The Political Consequences of Participatory Democracy: Evidence from the Great National Debate in France

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Abstract

Can participatory initiatives ease democratic discontent and reconnect citizens with representative institutions? Although such initiatives are widely championed as instruments of democratic repair, we still know little about whether and when they shape political attitudes. We offer new theoretical and empirical insights into these questions by examining political responses to France's 2019 *Grand Débat National*, a nationwide consultation launched by President Emmanuel Macron in response to the *Gilets jaunes* movement. Leveraging variation in both individual attendance and the local occurrence of public consultations, we find that consultations not only failed to restore confidence or boost support for their sponsor, but instead modestly benefited the anti-establishment radical left, both among participants and in localities that hosted meetings. We also lay out a pre-analysis plan for a survey experiment designed to identify the conditions under which participatory initiatives yield political returns and which actors stand to benefit. Taken together, our findings show that participatory initiatives do not necessarily reinvigorate democracy and may even benefit anti-establishment alternatives, suggesting that their democratic and electoral consequences depend on the relationship between citizen voice, government responsiveness, and partisan competition.

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1 Introduction

Participatory initiatives have become a common response to democratic disaffection. The number and variety of deliberative forums have expanded as governments across established democracies seek new ways to narrow the perceived distance between citizens and representative institutions (Lowndes and Pratchett 2001; Papadopoulos and Warin 2007). By bringing citizens into public decision-making outside ordinary electoral channels, participatory initiatives offer citizens opportunities to voice grievances and engage public authority. In doing so, they promise to strengthen civic competence and renew confidence in the political system (Bingham et al. 2005; Fung 2015; Nabatchi 2010). Yet participatory initiatives can also unsettle existing relationships between citizens and representative institutions by creating new expectations of government responsiveness (Mayer et al. 2005). Governments may claim credit for creating opportunities for citizen involvement, while the issues elevated through participation may strengthen parties already associated with the demands citizens express (Bélanger and Meguid 2008; Mayhew 1974; Petrocik 1996; Pin 2022). How governments respond to citizen input may also determine where these political returns accrue.

These questions carry particular importance in contemporary political contexts characterized by weakening partisan attachments, falling levels of institutional trust, electoral disengagement, and growing support for radical anti-establishment challengers (De Vries and Hobolt 2020; Druez et al. 2025; Tilley and Hobolt 2016). While prior research has shown that citizen involvement in participatory institutions can shape perceptions of legitimacy and political efficacy (Chambers 2003; Fishkin 1993; Michels and De Graaf 2010; Nabatchi 2010), we still know little about whether and when they influence partisan attachments and electoral outcomes. These dynamics warrant attention, not least because participatory initiatives often carry expectations of electoral rewards. Their political consequences also bear directly on the promise of democratic repair. While participatory initiatives may alter evaluations of their government sponsors, electoral behavior also depends on the issues citizens prioritize and the parties they see as capable of representing their concerns (Budge and Farlie 2025; Bélanger and Meguid 2008; Petrocik 1996). Participatory initiatives may therefore also redirect support toward parties associated with the grievances expressed through the process. We ask whether and when governments benefit politically from creating

participatory opportunities and under what conditions competing parties capture those returns.

We investigate these questions through the case of France's *Grand Débat National* (Great National Debate), launched by President Emmanuel Macron in January 2019 in response to widespread social unrest and protests led by the *Gilets jaunes* movement. The initiative invited citizens to deliberate on taxation, public services, ecological transition, and democratic representation. Its origins in mass protest, extensive funding, broad geographic reach, and high visibility make it particularly well suited for examining its political implications. More than 10,000 local consultations were held in 4,378 communes across metropolitan France, bringing together an estimated 500 000 participants.

We exploit variation in both individual attendance and the local occurrence of consultations. At the individual level, we draw on a panel survey that follows the same respondents over time and employ a difference-in-differences (DiD) design to estimate whether attending a consultation changed presidential approval and feelings of closeness to different party families. At the local level, we use a doubly robust DiD estimator (Sant'Anna and Zhao 2020) to evaluate whether hosting a consultation affected presidential election results relative to localities that did not. We propose a complementary survey experiment to identify how participatory institutions, issue ownership, and government follow-through shape government approval and party vote propensities.

We uncover a selective electoral effect across both levels of analysis. Participation in the *Grand Débat* did not deliver political dividends to its sponsor. Citizens who participated in a consultation reported lower presidential approval and were no more likely to identify with the President's party, La République en Marche! either. Instead, attendees expressed greater attachment to an anti-establishment challenger on the radical left, but no other established or radical alternative. The local-level evidence mirrors these findings. Communes that held consultations saw no increase in support for Macron or in turnout, while the mainstream parties, particularly on the left, lost ground. The radical left, by contrast, gained electoral support, again without a corresponding shift toward the radical right. Rather than restoring trust in the incumbent and the political establishment more generally, the initiative appears to have channeled discontent toward a specific type of an anti-establishment challenger.

This pattern is consistent with two related mechanisms we seek to explicitly examine in a survey experiment. First, consultation may have heightened expectations of government respon-

siveness, making any gap between citizen demands and governmental response more politically consequential. Second, by elevating particular grievances, consultation may have strengthened the credibility of the party that already possessed greater issue ownership and was thus associated with the substantive concerns emphasized in the debates.

Our article makes three contributions. First, we extend research on democratic innovation by shifting attention from institutional design and participant attitudes to observable electoral behavior. Second, we develop a theoretical account of how participatory initiatives distribute political returns between institutional sponsors and parties associated with the grievances placed on the agenda. Third, we contribute to scholarly debates on electoral realignment and rise of challenger parties by demonstrating that participatory consultation can also channel dissatisfaction toward a specific form of an anti-establishment outsider (De Vries and Hobolt 2020; Tilley and Hobolt 2016). Taken together, these findings have important implications for understandings of democratic discontent and the crisis of representation across established democracies, as well as the potential and limits of participatory initiatives in addressing them.

2 The Crisis of Representation and the Participatory Turn

Established democracies are under considerable strain. Citizens across rich postindustrial societies have grown increasingly disenchanted with politics and distrustful of democratic institutions (Citrin and Stoker 2018; Dalton 2004; Valgarðsson et al. 2025). At the ballot box, voters have moved away from traditional parties toward anti-establishment alternatives and become less likely to participate in elections in the first place (De Vries and Hobolt 2020; Mair 2023). Large numbers have also taken to the streets to express their dissatisfaction (Druez et al. 2025).

These developments are emblematic of a deeper crisis of representation. With established parties converging on their policy positions and decision-making becoming increasingly insulated from public pressure and more responsive to some groups over others (Bartels 2016; Berman 2019; Gilens and Page 2014; Mudge 2018; Persson and Sundell 2024), the gap between ordinary citizens and their representative institutions has widened. Citizens disengage or support political challengers when they perceive that they have little influence over public decisions and that elected representatives are unwilling to address their concerns (Fiorino 1990). Radical political en-

trepreneurs have capitalized on these perceptions by presenting themselves as representatives of ordinary citizens against unresponsive political elites (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). Because such appeals are often closely tied to illiberal authoritarian agendas, their growing resonance poses considerable threats to democratic institutions and norms (ibid.); once in office, these actors routinely undermine checks and balances and seek ways to weaken constraints on executive power (Bermeo 2016). Expert assessments tracking democratic developments suggest that these endeavors have proven at least partially effective: liberal democracy in North America and Western Europe has fallen to its lowest level in more than five decades (Nord et al. 2026).

Against this backdrop, participatory initiatives have become prominent institutional responses to this representational gap. Advocates argue that participatory initiatives can reconnect citizens with representative bodies through several pathways. First, participation can provide access to policymaking by giving citizens opportunities to articulate concerns outside electoral competition (Bingham et al. 2005; Fung 2015). Second, the deliberative interaction embedded in participatory institutions can help participants develop more considered policy judgments by exposing them to information and competing perspectives (Chambers 2003; Fishkin 1993). Third, consultation communicates citizen demands to public officials and allows citizens to evaluate whether political authorities acknowledge and act on those demands (Michels and De Graaf 2010; Nabatchi 2010). Venues where the public is consulted are particularly important within this broader participatory turn precisely because they invite citizens to express preferences and policy priorities outside ordinary electoral channels (Van Damme and Brans 2012). The appeal of participatory initiatives such as the Irish Constitutional Convention, the Irish Citizens' Assembly, and permanent citizens' bodies established in the German-speaking region of Belgium rests precisely on the expectation that participation helps restore confidence in the political system and enhances its legitimacy.

While these initiatives create new channels for citizen voice and political participation, they remain deeply embedded in electoral politics. By shaping citizens' policy judgments and evaluations of political responsiveness, participation may influence not only confidence in democratic institutions, but also whether and which political actors they support in turn. Moreover, decisions to establish participatory initiatives are themselves far from politically neutral. Governments have introduced them in response to public unrest, as part of broader reform pledges made during electoral campaigns, and to address divisive policy questions. Their adoption therefore

reflects both implicit and explicit electoral expectations: beyond gathering citizen input, sponsors leverage them to strengthen their political legitimacy and public support. Advocates have also made the case for deliberation as a means of countering the appeal of populist anti-establishment challengers.

Yet while a wealth of scholarship has examined how the institutional design, deliberative quality, and participants' political attitudes influence participatory processes and their outcomes, we still know surprisingly little about their political implications. These political dimensions warrant careful scholarly attention, not least because they bear directly on the promise of democratic repair. Can participatory initiatives electorally benefit their sponsors and redirect dissatisfaction from radical populist actors toward established parties or other political alternatives? If so, under what conditions? Our research sheds new light on these questions.

3 Theorizing the Political Consequences of Participatory Initiatives

Participatory governance encompasses government-sponsored opportunities for citizens to contribute to public discussion and policymaking outside elections. Although these initiatives vary in their organization and connection to government action, they create invited spaces through which citizens communicate preferences to public authorities and contribute to public decisions (Cornwall 2002). Across these institutional forms, participation provides citizens with information about which demands receive recognition and how political authorities respond (Germann et al. 2024; Grönlund et al. 2010; Luskin et al. 2002). How these experiences affect partisan attachments and electoral support remains an open question.

