

# Executive Accountability Beyond Outcomes: Experimental Evidence on Public Evaluations of Powerful Prime Ministers

Michael Becher\*      Sylvain Brouard†

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## Abstract

While executives in many democracies have constitutional powers to circumvent the majoritarian legislative process to make policy, political scientists know relatively little about whether and when ordinary people hold executives accountable for the process they use. To study this issue beyond the American presidency, we conduct a series of large survey experiments in France, where the institution of the confidence procedure puts the government in a strong position relative to parliament. Our experiments highlight that public evaluations of the executive reflect a fundamental trade-off between policy and process. If they face significant opposition in the legislative process, executives either have to accept policy failure or risk punishment for the use of procedural force. People dislike both results, and the average popularity gain of using the confidence procedure over not delivering the policy is modest. Moreover, in some contexts executives are strictly better off not legislating rather than applying force.

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\*Institute for Advanced Study in Toulouse, University Toulouse 1 Capitole. Email: michael.becher@iast.fr

†Sciences Po Paris, CEVIPOF. Email: sylvain.brouard@sciencespo.fr

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According to much of political science, government leaders have reasons to expect that they may be held accountable by voters for the outcomes they produce (or fail to produce). However, scoring major legislative accomplishments is hard because it requires confronting competing interests and ideas. When facing opposition to their policy agenda, executives in many contemporary democracies have the constitutional power to use procedures that circumvent the majoritarian legislative process to make policy. Prominent examples of such powers are executive orders and confidence vote procedures. Political opponents are usually quick to criticize the use of “procedural force” by executives as unfair or anti-democratic in spirit, or portray it as a signal of political weakness and incompetence. But these procedural critiques often go together with self-interested disagreements about policy or political posturing. At the same time, executives can be reluctant to use their constitutional powers despite anticipated policy gains.

How ordinary people assess the legislative performance of the executive is crucial for executives’ incentives to practice institutional forbearance rather than constitutional hardball politics as well as the policies resulting from political bargaining. In the long-run, the interplay between citizens and executives’ actions shapes democratic legitimacy and stability. While institutional theories demonstrate how the formal powers of executives influence policy (Howell, 2003; Huber, 1996*b*), we know much less about the microfoundations of how people assess executives facing tough choices over policy and legislative process. Do voters focus on outcomes and ignore the process through which they have been achieved? Or do considerations about process matter independently of policy preferences and partisan attachments? While standard spatial models or theories of retrospective voting focus on outcome-based political evaluations and accountability<sup>1</sup>, in recent years political scientists have started to pay

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<sup>1</sup>Large literatures examine voter responses to party positions (Iversen, 1994; Tomz and Houweling, 2008), policy decisions (Healy and Malhorta, 2009; Wlezien, 2017), and the economy (Duch and Stevenson, 2008; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2000).

more attention to process. However, several empirical challenges related to the strategic use of constitutional force make it difficult to study the role of process in accountability. Moreover, existing research is almost exclusively focused on the United States and its presidential constitution (Christenson and Kriner, 2017*a,b*, 2019; Graham and Svobik, 2019; Reeves and Rogowski, 2016, 2018).

In this paper, we go beyond the case of the American presidency and provide new insights on whether and when citizens hold executives accountable for the process they use to make policy. They have implications for the incentives of government leaders and highlight non-institutional limits to executive dominance. Conceptually and empirically, we focus on the institution of the confidence vote procedure as the strongest constitutional weapon available to executives (i.e., prime ministers) in many parliamentary and semi-presidential democracies.<sup>2</sup> By invoking this procedure, prime ministers credibly fuse the vote on a policy issue with a vote on the survival of the government, and in some countries the government's proposal may become law without an explicit vote in parliament as long as there is no majority to break the government. Bargaining theory shows that this institution can decidedly shift policy outcomes in favor of the prime minister relative to backbenchers, coalition partners, and parliament more broadly (Diermeier and Feddersen, 1998; Huber, 1996*b*).

Using the confidence procedure to make policy is a highly visible and salient political event. For example, in 1993 British prime minister John Major invoked the confidence procedure to ratify the Maastricht treaty against the rebels within his own party. But several observers also remarked that the process had significant costs. The prime minister

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<sup>2</sup>It exists in most of Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand. In 9 of the 17 cases covered by Huber (1996*b*, 271), the prime minister can unilaterally invoke the procedure. After 1990, many democracies in central and Eastern Europe adopted it (Evans and Schleiter, 2019). It is also featured in several constitutions in Africa (<https://www.constituteproject.org>).

“emerged bloodied and bruised”, unpopular in the electorate and presiding over a divided party.<sup>3</sup> In Germany, chancellor Gerhard Schröder used the procedure to force his Green coalition partner to support the war in Afghanistan. Although perhaps not the “nuclear option” it is sometimes referred to, the confidence vote has been used in a restrained and selective manner. For instance, in France the procedure was used, on average, 1.5 times per year between 1958 and 2018 – affecting a small number (51) of the more than 5000 laws passed in that period.

This is puzzling from the perspective of purely outcome-oriented theories. The spatial model assumes that people have induced preferences over the process of lawmaking based on their policy preferences. It implies that policy ends can justify the procedural means (Acemoglu, Robinson and Torvik, 2013). Theoretically, however, people evaluating executives may care about both outcomes and process (Huber, 1996*b*). This suggests that prime ministers who face veto hurdles and care about their popularity can face a stark trade-off between getting punished for not getting things done or for using constitutional force.

Empirically, we analyze a series of survey experiments, most of them embedded in a French election panel. France is a theoretically relevant case because its 1958 constitution, which influenced constitutional design around the world, provides the prime minister with a strong confidence procedure to circumvent the normal parliamentary process to make laws (Huber, 1996*a*). Our experimental design overcomes several vexing empirical problems. Strategic selection, endogeneity, and multiple attributes of executives and their performance as lawmakers make it difficult to establish whether democratic process matters for accountability using observational data. The few existing survey-experimental studies most directly addressing these issues focus on whether presidents in the U.S. are punished for pursuing a particular policy by procedural force rather than working through the legislature (Christenson and Kriner, 2017*a,b*; Reeves and Rogowski, 2018). This is clearly important. However,

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<sup>3</sup>Eugene Robinson. “Major survives vote of confidence.” *Washington Post*, July 24, 1993.

the executive's incentives are also shaped by how voters respond to the alternatives of trying but failing to pass policy or taking no action. Not considering these counterfactuals can understate the trade-off voters and executives face between policy and process.

Our experiments randomize different vignettes concerning the attributes and performance of the prime minister that may come to power after the upcoming election: partisanship, which policy is proposed, whether the policy is enacted by majority vote or constitutional force or is not passed, as well as the economic context. We find that ordinary people evaluating prime ministers put significant weight on policy and party. But we clearly reject the null hypothesis that they do not care about process. A prime minister who enacts a policy using constitutional force through the confidence procedure is evaluated significantly more harshly than a prime minister who passes the same policy through majority voting in the assembly. Importantly, there is a substantive willingness to punish prime ministers for the use of procedural force even among co-partisans and those who prefer the policy to the status quo. If passing policy without constitutional force is not feasible, prime ministers either have to accept policy failure or risk punishment for the use of procedural force. We find that people dislike both results. The average popularity gain of using the confidence procedure over not delivering the policy is modest. Moreover, our results suggest that prime ministers who care about their popularity can be strictly better off not legislating rather than applying force.

Taken together, our findings underscore the importance of both outcome and process evaluations for political accountability. They are broadly consistent with recent evidence from the U.S. (Christenson and Kriner, 2017*b*; Reeves and Rogowski, 2018). Going further, we study a political institution that is absent in presidential systems but takes a central place in the constitutional architecture elsewhere. Our design accounts for missing counterfactuals and generates new evidence on the trade-off between policy and process. As a result, we can better explain the real-world behavior of prime ministers and the functioning of representative democracy.

## Theoretical motivation

Canonical theories of the confidence vote procedure capture the idea that public evaluations of prime ministers may reflect both their policy achievements, as in the standard spatial model, and their actions with respect to process (Huber, 1996*b*; Huber and McCarty, 2001). While prime ministers may employ constitutional force in the form of a confidence vote to pass their proposal against significant parliamentary opposition, these theories assume that ordinary people typically dislike the executive's use of constitutionally legal but extraordinary means to bypass majoritarian decision making in the legislative arena. Opposition to constitutional force may be rooted in a mix of motivations, including normative concerns about democracy and signaling about leadership competence or the quality of the policy proposal. Whatever the motive, public qualms about the use of procedural force shape the incentives of prime ministers to use their prerogative. Public opinion may thus shape whether prime ministers engage in constitutional hardball or forbearance as well as the resulting policy compromise. However, there is no experimental evidence on the relevance of process in the evaluation of prime ministers pursuing their policy agenda with and without the confidence procedure.

To fix the theoretical ideas that guide our empirical investigation<sup>4</sup>, is it sufficient to consider a political situation with a binary policy choice  $x$  between the status quo, denoted by  $q$  or a policy proposal,  $p$ , made by the prime minister. Moreover, we consider three possible actions taken by the prime minister with respect to the policy. First, policy proposal  $p$  is submitted to a majority vote in parliament and it passes (this case is abbreviated as *mv*). Second, the policy proposal is passed after the prime minister uses the confidence vote procedure (*cv*). Third, the policy proposal is not passed. In particular, consider the

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<sup>4</sup>Our empirical analysis is exploratory in the sense that it is based on the theoretical expectations spelled out below but not pre-registered hypotheses.

case where the government withdraws the bill from consideration ( $w$ ). In many democratic regimes, including France, not further pursuing a policy is the most common way of government proposals to die as governments rarely lose floor votes or confidence votes.<sup>5</sup> We can represent the satisfaction of citizen  $i$  with the prime minister, denoted by  $S_i$  as a function of the policy outcome,  $x = \{p, q\}$ , and the actions taken by the prime minister, denoted by  $a = \{mv, cv, w\}$ . Following behavioral extensions of the spatial model (Adams, 2001), we also account for partisanship. Somewhat more formally,

$$S_i = \begin{cases} u(|x_i - p|) + \gamma CoP & \text{if } a = mv \\ u(|x_i - p|) + \gamma CoP + \alpha_i & \text{if } a = cv \\ u(|x_i - q|) + \gamma CoP + \beta_i & \text{if } a = w \end{cases}$$

where  $u(|x_i - x|)$  represents policy motivations. As in the standard spatial model, they are captured by a general loss function such that a larger distance between the policy outcome  $x$  and the preferred policy  $x_i$  corresponds to lower welfare. Following Huber's model (1996b),  $\alpha_i$  captures a procedural penalty (or reward) for the use of the confidence vote. It is a summary parameter that may combine a bundle of motivations. As indicated by the subscript, it may be heterogeneous across individuals. The co-partisanship term (CoP) is a dummy equal to 1 if the individual shares the partisanship of the prime minister, and zero otherwise.

Our principal expectation is that, on average, there is a negative causal effect of using the confidence vote on popular satisfaction with the executive, holding fixed policy and party. It follows from theories of the confidence vote as well as the broader, multi-disciplinary literature on process in the evaluation of decision-makers discussed below. Using the notation above, the individual causal effect of the confidence vote on satisfaction with the prime minister

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<sup>5</sup>In one of the experiments, we also allow for no policy action. This is discussed later.

is  $S_i(cv) - S_i(mv) = \alpha_i$ . It cannot be identified from the data because of the fundamental problem of causal inference. We only observe one potential outcome,  $S_i(cv)$  or  $S_i(mv)$ , for each individual. However, our experimental design enables us to obtain unbiased estimate of the average causal effect of the confidence vote for the French population:  $E(S_i(cv)) - E(S_i(mv)) = E(\alpha_i)$ .

*E1: On average, the use of procedural force in the form of the confidence vote procedure rather than normal parliamentary voting to pass a policy reduces public satisfaction with the the prime minister.*

Going beyond average effects, it is important to assess the heterogeneity of the procedural penalty with respect to the alignment of partisanship and policy preferences. Following scholarship on the importance of partisanship and policy motivations for the evaluation of politicians, punishment for the use of procedural force should be contingent (Christenson and Kriner, 2017a). If partisanship or policy-motivated reasoning are dominant relative to process motivations, then we should observe highly asymmetric effects: While people who oppose the prime minister based on a different partisanship and/or policy preferences will punish the use of procedural force, co-partisans and those who agree with the policy should be acquiescent and largely refrain from punishing “their” prime minister. The absence of a procedural effect for co-partisans or aligned respondents would indicate an important limitation to accountability beyond outcomes (Graham and Svobik, 2019). In contrast, we explore the possibility that even co-partisans and those who prefer the prime minister’s policy proposal negatively respond to the use of procedural force:  $E(S_i(cv|p \succ q)) - E(S_i(mv|p \succ q)) < 0$  and  $E(S_i(cv|CoP = 1)) - E(S_i(mv|CoP = 1)) < 0$ .

*E2: A penalty for using the confidence vote compared to majority voting exists regardless of co-partisanship with the prime minister or congruent policy preferences.*

When no parliamentary majority is available in the absence of a confidence vote, prime ministers face the hard political choice between being punished for the use of procedural force or for not delivering the policy outcome. We will explore empirically how people resolve this trade-off. To do so, the experiments will also include the outcome of a policy proposal that is not passed, leaving the status quo policy in place. If it is always more popular to rely on procedural force compared to withdrawing policy or refraining from legislating, incentives clearly push prime ministers toward playing constitutional hardball. Withdrawal leaves the status quo policy in place. In addition, there may be a non-policy effect of non-getting things done (captured by  $\beta_i$ ).

