When Politicians Are Older Than the Public: Age Gaps and Support for Democracy *

Alonso Roman Amarales † Scott Williamson ‡

May 14, 2026

Abstract

Many democracies elect political leaders who are older than the public. Drawing on original surveys from Italy, South Korea, and the United States, we find evidence that these age gaps can weaken confidence in representation and reduce support for democracy. Further analysis of cross-national surveys from dozens of democracies reinforces these findings. However, in a conjoint experiment, we also show that age gaps weaken evaluations of representational quality less so than gender gaps. Results are similar across age cohorts, suggesting that age gaps constitute a general challenge to democratic support rather than fueling intergenerational conflict over democracy. These findings imply that democracies can modestly improve public satisfaction by increasing representation of younger generations.

1 Introduction

Prominent politicians in democracies are typically older than the average adult citizen in their countries (Stockemer & Sundström, 2023), because older people are more likely to run for office and older politicians benefit from the political capital that comes with experience and incumbency (McClean & Ono, 2024; Roberts & Wolak, 2023). This pattern has received increasing attention in recent years, as ageing demographics have further strengthened the political power of older generations (Berry, 2014). A major concern in this discussion is that ageing political leadership could weaken confidence in democracy by undermining perceptions of effective representation of the population (Buchmeier & Vogt, 2024; Stockemer & Sundström, 2023). In the United States, for example, the advanced ages of former President Biden, President Trump, and much of the Congressional leadership have prompted a flurry of warnings that the American government has become

*The authors would like to acknowledge funding by the Next Generation EU – Age-It – Ageing well in an aging society project (PE0000015).

†Bocconi University

‡University of Oxford

an unresponsive gerontocracy (Jackson, Newall, & Rollason, 2024; Moyn, 2024; Smith, 2023; Xiao, 2023).

Age matters for how people think about politics and the kinds of policies they tend to prefer (Roberts & Wolak, 2023). As a result, people may notice when politicians are older than the public at large, especially if the average political leader is relatively advanced in age. These perceived age gaps may lead people to conclude that the political system is failing to give certain age groups a voice in the government and will not represent their interests well (Buchmeier & Vogt, 2024). Since representation is a core function of modern democracy, people who believe the political system is not adequately representing certain age groups may become less satisfied with the quality of democracy in their country; furthermore, if they conclude that age gaps are a recurring feature of democratic governance, they may become less supportive of democracy more generally. These declines in *specific* and *diffuse* support for democracy can both be problematic for democratic stability (Claassen, 2020a; Claassen & Magalhães, 2022; Norris, 2011a). Furthermore, we might expect these reductions in democratic support to be particularly pronounced among younger people, who are most underrepresented as a result of their age (Stockemer & Sundström, 2022b). This reaction by younger people could explain why this group has, in some countries, shown less robust support for democracy in recent years (Claassen & Magalhães, 2023; Foa, Klassen, Wenger, Rand, & Slade, 2020).

Do age gaps between political leaders and the public undermine support for democracy, and are these effects most consequential for the democratic attitudes of younger people? Despite growing interest in the effects of ageing demographics on representation (Buchmeier & Vogt, 2024; Stockemer & Sundström, 2023), as well as increasing demand to understand the resilience of popular support for democracy at a moment of global democratic stagnation (Adserà, Arenas, & Boix, 2023; Braley, Lenz, Adjodah, Rahnama, & Pentland, 2023), there has been little empirical research into the consequences of older political leaders for the public's views of democracy. We consider these questions with experimental and descriptive data from two rounds of original surveys conducted in the ageing democracies of Italy, South Korea, and the United States. These countries vary in the size of the age gap between political leaders and the voting-age public, offering a useful test of whether attitudes shift depending on how pronounced these patterns are. We complement this analysis with additional cross-national data from dozens of democracies over several decades.

We study age gaps specifically in terms of national legislators, who are meant to represent the public at large, and we identify deficiencies in age-based representation by the average age of legislators as well as the difference between legislators and the adult public. We find evidence that age gaps can weaken satisfaction with democracy and may undermine more principled democratic support, though the effects appear relatively modest and may be less important than other types of representational imbalances. In

the first round of our original surveys, respondents who perceive political leaders in their country as too old report lower satisfaction with the quality of their country's democracy, though they express somewhat higher support for democracy as a system of government. An experiment conducted in the second round of surveys aligns with this pattern. Respondents provided with information about the underrepresentation of younger people in their country's political leadership become more negative about the performance of their democracies, but do not express less principled support for democracy. We conduct further analyses of cross-national data, which show that having older legislators – both in absolute terms and relative to the adult public – is associated with reduced satisfaction with democracy, as well as lower principled support for democracy. Finally, we return to our original survey data to assess the relative importance of age-based representation in a conjoint experiment. Here, we find that age gaps can undermine perceptions of how well legislatures will represent the public, but less so than some other representation deficits, particularly gender. Across these analyses, the negative reactions to age gaps are not exclusively driven by younger respondents, but reflect a broader aversion that is detectable among other age groups.

In short, we find modest evidence that the dominance of older politicians can undermine satisfaction with democracy in one's own country, and may weaken support for democracy more generally. The similarity of these results across age groups suggests that the public response reflects a general dislike of deficient descriptive representation rather than substantive concerns over the policies promoted by political leaders of different ages. This consistency also implies that age gaps do not necessarily fuel intergenerational conflict over democracy, but may constitute a broader challenge for sustaining the public's confidence in how democracies are performing. As such, the findings imply that democratic legitimacy and stability can be strengthened by mechanisms that enhance effective representation of all age groups in key political offices. In the context of ongoing debates about the justifiability of age-based legislative quotas or age limits for important public offices (Bidadanure, 2015; Gramlich, 2023; Schachtschneider, 2024; Trantidis, 2016), this link between age gaps and democratic satisfaction highlights an important benefit that could follow from such quotas. At the same time, the effects of age gaps on democratic attitudes appear to be relatively modest, perhaps because age is less salient than other descriptive characteristics – especially gender – in shaping perceptions of representational quality. More generally, these findings contribute to the understanding of how and in which contexts representation can affect government legitimacy and support for democracy (Clayton, O'Brien, & Piscopo, 2026).

The paper proceeds as follows. We first expand on why age gaps may influence attitudes toward democracy and whether we should expect these effects to be more pronounced among some people than others. We then proceed through our four analyses, beginning with observational and experimental analyses of our original survey data, then

moving to our cross-national analysis using the World Values Survey and the pooled Barometer Surveys (Eurobarometer, Latinobarometer, Afrobarometer, and Asianbarometer), and ending with our conjoint experiment assessing the importance of age relative to other characteristics. We conclude with further discussion of implications for democratic resilience as democracies continue to age over the next several decades.

2 Age, Representation, and Democratic Support

Alongside characteristics such as race and gender, age is an important political trait that can shape how political leaders govern and how individuals engage with democratic politics (Kurz, Wurthmann, & Gross, 2025; McClean & Ono, 2024; Stockemer & Sundström, 2022b). Age groups often differ in values, worldviews, and material interests, leading to divergent political preferences and priorities, particularly in relation to government spending and social and economic policy (Sorensen, 2013). Reflecting these differences, younger and older political leaders tend to prioritize different policy issues and to make different governance decisions (Curry & Haydon, 2018; McClean, 2026). Age also matters in the electorate. Individuals of different ages tend to vote differently, and candidates' ages can affect the level of support they receive from voters (McClean & Ono, 2024; Roberts & Wolak, 2023). In addition, older people typically possess more time and resources, allowing them to vote and participate more regularly in politics (Blais & Rubenson, 2013).

Populations in many democracies are trending older, and researchers have posited that age will become increasingly important for politics in these contexts (Goerres & Vanhuysse, 2021). High-level political leaders already tend to be older than the average adult citizen in their countries due to the advantages that come with experience, incumbency, and greater resources (Belschner, 2024; McClean & Ono, 2024; Roberts & Wolak, 2023; Stockemer & Sundström, 2023). As populations age, these advantages may become stronger, further expanding the political power of older generations (Berry, 2014). In several countries, this shift has contributed to the emergence of political leadership that is visibly older than the country at large (Kurz & Ettensperger, 2023; Stockemer & Sundström, 2022b), of which the United States is the most prominent example, even as evidence suggests that voters would prefer to be represented by younger candidates (Eshima & Smith, 2022).

The growing political power of older generations, along with the potential for age-based representation deficits, has motivated concerns about the consequences for democratic support in affected countries (Silva, 2025). We argue that such effects are plausible, given the important relationship between age, representation, and democracy. Representation of the public is meant to be a core function of modern democratic governance (Wessels, 2009), so dissatisfaction with the quality of representation may plausibly un-

dermine support for democracy (Clayton et al., 2026). There are different aspects to representational quality. For one, people tend to value descriptive representation, or the degree to which the identities of representatives align with those of the public. When this descriptive representation is present, people are more likely to perceive decisions as legitimate and democratic (Arnesen & Peters, 2018; Bush & Zetterberg, 2021; Clayton, O'Brien, & Piscopo, 2019). Since age is a salient characteristic of political leaders (Hainmeuller, Hopkins, & Yamamoto, 2014; Roberts & Wolak, 2023; Sevi, 2021), it is plausible that people would value descriptive representation based on age. People also care about substantive representation, i.e., the extent to which their interests are effectively reflected in policymaking. As discussed, older political leaders often have different worldviews and priorities than younger citizens, and they govern in ways that conflict with the demands of this group (Buchmeier & Vogt, 2024; Chrisp & Pearce, 2019). Generational divides are especially pronounced on major issues such as climate change (Ross & Rouse, 2022), and policies more often reflect what older voters want. Faced with these differences, people may conclude that the political system will provide less effective substantive representation when there is a mismatch between the ages of important government officials and the ages of the public.

If age gaps weaken confidence in the quality of descriptive and substantive representation, we argue that they could lead to lower *specific* and *diffuse* support for democratic governance (Grant, 2021; Silva & Wratil, 2023). The former refers to a decline in satisfaction with how democracy is performing in one's own country (Linde & Ekman, 2003; Norris, 2011a), while the latter reflects a weakening of principled support for democratic governance (Claassen & Magalhães, 2022). We expect that age gaps would produce stronger effects on specific democratic support as opposed to diffuse democratic support.[1] Individuals who believe that an age gap has stifled representation in their country may become less satisfied with how their democracy is working, while also perceiving this lack of representation as a violation of democratic principles and therefore irrelevant to their broader support for democracy. However, if people conclude that age gaps are a common flaw of democratic political systems, they might also become less supportive of democratic governance in principle. Both outcomes can be important for democratic stability. Higher principled support for democracy is associated with more durable democratic governance, and higher satisfaction with democratic performance can strengthen this principled support as well as regime stability (Claassen, 2020a; Claassen & Magalhães, 2022; Norris, 2011a). This leads to our first two expectations:

> **E1:** Age gaps between political leaders and the public reduce satisfaction with how democracy is performing in one's own country (specific democratic support).
>
> **E2:** Age gaps between political leaders and the public may also reduce prin-

[1] This difference was specified in our pre-analysis plan.

cipled support for democratic governance in general (diffuse democratic support), though we expect this effect to be weaker than E1.

These negative reactions to age gaps may be more pronounced among younger people, who are frequently underrepresented in key positions in legislatures and cabinets (Kurz & Ettensperger, 2023; Stockemer & Sundström, 2022b). Feeling that they are excluded from the political process and lack both descriptive and substantive representation in the halls of power, younger people may become especially dissatisfied with their democracies and more likely to conclude that democracy does not serve its intended purpose. There is evidence that younger people in some countries have become relatively less supportive of democracy in recent years (Claassen & Magalhães, 2023; Foa et al., 2020), and both scholarly accounts and the popular press have suggested this pattern may be rooted partly in frustrations with ageing political leaders who are unwilling or unable to respond to their preferences (Berthin, 2023; Rosenblum, 2023). Along these lines, Silva (2025) finds that younger people are less satisfied with democracy when the party they favor is led by an older politician, and vice versa for older people. In general, however, there is little evidence as to whether younger people may be less satisfied with democracy *because* their age group is underrepresented. This leads to our third expectation:

> **E3:** The negative effects of age gaps on both specific and diffuse democratic support will be more pronounced among younger citizens, who are most directly affected by age-based representation deficits.

Yet, even if age gaps shape attitudes toward democracy, it is possible that they matter less than other potential deficiencies in representation. Compared to other individual characteristics that are politically and socially salient, age is somewhat different, insofar as most people expect to become older and can remember being younger (North & Fiske, 2012). As a result, people may react less strongly to age-related political issues because they can expect to reap the political benefits of older age themselves at some point. This possibility contrasts with race or gender, for instance, where society places most people in fixed categories that are less likely to change significantly throughout their lives. Thus, concerns about representational quality, and by extension democracy, may be more pronounced when representation gaps arise for these other characteristics. Certainly in the United States, deep rooted issues of race and gender have been more salient and polarizing in recent years, even as high levels of the US government have become increasingly unrepresentative along generational lines. On the other hand, the intersectional nature of these generational issues could lead to widespread emphasis on age as a particularly important driver of dissatisfaction with representation and democracy. If younger people of various gender, racial, and other backgrounds share a sense of grievance fueled by a perceived political exclusion based on age, they may place significant emphasis on this factor when they evaluate representation in their democratic political system (Stockemer & Sundström, 2022b). As such, it is important to investigate the influence of age

gaps on perceptions of representational quality relative to possible deficits based on other demographic characteristics.

The analyses that follow assess our three expectations. We test whether age gaps reduce specific and diffuse democratic support, and we analyze whether these effects are concentrated among younger citizens. As our final step, we investigate how age gaps compare to other representation deficits in shaping perceptions of representational quality, particularly relative to gender and race.

3 Research Design

To assess how and for whom age gaps affect support for democracy, we conduct several analyses, consisting of two parts: an analysis of original surveys fielded in Italy, Korea, and the United States including both observational and experimental modules, and a cross-national study using the World Values Survey and the pooled data from four regional Barometer surveys (Afrobarometer, Latinobarometer, Asianbarometer, and Eurobarometer). We preregistered our experiments on OSF.[2].

Deficiencies in age-based representation may become visible to the public in different ways. In some cases, people may be aware of differences between the average ages of political leaders and adult citizens in the country. However, if people are not aware of the country's demographic patterns, they may still intuit problems with age-based representation by observing that important political leaders tend to be from older generations. We use measures that reflect both possibilities. In some of our analyses, we focus on the difference between the ages of important political leaders and the ages of adult citizens in a given country. In other analyses, we focus on the ages of the politicians themselves, without reference to the age distribution of the public. By operationalizing age gaps in both relative and absolute terms, we can better assess how mismatches between the age of political elites and the public are associated with support for democracy.

We chose to run our surveys in Italy, South Korea, and the United States because they vary in the extent of their age gaps, as documented in Appendix A. The United States displays the largest gap between the average age of legislators and the adult public among liberal democracies, while South Korea sits closer to the middle of the distribution and Italy has a comparatively small gap (Figure A.2). However, similar age gaps can mask important differences in representation. Despite its smaller overall gap, South Korea strongly underrepresents younger citizens and overrepresents older ones, much like the United States, while Italy shows more moderate underrepresentation across age groups (Figure A.3). The three countries also differ in their demographic trajectories: Italy has

[2]We preregistered the experiments in Open Science Framework (OSF) on February 11, 2024. Our OSF pre-registration protocol is registered at the following link: https://osf.io/6rcq2. The text is included in the Supplementary Materials Section I

had one of the oldest populations in the world since the 1990s, South Korea is one of the fastest-ageing societies globally, and the United States follows a more gradual ageing path (Figure A.1). This variation in both the size and the nature of age-based representation deficits, combined with differences in region, culture, democratic history, and institutions, makes these three countries a useful set of cases for assessing whether similar patterns pertain across different contexts.

Two rounds of surveys were conducted in each of the three countries. Data collection for the first round of surveys occurred between December 18, 2023 and January 2, 2024. Data collection for the second round of surveys occurred between February 16, 2024 and February 22, 2024. For both rounds, the samples were acquired by Cint, with quotas for age, educational attainment, and gender. We acquired approximately 2,000 responses in Italy and 1,750 responses in both South Korea and the United States for each round.[3] The first round of surveys included descriptive questions about attitudes toward age-based representation, democracy, and ageism. The second round of surveys included an experiment in which some respondents were randomly assigned to information about the age gap in their country prior to describing their attitudes toward democracy, in addition to a conjoint experiment designed to assess the relative importance of age gaps in perceptions of representational quality.

For our cross-national analysis, we rely on global survey data on attitudes toward democracy, as well as data on national legislator ages, to analyze the country-level correlation between age gaps and support for democracy. We provide more detailed information about each analysis prior to reporting our results in the next section.

4 Results

We report results from four analyses. First, we use our initial wave of original survey data from Italy, South Korea, and the United States to analyze whether people who believe politicians are too old in their countries demonstrate less satisfaction with and support for democracy. Next, we rely on the second wave of original surveys in the three countries to analyze results from our experiment in which we randomize exposure to information about age gaps in the country. We then turn to the cross-national data on democratic support and parliamentarian ages to study the country-level relationship between age gaps and attitudes toward democracy. Finally, we return to our original survey data, drawing on the conjoint experiment to test how age gaps influence perceptions of representational effectiveness relative to other representation gaps. We proceed through each of these analyses in turn.

[3]The surveys were implemented on Qualtrics and programmed by the authors. The Italian and Korean surveys were translated by professional translators hired through Cint. They were then checked by native speakers associated with the authors.

4.1 People Who Think Politicians Are Too Old Are Less Satisfied with Their Democracies

If age-based representation deficits prompt more negative views of democracy, we should observe that perceptions of politicians' ages are related to attitudes toward democratic governance. If age gaps primarily affect the attitudes of younger citizens, these relationships should be more pronounced among younger adults.

We assess these expectations with our first wave of original survey data from Italy, South Korea, and the United States. Our primary independent variable is a question that asks respondents whether they think politicians in their country are generally too old, too young, or about the right age. Answers to this question should capture whether respondents believe an age-based representation deficit exists in their country. In particular, we create a dichotomous variable equal to 1 if respondents select "too old" and 0 otherwise. Between 1-2 % of respondents believe politicians are too young, whereas 53% of respondents believe politicians are too old, and the remaining 45% think politicians are about the right age. Younger respondents are not more likely than older ones to believe politicians are too old.

Our outcome variables include measures of both *specific* and *diffuse* support for democracy.[4] Regarding specific support, we record respondents' level of satisfaction with how democracy is working in their country on a ten-point scale. Regarding diffuse support, we ask respondents how important it is that they live in a democracy. We also create an index capturing general support for democracy, which draws on four questions: whether democracies do not perform well economically, whether they are indecisive, whether they are ineffective at maintaining order, and whether democracy is the best system of government. Descriptive statistics for all outcome variables, before standardization, are reported in Table B.1.

We regress these measures of democratic support, all standardized, on the indicator for believing politicians are too old, controlling for relevant demographic characteristics and political views. We control for age, gender, education, religiosity, unemployment, and ideology on a liberal to conservative scale [5]. We also control for anxiety about ageing, which is a predictor for ageism, as well as respondent ethnocentrism, to capture a more general tendency toward prejudice. These latter controls should address the possibility that a link between perceiving politicians as too old and viewing democracy less favorably

[4]Full question wording is provided in Appendix B2.

[5]One concern in studies of this kind is that more politically sophisticated respondents may be simultaneously more attentive to descriptive representation deficits and more critical of their democracy, potentially confounding the relationship of interest. While our surveys do not include a dedicated political knowledge or interest scale, we include education as a control variable. Education is strongly and consistently associated with political knowledge, interest, and engagement, and is widely used in the literature as a proxy for cognitive resources and political awareness when direct measures are unavailable (Le & Nguyen, 2021; Persson, 2015; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995).

Table 1: Belief that Politicians are Too Old and Support for Democracy

	Dem. Satisfaction *Specific*		Dem. Important *Diffuse*		Dem. Index *Diffuse*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Politicians Too Old	-0.330***	-0.330***	0.100***	0.069**	0.006	-0.024
	(0.026)	(0.030)	(0.026)	(0.029)	(0.025)	(0.030)
Young	0.015	0.015	-0.441***	-0.503***	-0.448***	-0.508***
	(0.028)	(0.037)	(0.030)	(0.042)	(0.026)	(0.036)
Politicians Too Old × Young		0.000		0.118**		0.114**
		(0.055)		(0.060)		(0.051)
R^2	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.12	0.19	0.19
Observations	5,685	5,685	5,691	5,691	5,681	5,681
Individual Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Country FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Notes: OLS estimates. Outcome variables are standardized. The results include country fixed-effects, and control variables, such as gender, education, age, working status, religion, income, ideology, anxiety about ageing and ethnocentrism. Robust SE in parenthesis. Signif.: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1.

is motivated by negative views of older people and their capacity to govern rather than concerns about representation (Roman & Williamson, 2026). We also run the same regressions but with an indicator variable for younger respondents interacted with the measure of whether politicians are too old, which allows us to analyze whether the relationship is stronger among younger people, who we define as those under the age of 35.[6]

The results are reported in Table 1, with data aggregated across Italy, South Korea, and the United States and dummies included for the countries and younger respondents.[7] Columns 1, 3, and 5 show the respective relationships between support for democracy and the belief that politicians are too old. As expected, we find a large, negative relationship with specific support for democracy (column 1). Respondents who believe politicians are too old are one-third of a standard deviation less likely to be satisfied with how democracy is working in their country, equivalent to a decline of approximately 0.8 points on the original ten-point scale.[8] By contrast, we do not find that respondents who believe politicians are too old show less diffuse support for democracy. Instead, the results show a small but positive and statistically significant relationship with viewing democracy as important (column 3) and no relationship with the democracy index (column 5). In Section D1 of the Supplementary Materials, we show in Table D1 that these results are consistent in all three countries, especially regarding the negative relationship with specific

[6]Definitions of "youths" can range up to 35, so we use this age to capture younger versus older people. Results are similar with other cut-points.

[7]In Section D1 in the Supplementary Materials, we report similar results separately for each country, and we include results of a more parsimonious estimation without covariates to avoid suppression effects in Table D.4 in the same section.

[8]Please refer to Table B.1 for statistics before standardization.

democratic support.[9]

Columns 2, 4, and 6 include the interaction between believing politicians are too old and being under the age of 35. The interaction is precisely zero for the outcome of specific support for democracy, indicating that both younger and older people are similarly less satisfied with how democracy is performing in their country when they perceive politicians as too old. For the two outcomes capturing diffuse support for democracy, the interaction is positive, suggesting that believing politicians are too old has a stronger positive relationship with general democratic support among younger rather than older people. These patterns hold when using age as a continuous variable rather than a young/old dummy, as shown in Table D.5 in the Supplementary Materials.

The results are consistent with age gaps weakening specific support for democracy without undermining diffuse support. This pattern reflects our expectation that representational problems rooted in age would be more likely to harm satisfaction with democracy in one's own country without necessarily affecting views of democracy more generally. A plausible interpretation of the slight positive correlation with diffuse democratic support is that people view age gaps as contrary to democratic values, and so they believe the solution is to strengthen democratic elements of the political system to address deficits in representation based on age. However, this design cannot rule out reverse causation or bias from omitted variables, and it is possible that individuals dissatisfied with democracy for other reasons would be motivated to describe politicians as too old. We address causation next.

