Working Paper Series 718
(ISSN 2788-0443)

Consequences of Inconvenient Information: Evidence from Sentencing Disparities

Michal Šoltés

CERGE-EI
Prague, January 2022

ISBN 978-80-7343-525-7 (Univerzita Karlova, Centrum pro ekonomický výzkum a doktorské studium)
ISBN 978-80-7344-620-8 (Národohospodářský ústav AV ČR, v. v. i.)

Consequences of Inconvenient Information: Evidence from Sentencing Disparities*

Michal Šoltés†

January, 2022

Abstract

Inconvenient information about the performance of public institutions may undermine public trust. In an experiment, I test how information about sentencing disparities among judges in the Czech Republic affects respondents' perception of the judicial system. I find no effect on respondents' declared institutional trust and willingness to rely on the formal judicial system. Instead, the information marginally increased respondents' policy involvement: They became more likely to: (i) sign a petition that invites politicians to address the underlying issue, and (ii) consider fairness of the judicial system a more important policy issue. The increased interest in the petition was driven by mothers, who are arguably more sensitive to the particular treatment information in the presented case of a *failure to pay alimony*.

JEL Codes: H11, H40, D02, D83, K40.
Keywords: information disclosure, institutional trust, performance of public institutions, sentencing disparities

*I thank Michal Bauer, Francesco Drago, Jakub Drápal, Christoph Engel, Ole Jann, Filip Matějka, and Nikolas Mittag for useful comments. This study was supported by Charles University, GAUK project No. 218218 and by a grant from the CERGE-EI Foundation's Teaching Fellows program. This project also received funding from the European Research Council under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 678081). All opinions expressed are those of the author and have not been endorsed by the CERGE-EI Foundation. Preregistration: AEARCTR-0005374. Online appendix available here.

†Email address: msoltes@cerge-ei.cz; CERGE-EI, a joint workplace of Charles University and the Economics Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Politických vězňů 7, 111 21 Prague, Czech Republic.; Charles University, Faculty of Law, nám. Curieových 901/7, 116 40 Prague, Czech Republic.

1 Introduction

Public sector institutions have been repeatedly found reluctant to disclose inconvenient information, even if not doing so may jeopardize public health and safety and undermine principles of modern democracies. Censorship of information after the Chernobyl catastrophe by Soviet propaganda and repeated efforts to cover-up the spread of diseases in China are two prominent examples. In these examples, and in many other cases, the aversion to disclose information to the public was supposedly motivated by concerns that the information might reveal the incompetence and systematic failure of responsible authorities. And this, in turn, might lead to public distrust in the system and its institutions.[1]

In many cases, the concerns may be valid. In general, information about the performance and competence of public institutions to deliver on their responsibilities (e.g., public health ensured by health officers) affects public trust in institutions. Importantly, the information is likely to shape citizens' behavior with economic and social consequences. For example, Acemoglu et al. (2020) document that providing the general public with positive information about state courts' performance (reduced delays) in Pakistan changed citizens' attitude and increased the likelihood of using state courts instead of relying on informal institutions for dispute resolution. Since the asymmetric impact of negative and positive information has been documented in many domains (Eil and Rao, 2011; Coutts, 2019; Galil and Soffer, 2011; Moutsiana et al., 2013), one may wonder whether disclosing negative – and for the public institution "inconvenient" – information would lead to the opposite: public distrust and avoidance of such institutions.

To provide empirical evidence on the consequences of inconvenient information regarding the performance of public institutions, I conduct a survey experiment studying how citizens respond to information about sentencing disparities among judges in the Czech Republic. The fact that judges' characteristics (e.g., propensity to incarcerate) affect sentencing decisions is arguably one of the most worrying signals regarding the performance of judicial systems. It challenges the formal rules of equality before the law, and the clear, stable, and predictable application of the law.[2]

[1] For example, the Associated Press (2020) reports on the COVID-19 outbreak in China as follows: *"In Wuhan, local leaders were accused of telling doctors in December not to publicize the spreading virus in order to avoid casting a shadow over the annual meeting of a local legislative body. As the virus spread, doctors were ordered to delete posts on social media that appealed for donations of medical supplies. That prompted complaints authorities were more worried about image than public safety."*.

[2] Sentencing disparities have been documented in many judicial systems worldwide and extensively discussed by scholars. Mainly in criminology, but also in other related fields, a lack of consistency in sentencing is an established fact. Disparities have been documented along different dimensions: (i) within judges across time; (ii) between judges in a single jurisdiction; and (iii) between jurisdictions (Sporer and Goodman-Delahunty, 2009). Many scholars have even leveraged the different practice (leniency) of judges as a source of quasi-exogenous variation to provide causal estimates of incarceration on various

In the experiment, 2,410 participants were randomized into a treatment and an active control group and provided with varying, yet not deceptive information, about sentencing disparities among judges at regional courts in the Czech Republic. The treatment group was informed about sentencing decisions at a regional court where judges differ in their sentencing practice, i.e., a court with sizeable sentencing disparities, while the active control group was informed about a court where judges tend to decide consistently, i.e., a court with negligible sentencing disparities.

The core of the information treatment consists of shares of cases in which judges imposed community service instead of other types of sanctions (e.g., incarceration) for one of the most frequent crimes in the Czech Republic - *failure to pay alimony*. In a between-subjects design, I then measure the effect of the information treatment on: (i) declared trust in several institutions, including the judicial system; (ii) court-related behavior, such as the willingness to apply to courts and the demand for alternative dispute resolution; and (iii) policy preferences regarding the judicial system, including a willingness to become actively engaged in addressing the problem of sentencing disparities by signing a petition.

The results show that the provision of inconvenient information about sentencing disparities did not lead to public distrust in the judicial system or any other intuitions (e.g. the police). The share of respondents who declared a high level of trust does not differ in the control and the treatment groups. I can rule out effects larger than 0.11 standard deviations (σ) at the 95% level for each of the institutions. Furthermore, the treatment did not affect respondents' willingness to endorse applying to courts or demand for alternative dispute resolution. The effects are again precisely estimated and I can rule out even small effects at the 95% level.

Instead, the treatment increased respondents' involvement in searching for a solution to reduce sentencing disparities. The treatment increased respondents' willingness to read and sign a petition calling on politicians to suggest specifying sentencing principles that would assist judges in their sentencing decisions and thus limit the sentencing disparities. The treatment increased the share of respondents willing to read and sign the petition by 3.3 percentage points (5.8%). Additionally, respondents exposed to the treatment information ranked fairness of the judicial system as a marginally more important policy issue than respondents in the control group.[3]

outcomes (see, for example, Kling, 2006; Di Tella and Schargrodsky, 2013; Dahl et al., 2014; Aizer and Doyle, 2015).

[3]The results qualitatively correspond to the reaction of the general public to information and a video of the death of George Floyd. The general public has became undoubtedly more interested in the issue of racism documented by the Black Lives Matter protests and, for example, by online search (Barrie, 2020). A survey conducted 2 months after George Floyd's death suggests that most Americans support major (58%) and minor (36%) changes in policing; however, only 15% support the idea of abolishing police

To understand who is likely to react to the inconvenience information, I made use of the fact that mothers[4] are arguably more sensitive to the incompetence of the judicial system in the case of *failure to pay alimony*. If after a divorce, a father refuses or is unable to pay alimony for his children, a mother is left to cover necessary expenditures alone. Unfortunately, this is a widespread problem.[5] As a result, divorced mothers are often left in a complicated financial situation with little help from the government and any other institutions. Even if NGOs provide help and assistance, they tend to focus on legal consultation regarding suing the defaulter rather than providing financial support. Consequently, mothers are likely to be more sensitive to the treatment information, as they are the most vulnerable.

I show that the increase in respondents' willingness to read and sign a petition is driven exclusively by mothers. Once I allow the treatment effect to vary by the mother-status of respondents, mothers in treatment groups are approximately 10 percentage points more likely to read and sign the petition than mothers in the control group and about 7 percentage points more likely than non-mother-treated respondents. A similar pattern is discernible in the declared level of trust in the judicial system. Importantly, the potential negative consequences of inconvenient information on reliance on the judicial system are not visible even among mothers. Overall, zooming in on the most sensitive group of respondents makes the results only stronger: Information about sentencing disparities did not lead to avoidance of the judicial system. Instead, it motivates the respondents to become engaged in policy discussion and demand improvement.

Previous literature has studied the consequences of publishing information under different conditions. First, scholars have studied the effects of information about the performance of private firms (see, for instance, Beyer et al., 2010). My project differs from that stream of literature, as a reaction to the disclosure of firms' performance usually materializes through market mechanisms and affects the firms' valuation, which is virtually impossible in the case of public institutions such as the criminal justice system. Second, previous discussions in economics regarding information disclosure by public institutions focused on precision of the information and, in particular, on a trade-off between timely but noisy information and slow but more accurate information regarding volatile economic statistics such as GDP (Morris and Shin, 2002) and on communication strategies

departments (Crabtree, 2020). Similarly, Vaughn et al. (2021) also find that the public is significantly more supportive of reforming the police than defunding or abolishing. Additionally, Philonise Floyd, George Floyd's brother, called on lawmakers to make law enforcement part of the solution, not the problem during a House Judiciary Committee hearing to discuss police brutality and racial profiling, in Washington, on June 10, 2020.

[4]Mothers are defined as female respondents with at least one child regardless of the age of that child

[5]There is no exact figure of how often this happens, but the fact that the *failure to pay alimony* is one of the three most frequent crimes, and only a fraction of the cases go to court, suggests that this is a sizeable problem.

of central banks as a monetary policy tool (Blinder et al., 2008). This literature thus differs in the nature of the information and its goals.

This project is more relevant to the stream of literature devoted to consequences of publishing the performance indicators of hospitals (Smith et al., 2009; Ketelaar et al., 2011), as public health is often (co-)financed through public budgets with regulated prices that limits the scope for market mechanisms. However, since patients are generally allowed to choose which hospital to use, even regulated market mechanisms work and patients prefer better performing hospitals. As a result, the consensus in the literature suggests that publishing information has led to an improvement in under-performing hospitals (Hibbard et al., 2005). My project clearly differs, as offenders cannot generally choose which court to attend and courts are not financed according to the performance; market mechanisms do not apply at all.

