro and Stanley 2022), pro-democratic alliance voters most likely just felt alienated by PiS' changes to the system.

As for election denial, both groups responded with increases and decreases in anti-establishment attitudes following typical winner-loser patterns (Anderson and Guillory 1997). Whereas pro-democratic alliance voters decreased 10 percentage points in anti-establishment sentiment, such sentiment grew 9 percentage points among Law and Justice voters. Interestingly, anti-establishment attitudes landed at similar levels for the two groups in wave three. We interpret this as evidence that voters—most relevantly pro-democratic alliance voters—know that democracy is not restored overnight; they remain system-skeptics even after the restorers have entered office.

4.2.2 Stable (Anti)Democratic Sentiment

For anti-democratic attitudes and support for violence, Figures 1-2 contrarily display remarkable stability: The election result neither galvanized voters of the pro-democratic alliance to become opportunistically undemocratic and supportive of political violence nor seethed Law and Justice voters enough to turn completely against democracy. If anything, pro-democratic alliance voters became slightly more democratic, decreasing in anti-democratic sentiment from .4 on the 0-1 scale before the election to .32 in wave three ($p < .001$)—corresponding to 8 percentage points or one third of a standard deviation in the scale. However, it is noticeable that while Polish voters remained largely opposed to political violence, Figures 1-2 show that both voter groups are more ambivalent when it comes to anti-democratic attitudes and only “lean” democratically on balance.

Figure 1: Panel results (all outcomes scaled 0-1). 1,163 individuals. Linear regressions with interaction terms between voter group (Pro-Democratic Alliance versus PiS) and wave ($\alpha = .05$).

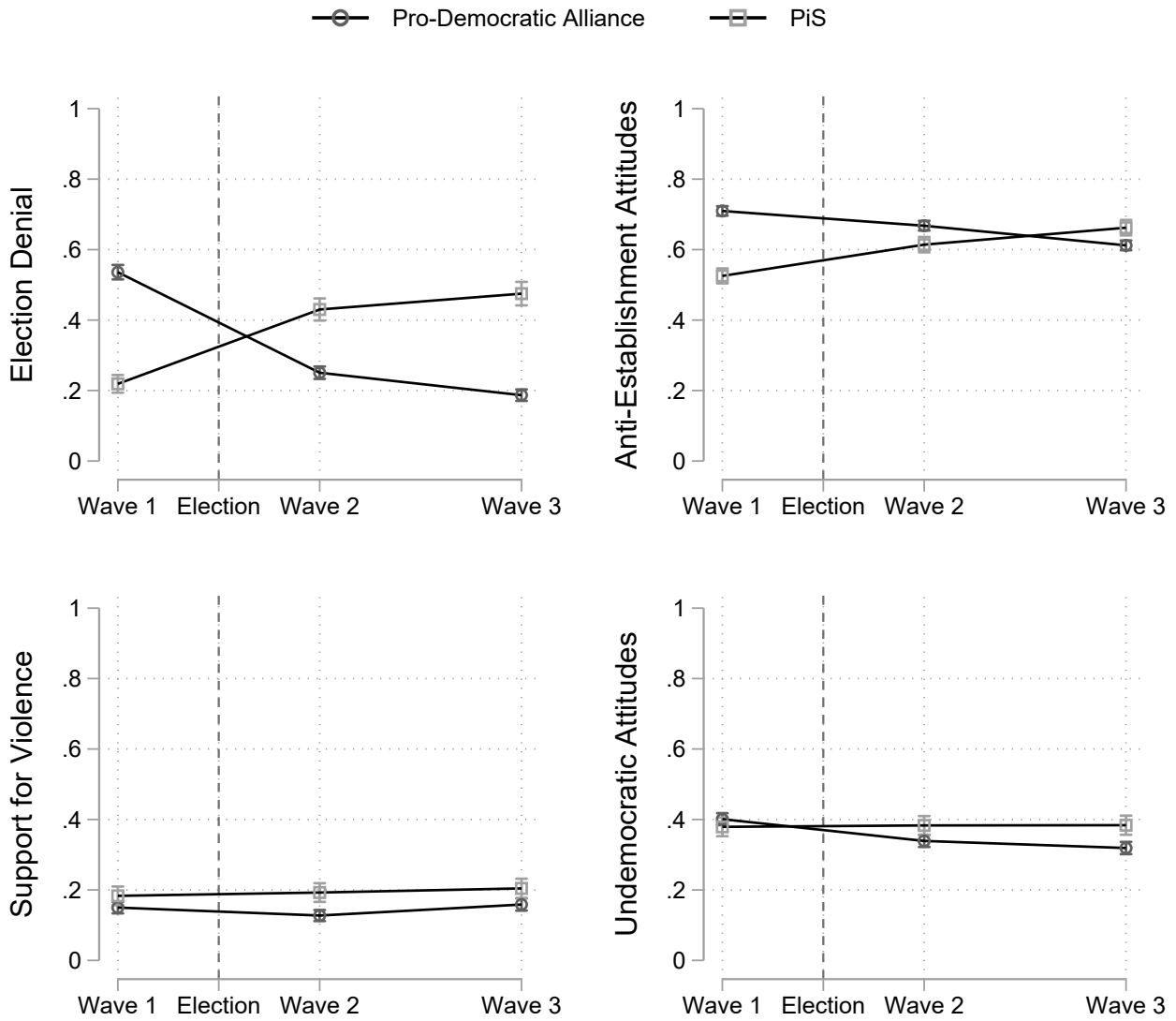
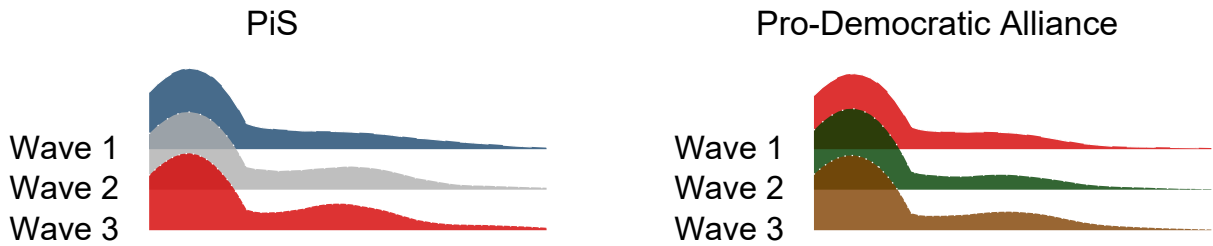
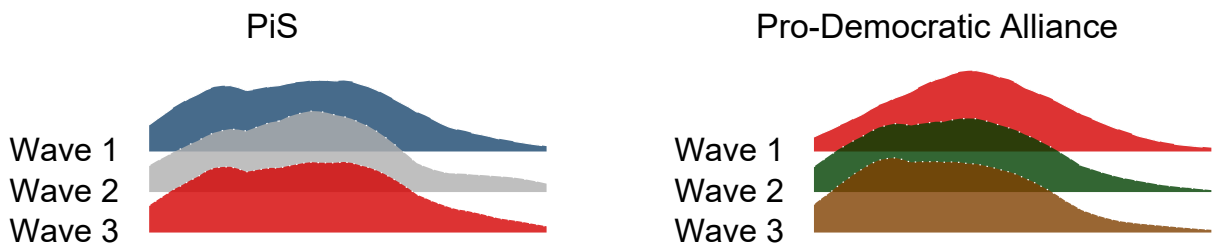


Figure 2: Illustration of election denial, undemocratic attitudes, and anti-establishment attitudes before and after the election (joyplots/densities).

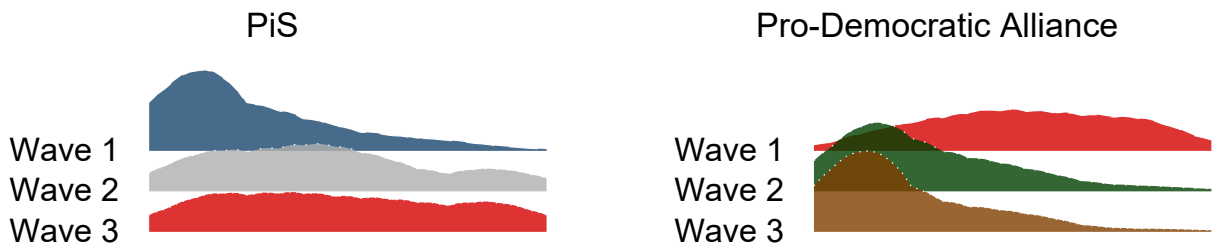
A: Support for Violence



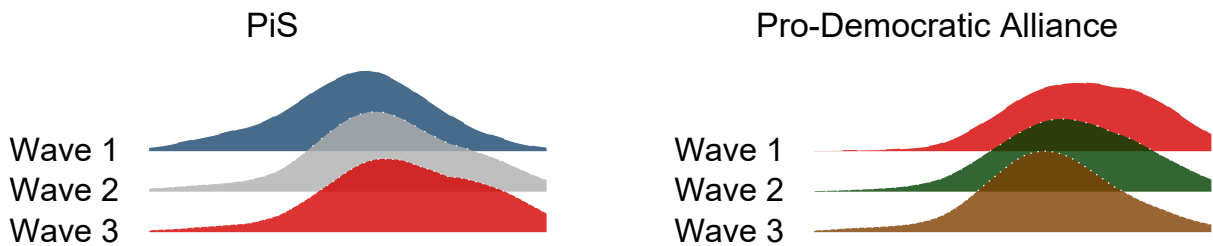
B: Undemocratic Attitudes



C: Election Denial



D: Anti-Establishment Attitudes



Appendix D shows that meta-perceptions in relation to support for violence and anti-democratic sentiment between the two groups as well as experienced online hostility and need for chaos also remained stable between the waves, underscoring that the political climate among Polish voters did not turn more violent or anti-democratic after the election.

In sum, while Law and Justice voters turned somewhat against the political system after losing, pro-democratic alliance voters responded benevolently to the election result. They became slightly more democratic and seem to, at least slowly, shrug off the system skepticism built up during democratic backsliding. We now turn to the question of how elite strategy in restoring democracy might mess that up.