We develop expectations about these outcomes by connecting research on participation and government responsiveness with scholarship on electoral credit and issue ownership. This framework directs attention to how consultation distributes political returns between the government that sponsors the process and the parties associated with the issues citizens are invited to discuss.

Government sponsorship provides one basis for allocating political returns. Creating a participatory initiative identifies the officials responsible for expanding citizen involvement and allows political leaders to present the process as evidence of responsiveness (Mayhew 1974; Pin 2022). Political rewards should depend on attribution because citizens must connect the initiative to its

sponsor before incorporating it into evaluations of government performance (Grimmer et al. 2012; Powell and Whitten 1993). Evidence from participatory budgeting shows that information about citizen involvement and policy outputs can improve evaluations of government among the wider public (Ardanaz et al. 2023). When citizens attribute a consultation to the government, we expect higher government approval and greater support for the governing coalition (Linde and Peters 2020).

The substantive agenda identifies a competing recipient of political returns. As partisan attachments have weakened, issue priorities and evaluations of political performance have acquired greater importance for electoral choice (Binzer Hobolt and Klemmensen 2008; Dalton and Welzel 2014). Parties benefit when voters associate them with sustained attention to an issue and regard them as credible representatives of the concerns involved (Budge and Farlie 2025; Bélanger and Meguid 2008; Petrocik 1996). By giving particular demands an institutionally recognized place in public debate, participatory initiatives should increase the electoral relevance of the issue under discussion. When an opposition party owns that issue, citizens can connect the demands articulated through participation to a party positioned to represent them (De Vries and Hobolt 2020; Tilley and Hobolt 2016).

Institutional sponsorship and issue ownership thus provide competing claims on the political returns from participation. The government can claim responsibility for creating the process, and an opposition party can claim a stronger connection to its substantive agenda. A government that creates a participatory initiative around an opposition-owned issue calls attention to a domain on which its competitor already possesses political credibility. We expect the relative strength of these claims to depend on the institutional treatment of citizen input.

Inviting citizens to formulate demands creates an expectation of institutional consideration and response. A commitment to incorporate measures supported through the process demonstrates attention to citizen input and strengthens the sponsor's claim to responsiveness (Christensen and Lægreid 2005; Esaiasson et al. 2017). We expect visible follow-through to direct political returns toward the government responsible for the initiative. Evidence from minipublics provides support for this expectation. Adopting a minipublic's recommendations increases support for the responsible authorities, whereas leaving those recommendations unimplemented decreases it (Van Dijk and Lefevere 2023).

Limited follow-through should strengthen the competing claim of the party that owns the substantive agenda. By converting citizen demands into recorded proposals, participatory institutions create outputs whose subsequent treatment can be observed (Font et al. 2018). When expectations of influence go unmet, the sponsor's claim to responsiveness weakens and participation can generate political frustration (Fernández-Martínez et al. 2020). We expect the unresolved issue to benefit the party viewed as most committed to addressing it.

The theory generates conditional expectations about the distribution of political returns. Participatory initiatives should increase support for their government sponsors when citizens attribute the process to governing actors and observe a credible commitment to act on citizen input. Initiatives addressing an opposition-owned issue should increase support for the party associated with that concern when government follow-through is limited. These effects can appear in evaluations of the executive, partisan attachments, and aggregate electoral support.

4 Case: Democratic Disaffection and Deliberation in France

4.1 French Democracy in Distress

France offers a particularly useful context for examining the electoral potential and pitfalls of democratic deliberative practices and innovation on several fronts. For one, it stands out as a paradigmatic case of broader partisan realignment and the fracturing of the traditional left-right political cleavage across rich democracies. Although radical parties on both sides of the political spectrum have a longstanding and influential history in French politics (Damiani and De Luca 2016; Rydgren 2003), France's semi-presidential, two-round electoral system has traditionally favored two entrenched, center-left and center-right blocs (Mayer et al. 2025).

France's bipolar party system collapsed in 2017, when centrist outsider Emmanuel Macron defeated radical-right leader Marine Le Pen after neither establishment party reached the runoff. Radical-left candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon won 19.6% of the vote, nearly matching center-right candidate François Fillon, while center-left candidate Benoît Hamon received only 6%, precipitating the implosion of the *Parti Socialiste* (Gougou and Persico 2017). Fragmentation deepened in 2022 when Macron and Le Pen again reached the runoff, Mélenchon placed a close third with 22%, and extreme-right outsider Éric Zemmour outperformed the center-left and center-right can-

didates combined. Le Pen ultimately received a record 41% of the runoff vote, while Macron won reelection without a parliamentary majority (Durovic 2023).

These shifts reflect a deeper crisis of representative democracy in France (Mayer et al. 2025). Although the vast majority of French citizens commend democracy as a political system and strongly support the key pillars of liberal democracy (Ferrín and Kriesi 2016), they nonetheless express markedly low levels of satisfaction and trust in political institutions compared to other European democracies (Cautres 2019; Grossman and Sauger 2017; Rouban 2022). Recent polls also point to a stark disconnect between French citizens and political parties (Tiberj 2024). Such attitudes have also declined in recent years, alongside a similar pattern in voter turnout (Mayer et al. 2025).

This deep-seated disaffection and the pervasive sense of underrepresentation it signals are in no small part rooted in the semi-presidential nature of the French political system and the strong control the executive holds over it (Vandamme 2025). Despite Macron running as an outsider candidate and positioning himself and his party as "ni gauche, ni droite" (neither left nor right) (Herman and Lorimer 2024), his presidency hardly represents a departure from the strongly top-down, vertical nature of French politics. Once in office, Macron heavily leaned on the strong executive control granted by the constitution to further centralize authority at the expense of intermediary institutions, including local representatives, the legislature, labor unions, and interest groups alike (Blondiaux 2022; Chamorel 2019; Vandamme 2025). Beyond instituting contested economic and fiscal reforms, Macron's initial popularity and promise of a more transparent and responsive politics were shaken by a number of scandals and public statements that painted an image of an elitist leader paying favors to his inner circle while dismissing the lived realities and economic hardships of ordinary citizens (ibid.).

4.2 The Gilets Jaunes and the Grand Débat National

Against this backdrop, a mere year and a half since Macron's 2017 victory, France confronted its most serious and widespread social unrest in decades. The *Gilets Jaunes* (Yellow Vests) movement began in late 2018 around opposition to fuel-tax increases, quickly expanding into a broader expression of citizens' deep-seated discontent over purchasing power, taxation, territorial inequality, democratic representation, and the perceived distance between governing elites and ordinary citizens (Perrineau 2020). At their peak, almost 300 000 people participated in the protests (Boyer

et al., 2020); during this time, as many as 70 percent of the French also supported the protesters' efforts (Chamorel 2019).

The *Grand Débat National* (Great National Debate) was launched in France in January 2019 in response to the social and political crisis generated by the *Gilets Jaunes*. In this context, President Emmanuel Macron presented the *Grand Débat* as a national consultation intended to reopen communication between citizens and public authorities.

Local participation was organized through *réunions d'initiative locale* (local initiative meetings). The key objective of these consultations was to allow citizens to freely exchange their views, express their opinions, and propose solutions to the four larger themes of the *Grand Débat* set by the national government: ecological transition, taxation and public spending, democracy and citizenship, and the organization of the state and public services (Buge and Morio 2019). These themes reflected both the immediate concerns raised by the protest movement and wider debates about the responsiveness of French representative institutions.

The public consultations operated alongside other channels of contribution, including online submissions and *cahiers citoyens* (citizens' notebooks) made available in participating town halls. Designed to be public, transparent, and participatory, these meetings were locally-initiated and organized by elected representatives, associations, or citizens themselves. As such, these meetings gave the consultation a decentralized territorial dimension, while the national platform provided a common framework for collecting contributions.

Institutionally, the Grand Débat occupied a distinctive position. It created a national channel for citizen input and generated a large corpus of public contributions, while the Macron government remained responsible for interpreting those contributions and formulating a political response. This structure gave the process considerable political significance, since citizens could evaluate both the opportunity to participate and the government's subsequent treatment of the contributions. We now turn to evaluating its political implications.

5 Empirical Strategy

We employ a multi-level empirical strategy to evaluate the political consequences of deliberative participation. Specifically, we focus on the local consultations held across metropolitan France in

2019 as part of Macron's *Grand Débat*. Among the channels through which citizens were invited to deliberate on the initiative's key themes, local consultations stood out as a highly visible, direct, face-to-face form of participation. These features are thus likely to give them particular political significance. A total of 10419 consultations were held in 4378 communes across metropolitan France (see Figure 1), bringing together an estimated 500 000 participants (Grand Débat National 2019). We exploit variation in both individual-level attendance and the local occurrence of consultations to examine their more immediate attitudinal effects and subsequent electoral consequences.

Figure 1: Geographic Location of Public Consultations across Metropolitan France



5.1 The Individual-Level Effects of Deliberative Participation

We first examine whether and how participating in a local consultation affected citizens' political attitudes, focusing on whether it achieved the *Grand Débat*'s stated aim of restoring trust in the political establishment and, implicitly, strengthened support for the incumbent who initiated it. To do so, we leverage the French Electoral Survey (*Enquête électorale française*, ENEF), a large online panel that tracks the political attitudes and electoral choices of the same roughly 10,000 French

voters across multiple waves between 2015 and 2020. Wave 19 of the ENEF, fielded in February 2019 while the *Grand Débat* was underway, asked respondents a series of questions about their views of the initiative, including whether they had attended a local meeting. Together with repeated measures before and after the debate, these data allow us to estimate how participation shaped political attitudes within the same individuals over time. Our cut-off point is wave 23, fielded in March 2020 before the onset of COVID-19.