An ancillary goal of this paper is to unbundle the mix of motives that is summarized by  $\alpha_i$ . First, informational accounts of policymaking and accountability suggest that rational voters can rely on highly visible actions of executives as a signal about the quality of their leadership and the policy proposal. While this informational logic concerns expectations about (future) outcomes, it can provide a foundation for public limits on the use of executive power. The use of procedural force may be seen as a signal that the executive lacks crucial skills to govern, such as the ability to select and manage a competent staff, formulate compelling policy and forge alliances (Huber 1996a, 119; also see Duch and Stevenson 2008, 131-147).

Second, process-based evaluations may also reflect an intrinsic value. Prime ministers' use of constitutional force to circumvent collective decision-making in the legislative assembly stands in conflict with the notion that democratic decision making, in the legislative stage, requires voting. Simple majority voting in particular "is widely seen as *the* democratic method and departures from it are usually seen as requiring some special justification" (Ward and Weale, 2010, 40). In normative political theory, this view has been justified based on the principle of political equality. When there are fundamental disagreements about policy, the ideal of democracy "supports a roughly majoritarian way of making final decisions" (Christiano, 2008, 103). Relatedly, social choice theory has shown that the method of majority

rule embodies basic notions of fairness and equality. It is well-known that majority rule may not lead to a decisive winner in some situations. Following Arrow's Impossibility Theorem, however, it is clear that the pathologies of majority rule apply to any non-dictatorial decision method, and some theorists have argued that majority rule is the most robust voting rule as it works well for the largest domain of preferences (Dasgupta and Maskin, 2008).

Of course, actual legislative procedures never resemble pure majority voting, as there are inequalities in agenda setting and amendment rights, and citizens are not political theorists. What matters is that majoritarian decision making processes in real-world assemblies tend to be closer to the democratic norm than executive unilateralism. This is not to say that the latter has no place in democratic constitutions. For instance, constitutional designers in countries like France have argued that government stability and effectiveness merit the price of "rationalizing" parliament (Huber, 1996*a*, ch. 2).

Should we thus expect ordinary people to hold prime ministers accountable for how they achieve policy ends? Some public opinion scholars argue that people's intrinsic views about the democratic decision-making process matter independently of their policy preferences or partisan leanings, and have the potential to shape the behavior of executives (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2001; Reeves and Rogowski, 2016, 2018). This perspective also draws on research on procedural fairness in psychology and behavioral economics. Procedural justice theory argues that people's evaluations of allocation decisions or leaders responsible for them are not only responsive to outcomes but also to perceptions about the fairness of the allocation process, such as whether a leader considered views from multiple sides or took enough time to make a careful decision (Tyler, Rasinski and McGraw, 1985). Most studies in this body of research have focused on implementation decisions rather than policymaking and they often focus on process perceptions rather than variation in actual decision-making procedures (Esaiasson et al., 2016). Beyond American presidents, we know very little about the relevance of process for the evaluation of chief executives.

## Experimental design

We implemented a series of factorial or conjoint survey experiments. Three of the four experiments were embedded in the French National Election Survey (FNES) conducted before the parliamentary and presidential elections held in May and June of 2017 (for a timeline, see Online Appendix Figure A1).<sup>6</sup> Using a sample that is representative of the French electorate is important as survey experiments from convenience samples may not recover real-world political behavior (Hainmueller, Hangartner and Yamamoto, 2015). In the experiments, we randomly vary multiple dimensions of prime ministers and their performance as lawmakers.

## Constitutional setting

France provides an ideal setting for the experiments. The constitution of the French Fifth Republic adopted in 1958 is a textbook case of semi-presidentialism and rationalized parliamentarism that puts an emphasis on government effectiveness and stability and has been widely emulated (Duverger, 1980; Huber, 1996*a*). The constitution endows the prime minister, as the head of government appointed by the president but responsible to the lower house of parliament (*Assemblée nationale*), with strong powers to curtail or bypass legislative debate and majoritarian voting procedures.

The strongest and most controversial legislative power is contained in Article 49.3 of the constitution. It provides the prime minister with a confidence vote procedure that is incorporated into our experiments. The procedure enables the government to enact policies with the

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<sup>6</sup>This is a panel survey conducted online by IPSOS. As nearly all surveys in France, sampling is done with a quota method based on age, gender, occupation, region and type of residential area (Gschwend, 2005). The sample closely approximates the subsequent voting behavior in the first round of the presidential election: the mean absolute error of the vote intentions in last wave of the panel before the elections was very low (.6) and the (close) ranking of the four leading candidates was accurate. See <https://www.enef.fr/>.

force of law without a vote in the *Assemblée nationale* unless a majority of deputies votes to censure and thus break the government. However, this institution has been contested since its inception. It is “one of the most controversial aspects of the Constitution” (Huber, 1996a, 54). It is often described as unfair, heavy-handed or anti-democratic by politicians and democratic theorists. Of course, such criticisms from politicians may be part of political mobilization against the government rather than sincere qualms about procedure. Altogether, the confidence procedure has been invoked 88 times since 1958.<sup>7</sup> A confidence-vote is material for front-page news (Becher, Brouard and Guinaudeau, 2017; Huber, 1996a) and the public has a fairly good knowledge of the process (Online Appendix, p. 3.)

The confidence procedure was a salient feature of French politics during the time of the first survey. Prime minister Manuel Valls relied on the procedure three times to “ram through parliament” his labor market reform against opposition in his parliamentary party and mass protests in the street.<sup>8</sup> As was widely reported in the media, these episodes featured public controversy over the policy and the method of lawmaking. They occurred in the month before and in the month after our first experiment and three years before our last experiment. Our experimental results are consistent across this time span.

## Design principles

Our approach shares with existing survey experiments the ability to address the strategic selection problem. Theoretically, executives strategically choose the means to pursue a policy (Huber, 1996b). If the use of procedural force is constrained by voter evaluations, they will occur for some policies but not others, diminishing the ability of researchers to find comparable observations in non-experimental data (Reeves and Rogowski, 2018).

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<sup>7</sup>See <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/connaissance/engagements-49-3.asp>.

<sup>8</sup>Anne-Sylvaine Chassany. “French government bypasses parliament to force through jobs bill.” *The Financial Times*, May 10, 2016.

Moreover, our experiments share several important design principles. They ask respondents to consider a hypothetical but plausible political situation that may emerge after the upcoming election. Each experiment randomly assigns different vignettes about the legislative actions of a potential future prime minister and then asks respondents to evaluate the prime minister’s overall performance. We focus on the prime minister because the constitutional power to use procedural force, by means of the confidence vote, belongs to the prime minister, not the president. Consistent with this, the media reports the use of this procedure as a decision of the prime minister (for examples, see Online Appendix p. 3). Moreover, under unified government popular evaluations of the prime minister are highly predictive of evaluations of the president, and under divided government the prime minister is the main focus of accountability for domestic matters (Lewis-Beck, 1997).

**Multiple attributes.** The vignettes deliberately confront respondents with richer information about the prime minister’s action with respect to policy and process as well as other attributes, such as party or economic conditions, all of which are varied experimentally. While the goal is to capture how respondents react to goal conflicts between policy outcomes and legislative process, there is information, as in the real-world, about additional attributes. We also vary the policy issues to increase external validity. In comparison to single-attribute experiments, this design approximates a more realistic environment and thus enhances the theoretical and external validity of the results (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2014).

**Multiple counterfactual policy outcomes.** A policy may be adopted by majority vote in the national assembly or it may be adopted using the confidence vote procedure. This enables us to compare whether using procedural force matters compared to majority voting. In addition, a policy may be proposed but not adopted. While governments in many non-presidential systems are rarely defeated in a parliamentary vote, this does not mean that they always manage to pass their agenda. A government’s policy proposals may die in committee,

expire with the end of the parliamentary session or be withdrawn for lack of support. Our experiments capture this possibility of proposing but failing to enact a policy. While not included in previous studies, theoretically the counterfactual that the government may not get things done is key to the incentives of executives considering the use of procedural force.

**Outcome variable.** After being shown a particular vignette, respondents are asked to evaluate the prime minister on a 11-point scale that asks about the satisfaction with the prime minister’s action, ranging from absolutely not satisfied (0) to absolutely satisfied (10).<sup>9</sup> The dependent variable does not specifically ask whether respondents approve of the use of the confidence vote because the goal of the experiments is to assess how voters assess executive performance more broadly, which is what ultimately matters for accountability. Respondents have to weight potentially competing considerations to come to a summary judgement (as in Reeves and Rogowski, 2018). In all analyses reported below, the dependent variable is rescaled to vary between 0 and 1.

The focus on satisfaction is consistent with the theoretical framework of Huber (1996*b*), where public opinion directly enters into prime ministers’ objective function. It captures that governments in France and elsewhere are finely attuned to public opinion because it is expected to shape future electoral contests within the party and in the general electorate. For instance, prime ministers who experience a large decline in popularity may never become viable presidential candidates (e.g., Manuel Valls). A large body of empirical work has documented that satisfaction and vote choice are highly correlated (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2000, 201), and we replicate this relationship in the context of our experiments (Online Appendix Table A2). Hence, a logical first step is to evaluate how executive actions affect evaluations.<sup>10</sup> Our last experiment adds outcome variables related to different mechanisms.

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<sup>9</sup>“In this instance, would you be satisfied or not with the Prime Minister’s action?”

<sup>10</sup>The experiments refrained from asking a vote choice question as this requires comparing

**Sample size.** Our unusually large sample size ( $N > 19,000$  in experiment 1,  $N > 6,000$  in experiment 2 and  $N > 15,000$  in experiment 3) ensures that we have several hundred respondents for a particular vignette (we are more precise below). It enables us to show only one vignette per experiment. This design avoids carryover effects from exposing respondents to repeated rating tasks (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2014), which is frequently done in existing studies, and it limits respondent disengagement. As in any survey, some respondents may nonetheless fail to pay attention. They may be satisficing (e.g., by answering randomly). The main effect of such behavior is to add noise to the data, reducing our statistical power to detect effects. However, recent work on the impact of satisfying in factorial experiments suggests that it has a limited impact even in designs with a larger number of attributes (Bansak et al., 2019). Furthermore, our large sample size helps to mitigate this concern. It also facilitates the analysis of heterogeneity in the treatment effects.

## Experiment 1: Party, policy and process

The first experiment is designed to answer the following questions: First, holding policy outcomes and party fixed, are prime ministers punished by the public for the use of procedural force—in the form of the confidence procedure—compared to making policy by majority rule? Second, are process effects mainly driven by those who disagree with the policy content or do not share the prime minister’s partisanship? Third, how large is the procedural punishment compared to the punishment for not getting things done?

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the incumbent with an alternative candidate that may also vary on multiple dimensions but does not necessarily have a track record as prime minister. Only comparing prime ministers would be too artificial as in the real-world voters only face one incumbent. For this reason, we opt for simpler design with a single vignette (or profile) rather than a paired design. A next step would be to study a more complex design including a challenger.

The experiment was included in the wave of the FNES administered on the internet between June 17 and 27, 2016 (with a sample size of 19,383 respondents). The topic was introduced by a short paragraph on the confidence vote procedure.<sup>11</sup> It re-states conventional trade-off between efficient government and collective parliamentary decision making identified in the French debate since the inception of the Fifth Republic, without taking sides. It is followed by a factual question about the use of confidence vote in the last 12 months. Only 10% of the respondents did not report any knowledge of at least one of the three uses of the confidence vote between mid-June 2015 and mid-June 2016. The prompt and information question were not repeated in experiments 2 and 3 conducted several months later. The fact that we find similar process effects in these experiments indicates that the initial priming was not crucial. Results in the Online Appendix shows that respondents who were never primed react very similarly to the use of constitutional force compared to those primed once months before (Figure A6). We also re-ran a version of this experiment without any prime about the confidence vote in a fresh sample of respondents, replicating our results (see Online Appendix, Experiment 4).

In the experiment, each respondent was presented with a relatively short and straightforward vignette where the party of the prime minister, the issue of the policy proposal, and the legislative process and outcome were randomly allocated. Table 1 provides the full wording for each profile of experimental conditions (translated into English, French versions are available upon request). The wording resembles factual newspaper reports. Altogether, there are 24 different vignettes (or attribute profiles) and there are around 800 respondents for each of them. A randomization check shows that the vignettes are balanced across pre-treatment co-variates (Online Appendix Table A2).

As the use of procedural force is only meaningful when there is political conflict, the policy proposal is always presented as being associated with “heated debates both with

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<sup>11</sup>See Online Appendix, p. 3.

Table 1: Vignette question wording for experiment 1

	Majority vote condition	Confidence vote condition	Withdrawal condition
Wealth tax	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to <i>increase the wealth tax</i> . Then the reform is adopted <i>by a majority in the National Assembly</i> after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to <i>increase the wealth tax</i> . Then the reform is adopted <i>without a parliamentary vote on the bill as the Prime minister invoked a confidence vote (article 49.3)</i> after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to <i>increase the wealth tax</i> . Then the reform is <i>not adopted as the Prime Minister withdrew the bill</i> after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.
Refugees	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to <i>to limit the number of refugees and asylum seekers welcome in France</i> . Then the reform is adopted <i>by a majority in the National Assembly</i> after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to <i>to limit the number of refugees and asylum seekers welcome in France</i> . Then the reform is adopted <i>without a parliamentary vote on the bill as the Prime minister invoked a confidence vote (article 49.3)</i> after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to <i>to limit the number of refugees and asylum seekers welcome in France</i> . Then the reform is <i>not adopted as the Prime Minister withdrew the bill</i> after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.