This project shares several features with Acemoglu et al. (2020). In contrast to my results, Acemoglu et al. (2020) show that information about reduced delays in state courts increased the reported likelihood of using formal courts instead of non-state institutions (*Panchayats*) in rural Pakistan. Their study differs diametrically in several aspects; each may contribute to the different effects of the provided information. First, their project was conducted in a rural area in Pakistan where households access the court system frequently[6] and thus are aware of, and are arguably more sensitive to, the performance of the judicial system. In my setting–a standard European democracy–awareness about courts' performance is less widespread, and respondents are less experienced in the judicial system and courts' practice. Only 10% of respondents in this study reported that they had had sizeable experience with the judicial system (first-hand and/or through people they know well, e.g., family).[7] Second, the judicial systems in Pakistan and the Czech Republic enjoy different levels of public trust. According to Eurobarometer (2018), 43% of respondents in the Czech Republic tend to trust the judicial system. That is 8 percentage points fewer than the average of the EU28, yet still comparable with most developed countries. Conversely, in Pakistan, the state institutions suffer from a lack of trust (Jackson et al., 2014; Cheema et al., 2017).[8] Third, information provided by Acemoglu et al. (2020) is viewed as positive, whereas mine as negative. Since the previous literature documented an asymmetric reaction to negative and positive news in many domains of

[6]"In our survey one in every five households report that they have accessed the court system in the last three months" (Acemoglu et al., 2020, p.7).

[7]A lack of knowledge about how the judicial system works among the general public seems to be common in the European democracies. For example, according to Chapman et al. (2002), the British Crime Survey (BCS) and other surveys have shown that the public is poorly informed about crime and the operation of the criminal justice system.

[8]"Pakistan is an ideal setting for such an investigation because of the well-recognized weakness of state institutions and the associated low levels of access to and trust in the state." (Acemoglu et al., 2020, p.1).

human behavior (Eil and Rao, 2011; Coutts, 2019; Galil and Soffer, 2011; Moutsiana et al., 2013), it is likely an important difference in this setting too. All three aspects likely contribute to different information sensitivity.

My results resemble those of Khan et al. (2021), who found little or no effect of information about state success in managing crises on support for government policies and trust in the state in Pakistan. Their design, however, differs from mine and Acemoglu et al. (2020) in the generality of the treatment information. While this project and Acemoglu et al. (2020) provide very specific information about the performance of one particular institution - the judicial system - and study the consequences in that domain, Khan et al. (2021) study generalized measures of trust in the state.

I also contribute to the literature studying the causal effects of interventions on institutional trust in the judicial and law enforcement systems. Two studies estimate the causal effect of the perceived quality of public institutions on institutional trust by analyzing procedural justice protocol and trust in the police. Murphy et al. (2014) finds that when police officers followed an experimental protocol — that focused on voice, neutrality, trustworthiness, and respect — during a control, then drivers in Australia reported higher trust in the police. However, using a similar experimental design in Scotland, MacQueen and Bradford (2015) failed to replicate the effect of an increase in trust. A similar question of whether judicial system transparency affects institutional trust was studied by Grimmelikhuijsen and Klijn (2015). In their field experiment, respondents were invited to watch a TV series about a district court in the Netherlands that allowed the public to watch judges' daily work on real cases. The authors report that watching the TV series increased the declared level of trust in judges. The treatment, however, conveys different information. Information on the day-to-day practice on several cases can barely reveal (in)consistency in sentencing among judges. I extend this stream of literature by estimating causal effects of information about public institutions' performance on declared institutional trust and other measures of intended behaviors related to the trust.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The following section introduces the design of the experiment, and the outcomes studied. Next, I discuss the results with attention to the heterogeneous treatment effect by the mother-status. Finally, before I conclude, I remark on the interpretation and implications of the results.

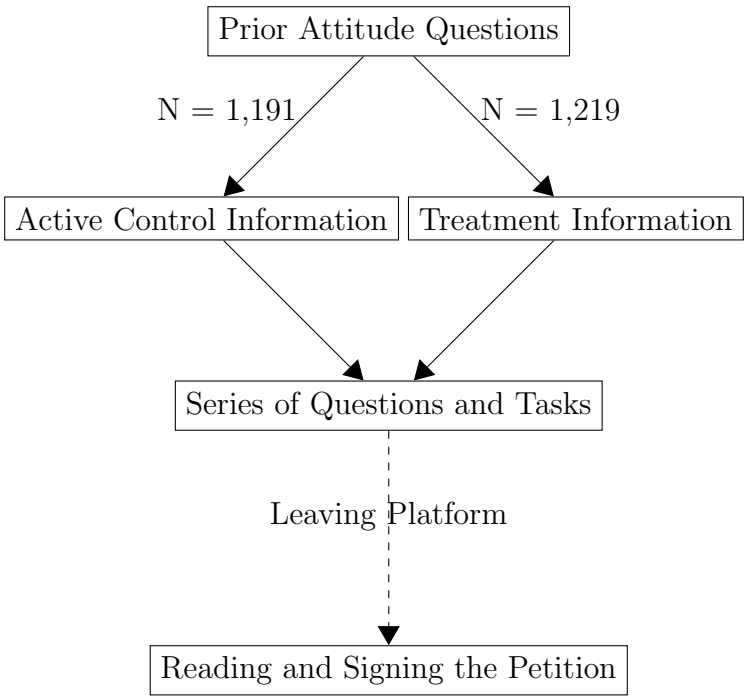
2 Design of Survey Experiment

To conduct the survey experiment, I partnered with Behavio, a private company administrating a panel of regular respondents. Respondents were invited by email to take part

in an online survey about courts and justice. 2,410 respondents completed the survey. In addition to the data collected in the experiment, I have basic demographic characteristics of respondents collected in previous surveys. Except for the final task, the experiment was run on a platform of Behavio familiar to the respondents.

The experiment consisted of four stages. Upon starting the survey, respondents were asked three questions regarding their prior attitude to the judicial system and their previous experience. Next, respondents were randomized into the treatment and the active control groups and were presented with the corresponding information. After the treatment phase, respondents were asked to complete five tasks and questions. The final task consisted of reading and signing a petition posted on a different website. Respondents interested in the petition had to leave the Behavio platform. Figure 1 captures the stages of the experiment. The order of tasks and questions in the first (prior attitude) and the third stages (five tasks) were randomized at the individual level.[9]

Figure 1: Flowchart of the Experiment



Notes: After three questions about prior attitude, respondents were randomized into control and treatment groups and provided with corresponding information. Respondents then answered several questions and tasks. If interested, at the end of the experiment, respondents left the platform to read and sign the petition.

[9]The full script is available in the online appendix.

2.1 Respondents' Prior Attitude

The first stage aims to understand the respondents' initial attitude towards the judicial system. Respondents were asked to what extent on a four-level scale they agree with two statements: (i) "Depending on the judge, similar cases can be sentenced differently"; (ii) "Overall, the judicial system in the Czech Republic works well." Additionally, I asked how experienced with the judicial system they and/or people close to them are.

2.2 Treatment and Control Information

I provided respondents with varying yet not deceptive information about sentencing disparities among judges within a regional court. The treatment group was informed about a court with high sentencing disparities among judges, while the active control group about a court with negligible sentencing disparities among judges. The source of the variation comes from sentencing disparities among judges at different courts. At some regional courts, judges significantly vary in their sentencing patterns, while at others, judges exhibit indistinguishable sentencing patterns. The information relies on variation within a given court, rather than between courts, as some of the regional, i.e., court-level, disparities in sentencing are justifiable and do not represent the intended variation.[10]

Data about sentencing decisions are complicated and multidimensional,[11] which makes it challenging to convey an understandable message. I rely on one of the most common offenses in the Czech Republic – *failure to pay alimony*[12] – and present shares of cases in which a judge sentences a convicted person to community service as the primary sanction. The offense of *failure to pay alimony* satisfies four criteria needed for the treatment to be based on credible information: (i) there are enough observations so that I can provide aggregate statistics based on at least 80 cases per judge (over the three year period of 2016-2018); (ii) compared to other offenses, in the objective elements of a crime, *failure to pay alimony* is a homogenous crime; (iii) while it is not part of the information provided in the treatment, the differences highlighted in the treatment are statistically significant; (iv) since it is a general type of crime, cases are assigned to judges at random.

The treatment and the control slides present the corresponding information in a way that the news would do. The slide's core is a simple, self-explanatory bar graph accompanied by a few additional pieces of information providing an interpretation of the

[10]For example, a driving disqualification in a city with functional public transportation is arguably a more lenient sanction in terms of economic and social consequences than in regions at the foothills of mountains with limited public transportation. These and similar considerations may lead to some desired sentencing disparities across regions.

[11]One has to consider different offenses and their subsections, different types and extent of sanctions, and combination of more types of sanctions.

[12]Formally, the crime is called Section 196 Negligence of Mandatory Support.

graph. In particular, the treatment slide consists of a bar graph showing shares of cases in which the convicted criminals were sentenced to community service by different judges (22%, 18%, 29%, 7%, and 8%), the headline says: "Judges sentence differently." Next, the slide explains that judge C (29%) sentenced almost a third of the convicted offenders to community service, whereas, for some, it is less than 10% and instead, the other judges impose different types of sanctions. Finally, the slide highlights that cases are assigned at random and that being assigned to judge C implies up to a threefold higher probability of being sentenced to community service.

In the control group, the slide shows a bar graph with shares of cases that were sentenced to community service by different judges (17%, 14%, 16%, 17%). The headline says: "Judges sentenced very similarly." The control slide further explains that regardless of the judge assigned, a convicted offender has a very similar probability of being sentenced to community service. Respondents in both groups are informed that the figures are based on actual sentencing decisions of judges at one of the Czech regional courts, but they do not know which one. The English version of the control and treatment slides are presented in Figure 7 in the appendix.[13]

2.3 Experimental Outcomes

The collected outcomes are classified into three main categories: (i) declared institutional trust; (ii) reliance on the judicial system; and (iii) policy preferences.

Institutional Trust To measure institutional trust, I adopt standard survey questions of declared institutional trust similar to those used by international institutions such as the World Values Survey (WVS) and the Eurostat. In particular, respondents were asked to indicate their trust level on a scale of: *a great deal*; *quite a lot*; *not very much*, and *none at all* towards four different institutions. One of the institutions was the judicial system. The choice of the others was dictated by the proximity to the judicial system. The closest institution to the judicial system is the police, as police officers often cooperate on criminal cases. The next institution is the government, which is responsible for a functioning judicial system[14]; and finally, the public broadcasting service, which can be viewed responsible for the lack of information about the sentencing disparities.

Reliance on the Judicial System I propose two measures to answer whether information about sentencing disparities reduces respondents' willingness to apply to a court.

[13]Once respondents finished the experiment, Behavio sent them a debriefing letter that explains that the information presented represents only one regional court and the situation may differ in different courts. The debriefing letter can be found in the online appendix.

[14]For example, the government (the Minister of Justice) plays a role in appointing new judges.

