

Breaking Negative Narratives: Long-term Social Progress and Trust in Institutions*

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Abstract

Trust in democratic institutions has declined in many countries. We study whether exposure to positive narratives about long-term social progress can increase institutional trust. In a large-scale online experiment in Italy, more than 7,000 adults were randomly exposed to information documenting declines in homicide rates and other improvements in public safety. Exposure to these narratives increased social and institutional trust and donations to a law-enforcement-related organisation, with effects of 6–9% of a standard deviation. Effects on institutional trust remained detectable approximately fifty days later. We discuss the role of belief correction and institutional attribution as possible mechanisms.

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“When people wrongly believe that nothing is improving, they may conclude that nothing we have tried so far is working and lose confidence in measures that actually work. I meet many such people, who tell me they have lost all hope for humanity.”

– Hans Rosling

1 INTRODUCTION

Trust in democratic institutions has declined steadily over recent decades across advanced economies.¹ According to OECD data, only 39% of respondents across the surveyed OECD countries report high or moderately high trust in their national government, while 44% report low or no trust (OECD, 2024). This erosion of confidence is commonly attributed to salient failures – such as corruption scandals or poorly managed crises (Algan et al., 2017; Daniele et al., 2023; Guriev and Papaioannou, 2022; Rivera et al., 2024) – a pattern that appears difficult to reconcile with the substantial social and economic progress achieved over the same period. Outcomes in areas such as health, education, and public safety have improved markedly, often through sustained institutional effort. Global child mortality and extreme poverty have declined sharply, access to education – especially for girls – has expanded, and life expectancy has increased worldwide.²

A key reason is that long-term social progress is both difficult to observe and hard to attribute. Improvements typically unfold gradually and attract little attention compared to sudden negative events, which are more salient and more likely to be reported. Media incentives and audience preferences reinforce this asymmetry (Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2010; Mullainathan and Shleifer, 2005), as does a well-documented negativity bias in information processing (Baumeister et al., 2001; Rozin and Royzman, 2001; Soroka et al., 2019). Moreover, successful outcomes usually reflect diffuse and cumulative institutional actions rather than identifiable policy shocks, making it difficult for citizens to credit institutions for success. Together, limited awareness of positive trends and weak institutional attribution can

¹In UK, the share of respondents reporting that they trust British governments “just about always” or “most of the time” fell from 40% in 1986 to 12% in 2024 (Scholes, 2025). Between 2006 and 2025, trust in the national government declined in 8 of the 12 countries for which OECD observations are available; the median within-country change was –2.71 percentage points (OECD, 2026). In the United States, the share of respondents reporting that they trust the federal government to do what is right “just about always” or “most of the time” fell from 73% in 1958 to 20% in 2022 (Pew Research Center, 2025).

²Between 2000 and 2023, the global under-five mortality rate declined by 52% (United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality, 2025). Between 1990 and 2015, the share of the global population living in extreme poverty fell from nearly 36% to 10% (World Bank, 2018). Global life expectancy increased from 66.8 years in 2000 to 73.1 years in 2019 (World Health Organization, 2024).

sustain pessimistic perceptions of institutional performance even when objective indicators improve ([Rosling et al., 2018](#)).

We ask whether institutional trust can be rebuilt by correcting pessimistic narratives about long-term social progress. Specifically, we study whether exposure to positive information about sustained improvements can increase trust in democratic institutions, and whether such effects operate via information correction and institutional attribution.

We examine this question in the context of public safety, a domain where long-run improvements are large, well documented, and widely misunderstood. Since the early 1990s, homicide rates have fallen dramatically across most advanced economies. Between 1990 and 2018, homicide rates declined by about 46% in both North America and Western Europe, making these societies considerably safer than a generation ago.³ Despite these improvements, violence remains very salient in the public debate, and perceptions of insecurity often move independently of actual trends ([Esberg and Mummolo, 2018](#)).

We field a large-scale experiment on a sample of approximately 7,000 Italian adults to study the effect of information on improvements in public safety. Italy is a particularly suitable context for such an intervention: levels of trust in state institutions are comparatively low.⁴ At the same time, Italy has experienced one of the sharpest declines in violent crime in Europe. Homicides fell from a peak of 1,916 in 1991 to 322 in 2022, a decline of more than 80%, giving Italy the lowest homicide rate in the European Union by 2022 ([UNODC, 2023](#)).⁵ Institutional performance improved in parallel: homicide clearance rates more than doubled, judicial efficiency increased, and corruption indicators improved substantially.⁶

First, we elicit respondents' prior beliefs about long-run change in homicide rates and other public-safety indicators. Baseline misperceptions are substantial: respondents systematically believe that these indicators have worsened over time, despite large objective improvements.

Second, in our main pre-registered intervention respondents are randomly assigned to either a treatment group, which receives accurate information documenting true positive trends in these indicators, or to an information-neutral and institutional salient control group. We find that exposure to positive trends increases several trust and pro-institutional outcomes. After multiple hypothesis testing adjustment, the pooled effects are clearest for trust in police and justice, social trust, and incentivised donations.

³Estimates based on UNODC homicide rate data: [UNODC](#).

⁴In 2023, only 36% of Italians reported high or moderately high trust in the national government according to the OECD. In our sample, only 15% of respondents report trust above the midpoint of a 1–10 scale for national politicians, and 35% do so for the justice system.

⁵Among current EU member states, Italy had the second-highest homicide rate in 1990.

⁶Data: ISTAT and Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. More details in Section 3.5.

Third, we discuss different mechanisms. We test institutional attribution by varying the explicitness with which improvements are attributed to institutions across four treatment arms. The results suggest that positive information about social progress is sufficient to increase trust, while explicit institutional attribution produces a more selective and outcome-specific pattern. An heterogeneity exercise with respect to prior misperception shows the information-correction as a main driver.

Finally, in a subsequent and separate exploratory exercise, we collect additional data to investigate a positive-news comparison involving a social trend less directly attributable to institutional action. This comparison helps us assess how much of the response reflects exposure to general “good news.” The evidence suggests that favourable information accounts for part of the response, while attribution remains a relevant, though outcome-specific, mechanism.

We address two common concerns in information-based experiments: demand effects and persistence. To mitigate demand effects, we obfuscate the purpose of the study, we rely on outcome measures that are conceptually distant from the intervention, and we include an incentivised behavioural proxy for institutional trust. A second critique is that survey experiments identify real but highly transient effects because treatments and outcomes are typically measured within the same short survey session. Existing panel survey experiments that explicitly track persistence mostly find effects disappearing within a few days (Coppock, 2017; Haaland et al., 2023). In contrast, we document sizeable changes in beliefs – a driver of institutional trust – and in institutional trust itself that remain present approximately fifty days after treatment, suggesting unusually durable updating relative to the standard survey-experiment benchmark.

Our design assumes that respondents perceive the information as trustworthy – an assumption that is non-trivial given declining confidence in expert institutions (Soliman, 2024) and evidence that misinformation-correction efforts can increase scepticism (Hoes et al., 2024). We therefore measure perceived credibility directly: 77% of treated respondents report that they consider the information reliable.

This paper contributes primarily to the literature on trust in institutions by studying whether trust can be rebuilt through information about overlooked long-term social progress. Despite a large body of work examining the causes and consequences of trust erosion (Algan and Cahuc, 2010; Daniele and Geys, 2015; Daniele et al., 2023; Guiso et al., 2008; Martinangeli et al., 2024; Rivera et al., 2024; Tabellini, 2008), there is little evidence on whether and how information about overlooked social progress can increase trust once it has declined. Existing studies largely focus on targeted interventions or policy-specific contexts. For example, Acemoglu et al. (2020) increase trust in Pakistani courts by providing

information about a successful judicial reform, while [Khan et al. \(2021\)](#) find weaker effects when informing citizens about government success in managing a dengue epidemic. Other works study direct institutional interventions, such as police retraining ([Abril et al., 2023](#)), or community policing programmes, often finding mixed or null effects on trust ([Blair et al., 2021](#)). More recently, [Briscese and Grignani \(2024\)](#) show that politically motivated heuristics shape evaluations of government performance during COVID-19, while access to institution-sourced information increases trust and compliance.

Unlike these contributions, which focus on specific policies, reforms, or crises, we study long-term social progress, such as the sustained decline in violent crime. Our approach emphasises structural improvements that unfold gradually and may escape public attention due to media bias ([Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2010](#); [Mullainathan and Shleifer, 2005](#)), cognitive shortcuts ([Baumeister et al., 2001](#); [Rozin and Royzman, 2001](#)), limited information ([Soroka, 2006](#)), or interpersonal (intergenerational or not) transmission of negative narratives ([Barron et al., 2023](#)). We show that citizens substantially underestimate improvements in public safety and related institutional indicators, and that providing accurate information about these improvements increases institutional and social trust. The evidence is strongest for a corrective-information interpretation: respondents exposed to positive information about long-term progress report higher trust, and the effects are often larger among those with more pessimistic prior beliefs. The design also allows us to explore whether explicitly attributing progress to institutions strengthens this response. We do not find evidence of a simple monotonic accountability gradient across treatment arms. Rather, our results suggest that institutional attribution may matter for some outcomes closely connected to law enforcement and public safety.

Second, the paper relates to a growing literature on misperceptions and their political consequences ([Alesina et al., 2023](#); [Gennaioli and Tabellini, 2023](#); [Nyhan, 2020](#); [Stantcheva, 2024](#); [Windsteiger, 2022](#)). While prior work focuses primarily on policy preferences, redistribution, or partisanship ([Alesina et al., 2018](#); [Mosleh et al., 2024](#); [Torrez et al., 2024](#); [Većkalov et al., 2024](#)), we instead study misperceptions about state performance itself. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first paper to show that correcting overly pessimistic beliefs about long-term trends can meaningfully increase trust in democratic institutions.

Finally, our work relates to the literature on institutional accountability, including electoral discipline, media and civil-society monitoring, and checks among state bodies ([Barro, 1973](#); [Dunning et al., 2019](#); [Ferraz and Finan, 2008](#); [Larreguy et al., 2020](#); [Maskin and Tirole, 2004](#)). We complement this literature by studying reputational accountability: whether citizens revise their trust in institutions when informed about institutional performance and associated social outcomes.

2 MOTIVATING FRAMEWORK

Public debates on long-term social, economic, and institutional performance are often characterised by persistent pessimism, even when objective indicators improve. To motivate our intervention, we outline a simple framework linking trends, narratives, and trust, highlighting how narratives can distort perceptions.

We define *trends* as empirically measurable changes in social and institutional outcomes, which can be positive (improvements) or negative (deteriorations). A *narrative* is a selective representation or interpretation of those changes. When narratives accurately reflect the underlying trends, perceptions align with performance. By contrast, distortions arise when narratives systematically underrepresent or overrepresent positive or negative trends, creating a gap between measured and perceived changes.

Under perfect information, individuals observe changes in social and institutional outcomes directly and update trust based on trends. Under imperfect information, individuals instead rely on narratives. Trust therefore responds to reported rather than actual performance.

Our experiment provides an exogenous shock to narratives in a low-trust setting. The intervention provides accurate information about long-term social progress, shifting participants' informational environment. This allows us to test whether misperceptions of institutional performance shape trust responses to positive information.

3 DATA AND EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

3.1 Data collection, sample and randomisation

Data collection. The study was conducted in Italy between February and June 2025. The main randomised survey was fielded between 17 February and 3 April and included 6,034 respondents assigned to the control group, Co, or one of the four pre-specified treatments, T1–T4. This first exercise includes a follow-up to gauge effect persistence. After completing this field, we recruited a separate sample of 994 respondents and fielded the exploratory positive-news condition, C1, between 26 May and 10 June. The combined sample therefore contains 7,028 respondents.⁷ Respondents were recruited by Demetra Opinioni from its proprietary online research panel, and invitations containing the link to the Qualtrics

⁷The initial randomised sample was designed to detect an effect of 0.11 standard deviations in pairwise comparisons, assuming approximately 1,200 observations per arm, power of 0.8, and $\alpha = 0.05$.

questionnaire were distributed by the company.⁸ Respondents received compensation upon completing the survey. The median duration of the main survey was 12.3 minutes. Complete versions of the main and follow-up questionnaires are available online.⁹

Sample. We targeted residents of Italy between 18 and 65 years of age and used sampling quotas based on age, gender, education, and region of residence. We deliberately oversampled respondents from Southern Italy, where we expected institutional trust to be comparatively low, while preserving geographic representativeness within the Northern and Southern strata. Random assignment identifies treatment effects within this experimental sample. Because of the Southern oversample and remaining differences from the population, however, the unweighted pooled estimate should not be interpreted as an exact nationally representative average; Online Appendix Table B.1 reports the sample–population comparison.

Randomisation. Respondents in the main data collection were randomly assigned to Co or one of the four pre-registered treatments, T1–T4. Once this randomised and the follow-up had been completed, C1 was administered to a separately recruited sample obtained through the same survey provider. The combined data therefore contain six conditions, but C1 was neither included in the original pre-analysis plan, was not randomised concurrently with Co and T1–T4, nor was included in the follow-up.

Pairwise tests reported in Online Appendix Table B.2 indicate broad balance between T1–T4 and Co. Among the core covariates, the only conventional 5% difference is a higher voting rate in T4. The C1 sample differs from Co on a small number of covariates; we examine the implications of these differences in the empirical analysis. Baseline covariates are also balanced across treatment arms among respondents retained at follow-up (Online Appendix Table B.3).

3.2 Main survey

The survey began by collecting demographic information: gender, age group, province of residence, marital status, household size, income group, political orientation, and voting behaviour.

⁸Demetra Opinioni is an established Italian survey provider. Registration in its proprietary panel requires email and mobile-phone verification through a double-opt-in procedure, and only one account is permitted per individual. The provider also applies standard checks intended to detect duplicate participation, VPNs and anonymous proxies, inconsistencies across browsers and devices, and suspicious or automated traffic.

⁹Surveys in English: [link](#). Surveys in Italian: [link](#).

Prior beliefs. Before treatment assignment, we elicited respondents' beliefs about four long-term social and institutional trends: (i) the percentage change in the number of homicides over the previous 20 years; (ii) the change in the share of homicides for which the perpetrator was identified over the same period; (iii) the change in Italy's position in the international corruption ranking over the previous 20 years; and (iv) the change in the share of civil disputes resolved within one year over the previous decade.

Video treatments. The treatment content is described in Section 3.5, and the complete scripts and video links are provided in Online Appendix A.3.

Outcomes. The main analysis focuses on five principal outcomes: trust in police and justice, in public administration, in politicians, generalised social trust, and donations.

Institutional and social trust. Respondents reported their trust, on 1–10 scales, in the police; the judiciary; the public administration; and national, regional, and municipal politicians. The order of the institutions was randomised. We aggregate these responses into an index of trust in police and justice and trust in politicians. Trust in public administration enters the analysis as a separate outcome. We also measured generalised social trust using the standard World Values Survey item (Inglehart et al., 2014). We did not elicit institutional trust before treatment assignment to avoid priming.¹⁰

Donation. Respondents received an additional one-euro endowment, which they could divide in one-cent increments between themselves and ONAOMAC (*Opera Nazionale Assistenza Orfani Militari Arma Carabinieri*), a non-profit organisation supporting the families of law-enforcement officers who died in the line of duty.^{11,12} This measure provides a behaviourally consequential and finely measured complement to the self-reported trust outcomes.

Secondary outcomes. Respondents rated whether public institutions implement useful long-term policies, reported their inflation expectations through the end of the year, and considered a hypothetical crime-victimisation scenario involving theft or robbery. They indicated whether they would seek help and, conditional on doing so, how likely they would be to turn to law-enforcement or judicial authorities. Additional measures include

¹⁰The trust indices have good internal consistency, and the estimates are unchanged when their components are standardised before aggregation (Online Appendix Table H.3)

¹¹ONAOMAC loosely translates to *National Welfare Organisation for the Orphans of Military Personnel of the Carabinieri Corps*.

¹²The question read: "We are now endowing you with 1 Euro. This is a new euro, and your choice will not impact previous decisions. You can decide how many cents to donate to ONAOMAC; whatever you choose not to donate, you will receive along with your participation compensation." Respondents made their choice using a slider and could access further information about ONAOMAC; see Online Appendix A.2.

optimism about the future and reliance on personal connections to obtain justice. These outcomes, together with the individual components of the trust indices, are reported in Online Appendix Tables [D.1](#) and [D.2](#).

3.3 Follow-up survey

To assess the persistence of the treatment effects, we recontacted respondents from the initial Co and T1–T4 sample between 24 April and 17 May 2025 via Demetra Opinioni. The follow-up occurred approximately fifty days after the initial survey, with individual intervals ranging from 22 to 88 days. Recontact through the survey provider preserved respondents’ anonymity across waves. C1 was fielded after follow-up recruitment and was therefore not included in the second wave.

The follow-up was presented as an independent survey on lifestyle habits and the use of public services. It employed a different interface, wording, and framing from the initial questionnaire and began with unrelated questions, thereby reducing the likelihood that respondents would associate the two surveys.

After the introductory and obfuscation questions, respondents evaluated whether Italian institutions prioritise citizens’ interests and reported their overall satisfaction with institutional quality, both on 1–10 scales. They also assessed whether institutional quality had changed over time and, when they perceived a change, the period over which it had occurred. The survey then repeated the institutional-trust battery used in the initial wave, permitting direct comparisons across surveys. Questions re-eliciting beliefs about the long-term social and institutional trends were placed at the end of the questionnaire.

