



TRUST IN THE FIGHT AGAINST POLITICAL CORRUPTION: A SURVEY EXPERIMENT AMONG CITIZENS AND EXPERTS

Documents de travail AFED

The French Law & Economics Association Working Papers Series

**BENJAMIN MONNERY
ALEXANDRE CHIRAT**

AFED WP No. 24-02

<https://econpapers.repec.org/paper/afdwpaper>

Les opinions exprimées dans la série des **Documents de travail AFED** sont celles des auteurs et ne reflètent pas nécessairement celles de l'institution. Les documents n'ont pas été soumis à un rapport formel et sont donc inclus dans cette série pour obtenir des commentaires et encourager la discussion. Les droits sur les documents appartiennent aux auteurs.

*The views expressed in the **AFED Working Paper Series** are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the institution. The Working Papers have not undergone formal review and approval. Such papers are included in this series to elicit feedback and to encourage debate. Copyright belongs to the author(s).*

Trust in the Fight against Political Corruption: A Survey Experiment among Citizens and Experts

Benjamin Monnery, University Paris-Nanterre, EconomiX

Alexandre Chirat, University Paris-Nanterre, EconomiX

AFED Working Paper No. 24-02

Abstract

Western democracies experienced in recent decades a transformation of the relationship between citizens and their representatives towards greater accountability and transparency. These demands led to the emergence of new regulations and anti-corruption institutions. However, it often remains unknown whether such institutions are able to secure public trust and legitimacy in order to fulfill their mission effectively. The paper investigates this question by focusing on France, which quickly became a leader in the fight against corruption after the launch in 2013 of the High Authority for the Transparency in Public Life (HATVP). We run a survey experiment among 3,000 citizens and 33 experts to collect their prior beliefs about political corruption, and then evaluate the impact of granting basic information on citizens' perceptions about the effectiveness and legitimacy of the French anti-corruption agency. First, results show a large divide between the average citizen and the more optimistic experts about the dynamics of political integrity. Second, citizens have heterogeneous beliefs and those most distrustful are not only more likely to vote for populist candidates or abstain but are also the least informed about the anti-corruption agency. Third, the information provision experiment has meaningful and positive impacts on citizens' perceptions of the HATVP, political transparency, and representative democracy. The beneficial effects are as large or even larger among the most distrustful and ill-informed citizens, and can close part of the gap with the assessments made by experts.

Keywords: Political corruption; Political trust; Anti-corruption agency; Integrity; Populism; survey experiment

JEL codes: C99; D72; M48; P37

Acknowledgments: We thank experts from the think tank "*Observatoire de l'éthique publique*" for accepting to participate in our survey, as well as participants at the 40th annual conference of the European Association of Law and Economics held in Berlin (Freie Universität and Humboldt Universität) and the CES seminar (University Paris Panthéon Sorbonne) for their useful feedbacks. Financial support from the French National Research Agency is gratefully acknowledged (ANR-18-CE26-0004).

1. Introduction

There is now ample evidence from surveys, lab experiments and quasi-experimental data, showing that voters in Western democracies value honesty and integrity a lot, even more so than competence or representation (Galeotti and Zizzo, 2018 ; Rienks, 2023). In France for instance, 40% of citizens declare that the most valuable trait among elected officials is their honesty, almost double the percentage for competency or promise-keeping (Cevipof, 2020). This rising demand for integrity among electorates led to the emergence of new regulations and anti-corruption agencies, documented by the OECD in its Public Integrity Indicators.¹ One prominent example in Europe is the launch in 2013 of the High Authority for the Transparency in Public Life (HATVP in french), an independent body in charge of collecting, controlling, and publishing the private interests and activities of thousands of public officials in France. Like the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) created in the UK in 2009 after the famous “parliamentary expenses” scandal, the HATVP was launched in the aftermath of the “Cahuzac” scandal in 2013, named after the Minister of Finance who was found to commit tax fraud using offshore bank accounts.² For the last ten years, thanks to the HATVP, lay citizens can easily learn about the past employments and incomes declared by their ministers or Members of Parliament, check whether they occupy side-jobs or volunteer positions while in office, and even scrutinize their assets and wealth. With the launch of this new authority as well as other institutions and regulations in the last decade, France rapidly reached a top position among OECD countries in terms of institutional devices promoting transparency and fighting corruption.³

Although there has been research on the effect of transparency on trust, it mostly focuses on governments and public administrations overall, e.g., disclosure of administrative documents or transparent deliberations (Grimmelikhuijsen, 2021; Wang and Guan, 2023). Very few studies investigate whether increased transparency concerning elected officials and top politicians, which allow citizens to better observe their behaviors and characteristics, can be effective in restoring trust in representative democracy and political elites (for an exception, see Crepez and Arikan, 2023). To succeed, third-party institutions such as the HATVP first need to secure trust and legitimacy themselves, in the eyes of the general public. However, it is often argued that citizens, famously portrayed by Brennan (2016) as either “Hobbits” or “Hooligans”⁴ , tend to exhibit low general trust towards institutions, moderate

¹ <https://oecd-public-integrity-indicators.org/>

² See the news report by Reuters on December 8, 2016 : “French ex-minister who fought tax evasion jailed for tax fraud” <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-politics-cahuzac-trial-idUSKBN13X10M>

³ The OECD Public Integrity Indicators rank France as the best-performing country in 2023 on three relevant themes: “Regulations on transparency of policy influence”, “Conflict of interest safeguards in practice” and “Lobbying safeguards in practice”.

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

interest in politics, or strong political bias due to partisanship. Such traits weaken the potential effectiveness of any regulatory institution or accountability device.

In this paper, we contribute to the literature on transparency and political trust by measuring the knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes of a large representative sample of citizens (N=3000) regarding the fight against corruption conducted in France. We also investigate the role of information in shaping people's beliefs about the legitimacy and effectiveness of the HATVP. To do so, we run an information provision experiment in our sample of lay citizens, granting information on the activity and record of the agency to a random treatment group, while the control group remains poorly informed. We also compare our survey results with the views of a small sample of experts in the field (N=33) who answered the same questions.

Our results show that citizens hold pessimistic views on average of the extent and evolution of corrupt behaviors by elected officials in France, much more so than experts. However, there is sizable heterogeneity in beliefs in the sample, which strongly correlates with political attitudes, i.e., interest in politics and electoral behavior (turnout in the last presidential election, vote for mainstream or populist candidates). We also find that, almost ten years after its launch, about 60% of citizens have not heard of the High Authority for the Transparency in Public Life (HATVP) and therefore do not trust it. However, when we randomly provide simple and concise information about this institution, the opinions of lay citizens shift closer to those of experts: they perceive the HATVP as significantly more useful and effective in promoting integrity among elected officials and restoring political trust in democracy. Quite surprisingly, we also find evidence that the beneficial effects of information are either as large or even larger among "disillusioned" citizens who had the most pessimistic prior views on the fight against corruption.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides an overview of the overall political context, both in France and in Western democracies, as well as the existing research on transparency, trust, and political attitudes. Section 3 explains our conceptual framework and the methodology used for the surveys and the information provision experiment. Section 4 presents the results on citizens' prior beliefs about corruption and the HATVP as well as a comparison with experts. Section 5 reports the effects of our information provision experiment and discusses treatment effect heterogeneity. Section 6 concludes by discussing the implications of our results for public policy and for normative theories of democracy.

2. Context and prior research

2.1. Corruption and transparency in Western democracies

In recent decades, most democracies have experienced a shift in the relationship between citizens and their elected officials. Democratic regimes have gradually moved away from traditional "representative government" democracy (Manin 1997), where citizens select

public officials through elections to represent their interests while in office, to a more demanding relationship of tighter control and increased political accountability (Rosanvallon, 2008). Benefiting from easier access to information and more channels to voice their demands, citizens can now better observe the characteristics and daily behavior of their elected officials and use this information to exert both greater scrutiny and increased influence over their actions (e.g., activism, lobbying, recall procedures, etc.). These developments also allow citizens to select and discipline their representatives to act with honesty and integrity, a key demand among voters.⁵ Individual characteristics like integrity have also probably become prominent criteria among voters in reaction to both globalization that has imposed new constraints on government policies and reduced accountability for economic outcomes (Hellwig and Samuels, 2007) and ideological convergence among mainstream parties (Fieschi and Heywood, 2004).

Political accountability often operates directly between voters and representatives, as formalized by classical principal-agent models (Besley, 2006). But it also operates indirectly by delegating the supervision of elected officials to specialized third-party institutions, such as the media, the legal system, non-governmental organizations⁶, and anti-corruption agencies such as the IPSA in the UK and the HATVP in France.⁷ In the presence of costly and asymmetric information, such institutions serve as a delegation mechanism to produce information for imperfectly informed citizens (the principal) to help them better select and control public officials (the agents). For example, anti-corruption agencies typically collect and publish data on politicians' activities and financial interests, thus enabling voters to learn about their "type" in terms of integrity or competence (reducing adverse selection) and to track their activity and enforce accountability (reducing moral hazard).

Alongside these growing demands for accountability from citizens, many Western democracies are also experiencing a process of "democratic deconsolidation" undermining some of the foundations of liberal democracy. According to Mounk (2018), this process is fostered by rising inequalities, the end of the monopoly on information, and a diversification of the population. These changes are accompanied by rises in populism, political distrust, "tabloidization" of the media, and greater public sensitivity to political scandals (Fieschi and Heywood, 2004; Nieuwenburg, 2007). Many explanations for populism have been offered, from the role of economic disruptions following 21st century globalization and the Great Recession (Rodrik, 2018, 2021; Guriev and Papaioannou, 2022), to a cultural "counter-revolution" (Ignazi, 1992; Inglehart and Norris, 2016), and a crisis of trust at both the institutional (Algan et al., 2017) and interpersonal (Algan et al., 2019) levels.