We focus on two sets of outcomes: support for the incumbent and his party, and broader party preferences. We first gauge presidential approval, measured on a 0-10 scale. This item is asked in each wave from June 2017 (wave 15), shortly after Macron's inauguration, through May 2019 (wave 22). We next measure party identification, operationalized as whether respondents report feeling close to a particular party. We construct binary indicators for closeness to Macron's La République en Marche! (LREM) and the four other major party families, the radical left, the mainstream left, the mainstream right, and the radical right.[1]

To capture participation in a local consultation, we use a question asking respondents whether they had attended a meeting, had not yet attended but intended to, did not intend to attend, or had not heard of the *Grand Débat*. In wave 19, 308 respondents reported having attended a meeting and 1796 intended to attend, while 7492 expressed no intention of doing so. Another 404 stated being unaware of the initiative. We classify attendees as treated, and compare them not with all non-attendees, but with those who stated their intention to participate. This not-yet-treated control group offers an important advantage: intenders share attendees' interest in the consultation, reducing selection into treatment based on willingness to participate. This group's non-attendance at the time of the survey is therefore more plausibly attributable to differences in timing and opportunity than to disinterest in the initiative. While we cannot identify intenders who may have attended a meeting after taking part in wave 19 and thereby subsequently received the treatment, such contamination would tend to attenuate estimated differences between the two groups, thus rendering our estimates more conservative.

We employ difference-in-differences (DiD) models comparing within-subject changes in political attitudes before and after the consultation between attendees and intended participants. To assess the parallel trends assumption, we estimate additional event-study specifications where we

[1] To classify parties in each family, we rely on the Comparative Political Data Set and PopuList.

interact treatment status with each survey wave (See Appendix). All models include individual fixed effects, which absorb time-invariant respondent characteristics associated with presidential approval and party identification, and survey-wave fixed effects, which account for time-varying shocks common to all respondents in a given wave. Although intenders share attendees' interest in the consultation, the two groups may still differ in ways that influence their political attitudes. To account for this, we reweight the comparison group using entropy balancing (Hainmueller 2012).[2]

5.2 The Local-Level Electoral Consequences of Deliberation

We next evaluate whether hosting a consultation affected electoral outcomes in the localities where meetings took place. To do so, we exploit geographic variation in the occurrence of public consultations across France in 2019. Our unit of analysis is the "commune" (i.e., municipality), the smallest administrative unit in France. Although communes vary greatly in size, the overwhelming majority (more than 70%) have fewer than 1,000 inhabitants. As such, they provide an exceptionally fine-grained setting for examining the electoral effects of hosting consultations. We restrict our analyses to communes with 10,000 or fewer inhabitants, as virtually all larger communes held a consultation, leaving little scope for comparison with untreated localities.

Our data on public consultations come from the *Grand Débat*'s national data repository (Grand Débat National 2019). We construct a binary treatment indicating whether a commune held a public consultation during the Grand Débat (12.6% of all communes, see also Figure 1).[3] We merge these data with an original commune-level dataset of electoral returns (Ministry of the Interior 2024)[4] and sociodemographic census data to control for potential confounders associated with electoral behavior (INSEE 2024).[5]

Our outcomes of interest are first-round vote shares for Emmanuel Macron and presidential candidates of the radical and mainstream left and right, along with turnout. Unlike these broader party families, Macron and his newly established La République en Marche! have only competed

[2]Specifically, we balance on age, sex, education, household income, left-right self-placement, presidential approval, party identification, political interest, agglomeration size, and region, averaging attitudes over all pre-debate party waves. See Appendix Table 1. The results are robust to alternative weighting and matching strategies; see Appendix.

[3]In additional specifications, we also consider whether the number of consultations, i.e., their local intensity, affects their political implications, given several communes held more than one consultation.

[4]We focus on national elections, as local electoral lists only exist for communes with 1k+ inhabitants.

[5]We account for municipal mergers by harmonizing the data to match the 2021 communal boundaries for all years.

in the 2017 and 2022 elections. We therefore observe Macron's support in a single pre-treatment election and cannot directly test pre-existing trends in his vote share. We probe the parallel trends assumption in two ways. First, for each outcome, we run a placebo regression with the same specification to compare changes between 2012 and 2017, before the *Grand Débat*. For Macron, we use the 2012 combined shares of the mainstream left and right candidates and François Bayrou, leader of the centrist Mouvement Démocrate – whose electorates he drew most heavily on – as a proxy for his vote share. In line with best practice (Baker et al. 2025; Rambachan and Roth 2023; Roth et al. 2022), we further assess the sensitivity of our post-treatment estimates to any violations by estimating the breakdown value, i.e., how much deviation from parallel trends the estimated effect can tolerate (Rambachan and Roth 2023).[6]

To estimate the political consequences of hosting a consultation, we use the doubly robust DiD estimator (Sant'Anna and Zhao 2020). This approach allows parallel trends to hold conditional on observed pretreatment characteristics. It combines an outcome regression, which models the counterfactual change in outcomes for treated communes, with inverse probability weighting based on propensity scores, which reweighs untreated communes to resemble treated ones. The resulting estimates are consistent as long as either model is correctly specified.[7] To examine electoral dynamics across earlier elections, we extend this approach to the multi-period setting (Callaway and Sant'Anna 2021).

5.3 When is Participation Politically Consequential?

To further probe when citizen participation becomes politically consequential and which parties benefit, we propose an original vignette experiment. While the individual- and local-level analyses enable us to estimate the overall effects of participating in, or being exposed to, the *Grand Débat*, they cannot isolate the features of deliberation that drive these effects or fully rule out self-selection into attendance or hosting. The experiment complements these analyses by randomly

[6] For outcomes observed across all presidential elections since 2002, we also estimate additional event-study specifications.

[7] We condition on the following local characteristics, measured in the 2017 census: log population and its square, local share of low-educated, older (65 and over), young (25 and under), foreign population, unemployment and industrial employment rate, local public service provision, and rural-urban classification. We also include the Department in which the commune is situated to compare communes that hosted a consultation with those in the same area, given longstanding geographic differences in French party presence and strength and differences in the regional intensity of GJ mobilization.

varying opportunities for participation, the initiative's substantive agenda, and the government's commitment to implementing citizen recommendations.

We design a survey experiment with nine experimental conditions and ask a nationally recruited sample of adults in France to evaluate a proposed policymaking initiative. The experiment varies the party–issue context of the initiative and whether policy proposals are developed by ministers or through local public consultations. Within the participatory condition, it further varies whether the government commits to implementing the measures citizens support or retains discretion over their adoption.

The experiment assesses political returns to both the government and competing parties. Our main outcomes are government approval and vote propensities for the governing party and major opposition parties. Comparisons across experimental conditions allow us to assess how these returns vary with a) opportunities for citizen participation, b) the party-issue alignment of the agenda, and c) the government's commitment to implementing citizen recommendations. The design evaluates consultation both with and without an implementation commitment; it does not separately identify the benefits of implementation commitments outside the participatory process.

The design identifies three related effects. Within each party–issue context, comparing consultation without an implementation commitment with ministerial policymaking estimates the effect of introducing consultation without guaranteed follow-through. Comparing the two consultation conditions estimates the additional effect of an implementation commitment. Comparing consultation with an implementation commitment with ministerial policymaking estimates their combined effect. The design does not separately identify the effect of an implementation commitment outside a participatory process.

5.3.1 Experimental Design

The target population is adults aged 18 or older residing in France. Approximately 4,000 respondents will be recruited through an online panel using quotas for age, gender, education, and region. Respondents will be randomly assigned with equal probability to one of the nine experimental conditions describing a proposed national policy initiative.

Common vignette

In response to growing public discontent, the national government has announced it

will develop new measures to address [ISSUE], a priority emphasized by [PARTY].

Randomized Dimension 1: Issue and Party Cue

Radical Left and Economic Issues

Cost of living and economic inequality, including household financial pressures and income disparities, a priority emphasized by La France Insoumise.

Radical Right and Immigration

Immigration and public security, including non-EU migration and concerns about public safety, a priority emphasized by Le Rassemblement National.

The Incumbent and Public Finances

Public finances and the budget deficit, including the balance between public spending and taxation, a priority emphasized by Renaissance.

Randomized Dimension 2: Process

Ministerial

Over the next two months, ministers will develop policy proposals on the issue.

Local consultation

Over the next two months, citizens will be invited to public meetings in communes across France. They will discuss the issue, express their concerns, and propose policy solutions. The government will receive a summary of the discussions and proposed measures.

Randomized dimension 3: Implementation Commitment (for process arms only)

Commitment to Implementation

The government has committed to adopting the measures that receive the strongest support from participating citizens.

No Commitment to Implementation

The government has not committed to adopting the measures supported by participating citizens and will decide which, if any, to adopt.

5.3.2 Outcomes

Our primary outcomes are approval of the national government and respondents' propensities to vote for Renaissance, La France Insoumise, and Le Rassemblement National. Each vote propensity will be measured separately on a common response scale. These outcomes assess whether consultation produces political returns and how those returns are distributed between the government and the party associated with the issue.

Secondary political outcomes include intended turnout and vote propensities for the mainstream left and mainstream right. Party favorability will be measured in place of party identification because evaluations of parties are more plausibly responsive to a single experimental vignette.

Mechanism measures will assess whether respondents attribute the initiative to the government, view the implementation commitment as credible, consider the government responsive, and associate each issue with the party identified in the vignette. These measures will be analyzed as treatment checks and potential mechanisms.

5.3.3 Expectations

Our theoretical framework yields three sets of expectations. Effects are defined relative to ministerial policy-making within the same party-issue context.

H1. Conditional government rewards. The political returns to citizen participation depend on the government's commitment to act on citizen input.

H1a. Consultation with an implementation commitment increases government approval and Renaissance vote propensity relative to both consultation without a commitment and ministerial policymaking.

H1b. Consultation without an implementation commitment lowers government approval and Renaissance vote propensity relative to ministerial policymaking.

H2. Issue-owner rewards. Consultation increases the vote propensity of the party associated with the issue relative to ministerial policymaking within the same party-issue context.

