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# "Sorry, None of Our Business": Grievances and Support for Defending Ukraine

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**Abstract**

Opponents of Western aid to Ukraine argue that every euro sent abroad is missing at home. Who still responds to this argument? With a preregistered framing experiment among 3086 German citizens, we show that making the opportunity cost explicit reduces support for financial aid to Ukraine from 48.7% to 40.6%. Textual responses to a follow-up question reveal a corresponding shift in reasoning patterns. To place our findings in a broader context, we utilize GLES data and show that opposition to aid is concentrated among citizens who are dissatisfied with democracy and pessimistic about the economy.

**Keywords:** Ukraine, foreign aid, opportunity costs, framing experiment, zero-sum thinking, public opinion, Germany

**JEL:** D72, F35, D91

# 1 Introduction

Across Europe, economic shocks, fiscal austerity, and cuts in public spending have undermined trust in traditional parties and fueled concerns over the state's neglect of disadvantaged communities (Algan et al., 2017; Baccini and Sattler, 2025; Guiso et al., 2024; Dickson et al., 2026; Hübscher and Sattler, 2026). Against this backdrop, citizens have increasingly turned to populist and far-right parties, which promise to prioritize the needs of native populations in the allocation of public resources (Cremaschi et al., 2025b,a; Dickson et al., 2026; Baccini and Sattler, 2025). Expenditures perceived to benefit non-native populations have consequently become a prominent target of far-right criticism. While this criticism has traditionally focused on domestic welfare spending and immigration, it has increasingly extended to foreign aid and costly international commitments. A particularly salient example is Western support for Ukraine.

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, far-right parties across Europe have consistently framed support for Ukraine as a diversion of public funds away from urgent domestic needs. This rhetoric extends across national borders. In the Netherlands, Geert Wilders opposed a €3.5 billion aid package for Ukraine, arguing that domestic housing and healthcare should take priority.[1] In France, Jordan Bardella denounced financial support for Ukraine as irresponsible given France's mounting national debt.[2] In Germany, Alice Weidel, a leader of the AfD, described aid to Ukraine as billions thrown away while Germany itself was experiencing economic decline.[3] While the argument is remarkably consistent across countries, whether it actually influences public opinion, and which voters are most susceptible to it, remains unclear. This question matters because democratic leaders take public opinion into account when making foreign policy decisions, as Tomz et al. (2020) demonstrate in the context of military interventions.

Our main evidence comes from a preregistered framing experiment embedded in an original survey of 3,086 German citizens, fielded in early 2026. Half of the respondents rated the statement that Germany should continue to support Ukraine financially, while the other half rated the same statement with the added clause "even if this money is then unavailable for other purposes in Germany". We find that framing in terms of a trade-off lowers support for financial aid to Ukraine by 0.20 points on a four-point scale (approximately one fifth of a standard deviation) and reduces the share of respondents who mostly or fully support aid from 48.7% to 40.6%. Importantly, the effect is more pronounced among respondents who are otherwise inclined to support Ukraine. Exploratory analyses also suggest stronger effects among those who place greater trust in political institutions and consider Russia primarily responsible for the war.

We complement the causal evidence with two datasets from the German Longitudinal Elec-

[1] Source: https://dutchnews.nl/2025/03/dutch-agree-to-give-e3-5bn-more-to-ukraine-wilders-says-no

[2] Source: https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-09-06/france-s-far-right-chief-bardella-wants-ukraine-to-pay-for-europe-s-help

[3] Source: https://www.presseportal.de/pm/130241/6183215.

tion Study (GLES). The GLES Tracking comprises ten cross-sectional surveys of eligible voters, fielded between April 2023 and March 2026, with a total of 11,614 respondents. These surveys asked whether Germany should stop weapon deliveries to Ukraine completely, allowing us to examine how opposition varies across population groups and over time. The GLES Panel followed 12,911 respondents across up to four waves between October 2022 and June 2024, asking whether Germany should continue to support Ukraine even if this meant high energy prices and restrictions for everyone. By following the same individuals over time, the panel allows us to examine how changes in opposition to aid are associated with changes in economic assessments and political trust.

The GLES data place our experimental findings in the broader context of political attitudes toward Ukraine in Germany. Opposition to aid is concentrated among citizens who are dissatisfied with democracy and pessimistic about the economy. In the GLES Tracking, the share of respondents agreeing that Germany should stop weapon deliveries completely rose from 40.7% in April 2023 to 45.6% in March 2026. Across all waves, respondents dissatisfied with democracy were approximately twice as likely to support ending weapon deliveries as other respondents. In the GLES Panel, changes in opposition were more strongly associated with changes in political alienation than with changes in respondents' assessments of their own economic situation. A one-standard-deviation increase in distrust of the Bundestag was associated with a 3.4-percentage-point increase in the probability of opposing aid. These within-person associations were particularly evident among respondents who initially placed themselves on the left or in the political center. Among respondents on the right, only worsening expectations about the general economy were significantly associated with changes in opposition.

We make three contributions. First, we bring a prominent far-right argument into experimental research on the costs of foreign and security commitments (Flores-Macías and Kreps, 2017; Mader et al., 2024; Bøggild et al., 2024; Frye, 2025; Rudolph et al., 2026). We test whether emphasizing the domestic opportunity costs of aid to Ukraine reduces public support in Germany in 2026, after four years in which the AfD has repeatedly advanced this argument. We find that the frame still reduces support for aid, but has little effect among AfD supporters, who already overwhelmingly oppose it.

Second, we contribute to research on the normalization of far-right ideas by showing that an argument frequently advanced by the AfD can influence citizens in the political center and on the left, while having little additional effect among AfD supporters themselves. Existing research examines how radical-right voters become more willing to express previously held views (Valentim, 2024), and how unchallenged far-right messages can shift attitudes across ideological groups (Bolet and Foos, 2025). Our open-ended responses help distinguish between respondents who invoke the domestic trade-off argument spontaneously and those who do so when it is made salient. AfD supporters frequently invoke this reasoning without prompting, consistent with their distinct foreign-policy attitudes (Mader and Schoen, 2026). By contrast, the frame reduces support for aid by 9.6 percentage points among respondents in the center

and 10.7 points among those on the left. This pattern contrasts with research documenting backlash against radical-right positions following these parties' entry into parliament (Bischof and Wagner, 2019). Although our experiment does not establish where respondents encountered the argument, the findings are consistent with the influence of a familiar narrative circulating in German political debates, where AfD claims have gained increasing media visibility in recent years (Völker, 2026).

Third, we extend research on austerity and populism from electoral behavior to foreign policy. Previous studies have shown that austerity increases support for populist parties, particularly among economically vulnerable voters (Baccini and Sattler, 2025; Hübscher and Sattler, 2026). Fiscal constraints can reinforce perceptions that support for Ukraine comes at the expense of domestic spending, creating an opportunity for far-right parties to frame foreign aid as a zero-sum trade-off. Our experiment shows that making this trade-off explicit reduces public support for aid. In the Bundestag, the AfD increasingly invoked this argument following the 2025 reform of Germany's debt brake, which relaxed borrowing constraints for certain security expenditures, including assistance to Ukraine, but not for ordinary social spending.

Section 2 develops the theoretical argument, while Section 3 introduces the survey experiment and the two GLES datasets. Section 4 presents the effects of the trade-off frame on support for Ukraine, examines which respondents are most susceptible to it, and analyzes how it shapes their reasoning. It then situates these findings in the context of parliamentary debates and trends in public opinion, drawing on the GLES data, before discussing the implications for party strategies and fiscal policy. Section 5 concludes.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

Rising inequality, repeated austerity, and declining public services have left many citizens in Western democracies feeling that *people like them* are falling behind. Over the past three decades, rising income inequality has been associated with growing support for the radical right (and, in some cases, the left), particularly among citizens with lower-middle incomes who perceive themselves as having relatively high social status (Engler and Weisstanner, 2021). Austerity adds a distinct political dimension to these grievances, as unlike shocks associated with trade and technological change, it results from deliberate government decisions (Hübscher and Sattler, 2026; Baccini and Sattler, 2025). Across sixteen advanced economies, fiscal adjustments between 1978 and 2018 led to persistent reductions in social spending, including social investment (Blossey, 2025). These cuts raised support for populist parties among economically vulnerable voters, leaving them less protected against structural economic change (Baccini and Sattler, 2025).

These developments have also eroded citizens' trust in parliaments, governments, and political parties. Recessions caused by austerity have increased political distrust more than other economic downturns (Gabriel et al., 2026). Across 143 countries, trust in parliaments, gov-

ernments, and political parties has declined in recent decades, while trust in the civil service, courts, and police has remained stable or increased (Valgarðsson et al., 2025). Evidence from a Norwegian panel shows that citizens became less trusting of politics as their assessments of public services and social protection deteriorated (Syrstad et al., 2025). Similarly, individuals who feel that people like them have been pushed to the margins of society tend to distrust politicians and parliament more and express lower satisfaction with democracy (Gidron and Hall, 2020).

Populist and far-right parties turn these grievances into demands to prioritize native populations in the allocation of public resources, including funds spent abroad. Where public services have declined, far-right parties have gained support and blamed these shortcomings on immigration (Cremaschi et al., 2025a,b; Dickson et al., 2026). Excluding immigrants from welfare benefits has become a cornerstone of their socioeconomic agenda (Careja and Harris, 2022). These parties extend this argument to foreign aid, demanding that it be cut and the funds redirected "to assist our own citizens in our own country", as a UKIP manifesto put it (Hackenesch et al., 2022, p. 1394). Citizens with nativist and anti-elitist views are also less supportive of foreign aid (Heinrich et al., 2021).

Similar patterns emerge in public attitudes toward foreign aid generally and support for Ukraine specifically. In the United States, citizens with greater trust in government were more supportive of foreign aid spending (Macdonald, 2025), consistent with broader evidence linking political trust to support for government policies (Hetherington and Husser, 2012). Assessments of the national economy were more strongly associated with support for foreign aid, including aid to Ukraine, than assessments of personal finances (Macdonald, 2025; Eck and Michel, 2025). However, Europeans whose household finances had deteriorated during the crisis were also less supportive of aid (Heinrich et al., 2016). Political mobilization matters as well: where governing parties, Kremlin-friendly parties, or churches mobilized against aid, public support for Ukraine declined (Stolle, 2024; Kostelka et al., 2026). In Germany, political alienation measured before the full-scale invasion predicted more favorable views of Putin in 2023 (Hoffeller and Steiner, 2024), while AfD identifiers returned to their prewar positions on defence spending and Russia (Mader and Schoen, 2026).

Drawing on this literature, we expect opposition to aid to be concentrated among citizens who distrust parliament, are dissatisfied with democracy, and hold negative views of the national economy. Within individuals, opposition should increase more strongly as these assessments deteriorate than as perceptions of their own economic situation worsen. Research on party mobilization, however, suggests an alternative explanation: citizens may follow cues from the AfD rather than respond directly to their own grievances. If this explanation holds, the associations between grievances and opposition to aid should weaken substantially once sympathy for the AfD is taken into account.

Far-right parties turn these grievances into the claim that money spent abroad is unavailable for domestic needs (Hackenesch et al., 2022; Bayram et al., 2024). The costs of foreign commitments appear particularly consequential when citizens are expected to bear them directly.

Across 17 European countries in April 2022, 82% supported humanitarian aid to Ukraine, while only 40% were willing to accept higher energy costs resulting from sanctions on Russia (Stolle, 2024). Americans and Brits who were told that a war would be financed partly through a new tax were 10 to 12 percentage points less supportive than those who were told that it would be financed through borrowing (Flores-Macías and Kreps, 2017). By contrast, tripling military and economic aid to Ukraine from 0.2% to 0.6% of GDP reduced the likelihood of choosing a strategy to end the war by 5.1 percentage points (Rudolph et al., 2026). Our trade-off frame differs from these approaches: it specifies neither a concrete amount nor a direct personal cost, but emphasizes that continued support for Ukraine comes at the expense of spending on domestic priorities. We therefore expect the frame to reduce support for aid on average.

If the trade-off frame lowers support for aid, framing theory suggests that it does so by changing the relative importance of different considerations in respondents' evaluations. According to this theory, attitudes reflect a weighted combination of considerations, and emphasis frames increase the weight attached to particular considerations rather than changing underlying beliefs (Chong and Druckman, 2007). We therefore expect respondents exposed to the trade-off frame to place greater emphasis on domestic spending priorities when explaining their views. At the same time, other considerations, such as the defence of democracy or the course of the war, may become less prominent. Respondents who already prioritize domestic needs should invoke these arguments regardless of the frame, consistent with evidence that citizens who closely followed the debate on aid to Ukraine were less responsive to new messages (Frye, 2025; Druckman and Leeper, 2012). We therefore expect the frame to have a greater effect among respondents who would otherwise support aid. The same reasoning suggests weaker effects among citizens with strong zero-sum beliefs, who already perceive public spending as a zero-sum trade-off without an explicit cue (Andrews Fearon and Götz, 2024). Since previous research finds that asking respondents to provide reasons before stating their views has little effect on those views (Blumenau, 2025), we interpret their explanations as evidence of which considerations the frame makes salient, rather than as the cause of the effect. We therefore asked respondents to explain their position in an open-ended question immediately after the support item.[4]

# 3 Data and Design

We combine an original survey experiment with two datasets from the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES). The experiment tests whether making the domestic opportunity costs of aid explicit reduces public support for Ukraine. The GLES Tracking examines how opposition to aid and its correlates evolved between 2023 and 2026, while the GLES Panel follows the same respondents from 2022 to 2024, allowing us to examine how changes in political and economic grievances are associated with changes in opposition to aid. The three datasets capture different dimensions of support for Ukraine. The experiment focuses on financial assistance, the GLES

[4]Preregistration available at https://aspredicted.org/kb42fk.pdf.

