

Experiencing Fictitious States in an Experimental Text-Based Narrative Environment: The Effects of Public Sector Quality and Corruption on Attitudes

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Abstract

How do citizens update their views of the state after repeated encounters with public administration? We study this question with a narrative vignette experiment embedded in Novaland, a fictional virtual state in which participants experience a sequence of service encounters. The design varies whether public services are delivered effectively, poorly, or poorly with an option to pay a petty bribe. The results show that citizens distinguish between capacity and integrity signals. Poor service delivery increases support for additional spending in the affected domain, consistent with a repair logic, but corruption weakens that response. Repeated corrupt encounters do not generate broader demand for welfare spending and substantially reduce trust in government. The paper contributes to public administration research on public encounters, administrative performance, corruption, and citizen-state relations by showing how frontline service experiences can produce targeted support for repair while eroding broader confidence in the state.

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Keywords: public administration; public service delivery; petty corruption; trust in government; public spending; citizen-state relations

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Citizens often meet the state through public encounters: applying for documents, seeking childcare, accessing health care, or navigating other frontline services (K. Bartels, 2013; Goodsell, 1981; Lahusen et al., 2026). These encounters are administrative transactions, but they are also signals about whether public authority is capable, fair, and worth supporting. A disappointing encounter may lead citizens to demand resources for the failed service, while repeated failures, especially corrupt ones, may erode trust in government. This paper studies that tension between a domain-specific repair logic and longer-term erosion of trust.

We examine the causal link between service quality, petty corruption during service access, support for public spending, and trust in government. Empirically, we use narrative vignettes embedded in Novaland, a fictional virtual state in which participants experience a sequence of administrative encounters and which can be adapted to any institutional and bureaucratic set-up imaginable. The design lets us test a question that is difficult to answer with conventional surveys: how do citizens react when administrative performance problems accumulate over time?

The results show that citizens do not simply punish a poor administration by withdrawing support. After a poor service encounter, participants become more supportive of additional spending in that specific policy domain. Yet corruption changes this reaction: when poor delivery is accompanied by the option to pay a bribe, spending support still increases, but significantly less. Over repeated encounters, negative and corrupt experiences do not translate into higher general welfare-spending demand, while corruption clearly undermines trust in government.

These dynamics matter for regulatory governance because service encounters are a key site where citizens experience the administrative state (Lahusen et al., 2026). Poor performance can be read as a capacity problem that might be repaired through investment. Petty corruption is an integrity problem: access depends not on rights and rules, but on informal payments. The

distinction is especially important in high-capacity democracies, where even rare failures violate strong expectations of impartial service delivery.

The empirical challenge is that poor or corrupt encounters are rare in well-functioning states and observationally confounded by place, socioeconomic status, and prior experience. Standard vignettes improve causal identification but usually isolate a single hypothetical episode. They cannot show how citizens update attitudes across a sequence of encounters.

We address this challenge with a preregistered narrative experiment in which about 1,600 Germany-based participants experience consecutive service encounters in Novaland. The design lets us separate immediate reactions to one administrative episode from cumulative reactions to repeated capacity and integrity signals.

The paper contributes to public administration research in three ways. First, it studies repeated public encounters rather than one-off evaluations of government performance. Second, it separates poor service quality from petty corruption, a street-level integrity failure that may appear to "grease the wheel" while violating impartiality. Third, it shows that citizens distinguish between domain-specific repair, broader welfare-spending preferences, and trust in government. These distinctions help explain why service failures may produce targeted support for improvement without generating broader confidence in the state.

The findings highlight why public managers should treat capacity failures and integrity failures differently. Visible underperformance can create support for repairing specific services, but corrupt access changes the meaning of failure and threatens the trust needed to sustain public administration.

Theoretical Framework: The Imagined Contract Model of Citizen–State Relations

We propose an Imagined Contract Model to explain how citizens interpret encounters with public administration. Citizens are expected to comply with rules, pay taxes, and support collective institutions; in return, the state is expected to provide services that are sufficiently effective, fair, and impartial. This contract is "imagined" because it is not a formal agreement and is only partly enforceable. What matters politically is therefore not only whether services are delivered, but whether citizens perceive the state as honoring its side of the relationship.