H2a. Under the economic agenda, consultation increases LFI vote propensity.

H2b. Under the immigration agenda, consultation increases RN vote propensity.

H2c. Under the public finances agenda, where the government owns the issue, consultation increases Renaissance vote propensity; effects on opposition parties in this context are exploratory.

H3. Redistribution of rewards through implementation commitment. Within the LFI-economy and RN-immigration contexts, consultation without commitment to implementation produces a larger increase in the associated opposition party's vote propensity than consultation with a commitment.

6 Results

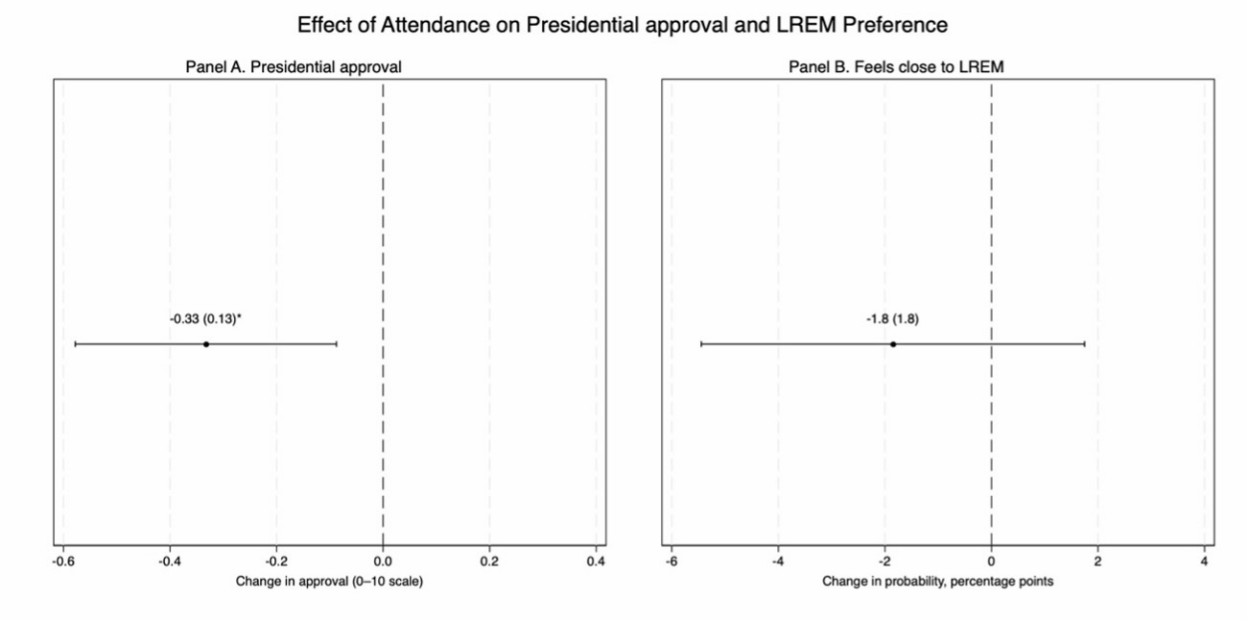
6.1 Participation and Political Attitudes

What are the political implications of participating in local deliberation? The DiD results, shown in Figure 2, suggest that participation did little to strengthen support for the incumbent. If anything, it may instead have weakened it. First, attendees' presidential approval declined relative to those who intended to attend but had not yet done so: on average, attendance decreased Macron's approval by 0.33 points on a 0-10 scale. Second, attending a meeting did little to boost closeness to Macron's party either: attendees were no more likely than intenders to feel close to La République en Marche! after the debate (Figure 2).

These findings are particularly notable given that attendees were more favorable toward Macron before the debate than other respondents: their presidential approval averaged 5.4 on a 0-10 scale, compared with 5.0 among non-attendees. They were also nearly three times as likely to feel close to LREM (15 vs. 5 percent). Because our models compare attendees with intenders and balance on prior approval, the decline in approval is unlikely to reflect regression to the mean among initially favorable respondents. While the decline is concentrated among attendees who had not voted for Macron in the first round of the 2017 election (-0.4 vs. -0.12), the difference between the groups is not statistically significant (See Appendix). Respondents who were open to the initiative but not part of Macron's electoral base – the group the *Grand Débat* was arguably the best posi-

tioned to win over – instead became, if anything, more critical after taking part.[8] Taken together, participation in local consultations appears to have cost Macron rather than benefited him.

Figure 2: Participation and Support for the Incumbent



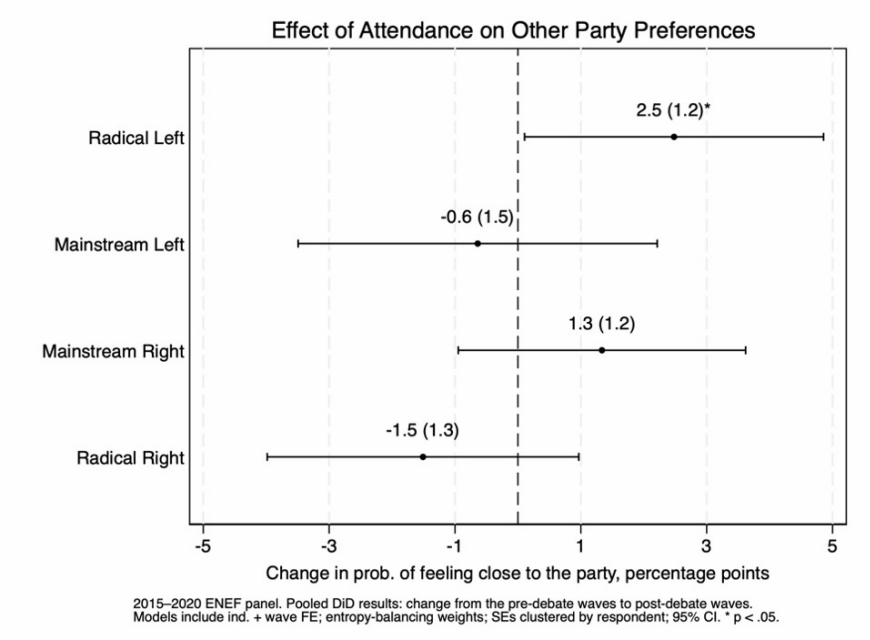
The results for broader party preferences tell a similar story. Attending a meeting did little to boost attachment to mainstream parties (Figure 3), providing no evidence that the deliberative initiative restored trust in the incumbent or renewed support for the traditional political establishment more generally. These findings are perhaps unsurprising: neither the mainstream left nor the right held a governing position or played a central role in organizing the *Grand Débat*. Moreover, Macron's rise and electoral victories in the last two elections were, in no small part, rooted in widespread dissatisfaction with the established parties. That said, the consultations were disproportionately held in communes where the mainstream parties remained comparatively strong in 2017 (See Appendix). The initiative thus created opportunities for participation in places where attachment to traditional parties had proven more resilient, yet did little to consolidate it. In this respect, the local consultations can be characterized as a missed opportunity. The local-level analyses discussed below reinforce this point, suggesting that the mainstream left subsequently lost ground in places where consultations were held.

[8]Event-study estimates probing party closeness likewise point to a decline in attachment to LREM by March 2020 (See Appendix).

Perhaps the clearest sign of the *Grand Débat*'s unintended consequences is the boost that participation appears to have given to an anti-establishment political challenger on the radical left. Attendees became about 2.5 percentage points (pp) more likely to express closeness to a radical-left party (Figure 3), with no evidence of diverging trends before the debate (see Appendix). This shift does not simply reflect who chose to attend: before the debate, attendees were only marginally more likely to feel close to the radical left than intenders (8 vs. 6 percent), a difference our weighting accounts for.

Crucially, however, this positive anti-establishment effect does not extend to the radical right: attendees were, if anything, slightly less likely to feel close to the Rassemblement National (-1.5 pp), although this estimate is statistically indistinguishable from zero. These findings thus point to a selective shift toward the radical left rather than a generalized increase in anti-establishment support. Either way, they further underscore how the initiative provoked reactions contrary to those it was designed to elicit.[9]

Figure 3: Participation and Party Preferences



Taken together, these individual-level findings underline the limitations of one of the *Grand Débat's* central and most direct components. Despite the initiative's high visibility, broad scope and

[9]The findings are robust to comparing the treated group to all non-attendees, as well as alternative model specifications. See Appendix.

ambition, and the backdrop of widespread social unrest against which it was organized, participation in local consultations did little to bolster presidential approval, support for the incumbent and the traditional political establishment, or attenuate the appeal of radical anti-establishment challengers (on the left). That participants were already more politically engaged and held more favorable views toward Macron than other respondents only reinforces this conclusion. Even citizens who were comparatively well disposed toward the incumbent appear to have become, if anything, more critical of him after taking part and more sympathetic to a radical-left outsider challenger instead.

It is important to note that our individual-level findings capture the effects of participation in the year following attendance, from the final weeks of consultation through March 2020. They therefore speak primarily to citizens' relatively immediate experience with and response to participation, before the *Grand Débat's* longer-term outcomes could be fully assessed. It is well plausible that the political effects of participatory initiatives unfold over longer periods, as citizens reassess their experiences in light of subsequent political developments. To examine the initiative's consequences over a longer time horizon, we turn to the local-level analysis and assess whether hosting consultations shaped electoral outcomes in the 2022 presidential elections.

6.2 Local Consultations and Electoral Outcomes

Did consultations shape local electoral outcomes? Consistent with the individual-level evidence, we find little indication that Macron benefited from the initiative in communes that held consultations relative to those that did not. As shown in Figure 4, the estimated effect on the incumbent's vote share is small and statistically insignificant, both in smaller and larger communes and in places with above- and below-median support for Macron in 2017. This null result does warrant some caution: because Macron first ran in 2017, our placebo tests rely on proxies for his support in 2012. Nonetheless, it offers little evidence that hosting consultations yielded electoral dividends for Macron.