Tracking on weapon deliveries, and the GLES Panel on continued support despite higher energy prices and other restrictions.

## 3.1 Survey Experiment: Sample

Germany provides a particularly relevant setting for examining how highlighting domestic opportunity costs shapes public support for aid to Ukraine. To study this, we fielded an original survey of German adults recruited through the professional survey provider Bilendi. The sample was constructed using quotas for age, gender, and federal state (Bundesland), based on German census distributions. Respondents had to be at least 18 years old. As preregistered, we restrict our analysis to German citizens, leaving 3,086 of the original 3,165 respondents. Data collection took place between February 18 and March 5, 2026. Appendix Table A1 compares the sample with the German census distribution, while Appendix Table A2 provides the wording of all survey questions used in the study.

## 3.2 Survey Experiment: Design and Empirical Strategy

We embedded a between-subjects experiment in the survey to examine whether making the domestic opportunity costs of aid explicit reduces support for Ukraine. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of two conditions:

**Control:** "Germany should continue to support Ukraine financially."[5]

**Treatment (Trade-off frame):** "Germany should continue to support Ukraine financially, even if this money is then unavailable for other purposes in Germany."[6]

For the effect of the frame on support, we estimate the following OLS model:

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta_1 T_i + \mathbf{X}_i'\boldsymbol{\gamma} + \delta_s + \varepsilon_i \tag{1}$$

where $Y_i$ is respondent $i$'s response to the manipulated item, and $T_i$ is a binary indicator for assignment to the framing condition. Since treatment is randomly assigned, $\beta_1$ has a causal interpretation. In the main specification we also include the control variables listed in the preregistration: age, gender, education, household income, left-right self-placement, party preference, trust in political institutions and media skepticism. These controls are included in all adjusted specifications of the survey experiment unless otherwise indicated. We additionally add state fixed-effects $\delta_s$ to account for time-invariant differences across German states. The balance test is presented in Table A3. We show that covariates do not jointly predict treatment assignment (F = 0.73, p = 0.896).

[5] Original: Deutschland sollte die Ukraine weiterhin finanziell unterstützen.

[6] Original: Deutschland sollte die Ukraine weiterhin finanziell unterstützen, auch wenn dieses Geld dann für andere Zwecke in Deutschland fehlt.

In addition, we analyze how the trade-off framing shapes the reasoning respondents provide in an open-ended follow-up question, in which they are asked to explain why they support or oppose aid to Ukraine. To quantify the information contained in these responses, we use OpenAI's GPT-4.1 mini, following Asirvatham et al. (2026). For GPT-4.1 mini, the model we use, the median accuracy across 1,141 binary classification tasks is 0.80. Table A4 specifies the prompt and the coding scheme, and Appendix A.2 describes the procedure. The frame did not change whether a response was analyzable (0.005, SE = 0.012) or how long it was (0.86 words, SE = 0.61).

For each outcome $Y_i$, we estimate the effect of the treatment by the following OLS model:

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta T_i + \mathbf{X}_i'\boldsymbol{\gamma} + \varepsilon_i, \tag{2}$$

For binary outcomes, this is a linear probability model, and $\beta$ measures the difference in the share of responses featuring the respective category between the treatment and control groups. Because the treatment is randomly assigned, $\beta$ identifies the causal effect of the frame on the content of the open-ended responses. Since we test the treatment effect on a large number of outcomes, the probability of obtaining some significant estimates by chance alone is high. We therefore report, in addition to conventional p-values, q-values that control the false discovery rate across all outcomes (Benjamini–Hochberg).

## 3.3 GLES Tracking

The GLES Tracking consists of repeated cross-sectional online surveys of eligible German voters with internet access. Each wave uses quotas for age, gender, and education to recruit respondents from Bilendi's opt-in online panel, the same provider that fielded our experiment.[7] We use the ten waves from April 2023 to March 2026 that include the statement "Germany should stop weapon deliveries to Ukraine completely."[8] In most waves, approximately 1,050 respondents answered this item, except for the February 2025 wave preceding the federal election, which included 2,121 respondents. This yields a total sample of 11,614 respondents. We code agreement with the statement (4 or 5 on a five-point scale) as opposition to military aid. We examine three assessments measured on five-point scales in every wave: satisfaction with democracy, evaluations of the current national economic situation, and evaluations of respondents' own economic situation. Respondents are classified as dissatisfied with democracy or as viewing the national or their personal economic situation negatively if they select 4 or 5 on the respective scales. The GLES Tracking does not include a measure of trust in the Bundestag. All reported shares are weighted using the sociodemographic weights provided for each wave.

[7] GLES Tracking 2009–2026, cumulation, GESIS study ZA6832, version 3.0.0, https://doi.org/10.4232/1.14820. The description of the sampling procedure follows the questionnaire documentation of wave T63 (ZA10108).

[8] Original: Deutschland sollte Waffenlieferungen an die Ukraine komplett einstellen.

### 3.4 GLES Panel

The GLES Panel follows a non-probability quota sample of German citizens with internet access who were eligible to vote in the 2017 or 2021 federal elections. We use waves 23 to 26, fielded in October 2022, May 2023, October 2023 and June 2024. In each of these waves respondents rated the statement "Germany should continue to support Ukraine, even if that means high energy prices and restrictions for everyone" on a five-point scale.[9] We measure opposition to aid using a binary indicator for respondents who disagree with the statement (1 or 2), with effects expressed in percentage points. The analysis includes 12,911 respondents.

We relate this outcome to eight measures of economic and political attitudes. Four concern the economy: respondents' assessments of their own and the general economic situation, both currently and one year ahead. Three capture political grievances: dissatisfaction with democracy, distrust of the Bundestag, and a five-item scale measuring feelings of being left behind, available in waves 23 to 25. The eighth measures sympathy for the AfD on a scale from −5 to +5. All measures are standardized across person-wave observations, with higher values indicating more negative assessments for the economic and political grievance measures. While most existing evidence on the relationship between political trust and policy support relies on cross-sectional comparisons (Devine, 2024), experimental attempts to increase trust have not necessarily changed policy preferences (Peyton, 2020). We therefore use the panel to examine how changes in attitudes are associated with changes in opposition to aid within the same individuals over time. Each model includes person and wave fixed effects, with standard errors clustered at the individual level. We first estimate separate models for each measure and then include all measures available across the four waves in a joint specification. As an additional robustness check, we include the value of each measure in the respondent's subsequent wave to examine whether future assessments predict current opposition beyond their contemporaneous values. Finally, we distinguish respondents by their left-right self-placement in May 2022, before the four waves under study, using an eleven-point scale (1–4 for the left, 5–7 for the center, and 8–11 for the right).

## 4 Results and Discussion

### 4.1 The Effect of the Trade-off Frame

Making the opportunity cost of aid explicit reduces support for continued financial assistance to Ukraine (Table 1). Respondents asked whether Germany should keep supporting Ukraine "even if this money is then unavailable for other purposes in Germany" scored 0.20 points lower on the four-point agreement scale than respondents who saw the non-manipulated statement, about one

[9] GLES Panel waves 23 to 26, GESIS studies ZA7729 (version 1.0.0, https://doi.org/10.4232/1.14064), ZA7730 (version 1.0.0, https://doi.org/10.4232/1.14141), ZA7731 (version 1.0.0, https://doi.org/10.4232/1.14242) and ZA7732 (version 2.0.0, https://doi.org/10.4232/1.14727). Item 2880cq.

fifth of a standard deviation. The share of respondents who agree with the statement (respond 3 or 4) falls from 48.7% to 40.6%. This is a notable effect given that the treatment merely highlights the opportunity cost of aid without providing new factual information. Including individual-level controls and state fixed effects leaves the estimate essentially unchanged. Although these covariates explain a substantial share of the variation in support, indicating the importance of existing political predispositions, the framing effect remains robust. Column 3 excludes the 761 respondents who identify the AfD as their preferred party. Among the remaining 2,325 respondents, the estimated effect is larger, at -0.25. An ordered logit model of the four response categories produces similar results (odds ratio 0.58 with controls, Appendix Table A9).

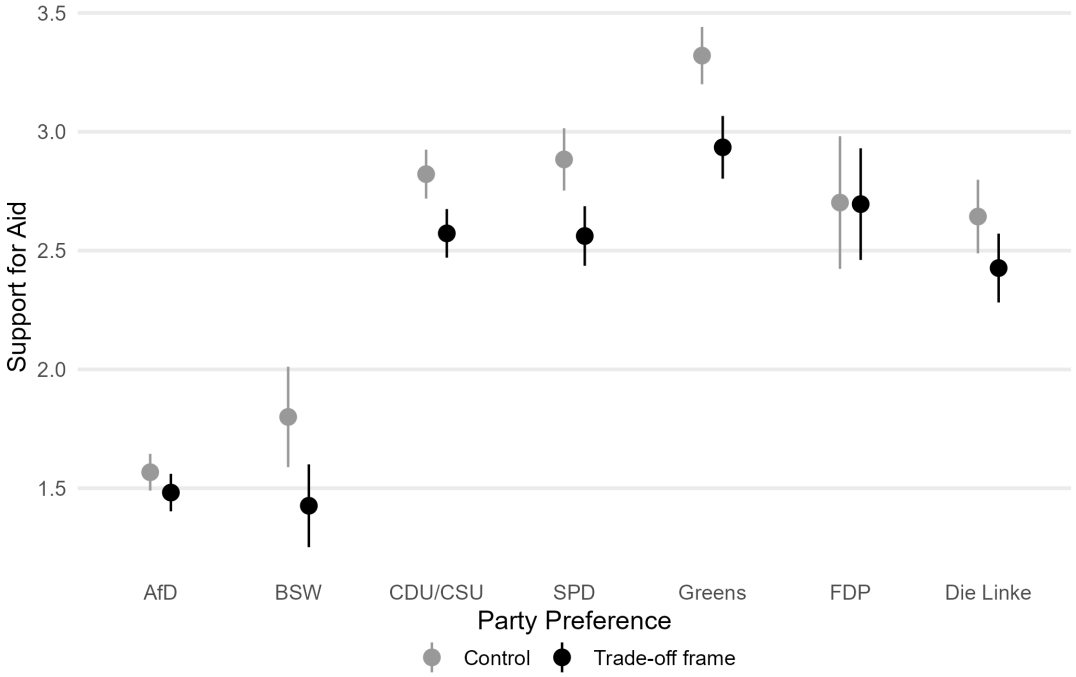
Table 1: Effect of Framing on Support for Ukraine

| | Support for aid to Ukraine | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Baseline | Controls + State FE | Excluding AfD |
| Trade-off frame | -0.196*** | -0.196*** | -0.247*** |
| | (0.036) | (0.028) | (0.033) |
| Controls | | ✓ | ✓ |
| State fixed effects | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Observations | 3,086 | 3,086 | 2,325 |
| $R^2$ | 0.010 | 0.426 | 0.342 |

*Notes:* OLS coefficients with heteroskedasticity-robust (HC2) standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is support for aid to Ukraine. The baseline model includes only the treatment indicator. Models 2 and 3 additionally control for age, gender, education, household income, left-right self-placement, party preference, institutional trust and media skepticism, and include state fixed effects. Model 3 excludes respondents who report the AfD as their preferred party. $^{*}p < 0.10$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$.

As Figure 1 shows, AfD supporters overwhelmingly reject aid already in the control condition, leaving little room for the frame to reduce their support further. In the control group, mean support ranges from 1.6 among AfD supporters to approximately 3.3 among Green supporters on the four-point scale. The frame reduces mean support in almost every party group, with the largest absolute declines among supporters of the Greens (0.39 points), BSW (0.37 points), and SPD (0.32 points). While the trade-off frame narrows partisan differences, it does not change their overall ranking: Green supporters remain the most supportive of aid, while AfD supporters remain the least supportive. A similar pattern emerges when respondents are grouped by ideological self-placement. The frame reduces the share supporting aid by 10.7 percentage points among respondents on the left (1–4) and 9.6 percentage points among those in the center (5–6), compared with a smaller, statistically insignificant decline of 2.8 percentage points on the right (7–10). The center also constitutes the largest group, accounting for 1,618 of the 3,086 respondents.

Figure 1: Effect on support for aid to Ukraine by party preference




Note. Points show predicted support for aid to Ukraine (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree) in the control and trade-off conditions, by preferred party (vote intention), from an OLS model of support on condition interacted with party. Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals based on HC2 standard errors. Respondents preferring another party, respondents who would not vote, and respondents who answered "don't know" or preferred not to say are omitted.

## 4.2 Who Responds to the Frame

Table 2 examines whether the effect of the trade-off frame varies with beliefs about responsibility for the war, institutional trust, and media skepticism. All moderators are mean-centered, so the coefficient on the frame represents its estimated effect for a respondent with an average value on the respective moderator.

