





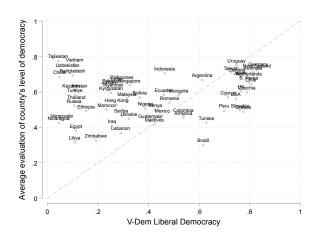


# Teaching Democracy How Education Shapes Support for Democratic Values

Professor Anja Neundorf

Universitat de Barcelona, 21 November 2025 Conference on Education for Democracy

### Perceptions vs. Reality: Misjudging Democracy



Data: World Value Survey, round 7, and V-Dem.

"For democracy to endure, their leaders and citizens must internalize the spirit of democracy" (Diamond 2008: 294; also Claassen 2020)

To love democracy is....

- to understand it
- ▶ to value it.
- to fight for it



### How to make a case for democracy?



## Study 1: The long-term impact of school education on democratic support



### Case study: German Democratic Republic

- ▶ We leverage the German reunification and the strict cut-off birth date used to determine school start dates for individuals born in the GDR to isolate the causal effect of exposure to socialist versus democratic education on democratic support.
- ► We use a difference-in-difference-in-difference (DiDiD) research design that leverages the school enrolment cut-off date (1 June) to ensure the causal identification of our regression (following Fuchs-Schündeln and Masella 2016).

### Case study: German Democratic Republic

- ▶ In the GDR, children born before the 1st of June started school the same year, they turned six years old, while children born on or after the 1st of June started school the year following their sixth birthday. Dummy: Born before June
- Cohorts born between 1973 and 1982 can potentially experience one additional year of socialist education (compared to their contemporaries born in the same year) if they were born before 1 June, as they were still in school in 1989.
- ▶ Dummy for *East* Germans to capture whether the fall of the Berlin Wall might have affected their exposure to socialist education.

 $Y_{ics} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Age + \beta_2 East + \beta_3 Cohort + \beta_4 BeforeJune + \beta_5 EastxCohort + \beta_6 EastxBeforeJune + \beta_7 CohortxBeforeJune + \beta_8 EastxCohortxBeforeJune + \gamma_5 + \epsilon$ 

## The impact of a socialist education on support for democracy

|                           | Democrati | c Satisfaction | Democratic support |         |  |
|---------------------------|-----------|----------------|--------------------|---------|--|
|                           | Coef.     | s.e.           | Coef.              | s.e.    |  |
| Age                       | 0.108**   | [0.020]        | 0.091**            | [0.028] |  |
| Born before June          | 0.328     | [0.308]        | -0.659             | [0.538] |  |
| Cohort (1973-1983)        | 0.860     | [0.797]        | -1.926             | [1.077] |  |
| Before June*Cohort        | 2.576*    | [1.088]        | 1.700              | [1.290] |  |
| East Germany              | -14.048** | [0.499]        | -6.031**           | [0.775] |  |
| Before June*East          | -0.861    | [0.869]        | 0.464              | [1.118] |  |
| Cohort*East               | 4.383**   | [1.216]        | 4.101*             | [1.742] |  |
| Before June*Cohort*East   | -4.286*   | [1.918]        | -5.818*            | [2.711] |  |
| Constant                  | 66.914**  | [0.761]        | 86.534**           | [1.481] |  |
| Survey-Year Fixed Effects | `         | /es            | Yes                |         |  |
| Survey Weights            | `         | /es            | Yes                |         |  |
| Observations              | 18        | ,391           | 4,509              |         |  |
| R <sup>2</sup>            | 0.        | .099           | 0.040              |         |  |

Results: The extra year of socialist education in East Germany for those born before the 1st of June between 1973 and 1982 causes a decrease of 4.3 percentage points in democratic satisfaction and 5.8 percentage points in democratic support, compared to their contemporaries born in the same year.

Data: ALLBUS, 1988-2018.

# Can we generalize these findings?

What drives these effects? The more intense experience of socialist or the lack of democratic education?

- ► We need comparative data on education content to distinguish pro- and anti-democratic school socialization.
- We need to match the education exposure to individuals and measure their democratic support today.