Analyses of mainstream party support point to a largely similar conclusion. The mainstream left Parti Socialiste lost ground in communes that held consultations (-0.12 pp), a decline that is consistent across commune size and baseline levels of support for the incumbent. The mainstream right also appears to have lost support, although this finding is slightly less robust; the placebo

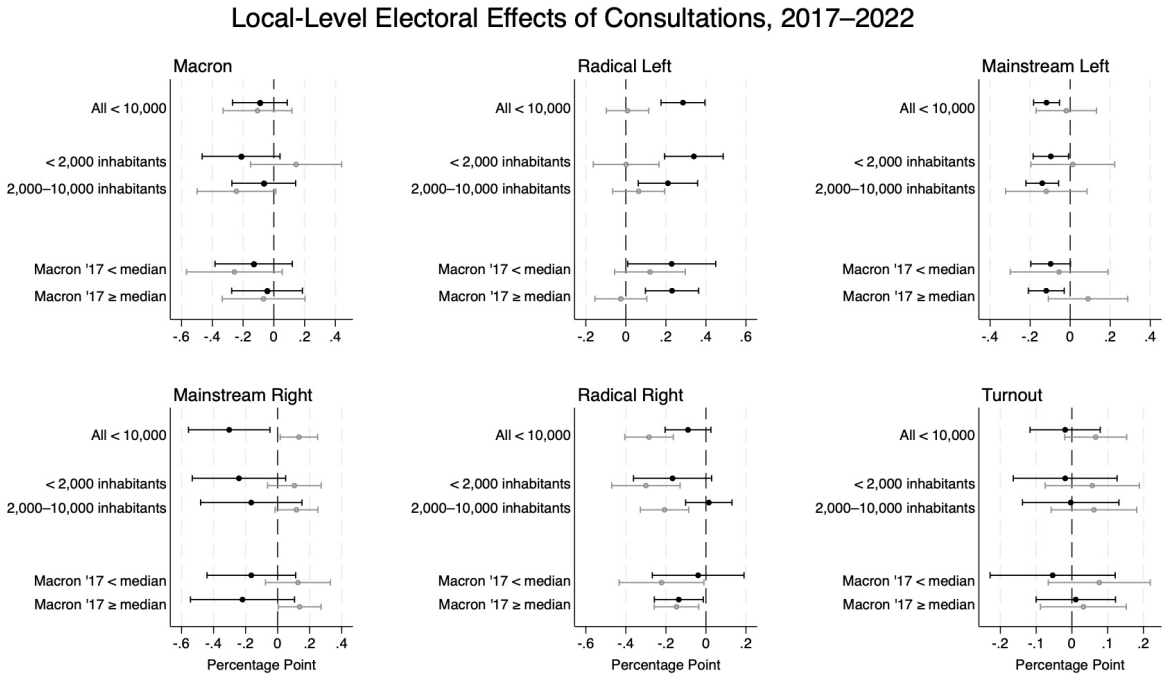
estimates suggest some diverging pre-trends between 2012 and 2017. While already noteworthy on their own, these findings are all the more striking considering communes where Macron and the two mainstream parties performed stronger were also significantly more likely to host a consultation in the first place (see Appendix).

Further echoing the individual-level evidence, we find that consultations also appear to have boosted support for the anti-establishment radical left in the subsequent elections at the local level. In communes that held consultations, the radical left's vote share increased by an estimated 0.3 percentage points ($p<0.001$). Although perhaps modest in absolute terms, the estimated effect represents roughly a fifth of the average increase in radical left support observed in all communes below 10,000 inhabitants between 2017 and 2022 (an increase of 1.3%). This finding thus suggests that local participatory consultations can meaningfully impact electoral behavior, even if the gains accrue not to the initiative's sponsor but to an anti-establishment challenger it was least designed to benefit.

As with individual participants, the local patterns likewise suggest that these gains are specific to the radical left and not indicative of a more generalized anti-establishment "backlash." We find no discernible effect on support for the French radical right and its leader Marine Le Pen, Macron's key challenger in both the 2017 and 2022 elections. Nor do we find evidence that consultations reinvigorated democratic participation more generally: hosting a consultation made little difference on turnout in the first round of presidential elections. To the extent that the *Grand Débat* sought to re-mobilize citizens in the wake of the *Gilets Jaunes* protests, and to address the deep-seated political dissatisfaction they reflected, our results provide no indication of success on this dimension.[10]

[10]The findings are robust to alternative model specifications. See Appendix.

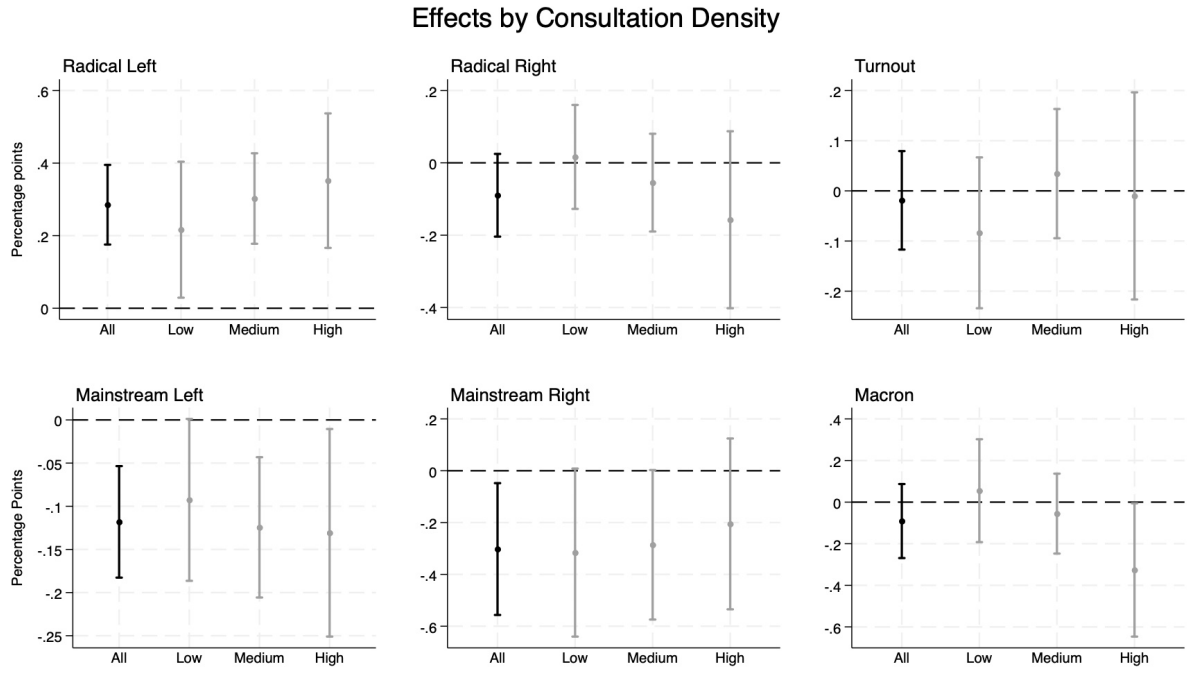
Figure 4: The Local-level Electoral Effects of Consultations



Doubly robust DiD within Dép., communes < 10,000 inhabitants. Black: effect (2017–2022). Grey hollow: placebo (2012–2017)
Macron: Macron 2017 vs. PS + LR + Bayrou 2012. 95% CI, SE clustered by département.

These findings are robust to operationalizing treatment as consultation intensity, i.e., the number of consultations held by 1,000 inhabitants; the effect for the radical left is, if anything, slightly larger in places with higher consultation density (Figure 5). Sensitivity analyses of our post-treatment estimates to violations of parallel trends largely support our key takeaways as well. Most notably, the estimated effect of public consultations on the radical-left vote share remains statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level up to $\bar{M} \approx 0.9$ in relative magnitude, that is, a post-treatment violation up to about 90% as large as the most extreme pre-treatment deviation we observe (see Appendix).

Figure 5: Consultation Density and Electoral Outcomes



Doubly robust DiD 2017–2022 within département; treated communes split into terciles of consultations per 1,000 inhabitants.
Terciles (per 1,000): Low (0.1–0.4); Medium (0.4–1.1); High (1.1–59.6); 95% CI, SE clustered by département.

From the perspective of deliberative democracy's potential to address the crisis of representation and increased prominence of radical anti-establishment expressions within and beyond electoral politics, the individual- and local-level findings are disquieting. Instead of alleviating democratic dissatisfaction, the consultations appear to have done little to restore a sense of responsiveness and may even have deepened discontent. Participation lowered presidential approval and did little to increase closeness to Macron's party and its two mainstream counterparts, while strengthening affinity for a radical-left challenger. Importantly, this anti-establishment boost was not generic, but highly specific in form: communes that held *Grand Débat* consultations shifted away from established parties, and the mainstream left in particular, toward the radical left with no corresponding gain for the radical right.

At first glance, the electoral outcomes associated with the *Grand Débat* may appear counter-intuitive. French citizens have long called for greater participatory opportunities, and Macron's *Grand Débat* stood out as particularly well positioned to meet that demand: its scope went far beyond the deliberative innovations his predecessors had introduced or advocated (Vandamme

2025). Why, then, did participation fail to repair democratic dissatisfaction and do little to benefit the incumbent who championed it? We offer several possible explanations for these patterns, which we next systematically evaluate.

Even if widely publicized and highly visible, however, democratic innovations like the *Grand Débat* are far from guaranteed to achieve their intended aims without careful attention to how deliberation is designed and how citizens' views and demands are reflected in future decision-making. Some scholars have indeed characterized the *Grand Débat* as offering an impression of controlled deliberation and participation (Vandamme 2025); the democratic mechanisms developed as part of the initiative did little to address perceived imbalances between citizens and political elites. Because the President retained strong discretion over which recommendation, if any, to act upon, the debate arguably served more to bolster the President's own legitimacy than to offer citizens new, meaningful avenues of influence over decision-making (Gourgues and Mazeaud 2022). Viewed from this perspective, the limited political benefits of the consultations may do little to strengthen trust or renew a sense of responsiveness if citizens do not interpret their participation as meaningful. Consultative initiatives and citizens' assemblies may thus do little to alleviate democratic disaffection if citizens doubt that their input will influence actual decisions.