Beliefs about responsibility for the war are strongly associated with support for aid. Respondents who regard Russia as primarily responsible are more supportive of aid and respond more strongly to the frame. Those who believe that NATO shares responsibility are less supportive overall, but do not respond significantly differently to the frame. Institutional trust is also strongly associated with support for aid and increases responsiveness to the frame. The estimated effect is $-0.33$ for respondents one point above the mean in institutional trust, compared with approximately $-0.06$ for those one point below it. Media skepticism shows the opposite pattern, with more skeptical respondents expressing less support for aid and responding less strongly to the frame. Overall, these findings suggest that the frame has its largest effect among respondents who would otherwise be more inclined to support Ukraine, particularly those who trust political institutions, express less skepticism toward established media, and regard Russia as primarily responsible for the war.

The three moderators are correlated, with pairwise correlations ranging from 0.39 to 0.55 in

Table 2: Heterogeneous Effects of Framing on Support for Aid to Ukraine

| | Support for aid to Ukraine | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Blame Russia | Blame NATO | Institutional trust | Media skepticism |
| Trade-off frame | -0.190*** | -0.200*** | -0.196*** | -0.196*** |
| | (0.027) | (0.028) | (0.028) | (0.028) |
| Blame Russia | 0.280*** | | | |
| | (0.022) | | | |
| Trade-off frame × Blame Russia | -0.082*** | | | |
| | (0.026) | | | |
| Blame NATO | | -0.112*** | | |
| | | (0.024) | | |
| Trade-off frame × Blame NATO | | 0.003 | | |
| | | (0.031) | | |
| Institutional trust | | | 0.407*** | |
| | | | (0.038) | |
| Trade-off frame × Institutional trust | | | -0.137*** | |
| | | | (0.043) | |
| Media skepticism | | | | -0.111*** |
| | | | | (0.012) |
| Trade-off frame × Media skepticism | | | | 0.039*** |
| | | | | (0.014) |
| Controls | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| State fixed effects | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Observations | 3,086 | 3,086 | 3,086 | 3,086 |
| $R^2$ | 0.465 | 0.434 | 0.428 | 0.427 |

*Notes:* Entries are OLS coefficients with HC2 heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. All models control for age, gender, education, household income, left-right self-placement, party preference, institutional trust and media skepticism, and include state fixed effects. Moderator variables, institutional trust and media skepticism are centered. $^{*}p < 0.10$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$.

absolute value (Appendix Table A7). When all three interactions are included in the same model, none remains statistically significant. We therefore interpret them as capturing overlapping aspects of a broader predisposition toward supporting Ukraine. The four-point response scale also limits the extent to which the frame can reduce support among respondents who already strongly oppose aid. In the lowest tercile of institutional trust, 55% of respondents in the control group choose the lowest response category, leaving little room for the frame to reduce their support further. Appendix Table A6 reports further moderators, along with Benjamini–Hochberg adjusted $q$-values.

Table 3: Heterogeneous Effects of Framing by Zero-Sum Thinking

| | Support for aid to Ukraine | |
|---|---|---|
| | General zero-sum thinking | Immigration-specific zero-sum thinking |
| Trade-off frame | -0.196*** | -0.196*** |
| | (0.028) | (0.028) |
| Zero-sum thinking | 0.041 | -0.121*** |
| | (0.041) | (0.024) |
| Trade-off frame × Zero-sum thinking | 0.057 | 0.074** |
| | (0.055) | (0.032) |
| Controls | ✓ | ✓ |
| State fixed effects | ✓ | ✓ |
| Observations | 3,086 | 3,086 |
| $R^2$ | 0.428 | 0.430 |

*Notes:* Entries are OLS coefficients with HC2 heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. All models control for age, gender, education, household income, left-right self-placement, party preference, institutional trust and media skepticism, and include state fixed effects. Zero-sum scales are centered. Column 1 uses the preregistered eight-item scale; column 2 uses the immigration-specific item (exploratory). The interaction terms capture heterogeneous treatment effects across levels of zero-sum thinking. $^{*}p < 0.10$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$.

Table 3 tests the preregistered expectation that dispositional zero-sum thinking amplifies the frame's effect, which the data do not support. With the full set of controls, the preregistered general zero-sum scale is unrelated to support and does not moderate the frame. A further model uses an immigration-specific zero-sum item. These beliefs go with lower support and moderate the frame in the opposite direction from what we expected. The frame's effect weakens as immigration-specific zero-sum beliefs increase. The implied effect is −0.30 at the scale minimum and −0.07 at the maximum.[10] This pattern fits the expectation in Section 2 that the frame adds little for respondents who already view domestic distribution in zero-sum terms, since they evaluate Ukraine aid through a trade-off lens regardless of question wording. Making the trade-off explicit introduces a new consideration only for respondents who do not think this

[10]Both zero-sum measures were taken after the experiment. The frame did not shift them (general scale: 0.007, SE = 0.020; immigration item: 0.000, SE = 0.033).

way by default. Respondents high in these beliefs also start from lower support, which leaves less room for movement.

Economic grievances are not uniformly associated with lower support for Ukraine. While perceptions of personal economic deprivation are not significantly related to support once we include the full set of controls, feelings of having lost social standing are (Appendix Table A8). In particular, nostalgic deprivation, measured by agreement that people like oneself had more opportunities 30 years ago and that other groups receive preferential treatment, is associated with lower support. Economic deprivation, measured by perceptions of receiving less than one deserves and a worsening economic situation of people like oneself, is not significantly associated with support in the fully adjusted models. Exploratory analyses also suggest that the frame has weaker effects among respondents reporting greater nostalgic deprivation and among those scoring higher on a five-item index of relative deprivation (Appendix Table A6). By contrast, the frame has a stronger effect among respondents who express greater trust in politicians and the political system. However, the deprivation interactions do not remain statistically significant after Benjamini–Hochberg adjustment for multiple testing.

## 4.3 How the Frame Changes the Reasons People Give

Before analyzing the open-ended responses, we validate the GPT-based coding by comparing it with respondents' closed-item answers (Table 4). Among the 2,425 analyzable responses expressing a clear position, the stance coded from the text matches the closed-item response in 91.1% of cases. Disagreements are concentrated in one direction. In 160 cases (10.5% of texts coded as opposing aid), respondents expressed opposition in their written answers despite agreeing with the closed-item statement. By contrast, only 57 respondents (6.3% of texts coded as supporting aid) showed the reverse pattern.

Inspecting these cases suggests that some disagreements may reflect ambivalent or conditional attitudes toward aid rather than straightforward coding errors. For example, one respondent wrote: "Before we continue to pour vast amounts of money into Ukraine, we should think about the working citizens and retirees in Germany. There are shortages everywhere. Dilapidated roads and bridges; too few teachers; pensions that are far too low for many; inequality in mothers' pensions; local public transportation in rural areas is a disaster—not to mention the German rail system. And the inequality in inheritance tax for corporate heirs or heirs to very large fortunes. The immigration of people who have little to nothing to do with (or want to have to do with) our culture. Poorly educated or uneducated immigrants. This issue should be explored. And quite a few more points".[11] The response emphasizes a range of domestic concerns, from

[11] Original: Bevor nach wie vor sehr viel Geld in die Ukraine fließt sollte an die arbeitenden Bürger und Rentner in Deutschland gedacht werden. Es fehlt an jeder Ecke. Marode Straßen, Brücken, zu wenige Pädagogen. Viel zu wenig Rente für viele. Ungleichheit bei der Mütterrente. Nahverkehr auf dem Land ist eine Katastrophe. Von der deutschen Bahn ganz zu schweigen. Und die Ungleichheit bei der Erbschaftssteuer für die Konzern Erben bzw. Erben von sehr großen Vermögen. Die Zuwanderung von Menschen die mit unserer Kultur wenig bis nichts am Hut haben (wollen). Schlecht ausgebildete oder nicht ausgebildete Zuwanderer. Hier sollte sondiert werden. Und

Table 4: Validation of Open-Text Coding Against Closed-Item Responses

| | Closed-item response | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Opposes aid | Supports aid | Total |
| Open-text: opposes aid | 1,360 (89.5%) | 160 (10.5%) | 1,520 |
| Open-text: supports aid | 57 (6.3%) | 848 (93.7%) | 905 |
| Total | 1,417 | 1,008 | 2,425 |

*Notes:* Entries report the number of observations, with row percentages in parentheses. The closed-item response is dichotomized: responses of 1 or 2 (strongly disagree, disagree) are coded as opposing aid, and responses of 3 or 4 (agree, strongly agree) as supporting aid. Open-text responses are coded as opposing or supporting aid based on the stance expressed in the text; responses coded as ambivalent or without a clear stance, and non-analyzable responses, are excluded. Note that the wording of the closed item differs by experimental arm: respondents in the trade-off condition rated the statement with the added clause "even if this money is then unavailable for other purposes in Germany." Overall agreement between the open-text coding and the closed-item response is 91.1%. The high correspondence between the two measures provides evidence for the validity of the open-text coding.

infrastructure and pensions to immigration, and was coded as opposing aid based on its opening sentence. Yet the same respondent selected 3 (agree) on the four-point support scale, suggesting that prioritizing domestic needs does not necessarily imply opposition to continued assistance.

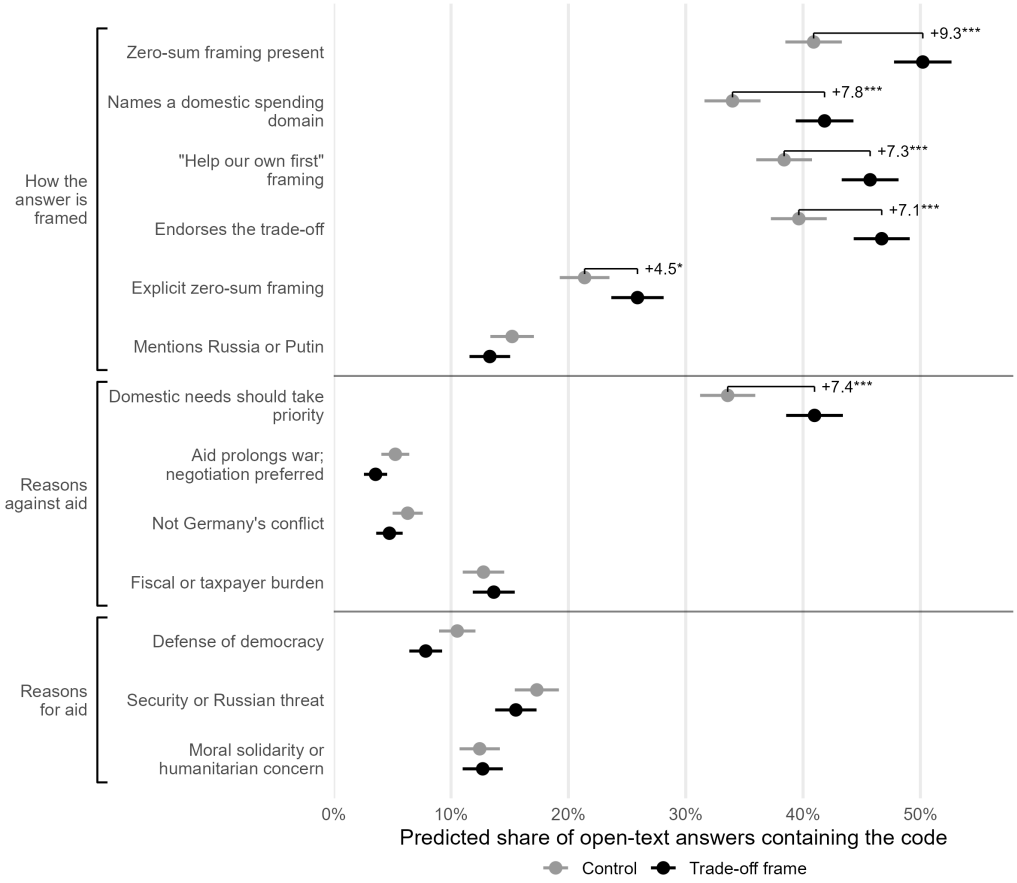
Figure 2 and corresponding Table A5 show how the frame affects the content of respondents' open-ended explanations. The strongest effects concern the trade-off argument itself. Zero-sum framing appears in 41.3% of control responses and 50.6% of treated responses (+9.3 pp, $q < 0.001$). Explicit zero-sum statements increase from 21.7% to 26.2% (+4.5 pp, $q = 0.023$). Respondents exposed to the frame are also more likely to mention domestic spending priorities (+7.8 pp, $q < 0.001$), use "help our own first" language (+7.3 pp, $q < 0.001$), and endorse the trade-off as a reason to oppose aid (+7.1 pp, $q < 0.001$).

Interestingly, the frame also leads some respondents to question its underlying premise. The share of responses explicitly rejecting the fixed-pie logic increases from 1.2% to 3.2% ($q = 0.003$) with responses like "At the end of the day, a good balance must be struck in addressing foreign and domestic policy issues"[12] or "Germany should also help Ukraine wherever possible — but the funds should not be taken from the budget allocated for the welfare state. A fair compromise would be for Germany to take this money from the military budget, for example. I believe that Germany is wealthy enough to help others without bringing about our own downfall—as long

noch etliche Punkte mehr.