4.2 Information about Age Gaps Lowers Confidence in Democratic Representation

The preceding analysis reveals a substantively important relationship between perceiving the existence of an age-based representation deficit and feeling that democracy is not working well in one's own country. Does exposure to information about age gaps between political leaders and the public cause more negative views of democracy? To probe causality, we implemented a survey experiment on our second round of surveys in Italy, South Korea, and the United States. The experiment randomly assigned respondents to a control group or a treatment group. The control group proceeded directly to outcome questions measuring specific support for democracy in their country and diffuse support for democratic governance[10]. We asked three questions to gauge satisfaction with democracy in one's own country. First, we asked respondents if their democracy is good at giving citizens what they want. Second, we asked if their democracy is effective at

[9]Results are also consistent when using an alternative construction of the democracy index, as shown in Table D4 in the Supplementary Materials.

[10]Specifically, the control group answers the outcome questions first, after which they also read the same information and answer the same questions about the age gap.

addressing major challenges. Third, we asked if they are satisfied with how democracy is working in their country. We viewed the first two questions as measures of satisfaction with how representation was working in the political system, while the third question provided a measure of general satisfaction with democratic performance. To measure more principled support for democracy, we then asked respondents if it is important for them to live in a democracy, and we asked the same four questions discussed previously that we transform into an index of general democratic approval. Descriptive statistics for all outcome variables in this round of surveys, before standardization, are reported in Panel B of Table B.1.

In the treatment group, respondents were first exposed to information about the age gap between national legislators and adults in their country before answering the questions about democratic support. The treatment included a short paragraph that described the average age of national legislators, the average age of an adult citizen, and the implications of this gap for underrepresentation of adults under the age of 40. This underrepresentation was also presented graphically with a bar chart.[11] Thus, the treatment drew attention both to how old legislators were in the country and to how much these ages differed from typical adults. We used neutral language to describe the age gap rather than trying to persuade respondents of its negative implications. After reading the information, respondents were asked if they found it surprising and if they found it concerning. Respondents then proceeded to the outcome questions. The experiment was pre-registered before implementation. We expected stronger effects on the first three outcomes indicating satisfaction with democracy in one's own country, and we had weaker expectations for effects on diffuse support for democracy.

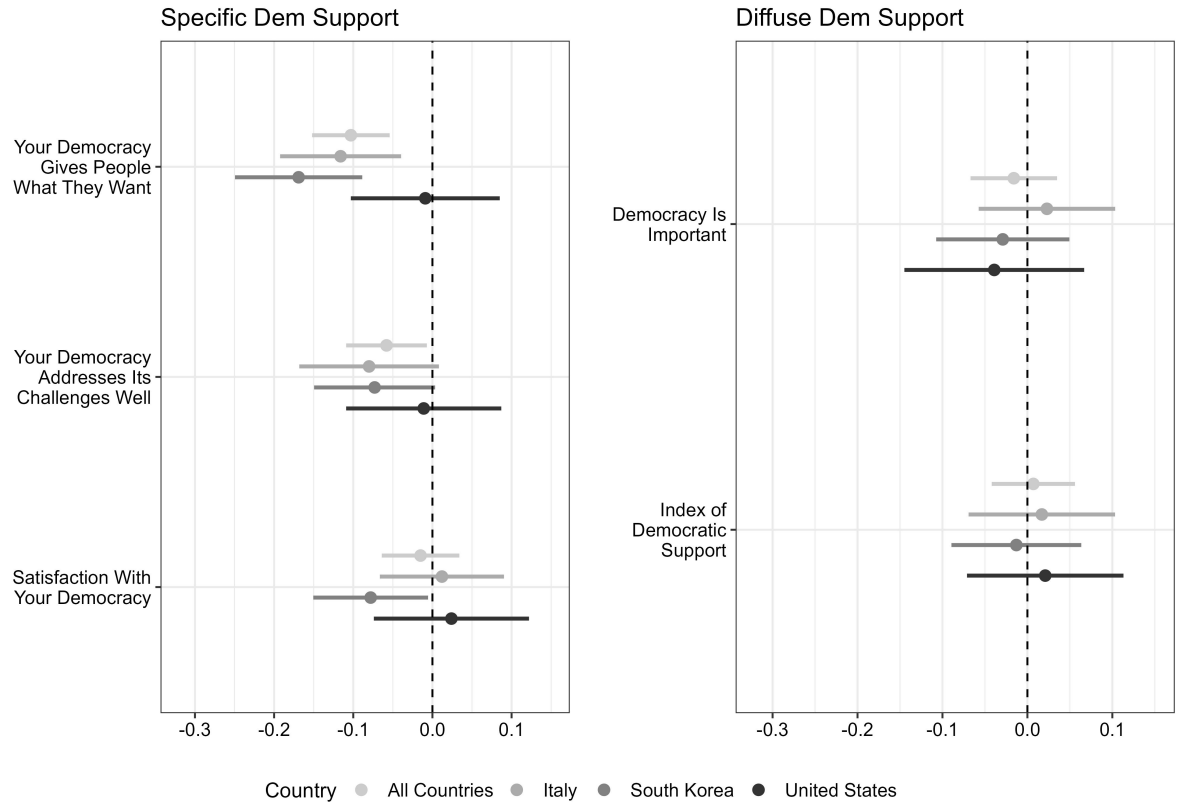
The treatment effects on the five democracy outcomes are presented in Figure 1. The left plot shows the effects on the specific support outcomes, and the right plot shows the effects on the diffuse support outcomes. Results are reported with the full sample across the three countries and within each country, with pre-registered control variables for age, education, gender, region of residence, employment, religion, income, and political ideology to increase precision.[12] We find evidence that providing information about the age gap between legislators and the public reduces specific support for democracy but not diffuse support.

First and foremost, the treatment lowers respondents' confidence in their democracy's ability to give the people what they want. The effect is pronounced in South Korea and

[11] For an example of the vignette, see Section E1 in the Supplementary Materials.

[12] In our pre-registered pre-analysis plan, we indicated that race would be included as a control variable in the USA model. However, to ensure consistency in model specifications across countries, we decided not to include race as a control. This decision reflects the intention to keep all contexts comparables. Importantly, sensitivity analyses confirm that including race as a control in the USA model does not alter the results or conclusions of the study. Effects are similar when dropping control variables. See Section E2 in the Supplementary Materials. Full regression tables underlying Figure 1, including results by country, are reported in Tables E3 in the Supplementary Materials.

Figure 1: Main Effects of Age Gap Treatment on Democracy Outcomes



Notes: OLS estimates and 95% confidence intervals of the average treatment effects of the information experiment. Outcome variables are standardized. The results include region and country fixed-effects, and control variables, such as gender, education, age, working status, religion, income, and ideology. Results without controls are reported in Figure E.5 and full regression tables are reported in Tables E3 in the Supplementary Materials.

Italy, but not in the United States. When pooling all countries together and including country fixed-effects, the effect size is approximately 0.11 standard deviations ($p < 0.01$). The age gap treatment also weakens respondents' confidence that their democracies are effective at addressing major challenges. This effect is present in the aggregated data ($p < 0.05$) and is also observed in Italy and South Korea ($p < 0.10$), but not in the United States. Thus, we find support for the notion that information about age gaps weakens perceptions of their democracy's ability to represent people well by providing them with what they want and responding to important challenges. Effects are less consistent for general satisfaction with democracy in one's country, but the treatment does reduce expressed satisfaction in South Korea ($p < 0.05$). However, the treatment produces no significant effects in any of the countries or in the pooled results on the two outcomes reflecting diffuse support for democratic governance, including how much importance they place on living in a democracy and the index of general democratic approval.

These results align with our pre-registered expectations and the observational findings in the previous section. They indicate that individuals exposed to information about

age-based representation deficits express lower confidence in how well democratic representation is functioning in their country, suggesting a causal effect (though one modest in magnitude) on specific support for democracy. However, this informational exposure does not appear to reduce support for democracy as a political system, indicating no detectable effect on more principled democratic attitudes.

We also explore subgroup effects among younger and older respondents (see Table E.6 in Section E4 in the Supplementary Materials). The treatment effects are relatively consistent by age group. If anything, they are somewhat more consistent among older respondents. This similarity aligns with the correlational findings in the previous section, which show that perceived age gaps are associated with lower specific support for democracy among younger and older respondents alike. This pattern contrasts with the expectation that the negative consequences of age gaps for democratic attitudes would be driven principally by younger citizens who will feel the effects of diminished representation most directly. However, this pattern does align with prior research indicating that people generally view representation deficits as problematic for democracy and legitimate decision-making, even when they themselves are not part of the group that lacks representation (Clayton et al., 2019, 2026).

We had anticipated that effects would be stronger in South Korea and the United States, since their age gaps are larger than the age gap in Italy. However, the results are consistently null in the United States, whereas effects exist for the specific democratic support outcomes in both South Korea and Italy. One explanation for this unexpected result could be that concerns about ageing politicians are already highly salient in the United States, and have therefore been factored into views of the political system, including the quality of democratic governance (Sevi, 2021). Because the age gaps are smaller in South Korea and Italy, respondents may have thought less about this element of the political system, in which case the treatment effects would plausibly be larger (Druckman & Leeper, 2012). Alternatively, broader political polarization and dissatisfaction with democracy in the United States could also play a role, though it is worth noting that US respondents in our sample report higher baseline satisfaction with democracy than respondents in Italy and South Korea (Table B.1), which argues against a simple ceiling effect in democratic dissatisfaction. We return to this question in the discussion section, where we consider the implications of the US null result alongside the broader pattern of findings.

4.3 Larger Country-Level Age Gaps are Associated with Less Democratic Support

We have shown evidence that perceptions of age-based representation deficits are associated with reduced specific support for democracy, and that exposure to information about age gaps in an individual's country lowers confidence in the ability of their democracy

to represent the people well. Do these individual-level patterns extend to countries more generally? Are people less satisfied on average with the quality of their democracy in countries where older politicians are more dominant? And does this loss of democratic satisfaction extend to less principled support for democracy as well?

We merge several existing datasets to answer these questions. To measure gaps in age-based representation, we use age data on all members of a country's legislature in a given year from the Worldwide Age Representation in Parliaments Dataset (WARP) developed by Stockemer and Sundström (2022a),[13] and population data projections prepared by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations in 2022 (United Nations & Social Affairs, 2022). [14] Since legislators are meant to function as the public's representatives in a democracy (J. Chu & Williamson, 2025), the age data on legislators provides a natural test of the consequences of age gaps. We create two independent variables. First, we measure the difference between legislators and adult citizens by subtracting the average age of adults from the average age of legislators. Second, we use the average age of the legislators, since the public may not be familiar with their country's age distribution and may assume that visibly older political leaders equate to a more pronounced age-based representation deficit.

To measure attitudes toward democracy, we use multiple waves of the World Values Survey (WVS) as well as a pooled dataset of four regional Barometer surveys: the Eurobarometer, Latinobarometer, Afrobarometer, and Asianbarometer. We limit the sample to countries rated as electoral or liberal democracies by Varieties of Democracy (Coppedge, Gerring, Knutsen, et al., 2023; Pemstein et al., 2023), since the argument that age gaps will reduce support for democracy applies most plausibly to countries that are already democratic.[15] The WVS sample includes responses from 70 countries between 1994 and 2022, incorporating long-established and new democracies as well as countries at varying levels of development from all regions of the world. The Barometer surveys add a substantial number of respondents across regions and years, covering 77 countries between 1995 and 2023 with much more frequent waves [16].

[13]The dataset includes information on the electoral results of parliaments between 1945 and 2023 for 195 countries or territories. Furthermore, it contains information about the composition of elected parliaments, such as the distribution of parliamentarians by age group and gender, the average and median age in each parliament, the number of elected parliamentarians, and coverage information on the data collected.

[14]The dataset includes population estimates for all countries and regions of the world between 1950 and 2021. We accessed the data on April 16th, 2024, at https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/

[15]If citizens of an authoritarian regime are disgruntled with older political leadership, they might plausibly become less satisfied with how their political system is working. Since autocracies try to convince their citizens that they govern democratically, this dissatisfaction could spill over into attitudes toward democracy (J. A. Chu, Williamson, & Yeung, 2024). Conceptually, however, we are interested in how democracies perform at representing different age groups, so we focus only on democratic countries.

[16]Details about the countries and number of respondents included in each analysis are reported in Tables F.15 and G.22 in Appendices F and G respectively.

We regress several measures of democratic support on our two measures of age-based representation deficits in the dozens of democracies in our sample. We also interact the age gap measures with a dummy variable for respondents under 35 to establish whether the pattern is more pronounced among younger people. For the WVS, we examine one measure of specific democratic support and two measures of diffuse democratic support. For the former, respondents rate how democratically their country is being governed. This question is not the same as the measure used in our previous two sections, but it should capture perceptions of how well democracy is functioning in one's own country, which reflects our interest in specific support for democracy (Norris, 2011a). For diffuse support, the World Values Survey asks the same questions that we implemented in our original surveys. We use the question about how important it is for respondents to live in a democracy, and we create an index of general democratic support based on the four questions about whether democracies do not perform well economically, if democracies are indecisive and full of problems, if democracies are not effective at maintaining order, and if democracy is the best system of government.[17]

For the Barometer surveys, we use comparable indicators of democratic attitudes. In all survey waves, respondents are asked to evaluate how satisfied they are with the way democracy works in their country, which provides insights into specific democratic support. To capture diffuse support for democracy, we rely on a question that presents respondents with a strict choice: preferring democracy above all other types of regimes, or endorsing the view that authoritarian rule may sometimes be preferable. These items make it possible to examine whether cross-national variation in the age of political elites is associated with differences in both satisfaction with democracy and principled support for it as a system of government, extending the analysis beyond the WVS sample.

Our specifications include several country- and individual-level covariates that may correlate with support for democracy and age gaps. We control for the quality of governance with the Political Corruption Index from V-Dem and GDP per capita.[18] We also control for inequality using the Gini Index,[19] as well as the poverty headcount ratio capturing the percent of the population making less than $6.85 per day.[20] Together, these variables should account for the most plausible alternative explanation, which is that countries governed by older political leaders are less effective at producing desirable outcomes and, therefore, produce lower levels of democratic satisfaction and support. Regarding individual characteristics, we control for gender, whether the respondent is young

[17] As in the previous sections, we create the index by averaging responses to the four questions. These questions are asked on different waves of the WVS, so our sample composition differs. Results for each of the four components of the index separately, as well as for satisfaction with democracy measured in a smaller subset of waves and countries, are reported in Table F.16 in Appendix F3

[18] We accessed the data on May 10th, 2024 at https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.CD

[19] We accessed the data on May 10th, 2024 at https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI

[20] We accessed the data on May 10th, 2024 at https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.UMIC. Because these variables do not cover all years or countries, we impute information for the missing years using linear interpolation between the years for which we have data.

(15-34 years old), has not received substantial education, and is unemployed, which together should help to account for individual resources and grievances with the political system.[21] We keep the individual controls consistent across the World Values Survey and Barometer analyses to ensure comparability between the two datasets.[22].

Our main results for the World Values Survey are reported in Table 2. Panel A shows the relationship between legislator-public age differences and perceptions of how democratic one's country is, the importance respondents place on living in a democracy, and an index of general support for democracy. Panel B reports analogous models using the mean age of legislators as the independent variable.

Across both sets of models, the age difference and mean legislator age variables are negatively associated with the three outcomes, although the size and reliability of the coefficients vary. Larger age differences are more clearly linked to lower reported importance of democracy and lower scores on the democracy index, while the relationship with perceptions of the country's level of democracy is negative but not statistically significant. When using the mean age of legislators, the pattern is similar: the coefficients are negative across all outcomes, and statistically significant for perceptions of how democratic their country is being governed and the democracy index, though not for the importance of democracy.[23] To ease interpretation, in all models, the outcomes are standardized, where higher values reflect greater satisfaction with democracy, stronger support for democratic principles, and more positive assessments of democratic governance. Substantively, moving one standard deviation in the legislator-public age difference (roughly +6.2 years) or in mean legislator age (+3.5 years) is associated with a reduction in democratic support of approximately one-fifth to one-seventh of a standard deviation, depending on the model, equivalent to roughly 0.4 points on the ten-point scales used in the World Values Survey outcomes.[24] These results are consistent with the idea that older political elites are viewed as less representative and may undermine confidence in democratic institutions.

In columns 2, 4, and 6, we also examine whether these patterns are more pronounced among younger individuals by interacting the age difference and mean age variables with

[21]One potential concern is that politically sophisticated respondents may be simultaneously more attentive to age-based representation deficits and more critical of their democracy. Both the World Values Survey and the Barometer surveys include questions that allow us to proxy for political sophistication; specifically, a dummy for respondents reporting high political interest in the World Values Survey, and a dummy for respondents who frequently discuss politics with family and friends in the Barometer surveys. Robustness checks including these controls are reported in Appendices F8 and G5 and are substantively unchanged from the results presented here.

[22]Measures of income, religious affiliation, and political ideology are not systematically available across all Barometer survey waves. We replicate the World Values Survey models with these additional controls in Appendix F4. The inclusion of ideology and income reduces the sample size by approximately 15 percent due to missing values. Results are substantively unchanged from those presented in the main text.

[23]Results are also consistent when using an alternative construction of the democracy index, as shown in Table F.20 in Appendix F7.

[24]see Table C.2 for descriptive statistics of all outcome variables

Table 2: Cross-National Differences in Legislator Ages and Support for Democracy: World Value Survey

Panel A: Age Differences

	How Democratic *Specific*		Dem. Important *Diffuse*		Dem. Index *Diffuse*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Legislator-Public Age Difference	-0.009	-0.008	-0.018**	-0.019***	-0.032**	-0.029**
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Young	-0.039*	0.026	-0.196***	-0.234***	-0.090**	0.062
	(0.017)	(0.036)	(0.035)	(0.055)	(0.030)	(0.070)
Young x Age Difference		-0.005*		0.003		-0.011*
		(0.002)		(0.004)		(0.004)
Observations	92195	92195	93238	93238	25557	25557
Adjusted R^2	0.093	0.093	0.045	0.046	0.096	0.097
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Panel B: Mean Legislator Age

	How Democratic *Specific*		Dem. Important *Diffuse*		Dem. Index *Diffuse*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Legislator Mean Age	-0.020*	-0.018†	-0.013	-0.008	-0.051**	-0.043**
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Young	-0.041*	0.282†	-0.199***	0.333	-0.091**	0.971*
	(0.016)	(0.159)	(0.035)	(0.450)	(0.030)	(0.398)
Young x Mean Age		-0.007*		-0.011		-0.022*
		(0.003)		(0.009)		(0.008)
Observations	92195	92195	93238	93238	25557	25557
Adjusted R^2	0.095	0.095	0.044	0.044	0.097	0.097
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Notes: OLS estimates. Outcome variables are standardized. Standard Errors clustered by country. Controls include individual controls for gender, education, age, working status, income; and country controls like corruption index, gini index, % poverty and GDP-per capita.
Signif.: ***: 0.001, **: 0.01, *: 0.05, †: 0.1.

the dummy for respondents who are under the age of 35. While the interaction terms show some variation across outcomes, they generally indicate that young people respond more negatively to larger age gaps. This pattern is most pronounced for the democracy index and for perceptions of how democratic one's country is, where the marginal effects for younger respondents become more strongly negative as the age gap increases and legislators become older. Figures F.7 and F.8 in the Appendix illustrate these patterns graphically, showing the predicted levels of democratic support for young and older respondents across the full observed range of age gap values. For the democracy index in particular, young respondents start at comparable predicted levels to older respondents when age gaps are small, but their support declines more steeply as gaps grow, such that at larger age gap values young respondents fall below older ones. This pattern suggests

that the consequences of age gaps become particularly pronounced for younger citizens when gaps are large. However, it is also important to note that older respondents also tend to be more negative toward democracy where age gaps are larger, so these negative reactions are not limited to younger people only. These results are robust to alternative specifications, including models using age as a continuous variable and models with country fixed-effects alongside year fixed effects.[25]

The analysis of the Barometer surveys, presented in Table 3, reveals a broadly similar set of patterns. In this case, we focus on satisfaction with democracy and support for democracy as the preferred form of government. As in the WVS, both the legislator-public age difference and the mean age of legislators are negatively associated with democratic attitudes. The relationship with democratic satisfaction is negative but insignificant for the age difference, and it is strongly negative and significant with mean legislator age. The relationship with principled democratic support is negative and significant for both age variables.[26] To contextualise these findings, descriptive statistics for the Barometer outcome variables are reported in Table C.2.[27] The Barometer results also indicate that the marginal effects of larger age differences and older politicians are more pronounced for younger people for the democratic satisfaction outcome. However, younger people react similarly to older people in these surveys when it comes to principled democratic support. Figures G.9 and G.10 in the Appendix complement these findings by showing that for satisfaction with democracy, young respondents begin with higher predicted levels than older respondents when age gaps are small, but their satisfaction declines more steeply as gaps grow, with the two groups converging and young respondents eventually falling below older ones at larger age gap values. For principled support for democracy, the two groups follow nearly parallel trajectories throughout the full range, consistent with the null interaction terms in the regression table.

Taken together, the results from both the World Values Survey and the Barometer data suggest that across countries, support for democracy will be lower where political leaders are older and diverge more from the ages of the public. In contrast to the previous results, this negative relationship appears for both specific and diffuse support for democracy. We consider the implications of this difference in the discussion section.

[25]See Table F.19 in Appendix F6 for age as a continuous variable; and Table F.18 in Appendix F5 for country fixed-effects. We treat the country fixed-effects models as a robustness check rather than our preferred specification, because the argument in this section is fundamentally cross-national. Country fixed effects absorb the between-country variation that is central to that argument and identify coefficients only from within-country changes over time. In our setting, those within-country changes are limited because legislative age profiles evolve slowly, and because many countries contribute only a small number of survey waves over roughly twenty-five years, leaving the estimates to be identified from relatively little temporal variation.

[26]These results are robust to using age as a continuous variable rather than a young/old dummy (Appendix G4) and to controlling for political sophistication (Appendix G5)

[27]We also estimated models with country fixed effects alongside year fixed effects (Appendix G3). As discussed above for the World Values Survey models, we view these as a useful robustness check rather than our preferred specification, since they rely only on limited within-country variation over time.

Table 3: Cross-National Differences in Legislator Ages and Support for Democracy: Barometers

Panel A: Age Differences

	Satisfaction Democracy *Specific*		Support Democracy *Diffuse*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Legislator-Public Age Difference	-0.007	-0.005	-0.005*	-0.005*
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Young	0.065***	0.118***	-0.045***	-0.057**
	(0.015)	(0.025)	(0.007)	(0.019)
Young x Age Difference		-0.005***		0.001
		(0.002)		(0.001)
Observations	1156002	1156002	208000	208000
Adjusted R^2	0.099	0.100	0.070	0.070
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓

Panel B: Mean Legislator Age

	Satisfaction Democracy *Specific*		Support Democracy *Diffuse*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Legislator Mean Age	-0.029***	-0.026**	-0.005*	-0.005*
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.002)	(0.003)
Young	0.063***	0.395*	-0.046***	-0.103†
	(0.015)	(0.193)	(0.007)	(0.056)
Young x Mean Age		-0.007†		0.001
		(0.004)		(0.001)
Observations	1156002	1156002	208000	208000
Adjusted R^2	0.105	0.105	0.070	0.070
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓

Notes: OLS estimates. Outcome variables are standardized. Standard Errors clustered by country. Controls include individual controls for gender, education, age, working status; and country controls like corruption index, gini index, % poverty and GDP-per capita.
Signif.: ***: 0.001, **: 0.01, *: 0.05, †: 0.1.