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Notes: \*Party is a random allocation of one of the following: Left Party, the Socialist party, the Republicans, the National Front. In total, there are 24 different experimental conditions. Original survey wording is in French.

the opposition and within the majority”. The prime minister belongs to one of the four parties that were at the time of the survey the four most important parties in France (from left to right): the Left Party, the Socialist party (PS), the Republicans, and the National Front. The survey was conducted 10 months before the elections and there was considerable political uncertainty. In this context, considering that different parties may win is plausible. The PS and the Republicans (under various names) were the two main parties for most of the Fifth Republic and the four included parties received 82% of the vote in the last election that occurred before the experiment (regional elections in December 2015). However, dissatisfaction with the incumbent PS and scandals involving the Republicans meant that it was by no means a foregone conclusion that one of them would again win the premiership (neither of them did).<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, each vignette was randomly assigned to one of two policy issues and to one of three legislative conditions. The prime minister proposes either “to increase the wealth tax” or “to limit the number of refugees and asylum seekers welcome in France”. By design, this controls information about who is responsible for the policy action (Duch, Przepiokra and Stevenson, 2015). Related survey experiments on public evaluations of American presidents emphasize the importance of studying concrete policy issues that may conflict with attitudes about process (Christenson and Kriner, 2017*b*; Reeves and Rogowski, 2018). We selected these two policies because both issues are salient in France (and many other countries) and they have opposite ideological direction: the wealth tax increase is a left-leaning proposal whereas the limitation of refugees is a right-leaning one. Prior surveys suggested that a little more than half of the public favored each proposal (Online Appendix, p. 3). All profiles are plausible. While left prime ministers may be more likely to propose increasing the wealth tax

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<sup>12</sup>The party of the president elected in June 2017 (*En Marche*) was created only two months before the survey and E. Macron was neither candidate for the 2017 presidential election nor a front runner in the polls at the time. Note that experiment 3 differs.

and less inclined to reduce immigration than right prime ministers, in Europe governments of all colors have strengthened immigration controls and right governments facing the European Unions' fiscal rules have not been beyond increasing taxes.<sup>13</sup>

There are three possible legislative outcomes. In the *Majority vote* condition, the prime minister's proposal is adopted by "a majority in the National Assembly". In the *Confidence vote* condition, the prime minister's proposal is adopted "without a parliamentary vote on the bill as the Prime minister invoked a confidence vote (article 49.3)." In the *Withdrawal* condition, the prime minister's proposal "is not adopted as the Prime Minister withdrew the bill". Withdrawing a bill from further consideration is the main form of legislative defeat for the government in France. Consistent with the theory of Huber (1996b), there has been no case where a prime minister was defeated in a confidence vote.

## Main results

We are interested in the marginal effect of a particular experimental condition rather than differences between individual vignettes.<sup>14</sup> To assess our first theoretical expectation (E1), for instance, we like to know how much satisfaction with the prime minister changes, on average, when the policy is adopted using the confidence vote procedure rather than by majority vote. This is what Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto (2014) call the average marginal component effect (AMCE). Intuitively, it is the effect of changing one feature in a profile, say the confidence vote, averaged across all other conditions, in this case party and policy proposals. Given the completely independent randomization of conditions, the AMCE is non-parametrically identified and can be estimated using an ordinary least squares regression that includes dummy variables for each component of each experimental condition

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<sup>13</sup>Excluding profiles seen as less likely, such as somewhat surprising policy proposals for a given party or extreme parties, does not change the results (Online Appendix Figure A4).

<sup>14</sup>Online Appendix Figure A3 displays results for each vignette.

(Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2014). Thus, the statistical model we employ includes a dummy for the confidence vote condition, another for the withdrawal condition and uses the majority vote condition as the baseline. It also includes three party dummies (PS is the baseline), one policy dummy (wealth tax is the baseline), and an intercept.

Figure 1 reports the main results from the first experiment. Panel (a) shows the estimated AMCEs with 95% confidence intervals. In line with our first theoretical expectation, respondents evaluate prime ministers more favorably when they manage to pass a policy by majority vote rather than by constitutional force using the confidence vote. Using force leads to a drop in satisfaction of 0.084. Recall that the dependent variable was rescaled to range between 0 and 1. This effect is precisely estimated and substantively relevant. It corresponds to a 16% reduction compared to average satisfaction with prime ministers in the majority vote condition. Given the strong relationship between satisfaction and vote choice (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000, 201; estimated in Online Appendix Table A2 for this electoral cycle), it is highly likely that the magnitude of the process effect is electorally relevant. At the same time, policy outcomes are clearly important. The experiment reveals that failing to adopt the policy leads to significantly lower evaluations of the prime minister compared to the majority vote condition. The negative effect of 0.13 corresponds to a 25% reduction of satisfaction. Respondents neither like executives who use procedural force nor those who are not effective policymakers.<sup>15</sup>

It is also instructive to consider the effect of the confidence vote relative to bill withdrawal as the reference category. Using the confidence vote to pass the policy improves, on average, the satisfaction with the prime minister compared to not passing the policy by 0.048 ( $\pm 0.01$ ). However, this boost is small, about one-third, compared the effect achieving the same outcome through a majority vote ( $0.13 \pm 0.01$ ). Procedural force neutralizes much of the popularity gain from delivering the policy. This suggests a hard choice for prime ministers.

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<sup>15</sup>Results are similar across policy issues (Online Appendix Figure A5).

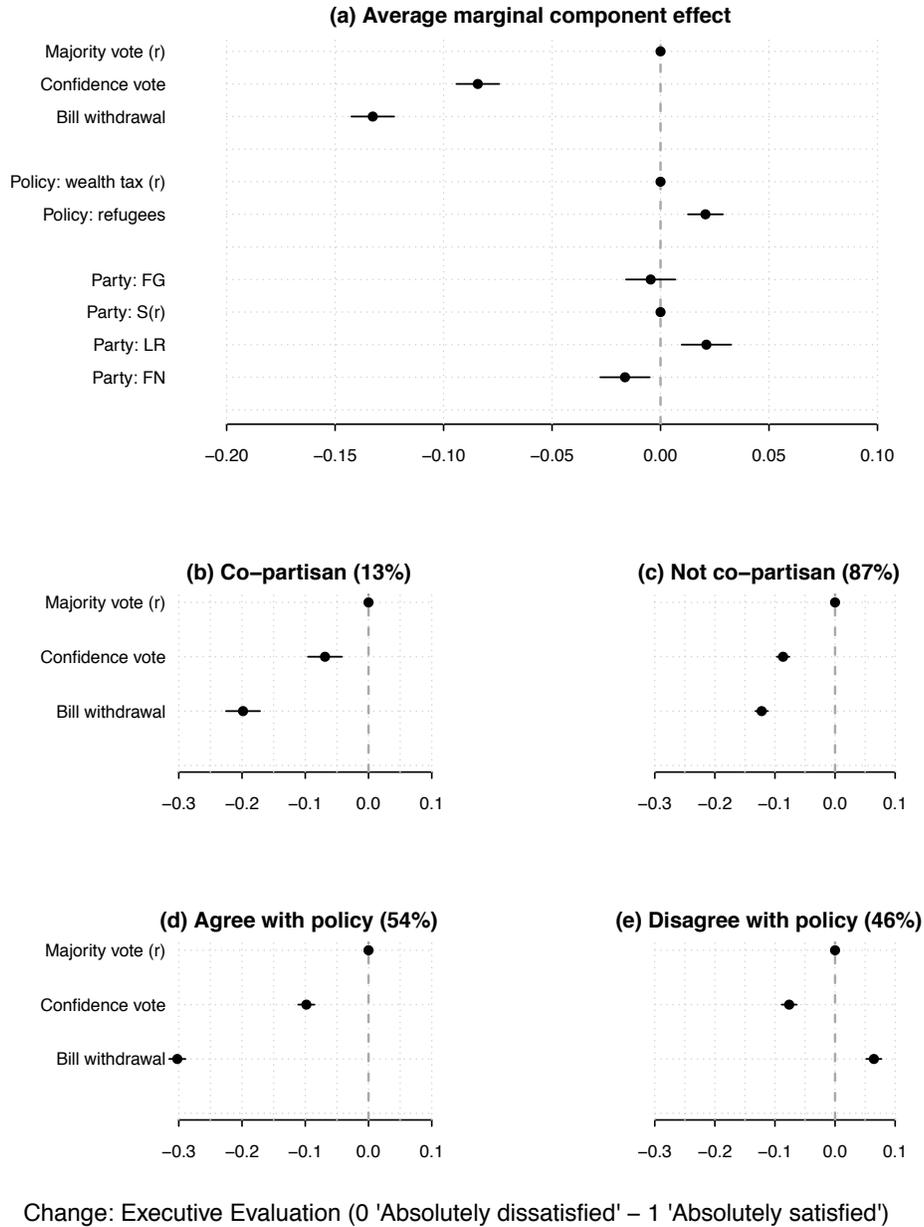


Figure 1: Effects of the executive’s legislative performance and party affiliation on public evaluations. Based on experiment 1 (N=19,283) embedded in French election study (June 2016), these plots show the effects of randomly assigned attributes on the satisfaction with the prime minister, rescaled to vary from 0 (“Absolutely dissatisfied”) to 1 (“Absolutely satisfied”). Plot (a) shows the Average Marginal Component Effects for all attributes. The remaining plots show conditional effects of confidence vote and bill withdrawal across partisanship and policy preferences (policy/party attributes are included but not displayed). Linear regression estimates; horizontal bars represent 95% confidence intervals; points without bars denote reference category.

Panels (b) - (e) of Figure 1 speak to our theoretical expectation (E2) concerning the heterogeneity of the effects with respect to partisan and policy alignment between respondents and the (hypothetical) prime minister. We find that a penalty for using procedural force exists even for respondents who share the partisanship or policy preferences of the prime minister. Panels (b) and (c) plot the AMCEs conditional on whether the respondent is a co-partisan of the prime minister. The partisanship of respondents was measured in a separate survey wave one month before the experiment. Co-partisans evaluate their prime minister significantly less favorably after the use of procedural force. The effect is of similar magnitude than that of people who do not share the prime minister’s partisanship.

Panels (d) and (e) plot the AMCEs conditional on whether respondents agree or disagree with the policy. Earlier in the survey, respondents were asked questions about both policy issues, which allows us to identify who agrees and who disagrees with the proposal.<sup>16</sup> Again, the confidence vote effect is similar across policy preferences. Even people who like the policy hold the prime minister accountable or the use of procedural force. In line with instrumental theories, the effect of withdrawal strongly varies with respondents’ policy preferences and co-partisanship. Those that agree with the prime ministers policy proposal harshly punish legislative defeat, those who disagree with the proposal modestly improve their assessment. This also implies that incentives to use the confidence vote compared to withdrawal, rather than majority voting, vary depending on which group of voters prime ministers cater to.

These experimental results are consistent with a time-series study of the use of the confidence vote and prime ministerial popularity in France (Becher, Brouard and Guinaudeau, 2017), which finds that French prime ministers experience a significant decline in popularity after using the confidence vote. The experimental evidence also corroborates the views of selected French politicians revealed in qualitative interviews (Huber, 1996a).

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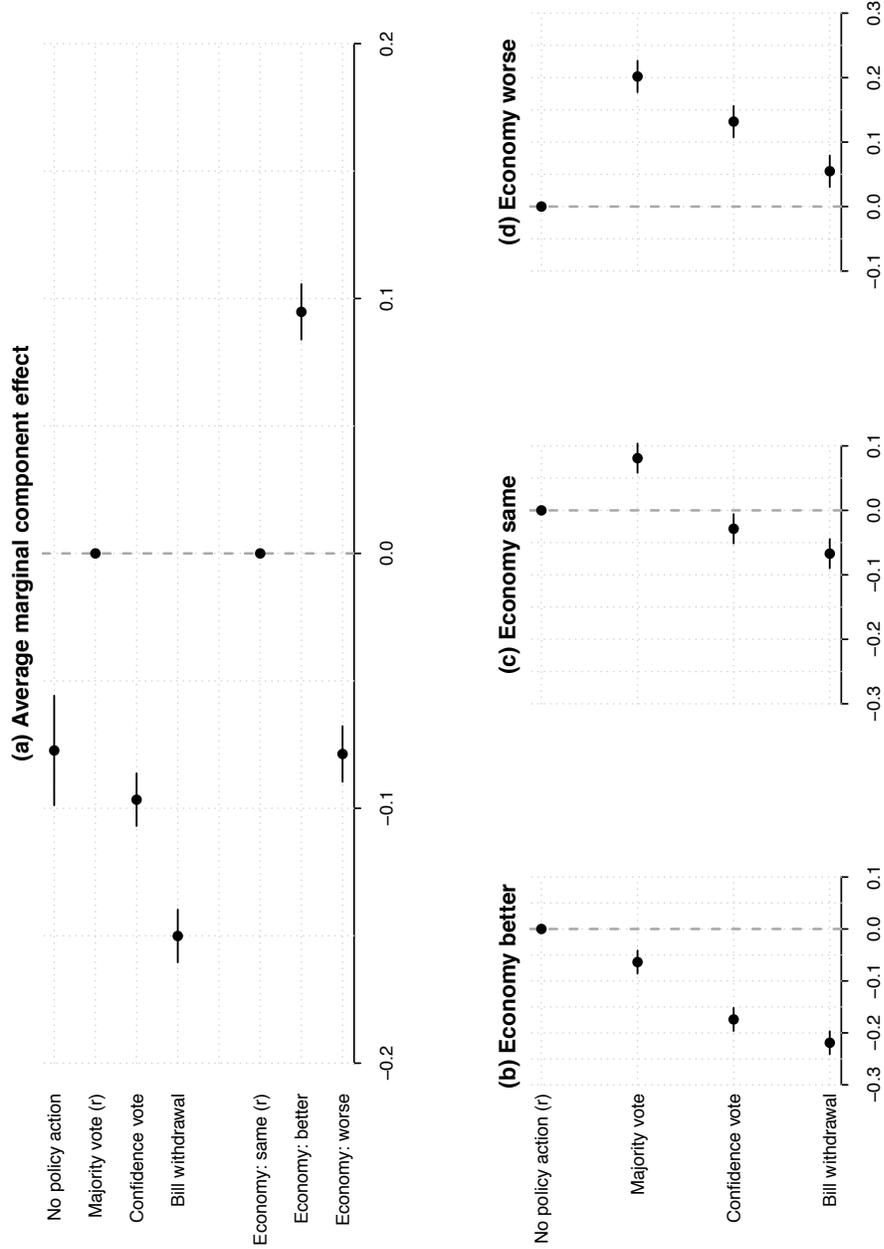
<sup>16</sup>Binary coding at the mid-point on a 11-point scale between “decrease a lot” (0) and “increase a lot” (10) (see Online Appendix, p. 4).