⁵ Although partisanship can moderate citizens' preferences for non-corrupt politicians, as shown by Eggers (2014) for the UK.

⁶ An increasing number of NGOs worldwide track lobbying and moonlighting among ministers, EU commissioners, or parliamentarians (like Transparency International), and ever more web platforms track parliamentary activity or public procurement, etc.

⁷ As a reminder, the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) was created in 2009 after the famous "expenses scandal" in the British Parliament. The High Authority for the Transparency in Public Life (HATVP) in France was set up in 2013 after the Cahuzac scandal.

A key aspect of populist attitudes⁸ is citizens' distrust of high-ranking politicians who are predominantly perceived as self-interested, untrustworthy, or corrupt, to a far higher degree than local officials (François and Méon, 2021). As an example, more than 50% of U.S. citizens have declared every year since 2010 that they have very little to no confidence in the U.S. Congress, up from about 20% in the early 2000s.⁹ Similarly "between Lyndon Johnson in 1964 and Barack Obama in 2012, the percentage of Americans who felt the government was being run for the benefit of all slumped from 64 to 19 percent" (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018, 123). In the UK, trust in Parliament has not recovered since the 2009 parliamentary expenses scandal: less than 30% of British citizens express general trust in their MPs (Quilter-Pinner et al., 2021). Similarly, in France, six to seven citizens out of ten do not trust their MP or MEP (Cheufra and Chanvril, 2019). More generally, political corruption (actual or perceived) and the means devoted to fight it has become a salient issue in most 21st century political systems, despite institutional differences. Symptomatically, during the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, candidate Trump called his democratic opponent "Hillary the Crook" and campaigned to "drain the swamp" of Washington politics. The tendency toward politicization of corruption, which is not the prerogative of populist parties (Engler, 2020), has proven effective in Europe in the last decade (Bågenholm and Charron, 2014). Anti-corruption programs are also a preferred strategy of populist parties in post-Soviet countries (Hoppe, 2022). Such a process of politicization is facilitated by the revelation of worldwide scandals, such as the Panama Papers (more than a hundred politicians from 50 countries were involved).

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

⁸ See Akkerman et al. (2014), Marcos-Marne et al. (2022) and Fernández-Vázquez et al. (2023).

⁹ Other negative perceptions regarding the U.S. Congress can be found on the Gallup webpage:

<https://news.gallup.com/poll/1600/congress-public.aspx>

Determining and measuring how anti-corruption agencies are perceived and trusted by lay citizens is important, since public perceptions toward integrity and the fight against corruption have direct social and political consequences. In Italy, for example, Gulino and Mazera (2023) show that shoplifting by lay people in supermarkets increases immediately after coverage of political scandals in local newspapers. Scandals also reinforce citizens' disillusionment, distrust, and anti-system attitudes, i.e., exit and voice strategies (Hirschman, 1970). For instance, when exposed to local cases of political corruption in Italy, citizens are less likely to run for office, less likely to vote, and more likely to opt for populist parties (Giommoni, 2021). Foresta (2020) also shows on Italian data that the exposure of *local* corruption scandals increases the share of the *national* vote share for the *Lega Nord* populist party. In France, cities exposed to scandals of poor public management (toxic loans contracted by the municipality) see more populist candidates running in the next municipal elections, and greater vote shares for these candidates (Sartre and Daniele, 2022). In an influential study in Brazil, Ferraz and Finan (2008) also show that local corruption scandals detected through random audits are severely sanctioned by voters: mayors who are exposed as corrupt before the next election are 7 percentage points less likely to be reelected than those exposed after the election date. This effect is concentrated in areas with local media coverage.

To our knowledge, the effects of transparency about elected officials on public perceptions have only been investigated empirically by Crepaz and Arikan (2023). Using a survey experiment on 1,373 citizens in Ireland, the authors study the effects of transparency about parliamentarians' private assets, as well as donations to political parties and lobbying activities by interest groups. They focus on the effect of transparency depending on who is the disclosing agent and show that increased transparency by Members of Parliament and parties has beneficial effects on citizens' opinions (higher trust and lower perception of corruption). In their study of the Irish case however, transparency concerning parliamentarians is limited to the disclosure of their wealth, whereas France has opted for a much broader transparency of elected officials' private interests. Moreover, our research deals with the effect generated by the activities of an anti-corruption agency on public perceptions, so that disclosure is constrained. That is why the focus is not on the differentiated effects according to the disclosing agent (MPs, parties, business interest groups) but on the very disclosure of information by a third-party institution in charge of preventing and fighting political corruption. Hence the use of an experiment providing information on the activities of the HATVP.

2.2. France and HATVP as a case study

To examine the extent to which a third-party institution in charge of monitoring the integrity of elected officials is likely to restore citizens' confidence in the democratic system, France provides an excellent case-study for three main reasons.

First, the French multiparty system has experienced a gradual rise in both right-wing (*Le Rassemblement National*, among others¹⁰) and left-wing (*La France Insoumise*) “anti-system” and “populist” parties (Ivaldi, 2018). They won more than 50% of the votes cast in the first round of the 2022 presidential election, up from an already large 40% vote share in 2017.¹¹ These parties are characterized by their repudiation of incumbent political elites, a desire for strong leadership, and a greater readiness to resort to direct democracy (e.g., referendums, citizen assemblies) or even to usher in a new Constitution. In addition, the anti-elite and anti-establishment rhetoric was used by the traditional right-wing party (*Les Républicains*) as well as by Macron's centrist campaign as he won the presidency in 2017 (Dijkstra et al., 2020).¹² As a consequence, a massive wave of Macron-sponsored candidates with no previous political experience were elected as MPs in 2017, entered Government, and pushed many incumbents out of office. This led to a historical turnover of 72% in the National Assembly.

Second, France has witnessed several major political scandals in recent years, leading to the fall of the poll-leading right-wing candidate for the 2017 presidential election (François Fillon), the resignation of several Ministers (Jérôme Cahuzac, Jean-Paul Delevoye, Alain Griset, etc.), and the conviction and incarceration of other high-profile politicians (MP Patrick Balkany, etc.). Even the former French President Nicolas Sarkozy was convicted in 2021 for illegal financing of his 2012 electoral campaign. Hence, high-profile politicians' corruption and lack of integrity, which are core elements of populism as an ideology (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017), have remained in the news headlines in France in the last decade.

Third, French political institutions have changed markedly since 2012 in the aftermath of the Cahuzac scandal. Many new rules emerged to prohibit suspect behavior (e.g., employing family members as parliamentary assistants or directing subsidies as MPs). More resources were granted to enhance controls (e.g., regarding office expenses at the National Assembly). Most importantly, the High Authority for the Transparency in Public Life was launched in 2013 to “promote integrity and exemplarity among public officials.” The HATVP now employs 70 agents and has a budget of approx. €8 million. The institution oversees more than 18,000 public officials, from the President to city mayors. This independent anti-corruption authority is notably in charge of collecting elected officials' declarations of interests, activities, and wealth, both as they enter and as they leave office. These declarations are mandatory and increasingly stringent for high-profile national politicians (members of the government, parliamentarians, etc.). The agency reviews and publishes these declarations

¹⁰ In addition to the “Rassemblement National” of Marine Le Pen (originally the “Front National”), several other populist right-wing parties are or have been popular, such as “Reconquête” of Eric Zemmour and “Debout la France” of Nicolas Dupont-Aignan.

¹¹ <https://www.gouvernement.fr/actualite/election-presidentielle-les-resultats-du-premier-tour>

¹² Macron's party, *La République en Marche*, was created in 2017 and initially scored as high as the Hungarian party Fidesz on “anti-elite and anti-establishment rhetoric” rankings, according to Dijkstra et al. (2020, 743).

online as open data so they are easily accessible to citizens, NGOs, and journalists. Through these controls, the HATVP acts as a “watchdog agency” (Bautista-Beauchesne, 2021) and transfers suspicious cases to the legal system (total of 130 cases from 2013 to 2022). Many of these cases are then prosecuted by the newly created National Finance Prosecutor’s Office, serving as a “guard-dog agency”, and eventually lead to convictions.

In order to fight corruption and conflicts of interest, the HATVP is also in charge of controlling movements between the public and private sectors for top officials and their staff (e.g., ex-members of ministerial cabinets recruited by private companies),¹³ and it keeps a public record of lobbying activities to track potential interferences with policymaking. In addition to the creation of the HATVP, a 2017 law “for trust in political life” established new rules on ineligibility penalties to further prevent conflicts of interests. The Council of Ministers declared on that occasion that “transparency towards citizens, the probity of elected officials, and the exemplarity of their behavior are fundamental democratic requirements. They contribute to strengthening the bond between citizens and their representatives, as well as the foundations of the social contract,”¹⁴ which has been destabilized as evidenced by a growing political distrust throughout Western democracies.

Studying whether the HATVP, as a third-party institution designed to grant transparency against political corruption, is able to revitalize citizens’ trust in the political system also appears particularly interesting regarding recent polls in France. While in 2014, 77% of citizens thought that elected officials were corrupt, this fraction was down to 65% in 2021 (Cevipof, 2021). It remains to be tested whether such favorable evolutions can be related to the new institutions fighting corruption in France.