4.4 Age Gaps Undermine Confidence in Representation Less Than Gender Gaps

We have found evidence that age-based representation deficits can result in more negative views of democracy, though the relationship is relatively modest and appears more consistent across our analyses for satisfaction with democratic performance in one's own country. However, age gaps are only one type of representation deficit that can become entrenched in a democracy. Women, for instance, are chronically underrepresented in elected positions around the world (Erlich & Beauvais, 2022; Masad, 2020). Ethnic, religious, and other minority groups also face representation deficits in many democratic contexts. To some extent, it is inevitable that descriptive representation in important

government positions will not precisely reflect the population in a democracy, at least for some characteristics. How do age gaps compare to these other potential deficits in shaping concerns about democratic representation?

To answer this question, we also implemented a conjoint experiment on our second round of surveys in Italy, South Korea, and the United States. The experiment randomized descriptive representation across several demographic groups in pairs of hypothetical legislatures and asked respondents to choose which legislature they would prefer and how well each legislature would represent the public. Unlike the information experiment in Section 4.2, which addresses the causal effect of age gaps on democratic satisfaction, the conjoint is designed to assess the relative importance of age-based representation deficits compared to other types of descriptive representation deficits. Because conjoint experiments randomize attribute values across multiple dimensions, they are ideal for understanding which attributes people prioritize in making multidimensional choices (Hainmeuller et al., 2014). Since descriptive representation can occur across many different characteristics and will not align on all of them, the design is useful for identifying whether age is relatively more or less important than other salient components of identity.

Prior to beginning the experimental module, respondents were given information about the demographic composition of their country in terms of gender, ethnicity, educational attainment, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, and age. Details varied slightly across countries; for instance, sexual orientation was dropped from South Korea due to data limitations. Respondents were told that citizens typically want the national legislature to represent this diversity, but that some characteristics will be represented better than others. They were then presented with pairs of hypothetical legislatures that reflected the aforementioned demographic characteristics more or less closely. A key feature of the design is that the actual demographic composition of the country was always displayed alongside the two hypothetical legislatures, so that respondents could directly compare each option against the real population benchmark. For each of these attributes, we randomized whether the legislature underrepresented it, represented it correctly in terms of the national population, or overrepresented it. For instance, with regards to age, respondents were told the actual percentage of adults in the country who are 60 years or older, and they were given a standardized percentage of legislators in each hypothetical legislature that indicated whether the body under, over, or correctly represented older people. Respondents completed the exercise three times. The full conjoint design, including an example task, is shown in Figure H.13 in Section H in the Supplementary Materials.

The results are reported in Figure 2, where we show the effects on the ratings of how well each legislature would represent the public.[28] We report the Average Marginal

[28] We use the rating outcome because it more directly reflects perceptions of representation. The forced choice preference outcome is shown in Figure H.16 in the Supplementary Materials H5 and leads to similar

Component Effect (AMCE), which is the effect of each attribute level on representation ratings, relative to the reference category and averaged across the other attributes.[29] In all cases, the reference category is the correct representation of the national population. The figure displays the results for each country, including all respondents. Figure H.15 in the Supplementary Materials shows the analysis considering younger respondents and older respondents (with 35 as the cut-point) separately.

In Italy and South Korea, overrepresentation of older people reduces perceptions that the legislatures would represent the public well. The effect sizes on the representation rating are -0.11 in Italy ($p < 0.05$) and -0.09 in South Korea ($p < 0.10$). These effects are consistent with our other analyses suggesting that age gaps favoring older people can reduce confidence in representation. In the United States, however, the overrepresentation of older people does not affect the representation ratings, a null effect that is similar to the lack of movement in the information experiment. Furthermore, in all three countries, the age effects are smaller than the effects of gender, and in some cases they are smaller than the effects of religion and education. As such, while our previous results indicate that age gaps can weaken satisfaction with democracy and perhaps support for democracy overall, other descriptive representation deficits may have stronger effects on how citizens perceive the quality of representation in their democracies.

Furthermore, as with our previous results, the negative effects are not driven primarily by the reactions of younger survey respondents. As shown by the second and third rows of the Figure H.15 in the Supplementary Materials, the effect sizes associated with overrepresentation of older people are similar in magnitude among respondents of both age groups. Thus, we do not find evidence that views of representational quality are particularly affected for younger people when they are the ones excluded from elected office.

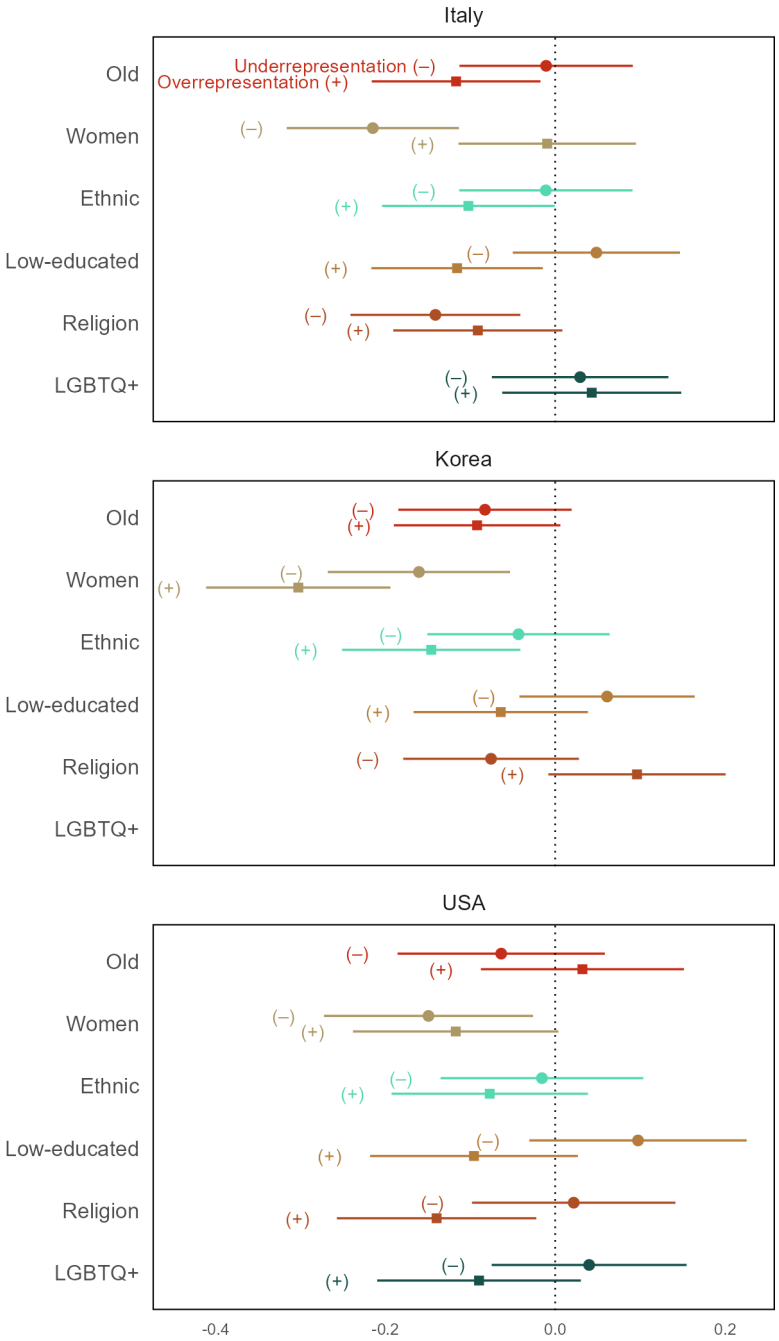
5 Discussion

Democracies often elect leaders who are older than the public, and these age gaps have become more salient recently as demographics have aged in a number of these countries (Berry, 2014; Stockemer & Sundström, 2023). Because age cohorts tend to view politics very differently, a number of scholars and social commentators have raised concerns that age gaps between political leaders and the public may increasingly undermine faith in democratic representation, sour attitudes toward democracy, and push younger people, in particular, toward distrust of democratic governance (Buchmeier & Vogt, 2024; Jackson et al., 2024; Stockemer & Sundström, 2023; Xiao, 2023). We find some evidence that there is merit to these concerns. Our results suggest that age gaps can weaken specific support

conclusions about the lower relative importance of age. In the forced choice, the effect of overrepresenting older people is negative for Italy but null in South Korea and the United States.

[29] Marginal means are also reported in Section H6 in the Supplementary Materials.

Figure 2: Conjoint Results with rating outcome (AMCE)



Notes: AMCES estimates and 95% confidence interval. The reference group is always the correct representation. The outcome is a 10-point rating of how well the legislature would represent the public. Young is 18-34 years old.

for democracy, increasing frustrations with how democracy is performing in one's own country. Consistent with our expectations, we find weaker evidence that age gaps reduce diffuse support for democracy as a system of government. Our cross-national analysis shows that larger age gaps are associated with lower expressions of principled democratic support, but the observational and experimental analyses from our surveys only indicate a relationship between age gaps and satisfaction with democratic performance in the respondents' specific countries.

As mentioned, a possible explanation for these findings is that age gaps decrease satisfaction with democracy by reducing perceptions of representational effectiveness; however, because these age gaps are seen as contrary to democratic principles, frustrated citizens perceive the solution to be reforms that strengthen rather than abandon democracy. However, it is also possible that age gaps may undermine diffuse support for democracy over time, which could explain the association we find between larger age gaps and lower general approval of democracy in our cross-national analysis. Prior research suggests that diffuse support for democracy is a stickier attitude that changes more slowly than satisfaction with democracy (Claassen & Magalhães, 2022). As such, our experimental treatment in the context of a short survey may have affected perceptions of democratic performance in one's own country without shifting expressions of general support for democracy, even if the persistence of large, visible age gaps can gradually erode principled support for democracy within a country.

We also find relatively weak evidence that the negative effects of age gaps are especially relevant to younger people. Both older and younger respondents in our data tended to react negatively to age gaps. In some of the analyses, these negative reactions were more pronounced among younger people, but in others the reactions were similar in intensity. That both age groups tended to react negatively points toward a broader mechanism: rather than being driven primarily by self-interested reactions to personal underrepresentation, the negative responses to age gaps appear to reflect a more general value placed on descriptive representation as a democratic norm, where citizens evaluate age-based representation deficits as part of their broader assessment of how well democracy is functioning (Clayton et al., 2019; Verge, Wiesehomeier, & Espírito-Santo, 2020). Yet, our results still suggest that mitigating age gaps in political leadership could strengthen confidence in democratic representation among younger people, while also shaping democratic attitudes among older generations as well. In that sense, our study aligns with findings suggesting that even if political conflicts in ageing democracies are heavily shaped by this demographic change, the conflict will not necessarily be intergenerational in nature (Emery, 2012).

Thus, it does not appear to be the case that age gaps provide a strong explanation for why younger people have become relatively less committed to democracy in recent years (Frederiksen, 2024). Instead, other explanations for this divergence in democratic

support between age groups may relate to thermostatic models of democratic support, changing patterns of political socialization and education over time, or disapproval of rising inequality and other policy outcomes that have disproportionately affected younger citizens (Claassen, 2020b; Foa et al., 2020). The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic may also have contributed to this divergence. Research suggests that crises of this kind increase dissatisfaction with democracy, particularly where governments adopted measures that were perceived as economically damaging (Quaranta & Martini, 2017; Su, 2026). Younger generations faced particularly severe economic consequences from the pandemic, including job losses and disrupted education, and this may have reinforced perceptions among them that democratic governments were unresponsive to their needs and priorities, contributing to declining democratic support in this group independently of age-based representation gaps.

Our observational results showing that people are less satisfied with democracy when they believe politicians are too old were consistent across the three countries in which we conducted our original surveys. However, the treatment effects related to age gaps in the vignette and conjoint experiments were visible in Italy and South Korea but not in the United States. We had expected the effects to be strongest in the United States, which has the largest age gap of the three. As discussed, one explanation for the weaker effects in the United States could be that concerns about the ages of political leaders were already exceptionally salient in the American public debate at the time of our surveys. As we note in the introduction, the advanced ages of former President Biden, President Trump, and much of the Congressional leadership had prompted widespread discussion about whether the United States had become an unresponsive gerontocracy (Jackson et al., 2024; Moyn, 2024; Xiao, 2023). As a result, pre-treatment exposure may have been stronger in the United States than in Italy or South Korea, with many US citizens already having developed fixed attitudes toward the issue before participating in our survey, leaving little room for our treatment to move attitudes further (Druckman & Leeper, 2012; Sevi, 2022). Alternatively, political and social polarization around other identities may overshadow age effects in the United States. This possibility aligns with the conjoint results, where other identities appear to matter more than age for how US citizens evaluate the quality of representation.

More generally across the three countries, we find evidence that mismatches between the ages of political leaders and the public matter less than gender gaps for shaping perceptions of representative bodies. This pattern does not negate our other findings, which suggest that age gaps on their own can directly reduce satisfaction with democracy to some extent. However, it does suggest that policies designed to mitigate gender disparities, such as quotas for female legislators, may have relatively stronger effects in shaping evaluations of democratic representation (Bush & Zetterberg, 2021; Clayton et al., 2026). At the same time, it is also true that demographic deficits are often intersectional. Older

political leaders tend to be male, and they tend to be from other dominant groups in society (Stockemer & Sundström, 2018). As such, policies designed to encourage more representation of younger people in important political offices may also contribute to more robust satisfaction with democracy by helping to address these other demographic deficits as well.

Our results are mixed as the whether age gaps reduce principled support for democracy. However, the evidence that age gaps can undermine satisfaction with democracy suggests the issue has longer-term implications for democratic stability that can be addressed by empowering younger people. Specific support for the political system in a given country can be strengthened by better governance that improves outcomes, strengthens perceptions of procedural fairness, and mitigates underlying grievances(Christmann, 2018; Hobolt, 2012; Magalhães, 2016; Norris, 2011b). In turn, this higher satisfaction can increase regime stability as well as principled support for democracy (Claassen & Magalhães, 2022; Norris, 2011a).

Our findings should nevertheless be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, our original surveys were collected through online opt-in panels. Although recruitment was guided by quotas for age, gender, and education, respondents may still differ from national populations in ways that we cannot fully observe, and some caution is therefore warranted when assessing generalizability. This concern is partly mitigated by the fact that the core associations we document appear consistently across multiple demographic subgroups, and by the fact that our cross national analyses draw on large multi-wave survey datasets covering dozens of democracies. Even so, the experimental component of the study remains limited to three countries surveyed at a specific moment in time, which may constrain how far those experimental results can be generalized across settings or periods.

A second limitation concerns the range of democratic contexts captured by our experimental studies. The WVS and barometer analysis includes a global sample of countries, but our original data is collected in established and ageing democracies. If we focused on democracies with very young populations, it is possible the experimental results would be different, depending on how salient age is politically and how visible the age gap is. In such contexts, age-based underrepresentation may be interpreted through different political lenses, and generational grievances may interact more strongly with other forms of exclusion or dissatisfaction than our data allow us to observe. The fact that our results from the larger set of countries in the cross-national analysis differ in some aspects from the results in our original surveys could suggest that the consequences of age gaps will differ in other democratic contexts. An important avenue for future research is therefore to examine whether the relationship between age gaps and democratic attitudes works similarly in these younger democracies.

Taken together, our results suggest that democracies should pay attention to age

gaps and may benefit from policies that improve representation of younger generations in important public offices. Scholars have argued previously that deficits in age-based representation merit similar treatment to gender deficits, including specific policies to address them (Trantidis, 2016). Advocates for better representation of younger people have proposed policies including legislative quotas and age limits for certain public offices (Bidadanure, 2015; Schachtschneider, 2024), and such policies can have significant public support (Gramlich, 2023). Strengthening confidence in democracy should be an important justification for giving further consideration to these policies that aim to limit misrepresentation of age groups.

References

Adserà, A., Arenas, A., & Boix, C. (2023). Estimating the value of democracy relative to other institutional and economic outcomes among citizens in brazil, france, and the united states. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *120*, e2306168120.

Arnesen, S., & Peters, Y. (2018). The legitimacy of representation: How descriptive, formal, and responsiveness representation affect the acceptability of political decisions. *Comparative Political Studies*, *51*(7), 868–899.

Belschner, J. (2024). Too young to win? exploring the sources of age-related electoral disadvantage. *Electoral Studies*, *88*, 102748.

Berry, C. (2014). Young people and the ageing electorate: Breaking the unwritten rule of representative democracy. *Parliamentary Affairs*, *67*(3), 708–725.

Berthin, G. (2023). Why are youth dissatisfied with democracy? *Freedom House*.

Bidadanure, J. (2015). Six reasons why the uk parliament should have youth quotas. *Open Democracy*.

Blais, A., & Rubenson, D. (2013). The source of turnout decline: New values or new contexts? *Comparative Political Studies*, *46*(1), 95–117.

Braley, A., Lenz, G. S., Adjodah, D., Rahnama, H., & Pentland, A. (2023). Why voters who value democracy participate in democratic backsliding. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 1282-1293.

Buchmeier, Y., & Vogt, G. (2024). The aging democracy: Demographic effects, political legitimacy, and the quest for generational pluralism. *Perspectives on Politics*, *22*(1), 168–180.

Bush, S., & Zetterberg, P. (2021). Gender quotas and international reputation. *American Journal of Political Science*, *65*, 326-341.

Chrisp, J., & Pearce, N. (2019). Grey power: Towards a political economy of older voters in the uk. *The Political Quarterly*, *90*, 743-756.

Christmann, P. (2018). Economic performance, quality of democracy and satisfaction with democracy. *Electoral Studies*, *53*, 79-89.

Chu, J., & Williamson, S. (2025). Respect the process: The public cost of unilateral action in comparative perspective. *The Journal of Politics*, *87*.

Chu, J. A., Williamson, S., & Yeung, E. S. (2024). People consistently view elections and civil liberties as key components of democracy. *Science*, *386*, 291-296.

Claassen, C. (2020a). Does public support help democracy survive? *American Journal of Political Science*, *64*, 118-134.

Claassen, C. (2020b). In the mood for democracy? democratic support as thermostatic opinion. *American Political Science Review*, *114*, 36-53.

Claassen, C., & Magalhães, P. C. (2022). Effective government and evaluations of democracy. *Comparative Political Studies*, *55*, 869-894.

Claassen, C., & Magalhães, P. C. (2023). Public support for democracy in the united

states has declined generationally. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *87*, 719–732.

Clayton, A., O'Brien, D. Z., & Piscopo, J. M. (2019). All male panels? representation and democratic legitimacy. *American Journal of Political Science*, *63*(1), 113–129.

Clayton, A., O'Brien, D. Z., & Piscopo, J. M. (2026). Electoral gender quotas and democratic legitimacy. *American Political Science Review*, *120*(1), 123–140.

Coppedge, M., Gerring, J., Knutsen, C. H., et al. (2023). *V-dem country-year dataset v13.* Gothenburg, Sweden. Retrieved from https://www.v-dem.net/data/the-v-dem-dataset/ (Accessed: 10 April 2024)

Curry, J. M., & Haydon, M. R. (2018). Lawmaker age, issue salience, and senior representation in congress. *American Politics Research*, *46*, 567-595.

Druckman, J. N., & Leeper, T. J. (2012). Learning more from political communication experiments: Pretreatment and its effects. *American Journal of Political Science*, *56*(4), 875-896.

Emery, T. E. (2012). Intergenerational conflict: Evidence from europe. *Journal of Population Ageing*, *5*, 7–22.

Erlich, A., & Beauvais, E. (2022). Explaining women's political underrepresentation in democracies with high levels of corruption. *Political Science Research Methods*, *11*(4), 804–822.

Eshima, S., & Smith, D. M. (2022). Just a number? voter evaluations of age in candidate-choice experiments. *The Journal of Politics*, *84*, 1856-1861.

Foa, R., Klassen, A., Wenger, D., Rand, A., & Slade, M. (2020). Youth and satisfaction with democracy: Reversing the democratic disconnect? *Centre for the Future of Democracy*.

Frederiksen, K. V. S. (2024). Young people punish undemocratic behaviour less than older people. *British Journal of Political Science*, *54*, 1014-1022.

Goerres, A., & Vanhuysse, P. (2021). *Global political demography: The politics of population change*. Springer Nature.

Gramlich, J. (2023). Most americans favor maximum age limits for federal elected officials, supreme court justices. *Pew Research Center*.

Grant, Z. P. (2021). Crisis and convergence: How the combination of a weak economy and mainstream party ideological de-polarization fuels anti-system support. *Comparative Political Studies*, *54*, 1256-1291.

Hainmeuller, J., Hopkins, D. J., & Yamamoto, T. (2014). Causal inference in conjoint analysis: Understanding multidimensional choices via stated preference experiments. *Political Analysis*, *22*(1), 1–30.

Hobolt, S. B. (2012). Citizen satisfaction with democracy in the european union. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, *50*, 88-105.

Inglehart, R., Haerpfer, C., Moreno, A., Welzel, C., Kizilova, K., Diez-Medrano, J., ... Puranen, B. (2022). *World values survey: All rounds – country-pooled datafile version 3.0.* Madrid, Spain & Vienna, Austria: JD Systems Institute & WVSA

Secretariat. doi: 10.14281/18241.17

Jackson, C., Newall, M., & Rollason, C. (2024). Majority of americans think both biden and trump are too old to serve second terms. *IPSOS*.

Kurz, K. R., & Ettensperger, F. (2023). Introducing a new dataset: Age representation in parliaments on the party-level. *Statistics, Politics and Policy*.

Kurz, K. R., Wurthmann, L. C., & Gross, M. (2025). The influence of age on citizens' preferences for age-related descriptive representation. *Politics and Governance*, *13*(Article 9251), 1–18.

Le, K., & Nguyen, M. (2021). Education and political engagement. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *85*, 102441.

Linde, J., & Ekman, J. (2003). Satisfaction with democracy: A note on a frequently usedindicator in comparative politics. *European Journal of Political Research*, *42*, 287-440.

Magalhães, P. C. (2016). Economic evaluations, procedural fairness, and satisfaction with democracy. *Political Research Quarterly*, *69*, 522-534.

Masad, R. (2020). The struggle for women in politics continues. *UNDP*.

McClean, C. T. (2026). Does youth representation matter for social spending? *The Journal of Politics*, *Forthcoming*. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1086/741605 doi: 10.1086/741605

McClean, C. T., & Ono, Y. (2024). Too young to run? voter evaluations of the age of candidates. *Political Behavior*.

Moyn, S. (2024). America's gerontocracy problem goes far beyond the president. *The New York Times*.

Norris, P. (2011a). *Democratic deficit: Critical citizens revisited*. Cambridge University Press.

Norris, P. (2011b). Does democratic satisfaction reflect regime performance? In M. Rosema, B. Denters, & K. Aarts (Eds.), *How democracy works* (p. 115-135). Amsterdam University Press.

North, M. S., & Fiske, S. T. (2012). An inconvenienced youth? ageism and its potential intergenerational roots. *Psychological Bulletin*, *138*(5), 982–987.