## Adding the economy

A follow-up experiment adds information about the state of the economy to the vignettes. This serves two purposes. First, a large literature shows that changes in macroeconomic conditions shape voting and government approval (Duch and Stevenson, 2008; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2000). Recent experiments on voter reactions to the opportunistic calling of early elections find that economic conditions are much more important than procedural concerns (Schleiter and Tavits, 2018). Hence, accounting for the economy is an important robustness check. Second, inspired by political economy theories on when re-election seeking executives have incentives to manipulate policy or “surf” good economic times by taking no policy action (but calling an early election) (Kayser, 2005), we explore whether voter responses to the use of constitutional force relative to taking no action vary with the economy.

The experiment was part of the FNES’s wave fielded between March 31, 2017 and April 4, 2017 (N=15,623). As unemployment has been for years the main issue in France, the vignette starts with describing the state of the economy “at the end of the first year in power of the next Prime Minister”: “there are 350,000 people less unemployed”, “there is the same number of unemployed people” or “there are 350,000 people more unemployed”. This amounts to a change of 1 percentage point in the unemployment rate. The focus on changes (rather than levels) is consistent with the large literature on economic voting.

We keep exactly the same three conditions regarding the legislative process (*Majority vote*, *Confidence vote*, *Withdrawal*) but add a new default no-bill condition in which the prime minister does not propose any policy. This captures the possibility of making no legislative initiative. This corresponds to surfing in the sense that no major policy action is taken (though we abstract from early elections). As most significant policy initiatives generate winners and losers, a strategy of not rocking the boat can be appealing while economic times are good.



Change: Executive Evaluation (0 'Absolutely dissatisfied' - 1 'Absolutely satisfied')

Figure 2: Effects of the executive's legislative performance and economic conditions on public evaluations. Based on an experiment (N=15,623) embedded in French election study (March/April 2017), these plots show the effects of randomly assigned attributes on the satisfaction with the prime minister, rescaled to vary from 0 ("Absolutely dissatisfied") to 1 ("Absolutely satisfied"). Plot (a) shows the Average Marginal Component Effects. Plots (b) - (d) show conditional effects of no policy action, confidence vote and bill withdrawal across randomly varied economic conditions. Linear regression estimates; horizontal bars represent 95% confidence intervals; points without bars denote reference category.

On the other hand, being passive when economic times are bad can further undermine electoral prospects (Kayser, 2005). We have no theoretical prior on whether the confidence vote penalty (as compared to passing policy by ordinary means) varies with economic conditions. But this experiment enables us to shed additional light on the question when using constitutional force, even if costly relative to ordinary means, may be attractive for prime ministers compared to other options, such as avoiding to take the initiative in the first place. Constitutional force may be comparatively more attractive than doing nothing when economic times are bad.

The experiment omits information about the party of the prime minister because it was conducted closer to the first-round of the national elections and electoral uncertainty was lower (also justified because experiment 1 found that confidence vote effects were robust across partisanship). Altogether, there are 21 different experimental vignettes<sup>17</sup> (for full text see Online Appendix, Experiment 3).

## **When surfing is better than legislating by force**

Figure 2 summarizes the main results from the third experiment. Panel (a) plots the AMCEs. The effect of the economy works in the standard way: improving conditions (i.e., less unemployment) lead to higher satisfaction with the prime minister and deteriorating conditions (i.e. more unemployment) lead to less satisfaction compared to the baseline of no change in the economy. Reassuringly, the process effect plays out as in the previous experiments even when voters get information on the state of the economy. The use of the confidence vote leads to significantly more negative evaluation of the prime minister’s performance compared to the majority voting condition. The confidence vote effect is of similar magnitude than a substantive decline in unemployment.

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<sup>17</sup>There are two issues: a salient policy proposal about immigration/refugees and a less salient one about decentralization. For results by issue, see Table A9.

While taking no policy action also leads to more negative evaluations compared to majoritarian policymaking, the magnitude of this effect is similar to the penalty of using the confidence vote. This suggests that prime ministers that care about their popular satisfaction do not generally have incentives to use constitutional force to pass a policy rather than refrain from taking legislative action when they anticipate legislative roadblocks.

To explore the benefits or costs of surfing compared to pursuing policy proposals, including by constitutional force, panels (b) - (e) of Figure 2 plot the effects of different legislative actions relative to the added potential outcome of doing nothing by economic condition.<sup>18</sup> The results suggest that economic context shapes the incentives when and how to legislate. When the economy is improving, taking any policy action hurts the popularity of the prime minister. This makes sense if one thinks of the economy as a valence issue and recognizes that many policy issues, even if supported by a majority, are divisive and generate some losers. When the economy is deteriorating, on the other hand, there are clear benefits from taking action and passing policy even using the confidence procedure. In the intermediate case of a stable economy, the prime minister gains in popularity by passing policy using majority voting but loses in popularity when passing policy using constitutional force. In this situation, there are incentives to not use the confidence procedure even though passing policy without it would be beneficial compared to inaction.

Other literatures have examined the degree to which the economy conditions other voter responses. For instance, one survey experimental study shows that the state of the economy conditions corruption voting on Moldova but not in Sweden (Klašnja and Tucker, 2013). This also suggest that the conditioning effect of the economy may vary across country contexts. While we will need another experiment to address this question, it is interesting to note that in our experiments, from an advanced industrialized democracy, the economy shapes the incentives to use the confidence vote relative to not legislating.

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<sup>18</sup>For results by policy issue, see Online Appendix Figure A9.

## Exploring mechanisms

What explains people’s dislike of the confidence vote procedure as a means to make policy? Theoretically, it may reflect normative motivations and/or signaling related to the competence of the prime minister or the quality of the law proposal. To shed light on what mechanisms are at work, we can further analyze experiment 1 and leverage two additional experiments. Taken together, this helps us to take a step toward unbundling what drives the negative effect of the confidence procedure on evaluation of the prime minister. The results rule in normative concerns as a relevant mechanism

One approach is to analyze additional outcome variables that tap into the mechanisms directly. Because they are not available in our previous experiments, we designed a follow-up experiment that was conducted between July 29 and August 2 of 2019 by Ipsos France. The representative sample (N=2,070) was drawn from people who had not participated in the FNES that contained our initial experiments. The experimental design is a simplified version of experiment 1.<sup>19</sup> The experiment includes three new outcome variables beyond the overall satisfaction with the prime minister’s actions already included in the previous experiments. One item captures perceptions about the functioning of democracy: “In this case, would you say that democracy in France is working well?” A second item asks about the perceived competence of the prime minister (“In this case, would you say that the prime minister is competent or not?”). A third item asks about trust in the proposed reform (“In this case, how much do you trust the proposed reform?”).

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<sup>19</sup>It does not include any pre-treatment information (i.e., prime) on the confidence vote. There are 6 vignettes (compared to 24 in experiment 1) based on the same two policy issues (immigration/refugees and wealth taxation) and the same three actions by the prime minister (passing the proposal by majority vote in parliament, passing it without a vote by invoking article 49.3 of the constitution, and withdrawing it). For more details, see Online Appendix Experiment 4.

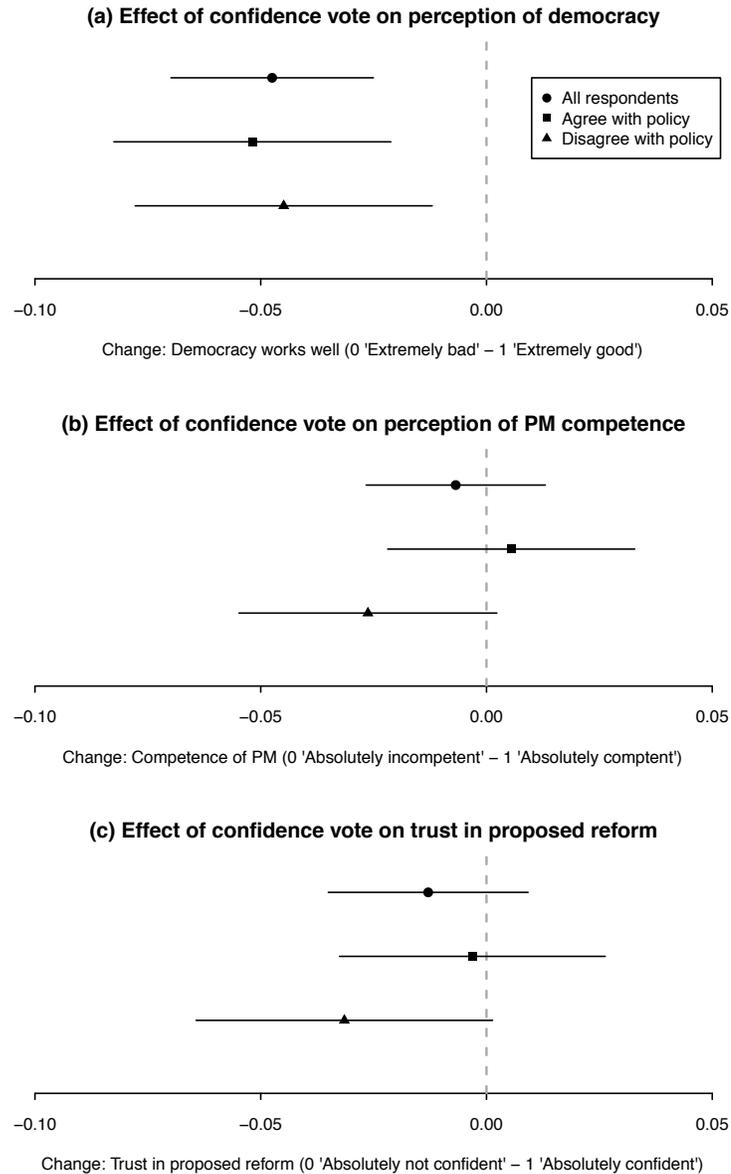


Figure 3: Effects of the confidence vote compared to majority voting on additional outcome variables. Based on the follow-up experiment conducted by Ipsos France in July/August 2019 (N=2,070). Estimates are from nonparametric estimator implemented via linear regression; all models adjust for satisfaction with incumbent prime minister; horizontal bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

This experiment replicates our previous results in a fresh sample of respondents. Compared to passing the same policy proposal by standard majority voting in parliament, the extraordinary use of procedural force causes a decline in satisfaction with the performance of the prime minister (Online Appendix, Figure A10). Turning to mechanisms, Figure 3 summarizes the effects using the confidence vote on additional outcome variables: perceptions of democracy (panel a), perceptions of the competence of the prime minister (panel b), and trust in the proposed reform (panel c); all outcome variables are rescaled to range between 0 and 1. Panel (a) shows that use of constitutional force in the form of the confidence procedure reduces the perception that democracy is working well. Again, this holds across policy preferences. Furthermore, panel (b) shows use of the confidence vote does not generally lead to a change in the perceived competence of the prime minister. The AMCE is substantively small and not statistically significant. This average effect masks some heterogeneity by policy preferences. As shown in panel (c), the results are very similar for trust in the proposed reform. Altogether, these findings are consistent with perceptions of democracy being a channel through which procedural force affects executive evaluations.

To more formally assess the relative importance of each channel, we use statistical mediation analysis (Imai, Keele and Yamamoto, 2010). In the causal mediation terminology, the mediation effect refers to an indirect effect of the treatment working through the mediator. Here, it denotes the change in executive satisfaction driven by a change in mediator, democratic norms or competence or trust in the reform, induced by the use of the confidence vote while holding the treatment status constant.

Randomization of the treatment does not guarantee identification of the mediation effect. In addition, we need to make the assumption that the mediator is ignorable given the randomized treatment as well as observed confounders. To make this part of the sequential ignorability assumption (Imai, Keele and Yamamoto, 2010) more plausible, we control for pre-treatment satisfaction with the incumbent prime minister and policy preferences. Given

continuous outcome and mediator variables, the mediation effects are estimated with a system of linear regression equations. One regresses the moderator on the treatment (plus the pre-treatment covariates mentioned above) and the other regresses the outcome variable on the treatment and moderator (plus covariates). The quantities of interest are then calculated using post-estimation simulation from the estimated model parameters.

The estimation results are summarized in Table 2. We find that there is a significant mediation of the confidence vote working through perceptions of democracy but not through perceptions of prime ministerial competence or trust in the proposed reform. Based on the estimation results, we can say that the democracy channel accounts for approximately 65% of the total effect of the confidence vote on prime ministerial satisfaction.<sup>20</sup>

Table 2: Results from causal mediation analysis

	Est.	95%Conf. intervall
Total effect of confidence vote	-0.041	[-0.069, -0.011]
Mediation effect: democracy	-0.027	[-0.039, -0.014]
Mediation effect: competence	-0.004	[-0.017, 0.008]
Mediation effect: trust in reform	-0.009	[-0.023, 0.006]

*Notes: Estimates are from a parametric algorithm implemented in mediation package (Hicks and Tingley, 2011), which uses simulation to calculate mediation effects from the distribution of model parameters for a system of linear regression equations (1000 simulations).*

Second, these results are in line with a complementary analysis of experiment 1 that examines the heterogeneity of the confidence vote effect. If the effect is at least in part related to normative considerations about democratic decision making, then people with lower pre-treatment support for parliamentary institutions should be less inclined to dislike the use

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<sup>20</sup>A sensitivity analysis suggests the qualitative effect working through democracy is quite robust to a violation of the ignorability assumption. The mediation effect would be zero if the correlation induced by unobservable confounders was approximately 0.45.

of constitutional force by the executive. We find that the procedural effect indeed varies with broader democratic norms. People who, 7 months before the experiment, indicated favoring a strongman who has not to concerned himself with parliament and elections are significantly less inclined to punish prime ministers for the use of constitutional force than those who oppose such a leader (Online Appendix, Figure A7).