The take-up rate was approximately 51% of the original sample.¹³ Treatment assignment does not jointly predict follow-up participation ($p = 0.754$); although respondents and attriters differ on some observables, inverse-probability-of-response-weighted estimates are close to the unweighted results (Tables [E.1–E.5](#); see the Online Appendix for details).

3.4 Demand effects and data quality

Information-provision experiments raise several design and measurement challenges, including experimenter demand and the interpretation of self-reported outcomes ([Haaland et al., 2023](#)). Information experiments may be affected by experimenter demand if respondents infer the study’s objective and adjust their answers accordingly. No single

¹³The pre-analysis plan anticipated a 60% recontact rate, or approximately 3,600 respondents, producing a minimum detectable effect of roughly 0.14 standard deviations at power of 0.8 and $\alpha = 0.05$. The realised take-up rate was approximately 51%, therefore slightly less precise.

design feature can eliminate this concern, but we combine several safeguards that make a purely demand-driven interpretation less likely.

First, the main questionnaire was presented as a study of news preferences and media consumption, with the videos embedded among related obfuscation questions. Second, the outcomes vary in their conceptual and behavioural distance from the treatment. Alongside direct trust measures, we include an incentivised donation decision, a two-stage measure of reliance on formal authorities, and inflation expectations concerning a different area of institutional responsibility. Third, the delayed follow-up described above collected the trust outcomes in a differently framed survey long after the initial treatment exposure. This design reduces immediate experimenter demand and short-lived survey-order effects.

We assess engagement using survey duration, enforced exposure to the treatment page, and an open-ended response. The videos were embedded directly in Qualtrics, and respondents could not advance until the assigned video had finished playing. This requirement ensures a minimum period of exposure but does not establish that every respondent watched or listened attentively. Accordingly, all estimates are interpreted as intention-to-treat effects based on random assignment.

Respondents were informed that inattentive answers or skipped questions could result in the loss of compensation. Item non-response was very limited: missing observations for the principal trust outcomes amount to 0.16% of the sample. We also examine the complete distribution of survey duration and re-estimate the main specifications after excluding the fastest and slowest 5% of respondents.

Finally, respondents assigned to T1–T4 rated the reliability of the information presented in the video and could explain their assessment in an optional open-ended response. We use the numerical rating as our measure of perceived credibility. The open-ended responses are used for post-treatment checks of engagement and response quality.

3.5 Experimental design

We design an information experiment to study how exposure to *positive narratives* about institutions-driven social progress affects institutional trust. Following Section 2, we define a positive narrative as a selective representation of empirically measurable changes, or trends, that are positive. T1–T4 together constitute the *positive narrative* intervention: all four treatments provide accurate information about sustained positive trends in public safety and institutional performance. The primary experimental comparison is therefore between the pooled T1–T4 treatments and Co, an information-neutral control that makes institutions salient without providing information about their performance. This comparison identifies

the effect of exposure to positive information about social progress, over and above institutional salience.

The four treatment arms vary the strength of the institutional-attribution signal. Specifically, they vary the institutional reference frame, the presence of explicit references to institutional effort, and the inclusion of outcomes more directly related to institutional performance. The decline in homicide rates, common to the first three treatments, is an *indirect trend*, reflecting broader social – at least partly – beyond institutional control (Tonry, 2014); *direct trends* include clearance rates, judicial efficiency, and corruption indicators. We use this variation to explore institutional attribution as a potential mechanism.

All four experimental arms convey positive information and are compared with the concurrently randomised Co baseline. To distinguish a general good-news response from institutional accountability, we later fielded C1 in a separate sample. Video frames with translation and links are provided in Online Appendix A.3.

Co – Control. Respondents receive a neutral description of the role of law enforcement and the judiciary, which allows to control for institutional salience: *“Justice plays a fundamental role. It ensures the application of laws and the respect of individual rights. Law enforcement agencies and the judiciary have the task of keeping society safe.”* This text is included in all treatment conditions except C1.

T1–T4 – Positive narrative. All four treatment conditions, in addition to the same information in Co, also provide accurate information about sustained positive trends in public safety and institutional performance. They differ only in the strength and form of the institutional-attribution signal, providing variation that we use to explore institutional accountability as a potential mechanism.

T1 – General indirect trend. In addition to the text in Co, the respondents are informed about the decline in homicide rates across Europe over the past two decades.¹⁴ The narrative presents a general, non-country-specific trend in public safety, without reference to Italian institutions.

T2 – National indirect trend. The same information provided in T1 is presented with explicit reference to Italy.¹⁵ Wording and statistics are otherwise identical, allowing us to isolate the effect of national framing.

¹⁴Homicide rates across Europe decreased by approximately 70% between 2000 and 2022. Source: [Our World in Data](#), based on United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime data (2024).

¹⁵Homicide rates in Italy decreased by approximately 70% between 1996 and 2022. Source: [ISTAT, Indagine su decessi e cause di morte, homicide rates by sex, 1992–2022](#).

T₃ – Link and indirect trend. Building on *T₂*, this condition adds an explicit reference to institutional effort by stating that the Italian state invests substantial resources in security and public protection. This treatment tests whether linking progress to institutional action – absent direct performance metrics – is sufficient to affect trust.

T₄ – Link and all trends. In addition to the content of *T₃*, this condition introduces direct indicators of institutional performance: higher homicide clearance rates, shorter civil trial durations, and improved corruption rankings.¹⁶ This treatment provides the most explicit institutional-attribution signal by coupling institutional attribution with directly attributable outcomes.

C₁ – General good news. Respondents are informed about the decline in suicide rates in Italy over the past two decades. This condition conveys positive social change while omitting references to institutions or institutional action, allowing us to assess whether treatment effects extend beyond a general “good news” response. Like the decline in homicides, the reduction in suicide rates follows a sustained trajectory, but it is arguably less directly attributable to state intervention.¹⁷

Hypotheses We hypothesize that exposure to accurate information about sustained positive trends in social and institutional outcomes increases institutional trust by shifting the narratives through which individuals interpret institutional performance. The effect may be stronger when positive trends are explicitly attributed to institutional action, as attribution strengthens the link between perceived progress and evaluations of institutions.

4 PERCEPTION OF LONG-TERM SOCIAL PROGRESS

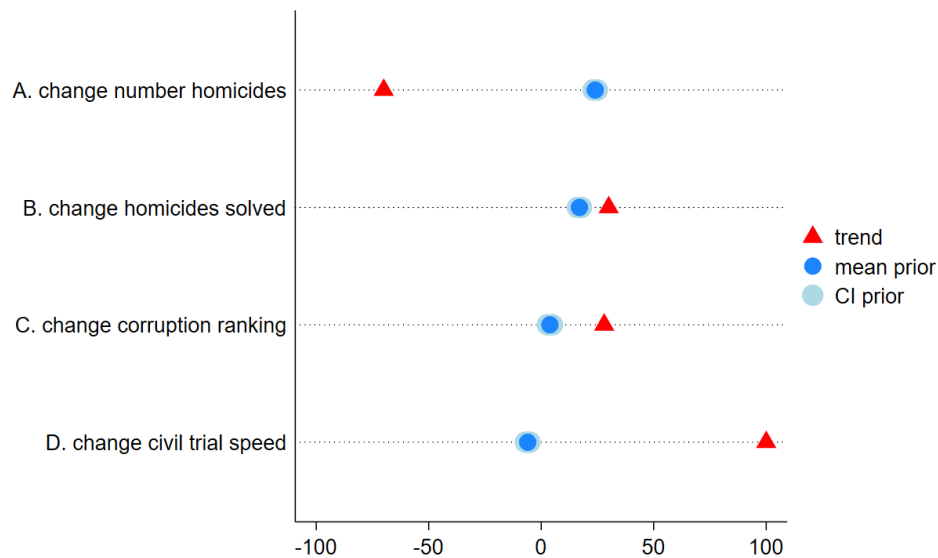
We present here our first set of results. Our intervention is motivated by the erosion of trust in democratic institutions. We posit that *negative narratives* overweight negative trends. If this is true, we should observe pessimistic misperceptions about social progress. Hence, we start by surveying individuals’ perceptions of social progress linked to institutional performance along four dimensions: the change in the number of homicides in the last 20

¹⁶Specifically: (i) the share of homicides for which the perpetrator was identified increased by about 30 percentage points between 2004 and 2024; (ii) Italy improved by 28 positions in international corruption rankings between 2011 and 2022; and (iii) the reported share of civil proceedings concluded in the same year in which they began doubled between 2013 and 2023. Sources: [ISTAT and the Italian Ministry of the Interior, homicide data for 2002–2024](#); [Transparency International, CPI 2011 and CPI 2022](#); and [ISTAT, civil-justice tables for 2013 and ISTAT, civil-justice report for 2023](#).

¹⁷The suicide rate in Italy decreased by almost 50% in the last twenty years: [Istituto superiore di sanità - data 1987 – 2016](#); [Istituto superiore di sanità - data 2019](#).

years, the change in the number of homicides solved in the past 20 years, the change in Italy's placement in corruption rankings in the past 20 years, and the change in the number of civil trials resolved within one year in the last decade. In line with our hypothesis, we find pessimistic misperceptions along all four dimensions.

Figure 1: Perceptions of long-term social progress



Notes: The red triangles report the actual trends. The dark blue circles report the means of respondents' prior beliefs, with confidence intervals in light blue. The distance between the red triangles and the blue circles represents the average misperception in our sample. **A.** Change in the number of homicides in the last 20 years: actual change of -70% versus a mean belief of $+23\%$. **B.** Change in the number of homicides solved in the past 20 years: actual change of $+30\%$ versus a mean belief of $+17\%$. **C.** Change in the corruption ranking in the past 20 years: actual improvement of 28 positions versus a mean expected improvement of 4 positions. **D.** Change in the number of civil trials resolved within one year in the last decade: actual change of $+100\%$ versus a mean belief of -6% .

Figure 1 plots the actual trends in four dimensions of state performance (red triangles) and respondents' mean beliefs about those trends (dark blue circles). Homicides and the speed of civil trials display the greatest pessimistic mismatch between actual trends (-70% and $+100\%$, respectively) and mean prior beliefs ($+23\%$ and -6% , respectively). The homicide result is closely aligned with evidence collected on the same topic by [Campedelli et al. \(2023\)](#). The number of homicides solved and Italy's position in the corruption ranking show smaller but still pessimistic misperceptions: an actual change of $+30\%$ versus a mean belief of $+17\%$, and an actual improvement of 28 positions versus a mean expected improvement of 4 positions. The full distribution of prior beliefs is displayed in Figure C.1 in Online Appendix C.

National averages can mask local variation in both prior beliefs and social progress.

Figure C.2 in the Online Appendix plots regional changes in homicides together with respondents' prior beliefs. The beliefs remain clustered around the national mean, while actual changes vary more substantially across regions, suggesting that perceptions of homicide trends reflect a national narrative rather than local experience. Figures C.3–C.5 show similar patterns for beliefs about homicide clearance, corruption rankings, and civil-trial speed. These patterns support our initial intuition that, under imperfect information, beliefs may align more closely with prevailing narratives than with underlying trends.

5 POSITIVE NARRATIVE AND TRUST

We now provide an empirical answer to our research question: can trust be increased by correcting negative narratives? This section presents our *positive narrative* intervention, defined as the pooled T1–T4 treatment. Overall, it increases institutional trust in both the short and medium term, although follow-up estimates are less precisely estimated after multiple-testing adjustment.

Table 1: Positive narrative effects at baseline and follow-up

	(1) Trust police/justice	(2) Trust public administration	(3) Trust politicians	(4) Social trust	(5) Donation	(6) Trust police/justice	(7) Trust public administration	(8) Trust politicians	(9) Trust EU
T1–T4	0.071** (0.027) [0.033**]	0.010 (0.029) [0.738]	0.052* (0.029) [0.144]	0.077*** (0.028) [0.038**]	0.092*** (0.034) [0.031**]	0.083** (0.039) [0.072*]	0.078* (0.040) [0.079*]	0.078* (0.042) [0.064*]	0.080** (0.035) [0.063*]
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Obs.	6,034	6,034	6,034	6,034	6,034	3,091	3,091	3,091	3,091
R ²	0.059	0.034	0.054	0.047	0.025	0.072	0.048	0.057	0.064
Mean Co	12.02	4.816	11.55	4.330	42.51	10.71	4.379	11.53	4.335
SD Co	4.144	2.278	6.440	2.383	35.37	4.309	2.296	6.478	2.547
Survey	baseline	baseline	baseline	baseline	baseline	follow-up	follow-up	follow-up	follow-up

Notes: This table reports pooled effects of the *positive narrative* treatments T1–T4 relative to Co, the baseline effect of mentioning the institutions. Columns 1 to 5 report outcomes measured in the baseline survey; Columns 6 to 9 report outcomes measured approximately fifty days later. Outcomes are trust in police and justice, trust in public administration, trust in politicians, social trust, donations, and follow-up trust in police and justice, public administration, politicians, and the European Union. Trust in police and justice is the sum of trust in the police and judicial system; trust in politicians is the sum of trust in national, regional, and municipal politicians. Coefficients are in standard-deviation units; the unstandardised Co mean and standard deviation are reported at the bottom. All models include the baseline controls, region fixed effects, and Italy-born fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered by province. Dependence-adjusted multiple hypothesis testing p -values are reported in square brackets. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Specification. In our main specifications, we sum trust in the police and judicial system to obtain the *trust in police and justice* outcome. Similarly, we sum individual trust in national,

regional, and municipal politicians to obtain *trust in politicians*. All specifications include controls for gender, age, income, education, voting in the last election, and following the news regularly, together with fixed effects for region of residence and for being born in Italy; standard errors are clustered at the provincial level. Outcomes are standardised using the mean and standard deviation of Co in the relevant survey wave, so coefficients can be interpreted as standard-deviation changes.

Baseline results. Columns 1 to 5 of Table 1 report the pooled estimates for the five principal baseline outcomes. Trust in police and justice, trust in politicians, and social trust increase by 0.071, 0.052, and 0.077 standard deviations, respectively, whereas the estimate for public-administration trust is 0.010. Donations increase by 0.092 standard deviations, equivalent to 3.25 additional cents from the one-euro endowment. Trust in police and justice, social trust, and donations remain significant at the 5% level after multiple-testing correction; the other pooled estimates are less precise (Online Appendix Table I.1).¹⁸

Results are robust to trimming completion-time outliers and among respondents who answer the open-ended credibility item. Online Appendix Tables H.1 and H.2 summarise the open-ended responses and re-estimate the main effects by comparing respondents who provided substantive, content-related explanations with the Co group. Because these responses were collected after treatment, the resulting estimates are interpreted as data-quality checks. Moreover, placebo tests reveal no systematic treatment effects on the obfuscation questions (Online Appendix Table H.5). Additional checks report pooled estimates without baseline covariates, randomisation-inference *p*-values, and binned added-variable plots (Online Appendix Tables H.4 and I.5; Figure I.1).

Follow-up results. Columns 6 to 9 of Table 1 report the pooled follow-up estimates. All four trust coefficients are positive and close to 0.08 standard deviations. After family-level multiple-testing adjustment, their *p*-values range from 0.063 to 0.079. A panel analysis restricted to respondents observed in both waves also finds no statistically significant decay in the trust effects between baseline and follow-up (Online Appendix Tables E.12 and I.1).

¹⁸Online Appendix Table D.1 reports disaggregated trust measures and other secondary baseline outcomes. Online Appendix Table D.2 reports inflation expectations and the two outcomes from the hypothetical crime-victimisation scenario, in pooled and treatment-specific specifications. The pooled inflation estimate is negative but imprecise (−0.048, standard error 0.031). However, T4—our most comprehensive treatment—reduces inflation expectations by 0.117 standard deviations (standard error 0.042). This result is consistent with the strongest treatment also affecting expectations about outcomes broadly related to institutional quality and is difficult to reconcile with a purely demand-driven channel. The pre-analysis plan specified a bivariate model of taking action after victimisation and, conditional on doing so, using institutional channels. Because over 92% of respondents report willingness to act, we instead estimate separate OLS models for these two outcomes.

We also report Lee bounds as an attrition-sensitivity check, as well as disaggregated trust measures and additional exploratory follow-up outcomes (Online Appendix Tables [E.6](#), [E.10](#), and [E.11](#)).

6 MECHANISMS

Having established that the *positive narrative* intervention increases institutional trust, we next ask why. We posit that positive narratives are generally overlooked and difficult to attribute. Hence, our intervention is designed to address information correction and institutional attribution, which we discuss separately. Additionally, a mechanical consequence of our intervention is that the information tone is kept positive. Hence, we consider a more general *good-news* channel. Finally, we discuss salience and emotions.

Corrective information. We start by checking whether the treatment effects are stronger among respondents who are more pessimistic about institutional performance. We construct an aggregate measure of individuals' prior beliefs about long-term social progress by extracting the first factor from a principal components analysis. This factor is based on individuals' beliefs regarding trends in (inverse) homicides, homicides solved, corruption, and trial speed. Higher scores on this synthetic prior reflect more positive beliefs about institutional performance.

Table [2](#) shows that the treatment-by-priors interactions are negative for all five principal outcomes, with treatment effects generally larger among more pessimistic respondents. After multiple hypothesis testing adjustment, none of the five interaction estimates remains significant at the 5% level; the public-administration interaction is marginal at the 10% level, while the donation interaction lies just above the 10% threshold ($p = 0.105$). A median-split specification is similarly outcome-specific. Across the five outcomes, the estimated treatment effects generally decline as prior beliefs become more optimistic, but they typically reach zero only near the upper end of the observed priors distribution. (Online Appendix Tables [F.1](#), [I.4](#), and [F.2](#); Figure [F.1](#)).

