

Does Governance Quality Have an Effect on Citizens' Willingness to Contribute to Public Redistribution? Different Effects of the Objective Regional Quality and its Subjective Individual Perceptions in Seven European Countries in 2026

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Abstract: What is the relationship between governance quality and citizens' willingness to contribute to public redistribution, that is, collectively financed public services and benefits? We argue that capable, fair, and non-corrupt institutions make collective provision more credible, but that credibility can be observed from two vantage points: each citizen's own assessment of the institutions they encounter, and assessments aggregated across the region they live in. We test the association of individual-level and regionally-aggregated governance quality measures. We use novel survey data from high-quality random samples of the national resident population (N=8,066) in Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, and Sweden, from March 2026 and link them to the 2024 regional European Quality of Government Index (EQI). The central empirical pattern is asymmetric: citizens' *perception* of governance is strongly positively related to stated willingness to contribute, whereas externally measured regional governance quality shows little evidence of an analogous positive within-country association. We do find that differences between countries are reflected in the regional EQI and can predict the individual willingness to contribute, but not the intra-national variation of the regional EQI. People in a better-government country are more willing to contribute to public provisions, but not people in a better governed region.

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1. Introduction

“Salvar la sanidad pública madrileña.” (RTVE 2026)

“Let us save public healthcare in Madrid” - under this motto, 8,000 protesters demonstrated against the low quality of public health services in the Spanish region of Madrid on 8 February 2026. They demanded more money in the system, more personnel, shorter waiting times and an expansion of health services provided for mental health patients. This example shows that what people believe about public services moves them to make political demands about those services. These beliefs may also shape what they are willing to contribute to such services. In this paper, we investigate whether the willingness to contribute to public redistribution is related to each citizen’s perception of public provisions and the objectifiable quality of government measured at the regional level.

Two competing expectations follow at the citizen level. Where the state does not deliver, citizens may support higher contributions if they view poor provision as a shortage of resources or withdraw support if they doubt that further contributions would be converted into quality services. It is harder to establish whether willingness to contribute relates primarily to each citizen's own perception of public provision, whether their perception is contingent on actual quality and whether there is a residual effect of overall quality.

We examine this distinction using novel random-sample survey data collected in seven European countries in 2026 and link them to the 2024 European Quality of Government Index (EQI) (Charron et al. 2024), which aggregates the assessments of large citizen samples to the regional level. Our central comparison is between regional governance quality measured this way, shared across residents of a region, recorded two years before our fieldwork, and independent of our own respondents' answers, and our respondents' contemporaneous perceptions of governance quality, which are politically proximate to the outcome but measured in the same instrument. Our outcome is willingness to contribute to public redistribution: willingness to contribute to collectively financed public services and benefits at municipal, national, and European levels, including when respondents would not personally benefit.

The central finding is an asymmetry. Perceived governance quality is strongly and positively associated with willingness to contribute, and the association holds across all specifications and across different indicators of satisfaction. Regional governance quality measured by the EQI shows no association within countries: the estimate is insignificant and close to zero. We find little evidence that the perception association is moderated by welfare-state effort, by ideology, or by measured change in regional governance between 2021 and 2024. We find out, in passing, that the levels of EQI between country explains willingness to contribute, but once the differences in levels are accounted for, intra-national variation does not matter.

We find a widely used and reliable regional indicator and citizens' own evaluations of governance quality relate very differently to willingness to contribute to public redistribution. Findings that rest on one of these measures therefore do not necessarily transfer to the other.

These findings may be politically consequential: if willingness to contribute follows from what citizens believe about public institutions more than it follows from measured regional conditions, then good governance is not enough on its own to generate support for collective provision. Rather, politicians and bureaucrats need to make sure that citizens perceive the actual quality of public services.

2. Theoretical framework: institutional credibility, its operationalisation and contextualisation

The theoretical starting point is institutional credibility. We first review the relevant literature and then present two perspectives on how credibility can be observed: each citizen's own assessment of governance, and the assessments aggregated across the region they live in.

2.1 Institutional credibility

Citizens' willingness to contribute is not only a matter of material self-interest; it also depends on whether they believe that public authorities can transform contributions into services and benefits competently, impartially, and without systematic leakage. Quality-of-government theory defines high-quality government around impartiality in the exercise of public authority and links it to low corruption, social trust, and welfare state legitimacy (Rothstein and Teorell 2008; Rothstein 2011). Besley's model of state capacity and reciprocity makes the same point in contractual terms: fiscal capacity and civic willingness to contribute can reinforce each other when citizens believe that taxpaying is reciprocated by public good provision (Besley 2020). Legitimacy research similarly treats trustworthiness and procedural justice as conditions under which citizens accept obligations imposed by public authority (Levi et al. 2009).

The literature does not imply a fully consistent positive link between trust, governance, and redistributive attitudes. Observational studies often find that government quality, trust, or corruption perceptions are associated with tax attitudes, spending, redistribution, and climate taxation (Svallfors 2013; Petrova 2021; Bauhr and Charron 2020; Davidovic 2025; Witko and Moldogaziev 2025). Early comparative evidence showed that political trust and redistribution can relate differently across welfare states (Svallfors 1999), and recent causal evidence finds negligible associations of political trust and redistribution preferences (Devine 2025). Survey experiments on redistribution also show that low trust in government can limit policy responsiveness to information about inequality (Kuziemko et al. 2015).

In our paper, the contribution is therefore not a causal claim that institutional confidence drives willingness to contribute, but a comparison of how citizens' own governance perceptions and an external regional governance quality indicator each relate to it.