Third, in another experiment we vary the political context in which the prime minister acts (Online Appendix, Experiment 2). We find that use of constitutional force is punished when the government appears divided or there are large-scale street protests against the reform but not if the opposition filibusters the proposal using a large number of amendments. While theoretical models of the confidence procedure do not precisely specify when people view the use of constitutional force as problematic, these results are consistent with people preferring decisions that are based on the support of the majority, holding the outcome fixed.

## Conclusion

Building on and extending recent survey experimental work focused on American presidents, we have studied process-based accountability in a different constitutional setting common in many parliamentary regimes. Our experiments demonstrate that public evaluations of constitutionally powerful prime ministers reflect a fundamental trade-off between policy and process. We find that public opinion may act as a constraint against the use of constitutional force and shapes the incentives for when it is used. A government that faces the tough choice between not passing its policy or passing it by constitutional force, in the form of the confidence vote, is not generally better off using the latter, though there can be popularity gains when the economy is doing badly or in a specific segments of the electorate. Moreover, normative concerns explain an important part of the public's distaste of the confidence vote.

Our results have implications for the behavior of government leaders and the working of

representative democracy. While our findings most directly relevant for France, they clearly speak to a larger set of democracies in which the confidence vote procedure is the most powerful and highly visible instrument for prime ministers to make policy against significant legislative opposition (Huber, 1996*b*). As for any political institution, the confidence procedure varies across countries. But it generally deviates from the ordinary legislative process by fusing a policy issue with the question of government survival, and often the prime minister alone can make the decision (Huber and McCarty 2001; Evans and Schleiter 2019, Table 4). In France and some other countries (e.g., Romania), the procedure enables the government to enact legislation without an explicit vote on the floor of parliament, if opponents of the bill do not bother to table a censure vote. Even when an actual vote is mandatory, however, scholars of the confidence procedure consider it a central instrument for making policy through constitutional force. For instance, there is evidence that executives with this power make less policy concessions to parliament (Franchino and Høland, 2009). Theoretically, a higher public disapproval of using constitutional force increases the set of policies the prime minister is willing to accept without it. Thus, the relative importance of process evaluations is linked to political bargaining over policy. Moreover, scholars have identified institutional forbearance as being fundamental to a functioning democracy (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018). Chief executives in many countries have potent constitutional powers that, if employed to the hilt, may enable them to marginalize the elected assembly. Forbearance means that executives' unilateral powers are deployed with restraint. In its absence, constitutional hardball may undermine mutual toleration and procedural legitimacy. Our findings can explain why constitutional force is often used restrictively.

Going forward, it would be instructive to compare public responses to the use of powerful non-majoritarian procedures by the executive that are clearly legal, such as the confidence vote, with those of more ambiguous legality. The latter may include the use of state of emergency declarations to make policy, which often entails disputes about whether the duration

and/or scope of the extra-parliamentary measures are consistent with the meaning of the constitution or statute establishing emergency powers.

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Online Appendix for  
“Executive Accountability Beyond Outcomes:  
Experimental Evidence on Public Evaluations of  
Powerful Prime Ministers”

October 25, 2019

# Contents

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# Experiment 1

## Measurement, sample characteristics, and covariate balance

**Timeline.** Figure A1 on the next page shows the timing of three survey experiments embedded in the French national election (panel) study (FNES) 2015-2017. Following a baseline survey in November 2015, the first experiment was conducted in June 2016. This was 10 months ahead of the first round of the presidential election and about a year before the first round of the parliamentary election for the National Assembly. The follow-up experiments were conducted several months after the first experiment. Experiment 4, conducted in the summer of 2019, was not part of the FNES and is not shown on the timeline.

**Knowledge of institution.** Three Kantar-SOFRES surveys (1500 respondents each) from September 2016, December 2016 and April 2017 show that between 79% and 82% of the respondents correctly identify that according to the constitution, the prime ministers can engage the responsibility of their government to adopt a bill without a vote in National Assembly. Results are available at <http://www.cevipof.com/fr/dynamiquespolitiques/resultats/>.

**Media and confidence procedure.** For examples of media reports of the confidence procedures invoked by the prime minister, see Anne de Guigné. “Valls précipite l’adoption définitive de la loi travail.” *Le Figaro*, July 20, 2016; *Le Monde*, “Projet de loi travail : Manuel Valls recourt au 49-3.” May 10, 2016.

**Prompt.** The wording of the prompt before experiment 1 is as follows: “The French constitution (article 49.3) allows the Prime minister, with the approval of the ministers’ council, to use the confidence vote to adopt a bill. In this case the bill is adopted without a vote in the National Assembly provided no censure resolution is adopted. Some people feel that the 49.3 is a legitimate tool to enable the Prime minister to govern efficiently and to hasten the adoption of bills. Others feel that it is undemocratic and allows the adoption of governments’ proposal that are not supported by a parliamentary majority.” There is no such prompt in the follow-up experiments. On the relevance of this priming, see page 8 below.

**Policy issues.** In six Kantar-SOFRES surveys (1500 respondents each) conducted between May 2015 and April 2017, between 47% and 52% of the respondents are in favor of an increase of the wealth tax. Surveys from October 2015 and February 2016 show that respectively 55% and 57% favored decreasing the number of refugees. Results are available at <http://www.cevipof.com/fr/dynamiquespolitiques/resultats/>

**Sample characteristics.** See Table A1.

**Covariate balance.** Figure A2 shows that pre-treatment covariates, measured in the baseline survey (November 2015), are balanced across the 24 different experimental conditions (vignettes).

**Coding of policy agreement (Figure 1 panels f and g).** Respondents’ preferences concerning the two issues, wealth taxation and refugees, were measured before the experiment on a 11-point scale between “decrease a lot” (0) and “increase a lot” (10). In particular, respondents were asked to indicate their relative preference on both issues: “According to you, in France, the wealth tax should decrease, stay stable, or increase?; According to you, in France, the number of refugees and asylum seekers welcome in France should decrease, stay stable, or increase?” For the analysis of the effect heterogeneity in panels (f) and (g) of Figure 1, we code that respondents agree with the policy proposal either when they favor an increase of the wealth tax ( $>5$ ) and the policy allocated in the experiment is the wealth tax or when they favor a decrease of the number of refugees and asylum seekers ( $<5$ ) and the policy allocated in the experiment is the number of refugees and asylum seekers.

Table A1: Sample characteristics for experiment 1

	Mean	SD
Age (years)	46.3	15.7
Female	0.56	0.50
Education (university degree)	0.52	0.50
Occupation	0.23	0.42
City > 100k	0.55	0.50
Ideology	0.53	0.25
Co-partisan	0.13	0.34
Policy congruent	0.54	0.50

*Notes:* Sample characteristics of experiment 1 (embedded in June 2016 French election study). Ideology refers to left-right self-placement rescaled to 0-1. Based on a recoding of the 13-category professional classification following the National Institute for Statistics (Insee), occupation is a dummy equal to 1 for Cadre supérieur, Profession indépendante or Agriculteur exploitant and 0 for all other (Profession intermédiaire, Employé, Ouvrier). Co-partisan and policy congruent refer to partisanship and policy preferences (measured before the experiment) relative to the randomly assigned prime minister and policy proposal in the vignette.

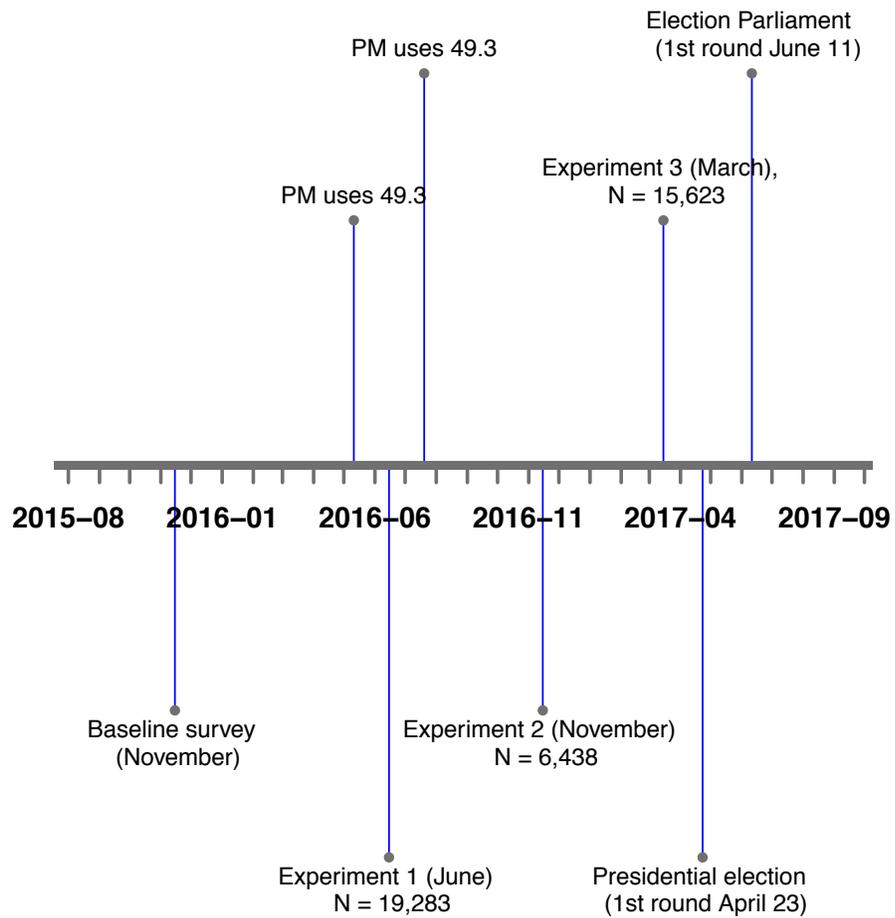


Figure A1: Timing of three survey experiments embedded in the French election study. The plot also shows the months (May and July 2016) during which prime minister Valls used the confidence vote procedure established by article 49.3 of the constitution to advance the government’s labor market reform.

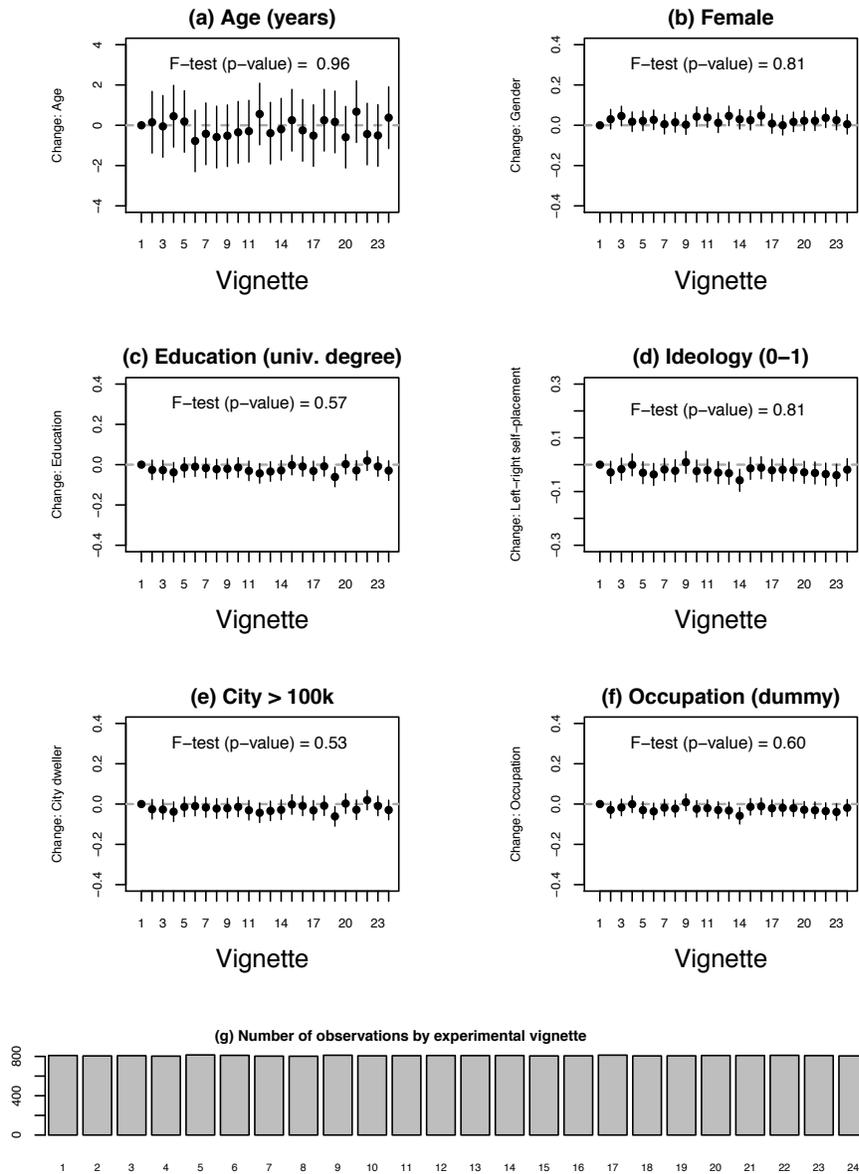


Figure A2: Balance of pre-treatment covariates in experiment 1 (embedded in June 2016 French election study). Plots (a) - (f) show difference in covariates (measured in the baseline survey of November 2015 before the experiment) across the 24 randomized vignettes (vignette 1 is reference category) with 95% confidence intervals and p-value for joint F-test. (Recall that each vignette contains 3 independently randomized features: party of PM (4 attributes), policy (2 attributes), legislative process and outcome (3 attributes).) For covariates, ideology refers to left-right self-placement rescaled to 0-1; occupation is a dummy equal to 1 for Cadre supérieur, Profession indépendante or Agriculteur exploitant and 0 for all other (Profession intermédiaire, Employé, Ouvrier).