Table 2: Heterogeneity by prior beliefs and information correction

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Trust police/justice	Trust public administration	Trust politicians	Social trust	Donation
T1–T4	0.068** (0.027)	0.007 (0.027)	0.048* (0.027)	0.075*** (0.027)	0.089*** (0.032)
Priors	0.241*** (0.031)	0.291*** (0.034)	0.297*** (0.031)	0.201*** (0.033)	0.238*** (0.034)
T1–T4 × Priors	-0.049* (0.029)	-0.083** (0.037)	-0.045 (0.033)	-0.037 (0.035)	-0.079** (0.035)
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Obs.	6,034	6,034	6,034	6,034	6,034
R ²	0.101	0.084	0.117	0.076	0.055
Survey	baseline	baseline	baseline	baseline	baseline

Notes: This table reports heterogeneity with respect to prior beliefs for the five principal outcomes. The first row shows the effect of pooled T1–T4 assignment relative to Co; the second row shows the association between the priors index and each outcome; and the third row shows their interaction. *Priors* is the first factor from a principal-components analysis of beliefs about trends in homicides, homicide clearance, corruption rankings, and trial speed. Trust in police and justice is the sum of trust in the police and judicial system; trust in politicians is the sum of trust in national, regional, and municipal politicians. All coefficients are in standard-deviation units. Models include gender, age, income, education, voting, and news-consumption controls, region and Italy-born fixed effects, and province-clustered standard errors. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

The follow-up belief measures provide additional evidence consistent with information correction (Online Appendix Tables E.9 and I.2). Overall, respondents’ beliefs move in the direction of the information provided, with the clearest evidence among respondents exposed to T4, the only treatment giving information about all trends. We also find that treated respondents who exhibit greater reductions in misperceptions in the follow-up survey are more likely to report higher trust¹⁹ (Online Appendix Table E.13). Taken together, these results are consistent with a belief correction mechanism.

Institutional attribution. We next unpack the treatment effects by experimental arm. The four randomised treatment arms progressively strengthen the link between positive trends and institutional action. The results, however, do not display a corresponding monotonic

¹⁹As shown in Tables F.3, F.4, F.5, F.6, F.7, F.8, and F.9, we do not find any substantial heterogeneity along other dimensions, i.e. education, employment status, gender, income, voting behaviour, or whether the treatment information was considered reliable. We find some evidence of stronger effects for respondents living in Southern regions.

gradient in treatment effects. At baseline, T1 generally produces effects comparable to T4, with both treatments showing broad increases across trust and related outcomes, whereas T2 and particularly T3 tend to produce smaller effects. At follow-up, T2 produces the clearest effects for trust in police and justice and trust in the European Union, while T3 remains weaker. Thus, making institutional attribution more explicit does not systematically amplify the treatment effect. One interpretation is that respondents may already have attributed positive trends such as declining homicide rates to institutional performance before the intervention, so making this link more explicit adds little. Because we did not measure pre-treatment attribution in order to avoid priming respondents, however, we cannot directly assess the extent to which institutional attribution was already present before treatment. After multiple hypothesis testing adjustment, the baseline estimates remain clearest for T1 and T4, while at follow-up mostly for T2 (Online Appendix Table I.3).

Table 3: Institutional attribution

	(1) Trust police/justice	(2) Trust public administration	(3) Trust politicians	(4) Social trust	(5) Donation	(6) Trust police/justice	(7) Trust public administration	(8) Trust politicians	(9) Trust EU
T1	0.100*** (0.037)	0.032 (0.031)	0.096*** (0.036)	0.090*** (0.030)	0.126*** (0.041)	0.073 (0.053)	0.087* (0.052)	0.079 (0.055)	0.046 (0.046)
T2	0.066* (0.038)	0.016 (0.044)	0.025 (0.044)	0.063* (0.036)	0.058 (0.041)	0.116** (0.052)	0.089 (0.055)	0.083 (0.056)	0.131** (0.055)
T3	0.026 (0.035)	-0.026 (0.040)	0.007 (0.037)	0.046 (0.041)	0.087** (0.041)	0.087* (0.046)	0.068 (0.047)	0.066 (0.051)	0.078* (0.042)
T4	0.093** (0.036)	0.019 (0.036)	0.079** (0.033)	0.112*** (0.031)	0.099** (0.042)	0.054 (0.050)	0.069 (0.050)	0.086 (0.055)	0.062 (0.047)
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Obs.	6,034	6,034	6,034	6,034	6,034	3,091	3,091	3,091	3,091
R ²	0.059	0.034	0.054	0.047	0.025	0.072	0.048	0.057	0.064
Mean Co	12.02	4.816	11.55	4.330	42.51	10.71	4.379	11.53	4.335
SD Co	4.144	2.278	6.440	2.383	35.37	4.309	2.296	6.478	2.547
Survey	baseline	baseline	baseline	baseline	baseline	follow-up	follow-up	follow-up	follow-up

Notes: This table reports treatment-specific effects relative to Co. The treatments are: T1 – General Indirect Trend, T2 – Indirect Trend, T3 – Link & Indirect Trend, T4 – Link & All Trends. See Section 3.5 for full description. Columns 1 to 5 report the five principal baseline outcomes; columns 6 to 9 report the four follow-up trust outcomes measured approximately fifty days later. Trust in police and justice is the sum of trust in the police and judicial system; trust in politicians is the sum of trust in national, regional, and municipal politicians. Coefficients are in standard-deviation units; the unstandardised Co mean and standard deviation are reported at the bottom of each panel. All specifications include the baseline controls, region fixed effects, and Italy-born fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered by province. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

General good news. To distinguish the information correction and institutional attribution component of our *positive narrative* intervention from a general response to favourable information, we later fielded C1 in a separate sample recruited through the same survey company. C1 communicates the long-term decline in suicide rates in Italy, a positive social trend less directly connected to law enforcement and judicial performance.²⁰ As described in Section 3, C1 was neither included in the pre-analysis plan nor concurrently randomised with Co and T1–T4; comparisons involving it are therefore exploratory. Importantly, respondents still attributed some responsibility for the decline in suicides to the state, although less than for the public-safety and justice trends: 44% assigned the state a responsibility score of 6 or above, compared with 55–59% for the four institutional outcomes (all paired differences $p < 0.001$, including after Holm adjustment; Online Appendix Table G.3). C1 should therefore be viewed as a conservative benchmark rather than an institution-free placebo.

Table 4 compares the public-safety treatments with C1. Effects on several broad outcomes are attenuated, consistent with a general response to favourable information accounting for part of the treatment effect. Trust in police and justice nevertheless increases by 0.109 standard deviations and remains significant after multiple hypothesis testing adjustment ($p = 0.017$). Moreover, both responses in the hypothetical crime-victimisation scenario increase relative to C1 (Online Appendix Table G.2). Thus, positive valence appears to contribute to the treatment effect, but the pattern does not suggest that good news alone accounts for the full response. Because C1 itself contains some perceived institutional content, these comparisons cannot cleanly isolate the good-news channel and should be interpreted as a conservative test. The estimates are similar after flexibly adjusting for observed composition differences between C1 and the main sample (Online Appendix Table G.1).

Salience. As discussed in Section 3, Co was designed to keep institutional salience constant by referring to the role of law enforcement and the judiciary without providing information about their performance. This design does not fully eliminate salience concerns, particularly for the institutional-attribution exercise, because treatments that make the institutional link more explicit also increase exposure to institutional content. However, the treatment effects in Table 3 do not exhibit a monotonic gradient across treatments, providing little support for a salience-based explanation. Crucially, the effects persist in the follow-up survey, approximately fifty days after treatment, a pattern more consistent

²⁰A typo in the information may have introduced noise in C1: the information sequentially mentions suicides three times, while a fourth piece of information mentions homicides. We expect the impact of this typo to be small, see Appendix A.

with information correction than with a temporary response to increased salience.

Table 4: General good news effect.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Trust police/justice	Trust public administration	Trust politicians	Social trust	Donation
<i>Panel A: Positive narrative</i>					
T1–T4	0.109*** (0.035)	0.054 (0.038)	-0.021 (0.039)	0.034 (0.036)	-0.006 (0.032)
<i>Panel B: Institutional attribution</i>					
T1	0.138*** (0.032)	0.076* (0.040)	0.023 (0.042)	0.045 (0.041)	0.027 (0.041)
T2	0.104** (0.043)	0.059 (0.048)	-0.048 (0.049)	0.021 (0.037)	-0.040 (0.042)
T3	0.063 (0.050)	0.016 (0.050)	-0.065 (0.047)	0.003 (0.050)	-0.012 (0.041)
T4	0.131*** (0.041)	0.063 (0.045)	0.006 (0.046)	0.069* (0.038)	0.000 (0.034)
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Obs.	5,805	5,805	5,805	5,805	5,805
R ²	0.067	0.039	0.055	0.050	0.023
Mean C1	11.81	4.681	12.03	4.330	46.67
SD C1	4.388	2.364	6.716	2.394	34

Notes: This table reports the treatment effects with respect to the later-fielded C1 good-news comparison for the five principal outcomes. Panel A shows the *positive narrative* T1–T4 effects; Panel B reports the *institutional attribution* exercise, with T1 to T4 separately. The treatments are: T1 – General Indirect Trend, T2 – Indirect Trend, T3 – Link & Indirect Trend, T4 – Link & All Trends. See Section 3.5 for full description. Trust in police and justice is the sum of trust in the police and judicial system; trust in politicians is the sum of trust in national, regional, and municipal politicians. Coefficients are in standard-deviation units; the unstandardised C1 mean and standard deviation are reported at the bottom. Models include the baseline controls, region and Italy-born fixed effects, and province-clustered standard errors. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Emotional responses. The videos may also generate emotional reactions (reassurance, relief, or optimism) that may shape how policy information is processed (Manzoni et al., 2026). In our main survey, we find no effect on the optimism measure (Table D.1). The C1 benchmark absorbs part of a general improvement in mood. The attenuation of broad outcomes in Table 4 is consistent with emotions contributing to the contemporaneous response (still, information about suicides and homicides might not generate the same emotions). However, the effects measured in the obfuscated follow-up are less readily

explained by a short-lived reaction to the initial video.

7 CONCLUSION

This paper studies whether correcting pessimistic beliefs about long-term social progress can increase trust in democratic institutions. In a large-scale experiment in Italy, respondents substantially underestimated improvements in public safety and related institutional outcomes. The clearest immediate effects of correcting these beliefs with factual information about long-term institutions-driven social improvements in justice and security are higher trust in police and justice, higher social trust, and larger incentivised donations to a non-profit organisation supporting law-enforcement. Institutional-trust estimates remain positive approximately fifty days later.

The results point primarily to a corrective-information mechanism. Explicitly attributing progress to institutional action did not produce a monotonic increase in treatment effects, suggesting that positive information about social progress is consequential even without strong accountability framing. Institutional attribution may nevertheless matter selectively for outcomes closely related to public safety and state authority. Interestingly, the findings also suggest that corrective information may be particularly effective among individuals with more pessimistic prior beliefs.

Credible communication about documented social progress may therefore help reduce misplaced pessimism and strengthen institutional trust. Scaling such interventions remains challenging, however, because citizens may pay limited attention ([Carnes and Henderson, 2025](#)), select into preferred information sources, or distrust the information itself. Their effectiveness is therefore likely to depend on both the credibility of the message and the ability to reach audiences whose beliefs leave the greatest scope for updating.

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ONLINE APPENDIX

Thursday 10th September, 2026

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A EXPERIMENTAL MATERIALS AND IMPLEMENTATION

A.1 Link to survey questionnaires

- Original surveys in Italian: [link](#).
- Surveys translation into English: [link](#).

A.2 The ONAOMAC

The following text, here translated to English, is accessible by the respondents on the donation page via a clearly visible HTML button close to the question.

During and after World War II, the Carabinieri Corps faced the difficult challenge of losing members who fell in the line of duty.

After the war, the challenge shifted to the loss of numerous law enforcement officers engaged in maintaining public order and combating crime.

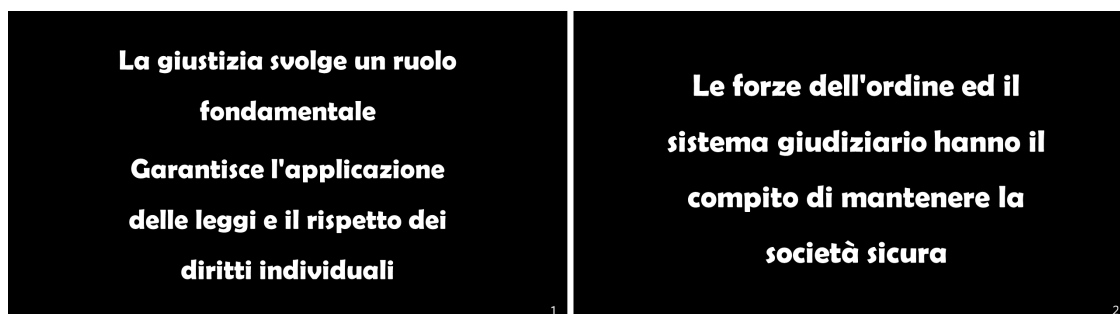
To support the Armed Forces' mission of protecting society, ONAOMAC was established in 1948 by Presidential Decree under President Luigi Einaudi. Since its founding, the organisation has been committed to honouring the sacrifices of fallen members by providing tangible support to law enforcement through initiatives aimed at assisting the families of the deceased, such as establishing educational institutions designed to care for young people.

The families of service members who died in the line of duty initially received direct assistance: over 5,000 children, many of them orphans of both parents, found not only shelter but also opportunities for education and growth in ONAOMAC's facilities. The male boarding school in San Mauro Torinese and the female boarding school in Mornese are concrete examples of the organisation's dedication.

Over the years, the support model evolved. Starting in the 1970s, ONAOMAC transitioned from providing direct assistance through boarding schools to offering indirect support to families, responding to mothers' requests to keep their children with them. This shift allowed the organisation to continue its mission, solidifying its role as a pillar of support for the Carabinieri Corps and Italian society.

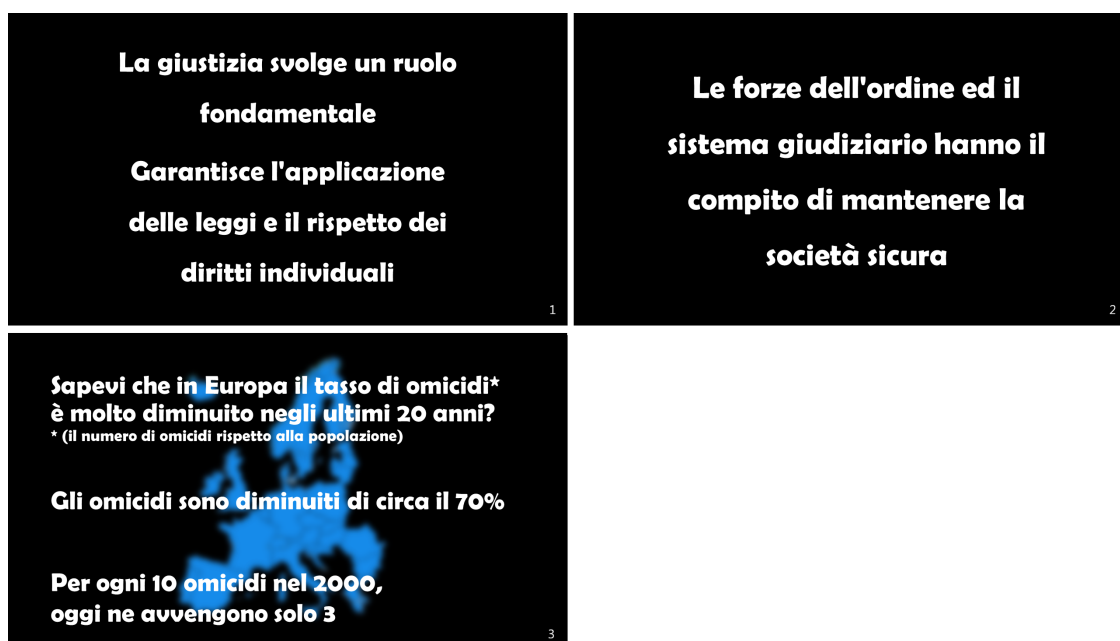
A.3 Information videos

Figure A.1: Co - Control



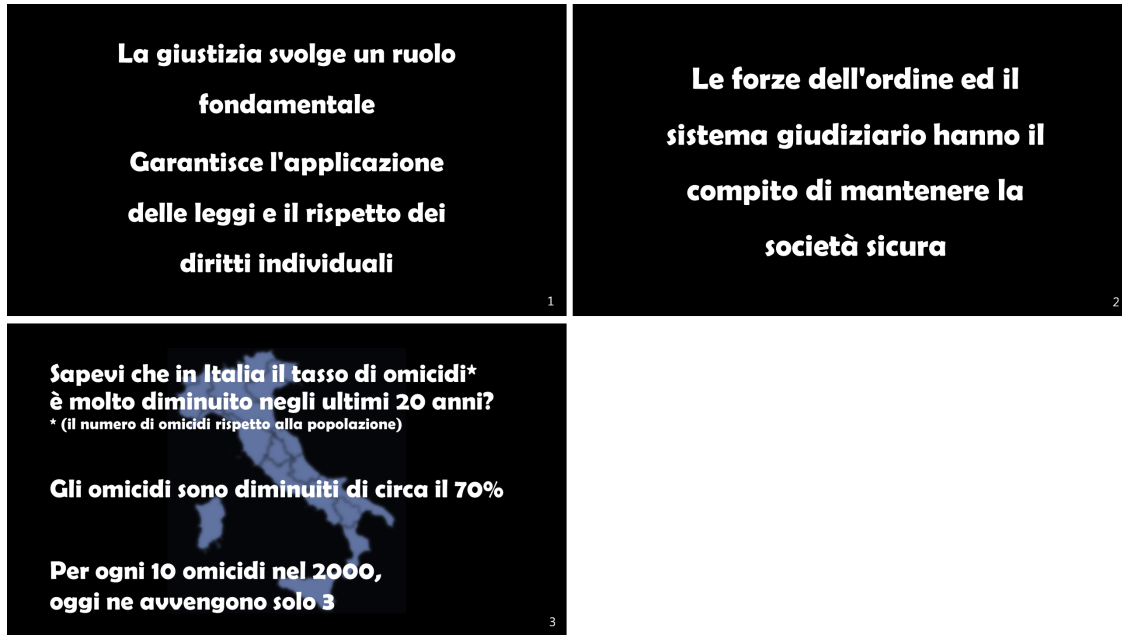
Notes: Screenshots from the video Co - Control (<https://youtu.be/AZmIhaCADL4>), duration: 20 seconds. English translation: slide 1 "Justice plays a fundamental role. It ensures that laws are enforced and that individual rights are respected."; slide 2 "Law enforcement agencies and the judicial system are responsible for keeping society safe." The slide numbers were added for ease of reference and were not present in the original video.