Service encounters are central to this imagined contract because they make the state visible in everyday life (K. Bartels, 2013; Goodsell, 1981; Hupe & Hill, 2007). Citizens rarely observe administrative capacity or integrity directly. Instead, they infer them from concrete interactions: whether a kindergarten place is available, whether a doctor appointment can be obtained, whether a passport is issued on time, or whether access depends on informal payments. These encounters update beliefs about capacity, fairness, and reciprocity.

The model builds on social contract approaches to legitimacy and state performance (Levi, 1997; Rothstein, 2021), and on work that treats impartiality and procedural fairness as central to legitimate public authority (Levi et al., 2009; Rothstein & Teorell, 2008). Its purpose here is not to reconstruct social contract theory, but to specify how citizens update political attitudes after concrete administrative experiences. A single poor encounter may increase support for additional spending if citizens interpret the problem as low capacity. Repeated failures or corrupt encounters should weaken trust because they suggest that the state cannot, or will not, provide services fairly and effectively.

Low service quality and petty corruption are distinct administrative failures. Low quality signals that the state may lack capacity or resources, but it can still be interpreted as a repairable

problem within the imagined contract. Petty corruption is different. It signals that access to public services depends on informal payments rather than equal treatment. In this sense, corruption is not merely a more severe version of poor quality. It is an integrity failure that changes what the service encounter means.

Fellow citizens may also matter because citizens infer whether others comply with shared rules. If bribery is perceived as common, citizens may feel less bound by the idea that public services are allocated impartially. In our empirical design, the social-norm component tests whether information about others' willingness to bribe changes reactions to service encounters, but it is not the central contribution of the paper.

Figure 1 summarizes the imagined contract as a relationship among the individual citizen, the state, and fellow citizens.

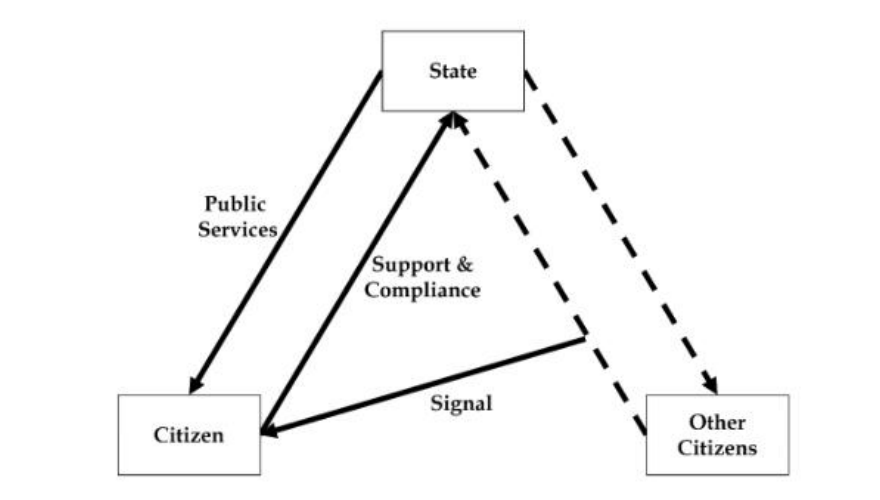


Figure 1: The Imagined Contract Model

How Citizens Respond to State Performance

When analysing how citizens respond to poor public-service delivery, it is important to distinguish between immediate reactions to a single encounter and cumulative updating after repeated encounters. A single negative experience does not necessarily undermine trust in government. Citizens may treat it as an isolated failure, or as evidence that the service domain is under-resourced. In that case, poor service delivery can increase support for additional spending in the affected domain: citizens may want the state to repair the service rather than withdraw support from it. This immediate response is especially plausible where exit is difficult and administrative burdens make public services hard to avoid (Moynihan et al., 2015).