Against this backdrop, the *Grand Débat*'s inability to stem widespread dissatisfaction and rising anti-establishment sentiment is less surprising. Yet why the radical left, and not the right, gained support in places where meetings were held warrants closer scrutiny, suggesting that this gain is attributable to factors beyond a simple rejection of the status quo.

One possible explanation for the asymmetry may stem from the fact that the radical left's agenda aligns with the key grievances the *Gilets Jaunes* protests articulated and the *Grand Débat* incorporated. Although both the radical left and the right criticize political elites for disregarding "ordinary" citizens' needs and lived realities, the popular mobilization and the themes subsequently picked up by the initiative heavily centered on economic insecurity, injustice, and equality. These themes align closely with the radical left's anti-capitalist emphasis and demands to transform "exploitative" political and economic structures (March 2012). The radical right's strongly ethnonationalist nature and vision of strict social order (Mudde 2007), by contrast, are less directly relevant to these concerns and may have thus resonated less.

A second possible explanation lies in the fact that, although Macron initiated the *Grand Débat*,

voters may associate participatory democracy with the radical left, which had championed such opportunities long before the initiative took place. If so, the party may have benefited electorally from these consultations because it also owns this issue (De Vries and Hobolt 2020): by raising the salience of participatory democracy, the *Grand Débat* may have inadvertently advantaged the party strongly associated with it. To be sure, populist rhetoric and demands for direct democracy and the devolution of power closer to the "people" are by no means confined to radical anti-establishment parties on the left. The radical right also frequently advocates their use, albeit in a manner more explicitly and strategically tied to its ethnonationalist agenda (Lachat 2025). The radical left may therefore enjoy a comparative advantage in contexts such as the *Grand Débat*, where the substantive emphasis is also placed on issues it heavily politicizes.

6.3 Assessing the Mechanisms: Experimental Evidence

Survey experiment to be fielded in early 2027.

7 Conclusion

This article examined the electoral consequences of participatory consultation through a study of France's *Grand Débat National*. Exploiting variation in both individual attendance and the local occurrence of public consultations, we find little evidence that the initiative restored a sense of responsiveness or bolstered support for the incumbent. Instead, it electorally benefited the radical anti-establishment challenger on the left. The findings therefore do not support the conclusion that the initiative eased democratic discontent or produced a generalized populist backlash. Its electoral effects were instead highly specific, shifting support toward a particular actor whose political agenda closely aligned with the substantive grievances raised during the *Gilets jaunes* crisis and the initiative's participatory form.

This asymmetry helps clarify how participatory reforms may affect electoral behavior. Consultation creates opportunities for citizens to articulate demands, but it also establishes standards against which citizens can evaluate governmental responsiveness. When public input is perceived as weakly connected to subsequent decisions, consultation may make existing dissatisfaction more politically salient without necessarily benefiting every party that criticizes the es-

tablishment. Which party gains will depend on how citizens interpret the shortcomings of the process and which political actors offer the most credible account of those shortcomings.

In the French case, two mechanisms are especially plausible. The first concerns substantive alignment. The *Grand Débat* centered heavily on purchasing power, taxation, public services, inequality, and political representation. These concerns were more directly compatible with the radical left's critique of economic and institutional power than with the radical right's ethnonationalist agenda. Consultation may therefore have helped citizens connect previously diffuse grievances to issues over which the radical left possessed a comparative advantage.

The second mechanism concerns ownership of participatory reform. Although Macron initiated the *Grand Débat*, the radical left had long advocated citizens' assemblies, open deliberative forums, and the devolution of political authority. Citizens dissatisfied with the government's control over the consultation and its subsequent interpretation of public input may therefore have credited the radical left as the more authentic advocate of meaningful participation. From this perspective, organizing consultation does not necessarily allow governing actors to claim political ownership of it. A process perceived as constrained or instrumental may instead strengthen parties that argue that more consequential forms of citizen influence are required.

These results have broader implications for democratic reform. Participatory opportunities cannot be evaluated solely by their scale or ability to elicit citizen input. Their political consequences depend on how participation is linked to authority and institutional follow-through. Inviting citizens to speak while retaining extensive governmental discretion over how their contributions are interpreted may increase the visibility of the very representational gap the reform is intended to address.

In this way, the results suggest that consultation is not politically neutral and should not be assumed to generate democratic benefits simply by expanding opportunities for voice. Its effects depend on the issues citizens are invited to discuss, the expectations the process creates, the credibility of governmental response, and the parties positioned to interpret its successes and failures. Participatory institutions may contribute to democratic repair when citizen input is visibly connected to consequential decisions. When that connection is weak, they may instead help citizens translate dissatisfaction into support for political alternatives.

Future research should examine whether similar patterns emerge across participatory designs

and political contexts. Consultations with binding policy consequences may produce different electoral effects from processes in which governments retain control over agenda setting and implementation. The partisan consequences of consultation may also vary according to which parties own the issues under discussion, which actors organize the process, and whether the initiative occurs during a period of acute political crisis. Individual-level evidence would further help distinguish whether consultation changes participants' issue priorities, evaluations of responsiveness, or perceptions of party credibility. Such research would clarify when participatory institutions strengthen representative democracy and when they reorganize dissatisfaction without resolving it.

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Supplementary Appendix

1. Individual-level Analysis

1.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Covariate balance before and after entropy balancing, attendees vs. intenders

	Mean			Std. difference	
	Attendees	Intenders (unweighted)	Intenders (weighted)	Before	After
Female	0.41	0.50	0.41	-0.18	0.00
Age	55.62	55.37	55.62	0.02	0.00
Education (1–4)	3.22	3.27	3.22	-0.05	0.00
Political interest (1 = very, 4 = not at all)	1.92	2.15	1.92	-0.26	0.00
Household income (1–6)	3.49	3.51	3.49	-0.02	0.00
Left–right self-placement (0–10)	5.25	5.17	5.25	0.03	0.00
Presidential approval (0–10)	5.39	5.46	5.39	-0.03	0.00
Feels close to any party	0.65	0.59	0.65	0.17	0.00
Feels close to radical left	0.08	0.06	0.08	0.11	0.00
Feels close to PS	0.12	0.15	0.12	-0.11	0.00
Feels close to LREM	0.15	0.08	0.15	0.26	0.00
Feels close to LR	0.10	0.13	0.10	-0.10	0.00
Feels close to RN	0.11	0.07	0.11	0.14	0.00
Agglomeration: Rural (<2,000)	0.23	0.20	0.23	0.08	0.00
Agglomeration: 2,000–9,999	0.17	0.13	0.17	0.10	0.00
Agglomeration: 10,000–49,999	0.09	0.12	0.09	-0.09	0.00
Agglomeration: 50,000–199,999	0.12	0.13	0.12	-0.03	0.00
Agglomeration: 200,000+ or Paris	0.39	0.42	0.39	-0.06	0.00
Region: Île-de-France	0.15	0.17	0.15	-0.05	0.00
Region: Centre-Val de Loire	0.05	0.04	0.05	0.03	0.00
Region: Bourgogne-Franche-Comté	0.04	0.04	0.04	-0.03	0.00
Region: Normandie	0.05	0.06	0.05	-0.03	0.00
Region: Hauts-de-France	0.06	0.10	0.06	-0.16	0.00
Region: Grand Est	0.08	0.10	0.08	-0.06	0.00
Region: Pays de la Loire	0.04	0.06	0.04	-0.11	0.00
Region: Bretagne	0.07	0.06	0.07	0.05	0.00
Region: Nouvelle-Aquitaine	0.11	0.09	0.11	0.08	0.00
Region: Occitanie	0.13	0.09	0.13	0.14	0.00
Region: Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes	0.14	0.13	0.14	0.03	0.00
Region: PACA and Corsica	0.09	0.07	0.09	0.07	0.00
Respondents	308	1,796	1,796		

Note: ENEF panel. Pre-debate attitudes averaged over all available waves before V19 (approval: V15–V18; closeness to LREM: from V11bis). Household income, agglomeration size, and region measured at V16 (June–July 2017) or, if missing, V1 (November 2015). Entropy-balancing weights match attendees on the means of all listed covariates and the squares of age, left-right placement, and approval. Maximum intender weight 5.2; effective number of intenders 1,282.

1.2 Participation and Trust

Table 2: Cross-sectional Comparison of Institutional Trust

	vs. Intenders	vs. All Non-Attendees
Mayor	0.07	0.11*
	(0.06)	(0.06)
President	-0.01	0.02
	(0.06)	(0.05)
Deputies	-0.02	-0.01
	(0.06)	(0.05)
Political parties	-0.06	-0.00
	(0.07)	(0.06)
Media	-0.03	0.01
	(0.06)	(0.06)
Attendees	234	234
Comparison respondents	1,263	6,843

Note: Cross-sectional comparison of institutional trust in ENEF wave 23 (March 2020), one year after the Grand Débat. Entries are coefficients on attending a local Grand Débat meeting from weighted OLS regressions; robust standard errors in parentheses. Trust is measured on a 1–4 scale. Comparison groups are reweighted using entropy balancing to match attendees on pre-debate sex, age, education, political interest, household income, agglomeration size, region, left–right self-placement, presidential approval, and closeness to any party and to each of the radical left, PS, LREM, LR, and RN. $^{*}p < .10$, $^{**}p < .05$, $^{***}p < .01$.