3. Methodology

3.1. Conceptual framework

The overall framework of the research is schematized below (Figure 1). Most works devoted to the literature on political corruption as well as political attitudes and political trust focus on their impact on electoral outcomes. Here, we neither study the aforementioned documented relationship from exposure to scandals of corruption to voting behavior (→ A) nor the relationship from political attitudes and trust to voting behavior (→ B). We rather propose an original approach by shifting the focus from electoral results as the outcome variable to public perceptions of political corruption and public knowledge of anti-corruption institutions as well as public perception of the anti-corruption agency.¹⁵ Indeed, the survey

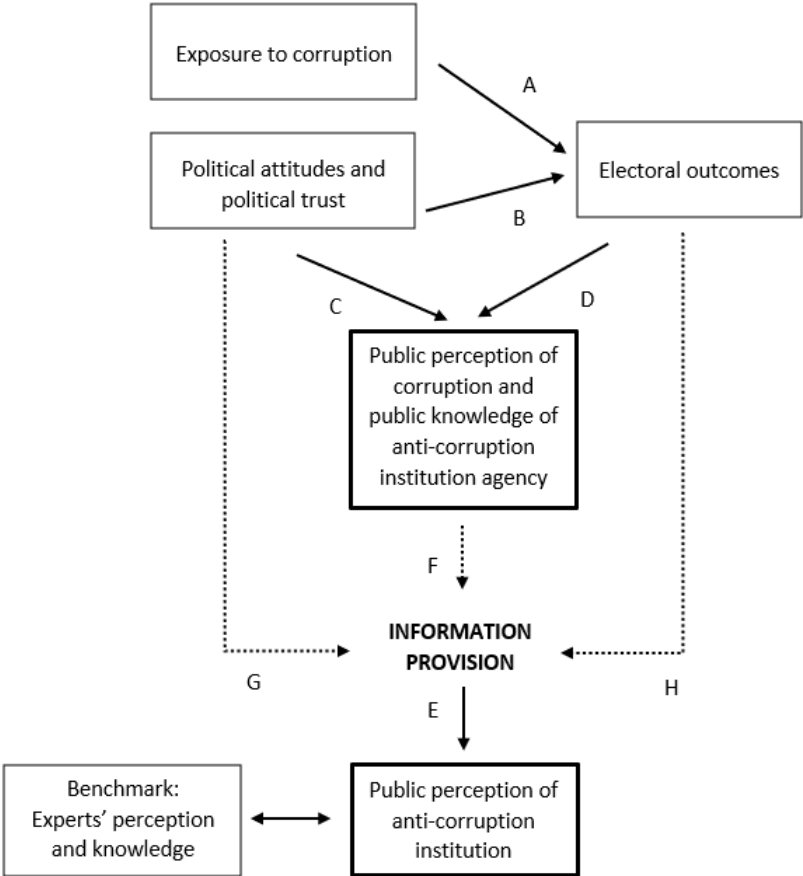
¹³ For instance, in April 2022, the HATVP pointed out the “substantial ethical risks” in former Minister of Transport and Ecology Jean-Baptiste Djebbari’s plan to become executive vice-president of the space division of the leading shipping company CMA-CGM.

¹⁴ <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000035567974/>

¹⁵ In the paper exposure to corruption is indirectly part of the institutional environment, because of the specificity of the French context.

first documents the relationships from political attitudes and trust (→ C) on the one hand and voting behavior (→ D) on the other hand, toward public perception of corruption and knowledge of the HATVP. We then run the information experiment to study its impact on public perception of the anti-corruption agency (→ E). The influence of the experiment on the outcome variables is mediated by the prior beliefs and knowledge of citizens (→ F), in particular their political attitudes and trust (→ G) and their voting behavior (→ H). Lastly, the data collected from experts act as a benchmark to run comparisons with citizens. This specific framework aims at investigating whether third-party institutions providing transparency with respect to political corruption are able to revitalize citizens’ trust in the political system. In other words, we investigate whether these institutions can foster political trust and reduce the (actual or perceived) divide between citizens and political elites.

Figure 1: Framework of the research



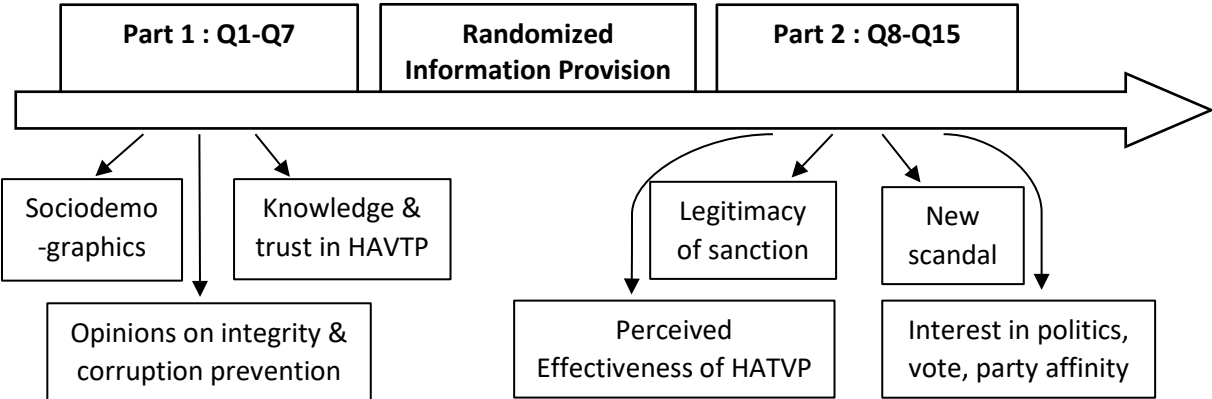
3.2. Design of the survey experiment

To investigate French citizens’ trust in the fight against political corruption, our method relies on a survey experiment conducted online in late April 2021 among a large sample of citizens in France (N=3000). The sample is representative of the adult population in metropolitan France in terms of gender, age, socio-professional category, region, and city size

(using the quota method).¹⁶ The participants were recruited and surveyed online through a specialized firm called Bilendi (www.bilendi.fr). Simultaneously, we ran the same online survey among a group of 33 French scholars (law scholars, political scientists, economists, etc.)¹⁷ who specialize in political integrity and transparency and are all members of the main think-tank on the topic in France (*The Observatory of Public Ethics*¹⁸). The two samples are referred to as “citizens” (N=3,000) and “experts” (N=33).

As depicted in Figure 2, our questionnaire mixes traditional survey questions (Part 1) and an experimental design with a randomized provision of information. All participants then respond to the second part of the survey collecting outcomes variables as well as final questions that serve as placebo tests (Part 2). The duration to complete the questionnaire is 6 minutes on average. The full transcript of the questionnaire is available in Web Appendix 1. For some questions, when relevant, the order of answers was randomized across respondents to reduce ordering effects, but questions always appear in the same order.

Figure 2. Timeline of the survey experiment



Part 1. Prior beliefs and knowledge

First, our survey collects respondents’ socio-demographics (gender, age, socio-professional category, zip code) and their attitudes to and beliefs about politics in France. In particular, we ask about the importance they attach to elected officials’ integrity (Q1), the perceived frequency of dishonest behavior at four tiers of political power, from mayoral (Q2-1) to presidential (Q2-4), the current state and recent trend in MPs’ integrity (Q3 and Q4), as

¹⁶ Besides representativity on socio-demographics, one might still be concerned by endogenous self-selection of respondents based on the topic of the questionnaire. However, we can safely exclude this possibility for two reasons. First, respondents do not know anything about the questionnaire (except for its length) before clicking to open it. Second, fewer than 60 individuals (2%) dropped out and did not complete the survey after opening it (usually very early on).

¹⁷ From a pool of 75 scholars contacted (response rate of 44%). Unfortunately, we lack individual information to test for self-selection of respondents among the group of experts.

¹⁸ The Observatory of Public Ethics is a non-partisan think-tank composed of academics and Members of Parliament interested in political integrity. According to its website, the Observatory “aims to contribute to the progress of transparency and deontology, both in the field of scientific knowledge and in the field of political practices.” <https://www.observatoireethiquepublique.com/>

well as the effectiveness of the current resources for fighting political corruption in France (Q5). We use these first questions (Q1–Q5) to build a score of political distrust via a Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) among citizens and experts (see below).

Then, we ask respondents whether they have ever heard of the High Authority for the Transparency in Public Life (HATVP) and if so, how much they know about it (Q6 and Q6B). Importantly for what follows, the results show that only 38% of citizens have ever heard of the institution and that only 9% declare to know it “well” or “very well”. After a brief explanation of the HATVP’s role to *all respondents*, we ask about their level of trust in the HATVP (Q7).¹⁹

The information provision experiment

To isolate the influence of information on public perceptions of corruption, comparing citizens and experts is informative but insufficient. Therefore, the survey follows with an information provision experiment. Following the guidelines of Haaland and al. (2023), the experiment is conducted only after we have measured respondents’ core political beliefs and their pre-treatment knowledge of the HATVP (Part 1).²⁰ The experimental treatment consists in randomly displaying one extra paragraph to half of the sample after Question 7. The other half serves as a pure control group and does not see any text. The two random groups, called “Treatment” and “Control”, have identical sociodemographic characteristics by design, because randomization occurs within each strata. Indeed, treatment randomization was stratified by gender, age, socio-professional category, region, and city size, to be sure that the treatment and control groups are homogeneous on all baseline characteristics. As expected, the two random groups are also found to be balanced in terms of their answers to pre-treatment questions from Part 1 of the survey, e.g., perceived frequency of unethical behavior and knowledge of the HATVP. By providing information about the anti-corruption institution exogenously to some respondents (N=1,500) but not to others (N=1,500), we can estimate the causal impact of such information on respondents’ perceptions and attitudes. The informative paragraph reads as follows:

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

¹⁹ Question 7 is preceded by this paragraph: *“The HATVP is an institution whose mission is to ensure transparency of elected officials’ interests in France, notably members of the National Assembly and senators. It collects and controls their declarations of interests, activities, and wealth to prevent any conflict of interest or unjustified personal enrichment while in office.”*

²⁰ “Eliciting prior beliefs is, therefore, necessary to make a directional prediction about how different groups should update their beliefs and change their behavior in response to the information” (Haaland et al., 2023).