## Additional experimental results

**Description of outcome by experimental vignette** Figure A3 plots the outcome variable, satisfaction with the action of the prime minister, for each experimental vignette. Each bar represents the average satisfaction (on the scale ranging from 0 to 1) for one of the 24 experimental vignettes defined by party of the prime minister, policy proposal, and whether the bill is passed by majority vote, confidence vote or is withdrawn. Given the randomization of the experimental features, differences between bars can be interpreted as average causal profile effects. While we are ultimately interested in the AMCEs reported in the main text, these profile effects are already informative. They yield the same conclusion as the main results reported in the paper and also make clear that the process effects vary little across party or policy.

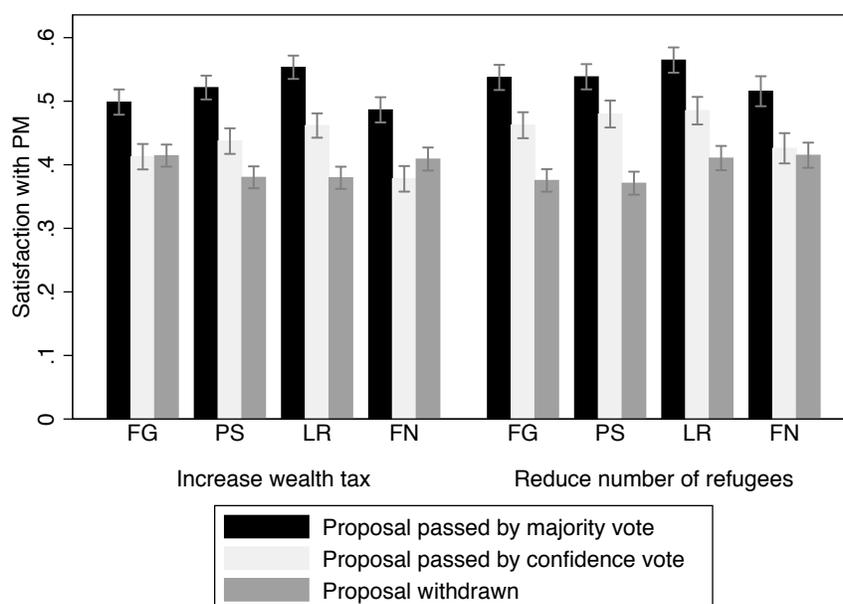


Figure A3: Summary of outcome across experimental conditions in experiment 1 (embedded in June 2016 French election study).

**Excluding profiles.** All possible experimental profiles, especially party-policy combinations, are plausible potential outcomes given a political context where concerns about immigration and redistribution are high on the public agenda and the two main established parties have no guarantee of winning. This does not mean that all profiles are equally likely to occur in the real-world, compared to say realized outcomes in other countries. What matters is that there was political uncertainty about the result of the election. It is nonetheless noteworthy that the experimental results are robust to excluding somewhat less likely profiles, even if we take a broad definition of what is less likely. More specifically, as a robustness test we only include vignettes where a Socialist prime minister propose a traditional left policy (i.e.,

increasing the wealth tax) and where a right (LR) prime minister proposes a traditionally more conservative policy (i.e., reducing immigration). Figure A4 shows that the estimated effect of the confidence vote is virtually identical to that estimated including all profiles. Something that one can also eyeball based on Figure A3.

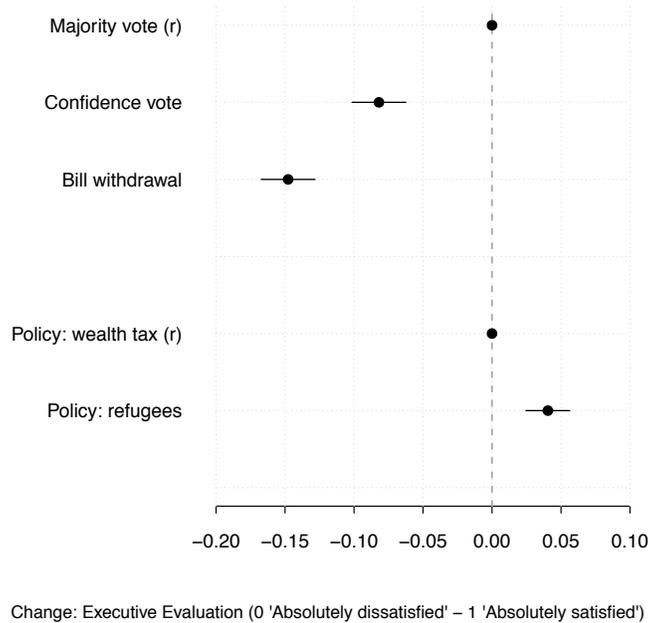


Figure A4: Robustness. Based on experiment 1 (N=4,832) embedded in French election study (June 2016), this analysis excludes vignettes where the prime minister (PM) either belongs to National Front or Left Party. It also excludes vignettes where a Socialist PM proposes to limit immigration or a Republican PM proposes to increase the wealth tax. Horizontal bars represent 95% confidence intervals; points without bars denote reference category.

**Issue heterogeneity.** Panels (b) and (c) of Figure A5 demonstrate that the results on the confidence vote are substantively similar across both policy issues, wealth taxation and refugees. For each policy, using constitutional force or failing to pass the policy causes a significant decline in popular satisfaction. The effects are slightly larger for wealth taxation. For the confidence vote effect, the difference between plot (b) and (c) is marginally significant ( $p=0.09$ ). The effect of withdrawal is higher for the proposal on refugees and the gap is precisely estimated ( $p = 0.01$ ).

**Priming.** Experiment 1 is preceded by a prompt (for wording see p. 3) and information question about the confidence vote. The paper notes that the prompt simply restates the conventional trade-off between efficient government and collective parliamentary decision

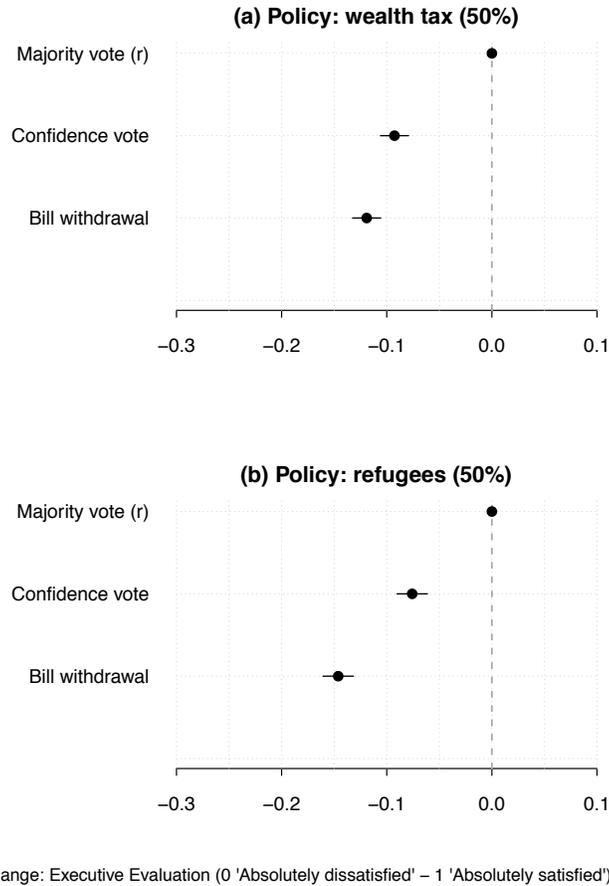


Figure A5: Robustness. Based on experiment 1 (N=19,283) embedded in French election study (June 2016), these plots show conditional effects of confidence vote and bill withdrawal across the two policy issues.

making identified in the French debate since the inception of the Fifth Republic’s constitution (Huber, 1996a). It does not take a side and avoids partisan or other political references. We also know from a long tradition of public opinion surveys that French people indicate that they value both things and that they are by no means shy to indicate support for a strong leader even if this comes at the expense of parliament (also true in this survey, see analysis below).

One may nonetheless be concerned that the experimental results are shaped by the initial priming of the issue. However, multiple pieces of evidence as well as follow-up experiment 4 conducted in a fresh sample without priming suggest that this is not the case. First, the prompt and information questions are not repeated before experiments 2 and 3, which take place 5 months and 9 months after the first experiment – a long time for any initial priming to be diluted. The experimental and non-experimental literature on public opinion generally finds that people give greater weight to more recent information and with respect to one-shot

advertisement and media frames in surveys there is a general tendency of effects to quickly decay over time (Chong and Druckman, 2010; Gerber et al., 2011; Healy and Lenz, 2014). Finding some persistence for stronger framing interventions over a period of two weeks is already noteworthy (Druckman, Fein and Leeper, 2012). The fact that substantively and statistically significant process effects emerge in these follow-up experiments indicates that priming is unlikely to be an issue.

Second, as additional test we can leverage that some respondents were never primed because they did not participate in the initial experiment. While exposure to the initial prime is not random, we can explore the heterogeneity of the results in experiment 3 and compare those primed in experiment 1 (N=14,449) and those not primed because they did not participate in the first experiment (N=599). The results are reported in Figure A6. It shows that the confidence vote penalty for those never primed is substantively important (very similar to the average effect in experiment 2) and statistically significant at 95 percent level. While the confidence intervals are wider by construction than those for the much larger group of other respondents, they are tight enough to make inferences. Among those participating in experiment 3, only 4% did not receive the initial prime in experiment 1. The difference between those initially primed and those never prime is modest (about 1/3) and not statistically significant at conventional levels. Experiment 4 is discussed in the final section.

**Democratic norms.** As reported in the mechanism section of the paper, we analyze whether the process effect varies by pre-treatment support for broader democratic norms. In a first wave of the French election study conducted 7 months before the experiment (November 2015) respondents were asked whether France should be led by a strongman that has not to concern himself with parliament and elections. People that care less about parliament and elections should also be less concerned about executives' use of procedural force in lawmaking. They may punish the executive for appearing weak or less competent, but not for anti-majoritarianism per se. To the extent that the confidence vote penalty varies by support for a strongman, this indicates that a process norm is contributing to accountability.

The results from an analysis interacting the experimental treatments with a dummy for previous support for a strongman are displayed in Figure A7. Support for strongman is coded as 1 for all respondents who agree with the statement or do not oppose it and 0 for respondents who oppose it. Those who favor a strongman are significantly less inclined to punish the executive for the confidence vote than those who oppose a strongman. The confidence vote effect is 30 percent smaller. This clearly indicates that intrinsic process concerns matter. Pro-strongman respondents react more negatively to bill withdrawal. This is consistent with them taking a more purely instrumental view.

## Vote choice regressions

The outcome variable in the experiments is the satisfaction with the actions of the prime minister. Research on executive popularity shows that satisfaction with the executive strongly

predictive of vote choice in France (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2000, 201). The experiments refrain from asking a vote choice question as this requires comparing the incumbent with an alternative candidate that may also vary on multiple dimensions but does not necessarily have a track record as prime minister. In other words, this would require a more complex research design based on multiple narratives with variable dimensions. However, we can use the observational data from the election survey to show that satisfaction with the real-world prime minister is a strong predictor of vote choice after controlling for ideology, socio-demographics and even party identification in the context of our experiments.

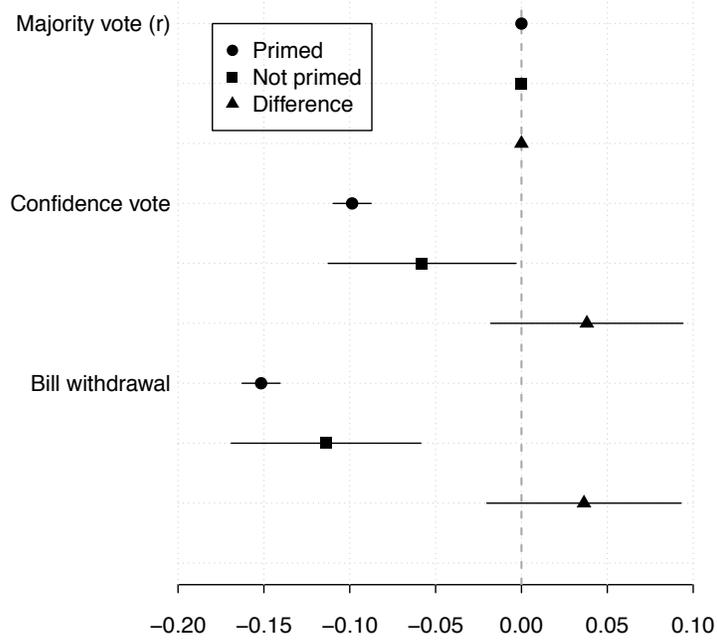
Specifically, we use data from the November 2016 wave French election study that includes the required data during the period of our experimental studies. First, the wave includes an item about the satisfaction with incumbent Socialist prime minister Manuel Valls on a 10-point scale ranging from absolutely not satisfied (1) to absolutely satisfied (10), which we rescale to range between 0 and 1. Second, the survey also asks about respondents' vote intention in the first round of the upcoming presidential election. As the primaries for several parties had not been concluded at the time of the survey, the survey asks multiple questions with varying sets of potential candidates. Two scenarios include Manuel Valls, who was one of the two main contenders in the primary of the Socialist Party (in January 2017, he lost against Benoit Hamon in the second round). The variables are re-coded as binary vote intention for Valls (1 = if support for Valls, = 0 if support for any other candidate).