Repeated negative encounters should work differently (compare the notion of administrative limbo by Kleizen et al., 2025). When poor service delivery recurs across several domains, citizens receive a broader signal about state capacity. The problem becomes harder to interpret as a one-off failure or a temporary shortage. Instead, repeated failures may suggest that the administration is generally unable to deliver services effectively. This cumulative updating should weaken trust in government and may reduce broader support for financing the state. The key theoretical distinction is therefore between a short-term repair logic, in which citizens respond to poor service by demanding more resources for the affected service, and a longer-term erosion logic, in which repeated failures undermine confidence in the state's capacity and reciprocity.

This kind of increased willingness to fund public services, even after personal disappointment (Stewart et al., 2025), reflects support for repair rather than generalized enthusiasm for state expansion. Supporting public spending becomes a way to reaffirm that access to essential services should be maintained when a specific public service fails.

Trust and Long-Term Expectations

State performance directly affects political trust. When public services meet expectations, citizens are more likely to view the government as competent and fair (Armesto, 2021; Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2025; Hardin, 2006; Hetherington, 2005; Kumlin, 2004; Kumlin & Haugsgjerd, 2017; van de Walle & Bouckaert, 2003; Zhang et al., 2022). Even in the absence of corruption, high institutional quality can increase generalized trust (Martinangeli et al., 2024). This, in turn, fosters willingness to comply with tax obligations, which is crucial for funding functioning public services (Yamamura, 2014).

Over time, however, repeated negative experiences can erode trust. Citizens form a general impression of state capacity, a “running tally” based on past interactions with public services (Christensen & Lægreid, 2005), similar to the idea of running tallies in party identification (Bartels, 2002; Campbell et al., 1960). As this tally worsens, people may grow sceptical about whether the system is fair and effective. Their confidence in shared obligations within the state weakens, and they become less willing to contribute. Some shift from collective solutions, like paying taxes, to private strategies, such as using personal connections or bribes to secure services. Instead of demanding reform, they adapt to dysfunction by withdrawing from the imagined contract.

Experiences of Corruption and the Erosion of Trust

Corruption often plays a key role in this erosion of trust, especially when it affects service delivery directly. We focus on petty service-access corruption in which citizens are offered an informal payment as a way to obtain faster or better access to a service. This is an immediate and visible integrity failure: it signals that access depends not on rights but on personal transactions, undermining the idea of impartial treatment (Morris & Klesner, 2010; Rothstein & Teorell, 2008).

Yet this type of corruption is also more ambiguous than grand corruption. It may appear to give citizens agency in an otherwise frustrating service encounter: by paying, they can “grease the wheel” and obtain an outcome closer to the one they expected (also see Mizrahi & Bar, 2026). This ambiguity matters for our expectations. It helps explain why corrupt service encounters may erode trust while still producing a weaker effect on spending preferences than plain low-quality service delivery. Citizens may see corruption as institutional failure, but also as an imperfect workaround within a failing system.

These effects may become stronger as corrupt encounters accumulate. Each corrupt encounter may reinforce the expectation that public authority is not applied impartially. Over time, citizens may lose confidence that public services are worth financing and that government can be trusted to deliver services fairly and effectively.

Political ideology as a Moderator

The imagined contract is a highly subjective phenomenon. Its workings are thus likely to be moderated by underlying political orientations. While all citizens form impressions of state performance, political ideology shapes how they interpret them. Left–right orientation influences reactions to breaches of the imagined contract (Baron & Jost, 2019; Jost, 2021). Right-leaning individuals are more likely to view poor performance as evidence of state inefficiency and respond by becoming less willing to fund public services. In contrast, left-leaning individuals may interpret the same failures as signs of underinvestment and call for more state involvement to restore the system’s original promise.