5 Survey Experiments

We conducted two vignette experiments to explore the consequences of elite strategies in relation to restoring democracy and test our pre-registered hypotheses (H1e-H5e). The first experiment was conducted in the third wave of the election panel ($N = 2,116$) and designed to estimate the effects of the two core choices in the restoration strategy: whether one should remind voters of the former government’s wrongdoings and/or proceed harshly and aggressively rather than carefully.

Accordingly, we conducted a 2x2 vignette experiment manipulating both dimensions, exploiting the fact that Donald Tusk—though leaning heavily towards a harsh strategy—occasionally shifted between a careful and a harsh strategy. Thus, our experiments consist of four conditions: a baseline condition in which Donald Tusk stresses the need to proceed carefully with no reminder about PiS’ wrongdoings, a condition in which the harsh strategy is highlighted but with no reminder, a condition with careful procedure but a reminder of PiS’ wrongdoings, and a final condition with both harsh strategy and reminder.

To avoid using deception, all conditions are based on true quotes and

newspaper articles (e.g., Brzeziński 2023; Henley and Piasecka 2023; Cienski and Hülsemann 2023), but naturally frames the actual strategy. The harsh dimension was conducted with reference to how Tusk, at the time, had just pushed aggressively for media reforms and endorsed the imprisonment of PiS MPs Mariusz Kaminski and Maciej Wasik. The reminder dimension was conducted with reference to how Tusk justified these efforts referring to PiS’ wrongdoings during their backsliding-ridden rule. Table 1 illustrates the four conditions. We discuss ethical considerations related to treatment construction further in Appendix A.

The second survey experiment, which had the two-fold purpose of providing an out-of-panel replication test of the main hypotheses and further clarify potential mechanisms, was fielded with Cint in April 2024 (N = 3,107 with quotas on age, gender, and region). Crucially, panel participants were disallowed to participate in the out-of-panel experiment. Beyond a few semantic differences, the treatment material of the second experiment deviated from the first in that the “3) Not harsh + reminder” condition was omitted, as that condition might seem like the least natural for respondents, because the reminder logically justifies a harsh rather than a careful strategy. This restricted us to capture the effect of adding the reminder on top of the harsh strategy. Experiment two thus provides a replication test both with slight changes in treatment material and sample composition aimed at probing the robustness of the results (Simmons, Nelson, and Simonsohn 2011; Mutz 2011).

Table 1: Treatment conditions framing the restoration strategy undertaken by Donald Tusk’s government.

1) *Not harsh + no reminder (baseline):*

Donald Tusk follows up on vows to reform state media

Since taking office on December 15, Tusk’s Cabinet has explored options to reform state media. According to Tusk, this will take time. “We must be sure that our actions are in line with the law,” Tusk told at a news conference.

When asked about his political opponents, Tusk said that “we have a common goal [...] to serve Poland and actually nothing else should matter.”

2) *Harsh behavior + no reminder:*

Donald Tusk follows up on vows to ‘chase away evil’ and reform state media

Since taking office on December 15, Tusk’s Cabinet has promptly fired and replaced the directors of state television, radio, and the Polish Press Agency (PAP). Tusk has also backed the Warsaw District Court decision to imprison opposition MPs Mariusz Kaminski and Maciej Wasik.

The new government has rammed home the changes at lightning speed, raising concerns that it may be overstepping the law to get what it wants. “Fasten your seatbelts,” Tusk announced recently.

3) *Not harsh + reminder:* Adds the following text to condition 1).

4) *Harsh + reminder:* Adds the following text to condition 2).

Tusk has justified the need for change by arguing it is aimed at undoing years of damage done by the old PiS government. During its time in power, PiS manipulated procedures to gain control of media, allowing it to tighten its grip on public broadcasters. PiS also illegally appointed judges to the body of the country’s top court, undermining its credibility.

We employed two core outcomes in both experiments, which tapped into anti-democratic sentiment in relation to restoring the two core institutions damaged during PiS' rule: the state media and the Constitutional Tribunal (court). The first outcome was measured on a 7-point scale capturing agreement/disagreement with the statement "Donald Tusk and his cabinet should violate the law, if necessary, to reform Polish state media.", whereas the second outcome captured sentiment to re-pack the Constitutional Tribunal "PiS-style" and included the statement "Donald Tusk and his cabinet should, whenever possible, seek to replace all 15 members of the constitutional court with members loyal to the cabinet." Beyond the obvious difference of topic, the two outcomes are different in the sense that the new government had already attempted to reform state media but not initiated reforms of the Constitutional Tribunal. We analyze these outcomes both separately and as additive indices ($\alpha = .66-.69$).

The second experiment employed four secondary additional outcomes aimed at testing whether potential effects are driven by revenge sentiment, as our theoretical expectations are largely anchored in a revenge psychology explanation (Price 2009). The four outcomes, which like the panel measures may be found with full question wordings in our pre-registration, consist of a perceptual measure of whether one finds the described Tusk-strategy vengeful, whether one is satisfied with the strategy, whether one gets angry when thinking of Law and Justice's time in government, and whether one feels happy when thinking of the current political situation in Poland more generally. As described earlier, a revenge psychology explanation predicts immediate increases in satisfaction and general decreases in happiness for achieving revenge (i.e., in response to the harsh strategy) and increases in anger when being reminded of Law and Justice's wrongdoings.

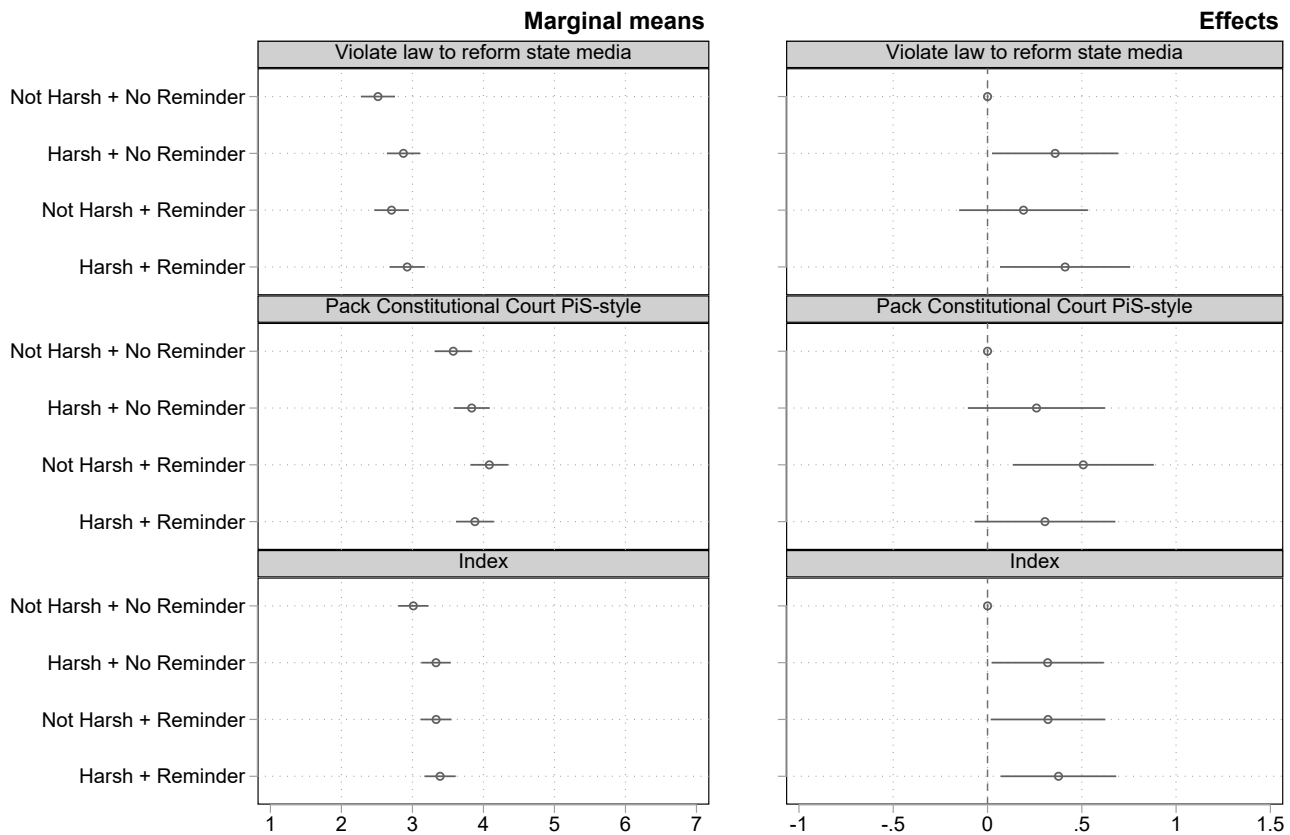
5.1 Experimental Results

5.1.1 Restoring Harshly Increases Anti-Democratic Sentiment

Figures 3-4 present the effects of the two restoration strategy dimensions—proceeding harshly and reminding of wrongdoings during backsliding—on the two core outcomes in separate and indexed format. Both figures show that proceeding harshly and reminding voters of PiS’ wrongdoings put the restoration process at risk by increasing anti-democratic restoration sentiment among voters of the pro-democratic alliance. The effects typically amount to .3-.5 scale point on the 7-point scales (corresponding to 5-8 percentage points), which are modest effect sizes but noticeable as voters were likely already pre-treated with a pre-dominantly harsh strategy by the new government (Slothuus 2016; Brzeziński 2023; Henley and Piasecka 2023). One should also note that the coefficients are not all statistically significant on conventional levels, but they are significant more often than insignificant, and the effect sizes are quite similar across the two experiments. These results are robust to covariate adjustment (see Appendix F). This supports H1e-H2e.

We initially pre-registered estimating the average marginal effects of each dimension, but ultimately decided to disintegrate the analysis to transparently show all four conditions, because—as Figure 3 shows—all three treatment conditions have comparable effects. In other words, proceeding harshly and reminding of PiS’ wrongdoings both increase anti-democratic restoration sentiment, but there is no additive effect and including just one of these aspects in the restoration strategy drives up such sentiment even in the absence of the other. We can only speculate as to the causes of this result, but suspect that the reminder, beyond just reminding of PiS’ wrongdoings, also makes voters recall the harsh aspects of Tusk’s actual strategy even though these aspects were not mentioned in the vignette. Moreover, the harsh strategy might in itself remind voters of what is being harshly rolled back (i.e., PiS’ former wrongdoings). Thus, the two dimensions may be rather inseparable.