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

Part 2. Outcomes and placebo questions

After the experimental treatment, the survey continues with questions about our outcomes of interest. They relate to citizens' perceptions of the usefulness of the HATVP for improving political transparency and integrity (Q8-1 and Q8-2), increasing people's trust in elected officials and democracy (Q8-3 and Q8-4), the HATVP's capacity to deter and punish wrongdoing (Q9-1 and Q9-2) and to publicly disclose relevant information to make public officials accountable (Q9-3).²¹ The next post-treatment questions measure the perceived legitimacy of the HATVP, as opposed to courts or voters, to sanction dishonest politicians (Q10), how respondents would react to a new hypothetical scandal revealed by the HATVP (Q11), whether their sensitivity to political integrity has changed over the last decade (Q12) and their level of interest in politics (Q13).

The final set of questions records respondents' vote in the 2017 Presidential election (Q14) and their current party affinity as of April 2021 (Q15). These last two questions are informative but also serve as placebo tests, as we do not expect our experiment to have any effect (and indeed find no significant treatment effect).

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

In this section, we present the main descriptive results of our survey focusing on the pre-treatment questions (Part 1) measuring perceptions of corruption and knowledge of the HATVP among citizens (N=3,000) and experts (N=33). The distributions of answers in the two samples appear in Table 1. We then turn to Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA)²² to capture the key features of heterogeneity among citizens.

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

²¹ Following Haaland et al. (2023), we decided not to ask the same question about respondents' trust in the HATVP (or any other question) before and after the experimental treatment to avoid demand effects.

²² Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) is a method analog to Principal Component Analysis (PCA) for qualitative variables. MCA exploits patterns of similar answers across respondents to capture the strongest dividing lines, called factors or dimensions. In the analysis, we focus on the first two dimensions.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Notes: the p-values in the final column are based on chi-squared tests of equal distributions between citizens (N=3,000) and experts (N=33).

4.2. Multiple Correspondence Analysis: affirmativeness and political distrust

To better grasp the heterogeneity of pre-treatment beliefs across citizens and compare them with experts, we run a Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) on questions 1 to 5 (for

a total of eight questions when considering the four versions of Q2). MCA allows us to reduce dimensionality by summarizing the main differences across respondents into just two synthetic variables (or dimensions), which facilitates subgroup analyses.

The underlying results of the analysis are reported with a coordinate plot in appendix (Figure A1). The first two dimensions of the MCA capture 76% of overall variance and represent two highly consistent attitudes toward political integrity and perceptions on the level of political corruption in France. As with any MCA, the two scores are uncorrelated and centered around 0 by design.

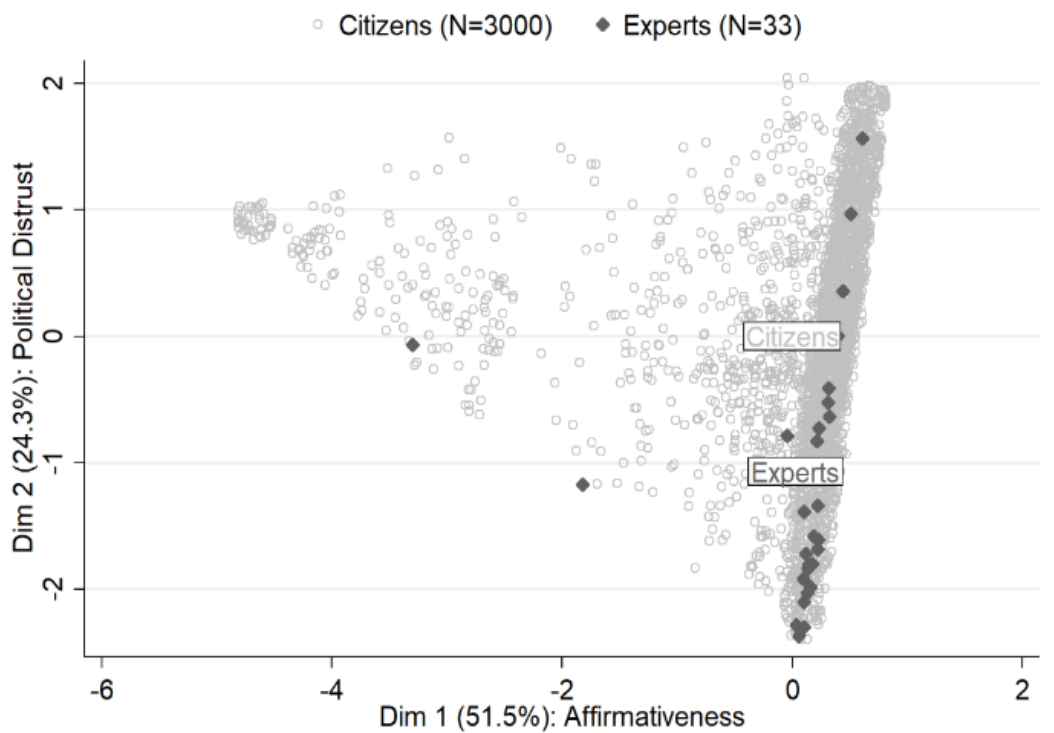
The first dimension (capturing 52% of the variance) reflects certainty/uncertainty on the part of respondents, contrasting those who provide substantive answers and those who prefer not to express firm and final opinions (“don’t know” answers). We label this dimension the *affirmativeness score*. In Figure A1, we observe that answers on the right correspond to affirmative choices while those on the left correspond to “don’t know” answers.

The second dimension (24%) captures optimistic/pessimistic views of the extent of perceived corruption across the different tiers of government, on the recent trend in corruption, and on the public efforts to reduce it. Answers located at the top correspond to pessimistic beliefs regarding corruption (high frequency of corruption, rising trend, etc.), whereas answers located at the bottom consistently correspond to optimistic views. We refer to this second dimension as the *score of political distrust* toward the current political institutions and elites.²³

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

²³ This is the dominant meaning of “political trust” in the literature (Algan et al., 2017), even if the concept could also refer to trust in policy outcomes (Geurkink et al., 2020) rather than trust in political institutions.

Figure 3. MCA scores of citizens and experts for questions 1 to 5

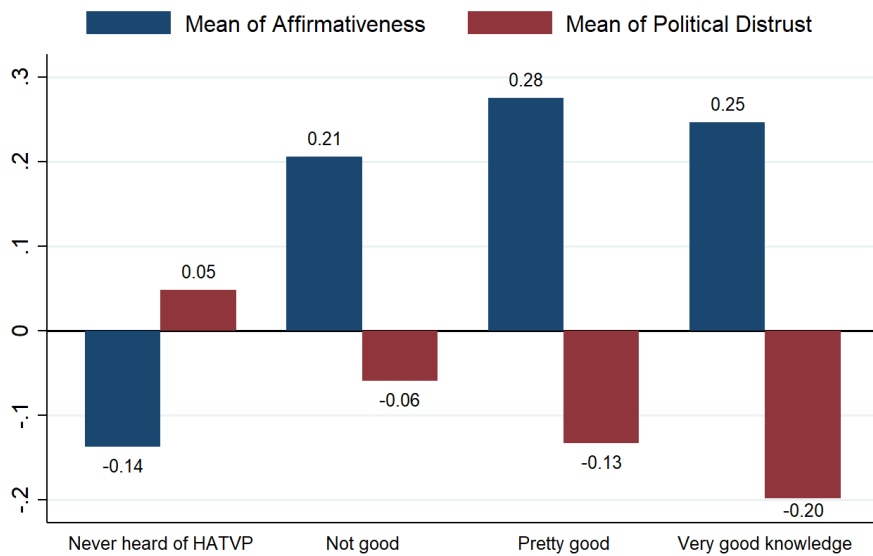


Notes: the coordinates of citizens are represented with circles and experts with diamonds. The boxes “Citizens” and “Experts” correspond to the average location of each group.

4.3. Political distrust, voting behavior and public perception of corruption

The score for political distrust (dimension 2 of our MCA) correlates with several individual characteristics (→ C). First, it correlates significantly with a lack of knowledge of the HATVP. Figure 4 shows the average levels of political distrust (red) and affirmativeness (blue) depending on citizens’ knowledge of the anti-corruption agency. Well-informed citizens score significantly lower on political distrust than those who know little about the HATVP (t-test p-value = 0.000). As expected, Figure 4 also shows that respondents who know about the HATVP are more affirmative on other questions as well. Second, our score for political distrust is unsurprisingly highly correlated with trust in the HATVP to accomplish its mission. Citizens who are very trustful of the HATVP score very low on political distrust (average score of -0.90) whereas citizens who do not trust the agency at all have a very high score for political distrust (average score of 0.98). Third, the score of political distrust also correlates with interest in politics. Citizens who declare no interest at all in politics have an average score of political distrust (0.36), which is significantly higher than citizens who show some interest in politics.