Based on this model, we distinguish between three expectations. The first concerns immediate reactions to a specific service encounter. The second concerns cumulative reactions after several encounters. The third concerns whether these reactions depend on bribery norms and

ideology. For clarity, the second expectation should be separated into two outcomes, because general welfare-spending demand and trust in government capture different kinds of updating.

- 1. In the short term, negative public-service experiences increase domain-specific support for more spending in the affected service domain. Corrupt experiences should also increase such support relative to positive experiences, but less strongly than non-corrupt negative experiences.**

When citizens have a negative experience with a public service, they often assume the problem is due to a lack of resources. Since they cannot easily turn to private alternatives, they respond by becoming more willing to fund public services in that specific area—for example, healthcare, education, or administrative services. Citizens seem to take the investment perspective on the public sector and give the state the benefit of the doubt if they have a general conviction that the state can be a capable actor. However, when the negative experience also involves corruption, they begin to see the system as unfair. This tension—wanting to fix the service but distrusting the system—weakens their willingness to fund public services. The conviction that the state is a capable actor is eroded by these experiences.

- 2. Prop. 2a. Over repeated encounters, negative or corrupt public-service experiences reduce general demand for welfare spending.**
Prop. 2b. Over repeated encounters, negative or corrupt public-service experiences reduce trust in government, with stronger effects expected for corrupt encounters than for non-corrupt negative encounters.

As disappointments accumulate across different service areas, citizens lose faith in the fairness and effectiveness of the state. This weakens their willingness to support welfare spending more broadly. Corruption, in particular, undermines the belief that the system is worth financing. Similarly, trust in government declines as negative experiences pile up. While a single failure

may not have much effect, repeated poor or corrupt encounters lead to a significant drop in trust.

3. Moderation by bribery norms and ideology

Perceived bribery norms and political orientation moderate how citizens react to service-quality experiences, and these moderators operate differently for negative versus corrupt experiences.

Prop. 3a (Bribery norms). The negative effect of corrupt service encounters on trust in government and support for welfare spending is stronger when citizens believe that bribing is common; this moderation should be weak or absent for non-corrupt negative encounters. Individuals take their observation of what others are doing into consideration before engaging in a social action. In our contract model, they observe whether other parties comply with their own contracts with the state. If they receive a signal that citizens use bribes to advance personal interests, we expect them to react even more strongly to corrupt experiences when accessing public services.

Prop. 3b (Ideology). Political orientation moderates reactions to non-corrupt negative service failures through attribution: left-leaning citizens are more likely to interpret failures as underinvestment and therefore increase support for spending, whereas right-leaning citizens are more likely to interpret failures as inefficiency and therefore decrease support. Corrupt encounters should reduce trust in government more broadly across the ideological spectrum than non-corrupt failures.

The theoretical scope conditions of the Imagined Contract Model are citizens in mature liberal-democratic welfare states with extensive public services and relatively strong expectations of impartial administration. We would expect different reactions in authoritarian settings, where citizens may interpret public services through a different logic of dependence, coercion, or

clientelism. We would also expect different reactions in liberal democracies with much smaller welfare states, where citizens may have weaker expectations that the state should provide broad public services.

Methodological Framework

Introducing the Narrative Framework

We use a narrative experimental framework in which service-encounter vignettes are embedded in a coherent fictional state. Rather than presenting participants with disconnected scenarios, we introduce them to Novaland and ask them to act as citizens during a compressed nine-day period. Over that period, they make decisions and repeatedly interact with public and private service providers.

Compared to standard online vignette studies, this approach has three advantages for public administration research. It makes service encounters concrete and sequential, reduces the risk that participants evaluate each vignette as an isolated survey item, and allows us to study the accumulation of performance signals over time. The narrative design is very flexible and allows to create textual experiences from real-life or hypothetical scenarios drawn from thought experiments (see Levi-Faur, Forthcoming).

This design has limits. Like conventional vignette and lab experiments, Novaland identifies causal effects within a controlled setting rather than directly observing real-world administrative behavior. We do not claim that behavior in Novaland directly predicts behavior in actual encounters with public administration. Our more modest claim is that the design tests whether participants respond to experimentally varied service encounters in theoretically expected ways within a coherent institutional narrative. Replication in other institutional and linguistic contexts would be needed to assess how far the mechanisms travel.