And (if so,) are the respondents more likely to search for alternatives to the formal judicial system? Since these questions ask about actual (intended) behavior, they arguably provide more convincing measures of real life consequences of the treatment information than the declared level of trust.

To understand whether providing information about sentencing disparities reduces the willingness to apply to the court, I cooperated with an NGO (*vasevyzivne.cz*), which assists single-parents in filing lawsuits against a spouse who is not paying alimony. In the experiment, I briefly explained a problem of a typical client of the NGO, i.e., a single mother who is considering whether to apply to the court to sue for alimony or not: "Applying to the court is potentially beneficial, but it also may lead to high costs, both in terms of money and time, and no benefits." I then asked the respondents whether they would recommend her to apply to the court or not. I also informed them that the NGO might use their advice as material in similar cases. Presumably, the belief that their responses will potentially serve as a guideline for other people in actual problems increases the cost of an ill-concerned answer.

Should information about sentencing disparities discourage respondents from applying to the judicial system, they may be interested in substitute to the judicial system. In a similar vein, Acemoglu et al. (2020) document the substitutability between formal and informal courts motivated by perception of the poor performance of the formal courts. As the next task, I explained that in some cases it is possible to rely on alternative dispute resolution instead of the judicial system. I then offered a free booklet with basic information about alternative dispute resolution. The respondents first provided an indicative answer of their interest, and if it was affirmative, they were asked to provide their email addresses to have the booklet sent. The two-step procedure evaded legal concerns about using their email addresses for different purposes than inviting them to conduct the survey. Furthermore, it imposed a small but positive cost on the action.

Policy Preferences New information about the performance of public institutions may change policy preferences and evoke public reactions (e.g. petitions and political protests). To measure this effect, I first asked respondents to imagine that they were the prime minister of the Czech Republic and gave them a list of four policy issues to rank according to the perceived priority. The most pressing issue was supposed to be ranked as the top priority, the second most pressing as the second priority, etc. The four policy issues were: (i) fairness of the judicial system; (ii) sufficient highway infrastructure; (iii) high-quality teachers in the education system; and (iv) the safety situation in the Czech Republic.

Second, I elicited respondents' willingness to become actively involved in policy de-

bate. Subjects were presented with an extract of a petition inviting politicians (members of the Committee on Constitutional and Legal Affairs, Chamber of Deputies, Parliament of the Czech Republic) to suggest specifying sentencing principles. Respondents were asked to indicate their interest in reading the full text of the petition and signing it. If interested, the respondents were referred to a Google forms website with the full text of the petition. The text highlights the importance and far-reaching consequences of sentencing decisions in one's life and suggests that it may be beneficial to have a manual that would lead to more consistent sentencing. The petition explicitly stated that the manual is meant to assist judges in their sentencing decisions but would not in any way undermine their independence and discretion. If interested in signing the petition, the respondents could have left their email address to have the signature sheet sent.[15] I collected individual declaratory answers regarding their interest in reading and signing the petition. Once respondents left the Behavio website and opened the petition, I could not observe responses at the individual level. However, since the treatment and the active control groups were referred to different forms of the identical petition, I observe the number of email addresses left by each group separately.

2.4 Randomization

The groups are balanced on both observed demographic characteristics and their prior attitudes towards the judicial system. Roughly 19% (21% in the control group) of the respondents in the treatment group reported to be single, 18% (17%) live in cohabitation, 43% (44%) are married. An additional 16% (15%) reported they are currently divorced, and only 4% (3%) are widowed. The reported marital status reflects their status at the time of the survey experiment but not their history; for example, respondents classified as married could have experienced a divorce before. Slightly more than 70% of respondents have at least one child, and the average number of children is 1.43 in the control group and 1.49 in the treatment group. In both groups, there are fewer male than female respondents (46.7% in the treatment group and 48.1% in the control group). For more details and balance tests, see Table 4 in the appendix.

[15]The respondents were informed that the petition would be filed once it collects at least 1000 signatures.

3 Results

3.1 Prior Attitude Towards the Judicial System

The majority of respondents (91.4%) agree that sentencing decisions are sensitive to the personality of a judge and that, depending on the judge assigned, similar cases can be sentenced differently. The measure of the general approval of the judicial system is less unequivocal. 52.4% agree that the judicial system works well, while 47.6% disagree. The immediate implication is that many respondents (46.7%) tend to approve of the judicial system, despite the perceived sentencing disparity. Figure 8 in the appendix shows the aggregate levels of responses.

Approval of the judicial system varies with the level of experience with that system. More experienced respondents hold more negative prior attitudes. Of the 10% of respondents with the highest level of experience, the majority (60%) strongly agree that, depending on the judge assigned, similar cases can be sentenced differently, and they do not consider the judicial system working well. Conversely, the less experienced respondents consider the judicial system working rather well and do not view the sentencing disparity as that extreme, although they still admit it may exist. Figure 9 in the appendix shows that more experienced respondents differ in their prior attitude towards the judicial system. The Wilcoxon rank-sum test rejects the equality of attitudes (p-value = 0.000) between the most experienced and the three levels of less experienced respondents taken together.

3.2 Experimental Outcomes

3.2.1 Institutional Trust

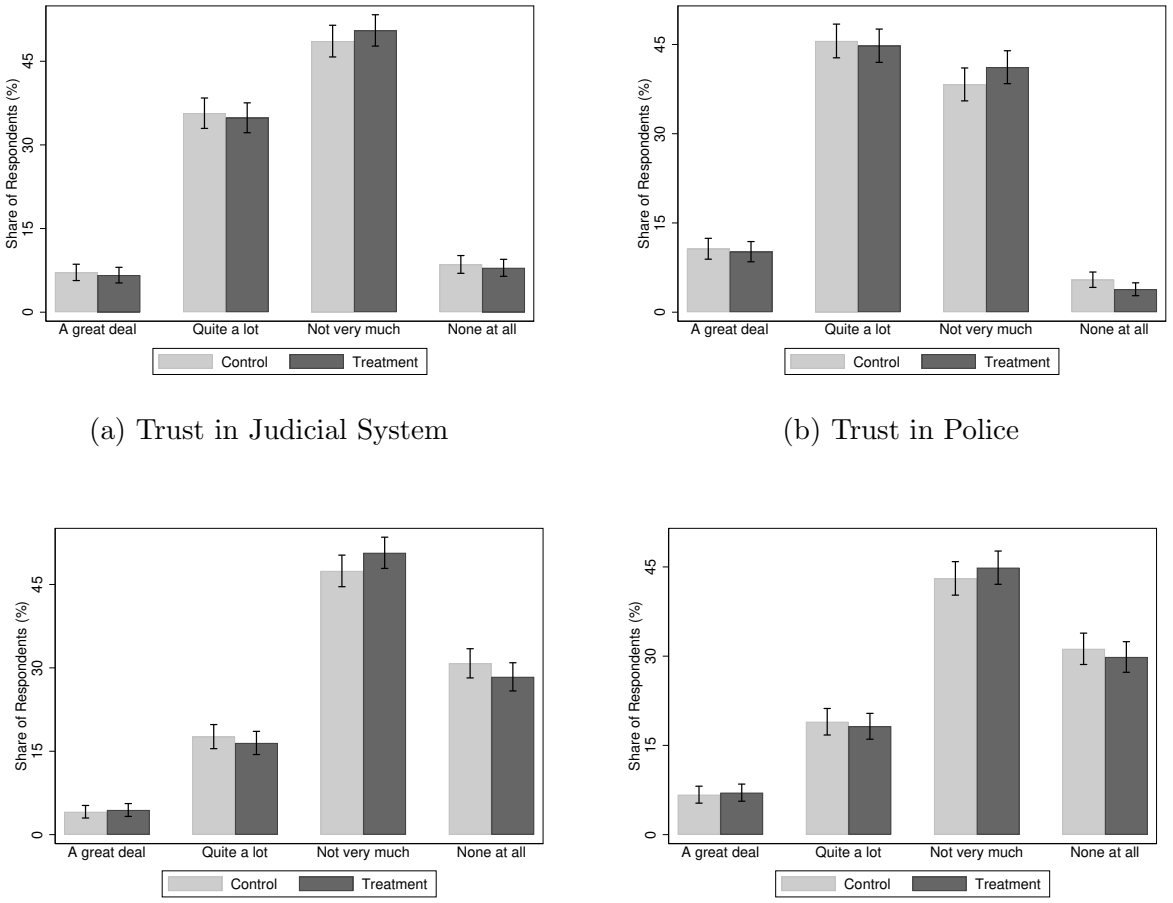
The most trusted institution is the police (56% of respondents report one of the two highest levels of trust), followed by the judicial system (42%) and the public broadcasting service (25%). The national government enjoys the lowest level of trust (21%). The results are consistent with international surveys. For example, according to Eurobarometer (2018), similar shares of Czech respondents trust in the police (63%), the judicial system (43%), and the national government (28%).[16] Overall, my results, while slightly less optimistic, resemble those from Eurobarometer (2018).

A high level of approval of the judicial system positively correlates with the level of declared trust in all four institutions. A respondent who views the judicial system as working well is approximately 45 percentage points more likely to report a high level of trust in the judicial system. More interestingly, they are also 25 percentage points more

[16]Eurobarometer (2018) does not include institutional trust in the public broadcasting service.

likely to trust the police, 12 percentage points the government, and 10 percentage points the public broadcasting service. The closer the institution is to the judicial system, the larger the effect is. All the effects are statistically significant. Table 5 in the appendix summarizes the full results.

Figure 2: Declared Levels of Institutional Trust by Treatment Status



(a) Trust in Judicial System

(b) Trust in Police

(c) Trust in Government

(d) Trust in Public Broadcasting

Notes: Declared level of institutional trust by treatment status: (a) in the judicial system; (b) in the police; (c) in the government; and (d) in public broadcasting service. For each institution, respondents were asked to choose from four levels of trust: (i) a great deal; (ii) quite a lot; (iii) not very much; (iv) none at all. 95% confidence intervals displayed.

Results from four different empirical exercises suggest that provided information about sentencing disparities has no effect on declared level of institutional trust. First, for each institution j, I use the two answers indicating a high level of trust: *a great deal* of trust; and *quite of a lot* as one category denoted as $High\ Trust$, and: (i) estimate univariate

OLS regressions

$$High\,Trust^{j} = \alpha + \beta\ Treatment + \varepsilon; \tag{1}$$

(ii) estimate OLS regressions with a set of controls (individual prior attitude towards the judicial system income, age, level of education, gender, the number of children, and heterogeneity of the treatment effect by mother-status and by prior approval of the judicial system); (iii) simulate the exact p-value for the sharp null hypothesis derived from the potential outcome framework (Athey and Imbens, 2017) and then test

$$High\,Trust_i(0) = High\,Trust_i(1) \quad \forall i = 1, \ldots, N. \tag{2}$$

Second, since the levels of institutional trust represent an ordinal scale, I assign a rank (1,2,3,4) to these categories and apply the Wilcoxon rank-sum test.