Figure 3: Results from panel-embedded survey experiment (only pro-democratic alliance government supporters). $N = 1,051$ ($\alpha = .05$).

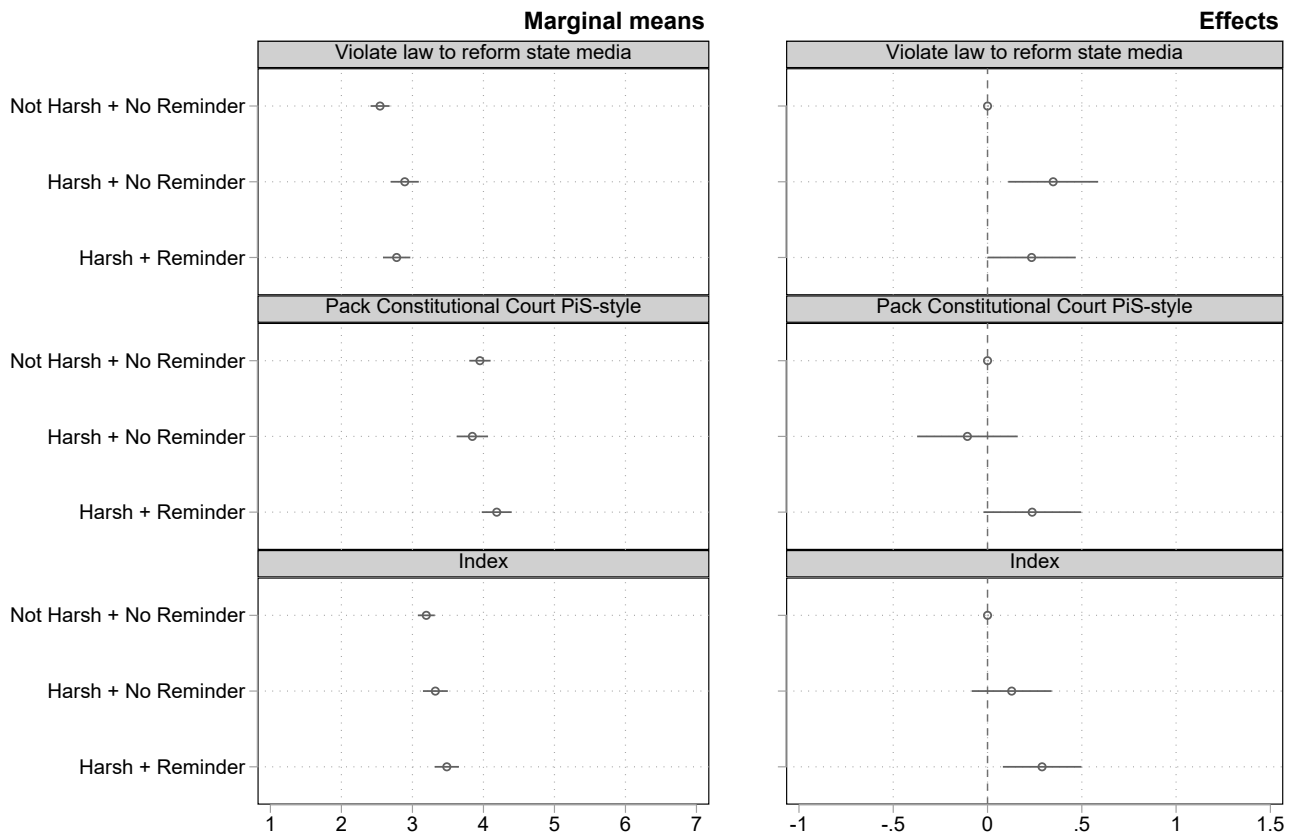


Finally, we note that the marginal means signal that pro-democratic alliance voters are quite ambivalent as to how democracy should be restored. They do lean toward not breaking the law to reform state media, but on average answer almost perfectly around the middle of the scale for the question of whether the new government should simply pack the constitutional court just like PiS did (an idea severely against principles of liberal democracy).

5.1.2 Mechanisms: Still No Need for Revenge

Having established the risks involved in restoring democracy, we now turn to potential mechanisms behind the main effects. Our pre-registered hypotheses—anchored in a revenge psychology explanation (Price 2009)—predict that a harsh and retaliative restoration strategy makes pro-democratic alliance voters immedi-

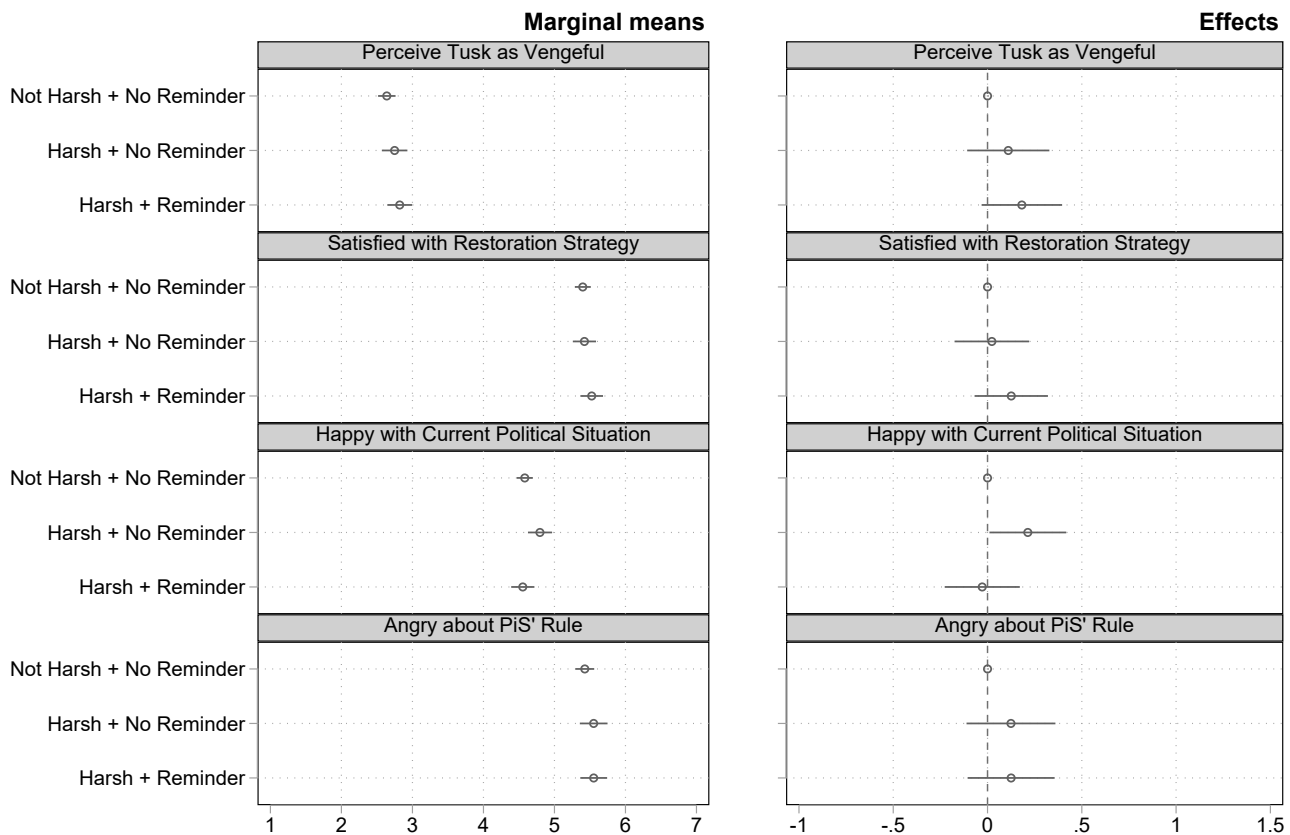
Figure 4: Results from out-of-panel replication experiment (only pro-democratic alliance government supporters). $N = 1,553$ ($\alpha = .05$).



ately satisfied (H3e) but less happy with the political situation in a general sense (H4e), while reminding them of PiS' wrongdoings awakens anger (H5e). We illustrate the tests of these predictions in Figure 5, which also includes the outcome of whether voters perceive Tusk as vengeful.

Generally, we do not find support for the revenge psychology explanation. Acting harshly, or acting harshly and reminding voters of PiS wrongdoings, does not significantly affect satisfaction, happiness, or anger. Moreover, pro-democratic alliance voters only perceive a harsh restoration strategy as marginally more vengeful than a careful strategy, if at all—the effects on perceiving the strategy as vengeful are insignificant by conventional thresholds. This is quite consistent with the longitudinal panel results, which showed that pro-democratic alliance voters did not respond to the election result with increased (vengeful) anti-democratic

Figure 5: Testing a revenge psychology explanation in out-of-panel replication experiment (only pro-democratic alliance government supporters). $N = 1,553$ ($\alpha = .05$).



sentiment.⁷

Beyond these null-effects, the marginal means are again insightful. Pro-democratic voters do not seem to perceive Tusk as vengeful regardless of which approach is taken to restore democracy. Moreover, they are quite satisfied with any approach the new government might take. Finally, they are moderately happy with the current political situation in Poland and—less surprisingly—angry about Law and Justice’s backsliding-ridden rule. We see the high levels of satisfaction as the most telling finding: Tusk and his government should not fear disappointing

7. In terms of statistical power, our replication experiment was, as our pre-registration also declares, geared to capture effects of approximately .365 scale points (or 6 percentage points) with .8 power. This corresponds closely to the effects we do find on the main outcomes.

voters by proceeding carefully, which would otherwise—as mentioned earlier—be one of the main concerns in doing so.