Figure A.2: T1 - General facts



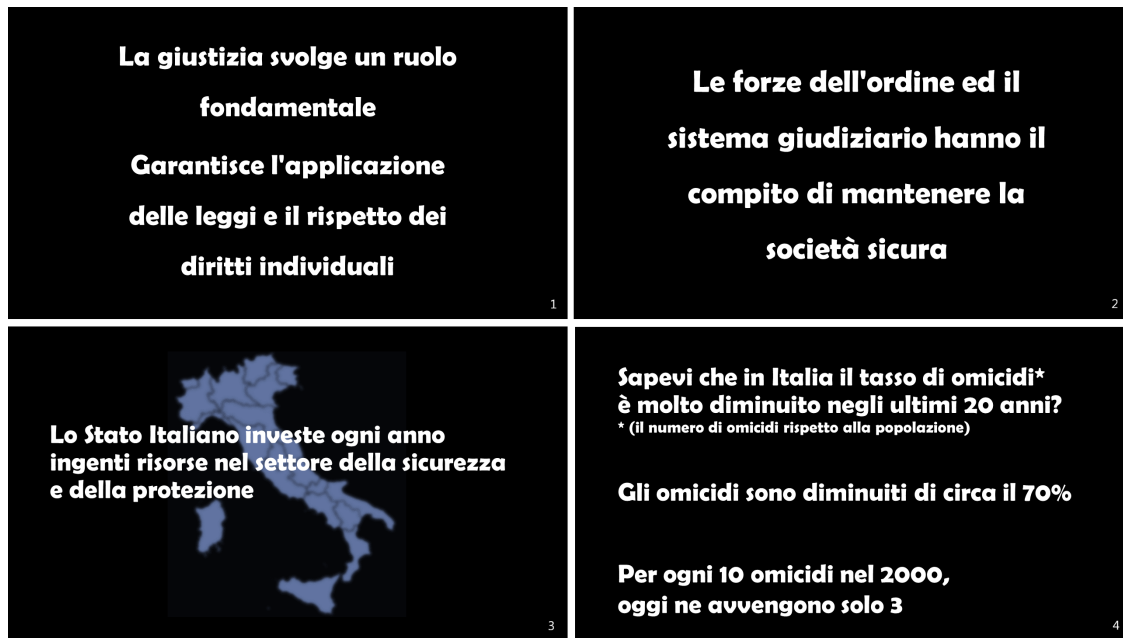
Notes: Screenshots from the video T1 - General facts (<https://youtu.be/5N-8hpqfWSE>), duration: 32 seconds. English translation: slide 1 "Justice plays a fundamental role. It ensures that laws are enforced and that individual rights are respected."; slide 2 "Law enforcement agencies and the judicial system are responsible for keeping society safe."; slide 3 "Did you know that the homicide rate* in Europe has fallen sharply over the past 20 years? *(The number of homicides relative to the population) Homicides have decreased by approximately 70%. For every 10 homicides committed in 2000, only 3 occur today." The slide numbers were added for ease of reference and were not present in the original video.

Figure A.3: T2 - Facts



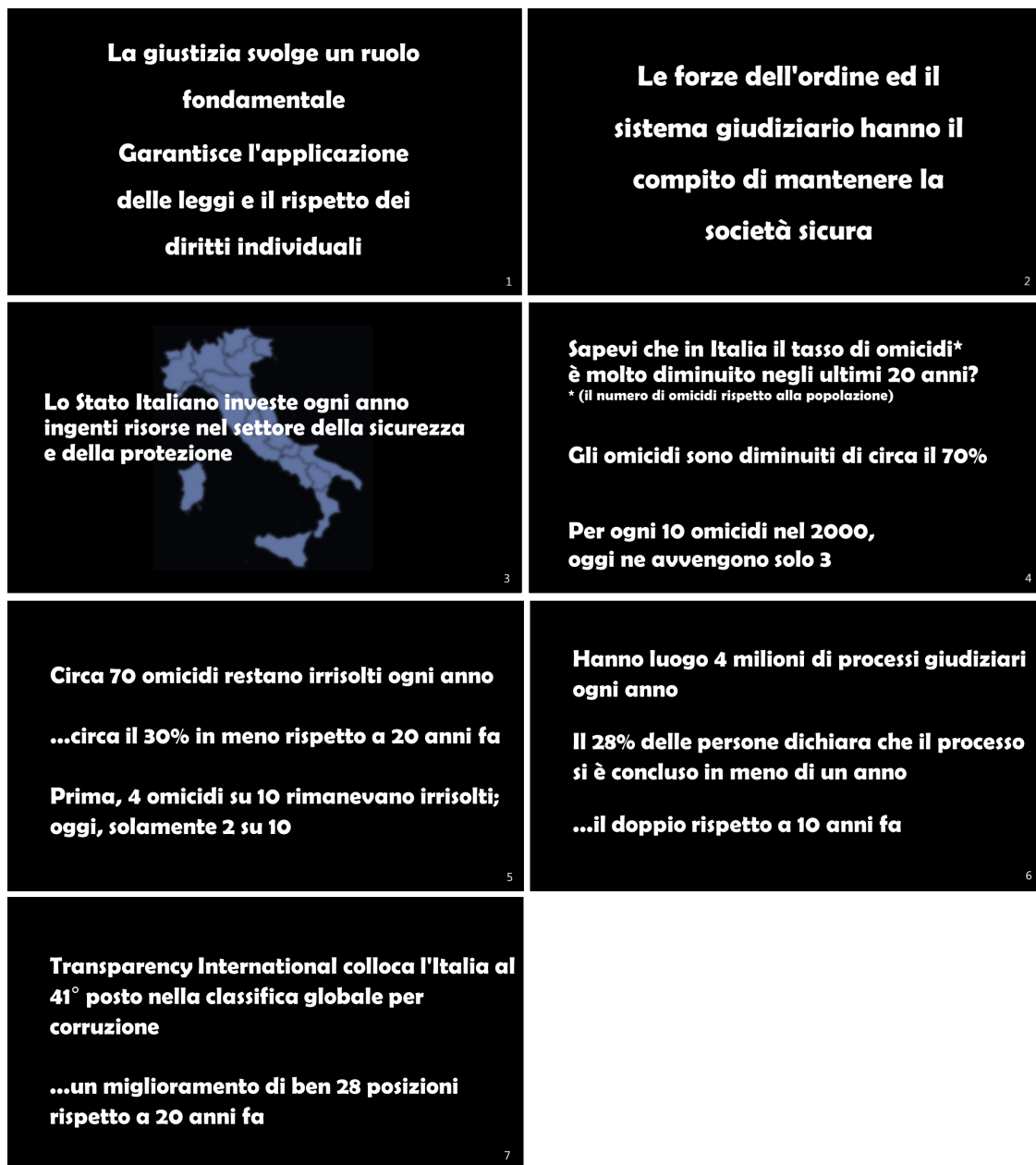
Notes: Screenshots from the video T2 - Facts (<https://youtu.be/bxRW2VvKyQA>), duration: 32 seconds. English translation: slide 1 "Justice plays a fundamental role. It ensures that laws are enforced and that individual rights are respected."; slide 2 "Law enforcement agencies and the judicial system are responsible for keeping society safe."; slide 3 "Did you know that the homicide rate* in Italy has fallen sharply over the past 20 years? *(The number of homicides relative to the population) Homicides have decreased by approximately 70%. For every 10 homicides committed in 2000, only 3 occur today." The slide numbers were added for ease of reference and were not present in the original video.

Figure A.4: T3 - Link



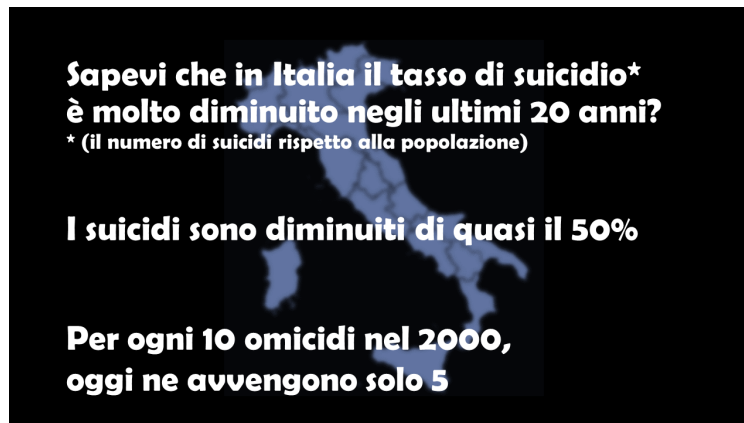
Notes: Screenshots from the video T3 - Link (<https://youtu.be/Uf5fqB9MBt0>), duration: 43 seconds. English translation: slide 1 "Justice plays a fundamental role. It ensures that laws are enforced and that individual rights are respected."; slide 2 "Law enforcement agencies and the judicial system are responsible for keeping society safe.", slide 3 "The Italian State invests considerable resources each year in the security and protection sector.", slide 4 "Did you know that the homicide rate* in Italy has fallen sharply over the past 20 years? *(The number of homicides relative to the population) Homicides have decreased by approximately 70%. For every 10 homicides committed in 2000, only 3 occur today." The slide numbers were added for ease of reference and were not present in the original video.

Figure A.5: T4 - Link and facts



Notes: Screenshots from the video T4 - Link and facts (<https://youtu.be/-pFUJkEvdCE>), duration: 1 minute and 15 seconds. English translation: slide 1 "Justice plays a fundamental role. It ensures that laws are enforced and that individual rights are respected."; slide 2 "Law enforcement agencies and the judicial system are responsible for keeping society safe."; slide 3 "The Italian State invests considerable resources each year in the security and protection sector."; slide 4 "Did you know that the homicide rate* in Italy has fallen sharply over the past 20 years? *(The number of homicides relative to the population) Homicides have decreased by approximately 70%. For every 10 homicides committed in 2000, only 3 occur today."; slide 5 "Around 70 homicides remain unsolved each year...approximately 30% fewer than 20 years ago. Previously, 4 out of 10 homicides remained unsolved; today, only 2 out of 10 do."; slide 6 "Four million court cases take place every year. Twenty-eight percent of people report that their case was concluded in less than one year...twice the proportion recorded 10 years ago."; slide 7 "Transparency International ranks Italy 41st in the global corruption index...an improvement of as many as 28 places compared with 20 years ago.". The slide numbers were added for ease of reference and were not present in the original video.

Figure A.6: C1 - General good news



Notes: Screenshot from the video C1 - General good news (<https://youtu.be/bqntlBtoiVo>), duration: 12 seconds. English translation: "Did you know that the suicide rate* in Italy has fallen sharply over the past 20 years? *(The number of suicides relative to the population) Suicides have decreased by almost 50%. For every 10 homicides recorded in 2000, only 5 occur today." We acknowledge a typo in the presentation of the information contained in C1: the last sentence of the video states "homicides" instead of "suicides".

B SAMPLE COMPOSITION AND BALANCE

B.1 Sample composition and representativeness

Table B.1 displays the sample and population frequencies for the representativeness categories. Our sample is representative by age and gender, but respondents with higher education are slightly overrepresented. As shown in Table F.3, we find no substantial heterogeneity by education.

Table B.1: Population and sample frequencies: age, gender, education

Variables	Frequencies	
	Sample	Population
Age class		
18-29	0.1739	0.1784
30-39	0.1629	0.1641
40-49	0.2298	0.2014
50-59	0.2299	0.2403
60-69	0.2001	0.1990
70+	0.0135	0.0165
Gender		
Males	0.48	0.4993
Females	0.5184	0.50087
Other	0.016	-
Education		
University degree +	0.27	0.2228

Notes: Sample and population frequencies by gender, age and education categories. Geographic representativeness is not reported due to our southern oversampling strategy.

B.2 Balance in the initial and retained follow-up samples

Table B.2 reports pairwise comparisons of baseline characteristics with Co and adds joint tests of whether the listed covariates predict each condition/sample indicator relative to Co. The four pre-specified treatment arms are broadly comparable with Co, with only isolated differences; the joint-test p -values are 0.929, 0.995, 0.964, and 0.308 for T1–T4, respectively. The separately fielded C1 sample has lower average income, lower high-school completion, and a lower employee share than Co and the joint C1–Co composition test is significant ($p < 0.001$). These differences motivate the flexible C1 adjustment reported in Table G.1. Among the 3,091 respondents retained at follow-up, the baseline covariates remain broadly balanced across T1–T4 and Co (Table B.3).

Table B.2: Baseline composition across conditions and samples: pairwise comparisons with Co

Covariate	Co mean	C1-Co	T1-Co	T2-Co	T3-Co	T4-Co
Female	0.518	-0.015 (0.495)	0.022 (0.272)	0.003 (0.870)	-0.006 (0.782)	-0.002 (0.920)
Age category (1-6)	3.155	0.008 (0.889)	0.050 (0.375)	0.007 (0.905)	-0.019 (0.738)	-0.008 (0.891)
Voted in last election	0.808	-0.015 (0.376)	-0.014 (0.395)	0.013 (0.417)	0.016 (0.301)	0.032** (0.042)
Household-income category	1.907	-0.142** (0.032)	-0.022 (0.718)	-0.002 (0.977)	0.024 (0.709)	0.030 (0.643)
High school or above	0.786	-0.218*** (0.000)	0.000 (0.994)	0.009 (0.599)	0.007 (0.674)	0.023 (0.166)
Born in Italy	0.955	0.002 (0.845)	-0.003 (0.759)	0.006 (0.486)	0.004 (0.655)	0.004 (0.667)
Homemaker	0.125	-0.007 (0.597)	0.005 (0.738)	0.000 (0.988)	-0.003 (0.829)	-0.003 (0.842)
Employee	0.403	-0.053** (0.011)	-0.005 (0.792)	-0.012 (0.557)	-0.017 (0.401)	-0.029 (0.147)
Part-time employee	0.096	0.008 (0.525)	0.002 (0.871)	-0.007 (0.539)	-0.006 (0.583)	-0.007 (0.567)
Self-employed	0.084	-0.005 (0.686)	0.008 (0.504)	-0.001 (0.952)	0.003 (0.771)	0.012 (0.294)
Inactive	0.034	0.013 (0.124)	0.003 (0.729)	-0.004 (0.568)	0.005 (0.485)	-0.002 (0.823)
Unemployed	0.083	0.018 (0.139)	-0.004 (0.730)	0.007 (0.557)	0.010 (0.389)	-0.004 (0.715)
Retired	0.104	0.009 (0.505)	-0.011 (0.355)	0.011 (0.392)	-0.005 (0.698)	0.003 (0.808)
Student	0.070	0.017 (0.133)	0.004 (0.737)	0.006 (0.579)	0.012 (0.255)	0.029** (0.011)
Joint test: all covariates		0.000	0.929	0.995	0.964	0.308

Notes: The table reports pairwise comparisons of each condition or sample with Co. The T1-T4 comparisons assess balance within the initial randomised sample. C1 was fielded later in a separate sample, so the C1-Co column describes observed composition differences rather than randomisation balance. Each coefficient is the difference in means between the relevant condition/sample and Co. Exact two-sided p -values from two-sample t -tests are reported in parentheses. The final row reports the p -value from an F-test of the joint predictive power of all listed covariates in a regression of the relevant condition/sample indicator on the balance covariates, estimated separately against Co. Income enters linearly. High school or above and born in Italy are binary indicators. High school or above includes professional education, high school, and university education. Occupation is represented by category indicators. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table B.3: Balance across treatment arms in the follow-up sample