Panel A of Table 1 shows results from the OLS regressions. The first column for each institution provides strong evidence that the average treatment effect is economically and statistically insignificant. With the exception of the public broadcasting service, all point estimates are in absolute value safely less than 2 percentage points. The estimates allow me to rule out effects larger than 0.11 standard deviations (σ) at the 95% level for each of the institution. Providing information about sentencing disparities among judges thus did not affect shares of respondents with high trust in institutions. Similarly, the exact p-value test and the Wilcoxon rank-sum test presented in Panel C confirm the null average treatment effect.

The null average treatment effect masks heterogeneity. The treatment marginally decreases the share of trusting mothers[17] who are arguably more sensitive to inconvenient information regarding *failure to pay alimony*. The second columns for each institution in Panel A report results with a focus on $Treatment\ x\ Mother$. In this specification, I control for prior attitudes and other individual characteristics. Taking the point estimates at their face values, the share of trusting respondents among mothers decreases by 6 percentage points more than among non-mother respondents. There is no spillover effect towards other institutions. The marginal statistical significance of the effect on mothers is confirmed by the Wilcoxon test in Panel C. I do not find heterogeneous treatment effect on trust in the judicial system with respect to any other characteristics of respondents, including a prior level of approval of the judicial system. Table 5 in the appendix summarizes the full results.

I next provide evidence that the null effect is not driven by the limited attention of

[17] A female respondent is characterized as a mother if she has at least one child, regardless of the child's age.

Table 1: Treatment Effect on Declared Level of Institutional Trust

Panel A: Baseline Sample

	Judicial System		Police		Government		Broadcasting	
Treatment	-0.013	-0.007	-0.013	-0.018	-0.008	-0.016	-0.032	-0.009
	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.039)	(0.025)	(0.030)	(0.021)	(0.033)	(0.022)
Treat. x Mother		-0.059*		-0.050		-0.034		0.011
		(0.035)		(0.040)		(0.034)		(0.034)
Prior Attitude	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Demo. Char.	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
N	2 410	2 407	2 410	2 407	2 410	2 407	2 410	2 407

Robust standard errors in parentheses.
* (p<0.1), ** (p<0.05), *** (p<0.01)

Panel B: Restricted Sample

	Judicial System		Police		Government		Broadcasting	
Treatment	-0.010	-0.008	-0.013	-0.025	-0.013	-0.006	0.003	-0.040
	(0.022)	(0.035)	(0.022)	(0.042)	(0.028)	(0.033)	(0.019)	(0.036)
Treat. x Mother		-0.057		-0.042		-0.054		0.022
		(0.038)		(0.043)		(0.036)		(0.037)
Prior Attitude	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Demo. Char.	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
N	2 008	2 005	2 008	2 005	2 008	2 005	2 008	2 005

Robust standard errors in parentheses.
* (p<0.1), ** (p<0.05), *** (p<0.01)

Panel C: Exact p-value and p-value of the Wilcoxon test (Baseline sample)

	Judicial System	Police	Government	Broadcasting
Exact p-value	0.510	0.518	0.625	0.810
Wilcoxon test				
Full sample	0.652	0.760	0.509	0.702
Only mothers	0.063*	0.094*	0.915	0.515

* (p<0.1), ** (p<0.05), *** (p<0.01)

Notes: Panel A shows results from univariate and multivariate OLS regressions of *Treatment* on a dummy for high level (great deal of trust and quite a lot) of institutional trust. Panel B shows results from univariate and multivariate OLS regressions of *Treatment* on a dummy for high level (great deal of trust and quite a lot) of institutional trust using the *restricted* sample of more attentive respondents. Panel C presents p-values of two alternative measures; the exact p-value (Athey and Imbens, 2017) derived from 20,000 simulations and the p-value of the Wilcoxon rank-sum test that tests for the same rank of declared level of institutional trust.

respondents. I replicate the exercises on a sample that drops 10% of respondents who spent the least time on the treatment and control slides, respectively. Additionally, I also discard 10% of respondents who spent the least time on the slide with the institutional trust task, reaching 2,008 observations (83% of the initial dataset). I refer to this sample as the *restricted* sample and report the results in Panel B of Table 1. I find no effect on the *restricted* sample. The lack of effect is thus unlikely caused by respondents' limited attention.

3.2.2 Reliance on the Judicial System

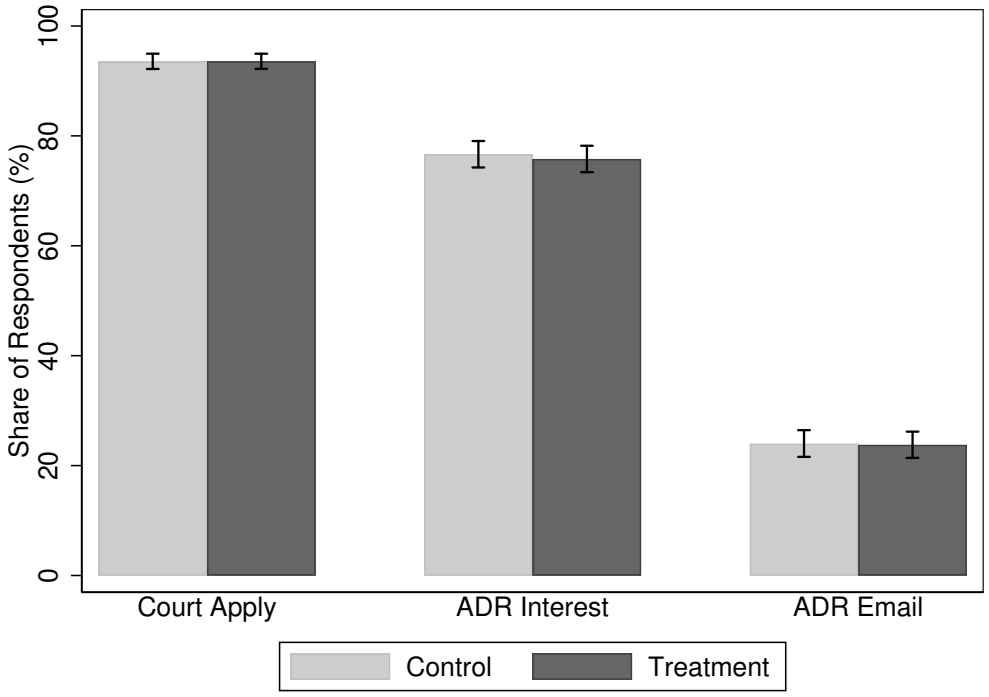
Respondents exhibited a strong will to apply to the judicial system, as almost 93.6% of respondents recommended that a single mother apply to the court in a situation in which she hesitates (*Court Apply*). Respondents who consider the judicial system working well, are by 4 percentage points more likely to do so. A majority of respondents (76.2%) was interested in receiving a booklet about alternative dispute resolutions (*ADR Interest*). However, when asked to provide email addresses (*ADR Mail*) to have the booklet sent, only 23.9% of all respondents and 31.4% of those who declared their interest did so. Better educated and more experienced respondents were more likely to demand ADR, which suggests that demand for alternative dispute resolution requires a particular level of sophistication regarding the judicial system. Figure 3 shows the shares of affirmative decisions for respondents in the treatment and the control group.

Information about sentencing disparities affected neither the (intended) reliance on the judicial systems nor the demand for alternative dispute resolution. The first columns for each outcome in Table 2 show that the average treatment effects are statistically insignificant and economically negligible. All point estimates of the average treatment effects are bounded between -1 and 1 percentage points. In terms of effect size, the effects are roughly of the same magnitude as those on institutional trust. I can rule out effects larger than 0.11 standard deviations (σ) for *ADR Interest* and 0.09 standard deviations (σ) for *Court Apply* and *ADR Mail* at the 95% level. Panel C in Table 2 shows the exact p-value and provides additional evidence of strong null results for all three measures.

The second columns for each outcome show results when controlling for other characteristics. With regard to the heterogeneity of the treatment effect, not even the most sensitive respondents - mothers - change their behavior. Similarly, there is no heterogeneous treatment effect with respect to approval of the judicial system. The full results are reported in Table 6 in the appendix. Panel B shows results estimated on the *restricted samples* of respondents who spent enough time on the treatment and control slides and on the slide with the corresponding task.[18] Results on the *restricted sample* confirm that

[18]Since the overlap of the dropped samples differs across tasks, the number of observations does too.

Figure 3: Reliance on Judicial System by Treatment Status



Notes: Shares of affirmative responses by the treatment status. *Court Apply* captures whether respondents recommend that a single mother apply to the court when she hesitates. *ADR Interest* measures shares of respondents who indicate their interest in receiving information about alternative dispute resolution (ADR). *ADR Mail* shows shares of respondents who provide their email addresses to have the information about ADR sent. 95% confidence intervals displayed.

the null effect is unlikely caused by the inattention of respondents.

3.2.3 Policy preferences

Petition I collected two measures of respondents' reactions to the petition. At the individual level, I measured respondents' interest in reading and signing the petition as an indicator variable and linked it to other characteristics of respondents. At the group level, I collected the number of email addresses provided by respondents once they left the platform to read the petition. More than 60% of respondents showed their interest in reading and signing the petition. Higher education, more experience with the judicial system, and perception of a sizeable sentencing disparity predict higher likelihood of an affirmative decision.

Figure 4 shows the shares of respondents interested in reading and signing the petition and those who provided their email addresses by groups. A visual comparison suggests a small but positive treatment effect. Panel A in Table 3 shows that the average treatment effect on respondents' interest in reading and signing the petition is 3.3 percentage points and marginally statistically significant. Given the baseline probability, the effect corresponds to a 5.8% increase. The exact p-value in Panel C also suggests that the effect is statistically significant. Estimates on the *restricted sample* presented in Panel B suggest an even slightly higher effect.

The average treatment effect, however, masks sizeable heterogeneity. The effect is more pronounced among mothers who are more likely to act on that information. Roughly 61% of mothers in the control group and 70% in the treatment group expressed their interest in reading and signing the petition. The difference of 8.4 percentage points (13%) is statistically significant (p-value of the two-sample t-test = 0.006). The second column of Panel A in Table 3 shows that mothers are more sensitive even when we control for other characteristics. Results from the restricted sample presented in Panel B suggest even an slightly larger effect. Finally, full results presented in Table 7 in the appendix show that there is no heterogeneity in the treatment effect with respect to the level of approval.