2.2 Institutional Credibility Observed from Two Perspectives

The empirical challenge is that institutional credibility can be observed from two different perspectives. The first perspective is that of regional-level measurement. Indicators, such as the European Quality of Government Index, summarize regional differences in administrative quality, impartiality, corruption, and service performance by using large-scale survey responses from ordinary citizens. The EQI was developed to capture meaningful subnational variation in quality of government across Europe (Charron et al. 2013), and later work documents both change and continuity in these regional patterns (Charron et al. 2022). Through aggregation from individual assessments to a regional group of answers, they capture institutional conditions shared by many residents rather than individual mood, ideology, or response style.

The second perspective is to measure people's perception at the individual level. Citizens have limited information about regional administrative quality, and their judgments may be shaped more by concrete service encounters, national political narratives, partisan interpretation, or generalised institutional confidence than by the regional conditions captured in EQI. Public-administration research shows that service evaluations combine experienced performance with expectations (Van Ryzin 2013). Welfare state feedback research shows why personal service encounters spill over into political trust and ideology (Kumlin 2004; Kumlin and Haugsgjerd 2017), while recent work on evaluation-based trust cautions that performance evaluations and trust are entangled in ways that are difficult to separate with observational data (de Blok et al. 2022).

Because perceptions combine experience, expectation, and general political outlook, they offer both an opportunity and a vulnerability for this study. The opportunity is that perceived governance quality is politically proximate. It can reflect direct evidence of service delivery experiences, and broader confidence in institutions. These perceptions matter even when they imperfectly track objective conditions (Stantcheva 2024). The vulnerability is that perceived governance quality is measured in the same survey as willingness to contribute, so any association may instead reflect generalised political trust, satisfaction with democracy, acquiescence or optimism, ideology, or reverse direction from pro-provision attitudes to better perceptions of institutions.

Regional governance quality as measured here is contextual and temporally prior: it aggregates to the region the assessments of a separate sample of citizens, surveyed two years before our fieldwork. It is therefore independent of our own respondents' answers, but follows from citizens' perceptions in general. Perceived governance quality, by contrast, is individual-level, contemporaneous, self-reported, and may be prone to

common-method covariance. A divergence between them cannot be read as showing that one measure is more valid than the other: the two should not be used interchangeably without attention to measurement level, timing, source, geography, and construction.

The two perspectives from which to observe institutional credibility raise a simple question: Do respondents in higher-EQI regions report more favourable average governance evaluations, and are those regional differences in average perceptions associated with greater willingness to contribute?

2.3 Contextualised Associations of Institutional Credibility

Beyond the central investigation of individual- and regional-level measures of governance quality, three further tests probe boundary conditions of our credibility argument. First, governance quality may matter more where social-protection expenditure is extensive, since citizens rely more on public institutions and may hold higher expectations against which performance is judged (Van Ryzin 2013). We can only provide a weak test of this argument, as it must rely on only seven country-level values, and expenditure imperfectly proxies welfare state effort. Second, ideology may condition this association, though prior work is split on the direction of the expected impact: Rudolph and Evans (2005) suggest political trust matters more for conservatives who face larger ideological “costs” from spending. We expect the opposite, because redistribution and expanded public provision are less central to right-wing policy commitments. The test therefore speaks to a contested expectation rather than a settled one. Third, citizens may respond to trajectories rather than levels: regions where governance has improved may offer a more credible background for support than regions where it has stagnated.

In sum, institutional credibility may shape citizens’ willingness to contribute when public authorities are seen as competent, impartial, and capable of converting contributions into public benefits. We distinguish between regional governance quality, measured by the European Quality of Government Index, and citizens’ subjective governance evaluations. These measures capture different contextual and individual-level dimensions and should not be used interchangeably. We examine whether higher regional governance quality is associated with more favourable average perceptions and whether both regional and individual perceptions relate to willingness to contribute.

2.4 Hypotheses

Deriving from our discussion of institutional credibility, its measurement on the regional or individual level, and the contextualisation of the expected associations, we postulate six pre-registered hypotheses. Hypotheses 1 to 3 reflect the core of our argument, hypotheses 4 to 6 are further extensions.

The hypotheses 1 and 2 state the core contrast. The same institutional-credibility argument is tested with an external regional indicator and with citizens' own perceptions, but the two tests do not have the same interpretation. H1 asks whether residents of higher-governance regions express greater willingness to contribute to public redistribution. H2 asks whether citizens who evaluate government and public services more favourably express greater willingness to contribute.¹

H1: Higher external regional governance quality is positively associated with willingness to contribute to public redistribution.

H2: More favourable individual perceptions of governance are positively associated with willingness to contribute to public redistribution.

The third hypothesis links these two levels: if regional governance matters partly because it shapes citizens' perceptions, higher-EQI regions should show more favourable average perceptions, which should in turn relate to willingness to contribute. We evaluate this as a between-region perception-path decomposition.

H3: External regional governance quality is positively associated with willingness to contribute to public redistribution through the preregistered between-region perception-path decomposition.

The remaining hypotheses 4-6 are preregistered extensions of the credibility argument rather than separate pillars of the paper. They ask whether the regional-governance association is stronger in higher-effort welfare states, weaker on the right, and linked to measured improvement in governance over time.²

H4: The association between external regional governance quality and willingness to contribute to public redistribution is stronger where social-protection expenditure is higher.

¹ The pre-registration is available at

https://osf.io/qbnk5/overview?view_only=03d10ab3b9e94b6d948b9b76d9ce5955

The hypotheses deviate in wording from the terminology of the preregistration, which referred to "other-regarding public redistribution." In this text, we use the more measurement-proximate term "willingness to contribute to public redistribution" for the outcome.

² The preregistration labels ideology moderation H4 and change H5, but its analysis section inserts welfare-state moderation as H4 and labels ideology and change H5 and H6. We resolve this internal inconsistency by following the numbering used in the preregistration's analysis plan.