1.3 Event-Study Specifications

Figure 6: Presidential Approval and Party Identification with LREM

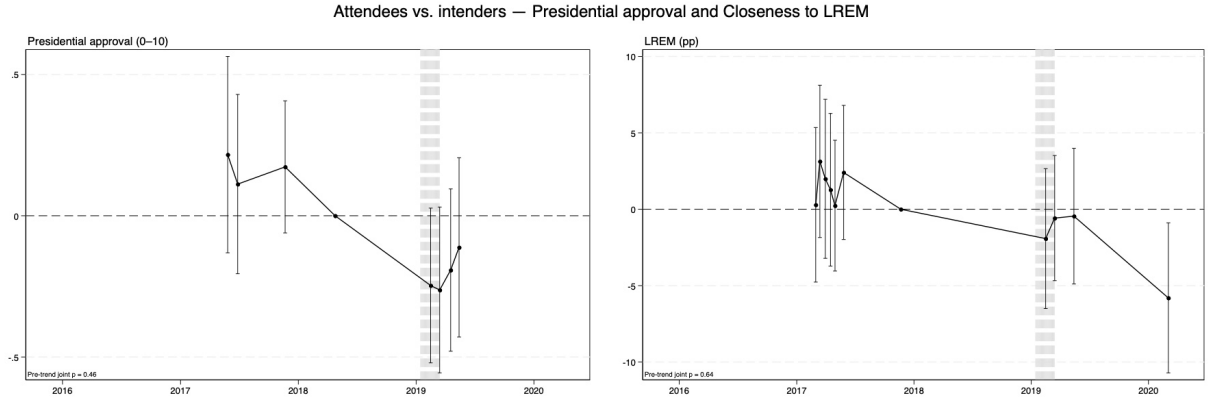
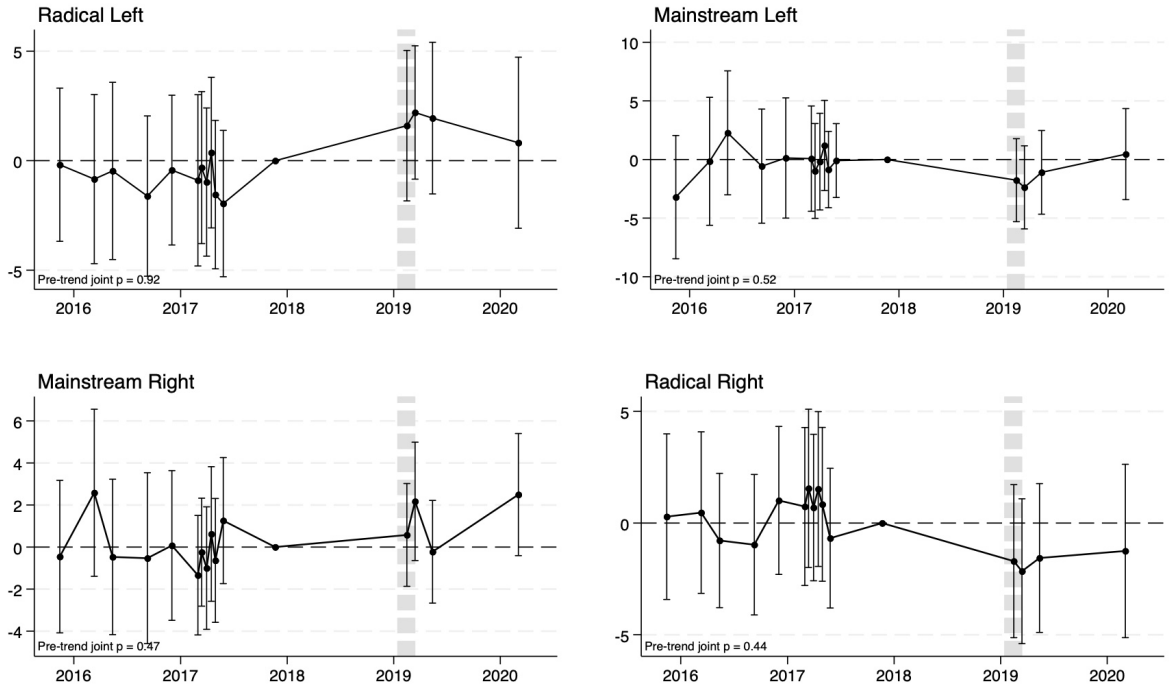
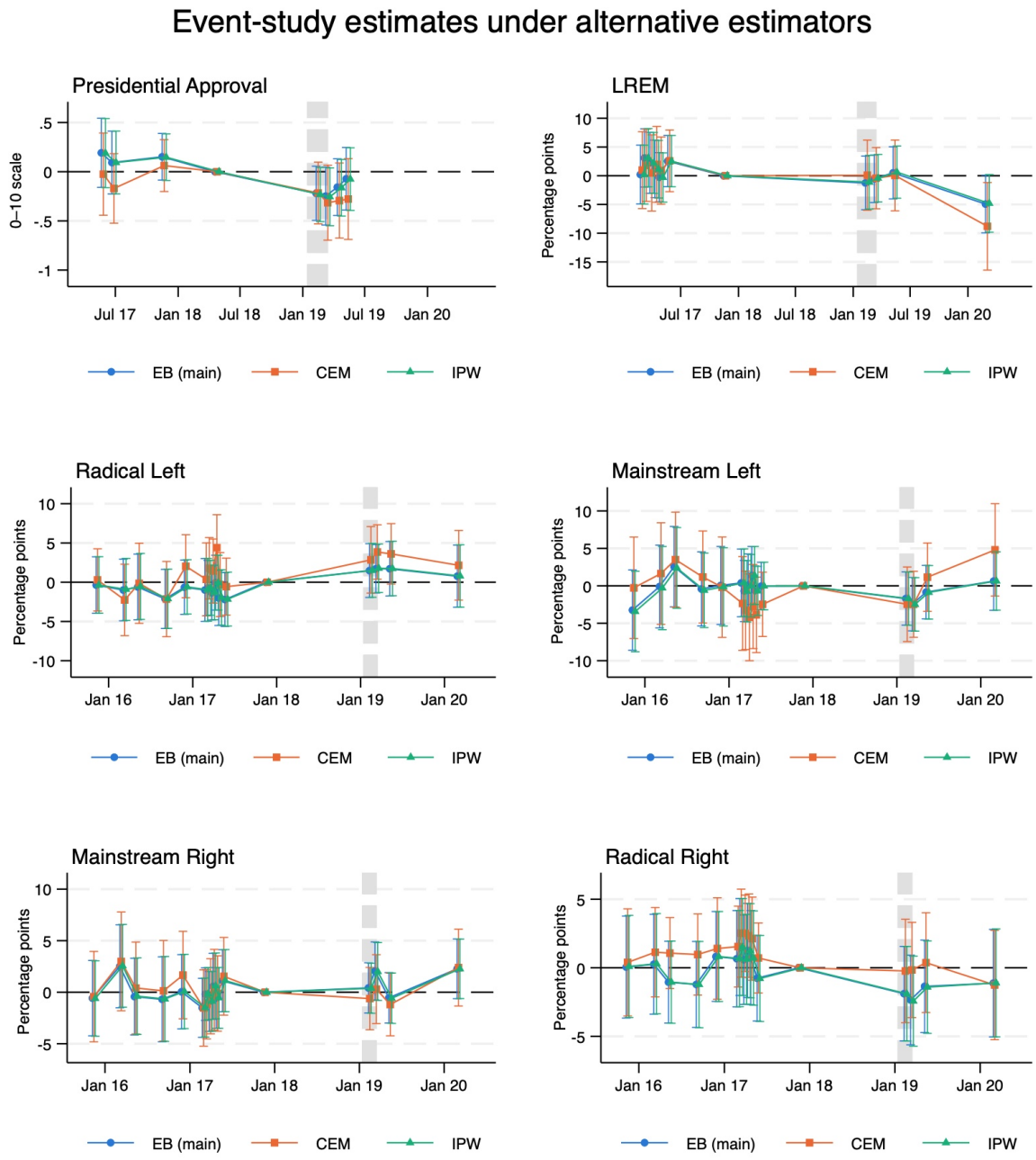


Figure 7: Presidential Approval and Party Identification with LREM



1.4 Event-Study Specifications with Alternative Estimators

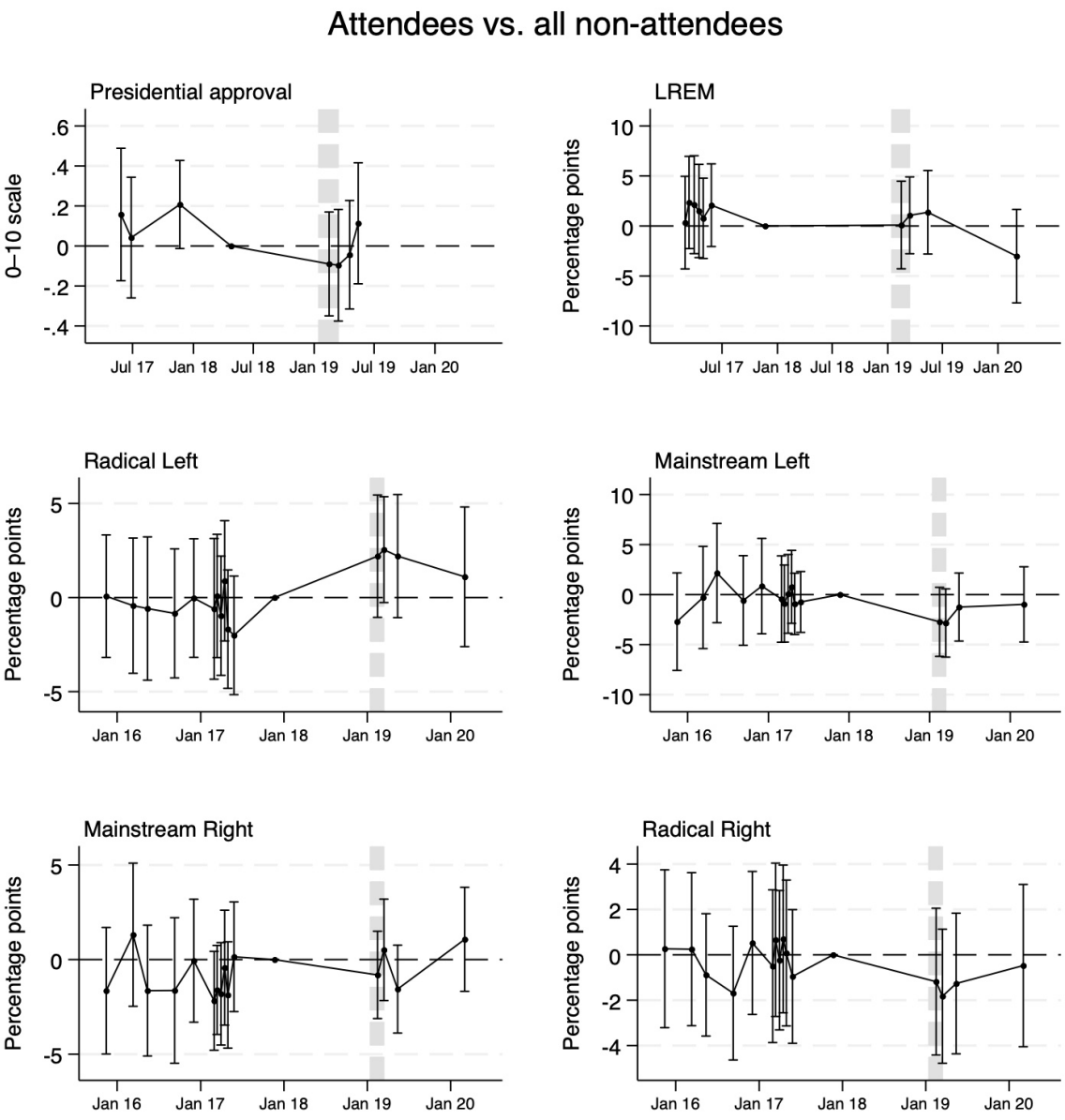
Figure 8: Alternative Event-Study Specifications