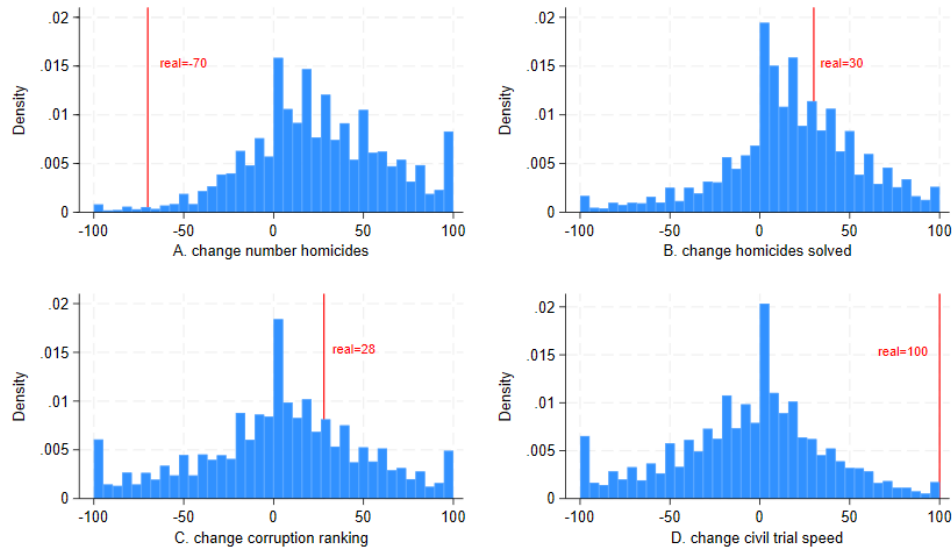
Covariate	Co mean	T1-Co	T2-Co	T3-Co	T4-Co
Female	0.502	0.042 (0.139)	0.015 (0.592)	-0.006 (0.844)	0.011 (0.693)
Age category (1-6)	3.125	0.120 (0.123)	0.037 (0.637)	0.075 (0.343)	0.086 (0.289)
Voted in last election	0.803	0.000 (0.996)	0.017 (0.454)	0.021 (0.329)	0.031 (0.157)
Household-income category	1.803	0.132 (0.129)	0.056 (0.503)	-0.018 (0.828)	0.001 (0.995)
High school or above	0.768	-0.016 (0.507)	-0.007 (0.755)	-0.007 (0.777)	0.011 (0.637)
Born in Italy	0.967	-0.018 (0.118)	-0.003 (0.747)	-0.012 (0.256)	-0.010 (0.379)
Homemaker	0.122	0.021 (0.265)	0.010 (0.590)	0.018 (0.334)	0.007 (0.721)
Employee	0.390	0.029 (0.295)	0.003 (0.900)	-0.016 (0.558)	-0.024 (0.394)
Part-time employee	0.096	-0.021 (0.194)	0.004 (0.828)	-0.002 (0.902)	-0.009 (0.586)
Self-employed	0.081	0.010 (0.533)	-0.014 (0.345)	-0.000 (0.980)	0.027 (0.103)
Inactive	0.036	-0.005 (0.621)	-0.006 (0.541)	-0.000 (0.987)	0.005 (0.667)
Unemployed	0.096	-0.024 (0.129)	-0.003 (0.869)	0.007 (0.661)	-0.023 (0.157)
Retired	0.101	-0.007 (0.663)	0.008 (0.626)	-0.000 (0.978)	0.002 (0.925)
Student	0.077	-0.003 (0.821)	-0.003 (0.851)	-0.007 (0.651)	0.015 (0.346)

Notes: The sample is restricted to respondents who participated in the follow-up survey. The table reports pairwise balance tests comparing each treatment arm with Co. Each coefficient is the difference in baseline means between the relevant treatment arm and Co. Exact two-sided p -values from two-sample t -tests are reported in parentheses. C1 is excluded because respondents assigned to C1 were not invited to participate in the follow-up. Income enters linearly. High school or above and born in Italy are binary indicators. Occupation is represented by category indicators. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

C PRIOR BELIEFS AND REGIONAL MISPERCEPTIONS

C.1 Distribution of prior beliefs

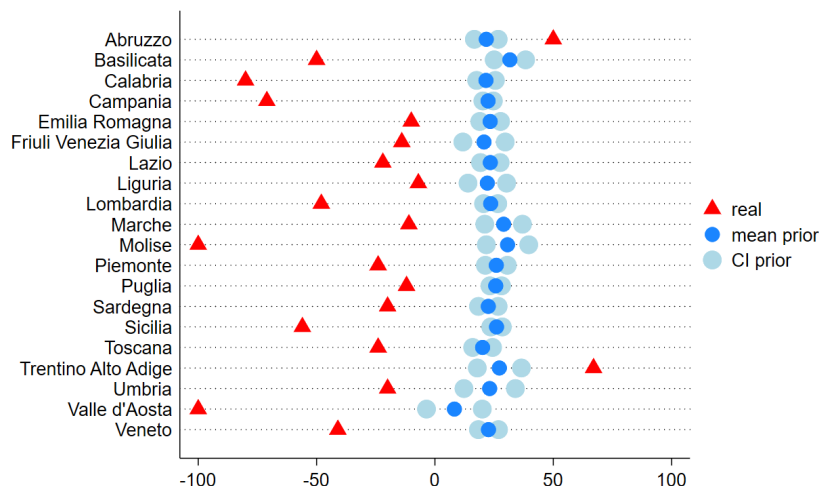
Figure C.1: Prior beliefs



Notes: The blue plots show the distribution of respondents' priors and the red lines report the real changes. Panel A: change in the number of homicides in the last 20 years (decrease of 70%). Panel B: change in the number of homicides solved in the past 20 years (increase of 30%). Panel C: change in the corruption ranking in the past 20 years (increase of 28 positions). Panel D: change in the number of civil trials that are solved within one year in the last decade (increase of 100%).

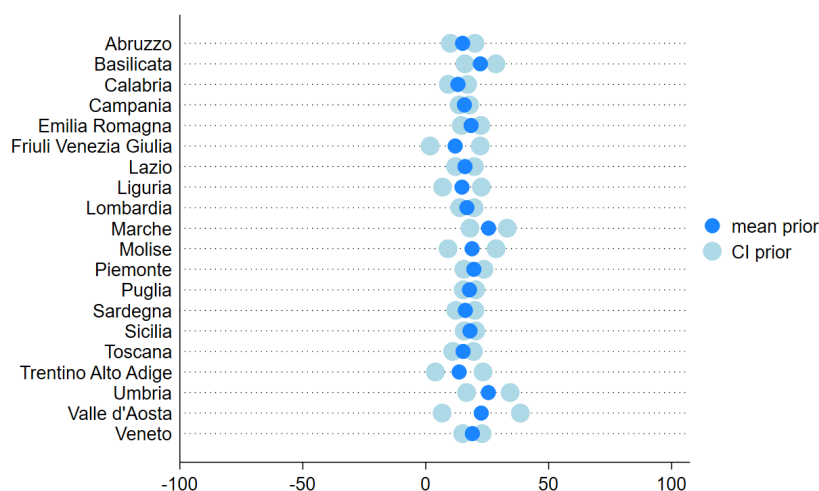
C.2 Regional patterns

Figure C.2: Perceived change in the number of homicides by region



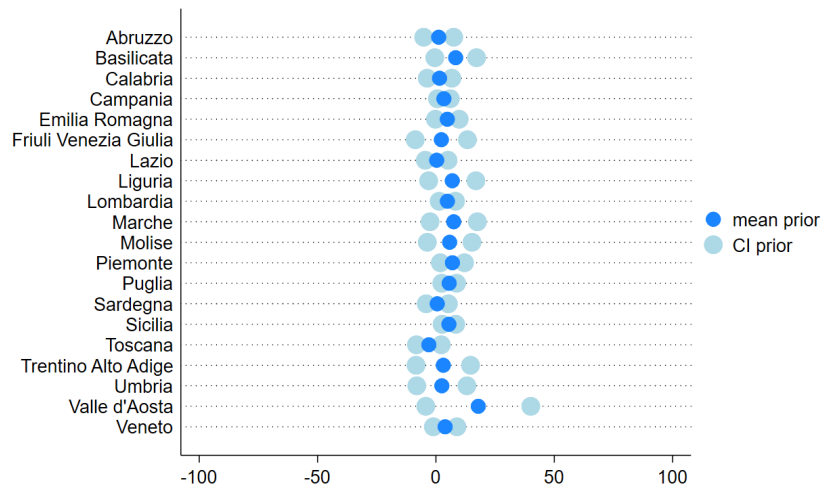
Notes: The red triangles report the real change in the number of homicides between 2006 and 2023 (source: ISTAT). The dark blue circles report the mean of respondents' priors. In light blue the confidence intervals of the means. The distance between the red triangles and the blue dots represents the average misperception at the regional level in our sample.

Figure C.3: Prior beliefs about changes in homicide clearance by region



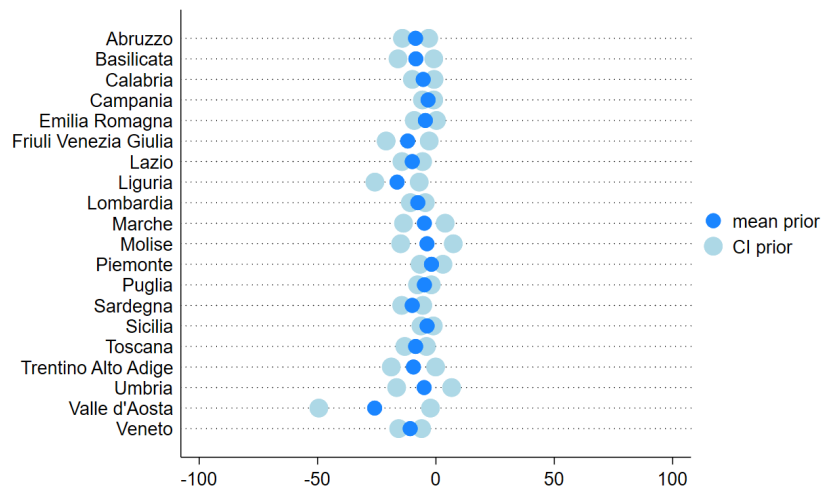
Notes: The dark blue circles report the mean of respondents' priors by region. In light blue the confidence intervals of the mean.

Figure C.4: Prior beliefs about changes in the corruption ranking by region



Notes: The dark blue circles report the mean of respondents' priors by region. In light blue the confidence intervals of the mean.

Figure C.5: Prior beliefs about changes in civil-trial speed by region



Notes: The dark blue circles report the mean of respondents' priors by region. In light blue the confidence intervals of the mean.

D ADDITIONAL BASELINE-TREATMENT RESULTS

D.1 Disaggregated trust and other baseline outcomes

Table D.1: Positive narratives: additional baseline outcomes

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	Trust police	Trust justice	Trust national politicians	Trust regional politicians	Trust municipal politicians	Optimism	Personal connections	Useful policies
<i>Panel A: Pooled treatment</i>								
T1–T4	0.187*** (0.070)	0.140** (0.066)	0.116 (0.073)	0.126* (0.075)	0.146** (0.068)	-0.000 (0.015)	-0.033 (0.066)	0.038 (0.030)
<i>Panel B: Individual treatment arms</i>								
T1	0.243** (0.095)	0.191** (0.094)	0.233** (0.090)	0.235*** (0.086)	0.181** (0.090)	0.011 (0.018)	-0.008 (0.088)	0.079** (0.036)
T2	0.130 (0.092)	0.170* (0.089)	0.058 (0.111)	0.064 (0.105)	0.095 (0.097)	0.007 (0.019)	-0.001 (0.082)	0.027 (0.041)
T3	0.155* (0.084)	-0.002 (0.085)	0.005 (0.096)	0.020 (0.090)	0.100 (0.090)	-0.015 (0.021)	-0.008 (0.081)	0.013 (0.035)
T4	0.224*** (0.084)	0.201** (0.099)	0.170** (0.081)	0.188** (0.085)	0.211** (0.081)	-0.004 (0.018)	-0.119 (0.077)	0.034 (0.042)
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Obs.	6,034	6,034	6,034	6,034	6,034	6,034	6,034	6,034
R ²	0.065	0.015	0.021	0.027	0.031	0.041	0.022	0.020
Mean Co	6.861	5.359	3.743	3.963	4.151	0.405	6.237	4.704
SD Co	2.352	2.400	2.379	2.373	2.425	0.491	2.215	2.197

Notes: This table reports pooled and treatment-specific effects of the *positive narrative* treatments relative to Co. Panel A pools T1–T4; Panel B reports each arm separately. Columns 1–5 and 7 are measured in points on their original 1–10 scales. Column 6 is a binary outcome, so its coefficients are changes in probability. Column 8 is standardised relative to the Co distribution. The Co means and standard deviations at the bottom are reported on the original outcome scales. All specifications include the baseline controls and region and Italy-born fixed effects; standard errors are clustered by province. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

D.2 Inflation and the hypothetical crime-victimisation scenario

Table D.2: Inflation expectations and the hypothetical crime-victimisation scenario

	(1) Inflation expectations	(2) Seek help	(3) Use police/ justice
<i>Panel A: Pooled treatment</i>			
T1–T4	-0.048 (0.031)	-0.002 (0.024)	0.047* (0.028)
<i>Panel B: Individual treatment arms</i>			
T1	-0.020 (0.035)	0.018 (0.037)	0.054 (0.036)
T2	-0.050 (0.039)	-0.041 (0.031)	0.061* (0.036)
T3	-0.009 (0.040)	-0.003 (0.031)	0.020 (0.036)
T4	-0.117*** (0.042)	0.018 (0.032)	0.055 (0.038)
Controls	Y	Y	Y
FE	Y	Y	Y
Obs.	6,034	6,034	5,567
R ²	0.022	0.024	0.074
Mean Co	4.536	0.922	8.383
SD Co	3.589	0.268	2.041

Notes: This table reports pooled and treatment-specific effects relative to Co for inflation expectations and two outcomes from a hypothetical crime-victimisation scenario: willingness to seek help and, conditional on doing so, willingness to turn to law-enforcement or judicial authorities. Panel A pools T1–T4; Panel B reports each arm separately. Coefficients are in standard-deviation units; the Co means and standard deviations are reported on the original scales. All specifications include the baseline controls and region and Italy-born fixed effects; standard errors are clustered by province. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

E FOLLOW-UP PARTICIPATION, OUTCOMES, AND PERSISTENCE

E.1 Follow-up participation and attrition adjustments

Response rates are similar across arms, ranging from 49.9% to 52.5%. The four treatment indicators are jointly insignificant in the response-propensity model ($p = 0.754$), although education and income predict follow-up participation and generate some compositional differences between respondents and attriters. The resulting stabilised weights are modest (0.720–1.673 before trimming), and both untrimmed and trimmed inverse-probability-weighted estimates closely resemble the unweighted results. These checks address selection on observed characteristics but cannot rule out attrition based on unobservables.

Table E.1: Follow-up response rates by experimental arm

Experimental arm	Invited	Respondents	Response rate
Co Control	1,223	633	0.518
T1 General Indirect Trend	1,219	608	0.499
T2 Indirect Trend	1,221	630	0.516
T3 Link & Indirect Trend	1,211	636	0.525
T4 Link & All Trends	1,160	584	0.503
Total	6,034	3,091	0.512

Notes: C1 was not included in the follow-up survey. The response rate is the number of follow-up respondents divided by the number invited in each arm.

Table E.2: Baseline characteristics of follow-up attriters and respondents

Variable	Attriters		Respondents		N	Difference Attriters minus respondents
	N	Mean (SE)	N	Mean (SE)		
Female	2943	0.528 (0.009)	3091	0.515 (0.009)	6034	0.013
High school or above	2943	0.824 (0.007)	3091	0.764 (0.008)	6034	0.060***
Household-income category	2943	1.993 (0.030)	3091	1.836 (0.027)	6034	0.156***
Voted in last election	2943	0.818 (0.007)	3091	0.816 (0.007)	6034	0.002
Not informed	2943	0.042 (0.004)	3091	0.050 (0.004)	6034	-0.008
Born in Italy	2943	0.956 (0.004)	3091	0.958 (0.004)	6034	-0.002
Age: 18–29	2943	0.180 (0.007)	3091	0.165 (0.007)	6034	0.015
Age: 30–39	2943	0.164 (0.007)	3091	0.162 (0.007)	6034	0.003
Age: 40–49	2943	0.223 (0.008)	3091	0.224 (0.007)	6034	-0.001
Age: 50–59	2943	0.224 (0.008)	3091	0.233 (0.008)	6034	-0.008
Age: 60–69	2943	0.192 (0.007)	3091	0.205 (0.007)	6034	-0.013
Age: 70+	2943	0.016 (0.002)	3091	0.012 (0.002)	6034	0.004
Homemaker	2943	0.117 (0.006)	3091	0.133 (0.006)	6034	-0.016*
Employee	2943	0.393 (0.009)	3091	0.389 (0.009)	6034	0.004
Part-time employee	2943	0.095 (0.005)	3091	0.091 (0.005)	6034	0.004
Self-employed	2943	0.093 (0.005)	3091	0.085 (0.005)	6034	0.008
Inactive	2943	0.033 (0.003)	3091	0.035 (0.003)	6034	-0.002
Unemployed	2943	0.082 (0.005)	3091	0.088 (0.005)	6034	-0.006
Retired	2943	0.105 (0.006)	3091	0.102 (0.005)	6034	0.004
Student	2943	0.083 (0.005)	3091	0.078 (0.005)	6034	0.005

Notes: The sample contains the 6,034 respondents in Co and T1–T4 who were eligible for the follow-up. The difference is the attriter mean minus the respondent mean. Standard errors of group means appear in parentheses in the same cells as the corresponding means. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table E.3: Response-propensity model

	(1) Participated in follow-up
T1 General Indirect Trend	-0.063 (0.074)
T2 Indirect Trend	0.003 (0.070)
T3 Link & Indirect Trend	0.036 (0.078)
T4 Link & All Trends	-0.038 (0.075)
Female	-0.097 (0.055)
High school or above	-0.262** (0.083)
Household-income category	-0.057* (0.029)
Voted in last election	0.061 (0.063)
Not informed	0.098 (0.137)
Observations	6034
Treatment indicators: joint p	0.754
All observables: joint p	0.000
Age indicators: joint p	0.692
Occupation indicators: joint p	0.461
Income: p	0.048

Notes: Logit estimates for an indicator equal to one when an invited respondent completed the follow-up. The omitted arm is Co. The model also includes age and occupation indicators and region and Italy-born fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered by province.