Columns 1-4 of Table A2 display the results from Logistic regressions of vote choice (supporting the incumbent prime minister) as a function of satisfaction with the prime minister, the respondents' ideology, measured as the left-right self-placement scaled to range between 0 and 1, and a large number of socio-demographic control variables (age, gender, 15 occupational categories capturing class, education, urbanization). Extended specifications in columns 2 and 4 also include include partisanship, measured as a series of 15 dummy variables, each one indicating for a particular party whether a respondent is close to it; this variable was measured in a previous wave of the panel. In all four specifications, satisfaction with the prime minister has the expected positive and precisely estimated effect on vote choice ( $p < 0.001$ ), despite partialing out ideology and partisanship. Moreover, columns 5 and 6 show that satisfaction of the prime minister also is a significant predictor of vote intention for incumbent president Hollande, in a scenario where he is the candidate of the Socialist Party. A few weeks after the survey, Hollande announced that he would not seek re-election.

Table A2: Evaluations of prime minister Valls and vote choice

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
PM Satisfaction	8.51 (0.20)	7.40 (0.24)	8.32 (0.20)	7.36 (0.25)	4.96 (0.22)	4.93 (0.21)
Ideology	-2.72 (0.15)	-0.77 (0.26)	-2.94 (0.16)	-0.91 (0.26)	-1.98 (0.27)	-2.08 (0.26)
Age	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Gender	0.06 (0.07)	0.00 (0.08)	0.03 (0.07)	-0.02 (0.08)	-0.14 (0.09)	-0.07 (0.08)
Occupation (13 dummies)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Education (4 dummies)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Urbanization (5 dummies)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Partisanship (15 dummies)		✓		✓	✓	✓
Observations	13,862	11,079	14,315	11,384	10,972	11,310

*Notes:* Dependent variable: vote intention for prime minister Valls in hypothetical first-round presidential contest with multiple contenders including either Sarkozy (models 1-2) or Juppé (models 3-4) as candidate from LR; vote intention for president Hollande in hypothetical first-round presidential contest with multiple contenders including either Sarkozy or Juppé as competitor from LR (models 5-6); all based on November 2016 round of the French election study. PM satisfaction measures the stated satisfaction with incumbent prime minister Valls, measured on a 10-point scale and re-scaled to range between 0 and 1. Estimation is by Logistic regression. Standard errors in parentheses.



Change: Executive Evaluation (0 'Absolutely dissatisfied' – 1 'Absolutely satisfied')

Figure A6: Process effects in experiment 3 based on exposure to experiment 1. Based on experiment 3 (N=15,623) embedded in French election study (March/April 2017), these plots show heterogeneity in the effects of confidence vote and bill withdrawal between respondents who had participated in experiment 1, being exposed to an information “prime” about the confidence vote, and those who did not participate in experiment 1 and thus were never primed. Process effects are present regardless of the priming and the difference in effects across the prime are not statistically significant. Estimates are from nonparametric estimator implemented via linear regression; horizontal bars represent 95% confidence intervals; points without bars denote reference category.

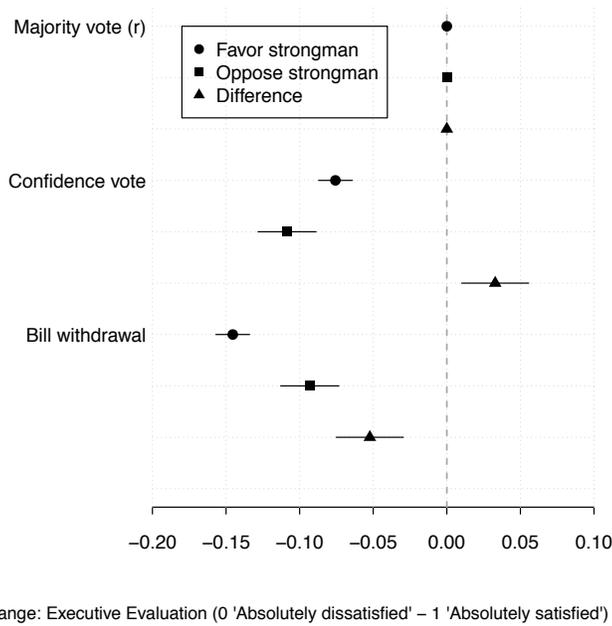


Figure A7: Heterogeneity of process effect by respondents' prior support for strongman. Based on experiment 1 (N=19,283) embedded in French election study (June 2016), this plot shows the effects of confidence vote and bill withdrawal varying by respondents' support, in a previous wave of the survey (November 2015), for a non-democratic strongman as a leader for France. Horizontal bars represent 95% confidence intervals; points without bars denote reference category.

## Experiment 2: Varying political context

The second experiment examines the role of political context in shaping the negative confidence vote effect, and due to space constraints the main text only briefly summarizes the main result. Here we explain the motivation, design and analysis in more detail.

**Motivation and design** Theories of the confidence procedure do not precisely specify the political conditions under which people view the use of constitutional force as problematic. However, the broader literature on process-based evaluations of political decisions suggests that context matters. Prime ministers using the extraordinary method of the confidence vote are often criticized in political debates for their “willingness to use procedural force against the directly elected representatives of the people” (Huber, 1996*a*, 119). This criticism has most bite when the government does not appear to have a majority for the policy on its merits. By the same logic, qualms about procedural force may also be weaker when it is used against obstructionism by a parliamentary minority (also see Smith and Park, 2013).

The general structure of the design is as in the first experiment, with the exception that the second experiment focuses on the immigration policy. In addition, we randomly vary the political context. We consider three scenarios. First, there is substantial internal dissent about the proposed policy and the government majority is split. More specifically, respondents in this condition are told that the policy is passed or withdrawn “after many MPs from the government majority announced that they did not support the prime minister’s proposal.” In this context, using the confidence vote may be the only means to pass the policy because it forces legislators into a trade-off between bringing down their government or conceding on policy (Diermeier and Feddersen, 1998; Huber, 1996*b*). This clearly departs from the majoritarian notion of policymaking. In this context, we expect the same effect of procedural force compared to majority voting as in the first experiment.

Second, there are mass demonstrations against the policy proposed by the prime minister. Mass demonstrations against government bill proposal are common in France. They provide a costly signal about public dissatisfaction with a policy proposal. In this condition the vignette mentions “the multiplication of mass demonstrations against the prime minister’s proposal”. Procedural fairness accounts argue that, holding outcomes fixed, people prefer decisions that are based on broad-based involvement in the process (Tyler, Rasinski and McGraw, 1985). Hence, the public may have similar qualms about the use of constitutional force to make policy in this context.

Third, a minority in the assembly obstructs the government’s policy. One possibility of delaying the passage of a law by the opposition is to introduce and debate a large number of amendments. In France, the parliamentary opposition regularly uses amendments as a filibustering strategy, sometimes scheduling thousands of amendments. This includes the contested labor-market reform passed by the Vall’s government using the confidence procedure a few months before the survey was conducted. Almost 5,000 amendments were introduced. Hence, respondents assigned to the obstructionism condition are informed that “the opposition introduced thousands of amendments to delay the adoption of the prime minister’s proposal.” In this context, the confidence procedure is a defensive move to pur-

sue a policy that is backed by the parliamentary majority. Hence its use is less clearly a violation of a democratic norm and the process effect should be weaker. (For instance, see Sylvain Mouillard. “L’obstruction parlementaire, une vieille pratique.” *Libération*. January 29, 2013.)

The experiment was included in the wave of the FNES fielded between November 8, 2016 and November 14, 2016 (6,438 respondents were allocated to the experiment). Altogether, there are 18 different experimental conditions. For the full wording, see Table A4 below. Sample characteristics are described in Table A3.

**Results** Figure A8 reports the main results from the second experiment. It plots the AMCEs for the confidence vote effect and the withdrawal effect (each relative to the baseline of passing the same policy by majority vote in the assembly) by political context. For each context, we also report AMCEs conditional on policy agreement. The main result is that there is a significant negative effect of using constitutional force unless it is used to counter opposition obstructionism. This is consistent people disliking constitutional force in part because it deviates from an ideal form of policymaking.

Given internal dissent within the government (panel (a)) or massive protests (panel (b)), the result is as in the first experiment: Prime ministers using force suffer a significant decline in satisfaction. Again, this holds for respondents that agree and those that disagree with the policy. However, the effect is close to zero in the context of obstructionism (panel (c)). (The confidence vote effect in the internal dissent context is 4.8 times larger than in the obstructionism context, though the estimate of the difference is somewhat noisy ( $p=0.12$ )).

Outside of the experiment, citizens may disagree about what constitutes obstruction and/or they may not be aware of it. As a result, the moderating effect on the confidence vote penalty may be lower and prime ministers face higher popularity costs. We believe the design somewhat limits this problem. First, the text of the vignette does not actually use the term “obstructionism”. The wording is more neutral, allowing for different interpretations. Second, the vignette always includes a party treatment. In line with numerous previous studies on the importance of party cues for political perceptions (Klašnja and Tucker, 2013), this allows respondents to differentially interpret the information about opposition amendments. Third, the obstructionism treatment focuses on high-profile scenarios that would attract media attention.

Table A3: Sample characteristics for experiment 2

	Mean	SD
Age (years)	46.4	15.9
Female	0.55	0.50
Education (university degree)	0.52	0.50
Occupation	0.23	0.42
City > 100k	0.56	0.50
Ideology	0.53	0.25
Co-partisan	0.16	0.37
Policy congruent	0.56	0.50

*Notes:* Sample characteristics of experiment 2 (embedded in November 2016 French election study). Ideology refers to left-right self-placement rescaled to 0-1. Based on a recoding of the 13-category professional classification following the National Institute for Statistics (Insee), occupation is a dummy equal to 1 for Cadre supérieur, Profession indépendante or Agriculteur exploitant and 0 for all other (Profession intermédiaire, Employé, Ouvrier). Co-partisan and policy congruent refer to partisanship and policy preferences (measured before the experiment) relative to the randomly assigned prime minister and policy proposal in the vignette.

Table A4: Vignette question wording for experiment 2

	Majority vote condition	Confidence vote condition	Withdrawal condition
Obstructionism by opposition	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France. Then the reform is adopted by a majority the National Assembly after the opposition introduced thousands of amendments to delay the adoption of the prime minister's proposal.	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France. Then the reform is adopted without a parliamentary vote on the bill as the Prime minister invoked a confidence vote (article 49.3) after the opposition introduced thousands of amendments to delay the adoption of the prime minister's proposal.	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France. Then the reform is not adopted as the Prime Minister withdrew the bill after the opposition introduced thousands of amendments to delay the adoption of the prime minister's proposal.
Internal dissent within government (split majority)	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France. Then the reform is adopted by a majority the National Assembly after many MPs from the government majority announced that they did not support the prime minister's proposal.	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France. Then the reform is adopted without a parliamentary vote on the bill as the Prime minister invoked a confidence vote (article 49.3) after many MPs from the government majority announced that they did not support the prime minister's proposal.	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France. Then the reform is not adopted as the Prime Minister withdrew the bill after many MPs from the government majority announced that they did not support the prime minister's proposal.
Street protests	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France. Then the reform is adopted by a majority the National Assembly after the multiplication of mass demonstrations against the prime minister's proposal since the beginning of the parliamentary debate.	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France. Then the reform is adopted without a parliamentary vote on the bill as the Prime minister invoked a confidence vote (article 49.3) after the multiplication of mass demonstrations against the prime minister's proposal since the beginning of the parliamentary debate.	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France. Then the reform is not adopted as the Prime Minister withdrew the bill after the multiplication of mass demonstrations against the prime minister's proposal since the beginning of the parliamentary debate.

Notes: \* Party is a random allocation of one of the following: the Socialist party, the Republicans. In total, there are 18 experimental conditions. Original survey wording is in French.