Results from the aggregate number of email addresses provided by each group are presented in middle columns in Panel A in Table 3. The data does not allow me to study heterogeneity and restrict the sample only to attentive respondents. The main results, however, are in line with the former measure of interest in the petition. Treatment information marginally increased policy involvement of respondents who are 3.2 percentage points more likely to be interested in the petition. Compared to the baseline rate, the treatment increased the share of provided addresses by 13.6%.

Table 2: Treatment Effect on Reliance on Judicial System

Panel A: Baseline Sample

	Court Apply		ADR Interest		ADR Mail	
Treatment	0.000	0.021	-0.009	-0.027	-0.002	0.009
	(0.010)	(0.022)	(0.017)	(0.035)	(0.017)	(0.033)
Treat. x Mother		-0.018		0.049		0.030
		(0.021)		(0.036)		(0.035)
Prior Attitude	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Demo. Char.	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
N	2 410	2 407	2 410	2 407	2 410	2 407

Robust standard errors in parentheses
* (p<0.10), ** (p<0.05), *** (p<0.01)

Panel B: Restricted Sample

	Court Apply		ADR Interest		ADR Mail	
Treatment	0.002	0.008	-0.007	-0.020	0.006	0.028
	(0.010)	(0.022)	(0.018)	(0.037)	(0.019)	(0.010)
Treat. x Mother		0.010		0.051		0.010
		(0.021)		(0.037)		(0.039)
Prior Attitude	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Demo. Char.	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
N	2 020	2 017	2 023	2 020	2 023	2 020

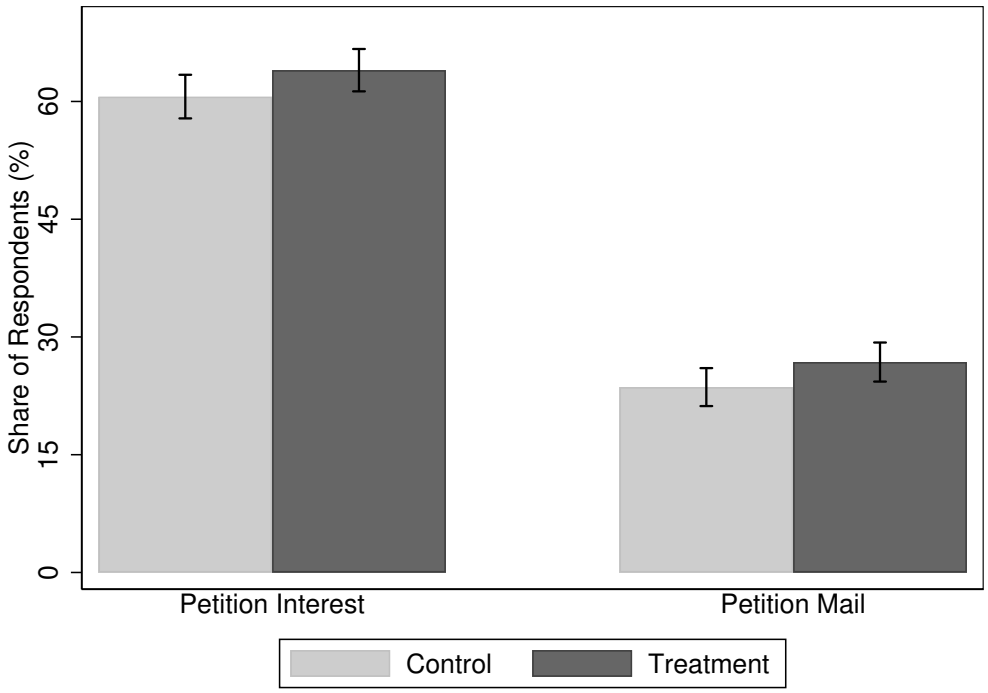
Robust standard errors in parentheses
* (p<0.10), ** (p<0.05), *** (p<0.01)

Panel C: Exact p-value (Baseline sample)

	Court Apply	ADR interest	ADR Mail
Exact p-value	0.993	0.620	0.898

Notes: Panel A shows results from univariate and multivariate OLS regressions of *Treatment* on a dummy variable for affirmative response from three tasks. Panel B shows results from univariate and multivariate OLS regressions of *Treatment* on a dummy variable for affirmative response from three tasks using the *restricted* samples of more attentive respondents. Panel C shows the exact p-value (Athey and Imbens, 2017) derived from 20,000 simulations.

Figure 4: Interest in Reading and Signing Petition by Treatment Status.



Notes: Share of respondents who declare their interest in reading and signing petition by treatment status. *Petition Interest* measures shares of respondents of the *baseline* sample who indicate their interest in reading the petition. *Petition Mail* measures shares of respondents of all respondents invited in the survey who provided me with their email addresses to have the petition sent. 95% confidence intervals displayed.

Table 3: Treatment Effect on Policy Preferences

Panel A: Baseline Sample

	Petition		Petition Mail	Top Priority JS	
Treatment	0.033*	0.030	0.032*	0.027	0.073*
	(0.019)	(0.040)	(0.017)	(0.019)	(0.038)
Treat. x Mother		0.077*			-0.008
		(0.040)			(0.039)
Prior Attitude	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Demo. Char.	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
N	2 410	2 407	2 410	2 410	2 407

Robust standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Panel B: Restricted Sample

	Petition		Petition Mail	Top Priority JS	
Treatment	0.047**	0.042		0.034*	0.070*
	(0.021)	(0.042)		(0.020)	(0.041)
Treat. x Mother		0.100**			-0.005
		(0.043)			(0.042)
Prior Attitude	No	Yes		No	Yes
Demo. Char.	No	Yes		No	Yes
N	2 037	2 034		2 018	2 015

Robust standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Panel C: Exact p-value (Baseline sample)

	Petition	Petition Mail	Top Priority JS
Exact p-value	0.086*	0.079*	0.155

Panel D: Rank Judicial System - Wilcoxon test

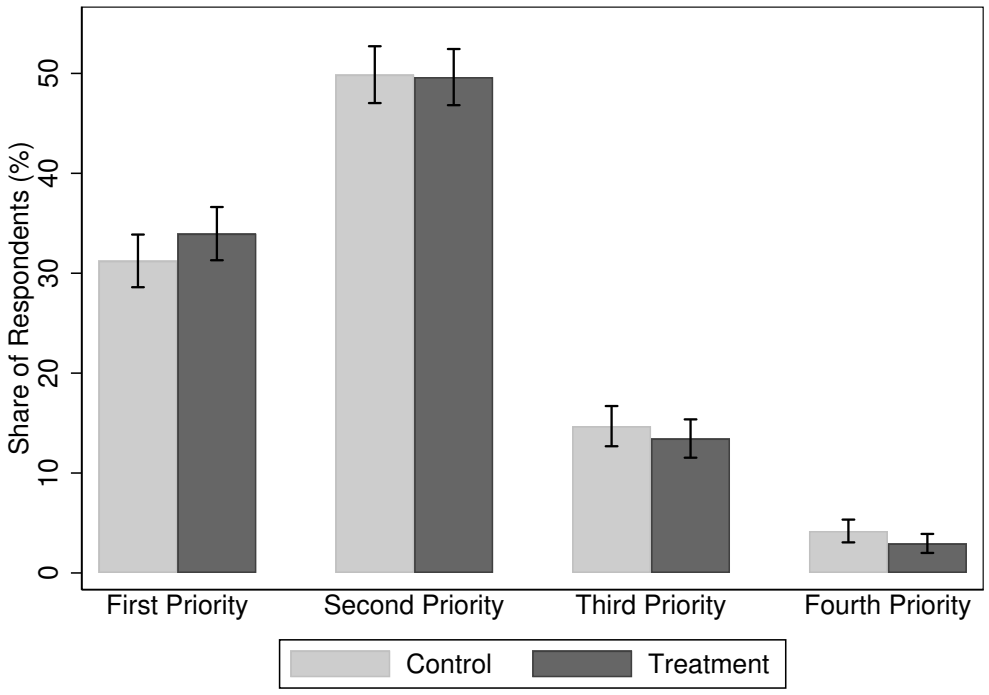
	Baseline sample	Restricted sample
Wilcoxon test	0.060*	0.041**

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Notes: Panel A and B show results from OLS regressions of *Treatment* on dummy variables that measure whether one (i) is interested in reading a petition; (ii) provide email address to have the petition sent; (iii) ranks fairness of judicial system as the top or second priority. Panel B shows results estimated on the *restricted* samples of more attentive respondents. Panel C shows the exact p-value (Athey and Imbens, 2017) derived from 20,000 simulations.

Relevance of Policy Issues The respondents view the fairness of the judicial system as a relevant policy issue. A third (32.6%) of them ranked fairness of the judicial system as the top priority and an additional 50% as the second most important priority. While the perception is likely affected by the survey experiment itself (e.g., through the experimenter demand effect) and thus it is barely generalizable, it is a good signal of the relevance of the issue. Figure 5 shows shares of respondents who ranked fairness of the judicial system as the first, the second, the third, and the fourth priority by both the treatment and the control groups. The figure suggests that the ranking among the treated respondents is slightly shifted towards the higher priority.

Figure 5: Rank of Fairness of Judicial System as Priority by Treatment Status



Notes: Share of respondents who rank fairness of the judicial system as the first, second, third, and the fourth priority by the control and the treatment groups. The remaining issues to be ranked were sufficient highway infrastructure, safety in the Czech Republic, and high-quality teachers in the education system. 95% confidence intervals displayed.

The share of respondents who would address the fairness of the judicial system as the top priority in the treatment group is 34%, while in the control group, it is 31.2%. The difference is not statistically significant. It becomes marginally statistically significant where controlled for other characteristics. The full results are presented in Table 7 in the appendix. To formally test the differences in the rankings of the policy issues, I

rely on the Wilcoxon rank-sum test. Panel D in Table 3 shows that the ranks marginally differ. This result confirms the apparent shift in the ranking of the judicial system among the treatment group. I find no heterogeneity effect with respect to mother-status and the level of approval. The results estimated on the restricted sample of more attentive respondents tend to be larger and also marginally statistically significant.