[12]Original: "Am Ende des Tags muss eine gute Mischung zur Lösung von außen- und innenpolitischen Themen gefunden werden."

Figure 2: Effect of trade-off frame on reasoning




Note. Points show covariate-adjusted predicted shares of open-text answers containing each code in the control condition (grey) and the trade-off condition (black), with 95% confidence intervals (linear probability models with the same controls as in Table 1; HC2 standard errors). Only codes with a control-group base rate above 5% are shown. Brackets connect the two estimates for codes with a statistically significant treatment effect and give the effect in percentage points; stars refer to Benjamini–Hochberg adjusted $q$-values across all coded outcomes ($^{*}q < 0.05$, $^{**}q < 0.01$, $^{***}q < 0.001$). Estimates are presented in Table A5.

as the money is distributed properly."[13] Nevertheless, even in the treatment group, only about one in thirty respondents explicitly challenges the trade-off.

The frame appears to shift the relative emphasis of respondents' arguments rather than simply introducing new considerations. Among arguments against aid, only the priority of domestic needs increases significantly (34.0% to 41.4%, q < 0.001). Among arguments supporting aid, references to the defence of democracy and alliance obligations become less frequent (10.3% to 7.6%, q = 0.052 and 1.4% to 0.6%, q = 0.106), although neither decline remains statistically significant after correcting for multiple testing. We find no significant changes in the frequency of security or humanitarian arguments. Overall, these patterns suggest that the frame may shift attention away from geopolitical considerations toward domestic spending priorities, although the evidence for such crowding out remains tentative.

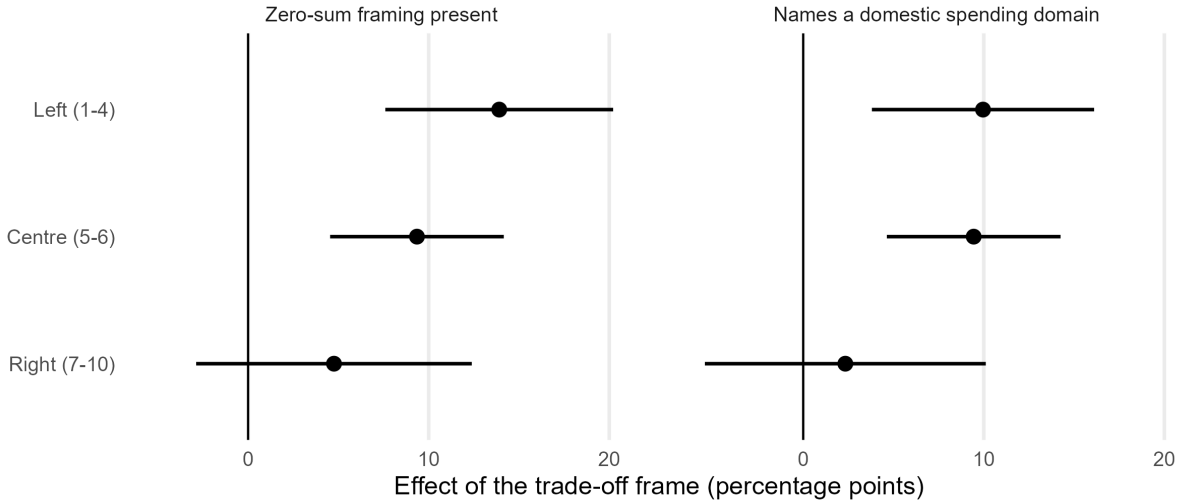
Most of the increase in references to domestic needs is general rather than tied to specific policy areas. The frame increases mentions of unspecified domestic priorities by 5.9 percentage points (q = 0.003), while references to concrete spending areas such as infrastructure, pensions, or education change little. It also does not increase references linking aid to Ukraine with immigration (3.2% in control, -0.6 pp, q = 0.541). Responses in the treatment group also express more frustration or resignation (+4.7 pp, q = 0.032). Overall, these findings suggest that the frame makes zero-sum and "our own first" considerations more prominent in respondents' explanations. They seem to draw on these arguments in place of, rather than in addition to, arguments about the war itself.

AfD supporters, and to a lesser extent BSW supporters, invoke the arguments made salient by the frame even without being exposed to it. In the control group, 65% of AfD supporters with an analyzable response used zero-sum framing, compared with only 23% of supporters of the CDU/CSU, SPD, Greens, FDP, and Left Party. Among supporters of these five parties, the share increased to 35% under the trade-off frame. A similar pattern emerges for references to domestic needs as a reason for opposing aid. These figures are descriptive shares without adjustment for covariates.

The effect of the trade-off frame on respondents' reasoning varies with their ideological self-placement (Figure 3). The frame increases zero-sum framing by 14 percentage points among respondents on the left (1–4), 9 points among those in the center (5–6), and 5 points among those on the right (7–10), although the latter effect is not statistically significant. For each one-point shift to the right on the ideological scale, the effect on zero-sum framing declines by 2.2 percentage points (SE 0.96, $q = 0.04$). A similar pattern emerges for references to domestic spending priorities, although the decline across the left-right scale is not statistically significant (1.7 points, SE 0.96, $q = 0.07$).

[13] Original: "Deutschland sollte wo möglich ist, auch der Ukraine helfen - es sollte aber nicht aus dem Budget rausgenommen werden welches für den Sozialstaat benutzt wird. Ein fairer Kompriss wäre, das Deutschland dieses Geld z.B. aus dem Militärbudget nimmt. Ich bin der Meinung Deutschland ist reich kann, dass wir anderen helfen können, ohne dabei selbst zu untergehen - wenn das Geld richtig verteilt wird."

Figure 3: Effect of the trade-off frame on zero-sum framing and domestic spending domains by left-right self-placement




Note. Points show the effect of the trade-off frame in percentage points within three groups of left-right self-placement (1–4, 5–6, 7–10), with 95% confidence intervals. Estimates come from linear probability models that interact the frame with the group, with the same controls as in Table 1 and HC2 standard errors. The two panels show the codes for zero-sum framing and for naming a domestic spending domain. The sample consists of respondents with an analyzable open-text answer.

## 4.4 Who Makes the Argument in Parliament

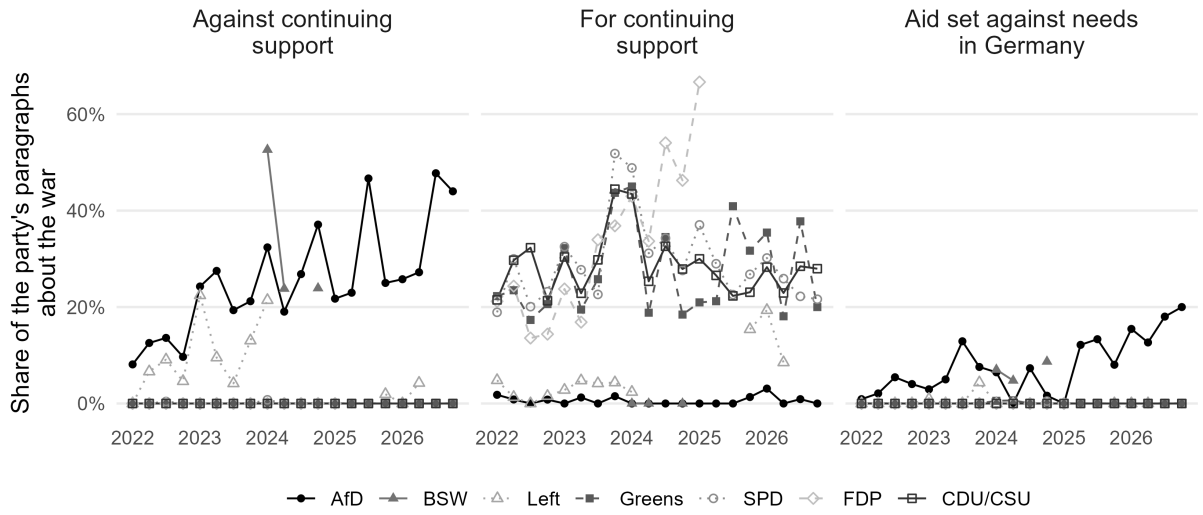
The arguments that AfD supporters invoke even without exposure to the frame closely resemble those advanced by their party in parliament (Figure 4, Appendix C). Of the 14,951 paragraphs from Bundestag speeches concerning the war in Ukraine between February 2022 and October 2026, 183 explicitly contrasted aid to Ukraine with social or economic needs in Germany. 85% of them were made by members of the AfD. By contrast, CDU/CSU, SPD, Greens, and FDP rarely argued against continued support for Ukraine, making the AfD the principal parliamentary proponent of the claim that money spent on Ukraine is missing at home. From 2025 onward, the AfD invoked this argument more frequently, with references to domestic needs appearing in up to one fifth of its paragraphs about the war in some quarters.

## 4.5 Who Opposes Aid to Ukraine, 2023–2026

In the GLES Tracking, the share of respondents agreeing that Germany should completely stop weapon deliveries to Ukraine increased from 40.7% in April 2023 to 45.6% in March 2026, reaching a peak of 47.2% in October 2024 (Figure 5, left panel). Over the same period, the share of respondents who considered the general economic situation to be bad increased from 44.4% to 63.3% (Appendix Figure B1).

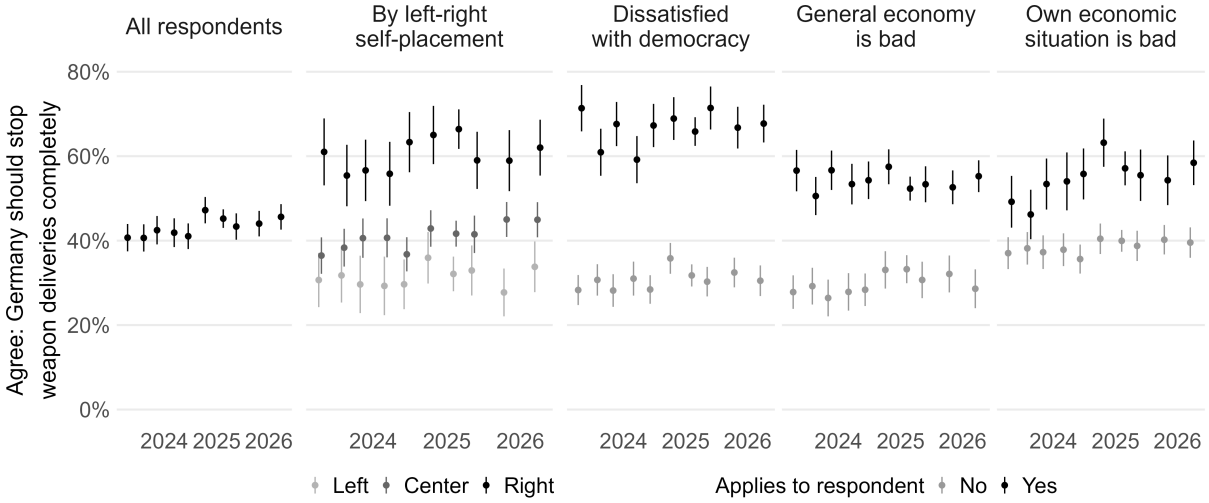
Opposition to aid is particularly widespread among respondents who are dissatisfied with democracy or hold negative views of the national economy. Across all waves, between 59.2% and 71.4% of respondents dissatisfied with democracy agreed that Germany should stop weapon

Figure 4: Positions on supporting Ukraine and the argument from domestic needs in the Bundestag, 2022–2026




Note. Share of each party's oral paragraphs about the war against Ukraine that argue against continuing or expanding support (left), for it (middle) or set aid to Ukraine against social or economic needs in Germany (right), by quarter. Quarters with fewer than 20 paragraphs of a party are left out. Plenary protocols of the 20th and 21st Bundestag, 24 February 2022 to 16 October 2026, coded paragraph by paragraph (Appendix C).

Figure 5: Agreement that Germany should stop weapon deliveries to Ukraine, 2023–2026




Note. Share of respondents who agree (4 or 5 on a five-point scale) that "Germany should stop weapon deliveries to Ukraine completely," by wave, with 95% confidence intervals. The first two panels show all respondents and the three groups of left-right self-placement (1 to 4, 5 to 7 and 8 to 11 on an eleven-point scale). The other panels compare respondents who are dissatisfied with democracy, who rate the current general economic situation as bad and who rate their own current economic situation as bad (4 or 5 on five-point scales, black) with all other respondents (grey). GLES Tracking, ten cross-sections from April 2023 to March 2026, 11,614 respondents, weighted with the sociodemographic weight of each wave.

deliveries to Ukraine, compared with 28.2% to 35.8% of other respondents. Among those who rated the general economic situation as bad, agreement ranged from 50.6% to 57.5%, compared with 26.4% to 33.2% among other respondents. Neither of these gaps widened over the period. By contrast, the gap associated with respondents' assessments of their own economic situation was initially smaller but increased over time. In April 2023, 49.2% of respondents who rated their personal economic situation as bad supported ending weapon deliveries, compared with 37.0% of other respondents. By March 2026, these shares had risen to 58.4% and 39.5%, respectively.