To further probe the validity of the null-findings in Figure 5, we conducted several additional explorative analyses. First, we correlated the revenge psychology outcomes with each other, still among voters of the pro-democratic alliance. Unsurprisingly, satisfaction with Tusk’s approach, anger about PiS’ time in government, and general happiness with the current political situation are all positively correlated ($r = .30-.47$). If one is angry about the past, one cheers for Tusk and see the new political situation in Poland as an improvement. However, perceiving Tusk’s strategy as vengeful is—still only among pro-democratic alliance voters—*negatively* correlated with both satisfaction, anger, and happiness. The negative correlation with satisfaction is particularly important: Pro-democratic alliance voters are not out for revenge, which these correlations indicate make voters less, not more, satisfied.

Second, we correlated the main outcomes reported in Figure 4—willingness to pack the constitutional court PiS-style and violate the law to reform state media—with anger (and happiness and satisfaction, but most importantly anger) using the following logic: If a revenge psychology should have any explanatory power for how attitudes form in processes of restoring democracy, we should at least see that the core feeling of anger correlates with willingness to strike back against Law and Justice with anti-democratic means. But it does not: Willingness to restore democracy using anti-democratic measures is quite uncorrelated with anger about PiS’ former rule ($r = .01-.08$).

Finally, we tested effects among people not voting for the pro-democratic alliance to check if the experimental setup in terms of treatment and outcome construction is equipped to detect effects on the revenge psychology outcomes reported in Figure 5. Unlike for pro-democratic alliance voters, acting harshly has strong (and statistically significant) effects on satisfaction (negative) and perceiv-

ing Tusk as vengeful (positive) among other voters. This also means that, while Tusk manages to satisfy his own voters regardless of the strategy, he—beyond risking to drive up anti-democratic sentiment among his own voters—risks antagonizing the opposition further by proceeding harshly. Interestingly, Tusk seems to antagonize the opposition the most if delivering a harsh strategy without any reminders of PiS’ former wrongdoings to justify it. These results are included in Appendix F.⁸

What might then explain the main effects of the harsh and reminding strategy on anti-democratic sentiment? Two explanations seem plausible. The first one is polarization (Svolik 2019; Krishnarajan 2023): Willingness to strike back against PiS, restoring democracy with anti-democratic means, might be driven by sheer polarization; or more specifically negative affect toward PiS. Such negative affect may also make voters more responsive to a harsh and retaliative strategy to restore democracy by the new government. Relatedly, fear of the other side—that is, PiS being willing to continue engaging in anti-democratic behavior—may also drive anti-democratic sentiment in the restoration process (Braley et al. 2022).

Using measures of affect toward PiS and PO and perceptions of PiS-voters’ anti-democratic tendencies from the original election panel, polarization does not seem to explain neither anti-democratic sentiment in the restoration process nor responsiveness to a harsh restoration strategy. Among voters of the pro-democratic alliance, affect toward PiS and perceptions of PiS’ anti-democratic tendencies are largely uncorrelated with willingness to violate the law to reform state media and re-pack the constitutional court ($r = -.07-.06$). Affect toward PO—Tusk’s party—is slightly correlated with such anti-democratic restoration sentiment ($r = .11-.17$). Finally, fear of the other side does not drive the adverse effects of a non-careful

8. Placing further boundaries on the negative consequences of a harsh strategy for backlash among government opponents, Appendix F also shows that willingness to engage in anti-government protests such as the January 10, 2024, Warsaw protests is unaffected by the treatment.

restoration approach (see Appendix E).

The second alternative explanation is one based on ambivalence touched on earlier. Democratic institutions, and not least how to restore them, is a complex issue (e.g., Coffé 2017). Citizens may therefore largely follow elites when it comes to attitudes toward restoring democracy (Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991; Clayton et al. 2021; Clayton and Willer 2023). To test this proposition, we leverage the anti-democratic attitudes scale measured pre-treatment in the election panel.⁹ We show in Appendix E that this explanation seems more promising. Specifically, pro-democratic alliance voters with attitudes around the middle of the anti-democratic attitudes scale are most responsive to the treatment varying Tusk’s strategy. Such voters increase in anti-democratic sentiment in response to a harsh restoration strategy, whereas die-hard democrats are largely unresponsive.

The finding that ambivalence seemingly drives the effects resonates with several observations mentioned earlier. First, many (pro-democratic alliance) voters are indeed ambivalent, both when it comes to undemocratic practices in general (Figure 6) but also toward using anti-democratic means in the restoration process (Figure 4). Second, pro-democratic alliance voters seem satisfied regardless of which restoration strategy is undertaken (Figure 5). Finally, the fact that affect toward PO correlates somewhat with anti-democratic restoration sentiment suggests that willingness to simply follow the restoring agents matters.

6 Conclusion

When opportunities to restore democracy after periods of backsliding appear, democratic elites face crucial dilemmas: Should democracy be restored as swiftly as possible at all costs, potentially using means that may be perceived as anti-

9. We use a composite measure of undemocratic attitudes from all three waves to increase measurement reliability and utilize the opportunity to impute attitudes from other waves should respondents have missing values to retain as many respondents as possible ($\alpha = .84$).

democratic? Should one let the past die or actively use wrongdoings from the past to justify the restoration strategy? This, in part, depends on what the public wants—in particular those who voted for the actors seeking to restore democracy. A vengeful public may be more supportive of a harsh strategy than a careful strategy.

This article suggests that the public was not very vengeful when such an opportunity to restore democracy saw the day of light in Poland in October 2023—the most prominent case to study democratic restoration in to this day. We leveraged an original three-way election panel to show that attitudes potentially harmful for democracy, if anything, cooled off among voters of Donald Tusk’s pro-democratic coalition. They did not see the election win as an occasion to turn the tables and strike back at Law and Justice.

However, the newborn Tusk-administration’s actual strategy did turn out to be fairly harsh—which our two survey experiments demonstrate may amplify anti-democratic sentiment among its supporters. Consistent with the panel results, this effect does not seem to reflect mobilization of vengeful sentiment. Tentatively, it may reflect a more hollow response from the public anchored in either ambivalence or ignorance. This resonates with the notion that “democracy erodes from the top” (Bartels 2023)—likewise, restoration prospects appear to be driven by choices made by the political elite. But that is positive news: The public does not get in the way.

Explaining elite strategies may then be a natural step for future research on democratic restoration. For example, the decisions of the Tusk-administration may or may not be driven by (mis)perceptions of public opinion. Do the elites think the public is vengeful, or is the rationale behind a harsh strategy anchored in considerations about other elites or institutions rather than citizens? The evidence presented here suggests that the former possibility is easy to fix, whereas the latter possibility leaves a rather benevolent mass public completely at the mercy

of political elites.

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Online Appendix for: “No Need for Revenge: Public Opinion and the Restoration of Democracy”

November 4, 2024

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Appendix A: Discussion of Ethics

We discuss ethical considerations in this appendix. These mostly relate to the two experimental studies, which frame the Polish government’s strategy in relation to restoring democracy. To minimize deception, harm, and impact, we used real-world news articles to conduct all our treatment conditions. The respondents were informed in the survey that the article they read is compiled of real-world articles for the purpose of the survey. The conditions were in particular a compilation of the following articles, which contain elements of both a harsh and careful strategy (with embedded reminders of PiS’ wrongdoings):

- <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/11/donald-tusk-power-poland-pm-loses-confidence-vote-law-justice>
- <https://www.politico.eu/article/donald-tusk-poland-sworn-in-prime-minister/>
- <https://www.politico.eu/article/poland-media-revolution-pis-law-and-justice-tusk-duda/>

It is stated clearly in the survey that it is part of a research study about political attitudes. Cint obtained consent and compensated each respondent economically for participating. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured. All studies reported in the manuscript gained IRB-approval from [anonymized]. This research therefore complies to APSA’s Principles and Guidance on Human Subject Research.

Appendix B: Panel Attrition

As mentioned in the paper, the sample for wave one is representative of the adult Polish population on gender and age. This appendix shows the sample composition on core demographic variables—age, gender, residence, and education— and party identification in each of the three waves (but as reported in wave one) to get a sense of attrition.

Table B1 demonstrates that socio-demographic sample composition did not change significantly despite attrition, which means that attrition does not appear to be very systematic. The mean age, percent people living in urban areas, percent people having college education, and percent respondents identifying with PO and PiS (in wave one) fluctuates unsystematically between the waves. Females and respondents identifying with PiS are slightly less likely to attrite. The latter finding is somewhat surprising since PiS lost the election.

Appendix C: Repeated Cross-Section Results

We replicate Figure 1 from the main paper treating the data as a repeated cross section in this appendix. Figure C1 shows that the findings are nearly identical when doing so compared with treating the data as a panel (as in Figure 1). The main difference is that

Table B1: Attrition and Sample Composition

Variable	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
Mean Age	44	43	45
% Female	52	56	58
% Urban	41	40	39
% College	48	50	47
% PiS-PID	22	24	26
% PO-PID	28	27	27

statistical uncertainty is lower when treating the data as a repeated cross section due to the higher number of observations.

Appendix D: Panel Results for Remaining Outcomes and Participants

In this appendix, we show results for panel outcomes and respondents omitted from the main paper, as our main focus is on sentiment toward the political system and democracy itself and clear winners/losers of the election.

Figure D1 shows panel results related to general trust in elections, experienced online hostility, and need for chaos (i.e., a desire to watch the political world burn, see Petersen, Osmundsen, and Arceneaux 2023), whereas Figure D2 shows in- and out-party meta-perceptions of support for violence and anti-democratic attitudes among PiS and pro-democratic alliance supporters.

Figures D1-D2 show that meta-perceptions in relation to support for violence and anti-democratic sentiment between the two groups as well as experienced online hostility and need for chaos remained stable between the waves, supporting the notion of a benevolent public response to the 2023 election presented in the paper. Figure D1 also shows that while general trust in elections follows somewhat the same pattern as trust in the specific 2023 election illustrated in the paper, the changes are less dramatic for the general measure.

Figure D3 shows panel results including participants not voting for PiS or the

Figure C1: Repeated cross section results (all outcomes scaled 0-1). 7,699 observations. Linear regressions with interaction terms between voter group (Pro-Democratic Alliance versus PiS) and wave ($\alpha = .05$).