4 Discussion

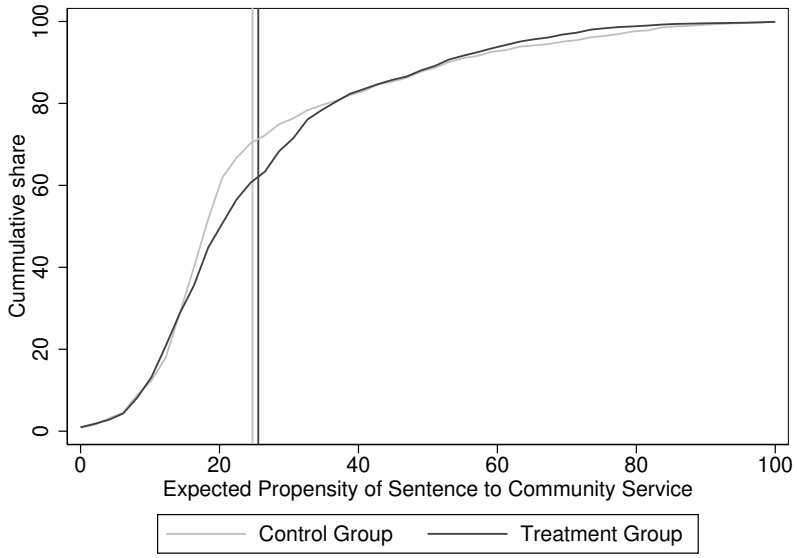
4.1 Interpretation of the Treatment Effect

An important concern in studying trust and trustworthiness based on information treatment is whether respondents trust the provided information. At the beginning of the experiment, respondents were informed that the provided information is truthful and based on data from the Ministry of Justice. This may evoke a tension between implicitly asking respondents to trust the data provided by the Ministry of Justice and, at the same time, asking them whether they trust the judicial system. To understand the degree of the potential risk, I elicited the perceived credibility of the information. To avoid influencing the experiment, the question regarding the credibility of the information came at the end of the experiment. 87% of respondents declared that they view the data as credible and only less than 1% of them selected an extreme choice of *definitely not credible*. The shares are virtually identical in the control and the treatment groups and the results are thus not systematically affected by respondents' mistrust in the information treatment. See Figure 10 in the appendix for more details.

For the proper interpretation of the results, it is important how respondents understood and interpreted the treatment information. The core of the treatment is to provide details on varying levels of sentencing disparities, i.e., the second moment of the distribution of sentencing decisions. This is a novel feature. Most of the information and survey experiments existing in the literature exogenously vary beliefs about the first moment of a relevant distribution, e.g., a probability of audit, a share of high-skilled immigrants (Haaland et al., 2020). Varying the signals about sentencing disparities is challenging, as it may be more complicated for citizens to understand the information and interpret it correctly.

Additionally, to derive the information treatment, one varies other statistical properties of the data. Conveniently, in the two courts used in the control and the treatment groups, the average shares of convicted offenders sentenced to community service for *failure to pay alimony*, i.e. the first moment of the distribution, were numerically identical (16%). Nevertheless, it is still plausible that the provided information affects respondents'

Figure 6: Expected Share of Cases Sentenced to Community Service



Notes:The figure shows empirical cumulative distribution function of respondents' estimates of the share of cases that are typically sentenced to community service at the national level for both the control and the treatment group.

perception of the propensity to sentence to community service systematically differently in the control and the treatment groups.

To understand this threat, I elicited the respondents' expectation regarding the average propensity to be sentenced to community service. In particular, the respondents were asked in what percentage of cases in the Czech Republic of *failure to pay alimony* is a convicted offender sentenced to community service. On average, respondents in both groups overestimate the actual shares. While the national average corresponds to the presented cases, i.e. 16%, the respondents in the control group expected 24.7% and in the treatment groups 25.6%. The difference between the groups is not statistically significant (p-value = 0.255). Figure 6 shows empirical cumulative distribution functions of the expected share of cases sentenced to community service and suggests that most of their estimates, in both groups, are concentrated between 10% and 30%. The fact that the cumulative distributions functions resemble each other, and the averages are not statistically different, suggests that the information provided does not affect the perception of the propensity of sentence to community services systematically differently in the control and the treatment groups.

4.2 Implications of the Results

I view three important implications of my results. First, evidence that inconvenient information did not lead to a decline in institutional trust and willingness to rely on formal institutions limits the concerns that revealing the information would be harmful from the public perspective. However, the personal incentives of public officers who decide whether to publish the information or not may still prevent publishing. If a public officer suspects that the information may harm him, his reputation, and his future in office, he may, in order to keep the information confidential, argue that if the information were public, it would cause distrust with a high (social) cost. My results imply that using that argument sounds more like a pretext than a real concern. Instead, the general public is likely to demand policy changes, which may indeed jeopardize position of the incumbent public officer.

Second, the observed heterogeneity shows the extent to which a particular group of citizens can drive the reaction to inconvenient information. While the idea is not new, I provide empirical estimates of such an effect. It suggests that even issues as worrying as sentencing disparities may remain overlooked and ignored as long as the information is not provided or available to a particular group of citizens. This is likely to hold more generally in many other policy issues. The heterogeneity also implies that publishing information about sentencing disparities for more (all) offenses might lead to a sizeable increase in the overall effect, as each of the offenses may trigger additional groups of citizens based on their sensitivity to the particular topic and offense. From that perspective, the effect estimated in this study would represent a lower bar of the effect.

Third, my results question the information value of standard measures of institutional trust. Even though the information increases the likelihood of signing a petition and demanding a change of the current system, suggesting dissatisfaction with situation, the information however did not pass-through to the standard measures of trust. If policymakers and international organizations identify social issues and consequently build policies and recommendations based on survey measures of institutional trust alone, it is possible that the policies will miss an important feature of citizens' preferences and dissatisfaction with formal institutions.

5 Concluding Remark

Publishing inconvenient information about the performance of public institutions in an environment where market mechanisms cannot operate raises the question of how citizens would respond. I focus on a particular case of sentencing disparities that undermine the principles of a clear, stable, and predictable application of law, and consequently, equality

before the law. The results suggest that inconvenient information about sentencing disparities does not lead to distrust and avoidance of the formal judicial systems. Instead, respondents exposed to the information were marginally more likely to read and sign a petition that calls on politicians to address the issue, and they consider fairness of the judicial system a more important policy issue. Additionally, I find a sizeable heterogeneity in the treatment effect. A personal connection to the offense seems more important for the effect of the information than a prior belief regarding the performance of the judicial system.

References

Acemoglu, D., Cheema, A., Khwaja, A. I., and Robinson, J. A. (2020). Trust in State and Nonstate Actors: Evidence From Dispute Resolution in Pakistan. *Journal of Political Economy*, 128(8):3090–3147.

Aizer, A. and Doyle, J. J. (2015). Juvenile Incarceration, Human Capital, and Future Crime: Evidence From Randomly Assigned Judges. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 130(2):759–804.

Athey, S. and Imbens, G. W. (2017). The Econometrics of Randomized Experiments. In *Handbook of Economic Field Experiments*, volume 1, pages 73–140. Elsevier.

Barrie, C. (2020). Searching Racism After George Floyd. *Socius*, 6:2378023120971507.

Beyer, A., Cohen, D. A., Lys, T. Z., and Walther, B. R. (2010). The Financial Reporting Environment: Review of the Recent Literature. *Journal of Accounting and Economics*, 50(2-3):296–343.

Blinder, A. S., Ehrmann, M., Fratzscher, M., De Haan, J., and Jansen, D.-J. (2008). Central Bank Communication and Monetary Policy: A Survey of Theory and Evidence. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 46(4):910–45.

Chapman, B., Mirrlees-Black, C., and Brawn, C. (2002). *Improving Public Attitudes to the Criminal Justice System: The Impact of Information*. Home Office London.

Cheema, A., Hameed, Z., and Shapiro, J. N. (2017). Victimization, Citizen Engagement, and Policing in Lahore. *Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives, Policy Report, Lahore, Pakistan*.

Coutts, A. (2019). Good News and Bad News Are Still News: Experimental Evidence on Belief Updating. *Experimental Economics*, 22(2):369–395.

Crabtree, S. (2020). Most Americans Say Policing Needs 'Major Changes.'. *Gallup*, 22.

Dahl, G. B., Kostol, A. R., and Mogstad, M. (2014). Family Welfare Cultures. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, pages 1–42.

Di Tella, R. and Schargrodsky, E. (2013). Criminal Recidivism After Prison and Electronic Monitoring. *Journal of Political Economy*, 121(1):28–73.

Eil, D. and Rao, J. M. (2011). The Good News-Bad News Effect: Asymmetric Processing of Objective Information About Yourself. *American Economic Journal: Microeconomics*, 3(2):114–38.

Eurobarometer, S. (2018). Public Opinion in the European Union.

Galil, K. and Soffer, G. (2011). Good News, Bad News and Rating Announcements: An Empirical Investigation. *Journal of Banking & Finance*, 35(11):3101–3119.

Grimmelikhuijsen, S. and Klijn, A. (2015). The Effects of Judicial Transparency on Public Trust: Evidence From a Field Experiment. *Public Administration*, 93(4):995–1011.

Haaland, I., Roth, C., Johannes, W., et al. (2020). Designing Information Provision Experiments. *The Warwick Economics Research Paper Series (TWERPS)*, (1275).

Hibbard, J. H., Stockard, J., and Tusler, M. (2005). Hospital Performance Reports: Impact on Quality, Market Share, and Reputation. *Health Affairs*, 24(4):1150–1160.

Jackson, J., Asif, M., Bradford, B., and Zakria Zakar, M. (2014). Corruption and Police Legitimacy in Lahore, Pakistan. *British Journal of Criminology*, 54(6):1067–1088.

Ketelaar, N. A., Faber, M. J., Flottorp, S., Rygh, L. H., Deane, K. H., and Eccles, M. P. (2011). Public Release of Performance Data in Changing the Behaviour of Healthcare Consumers, Professionals or Organisations. *Cochrane database of systematic reviews*, (11).

Khan, A., Nasim, S., Shaukat, M., and Stegmann, A. (2021). Building Trust in the State With Information: Evidence from Urban Punjab. *Journal of Public Economics*, 202:104494.

Kling, J. R. (2006). Incarceration Length, Employment, and Earnings. *American Economic Review*, 96(3):863–876.

MacQueen, S. and Bradford, B. (2015). Enhancing Public Trust and Police Legitimacy During Road Traffic Encounters: Results From a Randomised Controlled Trial in Scotland. *Journal of Experimental Ccriminology*, 11(3):419–443.

Morris, S. and Shin, H. S. (2002). Social Value of Public Information. *American Economic Review*, 92(5):1521–1534.

Moutsiana, C., Garrett, N., Clarke, R. C., Lotto, R. B., Blakemore, S.-J., and Sharot, T. (2013). Human Development of the Ability to Learn From Bad News. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 110(41):16396–16401.

Murphy, K., Mazerolle, L., and Bennett, S. (2014). Promoting Trust in Police: Findings from a Randomised Experimental Field Trial of Procedural Justice Policing. *Policing and Society*, 24(4):405–424.