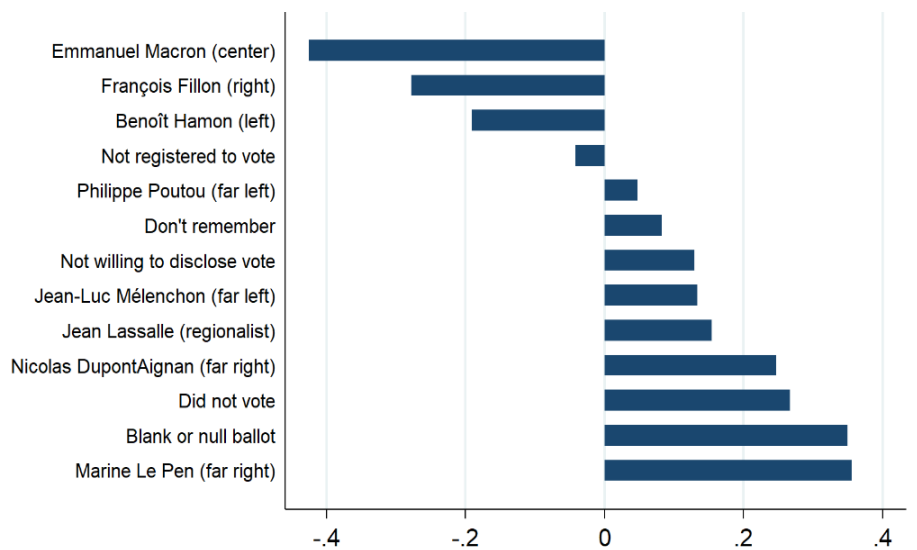
Figure 4. Knowledge of the HATVP, affirmativeness, and political distrust



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

Concerning the relationship between political trust and electoral outcomes (→ B), we observe the score of political distrust is strongly correlated with voting behavior, as depicted in Figure 5. The average scores for political distrust are very high among citizens voting for far-right populist parties (Le Pen, Dupont-Aignan), among non-voters (abstention) and protest voters (blank/null vote), and to a lesser extent among radical-left voters (Mélenchon, Poutou). Conversely political distrust is much lower among voters of mainstream parties and candidates (Macron, Fillon, Hamon). These results align with prior research on the relationship between trust, whether political or interpersonal, and electoral behaviors such as populist voting (Levi and Stoker, 2000; Algan et al., 2017, 2019).

Figure 5. Scores for political distrust and vote in the 2017 presidential election



Notes: average scores from Dimension 2 of our MCA (24.3% of overall variance). Minor candidates (N<20 in the sample) are not represented (Arthaud, Asselineau and Cheminade).

In Appendix (Table A1), we confirm that this relationship between political distrust and electoral behavior is robust to including control variables that are known to correlate with political attitudes. In particular, we include in our OLS regression explaining the score of political distrust citizens' gender, age (squared) and socio-professional category (high, medium, or low). The marginal effects of vote in the 2017 presidential election remain very similar to the descriptive evidence in Figure 4. Respondents who voted for Macron in 2017 (the "centrist" candidate who eventually won the presidential election) rank 0.5 units or standard deviations lower on our score of political distrust than those who chose not to disclose their vote (the reference category). Conversely, voters for Le Pen (far right) and those who abstained or voted blank/null show large positive coefficients (about +0.3 unit), i.e., significantly more pessimistic views of politicians' integrity. Consequently, there is a gap of almost 1 standard deviation in political distrust, conditional on gender, age, and socio-professional category, between centrist and far-right voters. Such correlation is consistent with evidence from other European countries (Akkerman et al., 2014; Algan et al. 2017).

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

In Table 2, we report the distribution of answers to questions 8 to 11 related to the role, effectiveness, and legitimacy of the HATVP. Since these questions are post-treatment outcomes, we focus, for means of comparison, only on the citizens from the control group (N=1,500) who did not receive any extra information on the record of the HATVP to compare the prior beliefs of lay citizens and experts.

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

These differences in perceptions between well-informed experts and lay citizens suggest that information plays a key role in assessing the usefulness and effectiveness of the HATVP. This interpretation is also consistent with the fact that a large fraction of citizens chooses the "don't know" option for these HATVP-specific questions. However, the large

divide between citizens and experts that we measure may simply reflect composition effects or selection effects, in the sense that experts can differ on many characteristics and traits from lay citizens (educational level, political orientation, etc.). Hence, differences in information levels might not be the source of the divide. That is why we turn to an information provision experiment, so as to test whether providing more information about the HATVP has a causal impact on citizens' beliefs ($\rightarrow E$) and can shift their views closer to the more optimistic experts (\leftrightarrow).

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

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

Notes: the p-values in the final column are based on chi-squared tests of equal distributions between untreated citizens (N=1,500) and experts (N=33).

5. Can mere information provision change public perception?

In this section, we present the results of our information provision experiment where half of the citizens (N = 1,500) received basic information about the judicial record of the HATVP while the control group (N=1,500) received no information (see subsection 3.2 for details).²⁴

5.1. Main results

The treatment has positive and sizeable effects on citizens' perceptions of both the usefulness and the effectiveness of the HATVP (\rightarrow E) (Figures 6 and 7).²⁵ Overall, providing basic information about the HATVP and its record significantly shifts the distribution of answers among citizens (p-values of chi-square tests are equal to 0.001 or lower), towards significantly more favorable perceptions of the anti-corruption agency. On all outcomes, the fraction of "don't know" answers significantly decreases, from about 24% to 17%, negative opinions stay constant or diminish slightly (although rarely significantly), and positive opinions increase significantly, usually by about 10 percentage points.

Such positive average treatment effects materialize for outcome variables related to the perceived usefulness of the HATVP to make private interests more transparent, promote integrity, or restore citizens' trust (Figure 6), as well as its effectiveness in detecting and deterring unethical behavior, and in making private interests more transparent for the public (Figure 7). Such results are in line with the main result of the study on the Irish case by Crepaz and Arian, who claims transparency has a direct positive effect on evaluations of trust and reduces perceptions of corruption (2023, p. 13).

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

Interestingly the treatment tends to alter the way citizens would likely react to a new scandal exposed by the HATVP (question 11). Compared to the control group, treated individuals are more likely to interpret a new scandal as evidence that politicians are corrupt (+ 4 points, from 32% to 36%), and less likely to interpret it as evidence that the detection mechanisms are effective (- 4 points, from 45% to 41%). The distributions of answers to this question are marginally statistically different between the two groups at the 10% threshold (chi-square test p-value of 0.081). This result points toward the existence of a so-called

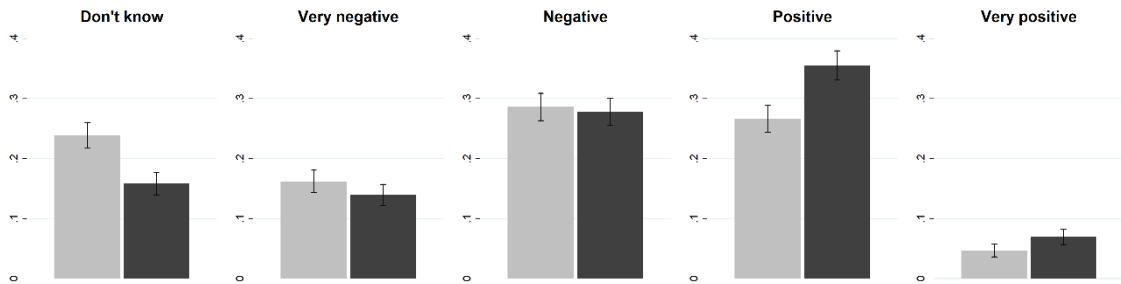
²⁴ We do not report the treatment effects for experts because the sample is too small and all estimates are close to zero and insignificant, as expected for this sample of already well-informed individuals.

²⁵ In terms of robustness, all these results obtained by two-group comparisons are qualitatively similar when we regress linear models or multinomial logit models controlling for respondents' observable characteristics (socio-demographics, vote in the last presidential election, etc.).

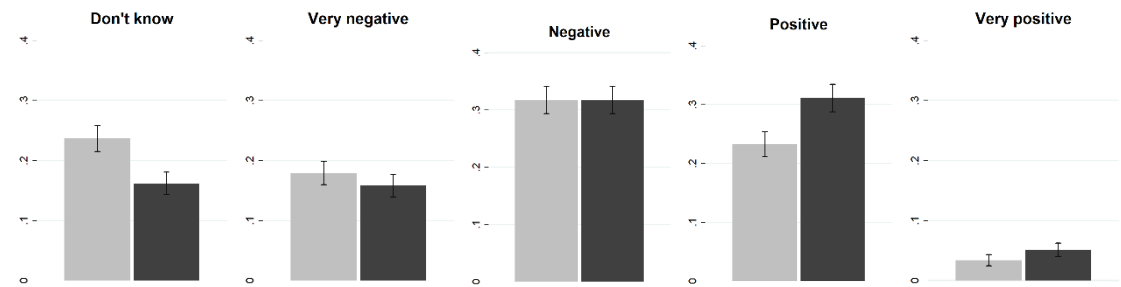
"integrity paradox". It means that informing respondents of the current record of the HATVP in detecting and sanctioning dishonest behavior seems to induce more reprimanding reactions to new scandals. This result runs counter the empirical evidence of Crepaz and Arian (2023, 13), who, in the case of Ireland, find no "backfiring or polarizing effect of transparency". This may be because the HATVP's current record, although perceived rather positively by treated citizens, tends to make dishonest behavior by politicians more salient among them. Moreover, the fact that a new scandal may still occur might provide further evidence that politicians deliberately serve their own interests and disregard moral or legal rules.