H5: The association between perceived governance quality and willingness to contribute to public redistribution is weaker among respondents further to the political right.

H6: Measured improvement in regional governance from 2021 to 2024 is positively associated with willingness to contribute to public redistribution reported in 2026, conditional on 2021 governance.

Figure 1 depicts the hypothesised associations on the individual, regional, and national level:

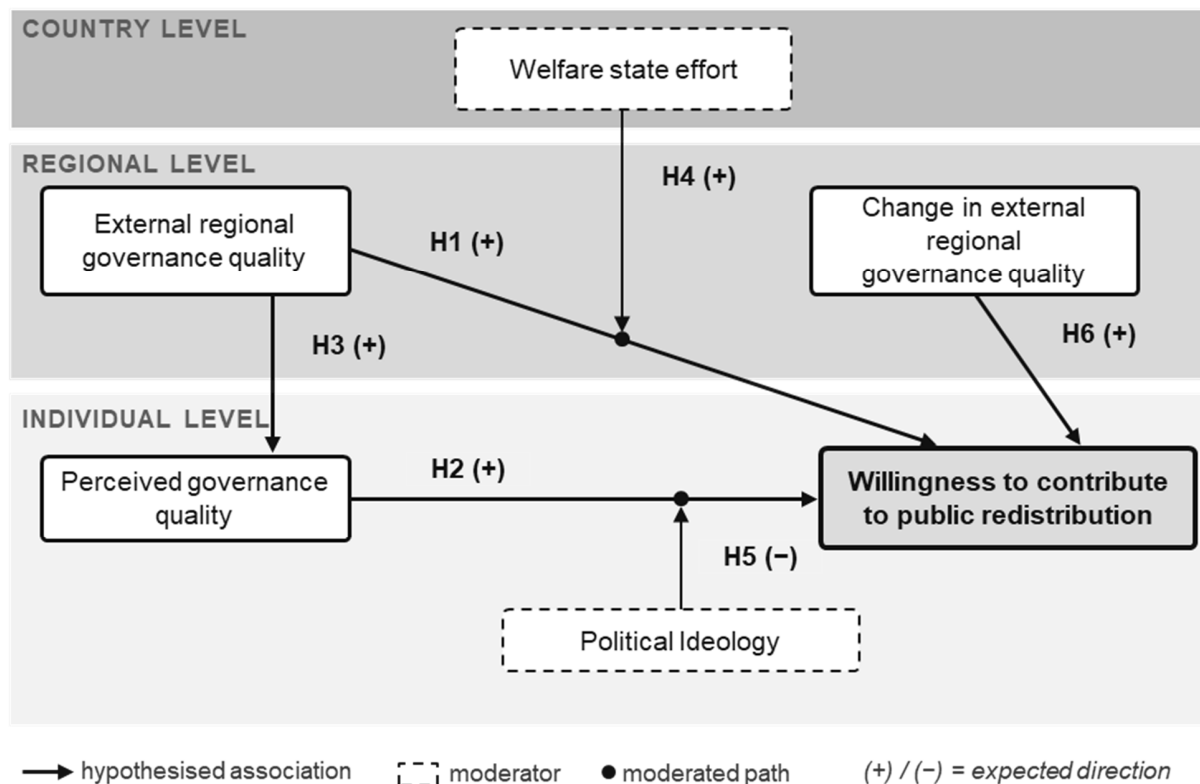


Figure 1: Theoretical framework including the hypothesised associations

3. Data and methods

3.1 Data set: the Panel Survey of European Solidarity

To test these hypotheses, we use data from the first wave of a cross-national panel survey fielded seven European countries in 2026: Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, and Sweden. The countries were selected to provide variation in welfare-regime types and governance quality (see Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.). We classify governance quality using the European Quality of Government Index (EQI).

Table 1. Country and Sample Characteristics

Country	Welfare Regime Type	Country-Level Governance Quality (EQI score and rank)	Total social protection expenditure (% of GDP)	Respondents	NUTS2 regions	EQI regions
Croatia	Post-Communist	Low (-0.97; rank 7/7)	20.2	1124	4	4
Poland	Post-Communist	Low (-0.93; rank 6/7)	22.5	1005	17	17
Italy	Mediterranean	Middle (-0.77; rank 5/7)	28.8	1117	21	21
Spain	Mediterranean	Middle (-0.28; rank 4/7)	25.5	1054	18	18
France	Conservative	Middle (0.40; rank 3/7)	33.8	1115	22	22
Germany	Conservative	High (0.98; rank 2/7)	29.9	1600	38	16
Sweden	Social-Democratic	High (1.32; rank 1/7)	27.8	1051	8	8

Note: Welfare-regime categories are based on the comparative welfare state literature, distinguishing conservative, social-democratic, Mediterranean, and Post-Communist regime contexts. The classification draws on Esping-Andersen's conservative and social-democratic types, Ferrera's Mediterranean model, and Fenger's post-communist extension. Governance quality is classified into low, middle, and high groups based on the 2024 European Quality of Government Index (EQI). EQI scores are analysis-weighted country means at the Core 2 EQI geography; ranks are high-to-low among the seven study countries. Total social protection expenditure as a percentage of GDP in 2023. Source: Eurostat, [Expenditure on social protection as percentage of GDP](#), dataset tps00098.

Data were collected primarily with Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI), with Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) offered to respondents unable to participate online (“offliners”). The target population was the non-institutionalised adult resident population in each country who had a good command of the dominant national language.

Samples were drawn from the IPSOS KnowledgePanel in all countries except Germany, where the infas Mastersample was used. Both panels recruit by probability sampling from address or telephone frames from the resident adult population, which substantially reduces the self-selection problems characteristic of open opt-in panels. In Germany, we disproportionately sampled respondents from East Germany (to allow for more precise estimates for East Germany) and account for this design choice through weighting.