Table E.4: Diagnostics for inverse-probability-of-response weights

Weight	Mean	SD	Min.	P1	P99	Max.
Stabilized IPW	1.000	0.114	0.720	0.779	1.288	1.673
Trimmed stabilized IPW	0.999	0.112	0.779	0.779	1.288	1.288

Notes: Stabilized weights use the arm-specific response rate in the numerator and the fitted response probability in the denominator. Trimmed weights are winsorized at the 1st and 99th percentiles.

Table E.5: Follow-up estimates weighted for response propensity

	(1) Police/justice	(2) Public admin.	(3) Politicians	(4) EU
Stabilized IPW	0.084** (0.039)	0.080* (0.041)	0.085** (0.041)	0.080** (0.035)
Trimmed stabilized IPW	0.084** (0.039)	0.080* (0.040)	0.085** (0.041)	0.079** (0.035)
Observations	3,091	3,091	3,091	3,091

Notes: Each row reports the pooled T1–T4 effect relative to Co for one of the four principal follow-up trust outcomes. Outcomes are standardised relative to the Co distribution. Models include the baseline covariates and region and Italy-born fixed effects; standard errors are clustered by province and reported in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table E.6: Lee bounds for follow-up estimates

Outcome	Main	Main	Lee lower	Lee upper	Trim share
Trust police/justice	0.083 [0.036]	0.102 [0.012]	0.011 [0.884]	0.102 [0.208]	0.013
Trust public administration	0.078 [0.053]	0.086 [0.025]	-0.148 [0.030]	0.118 [0.185]	0.013
Trust politicians	0.078 [0.067]	0.079 [0.055]	-0.162 [0.014]	0.115 [0.169]	0.013
Trust in EU	0.080 [0.025]	0.084 [0.015]	0.084 [0.165]	0.113 [0.173]	0.013
Controls	Y	N	N	N	-
FE	Y	N	N	N	-

Notes: The table reports Lee bounds (Lee, 2009) for the pooled T1–T4 effect relative to Co on the four principal follow-up trust outcomes, under monotonic sample selection into the follow-up survey. Column 1 reproduces the covariate-adjusted estimates from Table 1; column 2 omits fixed effects and covariates; columns 3 and 4 report the Lee lower and upper point bounds; and column 5 reports the required trim share. The point bounds are positive for trust in police and justice and trust in European institutions, while they span zero for trust in public administration and trust in politicians. Square brackets contain p -values for the individual endpoint estimates, not confidence intervals for the identified set. Outcomes are standardised relative to Co.

E.2 Sensitivity to the follow-up covariate set

Because education and income predict follow-up participation, Tables E.7 and E.8 verify that the follow-up pattern is not driven by including either covariate individually. The estimates remain close to the main follow-up specification.

Table E.7: Follow-up estimates excluding income from the covariates

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Trust police/justice	Trust public administration	Trust politicians	Trust EU
<i>Panel A: Positive narrative</i>				
T1-T4 = 1	0.087** (0.039)	0.081** (0.039)	0.082** (0.041)	0.084** (0.035)
<i>Panel B: Institutional attribution</i>				
T1	0.084 (0.052)	0.098* (0.051)	0.092* (0.054)	0.059 (0.045)
T2	0.121** (0.052)	0.093* (0.055)	0.089 (0.056)	0.137** (0.055)
T3	0.085* (0.046)	0.066 (0.046)	0.063 (0.051)	0.076* (0.043)
T4	0.053 (0.050)	0.068 (0.049)	0.085 (0.054)	0.061 (0.046)
Obs.	3,091	3,091	3,091	3,091
R ²	0.061	0.038	0.044	0.049
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y
FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
Mean DP	10.71	4.379	11.53	4.335
SD DP	4.309	2.296	6.478	2.547

Notes: The table reports pooled and treatment-specific effects relative to Co on the four principal trust outcomes measured approximately fifty days after the baseline intervention. The specification omits income but otherwise matches Table 3: it includes gender, age, education, voting, and news-consumption controls and region and Italy-born fixed effects. Outcomes are standardised relative to Co; standard errors are clustered by province. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table E.8: Follow-up estimates excluding education from the covariates

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Trust police/justice	Trust public administration	Trust politicians	Trust EU
<i>Panel A: Positive narrative</i>				
T1-T4 = 1	0.083** (0.039)	0.078* (0.040)	0.079* (0.042)	0.080** (0.035)
<i>Panel B: Institutional attribution</i>				
T1	0.074 (0.053)	0.087* (0.052)	0.080 (0.055)	0.045 (0.046)
T2	0.116** (0.052)	0.088 (0.055)	0.084 (0.056)	0.130** (0.054)
T3	0.087* (0.046)	0.068 (0.047)	0.066 (0.051)	0.078* (0.042)
T4	0.054 (0.050)	0.069 (0.050)	0.085 (0.055)	0.063 (0.048)
Obs.	3,091	3,091	3,091	3,091
R ²	0.072	0.048	0.057	0.064
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y
FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
Mean DP	10.71	4.379	11.53	4.335
SD DP	4.309	2.296	6.478	2.547

Notes: The table reports pooled and treatment-specific effects relative to Co on the four principal trust outcomes measured approximately fifty days after the baseline intervention. The specification omits education but otherwise matches Table 3: it includes gender, age, income, voting, and news-consumption controls and region and Italy-born fixed effects. Outcomes are standardised relative to Co; standard errors are clustered by province. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

E.3 Additional follow-up outcomes

Tables E.10 and E.11 report the disaggregated trust components and the remaining exploratory follow-up outcomes, respectively.

Table E.9: Follow-up effects on factual beliefs

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Homicides Italy	Homicides EU	Homicides solved	Corruption ranking	Trial speed
<i>Panel A: Positive narrative</i>					
T1–T4	-0.084* (0.043)	-0.063* (0.035)	0.008 (0.046)	0.064 (0.045)	0.094** (0.041)
<i>Panel B: Institutional attribution</i>					
T1	-0.058 (0.057)	-0.021 (0.043)	-0.009 (0.055)	0.047 (0.045)	0.095* (0.048)
T2	-0.094* (0.050)	-0.070 (0.046)	0.021 (0.057)	0.059 (0.054)	0.080 (0.057)
T3	-0.080 (0.059)	-0.056 (0.055)	0.007 (0.064)	0.050 (0.069)	0.064 (0.056)
T4	-0.105** (0.048)	-0.106** (0.046)	0.012 (0.051)	0.100* (0.053)	0.142*** (0.052)
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Obs.	3,091	3,091	3,091	3,091	3,091
R ²	0.043	0.030	0.017	0.017	0.034
Mean Co	19.49	16.84	16.87	3.231	-1.773
SD Co	37.58	36.08	35.20	43.58	40.48

Notes: This table reports pooled and treatment-specific effects on factual beliefs measured approximately fifty days after the baseline intervention. Panel A pools T1–T4; Panel B reports each arm separately. The outcomes are respondents' expected changes in homicides in Italy, homicides in the European Union, homicides solved in Italy, Italy's position in the corruption ranking, and civil trials resolved within one year. Negative coefficients in columns 1 and 2 indicate expectations of a larger homicide decline. All four treatments contained information about homicide trends; only T4 contained the additional information about homicide clearance, corruption, and trial speed. Outcomes are standardised relative to Co. All specifications include the follow-up controls, region fixed effects, and Italy-born fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered by province. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table E.10: Disaggregated follow-up trust outcomes

	(1) National politicians	(2) Regional politicians	(3) Municipal politicians	(4) Trust police	(5) Trust justice
<i>Panel A: Positive narrative</i>					
T1-T4	0.067 (0.048)	0.069* (0.039)	0.073 (0.044)	0.076 (0.047)	0.072** (0.032)
<i>Panel B: Institutional attribution</i>					
T1	0.042 (0.064)	0.078 (0.049)	0.092 (0.056)	0.076 (0.062)	0.055 (0.048)
T2	0.089* (0.053)	0.067 (0.059)	0.064 (0.055)	0.100* (0.057)	0.106** (0.048)
T3	0.052 (0.054)	0.063 (0.047)	0.060 (0.051)	0.086* (0.051)	0.069 (0.044)
T4	0.083 (0.061)	0.067 (0.046)	0.077 (0.059)	0.040 (0.055)	0.056 (0.044)
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Obs.	3,091	3,091	3,091	3,091	3,091
R ²	0.048	0.052	0.059	0.087	0.049
Mean Co	3.625	3.872	4.025	5.956	4.748
SD Co	2.371	2.361	2.416	2.499	2.390

Notes: The table reports pooled and treatment-specific effects relative to Co on the five component trust measures collected approximately fifty days after the baseline intervention. Panel A pools T1–T4; Panel B reports each arm separately. Outcomes are standardised relative to Co. All specifications include the follow-up controls and region and Italy-born fixed effects; standard errors are clustered by province. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table E.11: Additional exploratory follow-up outcomes

	(1) Optimism ITA	(2) Optimism EU	(3) Prioritize needs	(4) Satisfaction	(5) Change	(6) Positive change	(7) Time change
<i>Panel A: Positive narrative</i>							
T1-T4	0.024 (0.038)	0.109** (0.045)	0.056 (0.042)	0.054 (0.044)	0.030 (0.039)	0.030 (0.047)	0.005 (0.051)
<i>Panel B: Institutional attribution</i>							
T1	-0.052 (0.056)	0.081 (0.053)	0.062 (0.050)	0.024 (0.052)	0.080 (0.057)	0.026 (0.056)	-0.027 (0.066)
T2	0.084* (0.050)	0.183*** (0.050)	0.062 (0.054)	0.067 (0.052)	-0.035 (0.052)	-0.006 (0.061)	0.048 (0.074)
T3	-0.005 (0.054)	0.079 (0.061)	0.058 (0.061)	0.059 (0.060)	0.019 (0.046)	0.019 (0.060)	-0.030 (0.059)
T4	0.070 (0.050)	0.089 (0.062)	0.042 (0.053)	0.067 (0.060)	0.063 (0.054)	0.085 (0.057)	0.030 (0.067)
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Obs.	3,092	3,092	3,091	3,091	3,091	3,091	2,238
R ²	0.034	0.042	0.029	0.035	0.017	0.020	0.031
Mean Co	2.159	2.156	4.828	4.172	0.715	-0.0310	2.297
SD Co	0.779	0.755	2.698	2.342	0.452	0.975	0.910

Notes: The table reports pooled and treatment-specific effects relative to Co on exploratory outcomes collected approximately fifty days after the baseline intervention: optimism about Italy and Europe; whether Italian institutions prioritise national needs; satisfaction with Italian institutions; perceived changes in institutional quality; and the perceived timing of those changes. Panel A pools T1–T4; Panel B reports each arm separately. Outcomes are standardised relative to Co. All specifications include the follow-up controls and region and Italy-born fixed effects; standard errors are clustered by province. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

E.4 Within-respondent persistence and learning

To avoid comparing different respondents or changing the outcome scale across waves, Table E.12 uses the same 3,091 individuals and standardises both waves with the initial Co mean and standard deviation. For trust in police and justice, the estimated T1–T4 estimate is 0.124 standard deviations initially and 0.106 at follow-up; the within-person difference is -0.018 ($p = 0.594$). The other differential changes are also generally imprecise, apart from a marginal increase for trial-speed beliefs. Thus the analysis finds follow-up effects and no statistically detected decay.

Table E.12: Treatment effects at both waves and within-respondent change

	(1) Trust police/justice	(2) Trust public administration	(3) Trust politicians	(4) Homicides	(5) Homicides solved	(6) Corruption	(7) Speed trials
Initial T1–T4 vs. Co	0.124*** (0.038)	0.060 (0.040)	0.064 (0.043)	-0.038 (0.044)	0.015 (0.037)	0.037 (0.039)	0.002 (0.037)
Follow-up T1–T4 vs. Co	0.106** (0.042)	0.086** (0.038)	0.079* (0.041)	-0.077* (0.042)	0.012 (0.045)	0.060 (0.040)	0.093** (0.039)
Differential within-person change	-0.018 (0.033)	0.026 (0.042)	0.015 (0.040)	-0.038 (0.051)	-0.003 (0.048)	0.023 (0.049)	0.091* (0.052)
Respondents	3091	3091	3091	3091	3091	3091	3091

Notes: For each outcome, the sample contains the same 3,091 respondents at the initial and follow-up surveys. Both waves are standardised using the initial-survey Co mean and standard deviation. The third row is the difference between the follow-up and initial treatment–control estimates and is algebraically equivalent to the treatment-by-follow-up coefficient in a two-wave respondent fixed-effects model. It tests differential change. C1 is excluded. Standard errors are clustered by province.

Table E.13: Follow-up heterogeneity by learning

	(1) Trust police/justice	(2) Trust public administration	(3) Trust politicians	(4) Trust EU
T2–T4	0.067 (0.046)	0.041 (0.042)	0.030 (0.044)	0.045 (0.043)
median learner	0.001 (0.178)	-0.016 (0.104)	-0.027 (0.116)	-0.198 (0.124)
T2–T4*median learner	0.211 (0.217)	0.325** (0.134)	0.410** (0.157)	0.458*** (0.142)
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y
FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
Obs.	2,483	2,483	2,483	2,483
R ²	0.128	0.119	0.128	0.105
Mean Co	10.70	4.372	11.52	4.326
SD Co	4.308	2.297	6.473	2.548

Notes: The learner measure is the reduction in the absolute error between respondents' beliefs about homicide changes and the true change (Figure 1). *Above-median learner* equals one when this reduction exceeds the sample median. Because T1 provides information on European rather than Italian homicide trends, this descriptive heterogeneity exercise is restricted to T2–T4. The outcomes are the four principal follow-up trust measures. Outcomes are standardised relative to Co. Models include the follow-up controls and region and Italy-born fixed effects; standard errors are clustered by province. Because learning is measured after treatment, this is a descriptive heterogeneity exercise. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

F TREATMENT-EFFECT HETEROGENEITY

F.1 Heterogeneity by prior beliefs

Table F.1: Heterogeneity using an above- versus below-median priors index

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Trust police/justice	Trust public administration	Trust Politicians	Social trust	Donation
T1–T4	0.114** (0.046)	0.075* (0.040)	0.082** (0.036)	0.102*** (0.039)	0.119*** (0.041)
More optimistic half	0.374*** (0.055)	0.438*** (0.059)	0.436*** (0.053)	0.263*** (0.061)	0.292*** (0.055)
T1–T4 × more optimistic	-0.080 (0.060)	-0.122* (0.063)	-0.053 (0.055)	-0.045 (0.065)	-0.050 (0.059)
Observations	6,034	6,034	6,034	6,034	6,034

Notes: The table reports the median-split priors specification for the five principal outcomes. The more pessimistic half is the omitted category. The first row is the pooled T1–T4 effect for that group; the third row is the difference in the effect for respondents above the median. Controls, fixed effects, and clustering match Table 2. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

F.2 Support of the continuous priors-index estimates

The priors index used in Table 2 is the first principal component of beliefs about changes in homicides (reverse coded), homicide clearance, corruption, and trial speed; higher values indicate more optimistic beliefs about institutional performance. The index is approximately standardised in the estimation sample (mean -0.005 , standard deviation 0.996) and ranges from -3.917 to 3.291 (Figure F.1 and Panel A of Table F.2).

Panel B reports where the fitted treatment effect from the linear interaction model equals zero for each of the five principal outcomes. Every point estimate lies within the observed support of the priors index, but four of the five zero crossings occur only at or above the 87th percentile. The exception is trust in public administration, whose point estimate reaches zero near the 57th percentile. The delta-method confidence intervals are wide. We therefore read the estimates as a general pattern of declining effects as priors become more optimistic, not as evidence of negative effects or sharp thresholds.