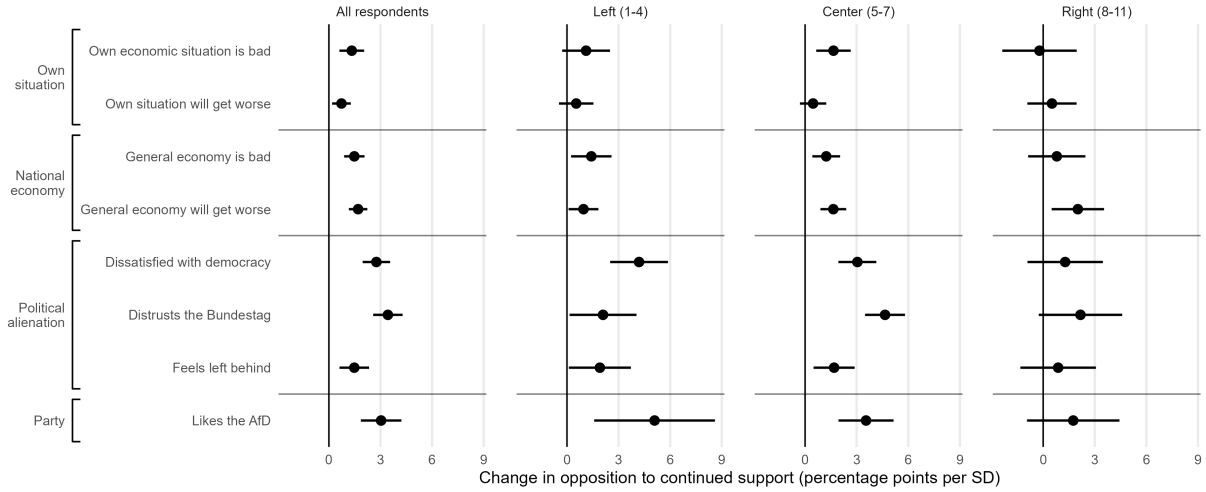
Across ideological groups, support for completely ending weapon deliveries to Ukraine remained relatively stable among respondents on the left (28–36%, positions 1–4 on the eleven-point scale) and the right (55–66%, positions 8–11), while increasing from 36.5% to 45.0% among those in the center (5 to 7) (Figure 5, second panel). The political center is also where our experiment finds that the trade-off frame continues to reduce support for Ukraine (Section 4.1). Among respondents intending to vote for the AfD, between 68% and 79% supported ending weapon deliveries across the ten waves. Since each wave surveys a different group of respondents, these findings describe changes in aggregate attitudes rather than changes in individual preferences.

Our findings also have implications for how mainstream parties respond to the domestic trade-off argument. In our experiment, the frame reduced support for aid particularly among respondents who would otherwise be more supportive, including those who trust political institutions and regard Russia as primarily responsible for the war (Section 4.2). By contrast, respondents with stronger grievances were less responsive to the frame, possibly because they already weigh support for Ukraine against domestic needs. This suggests that mainstream parties adopting the argument risk weakening support for aid among otherwise sympathetic voters, while having little additional influence on those who already oppose it. Research on immigration provides a relevant parallel. When mainstream parties in Western Europe moved toward radical-right positions on immigration, the radical right did not lose electoral support and sometimes gained voters (Krause et al., 2023; Abou-Chadi et al., 2022). Among 37 mainstream parties across 14 elections between 2005 and 2025, nine of the 15 that shifted to the right lost substantially to radical-right competitors, compared with three of the 22 that did not (Schwörer et al., 2026). The CDU/CSU in 2025 was among the former. Research also suggests that the German far right has increasingly shaped which cultural issues other parties emphasize (Saldivia Gonzatti and Völker, 2026), and that legitimizing far-right actors can have lasting consequences (Daur, 2025; Heinze and Off, 2026). An alternative response is to challenge the trade-off argument directly. Yet CDU/CSU, SPD, Greens, and FDP explicitly contested it in at most 1.1% of their Bundestag paragraphs about the war (Appendix C), even though a related experiment found that challenging far-right claims could prevent their effects on public attitudes (Bolet and Foos, 2025).

## 4.6 Grievances and Opposition to Aid Within Persons

The GLES Panel allows us to examine how changes in political and economic grievances are associated with changes in opposition to aid within the same individuals. At the aggregate level, opposition to continued support for Ukraine despite high energy prices and other restrictions increased over the period covered by the four panel waves. In October 2022, 30.2% of respondents disagreed with the support statement, while 43.7% agreed. By June 2024, these shares had changed to 36.6% and 38.4%, respectively.

Figure 6: Grievances and opposition to costly support for Ukraine within persons, 2022–2024




Note. Change in the share of respondents who disagree (1 or 2 on a five-point scale) that "Germany should continue to support Ukraine, even if that means high energy prices and restrictions for everyone," in percentage points per standard deviation of each channel, with 95% confidence intervals. Each channel is estimated in a separate model with person and wave fixed effects, standard errors clustered by person. Higher values of the channels mean a worse assessment. Left-right groups from the self-placement in May 2022 (1 to 11). GLES Panel waves 23 to 26 (October 2022 to June 2024), 12,911 respondents. Estimates in Appendix Table B2.

Political grievances show the strongest associations with opposition to aid (Figure 6). A one-standard-deviation increase in distrust of the Bundestag is associated with a 3.4-percentage-point increase in the probability of opposing continued support for Ukraine. The corresponding estimates are 2.8 percentage points for dissatisfaction with democracy and 1.5 points for feeling left behind. Economic assessments show weaker associations. A one-standard-deviation deterioration in perceptions of the general economic situation is associated with a 1.5-percentage-point increase in opposition, while worsening expectations about the general economy are associated with an increase of 1.7 points. The corresponding estimates for respondents' own economic situation and their expectations about its future development are smaller, at 1.3 and 0.7 percentage points, respectively. For comparison, the within-person standard deviation of the outcome is 21.9 percentage points. These findings are consistent with our experimental results, where institutional trust was strongly associated with support for Ukraine, while nostalgic deprivation, but not economic deprivation, was associated with lower support (Section 4.2).

The associations also vary across ideological groups, defined by respondents' left-right self-placement in May 2022 (Figure 6 and Appendix Table B2). Among respondents on the

left, a one-standard-deviation increase in dissatisfaction with democracy is associated with a 4.2-percentage-point increase in opposition to aid, compared with 2.1 points for distrust of the Bundestag. Among respondents in the political center, distrust of the Bundestag shows the strongest association (4.7 percentage points), followed by dissatisfaction with democracy (3.0 points) and worsening assessments of respondents' own economic situation (1.7 points). Among respondents on the right, only worsening expectations about the general economy are significantly associated with increased opposition (2.0 points), while the estimated association with respondents' own economic situation is close to zero (−0.2 points).

A one-standard-deviation increase in sympathy for the AfD is associated with a 3.0-percentage-point increase in opposition to aid, comparable in magnitude to the association with distrust of the Bundestag. A robustness check using values of the explanatory variables from the subsequent survey wave reveals an important difference. For distrust of the Bundestag, dissatisfaction with democracy, and economic assessments, the estimated coefficients for next-wave values range from −0.5 to +0.5 percentage points once contemporaneous values are included in the model. For AfD sympathy, by contrast, the next-wave estimate remains relatively large at 2.3 percentage points, compared with 3.3 points for the contemporaneous measure. Growing sympathy for the AfD and growing opposition to aid therefore move together over time rather than one preceding the other. Feelings of being left behind show an intermediate pattern, with a next-wave estimate of 1.0 percentage point (Appendix Table B2).

We also estimate a joint model including all measures available across the four waves, together with sympathy for the AfD (Appendix Table B4). In this specification, distrust of the Bundestag, dissatisfaction with democracy, expectations of a worsening general economy, and assessments of respondents' current economic situation remain associated with opposition to aid. By contrast, the association with expectations of a deterioration in respondents' personal economic situation becomes negligible. Importantly, the associations with political distrust and dissatisfaction with democracy persist even after controlling for AfD sympathy, suggesting that they cannot be explained by partisan preferences alone.

These findings are broadly robust across seven reported specifications, including a balanced panel, weighted estimates, the full five-point response scale, and the exclusion of respondents who intended to vote for the AfD in May 2022 (Appendix Table B3). An additional GLES item asks whether Germany should limit its support for Ukraine to avoid becoming a target of attack itself. Unlike the main outcome, this item does not explicitly mention economic costs. In the joint specification, the association with respondents' own economic situation is close to zero (0.1 percentage points; Appendix Table B5). Finally, cross-lagged models that examine the relationship between economic assessments and opposition to aid in both directions yield only small estimates for respondents' own economic situation (Appendix Table B6).

That institutional trust predicts support both within persons and in the experiment fits the finding that people need to trust the government to support more government (Hetherington and Husser, 2012). In this account, trust matters particularly when citizens are asked to bear

costs, whether for military spending or social programs. Distrust can also be self-reinforcing: it lowers approval of political leaders, making it harder for them to address problems and potentially deepening distrust (Hetherington, 1998). Applied to aid for Ukraine, citizens who distrust the government may be less willing to support spending abroad, especially if they believe it is failing to meet needs at home. From this perspective, changing positions on Ukraine alone may do little to break this cycle, whereas visible improvements in the conditions underlying domestic grievances could help rebuild trust.

## 4.7 The Debt Brake

The debt brake provides an institutional context for the trade-off examined in this paper. By limiting government borrowing, it can make support for Ukraine appear to compete with spending on domestic priorities. This tension became particularly visible in November 2024, when the governing coalition collapsed amid a dispute over the budget. Chancellor Scholz explicitly rejected financing support for Ukraine and defence at the expense of pensions, health or care. The reform of March 2025 partly relaxed these constraints by exempting borrowing for defence and other security-related expenditure, including aid to states attacked in violation of international law, to the extent that their combined spending exceeded 1% of GDP. The reform also provided for a separate EUR 500 billion infrastructure fund, but did not introduce a comparable general exemption for ongoing social expenditure.[14]

Public attitudes suggest that fiscal constraints can make the domestic trade-off argument plausible. Between 2023 and 2025, 61% to 65% of Politbarometer respondents preferred closing budget gaps by cutting spending, compared with 13% to 22% who preferred borrowing (Appendix Table D1). At the same time, 48% agreed in 2024 that the war in Ukraine constituted an emergency in which the debt brake should not apply. The trade-off was also increasingly prominent in the AfD's parliamentary rhetoric. Before the March 2025 reform, the party invoked it in 3.8% of its Bundestag paragraphs about the war, compared with 13.1% afterward, although our data cannot establish whether the reform contributed to this increase.

These findings help place our experimental results in a broader institutional context. The opportunity-cost frame reduces support for Ukraine even among respondents who would otherwise be sympathetic to providing aid. Fiscal constraints may reinforce the credibility of this argument by making competition between foreign commitments and domestic priorities more salient. A fiscal framework that allows spending on Ukraine and domestic needs to expand together could weaken the perception of an unavoidable trade-off, although it would not eliminate all budgetary constraints. Moreover, fiscal expansion alone may do little to counter political grievances unless it produces improvements that citizens experience directly. As Hübscher and Sattler (2026) emphasize, the political consequences of fiscal policy depend on its distributional

[14] Statement of Chancellor Scholz, 6 November 2024; Gesetz zur Änderung des Grundgesetzes (Artikel 109, 115 und 143h) of 22 March 2025, BGBl. 2025 I Nr. 94.

effects and the narratives through which citizens interpret it. Together with our findings on political distrust, this suggests that the institutional conditions shaping perceived trade-offs matter alongside the arguments used to mobilize opposition to aid.

### 4.8 Limitations

The experiment uses a quota sample rather than a probability sample. Studies comparing survey experiments conducted with probability and nonprobability samples in the United States find broadly similar average and subgroup treatment effects across sample types (Mullinix et al., 2015; Coppock et al., 2018). In our sample, the distributions of gender and Bundesland closely match those of the German population. However, the survey does not include respondents over 75 years old, limiting its representativeness, particularly with respect to age. Random assignment ensures that treatment status is independent of respondents' characteristics by design, supporting the internal validity of our experimental estimates, although their generalizability to the wider population remains subject to this limitation. Moreover, because the treatment adds an explicit condition to the statement about financial support, our experiment identifies the effect of making this opportunity cost salient on respondents' expressed agreement. It cannot establish whether the difference reflects changes in underlying policy preferences or how respondents evaluate the more qualified statement, nor whether the effect would persist over time. Finally, the GLES Panel estimates capture within-person associations rather than causal effects.

## 5 Conclusion

Four years after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the argument that money spent supporting Ukraine is missing at home continues to influence public opinion in Germany. Our preregistered experiment shows that making this trade-off explicit reduces the share of respondents supporting financial aid from 48.7% to 40.6%. The effect is particularly pronounced among respondents in the political center and on the left, and among those who would otherwise be more inclined to support Ukraine. Among AfD supporters, opposition is already widespread, and the frame has little additional effect. The argument thus reaches well beyond the electorate of the party that has promoted it most persistently.