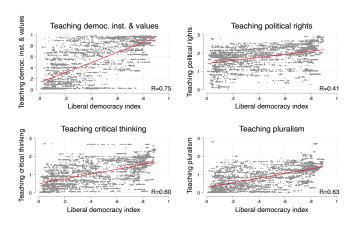
## Measuring education content: Introducing the Varieties in Indocrination (V-Indoc) data

Expert survey: Collaborating with the V-Dem Institute

- ► Coverage: 160 countries, 1945-2021
- 27 expert coded indicators; 21 on education and 6 on the media. 11 new abstract indices.
- ► Topics covered: Centralization (e.g. textbook production); curriculum (incl. subject-specific); teachers; schools; state-ownership of the media; patriotism
- ▶ Data collection: January to May 2022

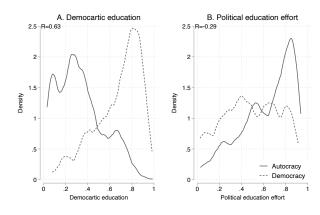
Learn more and access the data: https://www.gla.ac.uk/research/az/democracyresearch/dataandmethods/v-indocdataset/

### Education content across different levels of liberal democracy



▶ Definitions V-Indoc indicators

# Democratic education content and political education efforts across regime types



Motivation

### Exposing individuals to education and its long-term effect

- ▶ Data (1995-2022): World Value Survey, Latinobarometer, Afrobarometer, Americas Barometer, Asian Barometer, European Values Study, Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES)
- ► Sample: 106 countries (89% of the world population); N = 760,000
- ▶ Outcomes: 0="not at all" and 100="completely" agree
  - Agreement that "democracy is the best form of government"
  - 2 Agreement that "having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections"
- ► Education experience of individuals: Matching the average education curriculum that respondents were exposed to between 5 and 15 years of age. Capture core education for most generations.
- ► Model specification: Linear OLS with clustered standard errors by country-birth cohort and year and study FEs.

|                                   | OUTCOME: SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY (M1) |          |          |          |          |          |          |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
|                                   | M1.0                                | M1.1     | M1.2     | M1.3     | M1.4     | M1.5     | M1.6     |
|                                   | coef/se                             | coef/se  | coef/se  | coef/se  | coef/se  | coef/se  | coef/se  |
| Autocratic regime (aged 5-15)     | -1.157**                            | -0.676   | 0.443    | -0.874   | -0.884   | -1.312** | 2.304**  |
|                                   | [0.446]                             | [0.481]  | [0.477]  | [0.455]  | [0.467]  | [0.462]  | [0.651]  |
| Education environment (aged 5-15  | <u>s):</u>                          |          |          |          |          |          |          |
| Democratic education index        |                                     | 2.098**  |          |          |          |          | 5.413**  |
|                                   |                                     | [0.616]  |          |          |          |          | [0.764]  |
| Teaching democ. inst. & values    |                                     |          | 4.327**  |          |          |          |          |
|                                   |                                     |          | [0.387]  |          |          |          |          |
| Teaching political rights         |                                     |          |          | 2.077**  |          |          |          |
|                                   |                                     |          |          | [0.586]  |          |          |          |
| Teaching pluralism                |                                     |          |          |          | 3.162**  |          |          |
|                                   |                                     |          |          |          | [0.906]  |          |          |
| Teaching critical thinking        |                                     |          |          |          |          | -1.009   |          |
|                                   |                                     |          |          |          |          | [0.703]  |          |
| Autocratic x democratic education |                                     |          |          |          |          |          | -7.304** |
|                                   |                                     |          |          |          |          |          | [1.153]  |
| Constant                          | 54.879**                            | 54.091** | 54.498** | 53.450** | 54.645** | 55.278** | 52.871** |
|                                   | [1.122]                             | [1.134]  | [1.102]  | [1.222]  | [1.110]  | [1.154]  | [1.126]  |
| Observations                      | 518,054                             | 518,054  | 518,054  | 524,157  | 518,054  | 518,054  | 518,054  |
| R <sup>2</sup>                    | 0.054                               | 0.054    | 0.055    | 0.054    | 0.054    | 0.054    | 0.055    |

Individual controls: age, gender, education and working. Macro controls – impressionable years: (log) GDP per Capita, modernization index, political corruption, public goods provision. Macro controls – survey year: (log) GDP per Capita, political corruption, level of electoral democracy.