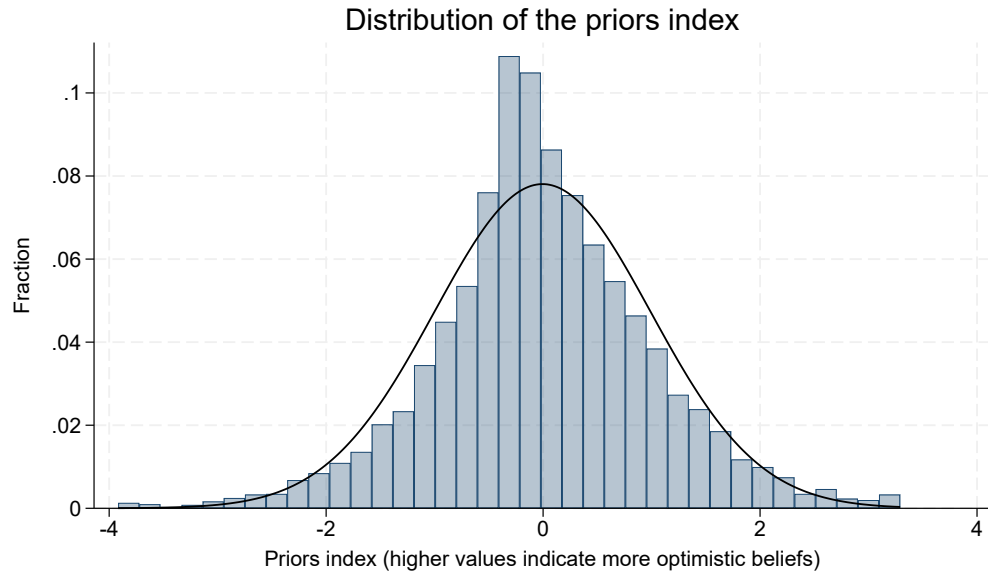


Figure F.1: Distribution of the priors index

Notes: The figure shows the first principal component used in the heterogeneity analysis. Higher values indicate more optimistic beliefs about institutional performance. The overlaid curve is a normal density with the sample mean and standard deviation. The estimation sample excludes C1.

Table F.2: Distribution of the priors index and conditional treatment-effect zero crossings

Panel A: Distribution of the priors index												
Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min.	P5	P10	P25	Median	P75	P90	P95	Max.
Priors index	6,034	-0.005	0.996	-3.917	-1.632	-1.176	-0.557	-0.059	0.584	1.258	1.662	3.291
Panel B: Conditional treatment-effect zero crossings for the five principal outcomes												
Outcome	Treatment		Treatment × priors		Zero crossing		95% CI		Percentile		In support	
Trust in police and justice	0.068**		-0.049*		1.391		[-0.374, 3.156]		91.8		Yes	
Trust in public administration	0.007		-0.083**		0.079		[-0.578, 0.737]		56.6		Yes	
Trust in politicians	0.048*		-0.045		1.060		[-0.957, 3.078]		87.1		Yes	
Social trust	0.075***		-0.037		2.050		[-2.273, 6.373]		97.2		Yes	
Donation	0.089***		-0.079**		1.125		[-0.304, 2.555]		88.2		Yes	

Notes: Panel A summarizes the priors index in the estimation sample. Panel B uses the same specifications as Table 2 for the five principal outcomes. “Treatment” is the pooled T1–T4 coefficient when the priors index equals zero. “Treatment × priors” is its interaction with the index. The zero crossing is $-\hat{\beta}_T/\hat{\beta}_{T \times P}$, the value of the priors index at which the fitted treatment effect equals zero; its confidence interval uses the delta method. “Percentile” is the empirical percentile of that point in the relevant estimation sample, and “In support” indicates whether it is between the observed minimum and maximum. All regressions include the baseline controls, region and Italy-born fixed effects, and province-clustered standard errors. C1 is excluded. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

F.3 Heterogeneity by respondent characteristics

Table F.3: Heterogeneity by university degree

	(1) Trust police/justice	(2) Trust public administration	(3) Trust politicians	(4) Social trust	(5) Donation
T1-T4	0.080** (0.032)	0.041 (0.031)	0.050 (0.030)	0.080** (0.036)	0.081* (0.043)
D	0.114* (0.068)	0.169** (0.070)	0.065 (0.068)	0.187*** (0.062)	-0.066 (0.069)
T1-T4*D	-0.081 (0.075)	-0.097 (0.078)	0.010 (0.072)	0.013 (0.073)	0.038 (0.059)
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Obs.	6,034	6,034	6,034	6,034	6,034
R ²	0.052	0.035	0.054	0.053	0.024

Notes: The table reports heterogeneity in the pooled T1–T4 effect for the five principal outcomes. *D* equals one for respondents with a university degree. The rows report the pooled treatment effect, the association with *D*, and their interaction. Outcomes are standardised relative to Co. Models include the baseline controls and region and Italy-born fixed effects; standard errors are clustered by province. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table F.4: Heterogeneity by employment

	(1) Trust police/justice	(2) Trust public administration	(3) Trust politicians	(4) Social trust	(5) Donation
T1-T4	0.054 (0.043)	0.005 (0.045)	0.025 (0.043)	0.035 (0.047)	0.188*** (0.057)
E	0.016 (0.058)	0.040 (0.054)	-0.050 (0.057)	0.036 (0.058)	0.147** (0.058)
T1-T4*E	0.002 (0.061)	0.010 (0.065)	0.045 (0.062)	0.079 (0.063)	-0.164** (0.063)
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Obs.	6,034	6,034	6,034	6,034	6,034
R ²	0.052	0.034	0.053	0.048	0.025

Notes: The table reports heterogeneity in the pooled T1–T4 effect for the five principal outcomes. *E* equals one for respondents who are employed, self-employed, or working part-time. The rows report the pooled treatment effect, the association with *E*, and their interaction. Outcomes are standardised relative to Co. Models include the baseline controls and region and Italy-born fixed effects; standard errors are clustered by province. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table F.5: Heterogeneity by gender

	(1) Trust police/justice	(2) Trust public administration	(3) Trust politicians	(4) Social trust	(5) Donation
T1-T4	0.054 (0.043)	0.015 (0.044)	-0.003 (0.045)	0.058 (0.042)	0.064 (0.050)
W	-0.014 (0.065)	-0.017 (0.063)	-0.159** (0.063)	-0.185*** (0.055)	-0.077 (0.057)
T1-T4*W	0.003 (0.067)	-0.005 (0.060)	0.106 (0.065)	0.038 (0.060)	0.054 (0.063)
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Obs.	6,034	6,034	6,034	6,034	6,034
R ²	0.052	0.034	0.054	0.046	0.024

Notes: The table reports heterogeneity in the pooled T1–T4 effect for the five principal outcomes. *W* equals one for women. The rows report the pooled treatment effect, the association with *W*, and their interaction. Outcomes are standardised relative to Co. Models include the baseline controls and region and Italy-born fixed effects; standard errors are clustered by province. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table F.6: Heterogeneity by income

	(1) Trust police/justice	(2) Trust public administration	(3) Trust politicians	(4) Social trust	(5) Donation
T1-T4	0.055* (0.030)	0.005 (0.028)	0.029 (0.029)	0.078** (0.031)	0.107*** (0.037)
HI	-0.205** (0.087)	-0.228** (0.101)	-0.268*** (0.092)	-0.095 (0.078)	0.082 (0.104)
T1-T4*HI	-0.008 (0.098)	0.030 (0.092)	0.165* (0.092)	0.008 (0.081)	-0.108 (0.096)
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Obs.	6,034	6,034	6,034	6,034	6,034
R ²	0.054	0.035	0.054	0.046	0.024

Notes: The table reports heterogeneity in the pooled T1–T4 effect for the five principal outcomes. *HI* equals one for respondents in the high-income group. The rows report the pooled treatment effect, the association with *HI*, and their interaction. Outcomes are standardised relative to Co. Models include the baseline controls and region and Italy-born fixed effects; standard errors are clustered by province. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table F.7: Heterogeneity by Southern residence

	(1) Trust police/justice	(2) Trust public administration	(3) Trust politicians	(4) Social trust	(5) Donation
T1-T4	0.091** (0.045)	0.046 (0.044)	-0.014 (0.046)	-0.011 (0.041)	0.018 (0.047)
T1-T4 × S	-0.058 (0.057)	-0.057 (0.059)	0.105* (0.057)	0.145*** (0.053)	0.121* (0.065)
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Obs.	6,034	6,034	6,034	6,034	6,034
R ²	0.052	0.034	0.053	0.047	0.025

Notes: The table reports heterogeneity in the pooled T1–T4 effect for the five principal outcomes. *S* equals one for respondents living in Southern Italy. The first row reports the pooled treatment effect outside the South; the second reports the difference in the treatment effect for Southern respondents. Outcomes are standardised relative to Co. Models include the baseline controls and region and Italy-born fixed effects; standard errors are clustered by province. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table F.8: Heterogeneity by voting

	(1) Trust police/justice	(2) Trust public administration	(3) Trust politicians	(4) Social trust	(5) Donation
T1-T4	0.020 (0.082)	0.012 (0.066)	-0.028 (0.062)	0.114* (0.058)	0.174** (0.079)
V	0.228*** (0.079)	0.214*** (0.067)	0.214*** (0.072)	0.214*** (0.069)	0.143* (0.077)
T1-T4*V	0.043 (0.089)	-0.002 (0.077)	0.097 (0.074)	-0.043 (0.066)	-0.100 (0.089)
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Obs.	6,034	6,034	6,034	6,034	6,034
R ²	0.052	0.033	0.053	0.046	0.024

Notes: The table reports heterogeneity in the pooled T1–T4 effect for the five principal outcomes. *V* equals one for respondents who voted in the most recent election. The rows report the pooled treatment effect, the association with *V*, and their interaction. Outcomes are standardised relative to Co. Models include the baseline controls and region and Italy-born fixed effects; standard errors are clustered by province. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table F.9: Heterogeneity by perceived information reliability

	(1) Trust police/justice	(2) Trust public administration	(3) Trust politicians	(4) Social trust	(5) Donation
T4	0.068 (0.496)	0.001 (0.481)	-0.160 (0.168)	1.283 (2.415)	-0.652** (0.276)
RI	2.700*** (0.255)	1.871*** (0.328)	0.434*** (0.089)	1.945 (1.450)	-0.476*** (0.140)
T4*RI	0.178 (0.564)	0.346 (0.590)	0.349* (0.201)	-1.269 (2.826)	0.416 (0.299)
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Obs.	4,810	4,810	4,810	4,810	4,810
R ²	0.061	0.042	0.047	0.018	0.021

Notes: The table reports heterogeneity in the T4 effect relative to T1–T3 for the five principal outcomes. *RI* indicates that the respondent considered the treatment information reliable. The rows report the T4 effect, the association with *RI*, and their interaction. Outcomes are standardised relative to Co. Models include the baseline controls and region and Italy-born fixed effects; standard errors are clustered by province. Because perceived reliability is measured after treatment, this is a descriptive exercise. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

G MECHANISMS AND THE C1 COMPARISON

G.1 C1 comparison allowing for observed composition differences

Table G.1: Pooled-treatment effects versus C1 allowing for observed composition differences

	(1) Trust police/justice	(2) Trust public administration	(3) Trust politicians	(4) Social trust	(5) Donation
T1–T4 vs. C1: average marginal effect	0.097*** (0.035)	0.044 (0.038)	-0.027 (0.042)	0.043 (0.037)	-0.016 (0.032)
Observations	5,805	5,805	5,805	5,805	5,805

Notes: This robustness exercise reports the T1–T4 versus C1 comparison for the five principal outcomes while allowing the effect to vary with the baseline covariates that differ between the separately fielded C1 and main samples: household-income category, high-school completion, and employee status. The table reports sample-average marginal effects. Models include the baseline controls and fixed effects; standard errors are clustered by province. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

G.2 Inflation and the hypothetical crime-victimisation scenario

Table G.2: Additional outcomes in the C1 comparison

	(1) Inflation expectations	(2) Seek help	(3) Use police/ justice
<i>Panel A: Positive narrative</i>			
T1–T4	0.034 (0.042)	0.111*** (0.034)	0.101** (0.041)
<i>Panel B: Institutional attribution</i>			
T1	0.064 (0.054)	0.131*** (0.043)	0.106** (0.043)
T2	0.033 (0.049)	0.072* (0.040)	0.115** (0.047)
T3	0.072* (0.038)	0.110*** (0.039)	0.074 (0.055)
T4	-0.038 (0.050)	0.132*** (0.044)	0.108** (0.041)
Controls	Y	Y	Y
FE	Y	Y	Y
Obs.	5,805	5,805	5,311
R ²	0.018	0.040	0.078
Mean C1	4.207	0.877	8.175
SD C1	3.618	0.328	2.220

Notes: This table reports pooled and treatment-specific effects of the public-safety treatments relative to the later-fielded C1 comparison for inflation expectations and two outcomes from a hypothetical crime-victimisation scenario: willingness to seek help and, conditional on doing so, willingness to turn to law-enforcement or judicial authorities. Panel A pools T1–T4; Panel B reports each arm separately. Comparisons involving C1 are exploratory because C1 was fielded separately and was not concurrently randomised with Co and T1–T4. Coefficients are in standard-deviation units; the C1 means and standard deviations are reported on the original scales. Models include the baseline controls and region and Italy-born fixed effects; standard errors are clustered by province. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

G.3 Institutional-attribution ratings

The institutional-attribution items were administered only to respondents in the separately fielded C1 sample. Table G.3 uses respondents with nonmissing ratings for all five trends, measured on the same 1–10 scale, and compares each public-safety or justice rating with the same respondent’s rating of state responsibility for the decline in suicides. State attribution is higher for all four public-safety and justice trends, and every difference remains significant at $p < 0.001$ after Holm adjustment across the four comparisons. At the same time, roughly 44% of respondents in this common sample assign the state a score

of 6 or above for the suicide trend, confirming that C1 has weaker institutional content but is not institution-free.

Table G.3: Within-respondent comparisons of institutional attribution in the C1 sample

Trend	Trend mean	Suicide mean	Difference	SE	<i>t</i>	Two-sided <i>p</i>	Holm <i>p</i>	<i>N</i>	Trend ≥ 6	Suicide ≥ 6
Homicide rates	5.881	5.232	0.649	0.069	9.375	< 0.001	< 0.001	969	0.573	0.441
Homicide clearance	5.963	5.232	0.731	0.069	10.539	< 0.001	< 0.001	969	0.562	0.441
Corruption	5.975	5.232	0.743	0.072	10.309	< 0.001	< 0.001	969	0.589	0.441
Trial duration	5.945	5.232	0.713	0.075	9.546	< 0.001	< 0.001	969	0.549	0.441

Notes: The table uses the separately fielded C1 sample, the only sample in which all five institutional-attribution items were administered. Respondents rated state responsibility for each trend on a 1–10 scale. All rows use the same common sample of respondents with nonmissing ratings for all five items. “Difference” is the mean within-respondent difference (indicated trend minus suicide trend). The standard error, *t*-statistic, and two-sided *p*-value come from a paired *t*-test of whether this mean difference equals zero. Holm *p*-values adjust jointly across the four displayed comparisons. The final two columns report the shares assigning a score of 6 or above in this common sample.

H DATA QUALITY AND ROBUSTNESS

H.1 Completion quality and open-ended engagement

The median completion time is 12.3 minutes. Excluding the fastest and slowest 5% of respondents leaves the main pattern broadly similar. Among T1–T4 respondents, 85.9% answer the open-ended credibility item, 68.8% provide a substantive answer, and 45.7% provide an answer matched to at least one content code – which we identified. Estimates among all answerers resemble the full-sample pattern, whereas the stricter content-coded sample produces its clearest positive estimate for trust in police and justice and less precise estimates for the other principal outcomes. Since answering and answer content are measured after treatment, these restrictions are descriptive data-quality checks rather than causal complier analyses.

Table H.1: Open-ended-response engagement and content coding

Open-ended response measure	Count	Share
Answered open-ended item	4,133	0.859
Low-information answer	367	0.076
Substantive answer	3,310	0.688
Content-coded substantive answer	2,200	0.457
Mentions source/data/statistics	824	0.171
Mentions missing or unclear sources	92	0.019
Mentions need to verify/check	216	0.045
Positive credibility/trust statement	1,131	0.235
Skeptical/distrust statement	238	0.049
Information conflicts with perception/news	229	0.048
Mentions homicide/crime/safety	322	0.067
Mentions institutions/police/justice/state	344	0.072
Mentions media/information environment	200	0.042
Mentions numbers/statistics/trends	516	0.107
Technical/error/non-recall comment	50	0.010

Notes: Counts and shares use all 4,811 respondents assigned to T1–T4 as the denominator. Categories are keyword-based, non-exclusive coding of the Italian open-ended responses; they are descriptive and do not replace manual validation.