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

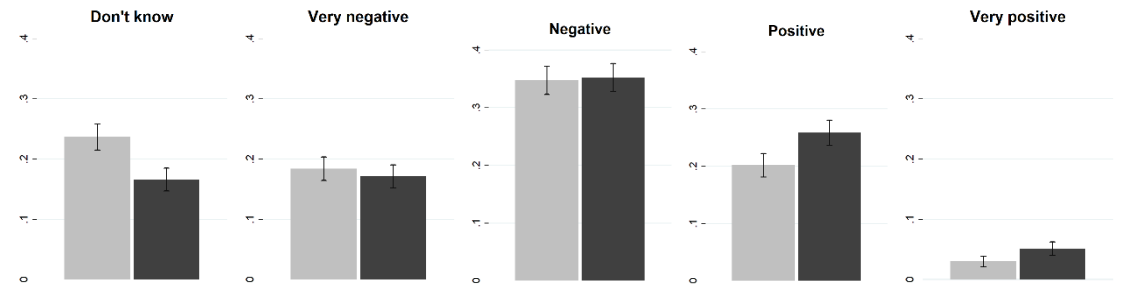
(A) Transparency of Representatives' Private Interests (Q8r1)



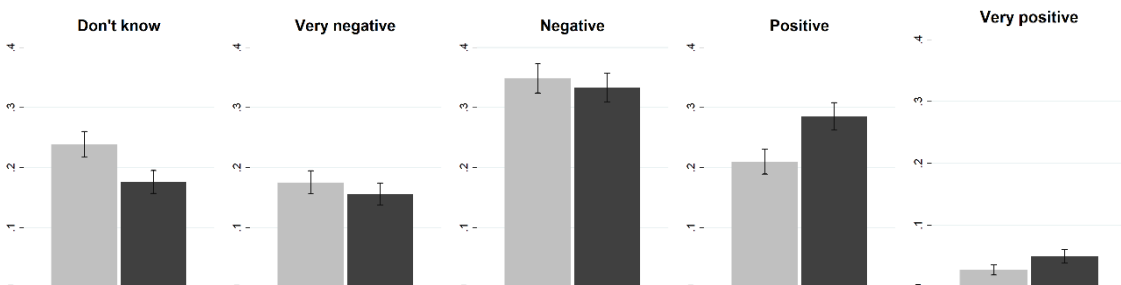
(B) Integrity and Honesty of Representatives (Q8r2)



(C) Citizens' Trust in their Elected Officials (Q8r3)



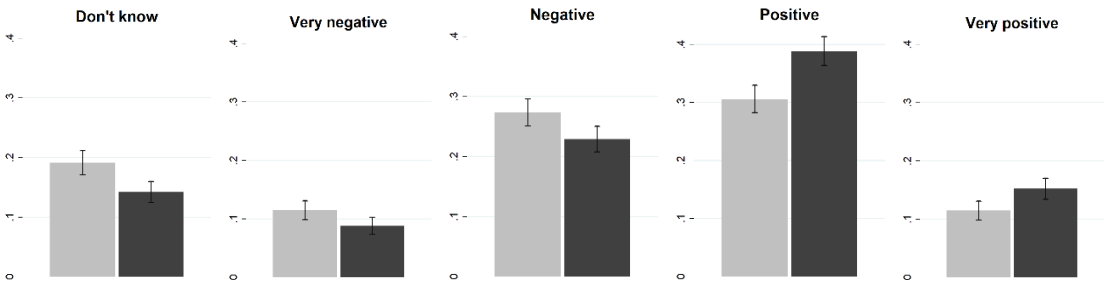
(D) Citizens' Trust in Democracy (Q8r4)



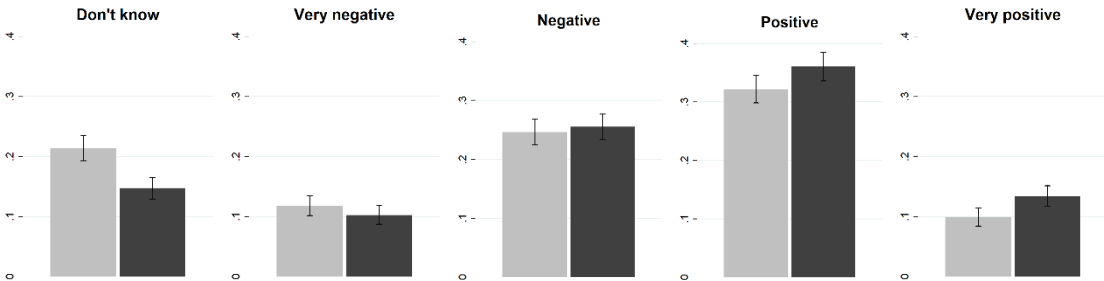
Note: bars in grey (control) and black (treatment) represent fractions of answers among each group of size 1500. Confidence intervals at 95% are depicted.

Figure 7. Perceptions of the HATVP’s effectiveness among the treatment (black) and control groups (grey)

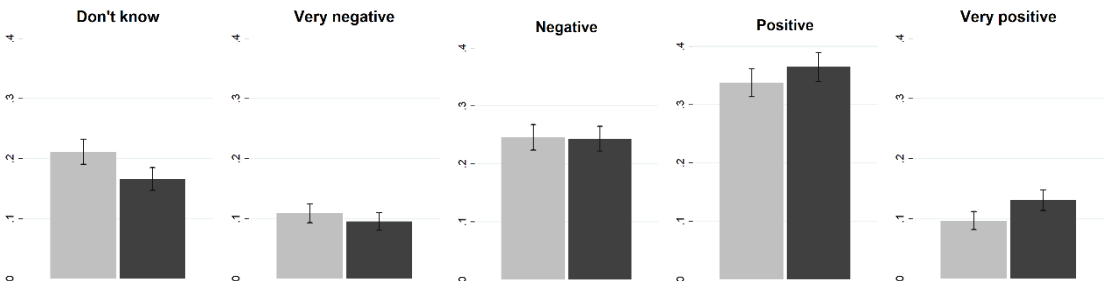
(A) Detect and sanction dishonest elected officials (Q9r1)



(B) Prevent dishonest behavior through deterrence (Q9r2)



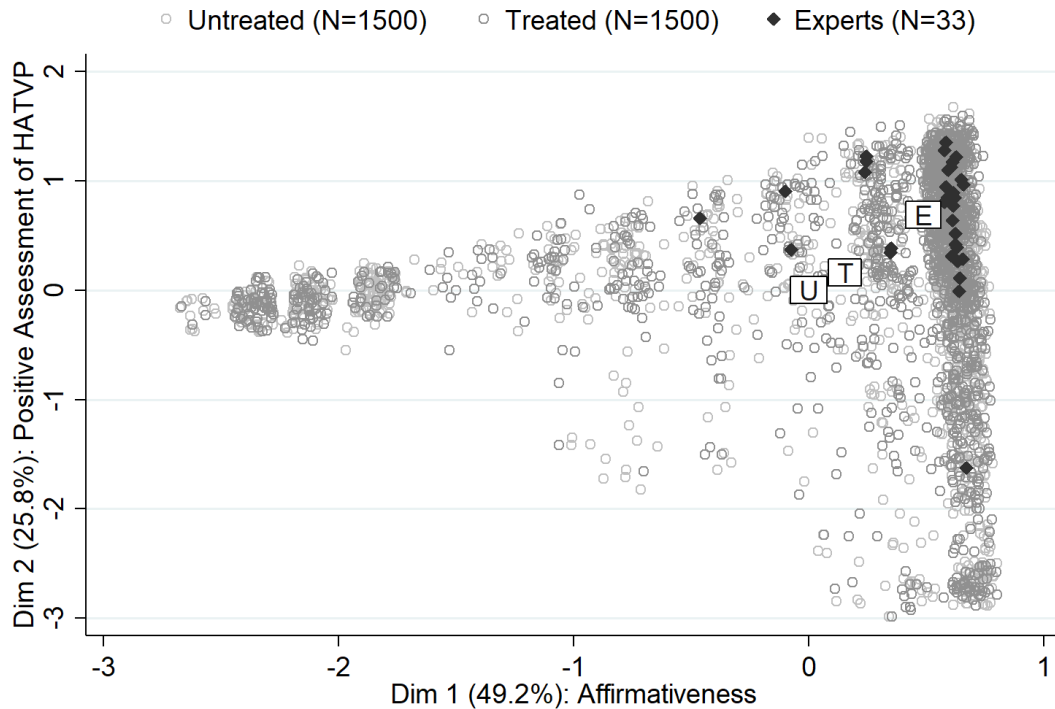
(C) Make public and accessible private information about elected officials (Q9r3)



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

We can summarize all the outcome variables using another MCA estimated on the untreated group for Questions 8 to 12. We obtain two dimensions explaining 75% of overall variance and capturing two consistent factors: the first one captures affirmativeness (as in our previous MCA) and the second one captures favorable assessments of the HATVP. We then estimate the scores for each group (untreated citizens, treated citizens, and experts). Figure 8 shows the individual coordinates (circles and diamonds) and the boxes correspond to the average coordinates of each group. The treatment effects on the first two scores are statistically significant and materialize by a north-east shift of treated citizens towards experts. Thus, the treatment effects bridge part of the gap with experts (33% of the gap on dimension 1 and 23% on dimension 2).

Figure 8. MCA scores of citizens and experts for questions 8 to 12



Notes: the coordinates of citizens are represented with circles and experts with diamonds. The box “ U” corresponds to the average of location of untreated citizens, “T” to treated citizens, and “E” to experts.

5.2. Heterogeneous treatment effects

The large sample of our survey experiment also allows us to investigate whether individual reactions to information are heterogeneous across groups of citizens. We may expect the same information to affect citizens differently according to their predetermined score of affirmativeness (\rightarrow F), degree of political distrust (\rightarrow G) or voting behavior (\rightarrow H). First, simple Bayesian updating theory predicts that the magnitude of citizens’ changes in beliefs should vary according to their prior level of knowledge: well-informed citizens, and *a fortiori* experts, may well not react to our treatment as they learn little, whereas uninformed respondents should react the most—unless they somehow “resist” our treatment for other reasons.²⁶ Using our pre-treatment questions, we test for such heterogeneous effects using the conditional average treatment effect algorithm (CATE) proposed by Lee et al. (2017).