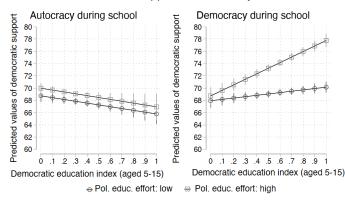
# Impact of education content on long-term democ. attitudes

|                                   | OUTCOME: SUPPORT FOR STRONG LEADER (M2) |          |          |          |           |          |          |
|-----------------------------------|---|----------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|
|                                   | M2.0                                    | M2.1     | M2.2     | M2.3     | M2.4      | M2.5     | M2.6     |
|                                   | coef/se                                 | coef/se  | coef/se  | coef/se  | coef/se   | coef/se  | coef/se  |
| Autocratic regime (aged 5-15)     | 4.977**                                 | 3.380**  | 3.570**  | 4.207**  | 4.053**   | 4.472**  | 3.288**  |
|                                   | [0.536]                                 | [0.555]  | [0.583]  | [0.542]  | [0.536]   | [0.548]  | [0.794]  |
| Education environment (aged 5-15  | <u>):</u>                               |          |          |          |           |          |          |
| Democratic education index        |   | -7.435** |          |          |           |          | -7.554** |
|                                   |   | [0.762]  |          |          |           |          | [1.055]  |
| Teaching democ. inst. & values    |   |          | -3.259** |          |           |          |          |
|                                   |   |          | [0.586]  |          |           |          |          |
| Teaching political rights         |   |          |          | -5.557** |           |          |          |
|                                   |   |          |          | [0.838]  |           |          |          |
| Teaching pluralism                |   |          |          |          | -10.445** |          |          |
|                                   |   |          |          |          | [1.002]   |          |          |
| Teaching critical thinking        |   |          |          |          |           | -5.065** |          |
|                                   |   |          |          |          |           | [0.892]  |          |
| Autocratic x democratic education |   |          |          |          |           |          | 0.228    |
|                                   |   |          |          |          |           |          | [1.619]  |
| Constant                          | 59.887**                                | 63.631** | 60.974** | 63.451** | 61.970**  | 61.791** | 63.674** |
|                                   | [1.788]                                 | [1.764]  | [1.754]  | [1.917]  | [1.755]   | [1.803]  | [1.765]  |
| Observations                      | 497,529                                 | 497,529  | 497,529  | 499,074  | 497,529   | 497,529  | 497,529  |
| R <sup>2</sup>                    | 0.158                                   | 0.159    | 0.158    | 0.162    | 0.160     | 0.158    | 0.159    |

Individual controls: age, gender, education and working. Macro controls - impressionable years: (log) GDP per Capita, modernization index, political corruption, public goods provision. Macro controls survey year: (log) GDP per Capita, political corruption, level of electoral democracy.

## Democratic school content and efforts of political education

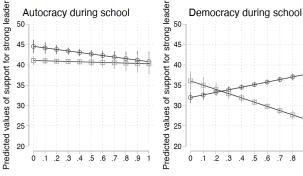
#### Outcome: Support for democracy



# Democratic school content and efforts of political education

⊕ Pol. educ. effort; low ⊟ Pol. educ. effort; high

#### Outcome: Support for strong leader



Democratic education index (aged 5-15

Democratic education index (aged 5-15)

Motivation

How can we strengthen democracies beyond school?

### Key challenges to traditional (adult) civic education

- 1 Extending its reach, particularly to those in ideological echo chambers and those difficult to reach with more traditional forms of democracy promotion, e.g., those less educated or interested in politics, younger people, and women.
- 2 Finding innovative, cost-effective methods to convey the critical role of upholding democracy amid increasing global skepticism.