Pemstein, D., Marquardt, K. L., Tzelgov, E., Wang, Y.-t., Medzihorsky, J., Krusell, J., ... von Römer, J. (2023). The v-dem measurement model: Latent variable analysis for cross-national and cross-temporal expert-coded data. *Varieties of Democracy Institute Working Paper*, *21*(8th Ed). https://v-dem.net/wp.html.

Persson, M. (2015). Education and political participation. *British Journal of Political Science*, *45*(3), 689–703.

Quaranta, M., & Martini, S. (2017). Easy come, easy go? economic performance and satisfaction with democracy in southern europe in the last three decades. *Social Indicators Research*, *131*(2), 659–680.

Roberts, D. C., & Wolak, J. (2023). Do voters care about the age of their elected

representatives? *Political Behavior*, *45*, 1959–1978.

Roman, A., & Williamson, S. (2026). The political roots of ageism in greying democracies: Evidence from italy, south korea, and the united states. *Research / Politics*.

Rosenblum, C. (2023). The gerontocracy waged war on gen z. now they're fighting back. *Rolling Stone*.

Ross, A. D., & Rouse, S. M. (2022). (young) generations as social identities: The role of latino*millennial/generation z in shaping attitudes about climate change. *Political Behavior*, *44*, 1105–1124.

Schachtschneider, K. (2024). Promoting democracy among young europeans: a how-to guide. *GLOBSEC*.

Sevi, S. (2021). Do young voters vote for young leaders? *Electoral Studies*, *69*, 102200.

Sevi, S. (2022). Too old to be president? *American Politics Research*, *50*, 752–756.

Silva, B. C. (2025). No votes for old men: Leaders' age and youth turnout in comparative perspective. *European Journal of Political Research*, *64*, 276-295.

Silva, B. C., & Wratil, C. (2023). Do parties' representation failures affect populist attitudes? evidence from a multinational survey experiment. *Political Science Research Methods*, *11*, 347-362.

Smith, D. (2023). Gerontocracy: the exceptionally old political class that governs the us. *The Guardian*.

Sorensen, R. J. (2013). Does aging affect preferences for welfare spending? a study of peoples' spending preferences in 22 countries, 1985–2006. *European Journal of Political Economy*, *29*, 259–271.

Stockemer, D., & Sundström, A. (2018). Age representation in parliaments: Can institutions pave the way for the young? *European Political Science Review*, *10*(3), 467–490.

Stockemer, D., & Sundström, A. (2022a). Introducing the worldwide age representation in parliaments (warp) data set. *Social Science Quarterly*, *103*(7), 1765–1774.

Stockemer, D., & Sundström, A. (2022b). *Youth without representation: The absence of young adults in parliaments, cabinets, and candidacies*. University of Michigan Press.

Stockemer, D., & Sundström, A. (2023). Age inequalities in political representation: A review article. *Government and Opposition*, 1–18.

Su, Y.-P. (2026). Health crisis and dissatisfaction with democracy: Evidence at the subnational level in the united states. In *Democracy under scrutiny: Unpacking the causes and consequences of democratic dissatisfaction* (pp. 79–92). Springer.

Trantidis, A. (2016). Is age a case for electoral quotas? a benchmark for affirmative action in politics. *Representation*, *52*(2-3), 149-161.

United Nations, D. o. E., & Social Affairs, P. D. (2022). *Probabilistic population projections based on the world population prospects 2022.* United Nations. doi: http://population.un.org/wpp/

United Nations, D. o. E., & Social Affairs, P. D. (2024). *World population prospects* (Data). UN DESA/POP/2024/TR/NO. 9. Retrieved from https://desapublications.un.org/publications/world-population-prospects-2024-summary-results

Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., & Brady, H. E. (1995). *Voice and equality: Civic voluntarism in american politics*. Harvard university press.

Verge, T., Wiesehomeier, N., & Espírito-Santo, A. (2020). Framing symbolic representation: exploring how women's political presence shapes citizens' political attitudes. *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, *3*(2), 257–276.

Wessels, B. (2009). Representation and democracy. In R. J. Dalton & H. Klingemann (Eds.), *The oxford handbook of political behavior* (p. 833-849). Oxford University Press.

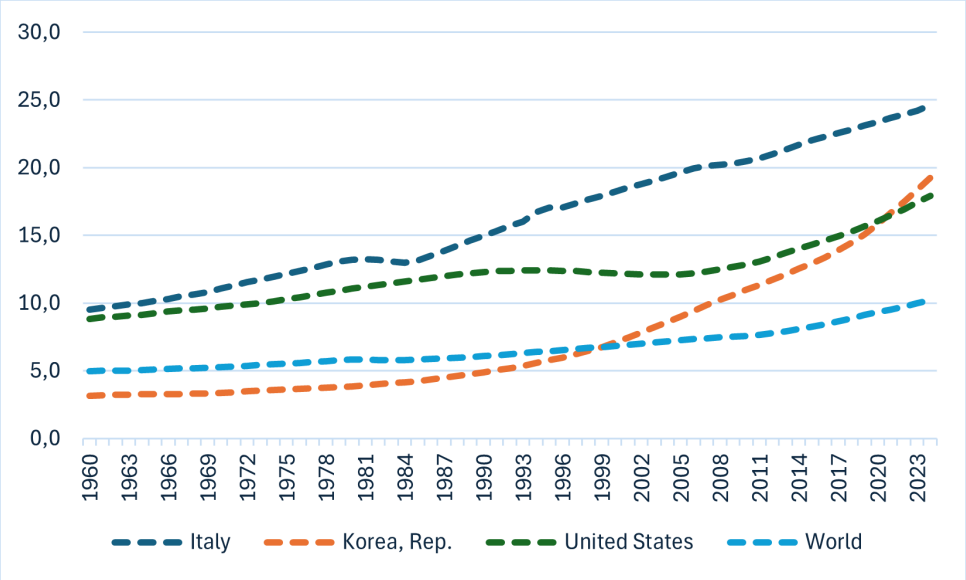
Xiao, E. (2023). Battle of the ages: how america's gerontocracy is a challenge for democracy. *Financial Times*.

Appendix

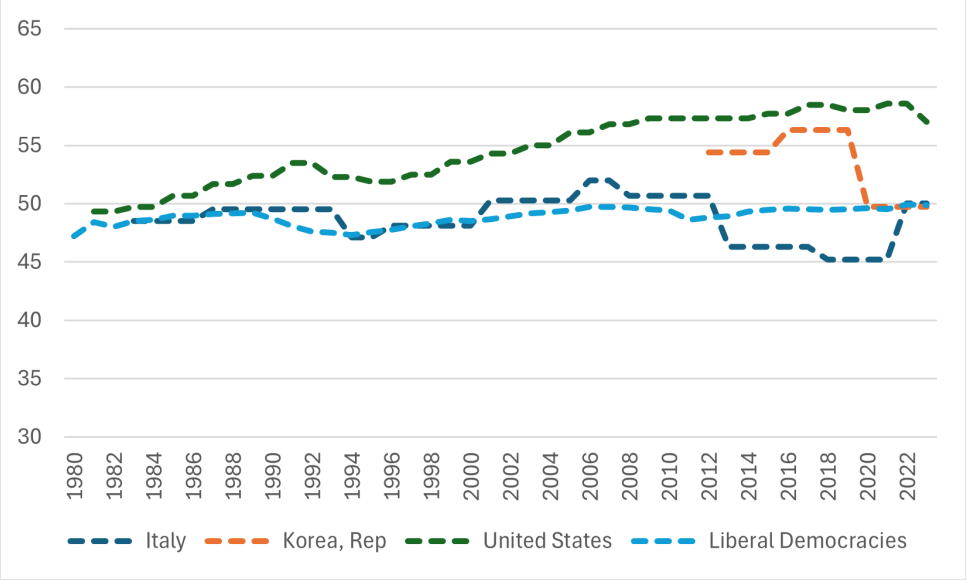
A Country Selection: Age Gaps Between Politicians and the People

Figure A.1: Population and Age of Legislators Evolution - Italy, United States and South Korea

Panel A: Population Ages 65 and above (% of total population)

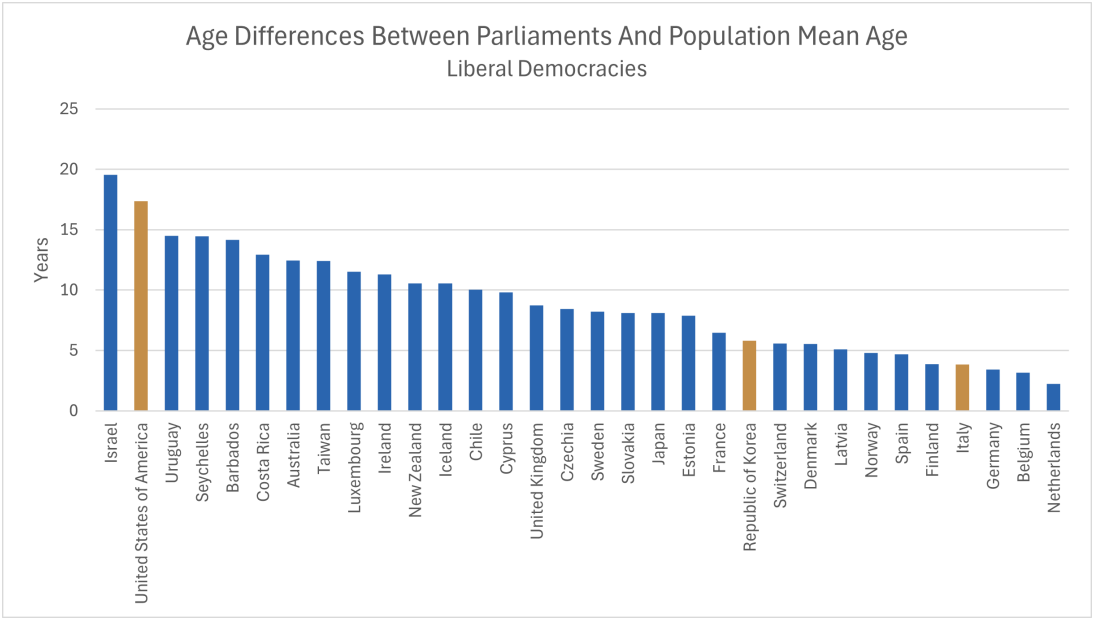


Panel B: Mean Age of Legislators



Source: Panel A: World Population Prospects, United Nations (UN), publisher: UN Population Division. Panel B: Author´s calculations using WARP database and countries considered as Liberal Democracies according to the Varieties of Democracy dataset elaborated by Coppedge et al. (2023) and Pemstein et al. (2023)(United Nations & Social Affairs, 2024)

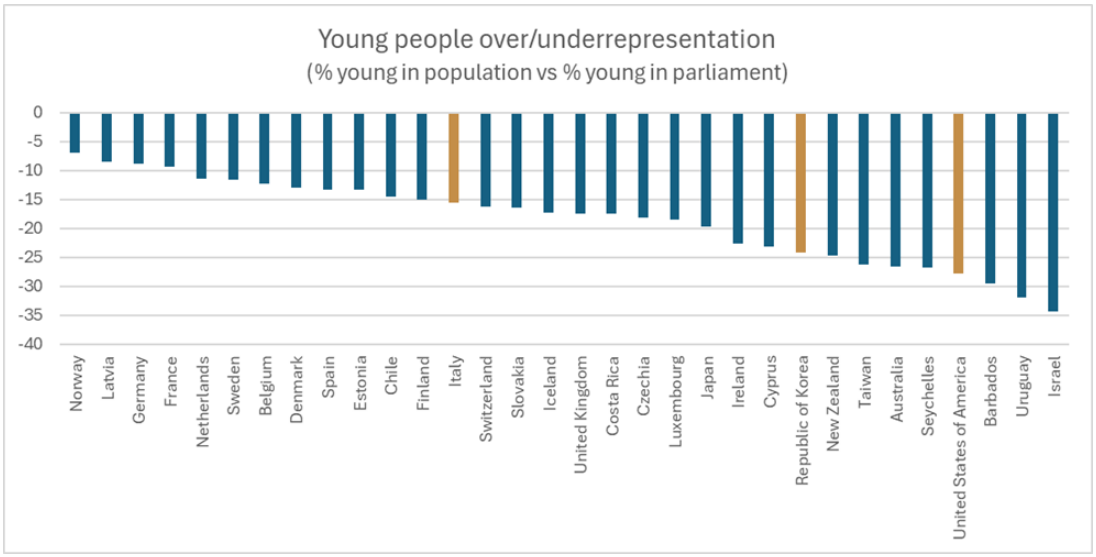
Figure A.2: Age Differences Between Parliaments And Population Mean Age



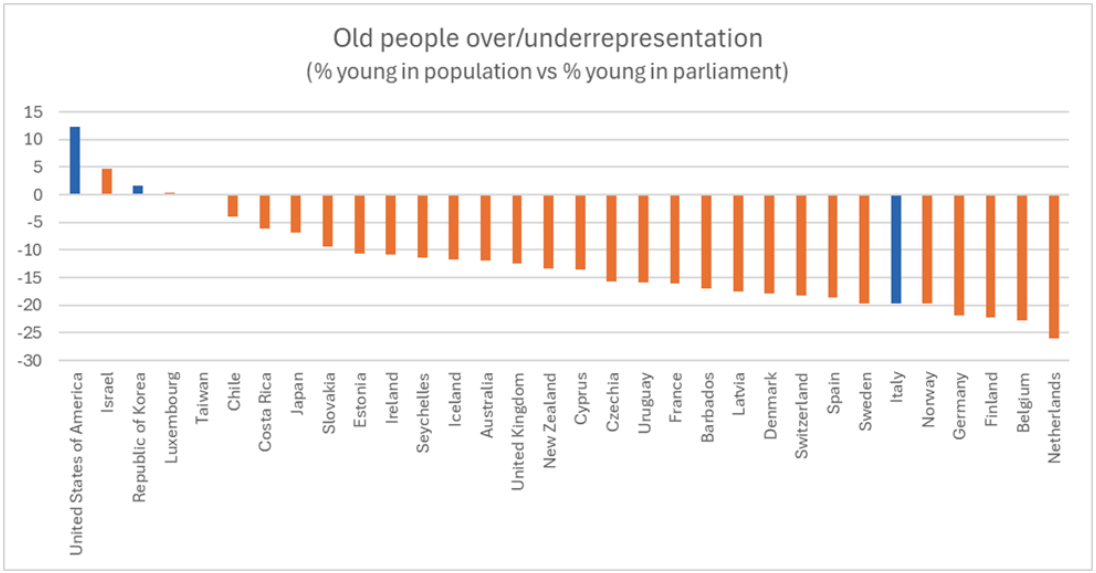
Source: Author´s calculations using WARP database and countries considered as Liberal Democracies according to the Varieties of Democracy dataset elaborated by Coppedge et al. (2023) and Pemstein et al. (2023)

Figure A.3: Over/underepresentation of Age Groups

Panel A: Over/underrepresentation of Young People



Panel B: Over/underrepresentation of Old People



Source: Author´s calculations using WARP database and countries considered as Liberal Democracies according to the Varieties of Democracy dataset elaborated by Coppedge et al. (2023) and Pemstein et al. (2023). Young people is 35 years old or younger. Old people is 60 years old or older.

B Original Surveys Questions and Descriptives

B1 Original Survey Descriptives

Table B.1: Outcome Descriptives for the 2 Rounds of Original Surveys

Panel A: Descriptives Round 1 (Section 4.1)

	Sample	Dem. Satisfaction		Dem. Important		Dem. Index		Politicians Too Old	
	N	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Italy	2059	5.878	2.420	8.737	1.858	3.452	0.896	0.471	0.499
Korea	1846	6.016	2.216	8.433	1.772	3.491	0.822	0.605	0.489
USA	1798	6.525	2.540	8.285	2.357	3.376	0.994	0.526	0.499
Total	5703	6.127	2.411	8.496	2.013	3.441	0.907	0.532	0.499

Panel B: Descriptives Round 2 (Section 4.2)

	Sample	Dem. Gives		Dem. Effective		Dem. Satisfaction		Dem. Important		Dem. Index	
	N	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Italy	2197	2.387	0.790	3.399	1.160	5.544	2.424	8.510	1.969	3.516	0.957
Korea	1856	2.633	0.828	3.687	0.947	5.962	2.207	7.867	1.818	3.322	0.796
USA	1786	2.710	0.889	3.477	1.188	6.298	2.624	8.231	2.356	3.452	0.968
Total	5839	2.564	0.845	3.514	1.112	5.908	2.442	8.220	2.068	3.435	0.916

Notes: Author's calculations based on the Original Surveys fielded in Italy, South Korea and the United States

B2 Original Survey Questions

This subsection reports the survey items used to measure support for democracy in the United States, Italy, and South Korea. These questions were included in the first wave of our original survey data and correspond to the dependent variables analyzed in Section 4.1.

1. **Politicians too old**: Do you think that politicians in your country are generally...
   - Too old
   - About the right age
   - Too young
2. **Importance of Democracy**: How important is it to you that your country is governed by a democracy?
   Scale: 1 = Not at all important; 10 = Very important

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
3. **Satisfaction with Democracy**: On the whole, how satisfied are you with how democracy works in your country?
   Scale: 1 = Not at all satisfied; 10 = Fully satisfied

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. **General Attitudes Toward Democracy**: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Democratic systems are not effective at maintaining order and stability.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Democratic governments are indecisive and full of problems.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Under a democratic system, the country's economic performance is weak.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Democracy is better than any other system of government.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

C General Surveys Descriptives: World Value Survey and Barometers

Table C.2: Outcome Descriptives for the General Surveys

	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
World Values Survey					
How Democratic	238864	6.163	2.551	1.000	10.000
Dem. Important	238864	8.391	2.078	1.000	10.000
Dem. Index	238864	2.791	0.604	1.000	4.000
Barometers					
Dem. Satisfaction	1926550	2.476	0.873	1.000	4.000
Support for Democracy	1926550	0.668	0.471	0.000	1.000

Notes: Author's calculations based on the World Value Survey data, and Latinbarometer, Eurobarometer, Afrobarometer, and Asianbarometer.

D Additional Analyses: Belief that Politicians Are Too Old and Support for Democracy

D1 Belief that Politicians Are Too Old and Support for Democracy: Country-specific Results

Table D.3: Belief that Politicians Are Too Old and Support for Democracy. Country-specific results.

	Dem. Satisfaction *Specific*		Dem. Important *Diffuse*		Dem. Index *Diffuse*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel A: Italy						
Politicians Too Old	-0.297***	-0.315***	0.071	-0.031	-0.099**	-0.148***
	(0.043)	(0.049)	(0.044)	(0.048)	(0.042)	(0.048)
Young	-0.058	-0.099	-0.432***	-0.662***	-0.464***	-0.576***
	(0.050)	(0.069)	(0.054)	(0.072)	(0.045)	(0.058)
Politicians Too Old × Young		0.081		0.455***		0.223**
		(0.100)		(0.105)		(0.089)
Individual Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
R^2	0.10	0.10	0.07	0.08	0.16	0.17
Observations	2,052	2,052	2,055	2,055	2,050	2,050
Panel B: Korea						
Politicians Too Old	-0.226***	-0.205***	0.191***	0.206***	0.176***	0.203***
	(0.046)	(0.056)	(0.047)	(0.053)	(0.045)	(0.056)
Young	0.056	0.093	-0.399***	-0.372***	-0.362***	-0.315***
	(0.046)	(0.063)	(0.050)	(0.075)	(0.045)	(0.065)
Politicians Too Old × Young		-0.065		-0.046		-0.083
		(0.090)		(0.099)		(0.087)
Individual Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
R^2	0.15	0.15	0.16	0.16	0.23	0.23
Observations	1,842	1,842	1,842	1,842	1,841	1,841
Panel C: United States						
Politicians Too Old	-0.403***	-0.389***	0.043	0.060	-0.040	-0.059
	(0.046)	(0.053)	(0.046)	(0.050)	(0.043)	(0.050)
Young	0.020	0.052	-0.440***	-0.402***	-0.425***	-0.468***
	(0.056)	(0.067)	(0.060)	(0.077)	(0.051)	(0.066)
Politicians Too Old × Young		-0.062		-0.076		0.084
		(0.102)		(0.109)		(0.090)
Individual Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
R^2	0.10	0.10	0.14	0.14	0.21	0.22
Observations	1,791	1,791	1,794	1,794	1,790	1,790

Notes: OLS estimates and robust SE in parenthesis. Outcome variables are standardized. The results include country fixed-effects, and control variables, such as gender, education, age, working status, religion, income, ideology, anxiety about ageing and ethnocentrism. Signif.: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1.

D2 Belief that Politicians Are Too Old and Support for Democracy: Results without individual-level controls

Table D.4: Belief that Politicians Are Too Old and Support for Democracy: Results without individual-level controls.

	Dem. Satisfaction *Specific*		Dem. Important *Diffuse*		Dem. Index *Diffuse*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Politicians Too Old	-0.391***	-0.380***	0.135***	0.090***	0.130***	0.066**
	(0.026)	(0.030)	(0.027)	(0.029)	(0.027)	(0.032)
Young		0.019		-0.558***		-0.631***
		(0.040)		(0.045)		(0.038)
Politicians Too Old × Young		-0.040		0.137**		0.205***
		(0.058)		(0.062)		(0.054)
R^2	0.05	0.05	0.01	0.06	0.01	0.06
Observations	5,710	5,710	5,714	5,714	5,701	5,701
Country FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Notes: OLS estimates. Robust SE in parenthesis. No controls included. Outcome variables are standardized. Signif.: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1.

D3 Belief that Politicians Are Too Old and Support for Democracy: Results with Age as Continuous Variable

Table D.5: Belief that Politicians Are Too Old and Support for Democracy. With Age as Continuous Variable

	Dem. Satisfaction *Specific*		Dem. Important *Diffuse*		Dem. Index *Diffuse*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Politicians Too Old	-0.329***	-0.366***	0.114***	0.260***	0.020	0.267***
	(0.026)	(0.080)	(0.026)	(0.084)	(0.024)	(0.072)
Age	0.001	0.001	0.017***	0.019***	0.018***	0.021***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Politicians Too Old × Age		0.001		-0.003*		-0.005***
		(0.002)		(0.002)		(0.002)
R^2	0.11	0.11	0.14	0.14	0.22	0.22
Observations	5,680	5,680	5,686	5,686	5,676	5,676
Individual Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Country FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Notes: OLS estimates and robust SE in parenthesis. Outcome variables are standardized. The results include country fixed-effects, and control variables, such as gender, education, age, working status, religion, income, ideology, anxiety about ageing and ethnocentrism. Signif.: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1.

D4 Belief that Politicians Are Too Old and Support for Democracy: Results For Alternative Democracy Index

The following table shows the results when we take out the variable "Democracy is always better" from the Democracy Index reported in Table 1

Table D.6: Belief that Politicians Are Too Old and Support for Democracy. For Alternative Democracy Index

	Dem. Index (simple) *Diffuse*	
	(1)	(2)
Politicians Too Old	0.019	-0.006
	(0.025)	(0.029)
Young	-0.413***	-0.465***
	(0.027)	(0.038)
Politicians Too Old × Young		0.097*
		(0.052)
R^2	0.20	0.20
Observations	5,681	5,681
Individual Controls	✓	✓
Country FE	✓	✓

Notes: OLS estimates and robust SE in parenthesis. Outcome variables are standardized. The results include country fixed-effects, and control variables, such as gender, education, age, working status, religion, income, ideology, anxiety about ageing and ethnocentrism. Signif.: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1.