From these panels, random samples were drawn stratified by age, gender, and education. This sampling approach supports inference to the national target populations, subject to coverage, nonresponse, and weighting assumptions, and is less reliant on strong modelling assumptions than self-recruited non-probability online panels (Cornesse et al. 2020).

We obtained ethical approval from the Ethics Review Board of Human-Centered Computing and Cognitive Science at the University of Duisburg-Essen prior to data collection (ID: 2507PWAG7550).

Fieldwork took place from 27 February 2026 to 17 April 2026. The analysis includes 8,066 respondents. This total includes 282 final-instrument early-fieldwork respondents and 7,784 later-fieldwork respondents. The early group received the final questionnaire and is therefore included in the common analysis sample; Appendix Table A8 repeats H1-H6 after excluding it. The within-country design and post-stratification weights are used without European population reweighting.

3.2 Operationalisation of variables

The dependent variable, willingness to contribute to public redistribution, is the mean of three answers from this item

“The state finances public services and benefits in favour of people who live in it. These are paid for by people like you. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Even if I don't benefit from them myself, I am willing to pay for public services and benefits for people in

- my village, town or city,
- {Country}.
- other EU countries who do not live in {Country}.”

Responses range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher values indicating greater willingness to contribute. Public redistribution is used here in the broad sense of collectively financed provision: it refers to financial contributions to public services and benefits rather than to direct cash transfers. We interpret the scale as other-regarding in the broader sense that the benefits of a contribution may extend beyond the individual contributor. Outcomes are observed and never imputed. Survey-weighted Cronbach's alpha is 0.837; country-specific values range from 0.809 to 0.852. Appendix Table A7 reports ordinal-item checks, and Appendix Table A9 reports measurement diagnostics.

The external indicator is the 2024 EQI. Germany's 2024 EQI is available at NUTS1, region id is German NUTS1 and NUTS2 elsewhere. Primary uncertainty nevertheless clusters at respondent NUTS2. Appendix Table A4 reports robustness checks clustering at the hybrid EQI-region level.

For the descriptive within-country analysis, we additionally construct country-demeaned versions of regional EQI and regional willingness to contribute. For each

region, we subtract the corresponding country mean, so that positive values indicate regions above their national average and negative values regions below it. This removes between-country level differences and makes the descriptive comparison correspond more closely to the variation used in our primary models with country fixed effects. The demeaning is used for visualisation and descriptive interpretation; the regression models analogously implement the within-country comparison through country-fixed effects.

Perceived governance quality gives equal weight to two component means: perceived service quality and institutional confidence. Perceived service quality combines 11 items: general service satisfaction (1-5); evaluations of health care, schools, tax authorities, public transport, benefits and employment services, and local administration (1-11); and assessments of fairness, efficiency, prompt help, and integrity (1-5). Each item is rescaled to 0-1 before available-item averaging. Survey-weighted alpha is 0.896, with a country range of 0.882-0.907. Institutional confidence combines trust in parliament, the judiciary, municipal authorities, national government, and the European Commission with satisfaction with democracy. All six items run from 1 to 11 and are rescaled to 0-1 before available-item averaging. Survey-weighted alpha is 0.891, with a country range of 0.827-0.923. Component-level missingness is replaced with the relevant country mean before the two component scores are averaged equally and standardised. Appendix Table A9 reports scale reliability and the relationship between the two perceived-governance components.

H2 tests the combined index and then the components jointly. Appendix Table A10 reports three focused sensitivity indicators: overall public-service satisfaction, domain-specific public-service evaluations, and public-service principle assessments. A focused construct-overlap check rebuilds institutional confidence without satisfaction with democracy and includes satisfaction separately. H3 calculates survey-weighted perceived-governance means in each EQI region and each respondent's deviation from that mean.

For H6, German 2021 NUTS2 EQI is aggregated to NUTS1 using the unweighted arithmetic mean because they are not available. NUTS2 values are retained elsewhere. Change equals harmonised 2024 EQI minus harmonised 2021 EQI; the primary model controls 2021 EQI. Categories define declining as below -0.10, stable as -0.10 through 0.10, and improving as above 0.10. This contextual model tests whether residents of regions with different measured trajectories later report different willingness to contribute, not whether respondents observed or reacted to those trajectories.

3.3 Missing data strategy

The analysis uses a deterministic single-imputation dataset before model estimation. Regression-based imputation replaces 902 missing household-income values and 576 missing ideology values. Smaller residual gaps in controls and perception components are completed with prespecified country means or modal categories, after which the perceived-governance indices are recomputed. Outcomes, survey weights, EQI, and

geography are never imputed. Standardisation constants are calculated once in the imputed analysis dataset and reused in complete-case comparisons.

This is a transparent departure from the preregistration's listwise-primary/multiple-imputation contingency. Deterministic single imputation preserves a common analysis sample and common standardisation across the model matrix, but it is not statistically ideal and does not propagate imputation uncertainty. Cleaned-unimputed complete-case models are therefore reported as sensitivity analyses.

Appendix Table A2 documents raw missingness and deterministic-imputation decisions, and Appendix Table A3 compares complete-case and imputed estimates. Those complete-case estimates are not used to validate the imputation procedure; they show only whether the focal associations are similar under an alternative sample definition. Appendix Table A12 documents the early-fieldwork harmonisation audit for the analysis inputs. The preregistration also named group-specific solidarity and conditional funding outcomes as secondary analyses. These outcomes fall outside the present paper's focus on willingness to contribute to public redistribution and do not inform its hypothesis assessments.

3.4 Analytical estimation strategy

We separate perceived governance quality into each region's weighted mean and each respondent's deviation from that mean. The product of the EQI-to-regional-perception path and the regional-perception-to-public-provision path is an associational decomposition, not a causal mediation estimate.