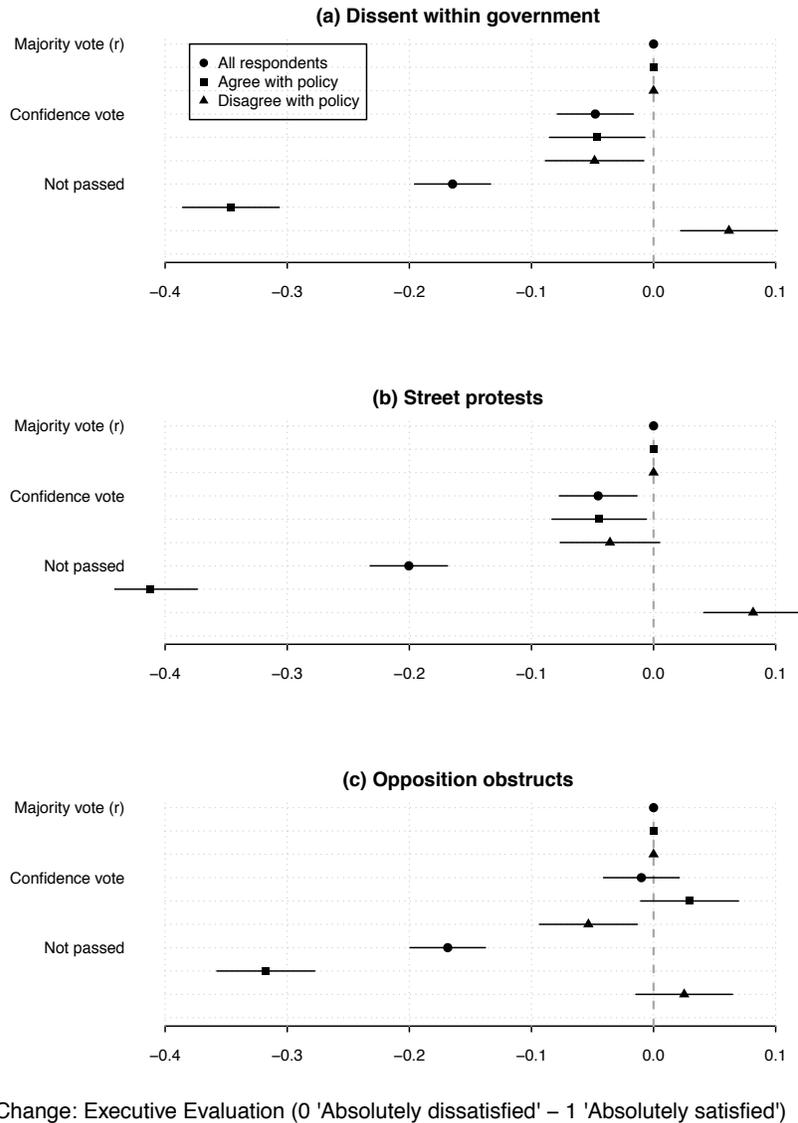


Figure A8: Effects of the executive’s legislative performance on public evaluations across different contexts of political opposition and varying by respondents’ policy preference. Based on an experiment (N=6,438) embedded in the French election study (November 2016), these plots show the effects of randomly assigned attributes on the satisfaction with the prime minister, rescaled to vary from 0 (“Absolutely dissatisfied”) to 1 (“Absolutely satisfied”). Plot (a) shows the Average Marginal Component Effects when there is internal dissent within government’s parliamentary majority; plot (b) when there are massive street protests; plot (c) when the opposition obstructs the proposal with a large number of amendments. Linear regression estimates; horizontal bars represent 95% confidence intervals; points without bars denote reference category; party effects are not shown to save space.

## Experiment 3: Adding the economy

**Vignette question wording.** See Table A5.

**Sample characteristics.** See Table A6.

**Importance of two issues.** In the Kantar-SOFRES survey (1500 respondents each) conducted in February 2016, only 35% of the respondents considered the issue of the power of subnational governments very or extremely important whereas 67% indicated that refugees is a very important issue. Results are available at <http://www.cevipof.com/fr/dynamiquespolitiques/resultats/>

**Heterogeneity by policy.** As part of the experimental vignette, respondents are either asked about a high-saliency policy, which concerns a reduction in the number of refugees, or a low-saliency policy, political decentralization. Figure A9 presents ACMEs conditional on policy. Pronounced process effects are present under each condition. The confidence vote effect is about one-third larger for the less salient decentralization policy ( $p < 0.000$ ) and the withdrawal effect is twice as large for the more salient refugee policy ( $p < 0.000$ ). For the less salient policy, there is no incentives to use the confidence vote. All other options are better, included withdrawal. As in experiment 1, for the most salient policy, there is incentives to use confidence vote as PM is better off when she delivers the policy despite the penalty caused by the use of procedural force than when she refrains to introduce it or withdraws it

Table A5: Vignette question wording for experiment 3 with example of refugee policy condition

Economy	No bill condition	Majority vote condition	Confidence vote condition	Withdrawal condition
Better	Suppose that at the end of the first year in power of the next Prime there are 350 000 people in power of the next Prime there are 350 000 people less unemployed. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France.* Then the reform is adopted by a majority the National Assembly after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.	Suppose that at the end of the first year in power of the next Prime there are 350 000 people more unemployed. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France.* Then the reform is adopted without a parliamentary vote on the bill as the Prime minister invoked a confidence vote (article 49.3) after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.	Suppose that at the end of the first year in power of the next Prime there are 350 000 people less unemployed. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France.* Then the reform is not adopted as the Prime Minister withdrew the bill after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.	Suppose that at the end of the first year in power of the next Prime there are 350 000 people less unemployed. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France.* Then the reform is not adopted as the Prime Minister withdrew the bill after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.
Same	Suppose that at the end of the first year in power of the next Prime there is the same number of unemployed people. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France.* Then the reform is adopted by a majority the National Assembly after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.	Suppose that at the end of the first year in power of the next Prime there is the same number of unemployed people. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France.* Then the reform is adopted without a parliamentary vote on the bill as the Prime minister invoked a confidence vote (article 49.3) after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.	Suppose that at the end of the first year in power of the next Prime there is the same number of unemployed people. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France.* Then the reform is not adopted as the Prime Minister withdrew the bill after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.	Suppose that at the end of the first year in power of the next Prime there is the same number of unemployed people. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France.* Then the reform is not adopted as the Prime Minister withdrew the bill after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.
Worse	Suppose that at the end of the first year in power of the next Prime there are 350 000 people more unemployed. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France.* Then the reform is adopted by a majority the National Assembly after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.	Suppose that at the end of the first year in power of the next Prime there are 350 000 people more unemployed. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France.* Then the reform is adopted without a parliamentary vote on the bill as the Prime minister invoked a confidence vote (article 49.3) after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.	Suppose that at the end of the first year in power of the next Prime there are 350 000 people more unemployed. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France.* Then the reform is not adopted as the Prime Minister withdrew the bill after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.	Suppose that at the end of the first year in power of the next Prime there are 350 000 people more unemployed. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France.* Then the reform is not adopted as the Prime Minister withdrew the bill after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.

Notes: \*The experiment also varies the policy issue. In a condition with a low-salience policy, the prime minister proposes "to increase subnational governments' powers". In total, there are 21 experimental conditions. Original survey wording is in French.

Table A6: Sample characteristics for experiment 3

	Mean	SD
Age (years)	46.9	15.7
Female	0.56	0.50
Education (university degree)	0.52	0.50
Occupation	0.23	0.42
City > 100k	0.56	0.50
Ideology	0.53	0.25
Policy congruent	0.53	0.50

*Notes:* Sample characteristics of experiment 3 (embedded in March/April 2017 French election study). Ideology refers to left-right self-placement rescaled to 0-1. Based on a recoding of the 13-category professional classification following the National Institute for Statistics (Insee), occupation is a dummy equal to 1 for Cadre supérieur, Profession indépendante or Agriculteur exploitant and 0 for all other (Profession intermédiaire, Employé, Ouvrier). Policy congruent refers to policy preferences (measured before the experiment) relative to the randomly assigned prime minister and policy proposal in the vignette.

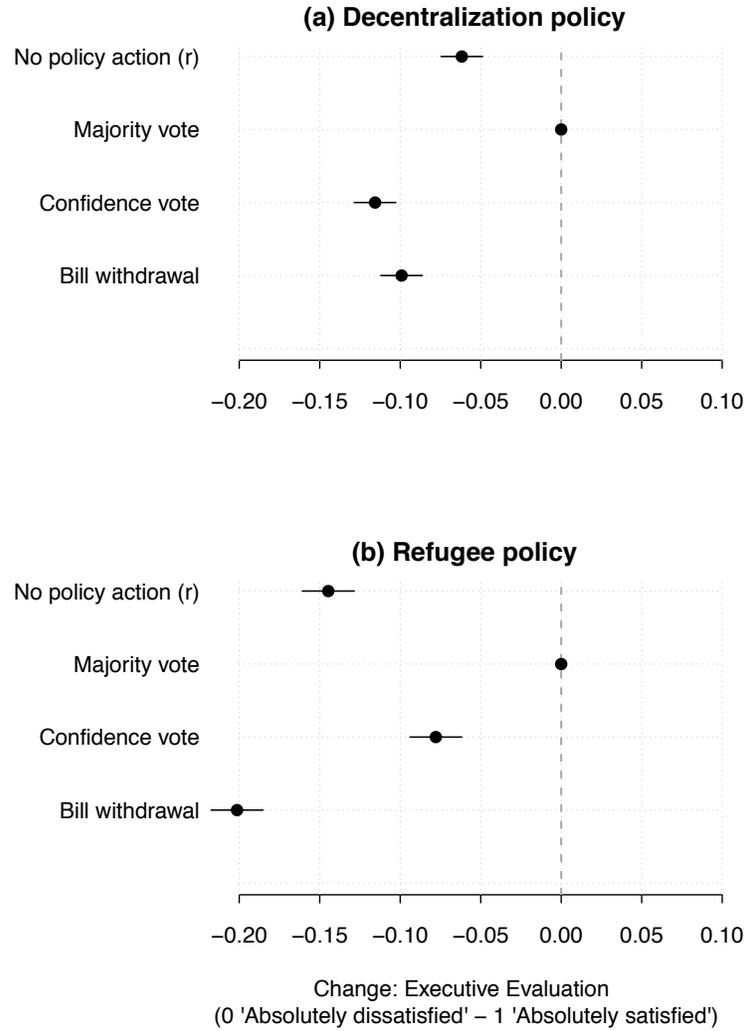


Figure A9: Effects varying by policy. Based on experiment 3 (N=15,623) embedded in French election study (March/April 2017), these plots show heterogeneity in the effects of confidence vote and bill withdrawal across policy issues: political decentralization and reducing the number of refugees. Estimates are from nonparametric estimator implemented via linear regression; horizontal bars represent 95% confidence intervals; points without bars denote reference category; effect of economic conditions omitted.

## Experiment 4: New sample & additional outcomes

**Design and background context** Our final experiment was conducted between July 29 and August 2 of 2019 by Ipsos France. The representative sample (N=2,070) was drawn from people who had not participated in the French election panel that contained our initial experiments. The experimental design is a simplified version of experiment 1 with additional outcome variables to further explore mechanisms. There are three design differences. First, the pre-experimental survey did not include any prior information/item about the confidence vote procedure. This is meant to eliminate possible priming effects. In terms of related political context, it may be noteworthy that the confidence procedure was not used at all by the government coalition of LREM and Democratic Movement (MoDem) elected in 2017 with a comfortable majority of around 60% until the time of the survey. This contrasts with the context before the first two experiments.

Second, this experiment does not consider a hypothetical prime minister that may come to power after the next election. Reflecting the different post-electoral political environment, it instead asks respondents to consider the actions of “the prime minister”. Concretely, the wording of the experimental vignettes is almost identical to experiment 1 after deleting the first sentence (“Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]\*.”). This adjustment was done because the survey was conducted almost three years before the next constitutionally mandated parliamentary election in 2022. This also means we do not experimentally vary the party of the prime minister. This simplifies the design. Hence, there are 6 vignettes (compared to 24 in experiment 1) based on the same two policy issues (immigration/refugees and wealth taxation) and the same three actions by the prime minister (passing the proposal by majority vote in parliament, passing it without a vote by invoking article 49.3 of the constitution, and withdrawing it). One slight change in wording concerns the issue of wealth taxation. Given the new government abolished it after coming into power, the experiment considers the re-introduction of the wealth tax, which was a common demand of the “Yellow Vest” protests that took place in the fall of 2018 and winter of 2019 across France. (Also, 161 leftwing MPs unsuccessfully tried to gather the support of 20% of the MPS (185 MPs) required to trigger a referendum on wealth tax in December 2018.)

Third, the experiment includes additional outcome variables beyond the overall satisfaction with the prime minister’s actions already included in the previous experiments (already discussed in the text).

**Effect of the confidence vote without priming** Figure A10 plots the causal effect of using the confidence vote procedure on satisfaction with the prime minister. As in previous experiments, the outcome is rescaled to range between 0 and 1. As the experiment does not randomize the party of the prime minister, we adjust for pre-treatment satisfaction with incumbent prime minister Eduard Philippe in this and all subsequent analyzes. The results demonstrate that this experiment replicates our previous results in a fresh sample of respondents that did not receive any prime concerning the confidence vote. Compared to passing the same policy proposal by standard majority voting in parliament, the extraordinary use of procedural force causes a decline in satisfaction with the performance of the prime minister.

The AMCE is precisely estimated (significant at the 5 percent level) even in the considerably smaller sample. The magnitude of the effect is comparable to our previous estimates. While somewhat smaller than that obtained in experiment 1, it is of the same magnitude as in experiment 2 in the context of a fractious government or mass street protests. We can see from Figure A10 the effect is virtually the same regardless of whether respondents like the policy proposal.

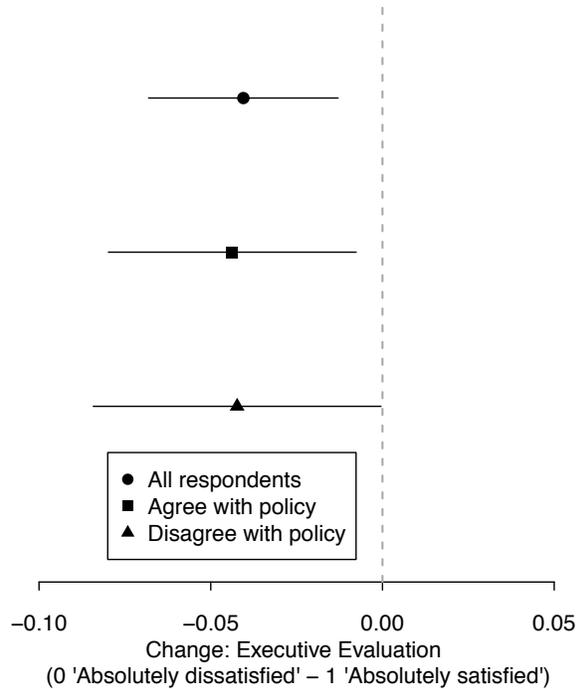


Figure A10: Effect of the confidence vote on satisfaction with the prime minister compared to majority voting from a follow-up experiment conducted by Ipsos France in July/August 2019. The representative sample (N=2,070) is drawn from people who had not participated in the French election panel in which experiments 1-3 were embedded. Estimates are from nonparametric estimator implemented via linear regression; all models adjust for satisfaction with incumbent prime minister and for policy congruence; horizontal bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

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