E Age Gap Information Experiment

E1 Experiment Set-up

Figure E.4: Treatment group vignette used in the US Survey

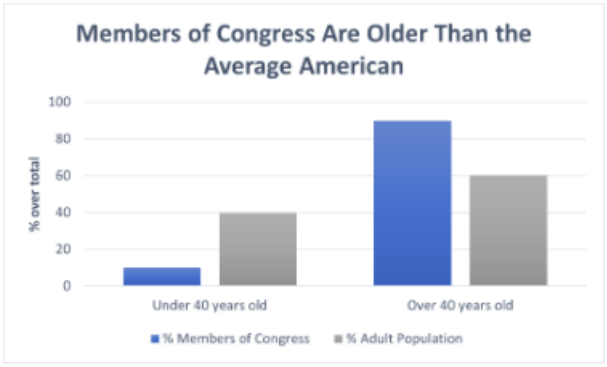
Politicians Are Older Than Their Constituents

Political leaders in the United States tend to be older than the average citizen. The average age of a US cabinet secretary is 61 years old, and the average age of a member of Congress is 57 years old. In comparison, the average age of an adult US citizen is 39 years old.

As you can see in the graph, this age gap between politicians and the public is more pronounced for certain age brackets.

For example, 40 percent of the general adult population is under the age of 40, but only 10 percent of legislators in Congress are under the age of 40.

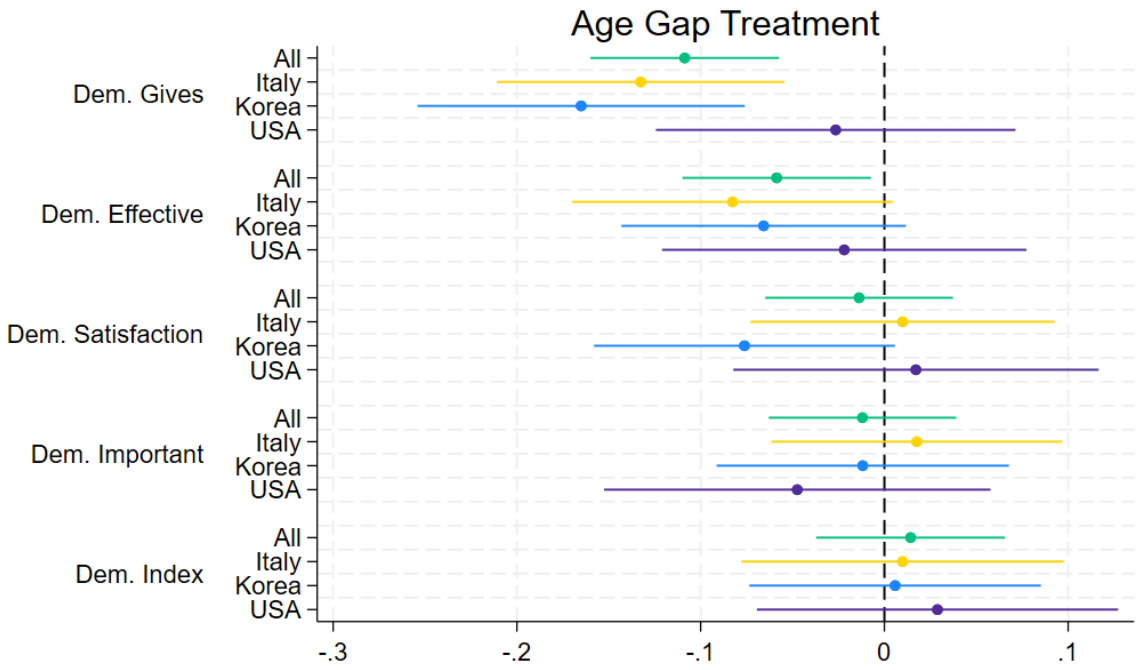
Meanwhile, 60 percent of the general adult population is older than 40, whereas 90 percent of legislators are older than 40.



Notes: Screenshot of the Qualtrics' US survey, December 2023 .

E2 Age-gap Information Experiment: Regression results without controls

Figure E.5: Main Effects of Age Gap Treatment on Democracy Outcomes



Notes: OLS estimates and 95% confidence intervals of the average treatment effects of the information experiment. Outcome variables are standardized. No controls.

E3 Age-gap Information Experiment: Regression Tables

The tables on the following pages report results for the age-gap information experiment.

Table E.7: Age-gap Information treatment effect on Democracy appreciation

	Dem. Gives		Dem. Effective		Dem. Satisfaction		Dem. Important		Dem. Index	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Age gap Treatment	-0.109***	-0.103***	-0.059**	-0.058**	-0.014	-0.015	-0.012	-0.016	0.014	0.007
	(0.026)	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.025)
Observations	5836	5615	5837	5616	5831	5610	5833	5612	5839	5618
Adjusted R^2	0.003	0.143	0.001	0.069	-0.000	0.149	-0.000	0.061	-0.000	0.138
Individual Controls		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes
Country Controls		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes

Note: OLS estimates and standard errors in parentheses. The results with individual controls include gender, education, age, working status, religion, income, region, and ideology. Country controls are
country fixed-effects. Pooled results for the 3 countries: Italy, South Korea, and the United States.
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10.

Table E.8: Age-gap Information treatment effect on Democracy appreciation: USA

	Dem. Gives		Dem. Effective		Dem. Satisfaction		Dem. Important		Dem. Index	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Age gap Treatment	-0.026	-0.009	-0.022	-0.011	0.017	0.024	-0.047	-0.039	0.029	0.021
	(0.050)	(0.048)	(0.051)	(0.050)	(0.051)	(0.050)	(0.054)	(0.054)	(0.050)	(0.047)
Observations	1784	1736	1784	1736	1783	1735	1783	1735	1786	1738
Adjusted R^2	-0.000	0.131	-0.000	0.077	-0.000	0.093	-0.000	0.080	-0.000	0.180
Individual Controls		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes
Country Controls		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes

Note: OLS estimates and standard errors in parentheses. The results with individual controls include gender, education, age, working status, religion, income, region, and ideology. Country controls are country fixed-effects.
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10.

Table E.9: Age-gap Information treatment effect on Democracy appreciation: Korea

	Dem. Gives		Dem. Effective		Dem. Satisfaction		Dem. Important		Dem. Index	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Age gap Treatment	-0.165***	-0.169***	-0.066*	-0.073*	-0.076*	-0.078**	-0.012	-0.029	0.006	-0.013
	(0.045)	(0.041)	(0.039)	(0.039)	(0.042)	(0.037)	(0.041)	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.039)
Observations	1856	1800	1856	1800	1854	1798	1856	1800	1856	1800
Adjusted R^2	0.007	0.238	0.001	0.074	0.001	0.266	-0.000	0.062	-0.001	0.113
Individual Controls		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes
Country Controls		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes

Note: OLS estimates and standard errors in parentheses. The results with individual controls include gender, education, age, working status, religion, income, region, and ideology. Country controls are country fixed-effects.
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10.

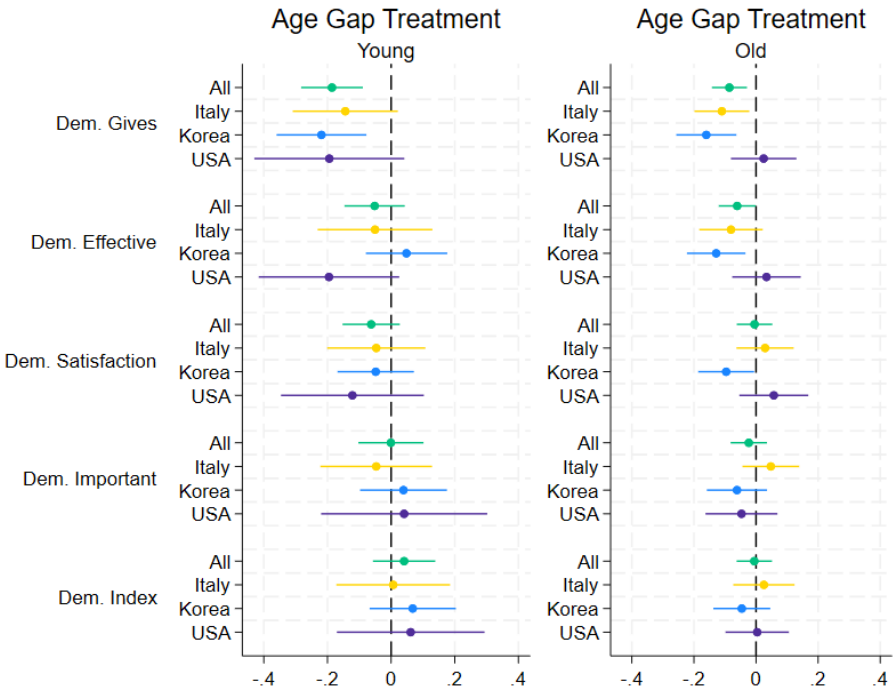
Table E.10: Age-gap Information treatment effect on Democracy appreciation: Italy

	Dem. Gives		Dem. Effective		Dem. Satisfaction		Dem. Important		Dem. Index	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Age gap Treatment	-0.133***	-0.116***	-0.083*	-0.080*	0.010	0.012	0.018	0.023	0.010	0.017
	(0.040)	(0.039)	(0.044)	(0.045)	(0.042)	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.041)	(0.045)	(0.044)
Observations	2196	2079	2197	2080	2194	2077	2194	2077	2197	2080
Adjusted R^2	0.005	0.088	0.001	0.042	-0.000	0.139	-0.000	0.044	-0.000	0.115
Individual Controls		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes
Country Controls		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes

Note: OLS estimates and standard errors in parentheses. The results with individual controls include gender, education, age, working status, religion, income, region, and ideology. Country controls are country fixed-effects.
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10.

E4 Age Gap Information Experiment: Young vs Old

Figure E.6: Age-gap vignette treatment effect for our model with covariates: Young vs Old



Notes: OLS estimates and 95% confidence intervals of the average treatment effects of the information experiment. Outcome variables are standardized. The results include region and country fixed-effects, and control variables, such as gender, education, age, working status, religion, income, and ideology

Table E.11: Democracy Value and Age gap Vignette (Young vs. Old)

	Dem. Gives		Dem. Effective		Dem. Satisfaction		Dem. Important		Dem. Index	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Age gap Treatment	-0.186***	-0.086***	-0.052	-0.061**	-0.062	-0.005	-0.001	-0.023	0.041	-0.006
	(0.049)	(0.029)	(0.048)	(0.030)	(0.046)	(0.029)	(0.052)	(0.030)	(0.050)	(0.029)
Observations	1352	4263	1353	4263	1351	4259	1351	4261	1354	4264
Adjusted R^2	0.221	0.116	0.155	0.051	0.249	0.124	0.051	0.052	0.107	0.129
Individual Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Subgroup	Young	Old	Young	Old	Young	Old	Young	Old	Young	Old

Note: OLS estimates and standard errors in parentheses. The results with individual controls include gender, education, age, working status, religion, income, region, and ideology. Country controls are country fixed-effects. Pooled results for the 3 countries: Italy, South Korea, and the United States.
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10.

Table E.12: Democracy Value and Age gap Vignette USA (Young vs. Old)

	Dem. Gives		Dem. Effective		Dem. Satisfaction		Dem. Important		Dem. Index	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Age gap Treatment	-0.194	0.025	-0.195*	0.034	-0.122	0.057	0.041	-0.047	0.062	0.004
	(0.120)	(0.054)	(0.112)	(0.056)	(0.114)	(0.057)	(0.133)	(0.059)	(0.118)	(0.052)
Observations	319	1417	319	1417	319	1416	318	1417	320	1418
Adjusted R^2	0.163	0.124	0.214	0.059	0.179	0.075	0.045	0.070	0.049	0.188
Individual Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Subgroup	Young	Old	Young	Old	Young	Old	Young	Old	Young	Old

Note: OLS estimates and standard errors in parentheses. The results with individual controls include gender, education, age, working status, religion, income, region, and ideology. Country controls are country fixed-effects.
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10.

Table E.13: Democracy Value and Age gap Vignette Korea (Young vs. Old)

	Dem. Gives		Dem. Effective		Dem. Satisfaction		Dem. Important		Dem. Index	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Age gap Treatment	-0.219***	-0.160***	0.049	-0.128***	-0.048	-0.096**	0.039	-0.061	0.068	-0.046
	(0.072)	(0.049)	(0.065)	(0.048)	(0.061)	(0.046)	(0.069)	(0.049)	(0.069)	(0.047)
Observations	559	1241	559	1241	558	1240	559	1241	559	1241
Adjusted R^2	0.231	0.209	0.119	0.053	0.341	0.220	0.132	0.029	0.076	0.089
Individual Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Subgroup	Young	Old	Young	Old	Young	Old	Young	Old	Young	Old

Note: OLS estimates and standard errors in parentheses. The results with individual controls include gender, education, age, working status, religion, income, region, and ideology. Country controls are country fixed-effects.
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10.

Table E.14: Democracy Value and Age gap Vignette Italy (Young vs. Old)

	Dem. Gives		Dem. Effective		Dem. Satisfaction		Dem. Important		Dem. Index	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Age gap Treatment	-0.144*	-0.110**	-0.051	-0.081	-0.047	0.029	-0.047	0.048	0.007	0.026
	(0.084)	(0.045)	(0.092)	(0.052)	(0.079)	(0.047)	(0.089)	(0.047)	(0.091)	(0.050)
Observations	474	1605	475	1605	474	1603	474	1603	475	1605
Adjusted R^2	0.115	0.081	0.063	0.038	0.185	0.135	0.003	0.046	0.118	0.108
Individual Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Subgroup	Young	Old	Young	Old	Young	Old	Young	Old	Young	Old

Note: OLS estimates and standard errors in parentheses. The results with individual controls include gender, education, age, working status, religion, income, region, and ideology. Country controls are country fixed-effects.
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10.

F World Values Survey

F1 World Values Survey Countries and Years

The following table shows the number of respondents per Country and Survey Wave of the World Values Survey (WVS).

Table F.15: World Values Survey Number of Respondents by Country and Survey Wave

Country	**Chronology of EVS-WVS waves**					
	1994-1998 No.	**1999-2004** No.	**2005-2009** No.	**2010-2014** No.	**2017-2022** No.	**Total** No.
Andorra	0	0	981	0	998	1,979
Argentina	1,052	1,240	963	1,010	987	5,252
Armenia	0	0	0	0	1,161	1,161
Australia	1,992	0	1,390	1,441	1,764	6,587
Bangladesh	1,441	0	0	0	0	1,441
Bolivia	0	0	0	0	1,998	1,998
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1,149	1,127	0	0	0	2,276
Brazil	1,124	0	1,451	1,415	1,613	5,603
Bulgaria	990	0	957	0	0	1,947
Burkina Faso	0	0	1,323	0	0	1,323
Canada	0	1,811	2,070	0	4,018	7,899
Chile	982	1,158	963	979	950	5,032
Colombia	0	0	2,830	1,472	1,520	5,822
Cyprus	0	0	1,047	989	967	3,003
Czechia	1,102	0	0	0	1,192	2,294
Dominican Republic	409	0	0	0	0	409
Ecuador	0	0	0	1,193	1,183	2,376
El Salvador	1,128	0	0	0	0	1,128
Estonia	950	0	0	1,478	0	2,428
Finland	940	0	997	0	0	1,937
France	0	0	985	0	0	985
Georgia	0	0	0	1,145	0	1,145
German Federal Republic	1,998	0	0	0	0	1,998
Germany	0	0	2,031	2,013	1,502	5,546

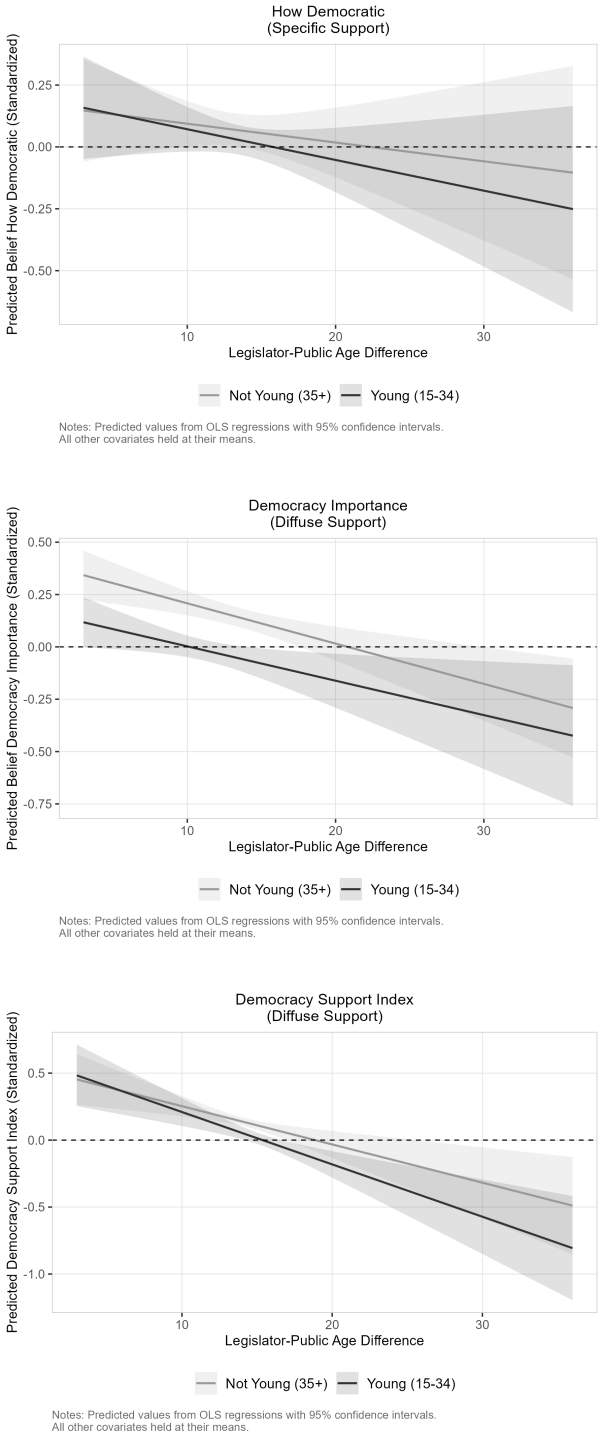
Country	1994-1998	1999-2004	2005-2009	2010-2014	2017-2022	Total
	No.	No.	No.	No.	No.	No.
Ghana	0	0	1,518	1,552	0	3,070
Great Britain	0	0	990	0	2,505	3,495
Greece	0	0	0	0	1,180	1,180
Guatemala	0	0	0	0	1,201	1,201
Hungary	600	0	971	0	0	1,571
India	1,549	1,489	1,483	4,033	0	8,554
Indonesia	0	965	1,834	0	3,115	5,914
Italy	0	0	973	0	0	973
Japan	856	1,147	998	2,065	1,193	6,259
Latvia	1,167	0	0	0	0	1,167
Lithuania	917	0	0	0	0	917
Macau SAR	0	0	0	0	1,015	1,015
Macedonia	908	0	0	0	0	908
Maldives	0	0	0	0	1,029	1,029
Mali	0	0	1,392	0	0	1,392
Mexico	1,357	1,290	1,490	1,973	1,722	7,832
Moldova	939	895	0	0	0	1,834
Mongolia	0	0	0	0	1,638	1,638
Montenegro	226	0	0	0	0	226
Netherlands	0	0	1,014	1,739	1,868	4,621
New Zealand	1,047	0	0	809	1,007	2,863
Nigeria	0	0	0	1,759	1,228	2,987
Northern Ireland	0	0	0	0	436	436
Norway	1,121	0	1,012	0	0	2,133
Peru	0	1,455	1,430	1,176	1,368	5,429
Philippines	1,193	1,195	0	1,200	0	3,588
Poland	1,025	0	917	911	0	2,853
Puerto Rico	1,146	710	0	0	1,112	2,968
Romania	1,165	0	1,590	1,416	1,144	5,315
Serbia	0	1,100	1,172	0	0	2,272
Slovakia	1,048	0	0	0	1,190	2,238
Slovenia	958	0	950	1,035	0	2,943
South Africa	2,636	2,781	2,901	3,453	0	11,771
South Korea	1,244	1,112	1,200	1,197	1,245	5,998
Spain	1,150	1,157	1,180	1,156	0	4,643
Sweden	996	1,004	2,040	1,183	0	5,223
Switzerland	1,151	0	1,216	0	0	2,367
Taiwan ROC	734	0	1,217	1,173	1,223	4,347
Trinidad and Tobago	0	0	983	912	0	1,895
Tunisia	0	0	0	1,103	1,180	2,283
Turkey	1,778	3,183	1,282	1,574	0	7,817
Ukraine	2,311	0	937	0	1,209	4,457
United States of America	1,490	1,181	1,193	2,153	2,541	8,558
Uruguay	967	0	972	963	962	3,864
Venezuela	1,186	1,190	0	0	0	2,376
Zambia	0	0	1,451	0	0	1,451
Total	48,122	27,190	54,294	47,670	52,164	229,440

Notes: World Value Survey survey waves by Inglehart et al. (2022) https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp

F2 World Values Survey Results: Interaction figures

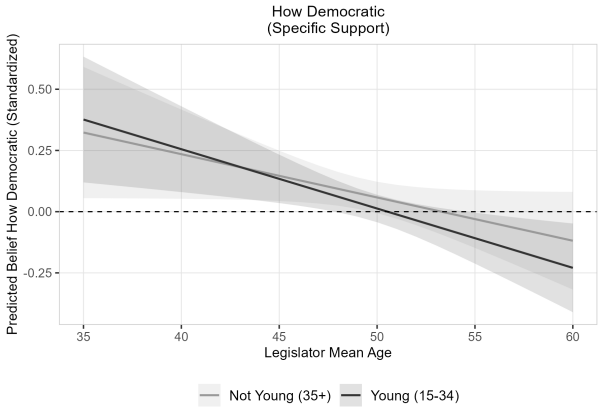
The following figures display the predicted values of democratic support for young respondents (aged 15–34) and older respondents (aged 35 and above), across the observed range of the age gap variables, based on the interaction models reported in Table 2. These figures complement the regression results by illustrating how the predicted levels of democratic support for each age group evolve across the full distribution of age gap values.