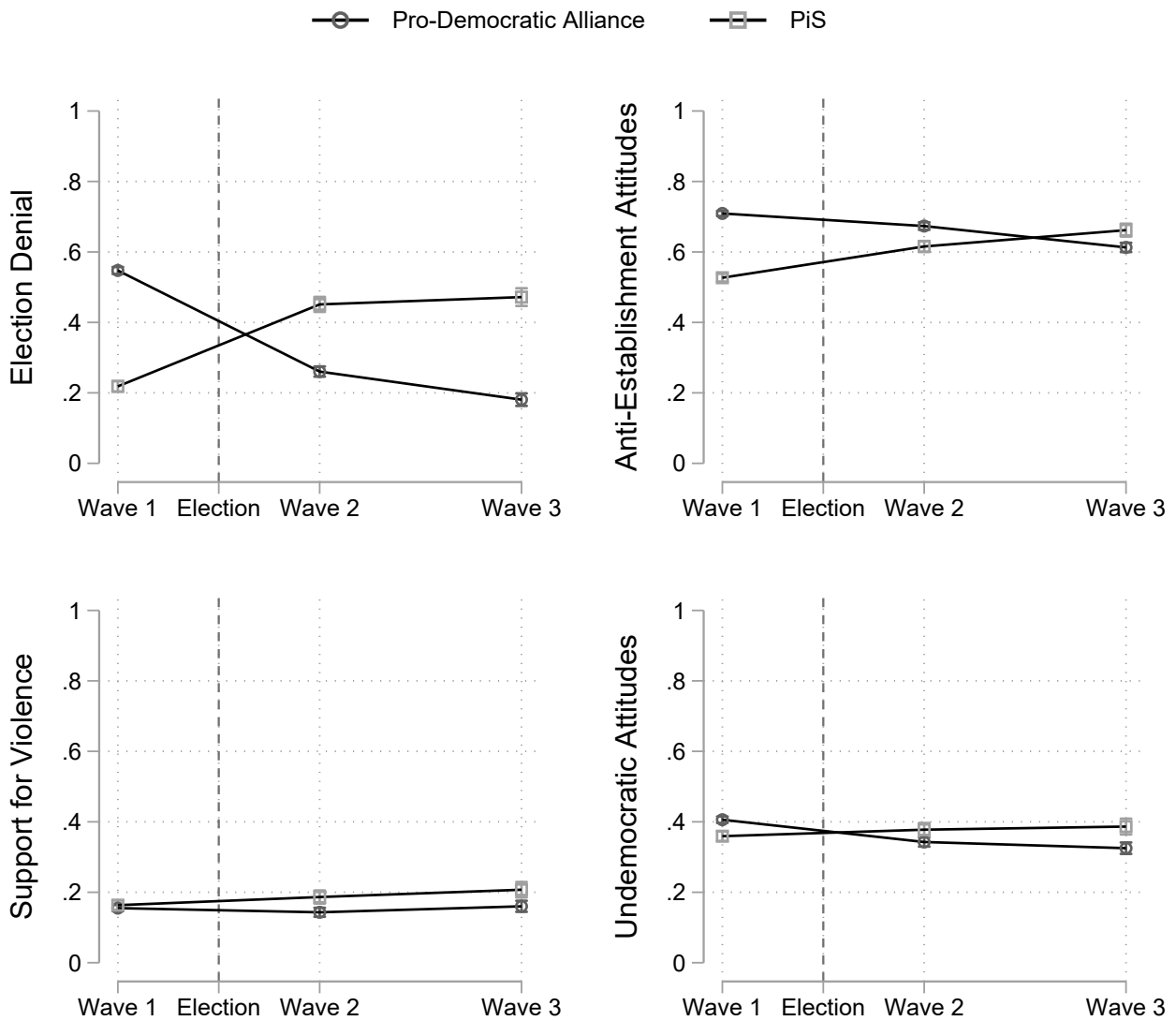


Figure D1: Panel results including need for chaos, experienced online political hostility, and general trust in elections.

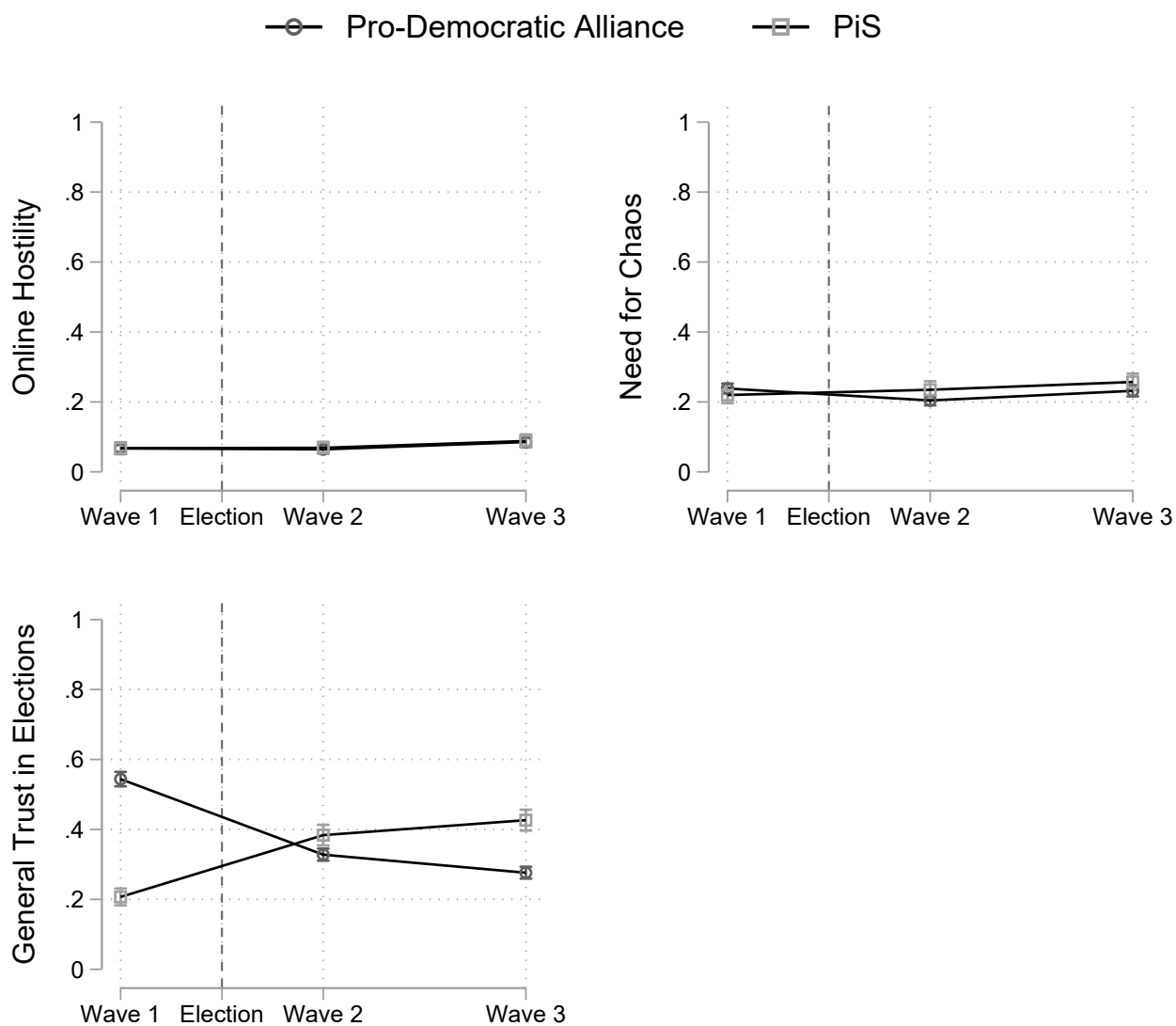


Figure D2: Panel results including in- and out-party meta-perceptions of support for violence and undemocratic attitudes.