Project DEMED addresses these challenges by using social media to conduct civic education campaigns, offering a cost-effective and wide-reaching method.

### Social media: The end or the savior of democracy?



### Social media: The end or the savior of democracy?



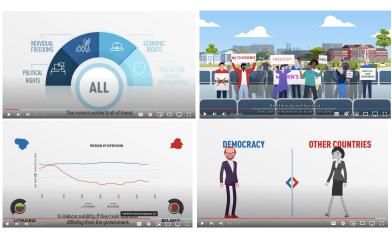
Turning the potential of social media on its head.

### Advantages of social media advertisement campaigns

- ► Massive reach: Billions of people worldwide, coming from nearly all social backgrounds and countries, use social media websites daily.
- Circumventing state control: Especially in autocracies, social media platforms' relatively decentralized structure allows more space for pro-democratic voices compared to traditional media structures, which are often controlled by the regime.

Sum & extra

### Video example: Civil rights framing



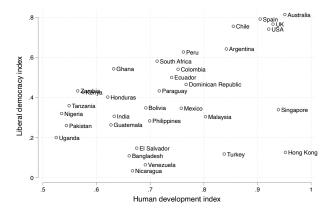
https://youtu.be/YBePPaGOBg8

# Civic education videos focusing on different aspects of democracy

- 1 Protection of civil, social, and economic rights
- 2 Checks and balances, e.g., institutions such as independent parliaments and courts
- 3 The economic and social outputs produced by democratic systems, e.g., economic growth, public goods
- **4** Control: The advantages of space exploration

**Experimental design**: People were randomly assigned to watch one of the videos.

### Over 90,000 people in 33 countries were included in our study

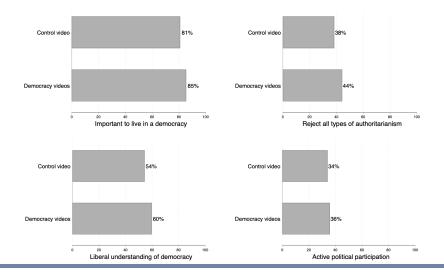


Research participants were recruited online using Facebook and Instagram ads.

Motivation

Modelling: Linear regression with country-level clustered standard errors

# Descriptive effects on democratic support & active citizenship

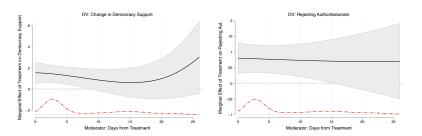


### Pooled treatment effects on democratic support

| Dependent Variable (DV) | Change<br>dem pref | Rejection of authoritarianism | Defending democracy | Knowledge<br>lib. democracy |
|-------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| Treatment               | 0.265**<br>[0.019] | 0.164**<br>[0.014]            | 0.045**<br>[0.013]  | 0.136**<br>[0.014]          |
| Covariates              | $\sqrt{}$          | $\checkmark$                  | $\sqrt{}$           | $\checkmark$                |
| Observations $R^2$      | 41,395<br>0.322    | 41,001<br>0.085               | 42,003<br>0.009     | 39,518<br>0.153             |
| Control Mean            | 0                  | 0                             | 0                   | 0                           |
| % change using raw data | 2.45               | 0.04                          | 0.02                | 0.03                        |
| Control Mean (raw)      | 0.11               | 2.89                          | 4.79                | 8.00                        |
| Min (raw)               | -10                | 1                             | 0                   | 0                           |
| Max (raw)               | 10                 | 4                             | 10                  | 10                          |

Significance levels: \*\* p < 0.01, \* p < 0.05. Results are based on linear regression with country-clustered standard errors.

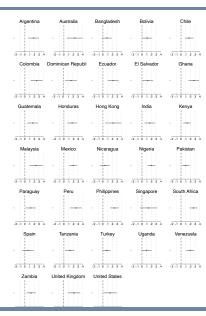
### How long do the effects of online civic education last?