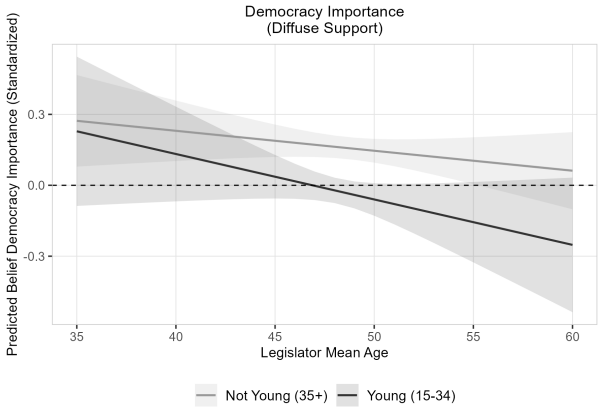
Figure F.7: World Values Survey: Predicted Values by Age Group across the Range of Legislator-Public Age Differences

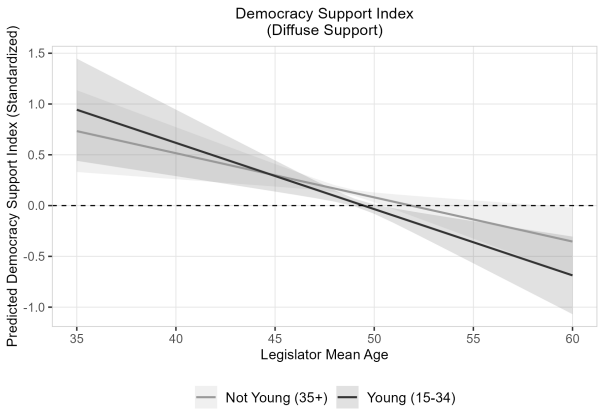


Notes: Predicted values from OLS regressions with 95% confidence intervals, estimated separately for young respondents (aged 15–34) and older respondents (aged 35 and above) across the observed range of the Legislator-Public Age Difference variable. All other covariates are held at their means. Models include year fixed effects and all controls reported in Table 2.

Figure F.8: World Values Survey: Predicted Values by Age Group across the Range of Mean Legislator Age







Notes: Predicted values from OLS regressions with 95% confidence intervals, estimated separately for young respondents (aged 15–34) and older respondents (aged 35 and above) across the observed range of the Mean Legislator Age variable. All other covariates are held at their means. Models include year fixed effects and all controls reported in Table 2.

F3 World Values Survey: Results for other outcomes

The following table shows the results considering all other democratic outcomes in the World Value Survey.

Table F.16: Cross-National Differences in Legislator Ages and Support for Democracy: Other outcomes with World Value Survey

Panel A: Age Differences

	Satisfaction Democracy *Specific*		Dem. Economic *Diffuse*		Dem. Indecisive *Diffuse*		Dem. Order *Diffuse*		Dem. Better *Diffuse*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Legislator-Public Age Difference	-0.023***	-0.020***	-0.020***	-0.018***	-0.013	-0.011	-0.023**	-0.019*	-0.037*	-0.035*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Young	0.000	0.087	-0.071**	0.029	-0.038	0.084	-0.003	0.181***	-0.167***	-0.094
	(0.021)	(0.062)	(0.021)	(0.054)	(0.027)	(0.075)	(0.027)	(0.042)	(0.033)	(0.063)
Young x Age Difference		-0.007		-0.007*		-0.008†		-0.013***		-0.005
		(0.004)		(0.003)		(0.004)		(0.002)		(0.004)
Observations	9211	9211	24369	24369	24728	24728	24455	24455	24892	24892
Adjusted R^2	0.011	0.012	0.090	0.090	0.083	0.084	0.062	0.063	0.039	0.040
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Panel B: Mean Legislator Age

	Satisfaction Democracy *Specific*		Dem. Economic *Diffuse*		Dem. Indecisive *Diffuse*		Dem. Order *Diffuse*		Dem. Better *Diffuse*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Legislator Mean Age	-0.032***	-0.030***	-0.024***	-0.021***	-0.055*	-0.049*	-0.020	-0.013	-0.049†	-0.040
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.018)	(0.019)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.027)	(0.028)
Young	0.000	0.414	-0.071**	0.319	-0.041	0.681	-0.003	0.991†	-0.168***	0.981
	(0.021)	(0.519)	(0.021)	(0.294)	(0.026)	(0.450)	(0.027)	(0.459)	(0.033)	(0.615)
Young x Mean Age		-0.008		-0.008		-0.015		-0.020†		-0.023†
		(0.010)		(0.006)		(0.009)		(0.009)		(0.013)
Observations	9211	9211	24369	24369	24728	24728	24455	24455	24892	24892
Adjusted R^2	0.011	0.011	0.090	0.090	0.085	0.085	0.061	0.062	0.039	0.040
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Notes: OLS estimates. Outcome variables are standardized. Standard Errors clustered by country. Controls include individual controls for gender, education, age, working status; and country controls like corruption index, gini index, % poverty and GDP-per capita.
Signif.: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1.

F4 World Values Survey Results: Model with all control variables

The following table replicates the main World Values Survey analysis reported in Table 2, adding controls for income, religious affiliation, and political ideology. These variables are not included in the main specification in order to maintain comparability with the Barometer surveys, where income is not available in every wave, and religious affiliation and political ideology are not systematically measured across all survey waves. The inclusion of political ideology reduces the sample size by approximately 15 percent due to missing values. Results are substantively unchanged from those reported in the main text.

Table F.17: Cross-National Differences in Legislator Ages and Support for Democracy: World Value Survey - with all individual controls

Panel A: Age Differences

	How Democratic *Specific*		Dem. Important *Diffuse*		Dem. Index *Diffuse*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Legislator-Public Age Difference	-0.013	-0.012	-0.020***	-0.021***	-0.054***	-0.051***
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.004)
Young	-0.036*	0.028	-0.188***	-0.228***	-0.080*	0.103
	(0.016)	(0.039)	(0.035)	(0.057)	(0.035)	(0.083)
Young x Age Difference		-0.005*		0.003		-0.012*
		(0.002)		(0.005)		(0.004)
Observations	77522	77522	77945	77945	20304	20304
Adjusted R^2	0.105	0.106	0.064	0.064	0.117	0.119
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Panel B: Mean Legislator Age

	How Democratic *Specific*		Dem. Important *Diffuse*		Dem. Index *Diffuse*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Legislator Mean Age	-0.021*	-0.020*	-0.015*	-0.011†	-0.063***	-0.056***
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Young	-0.037*	0.144	-0.191***	0.336	-0.080*	0.966*
	(0.015)	(0.159)	(0.035)	(0.469)	(0.035)	(0.386)
Young x Mean Age		-0.004		-0.011		-0.021*
		(0.003)		(0.010)		(0.008)
Observations	77522	77522	77945	77945	20304	20304
Adjusted R^2	0.107	0.107	0.062	0.062	0.117	0.117
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Notes: OLS estimates. Outcome variables are standardized. Controls include individual controls for gender, education, age, working status, political interest, income, religion, and ideology; and country controls like corruption index, gini index, % poverty and GDP-per capita.
Signif.: ***: 0.001, **: 0.01, *: 0.05, †: 0.1.

F5 World Values Survey Results with Country-Fixed Effects

The following table shows the results when we consider Country-Fixed Effects instead of Country and regional covariates in our regression model.

Table F.18: Cross-National Differences in Legislator Ages and Support for Democracy: World Value Survey - Country Fixed Effects Models

Panel A: Age Differences

	How Democratic *Specific*		Dem. Important *Diffuse*		Dem. Index *Diffuse*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Legislator-Public Age Difference	0.002	0.004	-0.032***	-0.033***	-0.065***	-0.063***
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Young	-0.049**	0.007	-0.193***	-0.224***	-0.087*	0.066
	(0.015)	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.050)	(0.030)	(0.068)
Young x Age Difference		-0.004*		0.002		-0.011*
		(0.002)		(0.004)		(0.004)
Observations	92195	92195	93238	93238	25557	25557
Adjusted R^2	0.016	0.016	0.017	0.017	0.023	0.024
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Country FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Panel B: Mean Legislator Age

	How Democratic *Specific*		Dem. Important *Diffuse*		Dem. Index *Diffuse*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Legislator Mean Age	-0.011	-0.008	-0.035***	-0.031**	-0.088***	-0.081***
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Young	-0.049**	0.266†	-0.193***	0.259	-0.087*	1.118*
	(0.015)	(0.135)	(0.032)	(0.405)	(0.030)	(0.383)
Young x Mean Age		-0.006*		-0.009		-0.025**
		(0.003)		(0.008)		(0.008)
Observations	92195	92195	93238	93238	25557	25557
Adjusted R^2	0.016	0.016	0.017	0.017	0.023	0.024
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Country FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Notes: OLS estimates. Outcome variables are standardized. Controls include individual controls for gender, education, age, working status; and country controls like corruption index, gini index, % poverty and GDP-per capita.
Signif.: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1.

F6 World Values Survey Results with Age as Continuous Variable

Table F.19: Cross-National Differences in Legislator Ages and Support for Democracy: World Value Survey - Age as Continuous Models

Panel A: Age Differences

	How Democratic *Specific*		Dem. Important *Diffuse*		Dem. Index *Diffuse*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Legislator-Public Age Difference	-0.009	-0.015	-0.017**	-0.019†	-0.031**	-0.052***
	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.005)	(0.010)	(0.008)	(0.010)
Age	0.002*	-0.000	0.006***	0.006***	0.002*	-0.004*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.002)
Age x Age Difference		0.000*		0.000		0.000**
		(0.000)		(0.000)		(0.000)
Observations	92195	92195	93238	93238	25557	25557
Adjusted R^2	0.093	0.093	0.049	0.049	0.095	0.097
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Panel B: Mean Legislator Age

	How Democratic *Specific*		Dem. Important *Diffuse*		Dem. Index *Diffuse*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Legislator Mean Age	-0.020*	-0.031**	-0.012	-0.030†	-0.050**	-0.084***
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.017)	(0.014)	(0.019)
Age	0.002*	-0.011*	0.007***	-0.014	0.002*	-0.036**
	(0.001)	(0.005)	(0.001)	(0.013)	(0.001)	(0.010)
Age x Mean Age		0.000*		0.000		0.001**
		(0.000)		(0.000)		(0.000)
Observations	92195	92195	93238	93238	25557	25557
Adjusted R^2	0.095	0.096	0.047	0.048	0.096	0.096
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Notes: OLS estimates. Outcome variables are standardized. Controls include individual controls for gender, education, age, working status; and country controls like corruption index, gini index, % poverty and GDP-per capita.
Signif.: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1.

F7 World Values Survey Results for Alternative Democracy Index

The following table shows the results when we take out the variable "Democracy is always better" from the Democracy Index reported in Table 2

Table F.20: Cross-National Differences in Legislator Ages and Support for Democracy: World Value Survey - Alternative Democracy Index

Panel A: Age Differences

	Dem. Index (simple) *Diffuse*			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Legislator-Public Age Difference	-0.020**	-0.017*	-0.032***	-0.030***
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Young	-0.044	0.108	-0.041	0.106
	(0.027)	(0.065)	(0.026)	(0.063)
Young x Age Difference		-0.011**		-0.010**
		(0.003)		(0.003)
Observations	25302	25302	25302	25302
Adjusted R^2	0.100	0.101	0.021	0.022
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Country FE			✓	✓

Panel B: Mean Legislator Age

	Dem. Index (simple) *Diffuse*			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Legislator Mean Age	-0.038***	-0.032**	-0.044***	-0.038***
	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Young	-0.045	0.713	-0.041	0.808†
	(0.027)	(0.433)	(0.026)	(0.385)
Young x Mean Age		-0.016†		-0.017*
		(0.009)		(0.008)
Observations	25302	25302	25302	25302
Adjusted R^2	0.100	0.101	0.021	0.021
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Country FE			✓	✓

Notes: OLS estimates. Outcome variables are standardized. Controls include individual controls for gender, education, age, working status; and country controls like corruption index, gini index, % poverty and GDP-per capita.
Signif.: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1.

F8 World Values Survey Results: Model with political interest/sophistication

The following table shows the results when we include as a control variable the political interest or sophistication of the respondent. For political sophistication we consider a dummy variable equal to one for respondents who report being highly interested in politics, based on the political interest question included in the World Values Survey. Respondents who report being 'very interested' in politics are coded as one, and those reporting little or no interest are coded as zero.

Table F.21: Cross-National Differences in Legislator Ages and Support for Democracy: World Value Survey - with Political Interest/Sophistication

Panel A: Age Differences

	How Democratic *Specific*		Dem. Important *Diffuse*		Dem. Index *Diffuse*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Legislator-Public Age Difference	-0.009	-0.007	-0.018**	-0.019***	-0.054***	-0.050***
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Young	-0.038*	0.029	-0.184***	-0.217***	-0.074*	0.092
	(0.017)	(0.036)	(0.033)	(0.055)	(0.032)	(0.076)
Young x Age Difference		-0.005*		0.002		-0.011*
		(0.002)		(0.004)		(0.004)
Observations	91787	91787	92813	92813	24486	24486
Adjusted R^2	0.093	0.093	0.054	0.054	0.108	0.110
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Panel B: Mean Legislator Age

	How Democratic *Specific*		Dem. Important *Diffuse*		Dem. Index *Diffuse*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Legislator Mean Age	-0.020*	-0.017†	-0.012	-0.008	-0.066***	-0.058***
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Young	-0.039*	0.284†	-0.187***	0.315	-0.074*	1.012*
	(0.017)	(0.160)	(0.033)	(0.443)	(0.032)	(0.392)
Young x Mean Age		-0.007*		-0.010		-0.022*
		(0.003)		(0.009)		(0.008)
Observations	91787	91787	92813	92813	24486	24486
Adjusted R^2	0.095	0.096	0.052	0.052	0.108	0.109
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Notes: OLS estimates. Outcome variables are standardized. Controls include individual controls for gender, education, age, working status, political interest; and country controls like corruption index, gini index, % poverty and GDP-per capita.
Signif.: ***: 0.001, **: 0.01, *: 0.05, †: 0.1.

G Barometers

G1 Barometer Surveys Countries and Years

The following table shows the number of respondents per Country and Survey Wave of the four Barometer surveys: Eurobarometer, Latinobarometer, Afrobarometer, and Asianbarometer.

Table G.22: Number of Respondents by Country and Year Group (1995–2023)

Country	Chronology of Barometer waves						
	1995–1999 No.	**2000–2004** No.	**2005–2009** No.	**2010–2014** No.	**2015–2019** No.	**2020–2023** No.	**Total** No.
Argentina	0	0	0	0	4,800	1,200	6,000
Australia	0	0	0	0	1,630	0	1,630
Austria	0	0	0	3,998	10,089	11,082	25,169
Belgium	7,215	8,107	3,025	8,165	10,211	11,487	48,210
Benin	0	0	0	0	1,200	0	1,200
Bolivia	0	0	0	0	4,800	0	4,800
Bosnia	0	0	0	0	0	4,062	4,062
Botswana	0	0	0	1,200	2,398	0	3,598
Brazil	4,281	5,404	6,020	3,612	4,858	1,204	25,379
Bulgaria	0	959	2,790	8,003	9,977	11,336	33,065
Burkina Faso	0	0	1,200	1,200	2,400	0	4,800
Cabo Verde	0	0	0	2,408	2,400	0	4,808
Chile	4,840	5,953	6,000	3,600	4,800	1,200	26,393
Colombia	0	0	0	0	4,800	1,200	6,000
Costa Rica	0	0	0	0	4,000	1,000	5,000
Croatia	0	0	0	2,983	10,204	11,147	24,334
Cyprus	0	0	0	3,497	4,970	5,533	14,000
Czechia	0	1,054	3,175	8,005	10,036	11,399	33,669
Denmark	6,406	7,595	3,031	8,013	10,052	11,154	46,251
Dominican R.	0	0	0	3,000	4,000	1,000	8,000
Ecuador	0	0	0	1,200	4,800	1,200	7,200
Estonia	0	0	0	6,783	9,321	11,185	27,289
Finland	7,307	8,017	3,035	7,919	9,968	11,320	47,566
France	0	5,060	2,992	7,923	9,948	11,040	36,963
Gambia	0	0	0	0	1,200	1,200	2,400
Germany	14,290	15,504	4,504	12,261	15,248	16,810	78,617
Ghana	0	0	0	2,400	4,800	0	7,200
Greece	7,053	7,779	2,996	8,020	10,067	11,176	47,091
Guatemala	0	0	0	1,000	4,000	1,000	6,000
Hungary	0	0	0	2,120	6,184	0	8,304
Iceland	0	0	0	517	0	2,029	2,546
Indonesia	0	0	0	0	3,090	0	3,090
Ireland	6,612	7,588	2,837	7,763	9,830	11,177	45,807
Italy	7,361	8,001	2,971	8,101	10,022	11,222	47,678
Japan	0	0	0	0	2,126	0	2,126
Kenya	0	0	0	2,397	1,599	0	3,996
Latvia	0	0	0	7,824	9,720	11,133	28,677
Lesotho	0	0	1,200	2,397	1,200	1,200	5,997
Lithuania	0	0	0	5,894	9,715	11,062	26,671
Luxembourg	0	0	0	1,995	4,967	5,685	12,647
Malawi	0	0	0	2,400	1,200	0	3,600

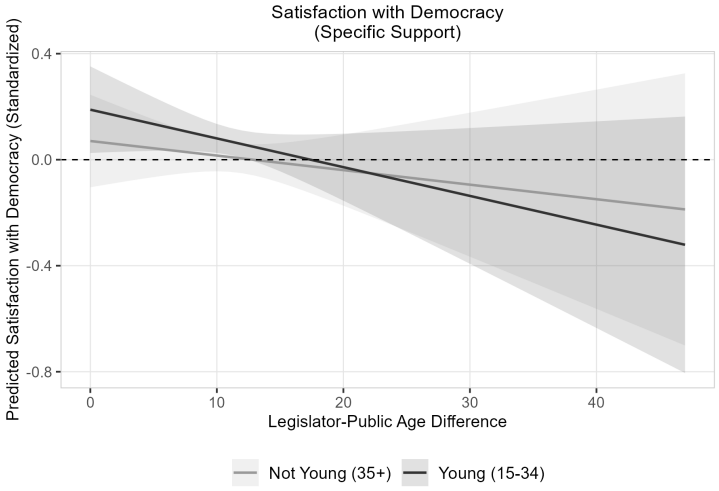
Country	1995–1999	2000–2004	2005–2009	2010–2014	2015–2019	2020–2023	Total
	No.	No.	No.	No.	No.	No.	No.
Mali	0	0	0	1,200	1,200	0	2,400
Malta	0	0	0	1,914	4,760	5,607	12,281
Mauritius	0	0	0	2,400	1,200	1,200	4,800
Mexico	0	0	0	1,200	4,800	1,200	7,200
Mongolia	0	0	0	2,438	1,284	0	3,722
Montenegro	0	0	0	0	0	1,535	1,535
Namibia	1,183	1,199	2,400	2,400	2,400	0	9,582
Netherlands	0	0	0	6,046	10,197	11,146	27,389
Nigeria	0	0	0	0	1,681	1,599	3,280
North Macedonia	0	0	0	0	992	5,171	6,163
Norway	801	938	0	0	0	4,184	5,923
Panama	0	0	0	0	4,000	1,000	5,000
Paraguay	0	0	0	1,200	4,800	1,200	7,200
Peru	0	0	0	2,400	4,800	1,200	8,400
Philippines	0	0	0	1,200	0	0	1,200
Poland	0	947	2,863	7,497	9,446	11,212	31,965
Portugal	6,997	7,850	2,831	8,056	10,186	11,270	47,190
Romania	0	0	0	6,130	10,104	11,580	27,814
Senegal	0	0	0	2,400	1,200	1,200	4,800
Sierra Leone	0	0	0	0	1,200	1,200	2,400
Slovakia	0	1,230	3,246	7,988	10,027	11,310	33,801
Slovenia	0	0	0	2,070	10,000	11,116	23,186
South Africa	0	0	0	0	4,230	1,600	5,830
South Korea	0	0	0	0	2,468	0	2,468
Spain	0	17,598	12,799	12,906	9,958	11,049	64,310
Sweden	7,042	7,830	2,981	8,139	10,119	11,602	47,713
Switzerland	0	0	0	0	0	4,202	4,202
Taiwan	0	0	0	1,657	1,259	0	2,916
Togo	0	0	0	1,200	0	0	1,200
Tunisia	0	0	0	1,200	2,399	1,200	4,799
Turkey	0	988	2,754	951	0	0	4,693
United Kingdom	4,926	7,885	2,942	7,884	9,890	5,590	39,117
Uruguay	0	0	0	0	4,800	1,200	6,000
Zambia	0	0	1,200	8	0	0	1,208
Total	86,314	127,486	79,792	237,082	376,030	332,816	1,239,520

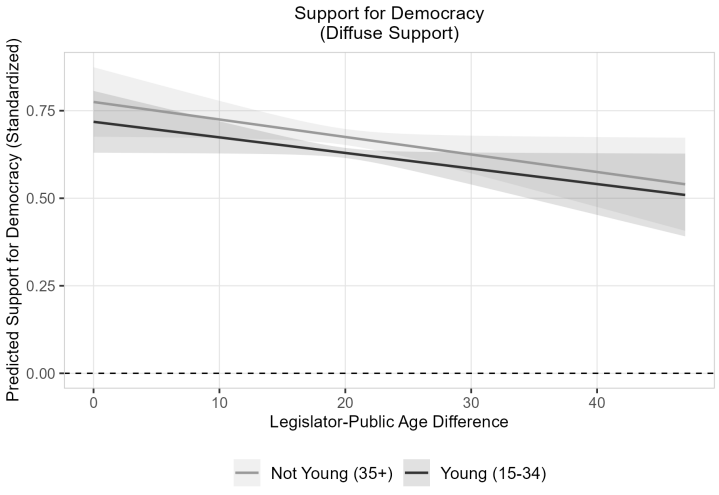
Notes: Respondent counts from national surveys conducted each year from 1995 to 2023

G2 Barometer Survey Results: Interaction figures

The following figures display the predicted values of democratic support for young respondents (aged 15–34) and older respondents (aged 35 and above) across the observed range of the age gap variables, based on the interaction models reported in Table 3. These figures complement the regression results by illustrating how the predicted levels of democratic support for each age group evolve across the full distribution of age gap values.

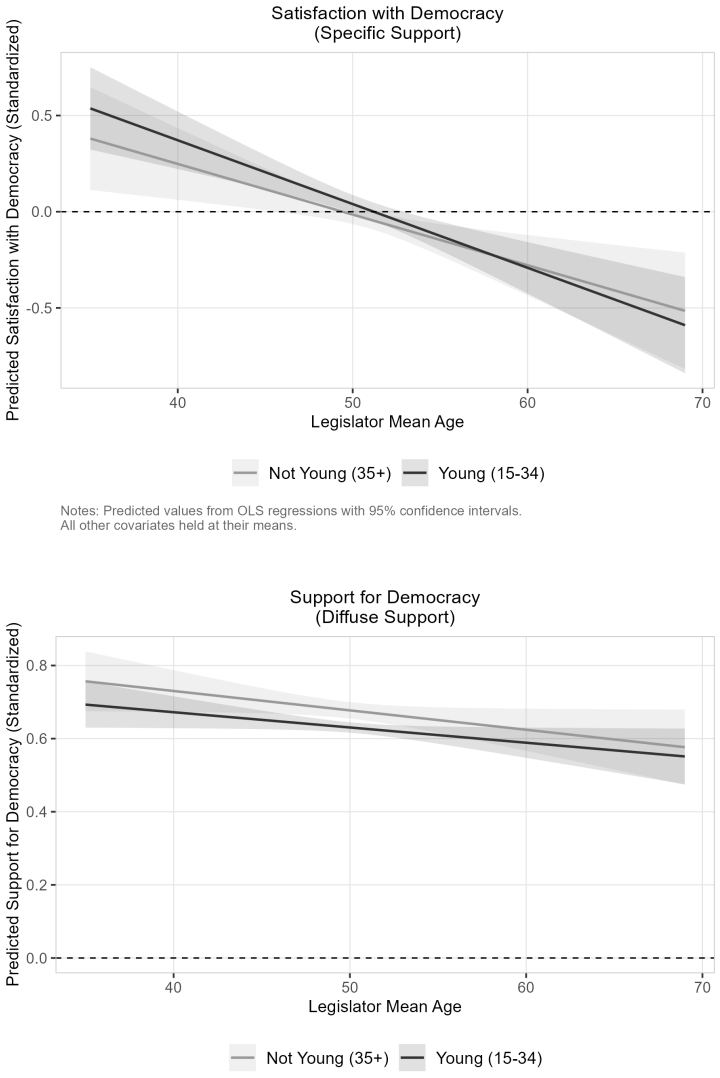
Figure G.9: Barometer Surveys: Predicted Values by Age Group across the Range of Legislator-Public Age Differences





Notes: Predicted values from OLS regressions with 95% confidence intervals, estimated separately for young respondents (aged 15–34) and older respondents (aged 35 and above) across the observed range of the Legislator-Public Age Difference variable in the pooled Barometer sample. All other covariates are held at their means. Models include year fixed effects and all controls reported in Table 3.