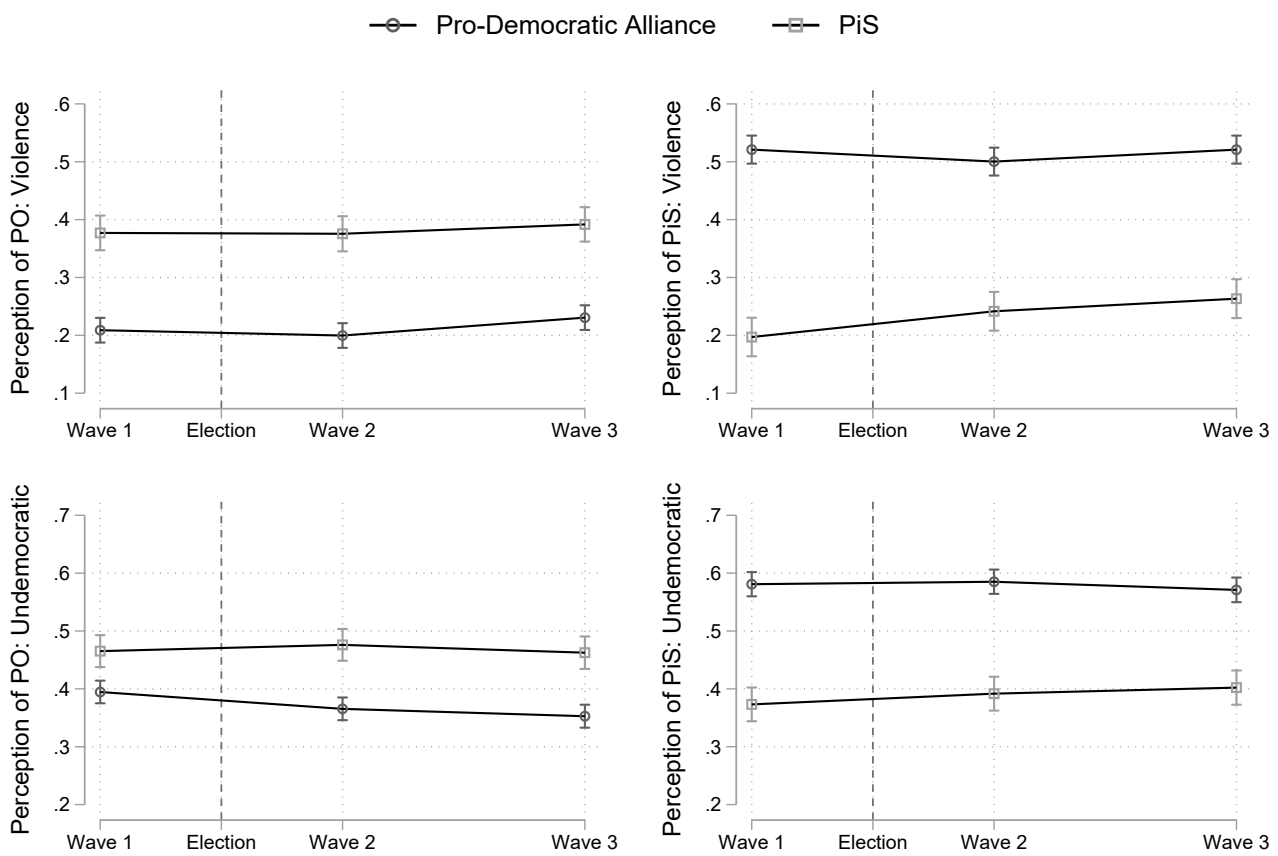
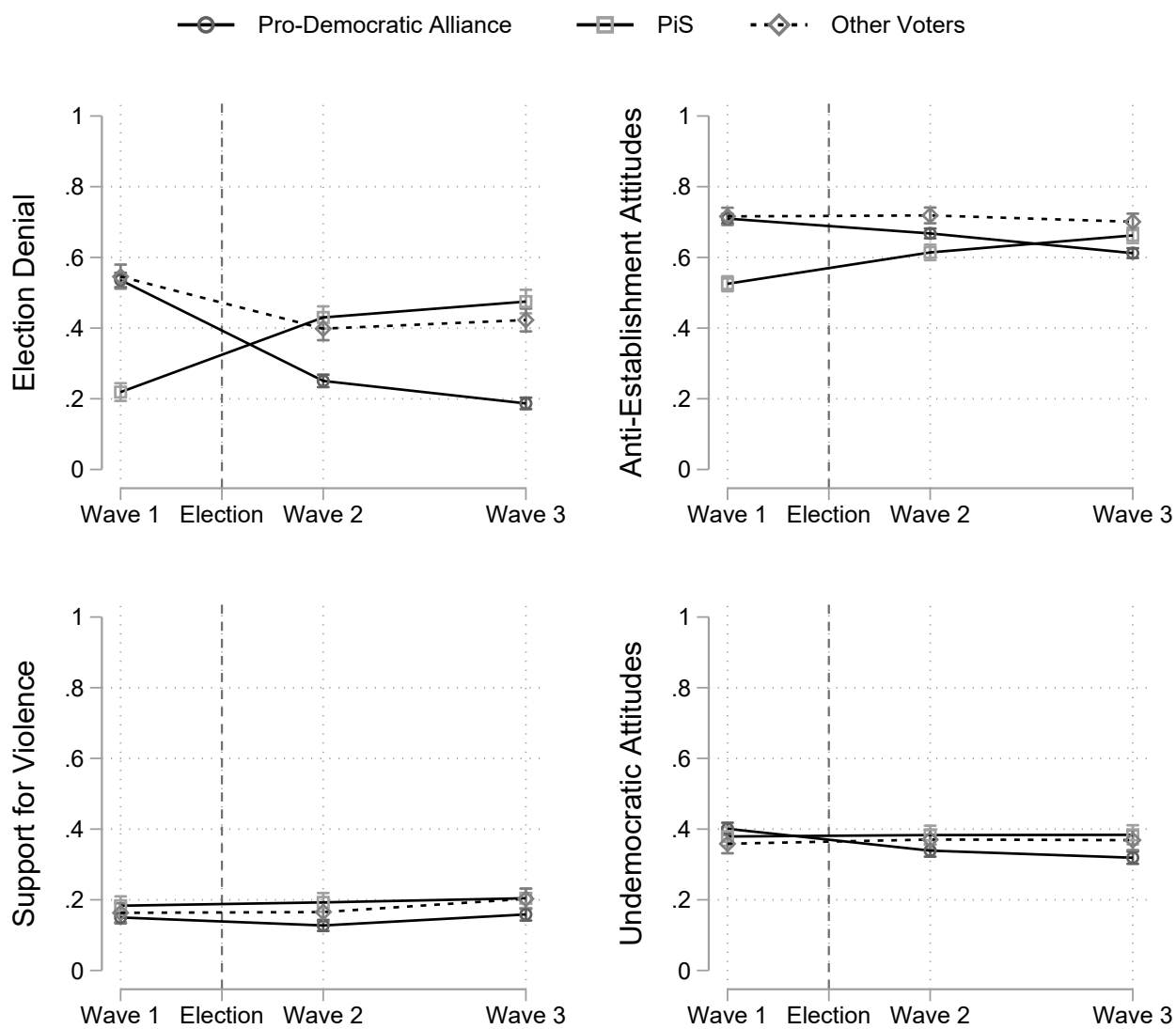


Figure D3: Panel results including other voters than those supporting PiS or the pro-democratic alliance.



pro-democratic alliance—for example Konfederacja-voters and non-voters. The figure reveals two core findings. First, developments in attitudes directly incompatible with democracy are as stable for the residual group as for the two main voter groups. Second, the residual group tends to be more similar with pro-democratic alliance voters than PiS voters in developments in the more malleable system attitudes of election denial and anti-establishment orientation. Thus, people not voting for the main coalition parties also responded rather benevolently to the election result.

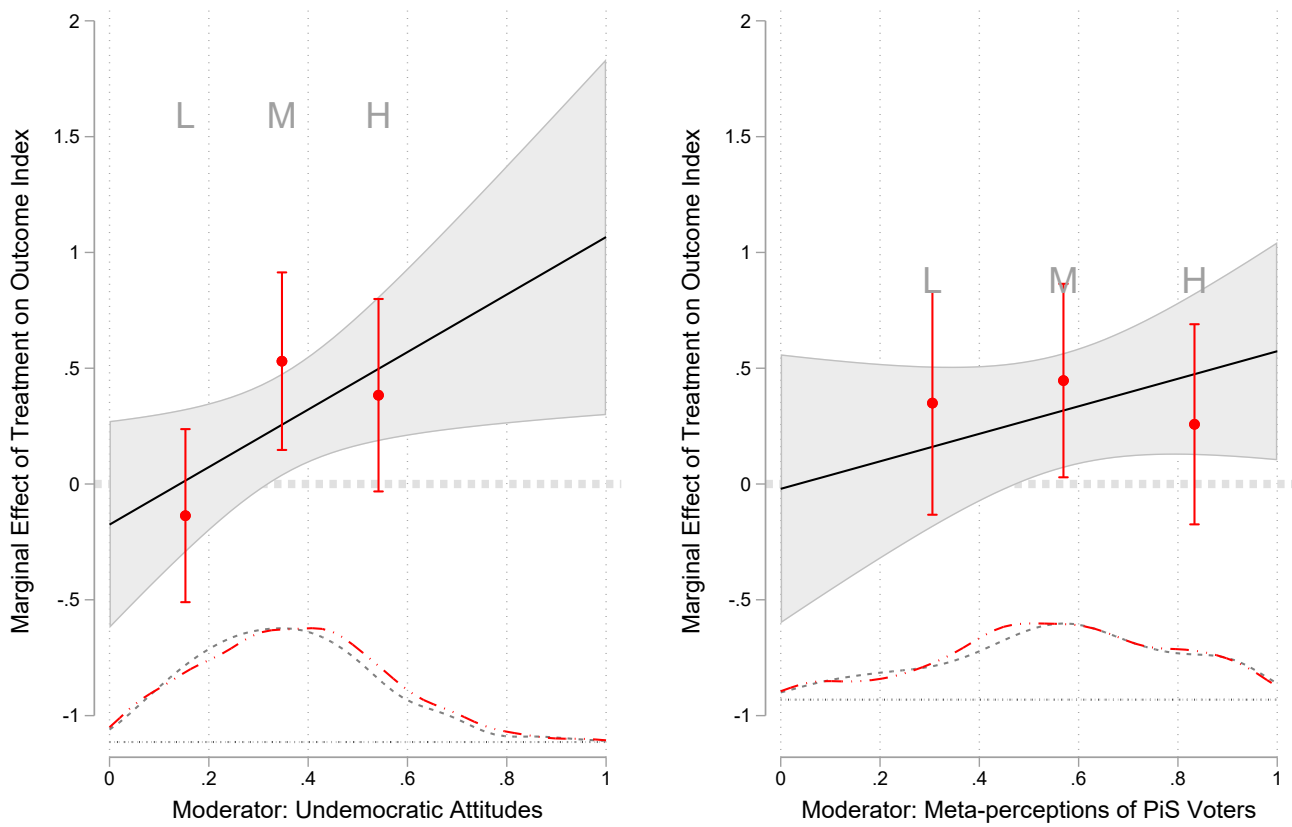
Appendix E: Heterogeneous Treatment Effects (Regarding Mechanisms)

In this appendix, we report tests of two potential mechanisms discussed in the paper estimating heterogeneous treatment effects in the panel-embedded experiment containing relevant pre-treatment moderators (we also conducted several correlation analyses to test mechanisms, but these are all reported in the main text of the paper). We specifically use Hainmueller, Mummolo, and Xu’s (2019) interflex estimator on a compounded version of the treatment comparing all groups to the baseline, as the main findings revealed that the three groups had indistinguishable effects.

As discussed in the main paper, the left panel in Figure E1 tentatively shows that it is those who have ambivalent democratic attitudes who are affected by the new government’s restoration strategy. The figure also shows that quite few voters are truly anti-democratic, wherefore both the middle (“M”) and high (“H”) value groups should be seen as ambivalent. Such voters increase in anti-democratic sentiment in response to a harsh restoration strategy, whereas die-hard democrats (“L”) are largely unresponsive. Meanwhile, the right panel tentatively shows that meta-perceptions of PiS-voters’ undemocratic attitudes—that is, fear of the other side’s willingness to subvert democracy (Braley et al. 2023)—does not drive the adverse effects of a non-careful restoration approach, as the three groups are equally affected by the treatment.¹

1. As reported in the main paper, we used a composite measure of undemocratic attitudes from all three waves for the left panel. For the right panel, we similarly used a composite measure of perceived

Figure E1: Heterogeneous treatment effects across undemocratic attitudes and meta-perceptions of PiS' voters' undemocratic attitudes (only pro-democratic alliance government supporters as in the main results). Panel-embedded experiment, where we had pre-treatment panel measures of these constructs.