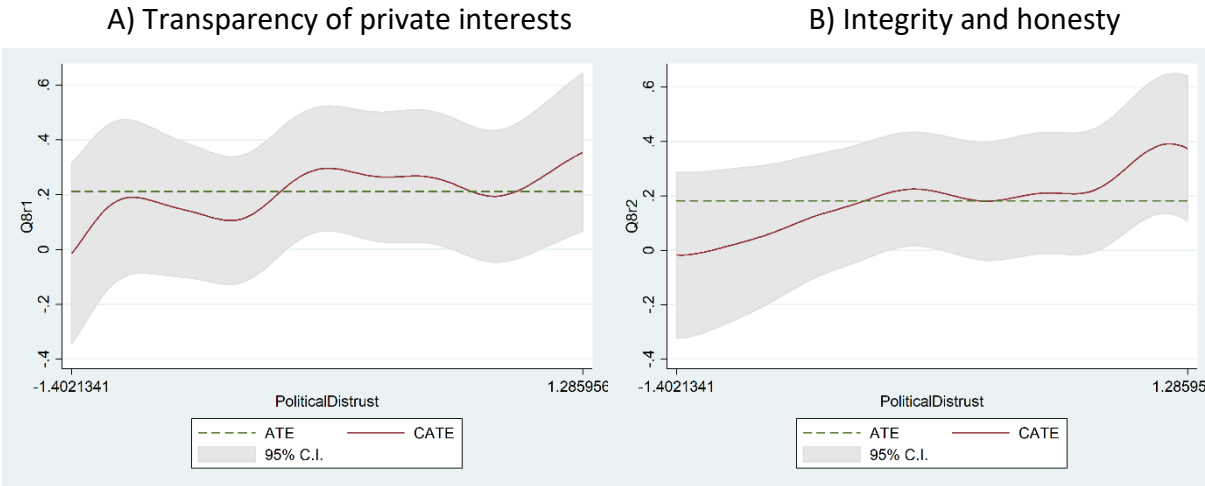
Overall, we find that most of the positive effects of providing information on citizens’ perceptions are broad-based and apply quite homogeneously to all citizens, whatever their initial level of affirmativeness or political distrust. As shows in appendix (Figure A2), the CATE functions for the effect of the treatment on trust in democracy and in political elites appear

²⁶ For example, some citizens may not react to our experimental manipulation if they do not trust the information we provide, or if they ignore it to preserve their prior beliefs (a case of motivated reasoning).

quite flat with respect to political distrust (→ G). This homogeneity is noteworthy as we may have expected that distrustful citizens would neglect and disregard the information provided, compared to more trustful citizens. Similarly, we do not find much evidence of heterogeneity in treatment effects according to affirmativeness (→ F) or voting behavior (→ H). Our findings show that perceptions regarding the usefulness and effectiveness of the HATVP are malleable across a wide spectrum of the electorate.

For a few outcomes, however, we find evidence of heterogeneous effects (panels A and B of Figure 9). For questions 8-1 and 8-2, regarding the HATVP’s capacity to improve transparency and promote integrity among politicians, our results suggest that the positive impacts of information provision are larger on citizens with high scores of political distrust (→ G). Conversely, people who already had quite optimistic views about corruption in politics do not seem to react much to the information provided (point estimates are close to zero and insignificant).

Figure 9: Heterogeneity in treatment effects over score for political distrust



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

Finally, in terms of heterogeneity depending on the initial level of knowledge of the HATVP (→ F), many of the positive impacts of providing information on the assessment of the HATVP are smaller and reach virtually zero among respondents who already knew the agency “well” or “very well.” This pattern is consistent with some form of Bayesian updating, namely that well-informed citizens do not learn much from our experiment and so do not adjust their

perceptions. Conversely, poorly informed citizens revise their beliefs after information is provided.

6. Discussion and conclusion

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

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

We also want to highlight broader lessons from our findings for the dynamic contemporary Democracy versus Epistocracy debate (Brennan and Landemore, 2021). In the famous typology proposed by Brennan, citizens in a democracy behave either like Hobbits—who are “mostly apathetic and ignorant about politics” or “have no opinions at all”—or like Hooligans—who have “strong and largely fixed worldviews” and “consume political information, although in a biased way” (2016, p. 4-5). This depiction contradicts the assumption of enlightened citizens that is so central in normative theories of democracy, namely the idea that a majority of citizens “maintain and revise their political beliefs in ways that are free from significant distortion by bias and other forms of irrationality” (Ancell, 2020). The Brennan typology leads to an epistemic critique of democracy and to the promotion of some epistocratic mechanisms to counter such ignorance and partiality among citizens (Brennan, 2016; Somin, 2010; Caplan, 2006). However, our survey results show that, although many citizens appear to firmly hold certain beliefs about the integrity of politicians and the trustworthiness of public institutions, which strongly correlate with their behavior during elections, providing simple and concise information can alter the views of a sizeable fraction

of citizens and bridge part of the gap with experts in the field. Our results even show that such revision of beliefs can be stronger among apparently disillusioned citizens who were initially characterized by high political distrust, poor institutional knowledge, and little interest in politics.

Obviously, this result does not mean that some citizens do not manifest information-processing biases or reluctance to revise their priors (Williams, 2022). Besides, even if some beliefs are revised toward more optimism, e.g., on the usefulness of anti-corruption institutions, the paper also shows that more information does not necessarily change citizens' opinions on normative issues, such as the legitimacy of the HATVP to oversee sanctions. These differences in reactions to positive versus normative issues opens areas for future research, notably to better understand which ingredients of anti-corruption agencies —independence, competency, representativeness, openness, etc.— are most crucial in the eyes of citizens for affecting their beliefs, judgments, and behaviors.

References

- Achen, C. H. & Bartels, L. M. (2017). *Democracy for Realists*. Princeton University Press.
- Ansell, A. (2020). Political irrationality, utopianism, and democratic theory. *Politics, Philosophy & Economics*, 19(1), 3-21.
- Algan, Y., Guriev, S., Papaioannou, E., & Passari, E. (2017). The European trust crisis and the rise of populism. *Brookings papers on economic activity*, 2017(2), 309-400.
- Algan, Y., Beasley, E., Cohen, D., & Foucault, M. (2019). *Les origines du populisme*. Média Diffusion.
- Akkerman, A., Mudde, C., & Zaslove, A. (2014). How populist are the people? Measuring populist attitudes in voters. *Comparative political studies*, 47(9), 1324-1353.
- Bågenholm, A. & Charron, N. (2014). Do politics in Europe benefit from politicising corruption?. *West European Politics*, 37(5), 903-931.
- Bautista-Beauchesne, N. (2021). Building anti-corruption agency collaboration and reputation: Hanging together or separately hanged. *Regulation & Governance*.
- Besley, T. (2006). *Principled agents. The political economy of good government*, Oxford University Press.
- Brennan, J. (2016). *Against Democracy*. Princeton University Press.
- Brennan, J. & Landemore, H. (2021). *Debating Democracy*. Oxford University Press.
- Caplan, B. (2006). *The Myth of the Rational Voter*. Princeton University Press.
- Castanho Silva, B., Jungkunz, S., Helbling, M. & Littvay, L. (2020). An empirical comparison of seven populist attitudes scales. *Political Research Quarterly*, 73(2), 409-424.
- Cevipof (2020). Le baromètre de la confiance politique, vague 11, february 2020.
- Cevipof (2021). Le baromètre de la confiance politique, vague 12, february 2021.
- Cheufra, M. & Chanvriil, F. (2019), "2009-2019 : la crise de la confiance politique", CEVIPOF.

- Crepaz, M. & Arıkan, G. (2023). The effects of transparency regulation on political trust and perceived corruption: Evidence from a survey experiment. *Regulation and governance*, early view.
- Downs, A. (1957). *An economic theory of democracy*, New York, Harper & brothers.
- Eatwell, R. & Goodwin, M. (2018). *National populism : The Revolt against Liberal Democracy*. London : Pelican Book.
- Eggers, A. C. (2014). Partisanship and electoral accountability: Evidence from the UK expenses scandal. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, 9(4), 441-472.
- Engler, S. (2020). "Fighting corruption" or "fighting the corrupt elite"? Politicizing corruption within and beyond the populist divide. *Democratization*, 27(4), 643-661.
- Fernández-Vázquez, P., Lavezzolo, S., & Ramiro, L. (2023). The technocratic side of populist attitudes: evidence from the Spanish case. *West European Politics*, 46(1), 73-99.
- Ferraz, C. & Finan, F. (2008). Exposing corrupt politicians. The effects of Brazil's of publicly released audits on electoral outcomes, *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 123(2), 703-745.
- Fieschi, C. & Heywood, P. (2004). Trust, cynicism and populist anti-politics. *Journal of political ideologies*, 9(3), 289-309.
- Foresta, A. (2020). The rise of populist parties in the aftermath of a massive corruption scandal. *Public Choice*, 184(3), 289-306.
- François, A. & Méon, P-G. (2021). Politicians at higher levels of government are perceived as more corrupt, *European Journal of Political Economy*, 67.
- Galeotti, F. & Zizzo, D. J. (2018). Identifying voter preferences: The trade-off between honesty and competence. *European Economic Review*, 105, 27-50.
- Geurkink, B., Zaslove, A., Sluiter, R. & Jacobs, K. (2020). Populist attitudes, political trust, and external political efficacy: old wine in new bottles?. *Political Studies*, 68(1), 247-267.
- Giommoni, T. (2021). Exposure to corruption and political participation: Evidence from Italian municipalities, *European Journal of Political Economy*, 68.
- Grimmelikhuijsen, S., Herkes, F., Leistikow, I., Verkroost, J., de Vries, F., & Zijlstra, W. G. (2021). Can decision transparency increase citizen trust in regulatory agencies? Evidence from a representative survey experiment. *Regulation & Governance*, 15(1), 17-31.
- Gulino, G. & Mazera, F. (2023). Contagious dishonesty: corruption scandals and supermarket theft, *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, forthcoming.
- Guriev, S. & Papaioannou, E. (2022). The political economy of populism. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 60(3), 753-832.
- Haaland, I., Roth, C. & Wohlfart, J. (2023). Designing Information Provision Experiments. *Journal of Economic Literature*, forthcoming.
- Hellwig, T. & Samuels, D. (2007). Voting in open economies: The electoral consequences of globalization. *Comparative Political Studies*, 40(3), 283-306.
- Hirschman, A. O. (1970). *Exit, voice, and loyalty: Responses to decline in firms, organizations, and states*. Harvard university press.