Figure G.10: Barometer Surveys: Predicted Values by Age Group across the Range of Mean Legislator Age



Notes: Predicted values from OLS regressions with 95% confidence intervals, estimated separately for young respondents (aged 15–34) and older respondents (aged 35 and above) across the observed range of the Mean Legislator Age variable in the pooled Barometer sample. All other covariates are held at their means. Models include year fixed effects and all controls reported in Table 3.

G3 Barometer Survey Results with Country-Fixed Effects

Table G.23: Cross-National Differences in Legislator Ages and Support for Democracy: Barometers - Country Fixed Effects Models

Panel A: Age Differences

	Satisfaction Democracy *Specific*		Support Democracy *Diffuse*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Legislator-Public Age Difference	-0.009	-0.008	0.001	0.001
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Young	0.056***	0.110***	-0.044***	-0.049**
	(0.014)	(0.024)	(0.006)	(0.018)
Young x Age Difference		-0.005***		0.000
		(0.001)		(0.001)
Observations	1159880	1159880	208000	208000
Adjusted R^2	0.022	0.023	0.012	0.012
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Country FE	✓	✓	✓	✓

Panel B: Mean Legislator Age

	Satisfaction Democracy *Specific*		Support Democracy *Diffuse*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Legislator Mean Age	-0.012	-0.010	0.001	0.001
	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Young	0.056***	0.438**	-0.044***	-0.074
	(0.014)	(0.162)	(0.006)	(0.047)
Young x Mean Age		-0.008*		0.001
		(0.003)		(0.001)
Observations	1159880	1159880	208000	208000
Adjusted R^2	0.022	0.023	0.012	0.012
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Country FE	✓	✓	✓	✓

Notes: OLS estimates. Outcome variables are standardized. Standard Errors clustered by country. Controls include individual controls for gender, education, age, working status; and country controls like corruption index, gini index, % poverty and GDP-per capita.
Signif.: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1.

G4 Barometer Survey Results with Age as continuous variable

Table G.24: Cross-National Differences in Legislator Ages and Support for Democracy: Barometers - Age as continuous Models

Panel A: Age Differences

	Satisfaction Democracy *Specific*		Support Democracy *Diffuse*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Legislator-Public Age Difference	-0.007	-0.013*	-0.005*	-0.004
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.002)	(0.003)
Age	-0.002**	-0.003**	0.001***	0.002
	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.001)
Age x Age Difference		0.000*		-0.000
		(0.000)		(0.000)
Observations	1155930	1155930	208000	208000
Adjusted R^2	0.099	0.099	0.070	0.070
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓

Panel B: Mean Legislator Age

	Satisfaction Democracy *Specific*		Support Democracy *Diffuse*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Legislator Mean Age	-0.029***	-0.038***	-0.005*	-0.003
	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Age	-0.002**	-0.012†	0.001***	0.004
	(0.001)	(0.006)	(0.000)	(0.003)
Age x Mean Age		0.000†		-0.000
		(0.000)		(0.000)
Observations	1155930	1155930	208000	208000
Adjusted R^2	0.105	0.105	0.070	0.070
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓

Notes: OLS estimates. Outcome variables are standardized. Standard Errors clustered by country. Controls include individual controls for gender, education, age, working status; and country controls like corruption index, gini index, % poverty and GDP-per capita.
Signif.: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1.

G5 Barometer Survey Results: Model with political interest/sophistication

The following table shows the results when we include as a control variable the political interest or sophistication of the respondent. For political sophistication we consider a dummy variable equal to one for respondents who report discussing politics frequently with family and friends, based on the political discussion question available across Barometer survey waves. Respondents who report discussing politics often are coded as one, and those who discuss politics rarely or never are coded as zero.

Table G.25: Cross-National Differences in Legislator Ages and Support for Democracy: Barometers - With Political Interest/Sophistication

Panel A: Age Differences

	Satisfaction Democracy *Specific*		Support Democracy *Diffuse*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Legislator-Public Age Difference	-0.007	-0.013*	-0.005*	-0.004
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.002)	(0.003)
Age	-0.002**	-0.003**	0.001***	0.002
	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.001)
Age x Age Difference		0.000*		-0.000
		(0.000)		(0.000)
Observations	1155930	1155930	208000	208000
Adjusted R^2	0.099	0.099	0.070	0.070
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓

Panel B: Mean Legislator Age

	Satisfaction Democracy *Specific*		Support Democracy *Diffuse*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Legislator Mean Age	-0.029***	-0.038***	-0.005*	-0.003
	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Age	-0.002**	-0.012†	0.001***	0.004
	(0.001)	(0.006)	(0.000)	(0.003)
Age x Mean Age		0.000†		-0.000
		(0.000)		(0.000)
Observations	1155930	1155930	208000	208000
Adjusted R^2	0.105	0.105	0.070	0.070
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓

Notes: OLS estimates. Outcome variables are standardized. Standard Errors clustered by country. Controls include individual controls for gender, education, age, working status, political interest; and country controls like corruption index, gini index, % poverty and GDP-per capita.
Signif.: ***: 0.001, **: 0.01, *: 0.05, †: 0.1.

H Conjoint Experiment

H1 Conjoint Sources

We attained the demographic information for each country from the following sources.

1. United States
    - Information on the country's composition in gender, ethnicity, and educational level was obtained from the US Census Quick Facts dataset. We accessed the data on September 7th, 2023 at https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045222
    - The country's age composition was obtained from the population projections prepared by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs in 2022. We accessed the data on October 30th, 2023 at https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/
    - The country's religious composition was obtained from surveys conducted by the PEW Research Center in 2021. We accessed the data on October 30th, 2023 at https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/01/14/measuring-religion-in-pew-research-centers-american-trends-panel/
    - The country's composition in LGBTQ+ identification was obtained from a Gallup survey in 2022. We accessed the data on October 30th, 2023 at https://news.gallup.com/poll/389792/lgbt-identification-ticks-up.aspx
2. Italy
    - The country's gender composition was obtained from the Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (ISTAT). We accessed the data on September 30th, 2023 at https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1,POP,1.0/POP_POPULATION/DCIS_POPORESBIL1/IT1,22_315_DF_DCIS_POPORESBIL1_1,1.0
    - Information on the country's ethnicity composition and LGBTQ+ identification was obtained from Special Eurobarometer 493: Discrimination in the EU. We accessed the data on September 7th, 2023 at https://data.europa.eu/data/datasets/s2251_91_4_493_eng?locale=en
    - The country's educational composition was obtained from the OECD Education at a Glance 2023. We accessed the data on September 7th, 2023 at https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance-2023_e13bef63-en
    - The country's religious composition was obtained from Eurobarometer 2021 516: European citizens' knowledge and attitudes towards science and technology. We accessed the data on September 7th, 2023 at https://europa.eu/

eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2237

- The country's age composition was obtained from the population projections prepared by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs in 2022. We accessed the data on October 30th, 2023 at https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/

3. South Korea

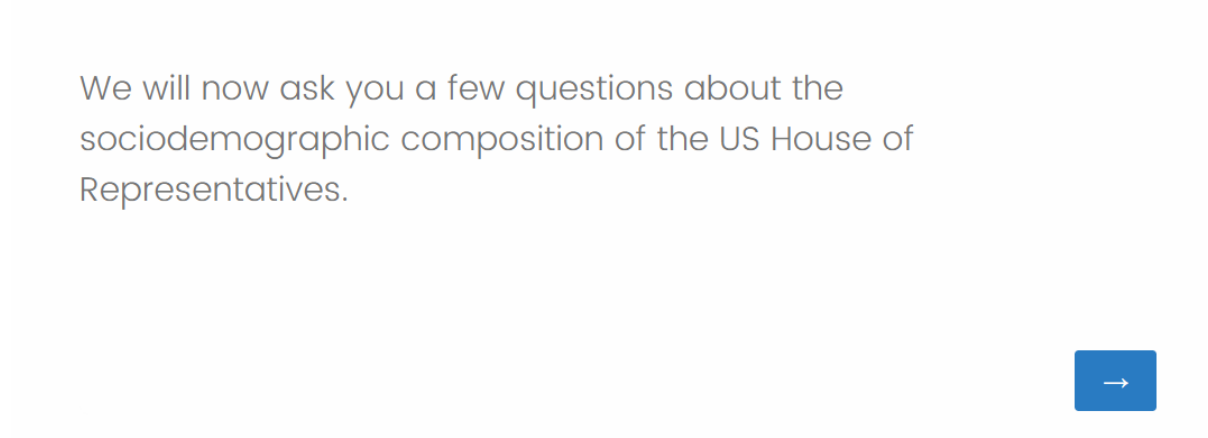
- The country's gender composition was obtained from World Bank staff estimates based on age/sex distributions of United Nations Population Division's World Population Prospects: 2022 Revision. We accessed the data on September 30th, 2023 at https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.FE.ZS?locations=KR
- The country's ethnic composition was obtained from the migration statistics of the Ministry of Justice of the Government of South Korea 2023. We accessed the data on September 7th, 2023 at https://www.moj.go.kr/moj/2412/subview
- The country's educational composition was obtained from the OECD Education at a Glance 2023. We accessed the data on September 7th, 2023 at https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance-2023_e13bef63-en
- The country's religious composition was obtained from the KOSIS statistics office of South Korea, based on the 2015 census. We accessed the data on September 7th, 2023 at https://kosis.kr/statHtml/statHtml.do?orgId=101&tblId=DT_1PM1502&conn_path=I2
- The country's age composition was obtained from the population projections prepared by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs in 2022. We accessed the data on October 30th, 2023 at https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/

H2 Conjoint Set-up

The conjoint experiment followed this set-up within the survey:

1. First page of introduction

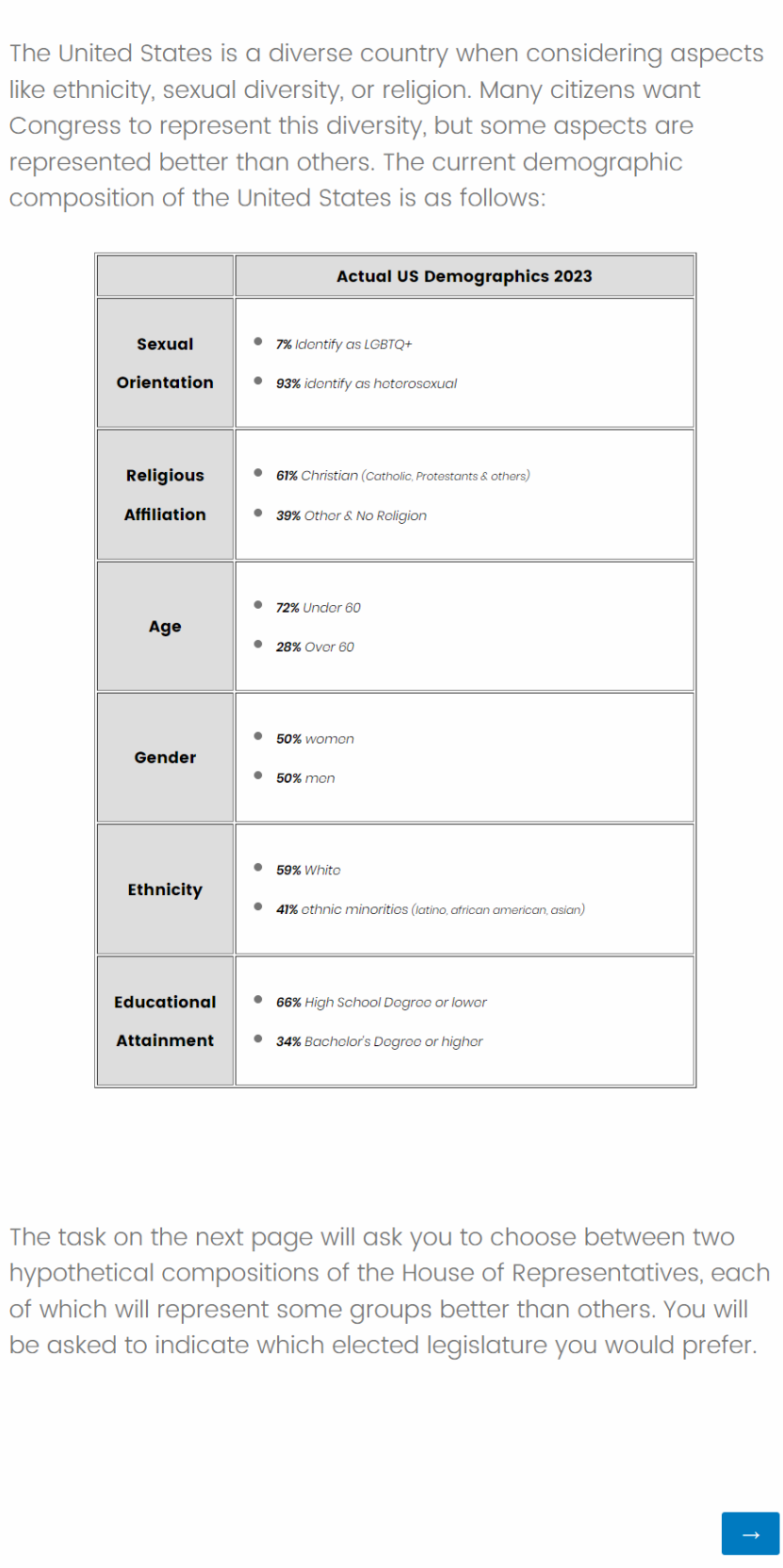
Figure H.11: Introduction to the topic



Notes: Screenshot of the Qualtrics' US survey, December 2023 .

2. Set Baseline: We informed the respondents about the demographic characteristics of the adult population in their country

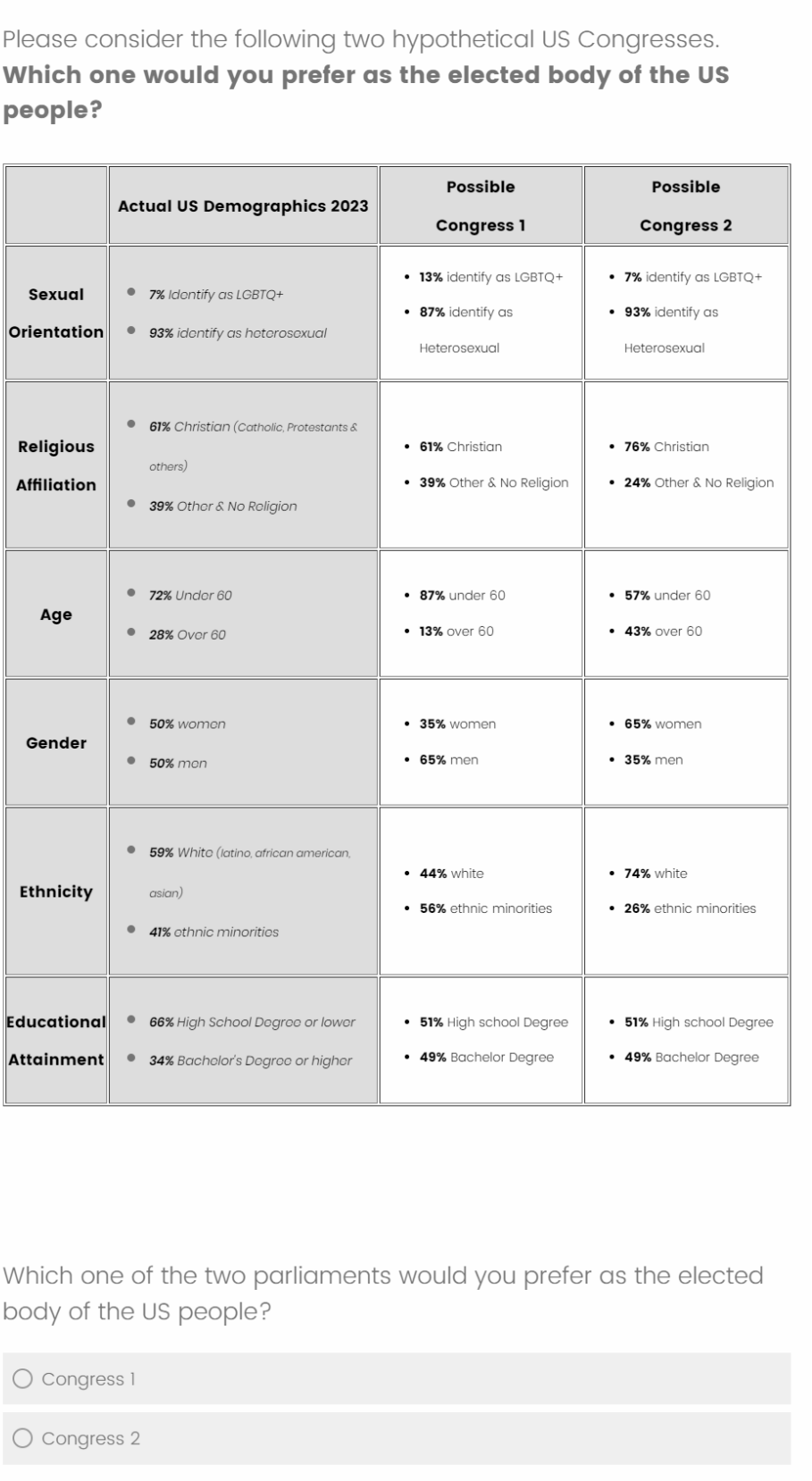
Figure H.12: Demographics baseline



Notes: Screenshot of the Qualtrics' US survey, December 2023 .

3. Conjoint: Forced choice between 2 congress alternatives

Figure H.13: Conjoint forced choice



Please consider the following two hypothetical US Congresses.
Which one would you prefer as the elected body of the US people?

	Actual US Demographics 2023	Possible Congress 1	Possible Congress 2
Sexual Orientation	• *7% Identify as LGBTQ+* • *93% identify as heterosexual*	• **13%** identify as LGBTQ+ • **87%** identify as Heterosexual	• **7%** identify as LGBTQ+ • **93%** identify as Heterosexual
Religious Affiliation	• *61% Christian (Catholic, Protestants & others)* • *39% Other & No Religion*	• **61%** Christian • **39%** Other & No Religion	• **76%** Christian • **24%** Other & No Religion
Age	• *72% Under 60* • *28% Over 60*	• **87%** under 60 • **13%** over 60	• **57%** under 60 • **43%** over 60
Gender	• *50% woman* • *50% man*	• **35%** women • **65%** men	• **65%** women • **35%** men
Ethnicity	• *59% White (latino, african american, asian)* • *41% ethnic minorities*	• **44%** white • **56%** ethnic minorities	• **74%** white • **26%** ethnic minorities
Educational Attainment	• *66% High School Degree or lower* • *34% Bachelor's Degree or higher*	• **51%** High school Degree • **49%** Bachelor Degree	• **51%** High school Degree • **49%** Bachelor Degree

Which one of the two parliaments would you prefer as the elected body of the US people?

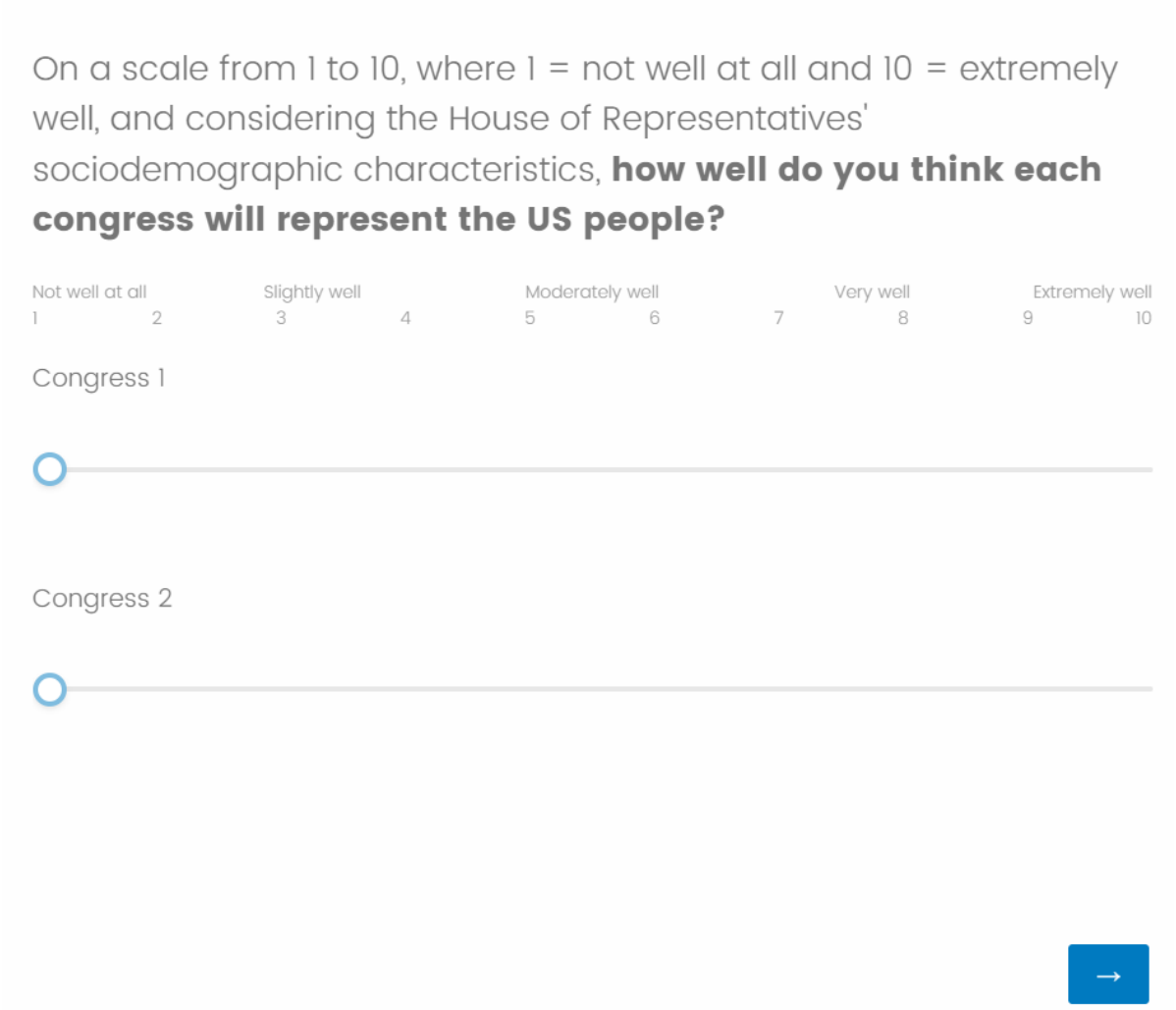
◯ Congress 1

◯ Congress 2

Notes: Screenshot of the Qualtrics' US survey, December 2023 .