The open-ended responses help explain how the frame works. Respondents exposed to it are more likely to invoke domestic spending priorities and describe support for Ukraine in zero-sum terms. AfD supporters frequently use these arguments even without prompting. The GLES data place these findings in a broader political context. Opposition to aid is consistently higher among citizens who are dissatisfied with democracy or pessimistic about the national economy. Within individuals, changes in distrust of the Bundestag and dissatisfaction with democracy are more strongly associated with opposition than changes in personal economic circumstances. Although these associations cannot establish causality, they suggest that attitudes toward support

for Ukraine are closely connected to broader grievances about domestic politics.

These findings have implications for how mainstream parties respond to arguments against foreign aid. Adopting the domestic trade-off frame may weaken support among voters otherwise sympathetic to Ukraine, while doing little to change the views of those who already oppose aid. Fiscal institutions may also shape the credibility of such arguments. Germany's debt brake illustrates how borrowing constraints can make spending on foreign commitments appear to compete with domestic priorities. The political consequences of these constraints depend partly on how citizens perceive government spending choices and whether they trust political institutions to address their concerns.

Our experiment identifies the immediate effect of making domestic opportunity costs salient. Whether repeated exposure produces lasting changes, and whether counterarguments can reverse these effects, remains to be established. The findings also raise questions about the extent to which similar dynamics operate in other countries supporting Ukraine. As European governments face continued demands for military and financial assistance, maintaining public support will remain a political challenge. Our results suggest that this support depends in part on how citizens assess their own government's priorities and its ability to respond to needs at home.

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# A Survey Experiment

## A.1 Preregistration

We preregistered the survey experiment on AsPredicted (#274175, https://aspredicted.org/kb42fk.pdf) on 18 February 2026, before data collection began. We follow it in sample, conditions, estimation and controls, with state fixed effects for the East–West indicator and media distrust for media consumption. Table A8 tests H1a, H1b and H2, Tables 1 and 3 test H3. The preregistered observational outcome is the two-item index in column 5 of Table A8, while columns 1 to 4 add the experimental item. We use the items on responsibility for the war as moderators, not outcomes, and do not report the preregistered checks for spillover, attention and order effects. The open-ended answers, further moderators, the ordered logit and the GLES analyses were not preregistered.

## A.2 Coding of the Open-Ended Answers

Each response was coded independently, with the temperature set to zero to make the output as deterministic as possible. The model was required to return its output in a predefined structured schema, which restricts every variable to the listed categories. It was instructed to code only what the text explicitly states, without translating the German original, and to code the stance expressed in the text independently of the respondent's answer on the four-point item. We then use codes extracted by GPT as outcome variables, restricting the analysis to responses classified as analyzable.

## A.3 Supplementary Tables

Table A2: Survey items used in the analysis

| **Variable** | **Question wording** | **Response scale** |
|---|---|---|
| *Sociodemographic controls* | | |
| Age | How old are you? | Years |
| Gender | What is your gender? | Male, female, diverse, prefer not to say |

*continued on next page*

*Table A2 continued*

| Variable | Question wording | Response scale |
|---|---|---|
| Education | What is your highest general school-leaving qualification? And what is your highest vocational or professional qualification? | Combined into low / medium / high |
| State | In which federal state (Bundesland) do you live? | 16 federal states |
| Household income | Into which group does the monthly net income of your entire household fall? | 9 categories, <556 . . . ≥9,000 euros |
| *Political attitudes and media* | | |
| Institutional trust | How much do you personally trust each of the following public institutions or groups of people? (a) The courts; (b) the police; (c) politicians; (d) the political system. | 1 = Do not trust at all . . . 4 = Trust completely |
| Left–right self-placement | In politics people sometimes speak of "left" and "right". Where would you place yourself on the scale? | 1 = Left . . . 10 = Right |
| Vote intention | Which party would you vote for if there were a federal election next Sunday? | CDU/CSU, SPD, Greens, FDP, AfD, Die Linke, BSW, Freie Wähler, other, would not vote, don't know |
| Media skepticism | "The established media in Germany withhold important information from the public." | 1 = Strongly disagree . . . 7 = Strongly agree |
| *Views on the war responsibility* | | |
| Russia responsible | Russia bears the main responsibility for the war in Ukraine. | 1 = Strongly disagree . . . 4 = Strongly agree |

*continued on next page*

*Table A2 continued*

| Variable | Question wording | Response scale |
|---|---|---|
| NATO co-responsible | NATO shares responsibility for the outbreak of the war. | 1 = Strongly disagree . . . 4 = Strongly agree |
| *Experimental outcome* | | |
| Support for aid to Ukraine | To what extent do you agree with the following statement?<br>*Control:* "Germany should continue to support Ukraine financially."<br>*Treatment:* "Germany should continue to support Ukraine financially, even if this money is then unavailable for other purposes in Germany." | 1 = Strongly disagree . . . 4 = Strongly agree |
| Open-ended reasoning | Could you briefly explain the reasons for your attitude on these questions? | Open text |
| *Zero-sum and justice beliefs* | | |
| General zero-sum thinking | (a) The successes of some people are usually the failures of others.<br>(b) When someone gets richer, it means someone else gets poorer.<br>(c) Life is arranged so that when someone wins, others must lose.<br>(d) In most situations, the interests of different people are incompatible.<br>(e) Life is like a game of tennis – you only win when others lose.<br>(f) When some people become poorer, it means that others become richer.<br>(g) Those who do a lot for others lose out in the process.<br>(h) The wealth of the few is acquired at the expense of the many. | 1 = Strongly disagree . . . 4 = Strongly agree |
| Immigration-specific zero-sum thinking | (a) When immigrants find work in Germany, it means fewer jobs for Germans. | |

Table A1: Demographic composition of the sample against German population.

| **Characteristic** | **N = 3,086** | **German Population** |
|---|---|---|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 1,542 (50.0%) | 49.3% |
| Female | 1,537 (49.8%) | 50.7% |
| Diverse | 7 (0.2%) | |
| Age group | | |
| 18–39 | 1,060 (34.3%) | 31.4% |
| 40–59 | 1,169 (37.9%) | 31.5% |
| 60–79 | 857 (27.8%) | 28.7% |
| 80+ | 0 (0.0%) | 8.4% |
| Bundesland | | |
| Baden-Württemberg | 415 (13.4%) | 13.5% |
| Bayern | 492 (15.9%) | 15.9% |
| Berlin | 139 (4.5%) | 4.4% |
| Brandenburg | 101 (3.3%) | 3.1% |
| Bremen | 27 (0.9%) | 0.8% |
| Hamburg | 67 (2.2%) | 2.2% |
| Hessen | 213 (6.9%) | 7.5% |
| Mecklenburg-Vorpommern | 64 (2.1%) | 1.9% |
| Niedersachsen | 303 (9.8%) | 9.6% |
| Nordrhein-Westfalen | 660 (21.4%) | 21.5% |
| Rheinland-Pfalz | 159 (5.2%) | 4.9% |
| Saarland | 40 (1.3%) | 1.2% |
| Sachsen | 143 (4.6%) | 4.8% |
| Sachsen-Anhalt | 65 (2.1%) | 2.5% |
| Schleswig-Holstein | 124 (4.0%) | 3.5% |
| Thüringen | 74 (2.4%) | 2.5% |

n (%); Destatis, 31.12.2025 (Census 2022 basis). Gender and Bundesland shares refer to the total population; age shares to adults 18+.

Table A3: Covariate balance across treatment conditions

| | Treatment assignment (1) |
|---|---|
| Constant | 0.473*** (0.099) |
| Gender: Female | -0.014 (0.019) |
| Gender: Diverse | -0.072 (0.208) |
| Age (years) | 0.0008 (0.0006) |
| Education (medium) | -0.019 (0.025) |
| Education (high) | 0.026 (0.017) |
| Income: 557 to 999 | 0.141** (0.067) |
| Income: 1,000 to 1,999 | 0.130** (0.059) |
| Income: 2,000 to 2,999 | 0.124** (0.059) |
| Income: 3,000 to 3,999 | 0.127** (0.060) |
| Income: 4,000 to 4,999 | 0.146** (0.062) |
| Income: 5,000 to 6,999 | 0.079 (0.063) |
| Income: 7,000 to 8,999 | 0.107 (0.078) |
| Income: 9,000 euros and more | 0.155* (0.089) |
| Left-right self-placement | -0.0003 (0.006) |
| Vote: SPD | 0.039 (0.036) |
| Vote: Greens | 0.058 (0.039) |
| Vote: FDP | 0.004 (0.057) |
| Vote: AfD | 0.001 (0.034) |
| Vote: Die Linke | 0.017 (0.043) |
| Vote: BSW | -0.007 (0.052) |
| Vote: Freie Wähler | 0.048 (0.067) |
| Vote: Other party | -0.017 (0.054) |
| Vote: Would not vote | 0.007 (0.046) |
| Vote: Don't know / prefer not to say | 0.002 (0.039) |
| Institutional trust | -0.037** (0.018) |
| Media skepticism | -0.002 (0.006) |
| Federal state dummies | Yes |
| Joint Wald test, state dummies (F) | 0.57 [p = 0.899] |
| Joint Wald test, all covariates (F) | 0.73 [p = 0.896] |
| Observations | 3,086 |
| $R^2$ | 0.010 |

*Notes:* OLS regression of treatment assignment on pre-treatment covariates. Reference categories: male, low education, household income up to 556 euros, CDU/CSU. HC2 robust standard errors in parentheses. Joint Wald tests evaluate the null that the respective coefficients are jointly zero (all covariates: F(41, 3044)). $^{*}p < 0.1$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$.

Table A4: Prompt and coding scheme for the open-ended responses

**Prompt**

*System prompt:* "You are a meticulous political-science research assistant coding German-language open-text survey responses. The survey item asks whether Germany should continue financially supporting Ukraine even if this means less money for domestic purposes (a 4-point agree/disagree item). Respondents were asked to briefly explain their attitude. Code ONLY what the text actually says; do not infer beyond it. Keep the German text in mind as written (do not translate). Multi-label fields may be empty lists. If the text is empty, a refusal, 'weiß nicht', or gibberish, set is_analyzable=false and use neutral/none/empty values for the rest. Return strictly the required schema."
*User message:* "Open-text response (German): [response text]"

**Coded variables**

| Variable | Categories | Definition |
|---|---|---|
| Stance | Strongly oppose; oppose; ambivalent; support; strongly support; no clear stance | Stance the text expresses toward continued financial aid to Ukraine, independent of the 1–4 rating |
| Stance confidence | Low; medium; high | Model's confidence in the stance coding |
| Zero-sum framing | None; implicit; explicit | Whether money for Ukraine is framed as directly subtracting from domestic resources |
| Zero-sum stance | Endorses; rejects; not applicable | Whether the respondent accepts the trade-off as a reason to oppose aid or rejects the fixed-pie premise |
| Pro-support reasons[a] | Moral solidarity/humanitarian; security/Russian threat; defense of democracy; international obligation/alliance; self-interest (deter now) | Reasons given in favor of support |
| Anti-support reasons[a] | Domestic needs priority; fiscal/taxpayer burden; aid ineffective or lost; corruption/mistrust; prolongs war/prefers negotiation; fear of escalation; not Germany's conflict; anti-US/NATO | Reasons given against support |
| Domestic domains[a] | Infrastructure (roads, bridges); pensions/retirement; education/schools; healthcare; public transport/rail; housing; social welfare/poverty; taxes/inequality; general/unspecified | Domestic policy areas mentioned |
| Migration linked | Yes; no | Respondent brings up immigration or asylum |
| Other grievances | Free text | Grievances not captured by the categories above |
| Sentiment | Negative; neutral; positive; mixed | Overall tone of the response |
| Emotion | Anger; frustration/resignation; fear/anxiety; empathy; none | Dominant emotion expressed |
| Analyzable | Yes; no | No for empty responses, "weiß nicht", gibberish, or refusals |
| Number of arguments | Integer | Count of distinct reasons given |
| Conditionality | Unconditional; conditional; prioritization | Prioritization denotes "help our own first", distinct from outright opposition |
| Mentions Russia/Putin | Yes; no | Response explicitly mentions Russia or Putin |

*Notes:* Model: GPT-4.1 mini, temperature = 0, structured output enforced via a predefined schema. [a]Multi-label variable; a response can receive several or no categories.