- Hoppe, S. (2022). Sovereignism vs. anti-corruption messianism: a salient post-Soviet cleavage of populist mobilization. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 38(4), 251-273.
- Ignazi, P. (1992). The silent counter-revolution: Hypotheses on the emergence of extreme right-wing parties in Europe. *European journal of political research*, 22(1), 3-34.
- Inglehart, R. F. & Norris, P. (2016). *Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash*. Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government.
- Ivaldi, G. (2018). Populism in France. In *Populism around the world: A comparative perspective* (pp. 27-47). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Lee, S., Okui, R. & Whang, Y-J. (2017). Doubly robust uniform confidence band for the conditional average treatment effect function. *Journal of Applied Econometrics*, 32(7), 1207-1225.
- Levi, M. & Stoker, L. (2000). Political trust and trustworthiness. *Annual review of political science*, 3(1), 475-507.
- Manin, B. (1997). *The principles of representative government*. Cambridge University Press.
- Marcos-Marne, H., Gil de Zúñiga, H. & Borah, P. (2022). What do we (not) know about demand-side populism? A systematic literature review on populist attitudes. *European Political Science*, 1-15.
- Morisi, D. & Wagner, M. (2021). Bringing people closer to the elites: the effect of information on populist attitudes. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*.
- Mounk, Y. (2018). *The People vs. Democracy*. Harvard University Press.
- Mudde, C. & Kaltwasser, C. R. (2017). *Populism: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Nieuwenburg, P. (2007). The integrity paradox. *Public Integrity*, 9(3), 213-224.
- Quilter-Pinner, H., Statham, R., Jennings W. & Valgarðsson, V. (2021). *Trust issues : dealing with distrust in politics*, Institute for Public Policy Research, December 2021.
- Rienks, H. (2023). Corruption, scandals and incompetence: Do voters care? *European Journal of Political Economy*, 79, 102441.
- Rodrik, D. (2018). Populism and the economics of globalization. *Journal of international business policy*, 1(1), 12-33.
- Rodrik, D. (2021). Why does globalization fuel populism? Economics, culture, and the rise of right-wing populism. *Annual Review of Economics*, 13, 133-170.
- Rosanvallon, P. (2008). *Counter-Democracy: Politics in an Age of Distrust*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sartre, E. & Daniele, G. (2022). Toxic loans and the rise of populist candidacies, *working paper*.
- Somin, I. (2010). Deliberative democracy and political ignorance. *Critical Review*, 22(2-3), 253-279.
- Towfigh, E. V., Goerg, S., Glöckner, A., Leifeld, P., Llorente-Saguer, A., Bade, S. & Kurschilgen, C. (2016). Do direct-democratic procedures lead to higher acceptance than political representation? Experimental survey evidence from Germany. *Public Choice*, 167, 47-65.

Wang, Q. & Guan, Z. (2023). Can sunlight disperse mistrust? A meta-analysis of the effect of transparency on citizens' trust in government, *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 33(3), 453-467.

Williams, D. (2022). The marketplace of rationalizations. *Economics & Philosophy*, 1-25.

APPENDIX

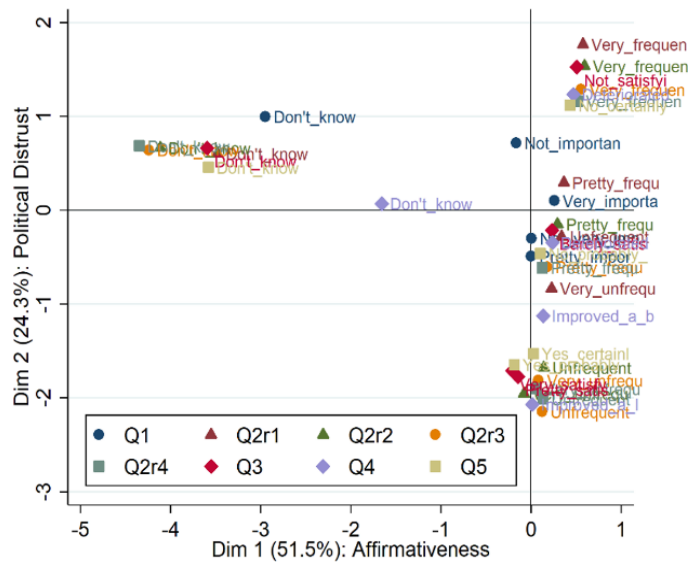
Table A1. OLS Regressions of the Political Distrust Score (MCA dimension 2)

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Sociodemographics			
Female	0.15*** 0.037		0.13*** 0.036
Age in years	0.055*** 0.0078		0.045*** 0.0078
Age squared	-0.00062*** 0.000085		-0.00049*** 0.000084
Socioprofessional category: middle (reference)	Ref.		Ref.
High	-0.064 0.058		0.031 0.058
Low	0.060 0.057		0.032 0.056
Vote in 2017 presidential election			
Not willing to disclose vote (reference)		Ref.	Ref.
Emmanuel Macron (center)		-0.55*** 0.074	-0.51*** 0.074
Marine Le Pen (far right)		0.23** 0.076	0.23** 0.076
François Fillon (right)		-0.41*** 0.082	-0.29*** 0.085
Jean-Luc Mélenchon (far left)		0.0035 0.081	0.012 0.080
Benoît Hamon (left)		-0.32*** 0.093	-0.30** 0.093
Nicolas Dupont-Aignan (far right)		0.12 0.11	0.14 0.11
Jean Lassalle (regionalist)		0.025 0.17	0.055 0.17
Philippe Poutou (far left)		-0.083 0.17	-0.092 0.17
Blank or null ballot		0.22* 0.098	0.20* 0.097
Did not vote		0.14 0.098	0.15 0.097
Not registered to vote		-0.17+ 0.089	-0.048 0.092
Don't remember		-0.047 0.13	-0.078 0.13
Constant	-1.09*** 0.15	0.13* 0.062	-0.88*** 0.17
Observations	2960	2960	2960
Adjusted R²	0.039	0.080	0.100

Standard errors in parentheses. Voters for minor candidates (N<20) are excluded.

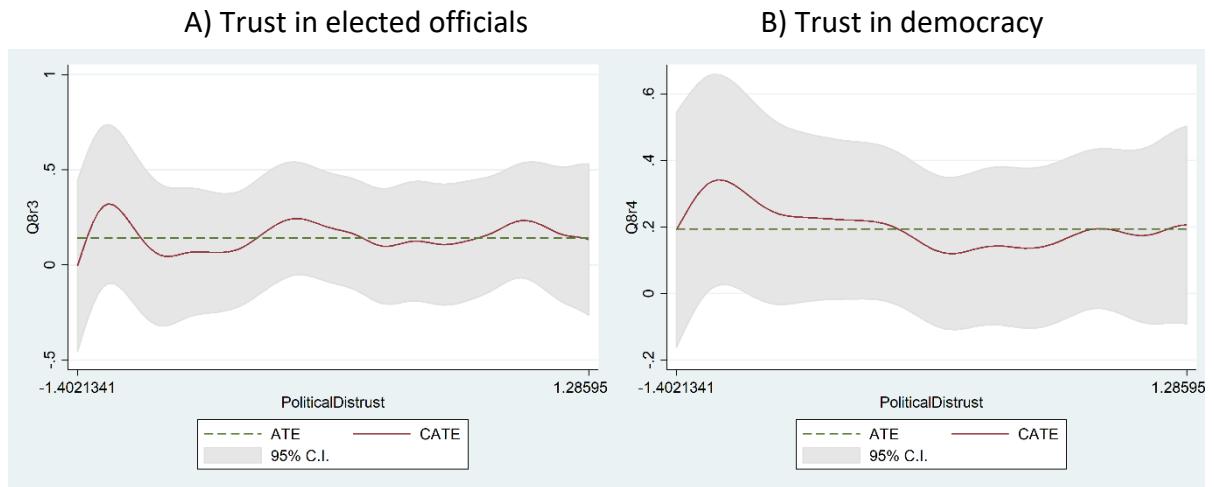
+ p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001.

Figure A1. Coordinate plot of the Multiple Correspondence Analysis



Notes: each question appears with its own symbol and color to facilitate interpretation

Figure A2. Heterogeneity in treatment effects over political distrust (score 2) for additional outcomes



DOCUMENTS DE TRAVAIL *AFED* PARUS EN 2024
AFED Working Papers Released in 2024

- 24-01** CLAUDIO CECCARELLI & ANTONIO CAPPIELLO
OECD PMR Indicators on Professional Services: Top Performances or Outliers?
- 24-02** BENJAMIN MONNERY & ALEXANDRE CHIRAT
Trust in the Fight against Political Corruption: A Survey Experiment among Citizens and Experts