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Constitutional Court of Czech Republic Legitimacy Study (#135957)

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1) Have any data been collected for this study already?
No, no data have been collected for this study yet.

2) What's the main question being asked or hypothesis being tested in this study?
I expect the framing of the Constitutional Court of Czech Republic decision on the electoral system emphasizing the elite status of judges (populist framing, H1), partisan affiliations of the court (partisan framing, H2) and procedural irregularity of the decision (procedural unfairness framing, H3) to produce the effects of lowering individuals' diffuse support (i.e. legitimacy perceptions) for the Court.

The study will feature a between-subjects experimental design with one control and three treatment vignettes containing different portrayals of the decision issued by the Constitutional Court of Czech Republic in 2020 on the constitutionality of changes to the electoral system. Prior to vignettes, a battery of questions, measuring individuals' demographic characteristics and political views will be asked. Included are the variables on education, age, gender, region, economic class, vote in the most recent national election, ideologically closest party, 3-question battery on populist attitudes, and prior exposure to the news about the Constitutional Court. The control condition will include a modified statement about the Constitutional Court decision pulled directly from the Constitutional Court press office.

Additionally to the main effects, I expect some moderating effects.

Thus, the decrease in diffuse support relative to the baseline group would be weaker who had not been exposed to news about the Court before in all three conditions.

In populism framing condition, voters with stronger populist attitudes, voters of populist parties (ANO, SPD), individuals with no college education and lower economic class would experience stronger effect of the populist frame.

In partisan farming condition, individuals who had voted in the most recent election would experience stronger effect of the frame compared to those who only indicate a political party closest to them without voting.

3) Describe the key dependent variable(s) specifying how they will be measured.
The study uses a quasi pre-test-posttest design. Thus, a measure of the outcome of the outcome variable is taken before participants are exposed to treatment and after they are exposed to the treatment. This greatly increases precision, and recent work suggests that, unless the researcher's intent is particularly clear for the participants and they have incentives to behave in expectation of that intent, the demand effects that might bias the estimate are not substantial.

The initial measure of the outcome variable is a feeling thermometer towards state institutions, including the feeling towards the Constitutional Court of Czech Republic on a 0-100 scale. The post-treatment measure is a modified single-dimensional battery of 6 diffuse support questions, measured on a five-point Likert scale. The latter measure will be converted into summative index treated at the interval measurement scale, and both measures will be rescaled for comparison.

4) How many and which conditions will participants be assigned to?
4 Conditions:

Control: Participants get a paragraph information about the decision of the Constitutional Court of CR on election law.
Populism: Participants get the same paragraph of information, but judges' educational background and unelected status will be emphasized.
Partisanship: Participants get the same paragraph of information but also the paragraph would state that the decision disadvantaged participant's preferred political party.
Procedural Irregularity: Participants get the same paragraph of information but emphasize the procedural length of the decisions and its irregularities.

5) Specify exactly which analyses you will conduct to examine the main question/hypothesis.
I estimate main effects using the OLS model, with Huber–White sandwich standard error estimator, to control for potential covariate imbalances and to control for the pretreatment repeated measure (see above on quasi pre-test-posttest-design).

I use the causal forest algorithm in grf R package with default values to estimate heterogenous effects of the moderators. I use the best linear predictor fitting the conditional average treatment effects as a function of causal forest estimates as a test for the presence of heterogeneity.

6) Describe exactly how outliers will be defined and handled, and your precise rule(s) for excluding observations.
Individuals who do not pass the attention check, who do not complete the survey, and who complete the survey in less than 3 minutes will be excluded.

7) How many observations will be collected or what will determine sample size? No need to justify decision, but be precise about exactly how the number will be determined.
Having conducted a pilot study with 59 participants, where the final post-treatment legitimacy battery and the feeling thermometer were placed before treatment, I have identified a correlation between the initial measure and post-treatment measure to be 0.68, with the lower confidence at 95% at 0.51. At Cohen's d of 0.2 and pre-post correlation at 0.5, it would be necessary to collect 300 participants per treatment condition. Therefore, I will attempt to collect 1200+100 participants using Meta ads who would pass the exclusion criteria, and will stop the collection at that point.

8) Anything else you would like to pre-register? (e.g., secondary analyses, variables collected for exploratory purposes, unusual analyses planned?)
The demographic battery not discussed in section 5 will be included for exploratory purposes and exploratory estimation of the heterogenous effects.