Attendees vs intenders, 95% CI; individual + wave FE; SE clustered by respondent.
CEM: exact matching on sex, age group, education, and V17/V18 left–right, approval and party closeness.
IPW: ATT odds weights from a logit on the entropy-balancing covariates.

1.5 Attendees vs. All Non-Attendees

Figure 9: Attendees vs. All Non-Attendees



Attendees – all non-attendees at V19, 95% CI.
Individual + wave FE; entropy-balancing weights (attendees vs all non-attendees); SE clustered by respondent.
Party identification = feels close to the party (Q8 = 1). Approval asked from V15 (Jun 2017); LREM listed from V11bis (Mar 2017).

2. Local-level Analysis

2.1 Descriptive Statistics

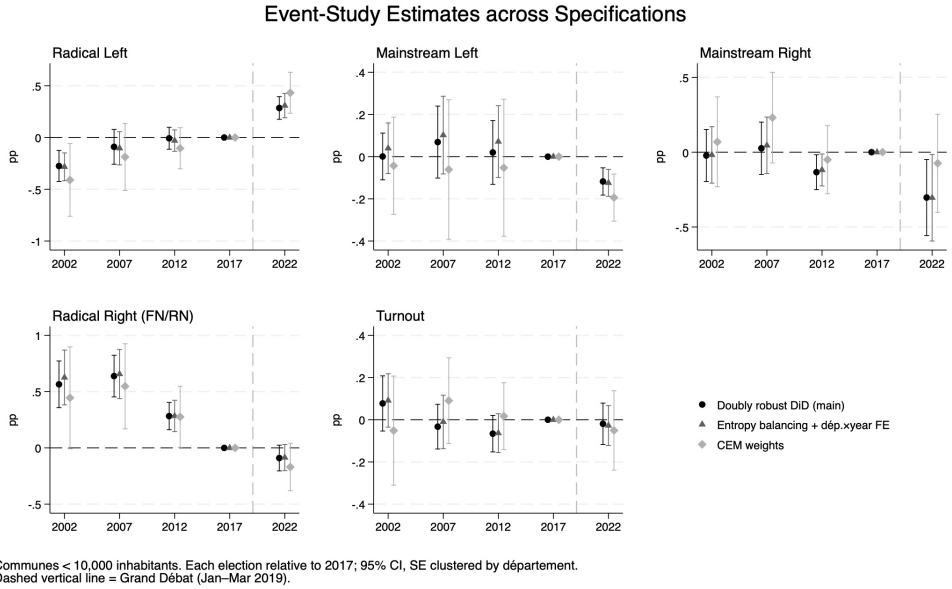
Table 3: Covariate balance before and after entropy balancing, communes with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants

	Mean			Std. difference	
	Consultation	No consultation		Before	After
		Unweighted	Weighted		
Log population	7.49	5.97	7.49	1.37	0.00
Low education (%)	22.82	23.35	22.82	-0.06	0.00
Older residents (%)	29.18	29.46	29.18	-0.03	0.00
Younger residents (%)	14.12	13.04	14.12	0.22	0.00
Foreign residents (%)	3.13	2.77	3.13	0.10	0.00
Unemployment (%)	11.00	10.17	11.00	0.19	0.00
Employed in industry (%)	13.65	10.23	13.65	0.23	0.00
Public services (range)	4.60	1.30	4.60	1.28	0.00
Peri-urban commune	0.65	0.50	0.65	0.31	0.00
Urban commune	0.04	0.00	0.04	0.26	0.00
Number of communes	3,582	30,164	30,164		

Note: Census covariates are measured in 2017. Entropy-balancing weights match the means of all listed covariates and squared log population. Standardized differences are calculated as the difference between the consultation and no-consultation group means divided by the pooled unweighted standard deviation. Absolute values below 0.10 are conventionally considered balanced. Rural communes are the reference category for the rural–urban classification. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

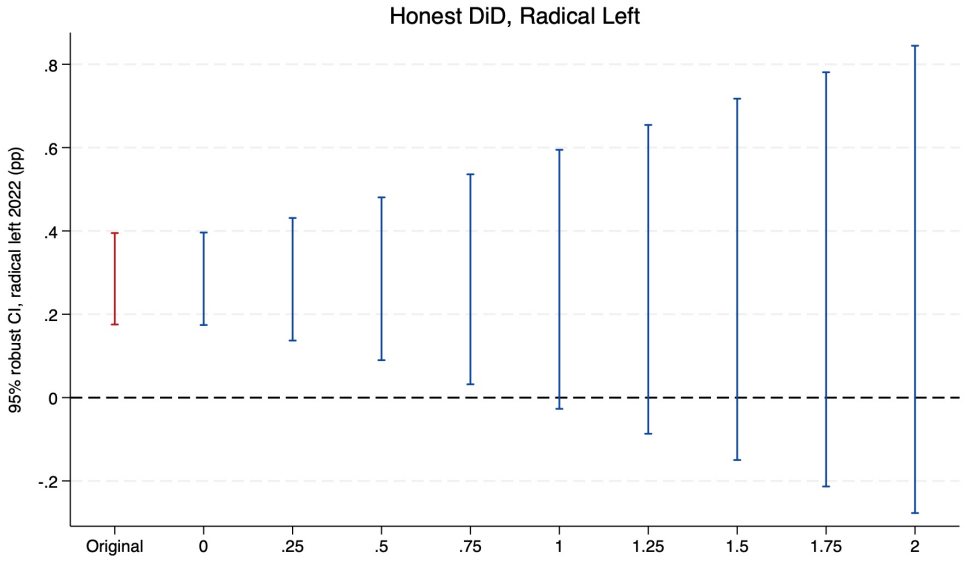
2.2 Event-Study Specifications and Robustness to Alternative Specifications

Figure 10: Robustness to Alternative Specifications



2.3 Sensitivity Analyses to Parallel Trend Violations (Rambachan and Roth 2023)

Figure 11: Relative Magnitudes Sensitivity Plot, Radical Left



2.4 Local Determinants of Consultations

Table 4: Where Were Consultations Held?

	(1) Hosted (1= Yes)	(2) Number of consultations	(3) Consultations per 10,000 inhab.
2017 First-Round Pres. Vote Shares			
Macron	0.174***	0.041***	0.447*
	(0.036)	(0.012)	(0.258)
Radical Left	−0.016	0.019	0.318
	(0.034)	(0.012)	(0.267)
Mainstream Left	0.163***	0.054***	0.116
	(0.050)	(0.016)	(0.328)
Mainstream Right	0.127***	0.023*	0.266
	(0.041)	(0.012)	(0.188)
Radical Right	−0.079**	−0.000	0.256
	(0.032)	(0.012)	(0.234)
Turnout	0.022	0.001	−0.195
	(0.033)	(0.007)	(0.184)
2017 Sociodemographic Characteristics			
Low educ.	−0.017	−0.005	0.018
	(0.013)	(0.003)	(0.071)
Old (65 and over)	0.050***	0.012***	−0.024
	(0.017)	(0.004)	(0.179)
Young (25 and under)	0.035*	0.010	0.255
	(0.020)	(0.006)	(0.280)
Foreign	−0.061	−0.014*	−0.009
	(0.041)	(0.008)	(0.224)
Unemployed	0.149***	0.026***	−0.186
	(0.035)	(0.006)	(0.182)
2017 Local context			
Public services (range)	1.726***	0.093***	1.017***
	(0.171)	(0.013)	(0.181)
Industry emp.	−0.013	0.000	0.062
	(0.009)	(0.002)	(0.047)
Peri-urban	−0.405	−0.059	−0.011
	(0.362)	(0.055)	(0.718)
Urban	8.721***	−0.150	−1.892
	(3.242)	(0.104)	(1.161)
Log pop.	−23.441***	1.712***	−141.275***
	(2.039)	(0.199)	(7.874)
Département FE	✓	✓	✓
Communes	33,746	33,746	3,580

Standard errors clustered by département in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.
(1) Linear probability model of hosting at least one consultation, coefficients in percentage points.
(2) Poisson model of the number of consultations, all communes; coefficients are log points, $\exp(b) - 1$ gives the proportional change.
(3) OLS of consultations per 10,000 inhabitants, communes that held at least one consultation.
Log population^2 is included but not shown; the log-population coefficient should thus not be interpreted on its own.