Weighted OLS models with country fixed effects are primary; otherwise identical pooled models without country indicators appear only in Appendix Table A1. Standard errors cluster at NUTS2. All primary models include the hypothesis-specific predictors together with individual-level controls for age, gender, education, equivalized household income, and migrant background, as well as country fixed effects.

H3 separates regional mean perceived governance quality from individual deviations and simulates 50,000 fixed-seed draws of the product of the EQI-to-regional-perception and between-region perception paths. The bootstrapping technique creates confidence intervals for regional and national measures that are not random samples from an underlying target population.

The preregistered coefficient comparison is supplementary. A region-aggregate model weights regional means by effective regional sample size; Appendix Table A5 reports the complete decomposition and aggregate check. H4 uses 9,999 Webb-weight wild-bootstrap replications clustered on seven countries, plus a country-cluster $t(G-1)$ sensitivity. Because only seven country values identify the moderator, H4 is a limited preregistered contextual extension. Total social-protection expenditure as a percentage of GDP is also an imperfect proxy for welfare state effort because spending reflects

demographics, unemployment, and other compositional conditions. Appendix Table A11 reports H4 and H5 conditional slopes at low, mean, and high moderator values.

Two-sided 95% confidence intervals describe effect-size uncertainty and are the primary basis for ordinary interpretation. For preregistered directional classifications, we additionally report one-sided p-values: a hypothesis is classified as supported when the estimate has the expected direction and one-sided $p < .05$, weak/mixed when it has the expected direction and $.05 \leq \text{one-sided } p < .10$, and otherwise not supported. Estimates in the wrong direction cannot count as supported. H3 uses the simulated indirect interval and H4 the country-cluster wild-bootstrap result.

4. Empirical results: strong positive effects of perceived governance quality and null effects of quality of government without country differences

The empirical analysis follows the structure of the hypotheses. We first describe variation in willingness to contribute to public redistribution and in the regional governance conditions relevant to the analysis. We then turn to the preregistered tests. The central comparison is between external regional governance quality (H1) and citizens' own perception of governance quality (H2). We subsequently examine whether these two levels are connected through regional perceptions (H3), whether their associations vary with welfare state effort or ideology (H4-H5), and whether measured changes in regional governance are related to later willingness to contribute (H6).

4.1 Descriptive patterns: demeaned regional governance quality and regional levels of willingness to contribute

Before evaluating the hypotheses, we briefly describe the main variation in the outcome and in the aggregate regional governance quality measure. Figure 2 shows weighted country means in willingness to contribute to public redistribution. Figure 3 then focuses on the within-country regional variation relevant to H1 by plotting country-demeaned regional governance against country-demeaned willingness to contribute. These figures serve to show the differences in patterns between focussing on level differences within and across countries.

Let us first look at the y-axis that shows the regional means of willingness to contribute. The average willingness to contribute varies visibly across the seven countries, with Sweden and Spain at the upper end of the distribution and Croatia and France at the lower end.

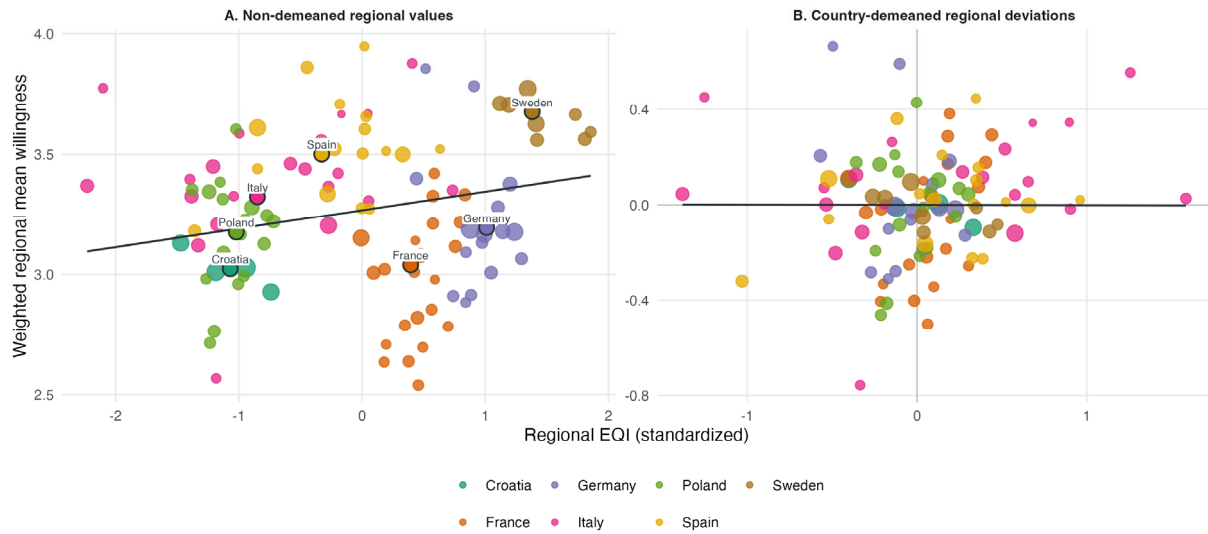


Figure 3. Regional EQI and willingness to contribute to public provision before and after country demeaning. Panel A plots analysis-weighted mean willingness for 105 hybrid EQI regions, defined as NUTS2 regions except Germany's 16 NUTS1 EQI units, against standardized 2024 regional EQI; large labelled points show country means. Panel B plots the corresponding country-demeaned regional deviations. Point sizes reflect summed regional analysis weights, fitted lines are weighted by these regional weights.