► The positive effect of the democracy videos is still statistically significant after 10 days.

Main effects by country: Democ. pref.

Motivation



### Which pro-democratic arguments have the strongest impact?



Institutional constraints on executive power and promotion of the rule of law



Protection of individual rights and liberties



Performance in providing positive economic, health, and environmental outcomes

► We found emphasizing democracy's liberal aspects, particularly its rights and institutions, to be more effective than arguments emphasizing democracy's economic benefits



Education – both in schools and online – is key to strengthening democracies!

### **Implications**

#### People need to learn to value democracy and their role as citizens.

- Brief, low-cost civic education interventions can strengthen democratic culture.
- Can be scaled online via platforms like Facebook and Instagram.
- ► Interventions work across different contexts.

**Conclusion:** Online civic education can be a powerful tool to counteract democratic backsliding



#### Definition V-Indoc indicators

- ▶ Teaching democ. inst. & values: How would you characterize the dominant societal model(s) or ideology(ies) promoted through the history curriculum? Option: Democratic norms, e.g. liberalism or pluralism, and democratic institutions, e.g. elections.
- ▶ Teaching political rights: To what extent does the curriculum of subjects that include the teaching of political values cover topics related to individuals' political rights and duties?
- Teaching pluralism: When historical events are taught, to what extent are students exposed to diverse views and/or interpretations of these events?
- ► Teaching critical thinking: To what extent do students have opportunities to discuss what they are taught in history classes?

→ Go back

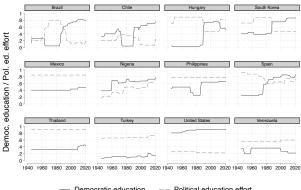
#### Definition V-Indoc indices

Study 1: School ed

- Democratic education content index: Indoctrination content in education can range from being democratic (participatory, critical, pluralist) to autocratic (loyal/obedient, uncritical, single view/ideology). This index measures the democratic/autocratic character of the regime's doctrine based on the core teaching principles and the level of contestation promoted in education.
- **Political education effort index:** This index measures the extent to which the regime attempts to teach its core political values and ideologies through education based on political education in primary and secondary schools, and the teaching of a dominant ideology in the history curriculum.



# Democratic education content and levels of liberal democracy over time (selected countries)



Democratic education

Political education effort



# Facebook/Instagram Ad to recruit research participants



# The global reach of Facebook and Instagram



Figure: Percentage of the population using Facebook/Instagram (2024)

| Treatment    | Passed a | attention check $\sqrt{}$ |
|--------------|----------|---------------------------|
| Placebo      | 11.3     | 88.7                      |
| Output       | 7.2      | 92.8                      |
| Institutions | 20.3     | 79.7                      |
| Rights       | 24.1     | 75.9                      |
| Total        | 15.7     | 84.3                      |