Appendix F: Average Treatment Effects (Covariates, Other Participants, and Other Outcomes)

ATEs with Covariates

We present the results of our two experiments when controlling for a series of pre-registered covariates aimed at increasing statistical precision. These are undemocratic attitudes, election denial, strength of partisanship, anti-establishment attitudes, and support for violence in the panel-embedded experiment and “abstract” democratic attitudes and in- and out-party affect in the replication experiment. Specifically, Figures F1-F2 show the Average Treatment Effects displayed in Figures 3-4 when controlling for the aforementioned covariates. Figures F1-F2 show that the ATEs remain largely similar when including these covariates.

ATEs on Protest Outcome

In the panel-embedded experiment, we pre-registered an additional hypothesis about the effects of a harsh restoration strategy among government opponents (i.e., Law and Justice supporters). To reflect the real-world relevance of the January 10, 2024, protests in Warsaw discussed in the paper, we specifically hypothesized that a harsh restoration strategy by the Tusk-government will increase willingness to engage in anti-government protests among these voters. We also take these anti-government protests as point of departure for our measure of willingness to participate in anti-government protest, using a 7-point no/yes scale and the following question: “Tens of thousands of opposition supporters protested against Donald Tusk’s new government outside Poland’s parliament on January 11. Would you be willing to participate in similar protests against Donald Tusk’s government?”.

Figure F3 shows the results. The coefficients are negative and statistically insignificant, and as we hypothesized positive effects, we can fairly confidently reject the

undemocratic attitudes among PiS-voters from all three waves.

Figure F1: Results from panel-embedded survey experiment (only pro-democratic alliance government supporters) when including covariates (undemocratic attitudes, election denial, strength of partisanship, anti-establishment attitudes, and support for violence).

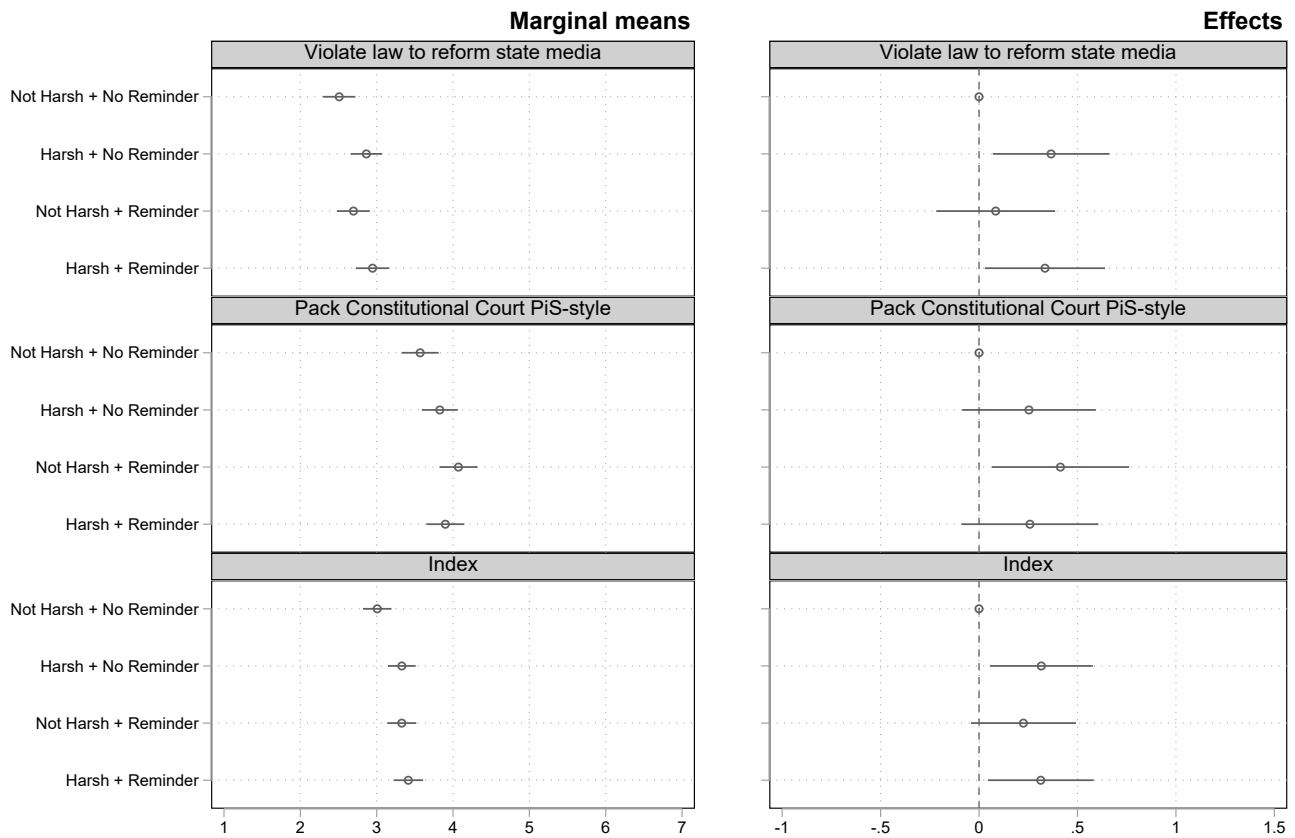


Figure F2: Results from out-of-panel replication experiment (only pro-democratic alliance government supporters) when including covariates (“abstract” democratic attitudes and in- and out-party affect).

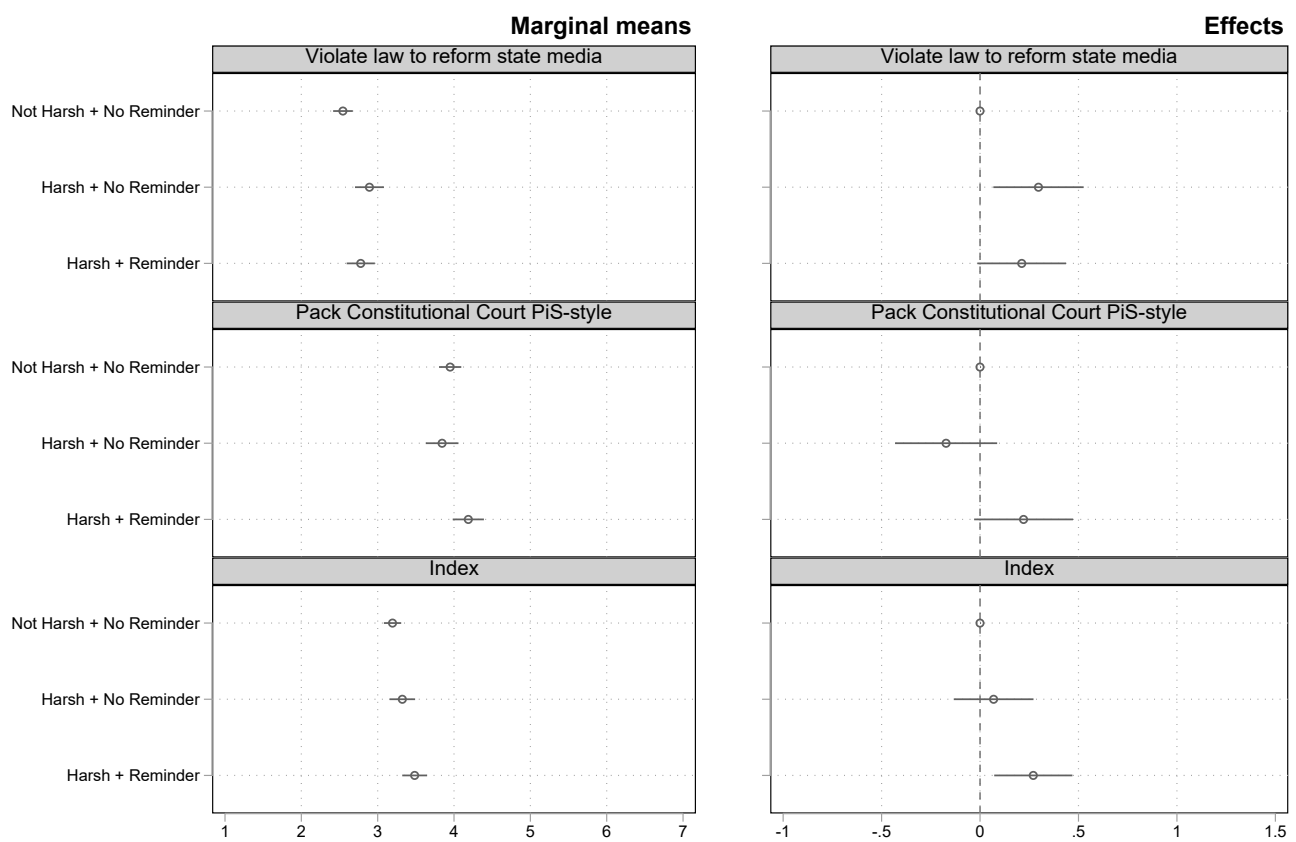
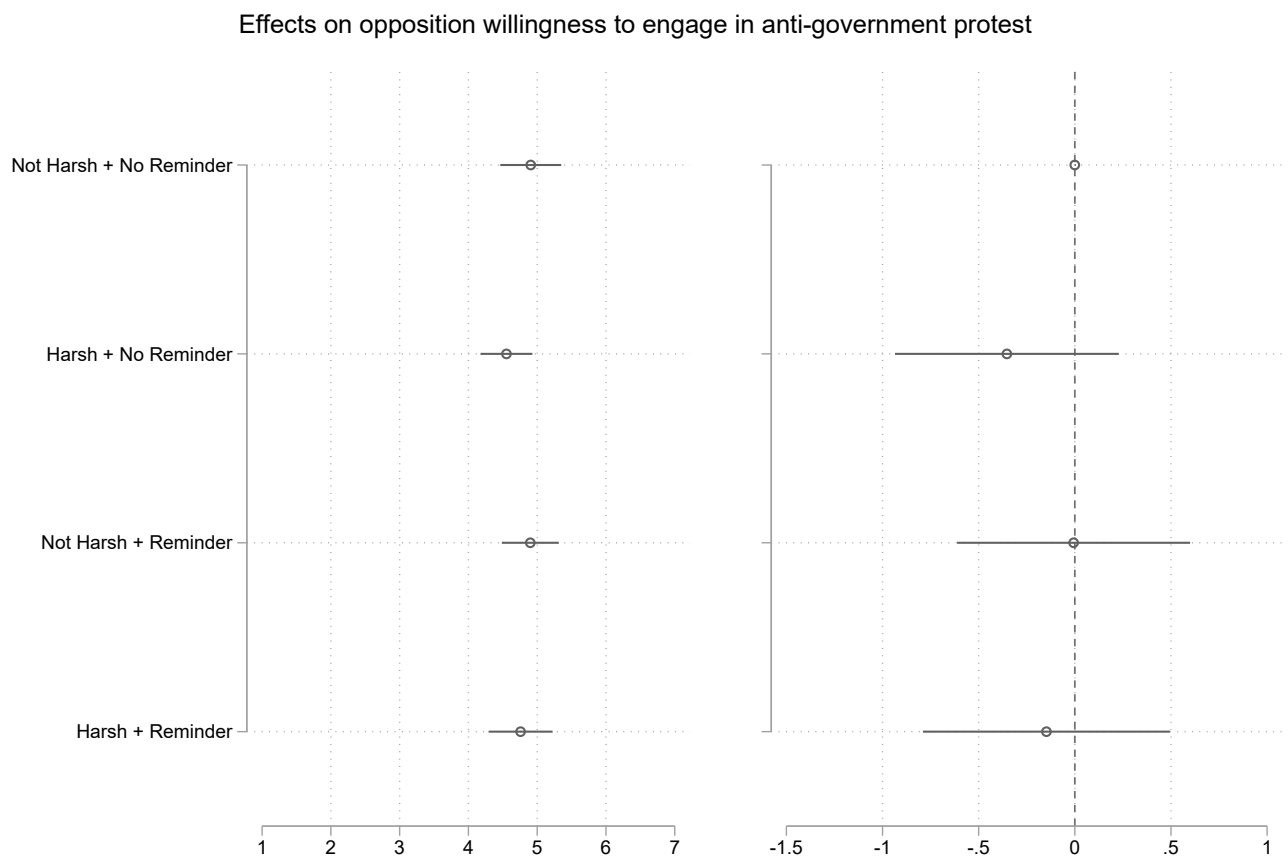