4. Conjoint: rating the 2 congress alternatives

Figure H.14: Conjoint forced choice



Notes: Screenshot of the Qualtrics' US survey, December 2023

H3 Conjoint Attributes and Levels

The following tables report the baseline demographic information as well as the possible attributes for the conjoint experiment, by country.

Table H.26: Baseline information USA - Italy - South Korea

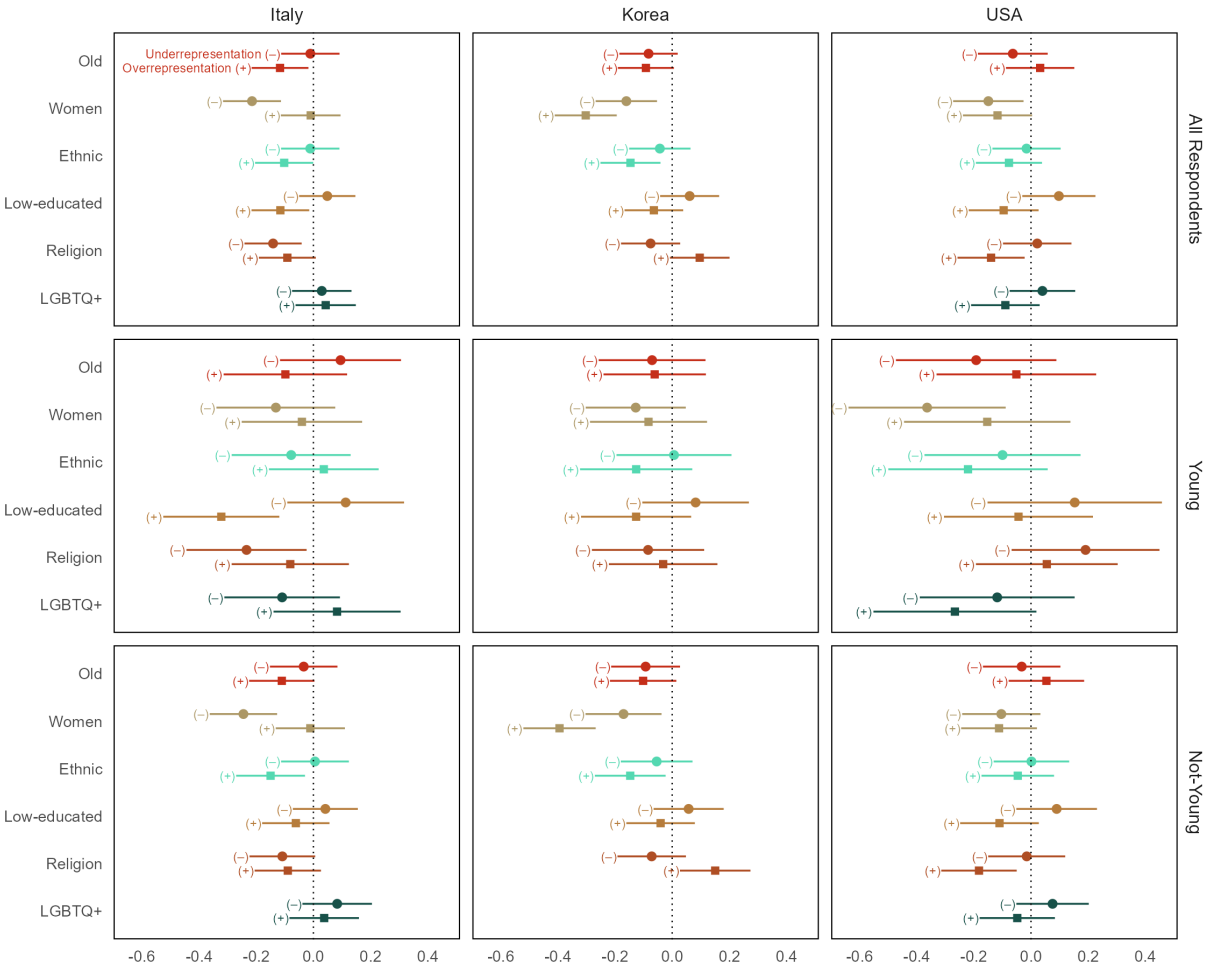
Attributes	US 2023	IT 2023	SK 2023
Gender representation	50% women 50% men	51% women 49% men	50% women 50% men
Ethnic representation	59% White 41% Other (african american, latino, asian)	91% Italian origin 9% Non-italian origin (African, South american, others)	95% Korean origin 5% Non-korean origin (Chinese, Japanese, others)
Education representation	66% High School Degree or lower 34% Bachelor Degree or higher	80% High School Degree or lower 20% Bachelor Degree or higher	46% High School Degree or lower 54% Bachelor Degree or higher
LGBTQ+ Minority representation	7% Identifies as LGBTQ+ 93% identifies as heterosexual	2% Identifies as LGBTQ+ 98% identifies as heterosexual	Not official information or survey
Religion representation	61% Christians 39% Other religion or no religion	79% Catholics 21 % Other or no religion	43% Religious (catholics,buddhist, other) 57 % No religious
Age representation	72% Under 60 28% Over 60	66% Under 60 34% Over 60	75% Under 60 25% Over 60

Table H.27: Conjoint Attributes and Levels

Attributes	#	Levels USA Content	Levels Italy Content	Level South Korea Content
Gender representation	3	35% women & 65% men 50% women & 50% men 65% women & 35% men	35% women & 65% men 50% women & 50% men 65% women & 35% men	35% women & 65% men 50% women & 50% men 65% women & 35% men
Ethnic representation	3	74% white & 26% ethnic minority 59% white & 41% ethnic minority 44% white & 56% ethnic minority	99% Italian Origin & 1% Non-italian origin 91% Italian Origin & 9% Non-italian origin 83% Italian Origin & 17% Non-italian origin	99% Korean Origin & 1% Non-Korean origin 95% Korean Origin & 5% Non-Korean origin 91% Korean Origin & 9% Non-Korean origin
Education representation	3	49% Bachelor Degree or Higher & 51% High School degree or lower 34% Bachelor Degree or Higher & 66% High School degree or lower 19% Bachelor Degree or Higher & 81% High School degree or lower	35% Bachelor Degree or Higher & 65% High School degree or lower 20% Bachelor Degree or Higher & 80% High School degree or lower 5% Bachelor Degree or Higher & 95% High School degree or lower	79% Bachelor Degree or Higher & 21% High School degree or lower 54% Bachelor Degree or Higher & 46% High School degree or lower 39% Bachelor Degree or Higher & 61% High School degree or lower
LGBTQ+ Minority representation	3	13% Identifies as LGBT+ & 87% identifies as Heterosexual 7% Identifies as LGBT+ & 93% identifies as Heterosexual 1% Identifies as LGBT+ & 99% identifies as Heterosexual	3.5% Identifies as LGBTQ+ & 96.5% identifies as Heterosexual 2% Identifies as LGBTQ+ & 98% identifies as Heterosexual 0.5% Identifies as LGBTQ+ & 99.5% identifies as Heterosexual	Do not apply
Religion representation	3	76% Christian Religions & 24 % Other or no religion 61% Christian Religions & 39 % Other or no religion 46% Christian Religions & 54 % Other or no religion	94% Catholics & 6 % Other or no religion 79% Catholics & 21 % Other or no religion 64% Catholics & 36 % Other or no religion	58% Religious & 42 % no religious 43% Religious & 57 % no religious 28% Religious & 72 % no religious
Age representation	3	43% Over 60 & 57% Under 60 28% Over 60 & 72% Under 60 13% Over 60 & 87% Under 60	49% Over 60 & 51% Under 60 34% Over 60 & 66% Under 60 19% Over 60 & 71% Under 60	40% Over 60 & 60% Under 60 25% Over 60 & 75% Under 60 10% Over 60 & 90% Under 60

H4 Rating: Conjoint by age group

Figure H.15: Conjoint Results by Age Group (AMCE)

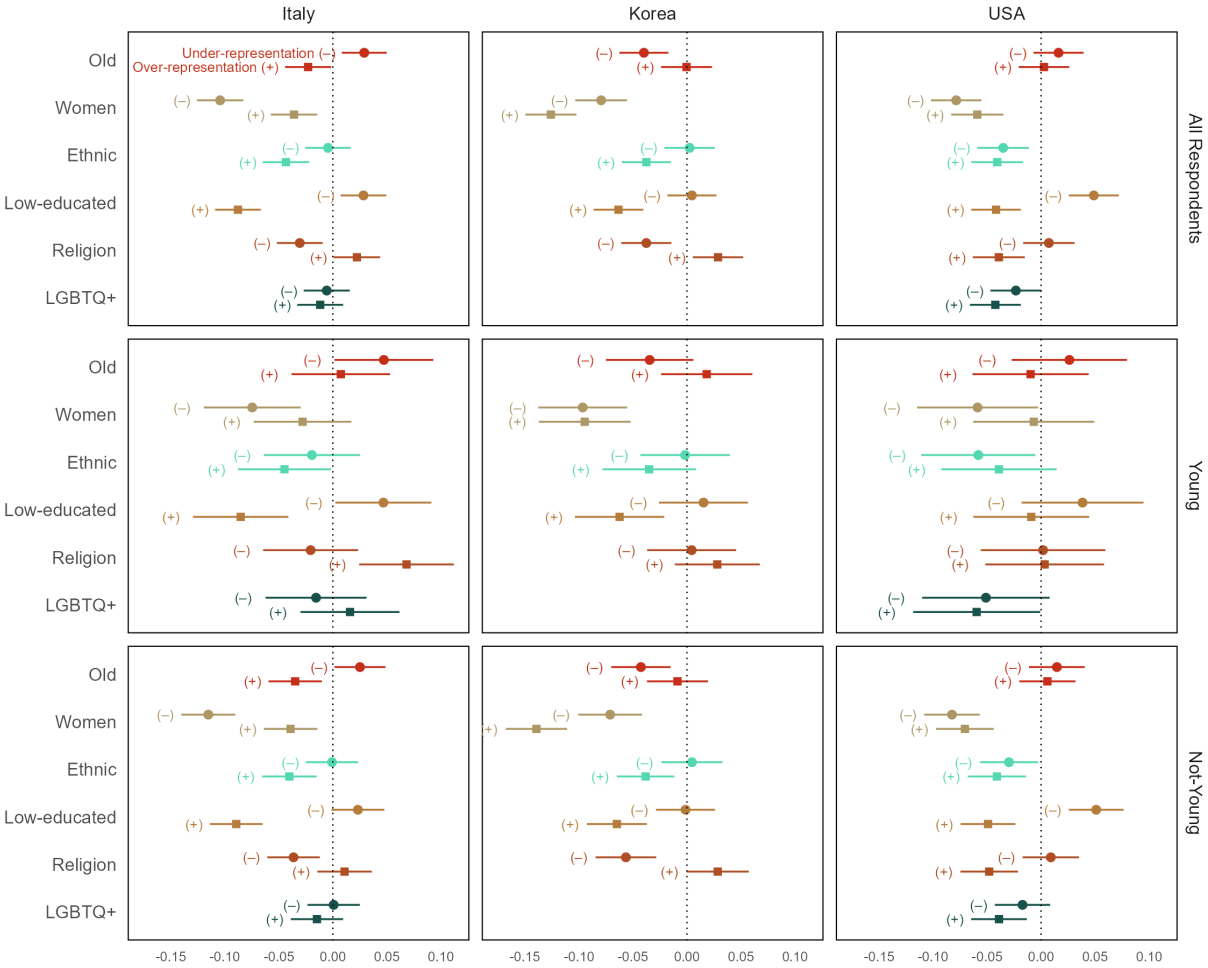


Notes: AMCES estimates and 95% confidence interval. The reference group is always the correct representation. The outcome is a 10-point rating of how well the legislature would represent the public. Young is 18-34 years old.

H5 Forced Choice: Conjoint by age group

This section shows the results of our forced choice, where the question was: *Please consider the following two hypothetical US Congresses. Which one would you prefer as the elected body of the US people?*

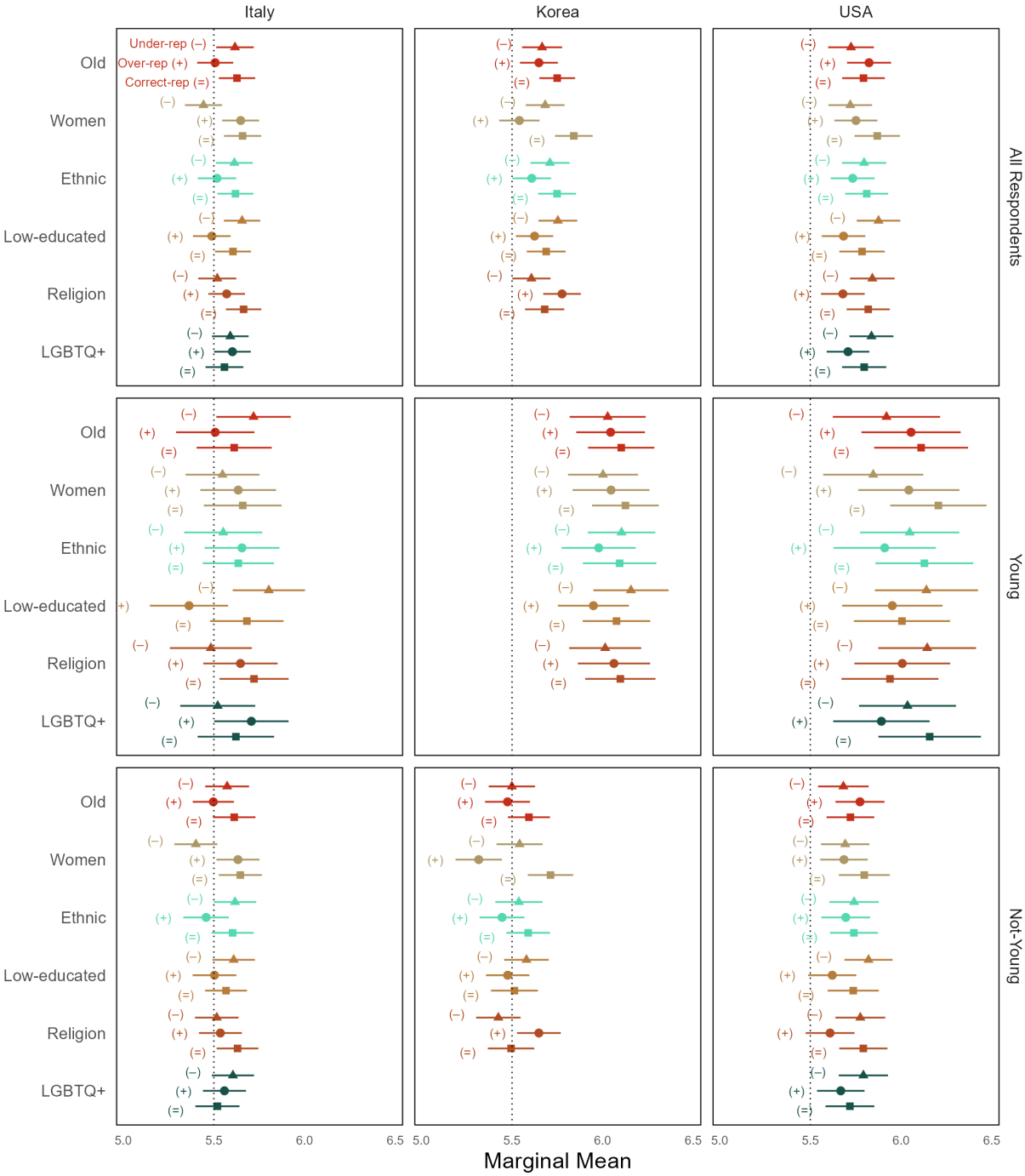
Figure H.16: Conjoint AMCES Means by Age: Forced Choice



Notes: AMCES estimates and 95% confidence interval. Reference group is always correct representation. The outcome is the forced choice of which one they prefer as elected body of the country's people. Young is 18-34 years old.

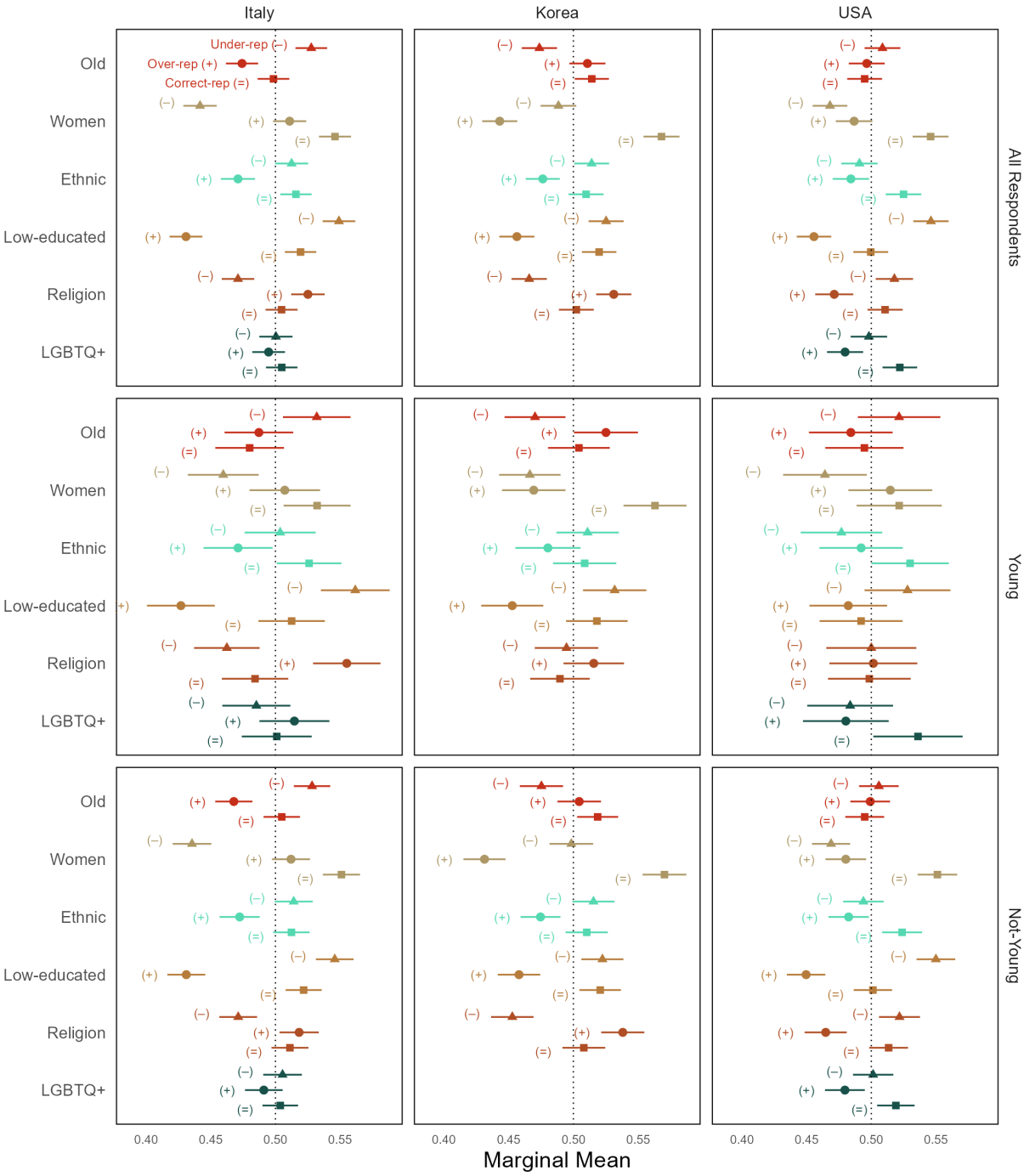
H6 Marginal Means

Figure H.17: Conjoint Marginal Means by Age: Ratings



Notes: Marginal Means estimates and 95% confidence interval. The outcome is a 10-point rating of how well the legislature would represent the public. Young is 18-34 years old. Young is 18-34 years old.

Figure H.18: Conjoint Marginal Means by Age: Forced Choice.



Notes: Marginal Means estimates and 95% confidence interval. The outcome is the forced choice of which one they prefer as elected body of the country's people. Young is 18-34 years old.

I Pre-Registration

Here we report our hypotheses and analyses from our pre-registration plan for the two experiments. The registered research designs are reported prior in this appendix.

I1 Hypotheses for Age Gap Information Experiment

Main Effects

We expect that respondents exposed to an age gap between political leaders and the adult public in their country will be less satisfied with how democracy functions in their country.

We expect that reduced satisfaction with democracy in their country will be linked to perceptions that the age gap makes democracy less representative of the public's preferences and less effective at addressing major issues in their country.

We also investigate whether exposure to their country's age gap reduces support for democracy generally (i.e. reduces their principled support for democracy rather than their satisfaction with democracy in their own country) and reduces perceptions of how representative and effective democracy is generally. However, we have only weak expectations that these general effects will apply, since the age gaps are specific to their own countries and may not be perceived as inherent to democratic political systems.

Variation by Country

We expect that negative effects of the age gap treatment on support for democracy will be stronger in countries with larger age gaps. As a result, we would expect to see larger treatment effects in the United States and South Korea compared to Italy, since the age gaps are much more pronounced in the former compared to the latter. However, this expectation may also not hold if other country-specific factors influence reactions to the treatment.

Subgroup Effects

We expect the negative effects on support for democracy to be stronger among younger respondents.

We expect the negative effects on support for democracy to be stronger among respondents who express more concern about the implications of the age gap.

We expect the negative effects on support for democracy to be stronger among respondents who hold more ageist attitudes toward older people.

We will also explore whether treatment effects vary by education, gender, and political affiliation.

I2 Analysis for Age Gap Information Experiment

We will analyze the results with data aggregated across the three countries and with data from each country separately.

For main effects, we will analyze the difference in means between the treatment and control groups using OLS regression. We will also implement models controlling for age, education, gender, region of residence, employment, religion, ethnicity (US only), income, and political ideology. For subgroup effects, we will interact an indicator for the treatment with the relevant variables, using OLS with and without the control variables.

I3 Hypotheses for Conjoint Experiment

The experiment is designed to assess whether gaps between political leaders and the public for some demographic characteristics are seen as more problematic for representation than others. Specifically, we randomize whether and to what extent political leaders differ from the public in terms of their age, gender, educational background, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and religious affiliation. We do not have strong expectations about which gaps may be perceived more negatively by respondents from the United States, Italy, and South Korea; rather, we are interested in understanding how age gaps compare to gaps on these other characteristics, and whether the effect is weaker, stronger, or similar in magnitude.

I4 Analysis for Conjoint Experiment

We will use standard methods for analyzing conjoint experiments, reporting the AMCE and the marginal means.

Internal Review Board Approval

The study was approved by the Bocconi Research Ethics Committee (application EA000694) on November 15, 2023. All participants provided informed consent prior to participating in the study.