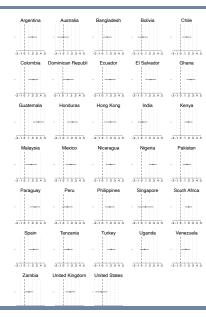


# Balance test

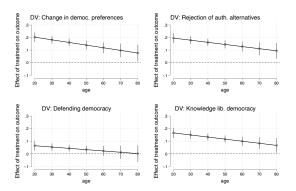
|                       | Output  | Treatment group<br>Institutions | Rights  |
|-----------------------|---------|---------------------------------|---------|
| Age                   | 0.001   | 0.002                           | 0.001   |
|                       | [0.001] | [0.001]                         | [0.001] |
| Female                | -0.017  | -0.001                          | -0.042  |
|                       | [0.029] | [0.029]                         | [0.029] |
| Secondary educ.       | -0.024  | 0.068                           | 0.034   |
|                       | [0.060] | [0.061]                         | [0.060] |
| Degree                | 0.034   | 0.148*                          | 0.084   |
|                       | [0.063] | [0.064]                         | [0.063] |
| Urban                 | -0.033  | -0.034                          | -0.023  |
|                       | [0.029] | [0.029]                         | [0.029] |
| Proficcient language  | 0.065   | 0.009                           | 0.022   |
|                       | [0.036] | [0.035]                         | [0.036] |
| Pre-treat democ pref. | -0.004  | 0.004                           | 0.008   |
|                       | [0.007] | [0.007]                         | [0.007] |
| No very interested    | 0.074   | 0.061                           | 0.028   |
|                       | [0.047] | [0.047]                         | [0.047] |
| Somewhat interested   | 0.052   | 0.055                           | -0.008  |
|                       | [0.045] | [0.045]                         | [0.045] |
| Very interested       | 0.075   | 0.083                           | 0.02    |
|                       | [0.050] | [0.050]                         | [0.050] |
| Turnout               | 0.009   | -0.024                          | -0.038  |
|                       | [0.034] | [0.033]                         | [0.033] |
| Country FE            | · √ ·   | _ /                             | · 🗸 ·   |
| Constant              | 0.008   | -0.126                          | 0.039   |
|                       | [0.123] | [0.124]                         | [0.123] |
| Observations          | 41,395  | 41,395                          | 41,395  |

Main effects by country: Reject. auth.

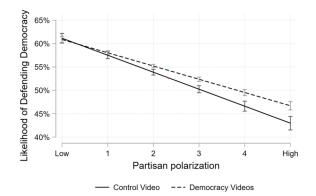
Motivation



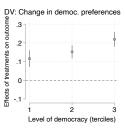
# Do these interventions work better among some individuals?

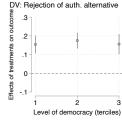


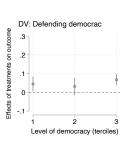
➤ The effects of the videos were greatest among those who have a greater need for political education, e.g. younger and less politically interested voters.

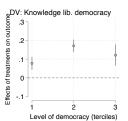


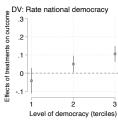
#### Marginal effects (and 95% c.i.) of treatments by liberal democracy



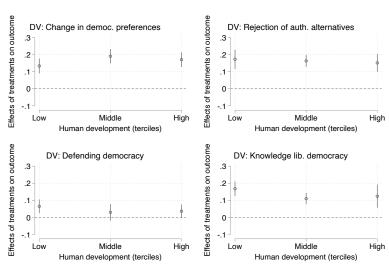




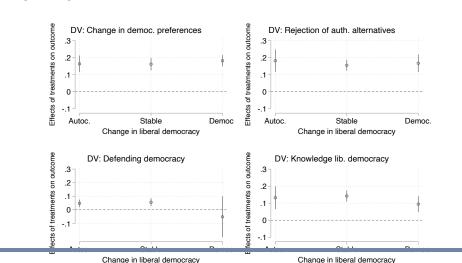




# Marginal effects (and 95% c.i.) of treatments by econ. development



# Marginal effects (and 95% c.i.) of treatments by democ. trajectory

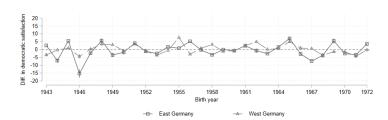


# Summary and discussion

- ▶ DEMOCRATIC school education plays a crucial role in shaping enduring democratic attitudes. People need to learn to value democracy and their role as citizens.
- Online, adult civic education works generally across a wide range of contexts and individual traits. Treatment effects are still significant after up to 2 weeks.
- Online, adult civic education can reduce the negative impact of partisan polarization on democratic erosion.
- ▶ Abstract online civic education can reduce support for autocratic incumbents by inducing more realistic evaluations of the autocratic nature of the regime, affecting the autocrats legitimacy claims.
- Social media ads are helpful for pro-democratic capacity building in an authoritarian context, especially in the least developed regions.



# Parallel trends in East and West Germany





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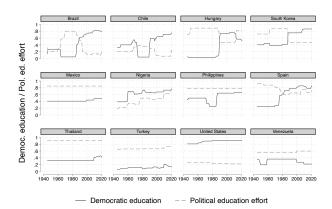
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- ▶ Political education effort index: This index measures the extent to which the regime attempts to teach its core political values and ideologies through education based on political education in primary and secondary schools, and the teaching of a dominant ideology in the history curriculum.