Figure F3: ATEs on willingness to participate in anti-government protests (only pro-democratic alliance government opponents). N = 425.



hypothesis. Importantly, the out-of-panel experiment contained no hypotheses about reactions among government opponents and should be seen as a replication of our results related to government supporters exclusively.

“Revenge” ATEs for Other Participants

As reported in the manuscript regarding the replication experiment testing a revenge psychology explanation, one could worry that the experimental setup in terms of treatment and outcome construction is not equipped to detect effects on the revenge psychology outcomes reported in Figure 5. To probe that proposition further, we present ATEs on the revenge psychology outcomes among people not supporting the government in Figure F4.

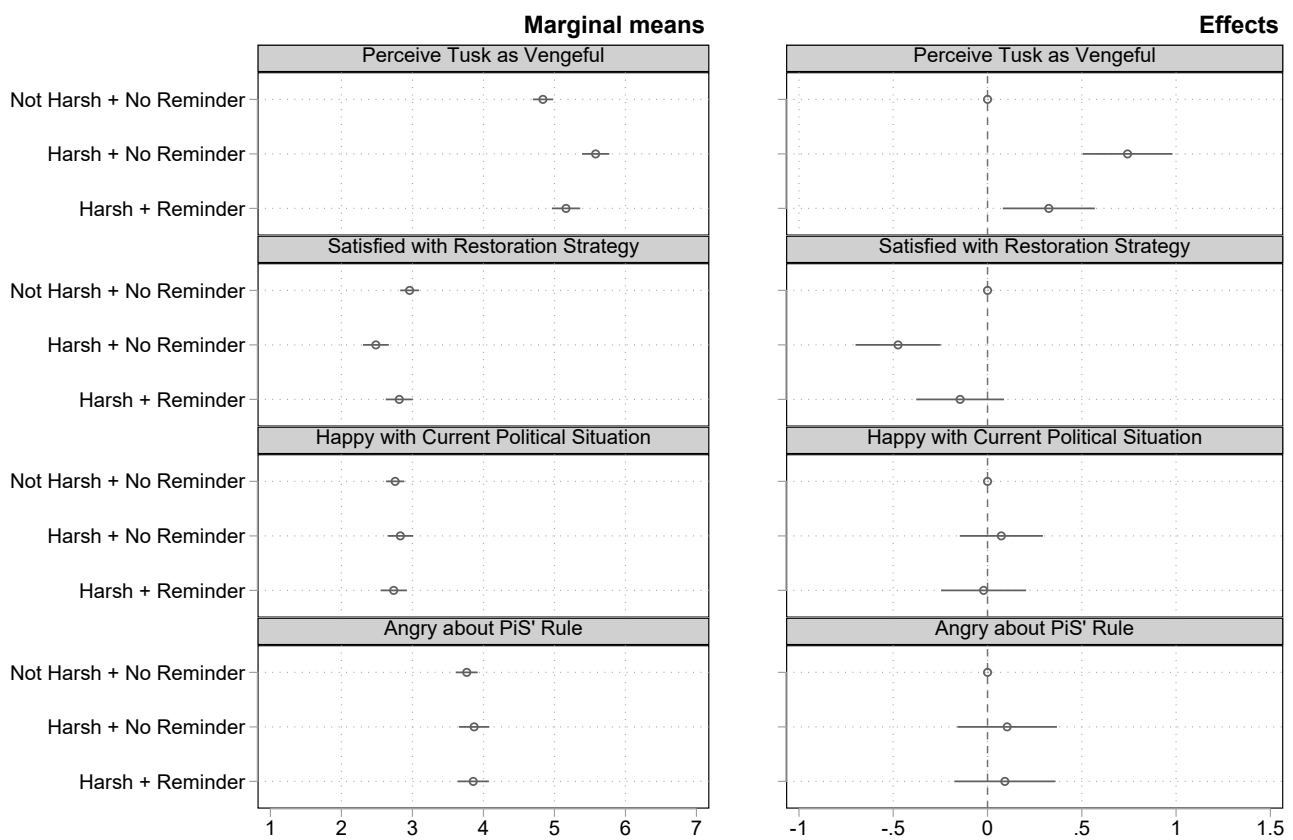
As referred to in the paper, quite strong effects materialize on some of the outcomes among this group of voters, who perceive Tusk as substantially more vengeful if taking a harsh strategy, which they are also less satisfied with. Interestingly, adding the reminder about PiS’ former wrongdoings dampen these effects somewhat, such that government opponents perceive Tusk as a little less vengeful and also spike less in dissatisfaction if the harsh restoration strategy is justified with reference to wrongdoings during backsliding.

Appendix G: Regarding Pre-registration

Our pre-registrations to the panel study, the panel-embedded experiment, and the replication experiment are appended to this submission. We discuss core focus points and the (minor) deviations in relation to reading the pre-registrations in this appendix. While described in the manuscript and/or appendices as well, all outcome measures and treatment materials are declared in the pre-registrations.

1. **Open format of pre-registration of panel study.** The pre-registration of our panel study (i.e., before the first wave) had a more open format. This was partly because we did not know the result of the election and partly because we did

Figure F4: ATEs on revenge psychology outcomes in out-of-panel replication experiment among people not supporting the pro-democratic alliance government. N = 1,480 ($\alpha = .05$).



not have clear hypotheses to how the different voter groups would respond to the election result. Our manuscript is true to this more explorative approach, as we did not derive firm hypotheses regarding responses to the election in section 3.1.

2. **Reserving some outcomes to Appendix D.** One deviation from the pre-registration of the panel is that we report results related to the outcome of online hostility, need for chaos, and general trust in elections in Appendix D instead of in the main paper. However, as we discuss in the manuscript and in Appendix D, results related to these outcomes underscore rather than contradict the conclusions made in the main paper.
3. **Splitting experimental conditions.** As discussed in the paper, we “pre-registered estimating the average marginal effects of each dimension, but ultimately decided to disintegrate the analysis to transparently show all four conditions, because—as Figure 3 shows—all three treatment conditions have comparable effects.” In other words, it is our assessment that aggregating treatment conditions as suggested by the pre-registration would cast one astray when interpreting the results and that showing all treatment conditions separately instead helps to interpret the results and increases transparency.
4. **Reserving protest hypothesis to Appendix F.** As declared in Appendix F, we pre-registered an additional hypothesis for the panel-embedded experiment (but not for the replication experiment). This hypothesis, which is quite unrelated to the main focus of the paper, is also tested in Appendix F.
5. **Reserving covariate adjustment to Appendix F.** We originally pre-registered including covariates when estimating treatment effects in the two experiments, but have relegated the inclusion of covariates to tests included in Appendix F. We made this choice in continuation of the choice of splitting experimental conditions—that is, with an aim to show the “clean” experimental results without any adjustments in the main paper. However, as Appendix F shows, including covariates does not change the results.

6. **Labeling “vengeful” outcome a manipulation check.** In the pre-registration for the replication experiment aiming to also test the revenge psychology explanation, we labeled the outcome tapping whether Donald Tusk is perceived as vengeful a manipulation check. Re-thinking this, conceiving of this outcome as a manipulation check only makes sense under the assumption that revenge psychology actually explains the significant effects which we do find—which we find is not the case. In other words, something else than perceiving Tusk as vengeful drives the effects on the main outcomes shown in Figure 4. Meanwhile, effects on the vengefulness outcome are quite heterogeneous between among government opponents (strong) and supporters (weak), as illustrated in Figures 5 and F4.

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