Table H.2: Data-quality restrictions and immediate treatment effects

	(1) Trust police/justice	(2) Trust public administration	(3) Trust politicians	(4) Social trust	(5) Donation
Exclude fastest/slowest 5%	0.061* (0.031)	0.007 (0.030)	0.070** (0.028)	0.113*** (0.028)	0.114*** (0.033)
Provided an open-ended answer	0.067** (0.029)	0.004 (0.031)	0.053 (0.032)	0.080*** (0.029)	0.090** (0.036)
Content-coded substantive answer	0.099*** (0.032)	-0.013 (0.037)	0.007 (0.037)	0.032 (0.032)	0.046 (0.039)

Notes: Each row reports the pooled T1–T4 effect relative to Co for the five principal outcomes under the indicated restriction. The first row excludes the fastest and slowest 5 percent of survey completions. The second retains treated respondents who supplied any open-ended answer; the third retains treated respondents whose answer is substantive and matched by at least one content code. All Co respondents are retained. The open-ended restrictions are post-treatment diagnostics, not complier estimands. Models use the baseline controls and fixed effects; standard errors are clustered by province. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

H.2 Outcome construction and covariate robustness

Table H.3: Internal consistency and alternative aggregation of trust indices

Index	Construction	Alpha	Item corr.	Estimate	SE	p-value
Immediate: police/justice	Main summed index	0.660	0.493	0.078	(0.028)	0.007
Immediate: police/justice	Std.-item average	0.660	0.493	0.078	(0.028)	0.007
Immediate: state trust	Broader summed index	0.762	–	0.061	(0.028)	0.032
Immediate: state trust	Std.-item average	0.762	–	0.061	(0.028)	0.034
Immediate: politicians	Main summed index	0.899	–	0.056	(0.030)	0.069
Immediate: politicians	Std.-item average	0.899	–	0.056	(0.030)	0.069
Follow-up: police/justice	Main summed index	0.686	0.522	0.100	(0.040)	0.014
Follow-up: police/justice	Std.-item average	0.686	0.522	0.100	(0.040)	0.014
Follow-up: state trust	Broader summed index	0.802	–	0.103	(0.040)	0.012
Follow-up: state trust	Std.-item average	0.802	–	0.103	(0.040)	0.012
Follow-up: politicians	Main summed index	0.903	–	0.083	(0.041)	0.044
Follow-up: politicians	Std.-item average	0.903	–	0.083	(0.041)	0.044
Immediate: police/justice	Single item: police	–	–	0.081	(0.030)	0.009
Immediate: police/justice	Single item: justice	–	–	0.055	(0.027)	0.049
Immediate: state trust	Single item: public admin.	–	–	0.015	(0.030)	0.617
Follow-up: police/justice	Single item: police	–	–	0.095	(0.047)	0.047
Follow-up: police/justice	Single item: justice	–	–	0.081	(0.032)	0.014
Follow-up: state trust	Single item: public admin.	–	–	0.086	(0.038)	0.027

Notes: The table reports Cronbach's alpha for multi-item trust indices and estimated pooled T1–T4 effects relative to Co under the main specification; the treatment estimates are therefore coefficients on the pooled T1–T4 indicator. For two-item indices, the table also reports the inter-item correlation. "Std.-item average" constructs the index as the average of component items first standardised relative to the Co distribution, and then standardises the resulting average relative to Co. Single-item rows report the component outcomes separately. All specifications include the baseline controls and region and Italy-born fixed effects; standard errors are clustered by province. C1 is excluded.

Table H.4: Pooled-treatment effects without baseline covariates

Outcome	Estimate	SE	p-value	Observations
<i>Panel A: Immediate outcomes</i>				
Trust police/justice	0.078	(0.028)	0.007	6034
Trust public administration	0.015	(0.030)	0.617	6034
Trust politicians	0.056	(0.030)	0.069	6034
Social trust	0.081	(0.028)	0.005	6034
Donation	0.094	(0.035)	0.008	6034
<i>Panel B: Follow-up outcomes</i>				
Trust police/justice	0.100	(0.040)	0.014	3091
Trust public administration	0.086	(0.038)	0.027	3091
Trust politicians	0.083	(0.041)	0.044	3091
Trust in EU	0.082	(0.034)	0.019	3091

Notes: The table reports pooled T1–T4 effects relative to Co after omitting the baseline covariates from the principal baseline and follow-up specifications. Panel A contains the five principal baseline outcomes; Panel B contains the four principal follow-up trust outcomes. All specifications retain region and Italy-born fixed effects and cluster standard errors by province. C1 is excluded. Outcomes are standardised relative to the Co distribution.

H.3 Post-video obfuscation outcomes

Table H.5: Effects on post-video obfuscation questions

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Print to online	TV to online	Print obstacle	Broadcast obstacle
T1–T4 vs. Co	-0.021 (0.038)	-0.008 (0.037)	0.021 (0.053)	-0.080* (0.043)
Observations	6,034	6,034	6,034	4,897

Notes: Pooled T1–T4 effects relative to Co for four questions about changes in media consumption and obstacles to online media. Models include the baseline controls and fixed effects; standard errors are clustered by province. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

I MULTIPLE HYPOTHESIS TESTING AND SPECIFICATION DIAGNOSTICS

I.1 Multiple hypothesis testing adjustments

Table I.1 reports conventional and dependence-adjusted p -values for the outcomes retained in the article using the correction method proposed by List et al. (2019). The immediate T1–T4 versus Co and T1–T4 versus C1 panels contain the five principal trust and donation outcomes. At follow-up, the table reports both the four trust outcomes and the five factual-belief outcomes, because belief updating is a central diagnostic of the corrective-information interpretation. In the immediate Co comparison, trust in police and justice, social trust, and donations remain significant at 5% after adjustment. The four follow-up trust estimates remain detectable at 10% ($p = 0.063$ – 0.079), whereas none of the factual-belief estimates reaches the 10% threshold after adjustment. Against C1, only trust in police and justice remains significant at 5% after adjustment across the five principal outcomes.

Table I.2 reports a separate adjustment across the five T4 factual-belief coefficients from Table E.9. T4 is the strongest and most information-rich treatment (T4 is the only one receiving updates on homicides solved, corruption and trial speed): in addition to the homicide trends, it provides information about homicide clearance, corruption, and trial speed. After adjustment, its effects on homicide beliefs in Italy and the European Union remain significant at 10% (adjusted $p = 0.091$ and $p = 0.092$), while the trial-speed effect remains significant at 5% (adjusted $p = 0.035$). The clearance and corruption estimates do not remain significant. This result is consistent with more detectable updating in the arm receiving the strongest mix of information.

Table I.3 completes the multiple-testing analysis for the four main-text tables by reporting adjusted inference for the treatment-specific estimates in Table 3. For each treatment arm,

the adjustment is calculated separately across the five principal baseline outcomes and the four follow-up trust outcomes. The T1 and T4 effects on trust in police and justice, trust in politicians, social trust, and donations remain significant at 5% after adjustment. At follow-up, only the T2 effects on trust in police and justice and trust in the European Union remain detectable at 10%. The adjusted results therefore do not reveal a monotonic pattern as institutional attribution becomes more explicit across T1–T4.

Table I.4 adjusts the treatment, priors-index, and treatment-by-priors hypotheses separately across the five principal outcomes. The priors index strongly predicts all five outcomes. None of the five interaction estimates remains significant at 5% after adjustment; the public-administration interaction is marginal at 10%. We therefore describe the heterogeneity pattern as suggestive and outcome-specific.

Table I.1: Pooled estimates with multiple-testing-adjusted inference

Outcome	Family	Coefficient	Conventional p	MHT-adjusted p
<i>Panel A: Immediate outcomes, T1–T4 vs. Co</i>				
Trust police/justice	1	0.071	0.011	0.033
Trust public administration	1	0.010	0.723	0.738
Trust politicians	1	0.052	0.076	0.144
Social trust	1	0.077	0.007	0.038
Donation	1	0.092	0.007	0.031
<i>Panel B: Follow-up outcomes, T1–T4 vs. Co</i>				
Trust police/justice	1	0.083	0.036	0.072
Trust public administration	1	0.078	0.053	0.079
Trust politicians	1	0.078	0.067	0.064
Trust in EU	1	0.080	0.025	0.063
Homicides in Italy	2	-0.084	0.054	0.209
Homicides in EU	2	-0.063	0.073	0.204
Homicides solved	2	0.008	0.863	0.865
Corruption	2	0.064	0.164	0.299
Trial speed	2	0.094	0.024	0.124
<i>Panel C: Immediate outcomes, T1–T4 vs. C1</i>				
Trust police/justice	1	0.109	0.002	0.017
Trust public administration	1	0.054	0.167	0.462
Trust politicians	1	-0.021	0.588	0.828
Social trust	1	0.034	0.346	0.702
Donation	1	-0.006	0.846	0.853

Notes: Dependence-adjusted multiple-hypothesis-testing p -values are calculated separately within the displayed outcome families. Family 1 contains the principal trust and donation outcomes. In the follow-up panel, family 2 contains the five factual-belief outcomes used to assess belief updating. Inflation expectations, useful-policy beliefs, seeking help, and calling the police are not included in an MHT family. Conventional p -values use province-clustered standard errors.

Table I.2: T4 follow-up belief estimates with multiple-testing-adjusted inference

Outcome	Coefficient	Standard error	Conventional p	MHT-adjusted p
Homicides in Italy	-0.105	0.048	0.031	0.091
Homicides in EU	-0.106	0.046	0.023	0.092
Homicides solved	0.012	0.051	0.807	0.816
Corruption	0.100	0.053	0.061	0.121
Trial speed	0.142	0.052	0.008	0.035

Notes: The table reports the T4 coefficients from the arm-specific specifications in Online Appendix Table E.9. T4 is compared with Co while retaining the other treatment indicators and the full Table E.9 estimation sample. All specifications include the follow-up controls, region fixed effects, and Italy-born fixed effects; standard errors are clustered by province. Dependence-adjusted multiple-hypothesis-testing p -values are calculated across the five displayed T4 factual-belief coefficients using 3,000 bootstrap replications.

Table I.3: Arm-specific estimates from main Table 3 with multiple-testing-adjusted inference

Outcome	T1			T2			T3			T4		
	Coef.	p	MHT p	Coef.	p	MHT p	Coef.	p	MHT p	Coef.	p	MHT p
<i>Panel A: Baseline outcomes</i>												
Trust police/justice	0.100	0.008	0.020	0.066	0.086	0.291	0.026	0.461	0.771	0.093	0.011	0.048
Trust public administration	0.032	0.299	0.309	0.016	0.711	0.710	-0.026	0.513	0.691	0.019	0.596	0.598
Trust politicians	0.096	0.008	0.023	0.025	0.570	0.733	0.007	0.846	0.846	0.079	0.017	0.043
Social trust	0.090	0.003	0.013	0.063	0.086	0.256	0.046	0.259	0.640	0.112	< 0.001	0.002
Donation	0.126	0.003	0.012	0.058	0.165	0.372	0.087	0.034	0.136	0.099	0.021	0.046
<i>Panel B: Follow-up outcomes</i>												
Trust police/justice	0.073	0.170	0.296	0.116	0.029	0.074	0.087	0.061	0.159	0.054	0.283	0.288
Trust public administration	0.087	0.098	0.240	0.089	0.108	0.161	0.068	0.149	0.229	0.069	0.170	0.348
Trust politicians	0.079	0.156	0.317	0.083	0.141	0.155	0.066	0.200	0.205	0.086	0.124	0.321
Trust EU	0.046	0.319	0.333	0.131	0.018	0.069	0.078	0.068	0.153	0.062	0.188	0.312

Notes: The table reproduces the treatment-specific coefficients from main Table 3. Each treatment is compared with Co while retaining the other three treatment indicators. Dependence-adjusted multiple-hypothesis-testing p -values are calculated separately for each treatment arm across the five principal baseline outcomes in Panel A and across the four follow-up trust outcomes in Panel B. All specifications include the baseline controls, region fixed effects, and Italy-born fixed effects; standard errors are clustered by province. The adjustment uses 3,000 bootstrap replications.

Table I.4: Priors heterogeneity with multiple-testing-adjusted inference

Outcome	Family	Treatment			Priors index			Treatment $\times$ priors		
		Coef.	p	MHT p	Coef.	p	MHT p	Coef.	p	MHT p
Trust police/justice	1	0.068	0.012	0.036	0.241	< 0.001	< 0.001	-0.049	0.097	0.234
Trust public administration	1	0.007	0.810	0.801	0.291	< 0.001	< 0.001	-0.083	0.025	0.085
Trust politicians	1	0.048	0.075	0.143	0.297	< 0.001	< 0.001	-0.045	0.177	0.279
Social trust	1	0.075	0.007	0.034	0.201	< 0.001	< 0.001	-0.037	0.298	0.314
Donation	1	0.089	0.007	0.036	0.238	< 0.001	< 0.001	-0.079	0.025	0.105

Notes: Conventional p -values use province-clustered standard errors. MHT p -values are dependence-adjusted separately for each coefficient type across the five principal outcomes: trust in police and justice, trust in public administration, trust in politicians, social trust, and donation. The interaction is pooled T1–T4 assignment multiplied by the continuous prior-beliefs index. With 3,000 bootstrap replications, the smallest estimated adjusted p -value is 1/3000; values below 0.001 are displayed as < 0.001.

I.2 Randomisation inference

Table I.5: Randomisation-inference p -values for arm-specific baseline estimates

Outcome	Arm	Estimate	Clustered p	RI p
Trust police/justice	T1	0.100	0.008	0.009
Trust police/justice	T2	0.066	0.086	0.088
Trust police/justice	T3	0.026	0.461	0.462
Trust police/justice	T4	0.093	0.011	0.008
Trust public administration	T1	0.032	0.299	0.325
Trust public administration	T2	0.016	0.711	0.712
Trust public administration	T3	-0.026	0.513	0.509
Trust public administration	T4	0.019	0.596	0.596
Trust politicians	T1	0.096	0.008	0.015
Trust politicians	T2	0.025	0.570	0.569
Trust politicians	T3	0.007	0.846	0.843
Trust politicians	T4	0.079	0.017	0.021
Social trust	T1	0.090	0.003	0.007
Social trust	T2	0.063	0.086	0.086
Social trust	T3	0.046	0.259	0.257
Social trust	T4	0.112	<0.001	<0.001
Donation	T1	0.126	0.003	0.005
Donation	T2	0.058	0.165	0.179
Donation	T3	0.087	0.034	0.038
Donation	T4	0.099	0.021	0.026

Notes: The table reports randomisation-inference p -values for the arm-specific estimates in Table 3, Panel A, covering the five principal baseline outcomes. C1 is excluded. We permute treatment labels among Co and T1–T4 while preserving the realised arm sizes, re-estimate the same covariate-adjusted specification with region and Italy-born fixed effects and province-clustered standard errors, and compare the observed absolute clustered t -statistic with its permutation distribution. The reported p -value uses the standard plus-one correction.

I.3 Binned added-variable plots

Figure I.1 provides a graphical companion to the pooled linear specifications for the five principal baseline outcomes. It plots residualised outcomes against residualised T1–T4 assignment after removing the baseline controls and fixed effects, using equally populated bins.

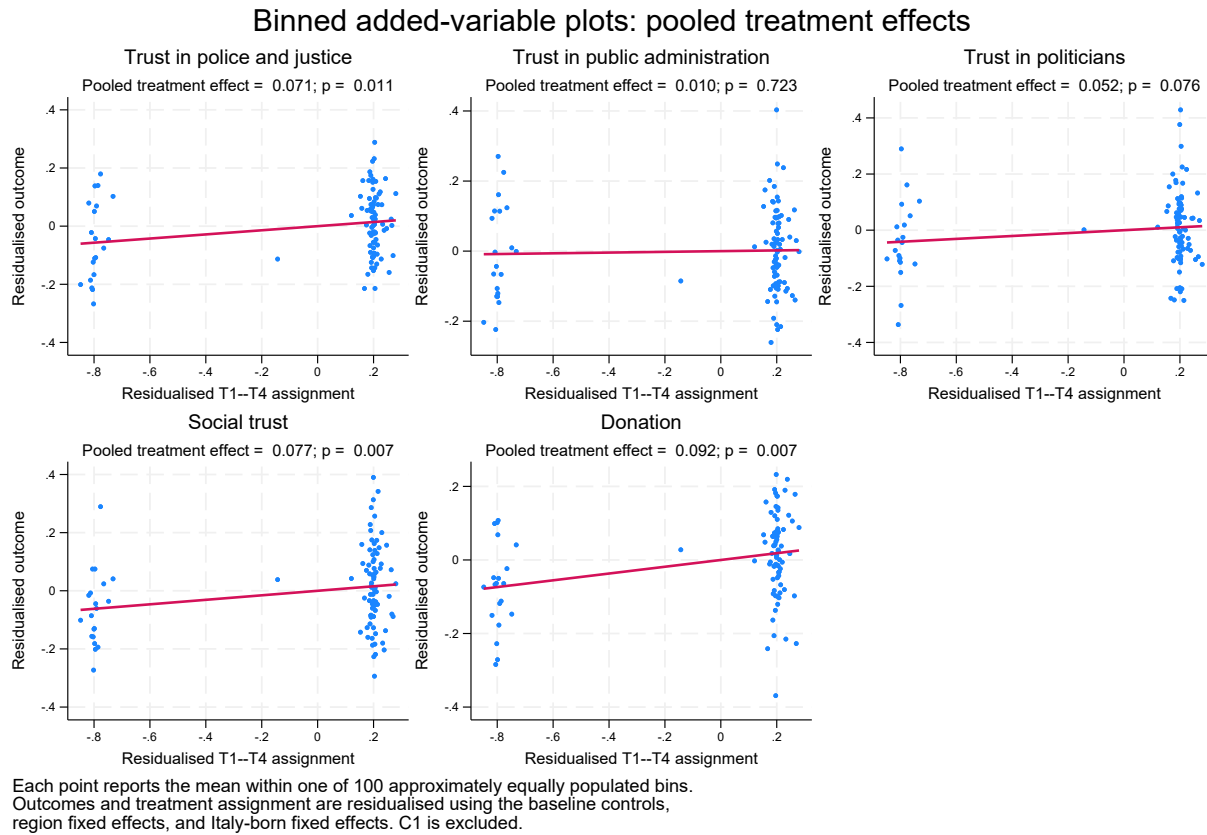


Figure I.1: Binned added-variable plots for the five principal baseline outcomes

Notes: Each point is the mean within one of 100 approximately equally populated bins. The five principal outcomes and pooled T1–T4 assignment are residualised using the baseline controls and region and Italy-born fixed effects. C1 is excluded.