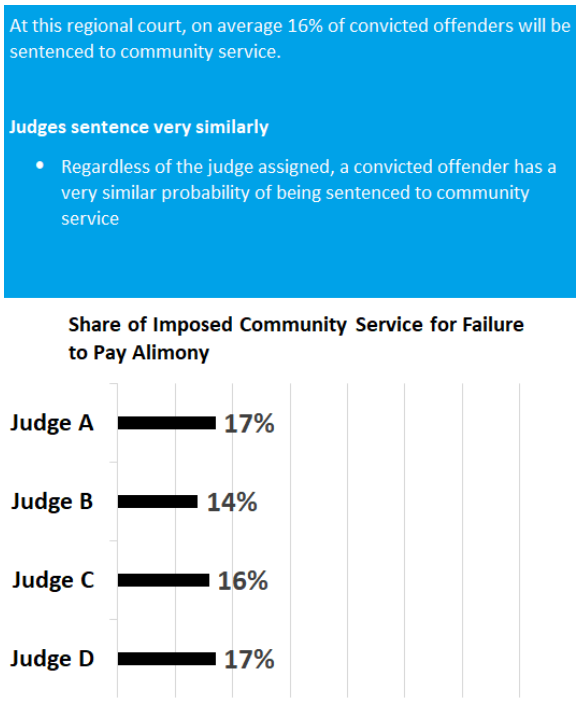
Smith, P. C., Mossialos, E., Papanicolas, I., and Leatherman, S. (2009). *Performance measurement for health system improvement: experiences, challenges and prospects*. Cambridge University Press.

Sporer, S. L. and Goodman-Delahunty, J. (2009). Disparities in Sentencing Decisions. *Social Psychology of Punishment of Crime*, pages 379–401.

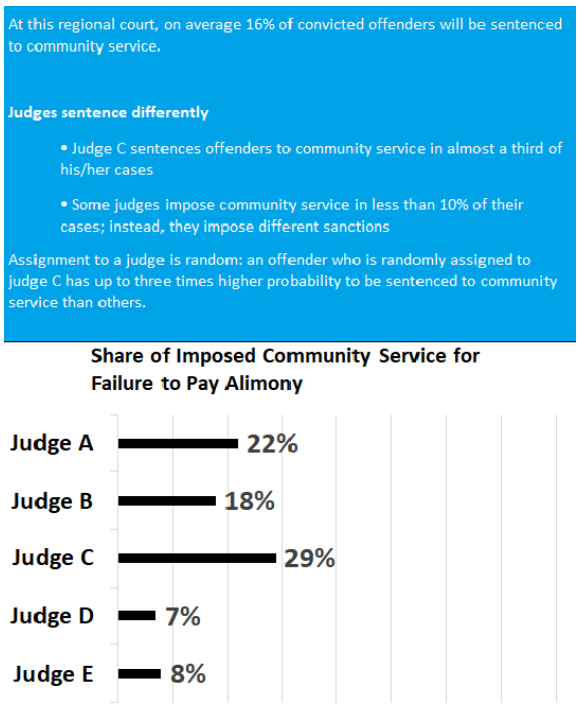
Vaughn, P., Peyton, K., and Huber, G. A. (2021). Public Support for Different Movements to Reshape American Policing is Contingent on the Perceived Implications for Crime and Public Safety. Unpublished Manuscript.

Appendix

Figure 7: Control and Treatment Slides



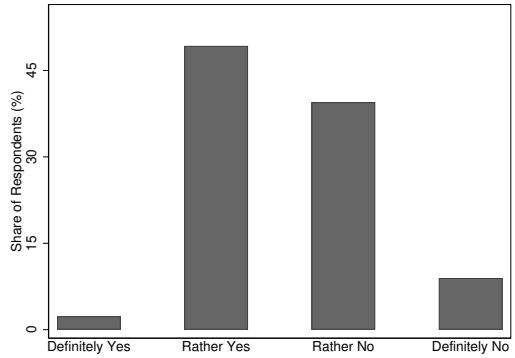
(a) Control Slide



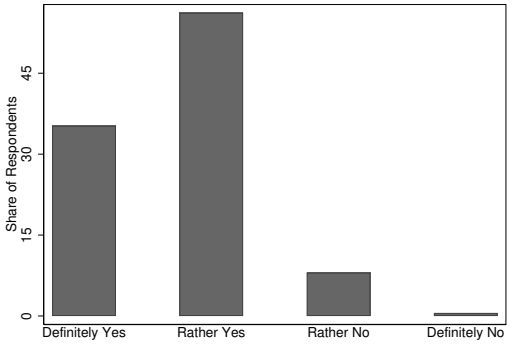
(b) Treatment Slide

Notes: This figure shows English version of the control and the treatment slides.

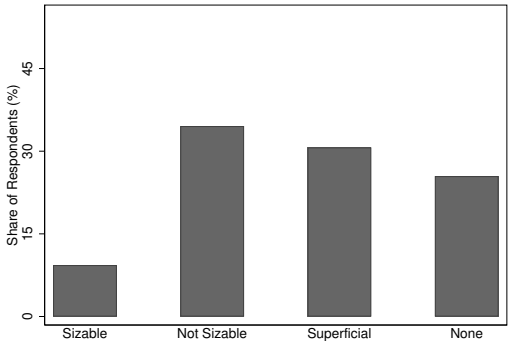
Figure 8: Prior Attitude Towards Judicial System



(a) Prior Approval of the JS



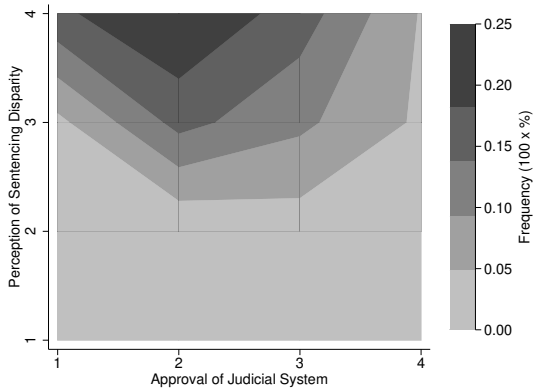
(b) Perception of Sentencing Disparity



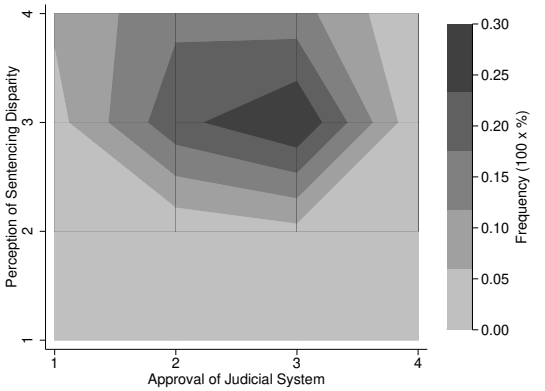
(c) Prior Experience with the JS

Notes: This figure shows responses to three questions regarding prior attitude. In (a) and (b) respondents were asked whether they agree with the following statements: (a) The judicial system in the Czech Republic works well. (b) Judges regularly differ in sentencing decisions in similar cases. (c) Considering how often you or people you know well come into contact with the judicial system, how experienced you do think you are?

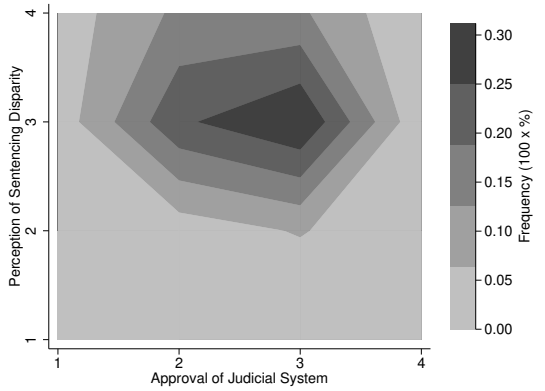
Figure 9: Attitude Towards Judicial System by Experience



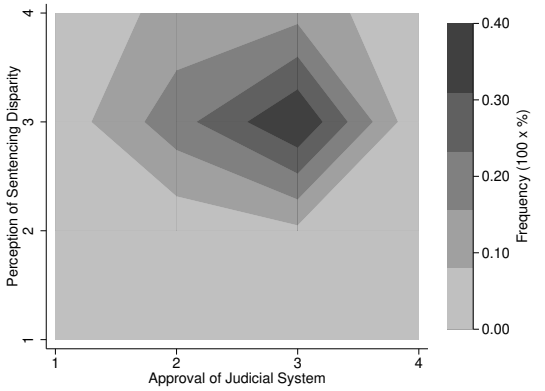
(a) Sizable Experience With the JS



(b) Not Sizeable Experience with the JS



(c) Superficial Experience with the JS



(d) None Experience with the JS

Notes: This figure shows level of approval of the judicial system (x-axis) and perception of sentencing disparity (y-axis) by four groups of respondents with different levels of experience with the judicial system.

Table 4: Mean Characteristics by Treatment Status

Variable	Mean Control	Mean Treatment	t-test (p-value)
Measures of Prior Attitude			
Approval of Judicial System			
Definitely yes	0.031	0.027	0.560
Rather yes	0.489	0.502	0.511
Rather no	0.380	0.386	0.760
Definitely no	0.101	0.085	0.192
Perception of Sentencing Disparity			
Definitely yes	0.361	0.338	0.235
Rather yes	0.548	0.578	0.137
Rather no	0.084	0.077	0.537
Definitely no	0.006	0.006	0.965
Experience with the Judicial System			
Sizable	0.100	0.102	0.883
Not sizeable	0.351	0.347	0.838
Superficial	0.296	0.294	0.919
None	0.253	0.257	0.820
Demographic Characteristics			
Education			
University	0.243	0.246	0.844
Highschool	0.702	0.691	0.550
Elementary	0.055	0.063	0.421
Marital Status			
Single	0.221	0.187	0.116
Cohabitation	0.184	0.192	0.613
Married	0.427	0.422	0.808
Divorced	0.142	0.156	0.301
Widowed	0.028	0.041	0.030
Male	0.481	0.466	0.432
Age	43.71	44.45	0.188
At least 1 child	0.702	0.719	0.367
Number of children	1.395	1.464	0.155
N	1,191	1,219	

Table 5: Treatment Effect on Declared Institutional Trust (Full Results)