The non-demeaned data in Panel A of Figure 3 show a modest positive pooled association between regional governance quality and willingness to contribute. The better governed somebody's region is, the higher the mean willingness to contribute to public provisions. This first pattern of co-variation is also mirrored at the individual-level. When we run a super-simple model at the respondent-level bivariate model without country fixed effects, a one-standard-deviation higher regional EQI is associated with a 0.077-point higher willingness to contribute (95% CI [0.016, 0.139], $p = .014$), equivalent to approximately 0.08 standard deviations in the outcome. Put differently, respondents living in regions two standard deviations apart in EQI would be predicted to differ by about 0.15 points, or 0.16 outcome standard deviations, in willingness to contribute. At first sight, this looks like a confirmation of our hypotheses. However, as we will show, this is only driven by country-level differences. People in better governed countries show more willingness to contribute to public provisions. But we are interested in the intra-country regional variations. Do people in better-governed regions of a country also show higher willingness to contribute to public provisions? As sub-section 4.2 will demonstrate, that is not the case.

4.2 Preregistered hypothesis tests: external and perceived governance show markedly different associations

Figure 4 summarizes the six preregistered hypothesis tests, together with two focused checks of the perceived-governance measure. H1 and H2 provide the paper’s central empirical comparison: H1 tests whether externally measured regional governance is positively associated with willingness to contribute, whereas H2 tests the corresponding association for citizens’ perceptions of governance quality. H3-H6 extend this comparison by examining the perception pathway, contextual and ideological moderation, and measured governance change. We therefore begin with the H1-H2 contrast before turning to these extensions. Full regression models are reported in Appendix Table A13.

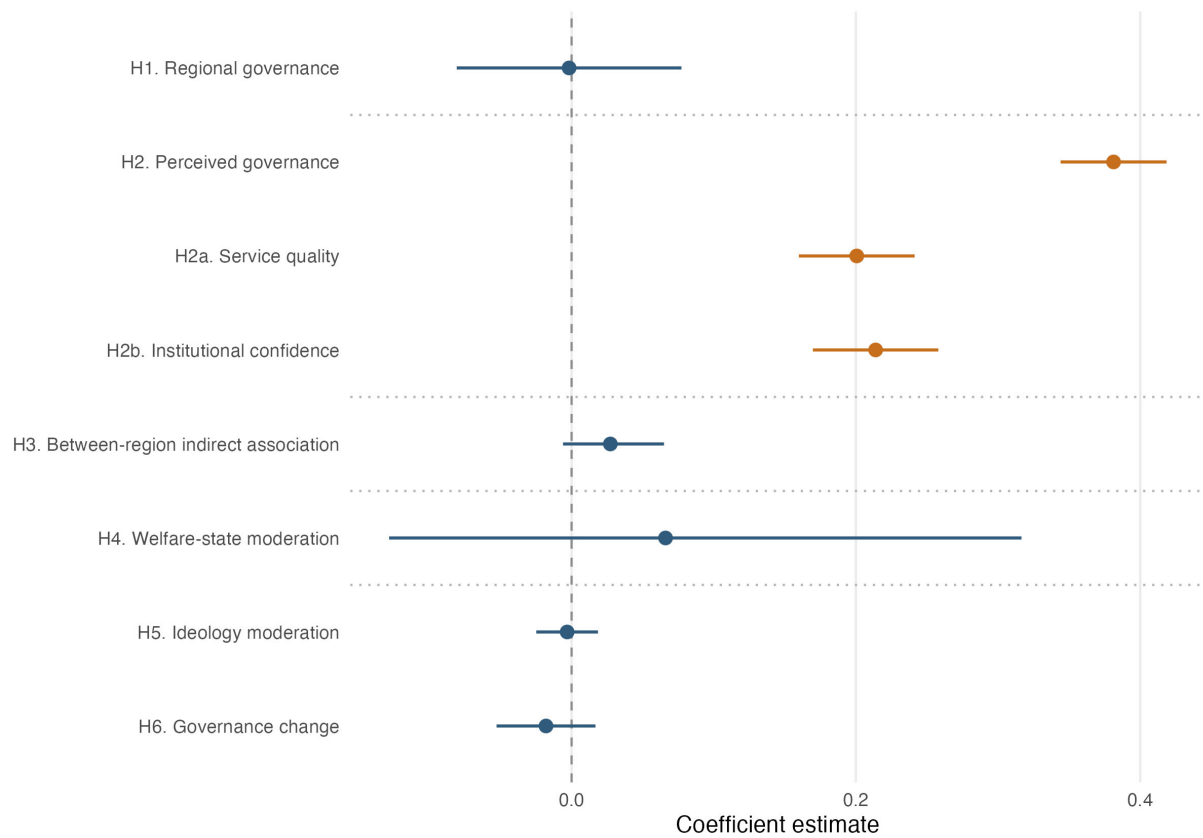


Figure 4. Preregistered hypothesis estimates and focused perceived-governance checks.

Note. Points show coefficient estimates and horizontal lines show 95% intervals. H1-H6 are the preregistered hypothesis tests; service quality and institutional confidence are focused component checks of H2 rather than additional preregistered hypotheses. All specifications use analysis weights, individual-level controls, and country fixed effects. Intervals are based on NUTS2-clustered standard errors except for H3, whose indirect-association interval is based on fixed-seed simulation draws, and H4, which uses wild-bootstrap replications clustered at the country level. Full regression models are reported in Appendix Table A13; the H3 path decomposition is reported in Appendix Table A5.