# Democratic education content and levels of liberal democracy over time (selected countries)





# Attention check

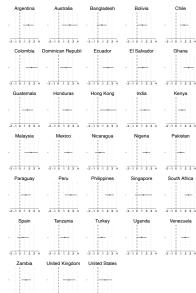
| Treatment    | Passed a | attention check $\sqrt{}$ |
|--------------|----------|---------------------------|
| Placebo      | 11.3     | 88.7                      |
| Output       | 7.2      | 92.8                      |
| Institutions | 20.3     | 79.7                      |
| Rights       | 24.1     | 75.9                      |
| Total        | 15.7     | 84.3                      |



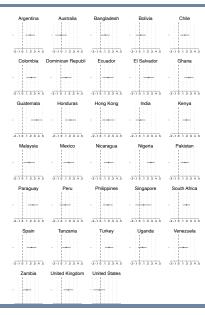
#### Treatment group Output Institutions Rights Age 0.001 0.002 0.001 [0.001] [0.001] [0.001] Female -0.017 -0.001 -0.042 [0.029] [0.029][0.029]Secondary educ. -0.024 0.068 0.034 [0.060] [0.061] [0.060] 0.034 0.148\* 0.084 Degree [0.063][0.064][0.063] Urban -0.033 -0.034 -0.023 [0.029] [0.029] [0.029] Proficcient language 0.065 0.009 0.022 [0.036] [0.035] [0.036] 0.004 Pre-treat democ pref. -0.0040.008 [0.007][0.007][0.007]No very interested 0.074 0.061 0.028 [0.047] [0.047] [0.047] Somewhat interested 0.052 0.055 -0.008[0.045][0.045][0.045]0.083 0.02 Very interested 0.075 [0.050] [0.050] [0.050] Turnout 0.009 -0.024-0.038[0.034] [0.033] [0.033] Country FE Constant 0.008 -0.1260.039 [0.123][0.124][0.123]Observations 41,395 41,395 41,395

Main effects by country: Change dem. pre

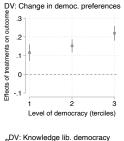
Motivation

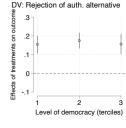


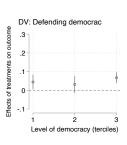
Motivation

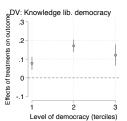


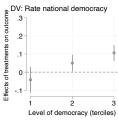
## Marginal effects (and 95% c.i.) of treatments by liberal democracy



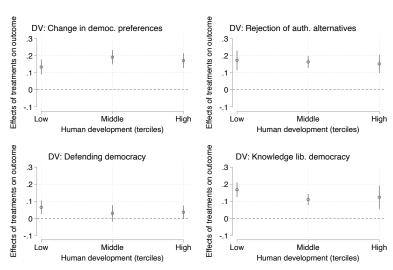




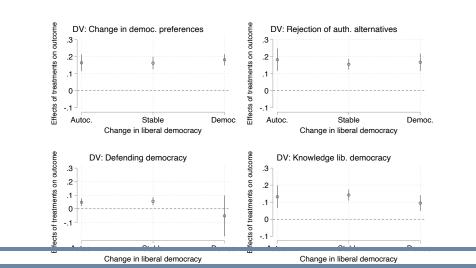




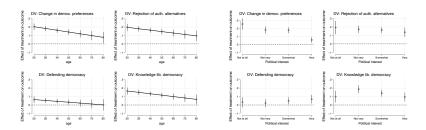
## Marginal effects (and 95% c.i.) of treatments by econ. development



# Marginal effects (and 95% c.i.) of treatments by democ. trajectory



## Individual differences in treatment effects by age and political interest



No systematic conditional effects for gender, education, residence, or pre-existing democratic preferences.