Table A5: Effects of the Trade-off Frame on the Content of Respondents' Answers

| Outcome | Control mean | Difference | $p$ | $q$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Trade-off framing* | | | | |
| Zero-sum framing present | 0.413 | 0.093*** (0.018) | < 0.001 | < 0.001 |
| Names a domestic spending domain | 0.344 | 0.078*** (0.018) | < 0.001 | < 0.001 |
| "Help our own first" framing | 0.388 | 0.073*** (0.017) | < 0.001 | < 0.001 |
| Endorses the trade-off | 0.400 | 0.071*** (0.017) | < 0.001 | < 0.001 |
| Rejects the trade-off | 0.012 | 0.020*** (0.006) | < 0.001 | 0.003 |
| Explicit zero-sum framing | 0.217 | 0.045*** (0.016) | 0.004 | 0.023 |
| Mentions Russia or Putin | 0.149 | −0.019 (0.013) | 0.145 | 0.285 |
| Conditional support | 0.042 | 0.009 (0.008) | 0.284 | 0.463 |
| Links aid to migration | 0.032 | −0.006 (0.007) | 0.393 | 0.541 |
| *Sentiment* | | | | |
| Positive | 0.320 | −0.032** (0.015) | 0.036 | 0.106 |
| Negative | 0.578 | 0.030* (0.016) | 0.064 | 0.160 |
| Mixed | 0.024 | −0.005 (0.006) | 0.390 | 0.541 |
| Neutral | 0.079 | 0.007 (0.010) | 0.490 | 0.641 |
| *Dominant emotion* | | | | |
| Frustration or resignation | 0.419 | 0.047*** (0.017) | 0.006 | 0.032 |
| Empathy | 0.171 | −0.023* (0.013) | 0.079 | 0.174 |
| None | 0.296 | −0.024 (0.017) | 0.155 | 0.285 |
| Anger | 0.039 | 0.003 (0.008) | 0.658 | 0.804 |
| Fear or anxiety | 0.074 | −0.003 (0.010) | 0.788 | 0.867 |
| *Reasons given against aid* | | | | |
| Domestic needs should take priority | 0.340 | 0.074*** (0.017) | < 0.001 | < 0.001 |
| Aid prolongs war; negotiation preferred | 0.053 | −0.017** (0.008) | 0.033 | 0.106 |
| Not Germany's conflict | 0.062 | −0.016* (0.009) | 0.077 | 0.174 |
| Fear of escalation | 0.006 | 0.004 (0.003) | 0.272 | 0.460 |
| Anti-US/NATO sentiment | 0.005 | −0.002 (0.002) | 0.321 | 0.504 |
| Fiscal or taxpayer burden | 0.127 | 0.009 (0.013) | 0.495 | 0.641 |
| Corruption or mistrust | 0.029 | −0.002 (0.006) | 0.695 | 0.827 |
| Aid ineffective or misappropriated | 0.023 | 0.001 (0.006) | 0.908 | 0.930 |
| *Reasons given for aid* | | | | |
| Defense of democracy | 0.103 | −0.027** (0.011) | 0.012 | 0.052 |
| International or alliance obligation | 0.014 | −0.008** (0.004) | 0.036 | 0.106 |
| Security or Russian threat | 0.170 | −0.018 (0.013) | 0.175 | 0.309 |
| Self-interest or deterrence | 0.020 | −0.002 (0.005) | 0.758 | 0.867 |
| Moral solidarity or humanitarian concern | 0.124 | 0.003 (0.012) | 0.837 | 0.876 |
| *Domestic spending domains named* | | | | |
| General or unspecified | 0.273 | 0.059*** (0.017) | < 0.001 | 0.003 |
| Infrastructure, roads, or bridges | 0.023 | 0.014** (0.007) | 0.036 | 0.106 |
| Taxes or inequality | 0.006 | −0.005** (0.002) | 0.049 | 0.135 |
| Education or schools | 0.026 | 0.010 (0.007) | 0.134 | 0.281 |
| Healthcare | 0.013 | 0.007 (0.005) | 0.155 | 0.285 |
| Pensions or retirement | 0.032 | 0.007 (0.007) | 0.354 | 0.519 |
| Housing | 0.009 | 0.002 (0.004) | 0.606 | 0.762 |
| Social welfare or poverty | 0.033 | −0.002 (0.007) | 0.828 | 0.876 |
| Public transport or rail | 0.002 | −0.000 (0.002) | 0.930 | 0.930 |

*Notes:* OLS estimates with the same controls as in Table 1; responses classified as analyzable only (N = 2,681). HC2 heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. $q$: Benjamini–Hochberg adjusted across all coded outcomes. Difference denotes the estimated difference between the trade-off and control conditions (trade-off minus control); for binary outcomes, coefficients represent differences in shares. $^{*}p < 0.10$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$.

Table A6: Moderators of the trade-off frame

| | Coefficient (SE) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Moderator | Trade-off frame | Moderator | Interaction | $p$ | $q$ |
| *Panel A: Pre-registered moderator* | | | | | |
| Zero-sum thinking | −0.196*** (0.028) | 0.041 (0.041) | 0.057 (0.055) | 0.300 | 0.393 |
| *Panel B: Moderator measured before the treatment* | | | | | |
| Trust in courts and police | −0.196*** (0.027) | 0.056* (0.033) | −0.114*** (0.040) | 0.004 | 0.050 |
| Media skepticism | −0.196*** (0.028) | −0.111*** (0.012) | 0.039*** (0.014) | 0.006 | 0.050 |
| Trust in politicians and system | −0.196*** (0.027) | 0.406*** (0.033) | −0.093*** (0.035) | 0.009 | 0.050 |
| Relative deprivation | −0.196*** (0.028) | −0.068** (0.033) | 0.087** (0.041) | 0.033 | 0.113 |
| Nostalgic deprivation | −0.195*** (0.028) | −0.082*** (0.028) | 0.068* (0.036) | 0.058 | 0.141 |
| Preference for a strong state | −0.196*** (0.028) | 0.084*** (0.016) | −0.039* (0.021) | 0.058 | 0.141 |
| Left-right self-placement | −0.196*** (0.028) | −0.056*** (0.014) | 0.029* (0.016) | 0.066 | 0.141 |
| Preference for less immigration | −0.197*** (0.027) | −0.259*** (0.022) | 0.043 (0.026) | 0.103 | 0.194 |
| Economic deprivation | −0.197*** (0.028) | −0.023 (0.029) | 0.060 (0.038) | 0.114 | 0.194 |
| Subjective intergenerational mobility | −0.196*** (0.028) | 0.021 (0.018) | −0.032 (0.023) | 0.172 | 0.266 |
| Regional social mobility | −0.196*** (0.028) | −0.151 (0.297) | 0.296 (0.327) | 0.366 | 0.444 |
| High incomes pay their fair share | −0.197*** (0.028) | −0.032 (0.024) | 0.024 (0.033) | 0.475 | 0.538 |
| Objective deprivation | −0.197*** (0.028) | 0.084*** (0.032) | −0.016 (0.044) | 0.724 | 0.724 |
| *Panel C: Moderator measured after the treatment* | | | | | |
| Zero-sum beliefs about immigration | −0.196*** (0.028) | −0.121*** (0.024) | 0.074** (0.032) | 0.020 | 0.086 |
| Belief that effort pays off | −0.196*** (0.028) | −0.113*** (0.039) | 0.054 (0.051) | 0.295 | 0.393 |
| Just-society beliefs | −0.196*** (0.028) | −0.074* (0.042) | 0.024 (0.058) | 0.684 | 0.724 |

*Notes:* Each row is one OLS model of support for aid to Ukraine on the trade-off frame, the centered moderator and their interaction, with the controls and state fixed effects of Table 1 (N = 3,086). A moderator that is also a control enters the model once; in the two trust models the two trust sub-scales replace the full trust scale among the controls. HC2 heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. $p$ refers to the interaction; $q$ is the Benjamini–Hochberg adjusted $p$-value across all moderators in the table. $^{*}p < 0.10$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$.

Table A7: Correlation table

| Variable | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) | (9) | (10) | (11) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (1) Pro-Ukraine index (B07a) | 1.00 | | | | | | | | | | |
| (2) Support for aid to Ukraine | 0.75 | 1.00 | | | | | | | | | |
| (3) Econ. depriv. | −0.32 | −0.26 | 1.00 | | | | | | | | |
| (4) Nostalgic depriv. | −0.37 | −0.32 | 0.67 | 1.00 | | | | | | | |
| (5) Zero-sum | −0.16 | −0.11 | 0.36 | 0.34 | 1.00 | | | | | | |
| (6) Age (years) | −0.04 | 0.02 | −0.05 | 0.00 | −0.07 | 1.00 | | | | | |
| (7) Education (1 = low, 3 = high) | 0.29 | 0.26 | −0.17 | −0.20 | −0.11 | −0.19 | 1.00 | | | | |
| (8) Left-right | −0.31 | −0.29 | 0.12 | 0.15 | 0.01 | 0.04 | −0.08 | 1.00 | | | |
| (9) Inst. trust | 0.50 | 0.51 | −0.35 | −0.39 | −0.21 | 0.04 | 0.22 | −0.20 | 1.00 | | |
| (10) Media skepticism | −0.53 | −0.49 | 0.40 | 0.44 | 0.26 | −0.05 | −0.19 | 0.33 | −0.55 | 1.00 | |
| (11) East Germany | −0.11 | −0.11 | 0.05 | 0.05 | 0.03 | 0.02 | −0.07 | −0.04 | −0.08 | 0.07 | 1.00 |

Table A8: Deprivation, zero-sum thinking and support for Ukraine

| | Pro-Ukraine index, 3 items (preregistered) | | | | 2 items |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
| Constant | 3.317*** | 3.326*** | 2.384*** | 2.438*** | 2.517*** |
| | (0.056) | (0.076) | (0.123) | (0.134) | (0.137) |
| Economic deprivation | −0.132*** | −0.131*** | −0.007 | −0.004 | −0.023 |
| | (0.026) | (0.026) | (0.022) | (0.021) | (0.021) |
| Nostalgic deprivation | −0.302*** | −0.301*** | −0.096*** | −0.089*** | −0.093*** |
| | (0.025) | (0.025) | (0.022) | (0.021) | (0.022) |
| Zero-sum thinking | | −0.005 | 0.054** | 0.040* | 0.018 |
| | | (0.029) | (0.023) | (0.022) | (0.023) |
| Trade-off frame | −0.043 | −0.043 | −0.049** | −0.056** | |
| | (0.028) | (0.028) | (0.023) | (0.022) | |
| Demographic controls | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Political / media controls | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Vote-intention indicators | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Observations | 3,086 | 3,086 | 3,086 | 3,086 | 3,086 |
| $R^2$ | 0.150 | 0.150 | 0.444 | 0.487 | 0.442 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.149 | 0.148 | 0.440 | 0.482 | 0.437 |

*Notes:* OLS coefficients with HC2 heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. Columns 1 to 4 use the preregistered dependent variable, the mean of three items: (a) Germany should focus on its own problems (reverse coded), (b) the economic burden is bearable for Germany, and (c) the experimental item on continued financial support. Because item (c) was manipulated, these models include an indicator for the trade-off frame. Column 5 uses the mean of items (a) and (b) only. Economic deprivation is the mean of two items, getting less than one deserves and a worsening economic situation. Nostalgic deprivation is the mean of two items, fewer opportunities than 30 years ago and other groups being treated preferentially. Zero-sum thinking is the mean of the eight-item scale. All scales run from 1 to 4. Demographic controls are age, gender, education, household income and East Germany. Political and media controls are left-right self-placement, institutional trust and media skepticism. $^{*}p < 0.10$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$.

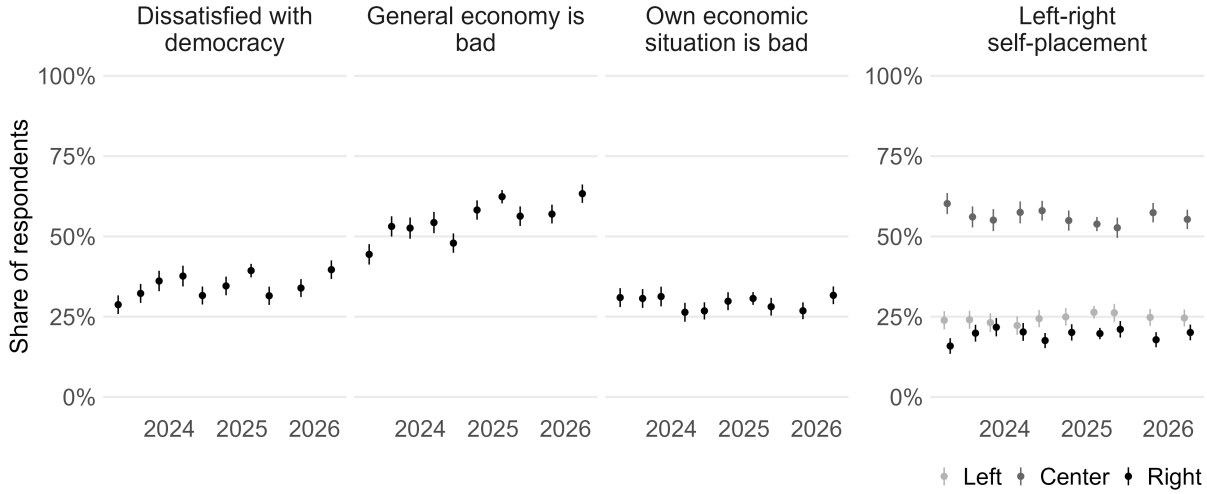
Table A9: Effect of Framing on Support for Ukraine, Ordered Logit

| | Support for aid to Ukraine | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Baseline | Controls + State FE | Excluding AfD |
| Trade-off frame | −0.345*** | −0.553*** | −0.643*** |
| | (0.065) | (0.071) | (0.081) |
| Odds ratio | 0.708 | 0.575 | 0.526 |
| Controls | | ✓ | ✓ |
| State fixed effects | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Observations | 3,086 | 3,086 | 2,325 |

*Notes:* Ordered logit coefficients (log odds) with robust sandwich standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is support for aid to Ukraine on the four-point scale. Columns, controls and samples as in Table 1. Odds ratios below 1 indicate that the trade-off frame lowers the odds of a higher support category. $^{*}p < 0.10$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$.