The central H1-H2 comparison reveals a pronounced asymmetry (Figure 4). We find little evidence of the preregistered positive association between externally measured regional

governance and willingness to contribute: the regional EQI estimate is close to zero ($b = -0.002$, 95% CI $[-0.081, 0.077]$, $p = .966$). By contrast, perceived governance quality is strongly positively associated with willingness to contribute. A one-standard-deviation increase in perceived governance quality is associated with a 0.381-point increase in the outcome (95% CI $[0.344, 0.419]$, $p < .001$), equivalent to approximately 0.40 outcome standard deviations. Under the preregistered directional rule, H2 is classified as supported. The two focused component checks show that both service quality and institutional confidence retain positive associations when entered jointly. The estimated between-region indirect association is positive but uncertain (Figure 4): its simulated 95% interval includes zero ($ab = 0.027$, simulated 95% interval $[-0.006, 0.065]$, two-sided $p = .108$).

The component and appendix checks do not eliminate common-method concerns, but they show that the association is not carried solely by one item family. When satisfaction with democracy was removed from the composite and entered separately, revised perceived governance quality remained associated with willingness to contribute ($b = 0.359$, 95% CI $[0.309, 0.409]$, two-sided $p < .001$), whereas satisfaction's separate coefficient was imprecise. The three sensitivity indicators—overall public-service satisfaction, domain-specific public-service evaluations, and public-service principle assessments—are reported in Appendix Table A10. The municipal, national, and EU contribution-item checks are reported in Appendix Table A7. Excluding the 282 early-fieldwork respondents left H2 substantively unchanged ($b = 0.384$, 95% CI $[0.347, 0.421]$, two-sided $p < .001$).

4.3 Between-region perception-path decomposition

H3 examines whether the two levels considered in H1 and H2 are empirically connected. Specifically, it asks whether higher external regional governance quality is associated with more favourable average regional governance quality perception, and whether those regional perceptions are in turn statistically associated with greater willingness to contribute.

The estimated between-region indirect association is positive, but its simulated 95% interval includes zero ($ab = 0.027$, simulated 95% interval $[-0.006, 0.065]$, two-sided $p = 0.108$). Under the preregistered directional decision rule, the one-sided p -value of 0.054 places it narrowly in the weak/mixed category. Regional mean perceptions and individual deviations are positively associated with willingness to contribute, but the EQI-to-perception path is imprecise. The supplementary coefficient comparison likewise does not identify an explanatory sequence. Full path and aggregate estimates appear in Appendix Table A5.

4.4 No evidence of moderation or of an association with change in governance quality

The remaining three hypotheses examine extensions of the central governance associations. H4 asks whether the external-governance association is stronger in more-effort welfare states, H5 asks whether the perceived-governance association weakens toward the political right, and H6 asks whether improvement in regional governance is associated with greater subsequent willingness to contribute.

For H4, the EQI-by-social-protection-expenditure interaction is positive, but the seven-country Webb wild-bootstrap interval includes zero ($b = 0.066$, 95% CI $[-0.128, 0.316]$, two-sided $p = 0.471$). We do not detect clear evidence that the association varies systematically with welfare state effort, although the comparison is based on only seven country-level values. Conditional slopes appear in Appendix Table A11.

For H5, the perceived-governance-by-ideology interaction is close to zero ($b = -0.003$, 95% CI $[-0.025, 0.019]$, two-sided $p = 0.778$). Simple slopes remain positive at left, middle, and right ideology (Appendix Table A11). We find no clear evidence that the perceived-governance association either weakens or strengthens across ideology. In the cleaned-unimputed model, the interaction is likewise indistinguishable from zero ($b = -0.008$, 95% CI $[-0.030, 0.014]$, $p = 0.485$, $N = 6720$).