	Judicial System		Police		Government		Broadcasting	
Treatment	-0.007	-0.008	-0.018	-0.025	-0.016	-0.006	-0.032	-0.040
	(0.032)	(0.035)	(0.039)	(0.042)	(0.030)	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.036)
Treat.x Mother	-0.059*	-0.057	-0.050	-0.042	-0.034	-0.054	0.011	0.022
	(0.035)	(0.038)	(0.040)	(0.043)	(0.034)	(0.036)	(0.034)	(0.037)
Mother	0.031	0.007	0.005	-0.027	-0.027	-0.038	0.022	-0.016
	(0.042)	(0.047)	(0.047)	(0.053)	(0.039)	(0.043)	(0.045)	(0.050)
High SD	-0.100***	-0.098***	-0.050*	-0.058	0.013**	0.010	-0.049	-0.072
	(0.030)	(0.033)	(0.031)	(0.034)	(0.029)	(0.032)	(0.033)	(0.036)
High Approval	0.469***	0.460***	0.268***	0.240***	0.134***	0.117***	0.116***	0.096***
	(0.025)	(0.027)	(0.028)	(0.031)	(0.023)	(0.026)	(0.025)	(0.027)
High Experience	-0.065***	-0.064**	-0.056**	-0.044***	-0.043*	-0.039	-0.049**	-0.075***
	(0.024)	(0.027)	(0.028)	(0.031)	(0.024)	(0.026)	(0.025)	(0.026)
Treat. x High Appr.	0.007	0.020	0.072*	0.087**	-0.005	-0.005	-0.032	-0.024
	(0.034)	(0.037)	(0.039)	(0.043)	(0.032)	(0.036)	(0.035)	(0.037)
Treat. x High Exper.	0.032	0.024	-0.031	-0.035	0.043	0.036	0.099***	0.107***
	(0.034)	(0.037)	(0.039)	(0.043)	(0.033)	(0.036)	(0.035)	(0.037)
Male	0.037	0.016	0.060*	0.031	0.027	0.012	0.086**	0.040
	(0.032)	(0.037)	(0.036)	(0.041)	(0.029)	(0.033)	(0.037)	(0.042)
Age	-0.010**	-0.010**	-0.011**	-0.013**	-0.011**	-0.012**	0.007	0.010*
	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Age Sq	0.000	0.000	0.000*	0.000*	0.000***	0.000***	-0.000**	-0.000**
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
University Educ.	0.092***	0.084***	-0.014	-0.021	-0.019	-0.019	0.098***	0.101***
	(0.020)	(0.022)	(0.023)	(0.026)	(0.019)	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.024)
Income (1000 CZK)	-0.000	-0.000	0.001	0.001	-0.001***	-0.002**	0.002*	0.002**
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Child Dummy	0.014	-0.015	-0.012	-0.009	0.041	0.064*	-0.028	-0.044
	(0.034)	(0.037)	(0.039)	(0.043)	(0.033)	(0.035)	(0.036)	(0.039)
Number Children	0.016	0.019*	0.020	0.022	0.005	-0.000	-0.023**	-0.019*
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Constant	0.568***	0.612***	0.686***	0.791***	0.252***	0.274***	0.114	0.107
	(0.094)	(0.105)	(0.106)	(0.119)	(0.092)	(0.104)	(0.098)	(0.110)
Observations	2407	2005	2407	2005	2407	2005	2407	2005
Restricted Sample	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 6: Treatment Effect on Reliance on Judicial System (Full Results)

	CourtApply		ADR Interest		ADR Mail	
Treatment	0.021	0.008	-0.027	-0.020	0.009	0.028
	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.035)	(0.037)	(0.033)	(0.037)
Treat.x Mother	-0.018	0.010	0.049	0.051	0.030	0.010
	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.036)	(0.037)	(0.035)	(0.039)
Mother	0.015	0.004	-0.017	-0.049	0.029	0.004
	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.041)	(0.043)	(0.045)	(0.050)
High SD	-0.029**	-0.012	-0.025	-0.036	0.054	0.051
	(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.029)	(0.032)
High Approval	0.040***	0.048***	0.008	0.014	-0.002	0.005
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.024)	(0.026)	(0.025)	(0.027)
High Experience	-0.011	-0.000	0.086***	0.081***	0.050**	0.056**
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.025)	(0.028)
Treat. x High Appr.	-0.020	-0.015	0.018	0.018	-0.048	-0.059
	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.035)	(0.037)	(0.035)	(0.039)
Treat. x High Exper.	-0.006	0.001	-0.021	-0.035	0.008	0.014
	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.035)	(0.037)	(0.0353)	(0.039)
Male	-0.004	0.003	-0.018	-0.043	0.062*	0.039
	(0.019)	(0.020)	(0.031)	(0.033)	(0.035)	(0.0402)
Age	-0.001	-0.002	-0.003	-0.006	-0.005	-0.005
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Age Sq	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
University Educ.	0.006	0.006	0.117***	0.100***	0.071***	0.076***
	(0.012)	(0.011)	(0.019)	(0.020)	(0.022)	(0.025)
Income (1000 CZK)	0.001**	0.001**	0.003***	0.002***	0.001	0.001
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Child Dummy	0.002	0.018	-0.055	-0.035	-0.103***	-0.086**
	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.035)	(0.037)	(0.036)	(0.041)
Number Children	-0.001	-0.004	-0.001	-0.001	0.024**	0.021*
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.013)
Constant	0.946***	0.959***	0.770***	0.903***	0.247***	0.272**
	(0.057)	(0.056)	(0.100)	(0.106)	(0.094)	(0.109)
Observations	2394	2010	2407	2020	2407	2020
Restricted Sample	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes

Robust standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

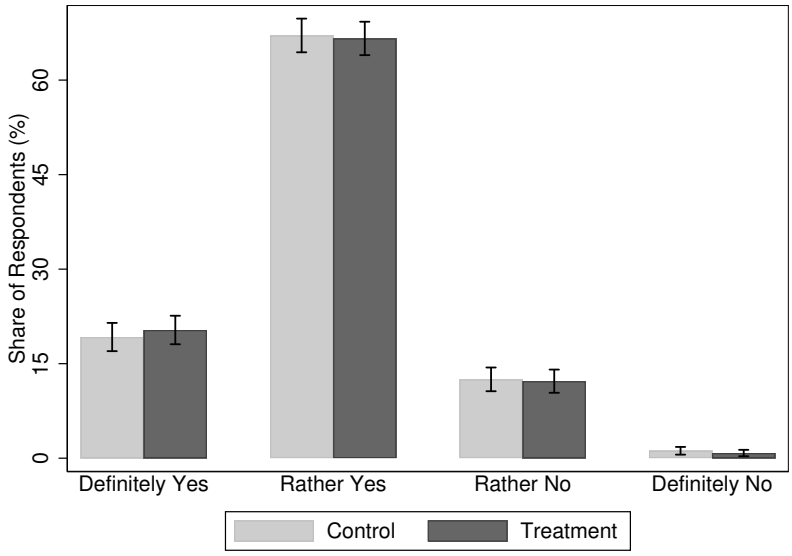
Table 7: Treatment Effect on Policy Preferences (Full Results)

	Petition		Top Priority JS	
Treatment	0.030	0.042	0.073*	0.070*
	(0.040)	(0.042)	(0.038)	(0.041)
Treat.x Mother	0.077*	0.100**	-0.008	-0.005
	(0.040)	(0.043)	(0.039)	(0.042)
Mother	0.010	-0.024	0.036	0.056
	(0.050)	(0.054)	(0.048)	(0.053)
High SD	0.075**	0.093**	-0.032	-0.024
	(0.036)	(0.034)	(0.035)	(0.037)
High Approval	0.020	0.015	-0.059**	-0.065**
	(0.029)	(0.031)	(0.027)	(0.030)
High Experience	0.076***	0.074**	0.072***	0.058*
	(0.029)	(0.031)	(0.027)	(0.030)
Treat. x High Appr.	-0.058	-0.054	0.003	0.005
	(0.040)	(0.043)	(0.039)	(0.042)
Treat. x High Exper.	0.002	-0.017	-0.097**	-0.082*
	(0.040)	(0.043)	(0.039)	(0.043)
Male	0.011	0.001	-0.017	0.005
	(0.038)	(0.042)	(0.037)	(0.042)
Age	0.000	-0.001	0.002	0.000
	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.006)
Age Sq	0.000	0.000	-0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
University Educ.	0.055**	0.048*	-0.018	-0.010
	(0.024)	(0.026)	(0.023)	(0.025)
Income (1000 CZK)	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Child Dummy	-0.049	-0.008	-0.096**	-0.077*
	(0.040)	(0.044)	(0.039)	(0.044)
Number Children	0.012	0.003	0.005	0.003
	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.014)
Constant	0.426***	0.480***	0.309***	0.313***
	(0.112)	(0.125)	(0.107)	(0.120)
Observations	2407	2034	2407	2015
Restricted Sample	No	Yes	No	Yes

Robust standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Figure 10: Perception of Credibility of Information Provided by Treatment Status



Notes: The figure shows shares of respondents classified by how credible they perceive information provided by the experimenter. 95% confidence intervals displayed.

Abstrakt

Nepříjemné informace o fungování veřejných institucí mohou podkopat důvěru veřejnosti. V experimentu testuji, jak informace o rozdílném ukládání trestů mezi soudci v České republice ovlivňují vnímání soudního systému. Nenašel jsem žádný vliv na důvěru respondentů ve veřejné instituce ani na jejich ochotu obrátit se na soudní systém. Informace místo toho mírně zvýšily angažovanost respondentů ve veřejné diskuzi: (i) zvýšila se jejich ochota podepsat petici, která vyzývá politiky, aby se zabývali problémem ukládání trestů a (ii) začali považovat spravedlnost soudního systému za důležitější problém. Ke zvýšenému zájmu o petici přispěly matky, které jsou pravděpodobně citlivější na konkrétní informace o fungování soudů v prezentovaném případě neplacení výživného.

Working Paper Series
ISSN 2788-0443

Individual researchers, as well as the on-line version of the CERGE-EI Working Papers (including their dissemination) were supported from institutional support RVO 67985998 from Economics Institute of the CAS, v. v. i.

Specific research support and/or other grants the researchers/publications benefited from are acknowledged at the beginning of the Paper.

Published by
Charles University, Center for Economic Research and Graduate Education (CERGE)
and
Economics Institute of the CAS, v. v. i. (EI)
CERGE-EI, Politických vězňů 7, 111 21 Prague 1, tel.: +420 224 005 153, Czech Republic.
Phone: + 420 224 005 153
Email: office@cerge-ei.cz
Web: https://www.cerge-ei.cz/

Editor: Byeongju Jeong

The paper is available online at https://www.cerge-ei.cz/working-papers/.

ISBN 978-80-7343-525-7 (Univerzita Karlova, Centrum pro ekonomický výzkum a doktorské studium)
ISBN 978-80-7344-620-8 (Národohospodářský ústav AV ČR, v. v. i.)