# B GLES Tracking and GLES Panel: Supplementary Material

Figure B1: Dissatisfaction with democracy, economic assessments and left-right self-placement, 2023–2026




Note. Share of respondents who are dissatisfied with democracy, who rate the current general economic situation as bad and who rate their own current economic situation as bad (4 or 5 on five-point scales), by wave, with 95% confidence intervals. The right panel shows the share of respondents in each group of left-right self-placement (1 to 4, 5 to 7 and 8 to 11 on an eleven-point scale), among those who placed themselves. GLES Tracking, ten cross-sections from April 2023 to March 2026, weighted with the sociodemographic weight of each wave.

Table B1: Support for Ukraine despite high energy prices by wave

| Wave | Fieldwork | Respondents | Oppose (1–2) | Neither (3) | Support (4–5) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| W23 | 12–25 Oct 2022 | 10,679 | 30.2 | 26.1 | 43.7 |
| W24 | 3–16 May 2023 | 9,850 | 32.2 | 26.6 | 41.2 |
| W25 | 11–24 Oct 2023 | 9,784 | 35.0 | 26.7 | 38.4 |
| W26 | 12–25 Jun 2024 | 8,244 | 36.6 | 25.0 | 38.4 |

*Note.* Share of respondents in percent, unweighted. Item 2880cq, "Germany should continue to support Ukraine, even if that means high energy prices and restrictions for everyone."

Table B2: Grievances and opposition to costly support within persons, by left-right group, with placebo

| | One channel at a time | | | | Placebo | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Channel | All | Left (1–4) | Center (5–7) | Right (8–11) | Same wave | Next wave |
| Own economic situation is bad | 1.33 (0.37) | 1.11 (0.71) | 1.65 (0.51) | -0.22 (1.10) | 1.32 (0.39) | 0.22 (0.39) |
| Own situation will get worse | 0.73 (0.28) | 0.54 (0.51) | 0.46 (0.39) | 0.51 (0.73) | 0.67 (0.29) | 0.11 (0.32) |
| General economy is bad | 1.48 (0.30) | 1.41 (0.60) | 1.23 (0.41) | 0.79 (0.85) | 1.47 (0.32) | 0.24 (0.33) |
| General economy will get worse | 1.70 (0.27) | 0.96 (0.44) | 1.64 (0.38) | 2.02 (0.78) | 1.81 (0.29) | 0.50 (0.33) |
| Dissatisfied with democracy | 2.76 (0.41) | 4.19 (0.86) | 3.04 (0.56) | 1.28 (1.12) | 2.49 (0.44) | 0.44 (0.41) |
| Distrusts the Bundestag | 3.43 (0.44) | 2.09 (0.99) | 4.65 (0.59) | 2.17 (1.24) | 3.45 (0.47) | -0.51 (0.46) |
| Feels left behind | 1.48 (0.44) | 1.91 (0.92) | 1.69 (0.61) | 0.87 (1.12) | 2.05 (0.50) | 0.97 (0.51) |
| Likes the AfD | 3.03 (0.60) | 5.09 (1.79) | 3.54 (0.82) | 1.75 (1.37) | 3.27 (0.63) | 2.27 (0.65) |

*Note.* Change in the share opposing (1 or 2) in percentage points per standard deviation of the channel, standard errors clustered by person in parentheses. Each cell is a separate model with person and wave fixed effects. Placebo: the channel in the same wave and in the respondent's next wave in one model. Left-right groups from May 2022. Feeling left behind is asked in waves 23 to 25, distrust of the Bundestag in all four waves.

Table B3: Robustness of the within-person estimates across specifications

| Channel | Base | Main sample | Balanced | Weighted | Full scale | Support (4–5) | Without AfD W22 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *One channel at a time* | | | | | | | |
| Own economic situation is bad | 1.33 (0.37) | 1.33 (0.37) | 1.19 (0.42) | 1.41 (0.57) | 0.94 (0.21) | -0.76 (0.34) | 1.43 (0.39) |
| Own situation will get worse | 0.73 (0.28) | 0.73 (0.28) | 0.61 (0.32) | 0.99 (0.41) | 0.60 (0.16) | -0.60 (0.27) | 0.82 (0.30) |
| General economy is bad | 1.48 (0.30) | 1.48 (0.30) | 1.36 (0.35) | 1.59 (0.47) | 1.14 (0.17) | -1.33 (0.30) | 1.51 (0.32) |
| General economy will get worse | 1.70 (0.27) | 1.70 (0.27) | 1.46 (0.32) | 2.27 (0.41) | 0.82 (0.16) | -0.24 (0.29) | 1.65 (0.29) |
| Dissatisfied with democracy | 2.76 (0.41) | 2.76 (0.41) | 2.48 (0.47) | 2.71 (0.59) | 2.03 (0.23) | -2.16 (0.38) | 2.61 (0.43) |
| Distrusts the Bundestag | 3.43 (0.44) | 3.43 (0.44) | 3.11 (0.51) | 3.81 (0.68) | 2.87 (0.25) | -2.72 (0.41) | 3.30 (0.46) |
| Feels left behind | 1.48 (0.44) | 1.48 (0.44) | 2.03 (0.51) | 1.79 (0.71) | 1.21 (0.27) | -0.40 (0.43) | 1.48 (0.47) |
| Likes the AfD | 3.03 (0.60) | 3.03 (0.60) | 3.50 (0.71) | 3.12 (0.82) | 1.97 (0.34) | -1.67 (0.50) | 3.03 (0.63) |
| *All channels asked in every wave in one model* | | | | | | | |
| Own economic situation is bad | 0.95 (0.37) | 0.95 (0.37) | 0.74 (0.42) | 0.75 (0.57) | 0.65 (0.21) | -0.41 (0.35) | 1.03 (0.39) |
| Own situation will get worse | 0.11 (0.29) | 0.11 (0.29) | 0.09 (0.33) | 0.15 (0.42) | 0.29 (0.17) | -0.51 (0.28) | 0.16 (0.31) |
| General economy is bad | 0.84 (0.31) | 0.84 (0.31) | 0.76 (0.35) | 0.75 (0.48) | 0.78 (0.18) | -1.07 (0.31) | 0.86 (0.32) |
| General economy will get worse | 1.23 (0.29) | 1.23 (0.29) | 1.05 (0.33) | 1.71 (0.42) | 0.45 (0.17) | 0.12 (0.30) | 1.18 (0.30) |
| Dissatisfied with democracy | 2.29 (0.41) | 2.29 (0.41) | 2.09 (0.47) | 2.13 (0.59) | 1.75 (0.24) | -1.96 (0.39) | 2.15 (0.43) |
| Likes the AfD | 2.64 (0.60) | 2.64 (0.60) | 3.10 (0.71) | 2.86 (0.82) | 1.72 (0.34) | -1.36 (0.50) | 2.60 (0.63) |
| Persons | 12,911 | 12,911 | 6,226 | 8,410 | 12,911 | 12,911 | 11,886 |

*Note.* All respondents, person and wave fixed effects, standard errors clustered by person. Upper panel: one channel per model. Lower panel: all channels asked in every wave in one model. Main sample: panel members recruited before 2022 (identical to the base sample in these waves). Balanced: respondents observed in all four waves. Weighted: structural weight of wave 26. Full scale: the five-point item on 0 to 100, higher values mean less support. Support (4–5): share agreeing, so signs are expected to flip. Without AfD W22: excludes respondents with an AfD vote intention in May 2022.

Table B4: All channels in one model

| | (1) All | (2) All | (3) All | (4) Center |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Distrusts the Bundestag | | 2.88 (0.44) | | |
| Feels left behind | | | 1.08 (0.44) | |
| Own economic situation is bad | 0.95 (0.37) | 0.87 (0.37) | 1.23 (0.44) | 1.27 (0.52) |
| Own situation will get worse | 0.11 (0.29) | 0.07 (0.29) | 0.05 (0.34) | -0.12 (0.41) |
| General economy is bad | 0.84 (0.31) | 0.74 (0.31) | 0.69 (0.37) | 0.59 (0.42) |
| General economy will get worse | 1.23 (0.29) | 1.16 (0.29) | 0.91 (0.34) | 1.38 (0.41) |
| Dissatisfied with democracy | 2.29 (0.41) | 1.95 (0.41) | 2.28 (0.50) | 2.58 (0.57) |
| Likes the AfD | 2.64 (0.60) | 2.59 (0.60) | 1.08 (0.72) | 3.17 (0.82) |
| Person-waves | 35,276 | 35,152 | 26,568 | 18,170 |

*Note.* Person and wave fixed effects, standard errors clustered by person. Columns 2 and 3 add the channels asked only in some waves, so their samples differ. Column 4: respondents at 5 to 7 on the left-right scale in May 2022.

Table B5: Grievances and agreement that Germany should hold back in supporting Ukraine

| | One channel at a time | | All channels in one model |
|---|---|---|---|
| Channel | All | Center (5–7) | All |
| Own economic situation is bad | 0.42 (0.20) | 0.34 (0.33) | 0.08 (0.20) |
| Own situation will get worse | 0.36 (0.16) | 0.50 (0.26) | 0.01 (0.17) |
| General economy is bad | 1.46 (0.18) | 1.62 (0.28) | 1.07 (0.18) |
| General economy will get worse | 0.95 (0.15) | 1.10 (0.24) | 0.58 (0.16) |
| Dissatisfied with democracy | 2.01 (0.21) | 2.55 (0.34) | 1.61 (0.21) |
| Distrusts the Bundestag | 2.53 (0.33) | 2.71 (0.47) | |
| Feels left behind | 3.82 (0.34) | 4.14 (0.50) | |
| Rising prices force cutbacks | 2.69 (0.67) | 3.09 (0.93) | |
| Likes the AfD | 4.16 (0.33) | 5.15 (0.53) | 4.02 (0.33) |

*Note.* Item 2880cl, share agreeing (4 or 5), waves 22 to 30, 33 and 34, person and wave fixed effects, standard errors clustered by person.

Table B6: Cross-lagged paths between own economic situation, opposition to aid and AfD sympathy

| | Cost item, W23–W26 | | Escalation item, W22–W27 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cross-lagged path | All | Center | All | Center |
| Ukraine → own situation | 0.016 (0.008) | 0.009 (0.011) | -0.009 (0.005) | -0.008 (0.006) |
| AfD → own situation | 0.003 (0.004) | -0.002 (0.005) | 0.004 (0.003) | -0.000 (0.003) |
| own situation → Ukraine | 0.019 (0.013) | 0.027 (0.017) | 0.010 (0.009) | 0.021 (0.012) |
| AfD → Ukraine | 0.016 (0.006) | 0.024 (0.008) | 0.038 (0.004) | 0.052 (0.006) |
| own situation → AfD | -0.043 (0.032) | -0.091 (0.044) | 0.000 (0.020) | -0.018 (0.028) |
| Ukraine → AfD | 0.123 (0.028) | 0.182 (0.041) | 0.113 (0.015) | 0.153 (0.024) |

*Note.* Unstandardized cross-lagged paths between the current own economic situation (1 very good to 5 very bad), opposition to aid (five-point item, higher values mean less support) and AfD sympathy (−5 to +5), standard errors in parentheses. Paths are constrained equal over waves.

# C Bundestag Speeches

We use the plenary protocols of the 20th and 21st Bundestag from the open data of the Bundestag (317 sittings up to 16 October 2026). From 24 February 2022 on, we keep the paragraphs of each speaker, without remarks of the chair or interjections, that name Ukraine, Russia or Putin, or the war in a speech about Ukraine or Russia. Of these 20,344 paragraphs, 19,719 were delivered orally. Claude Opus 5.5 coded each of them through the Anthropic Message Batches API, seeing only the paragraph text and no speaker, party or date. It recorded whether the paragraph concerns the war, its stance on supporting Ukraine and whether it sets aid to Ukraine against a domestic need or rejects that trade-off, which counts only if both sides appear in the paragraph. A random 10% of the paragraphs (1,971) were coded twice in separate requests, with agreement of 99.9% on the trade-off code (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.97$) and 98.7% on the stance ($\kappa = 0.96$). The prompt and the code are part of the replication materials.

# D Politbarometer

Table D1: Budget preferences and the debt brake in the Politbarometer, 2023–2025

| | 2023 | 2024 | 2025 |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Close a budget gap by . . .* | | | |
| cutting spending | 64.8 | 63.3 | 61.0 |
| raising taxes | 15.2 | 14.4 | 25.9 |
| borrowing | 19.9 | 22.3 | 13.1 |
| Respondents | 4,129 | 1,360 | 1,466 |
| *War in Ukraine is an emergency, debt brake does not apply* | | | |
| Yes | | 47.6 | |
| Respondents | | 1,323 | |

*Note.* Share of respondents in percent, weighted with the total weight (dwght), respondents without an answer excluded. Budget item: "Spending cuts, tax increases or new debt?" (Sparen, Steuern erhöhen oder Schulden machen?), asked in weeks 11, 13 and 47 of 2023, week 5 of 2024 and week 38 of 2025. Emergency item: "Is the war in Ukraine an emergency?" with the answers "yes, the debt brake does not apply" and "no, the debt brake applies" (Ist der Ukraine-Krieg eine Notsituation?), asked in week 26 of 2024. Politbarometer 2023, 2024 and 2025, GESIS studies ZA8785, ZA8974 and ZA9151.