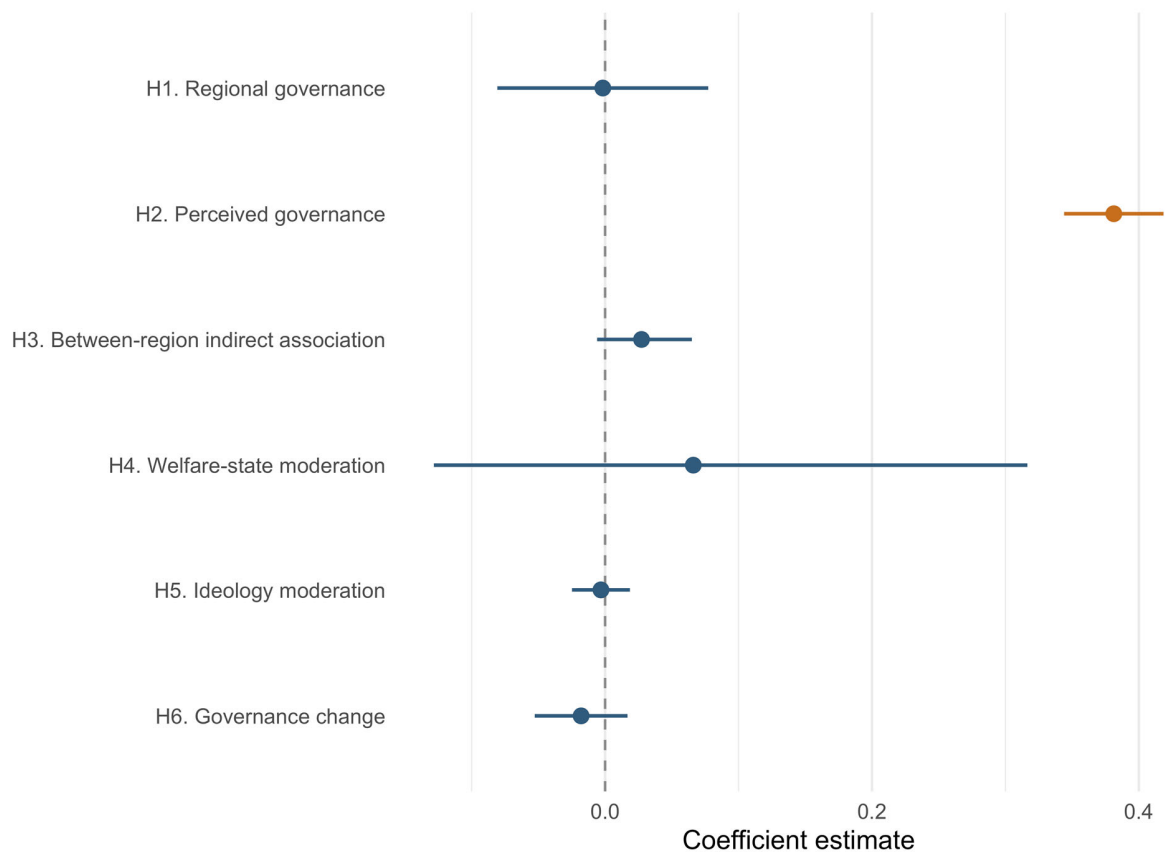


Figure 5. Estimates for the six preregistered tests. Rows show different estimands—direct associations, a between-region product, interaction terms, and a change coefficient—so coefficient magnitudes should not be compared directly.

H3 uses a 50,000-draw simulated interval and H4 a 9,999-replication country-cluster wild-bootstrap interval; the other intervals cluster at NUTS2.

For H6, the baseline-adjusted model shows little evidence of a positive association between measured 2021-2024 regional EQI trajectory and willingness to contribute reported in 2026 ($b = -0.018$, 95% CI $[-0.053, 0.017]$, two-sided $p = 0.311$). It does not test whether respondents perceived or responded to the contextual change. The no-baseline and categorical results also did not form the predicted pattern (Appendix Table A6).

Taken together, the preregistered tests provide support for H2, weak/mixed directional evidence for H3 under the preregistered classification rule, and no support for H1 or H4-H6. The central empirical pattern is therefore not a general relationship between externally measured regional governance and willingness to contribute. Rather, it is the much stronger association between citizens' perception of governance quality and willingness to contribute, an association that remains visible across several alternative operationalisations but cannot be given a causal interpretation in this design.

5. Conclusions

The central empirical divergence is clear: people who evaluated government and public services more favourably expressed substantially greater willingness to contribute to public redistribution, whereas external regional governance quality showed little evidence of a comparable positive within-country association. This does not establish that subjective perceptions are superior to external indicators. It shows that, in this design, the two governance measures have very different empirical relationships with the outcome and should not be used interchangeably without attention to level, timing, source, geography, and construction.

Several explanations are compatible with this pattern. Governance quality perception may be politically proximate to attitudes about contributions because they summarize service experiences and confidence in public institutions. Citizens may also respond more to personal or national institutional experience than to regional administrative quality, especially if they know little about regional governance or attribute public provision to national politics. The EQI measure of external regional governance quality may have insufficient geographic or temporal correspondence to individual attitudes, and Germany's NUTS1 EQI geography is coarser than the NUTS2 geography used elsewhere. These explanations are not mutually exclusive.

The same proximity that makes perceptions politically relevant creates the paper's main inferential vulnerability. Perceived governance quality and willingness to contribute are contemporaneous self-reports about public institutions. Their association may partly reflect political trust, satisfaction with the system, acquiescence or positive response style, ideological or dispositional optimism, or reverse direction in which respondents who

support public provision evaluate institutions more favourably. Common source does not automatically invalidate a relationship, but it requires explicit construct and method scrutiny (Podsakoff et al. 2003; Conway and Lance 2010). Cross-national response styles provide an additional reason for caution (Baumgartner and Steenkamp 2001). The component, satisfaction-exclusion, item-family, and complete-case checks narrow some simple explanations, but they cannot identify causal direction or remove shared response tendencies.

This distinction is consistent with Devine's (2025) causal evidence that political trust need not have meaningful effects on redistribution preferences. The present H2 result is a strong cross-sectional association, not evidence that improving political trust or perceived governance quality would increase willingness to contribute. That caution is part of the contribution: observational studies can reveal politically important alignment between evaluations and public-provision attitudes while still leaving the causal status of that alignment open.

The null ideology interaction indicates that the perception association remained positive across the left-right distribution. Given the competing logic in Rudolph and Evans (2005), this result is best read as neither a meaningful weakening nor a meaningful strengthening by ideology. The seven-country H4 extension is intrinsically limited, and the spending proxy does not isolate welfare state effort. Its wild-bootstrap result should therefore be read as uncertainty, not proof of no contextual moderation.

Future research could measure branch-specific exposure to public services and institutions, then test whether perceived quality of the institutions respondents personally encounter correspond more closely to willingness to contribute than broad regional indicators do. This would connect institutional experience to willingness to contribute to public redistribution without presuming that a general perception composite identifies the direction of influence.

The dependent variable is also narrower than some redistribution language implies. The three items concern contributions to public services and benefits across territorial levels; they do not constitute a pure measure of interpersonal income redistribution, and respondents may themselves benefit from the provision they support. Perceptions and willingness to contribute come from the same survey at the same time, leaving common-method variance, conceptual proximity, unobserved dispositions, and reverse direction unresolved. Formal cross-national measurement invariance was not tested. Regional EQI is measured at a coarser German geography than elsewhere, and only seven countries identify the H4 moderator. H6 compares two contextual cross-sections and cannot show that respondents observed or reacted to change. Deterministic single imputation preserves the common analysis sample but understates missing-data uncertainty.

Across seven European countries, citizens' perception of governance quality was strongly associated with willingness to contribute to public redistribution, whereas an external regional governance quality indicator showed little evidence of a comparable positive

within-country association. This does not prove measurement non-equivalence in general. It shows that these measures exhibit very different empirical relationships in this design and should not be used interchangeably without attention to level, timing, source, geography, and measurement construction.

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