The Structure of Participants' Experience in Novaland

The narrative vignettes are embedded in a simulated nine-day period in the life of a citizen of Novaland (see Figure 2 and Supplementary Information, Appendix S1.1). Participants first encounter non-political smokescreen situations and a newspaper quiz, then receive four service vignettes in randomized order. Later they answer questions about trust in Novaland's government, general welfare-state spending, and related political attitudes.

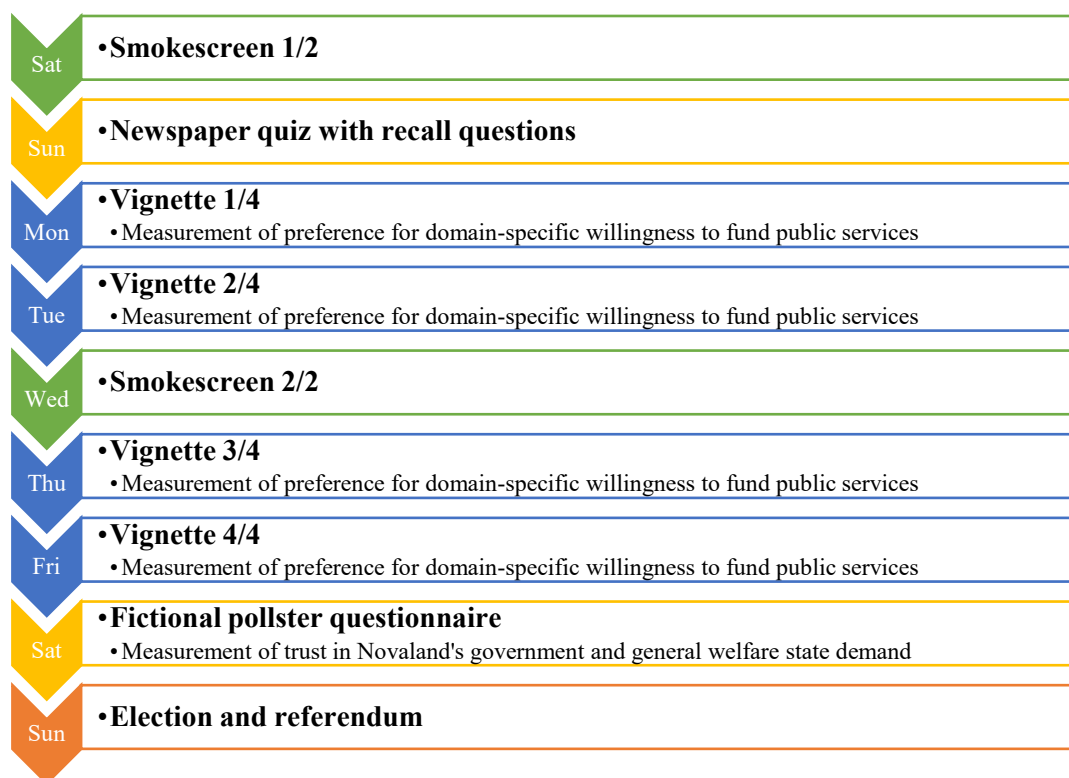


Figure 2: Structure of the experience in Novaland

We created four vignettes that reflect common service encounters and vary whether the service outcome is positive, negative, or corrupt. The three state-related vignettes involve kindergarten placement, a doctor appointment, and passport renewal. A private washing-machine technician vignette serves as a placebo-like comparison. The original German texts, representative screenshots, and supplementary models are provided in Supplementary Information, Appendices S1.2, S1.3 and S2.

Figure 3 shows a screenshot of one vignette. The vignettes were mostly text-based and included a picture to increase participants' transportation into the situation described. The original German version can be found in Supplementary Information, Appendix S1.2.

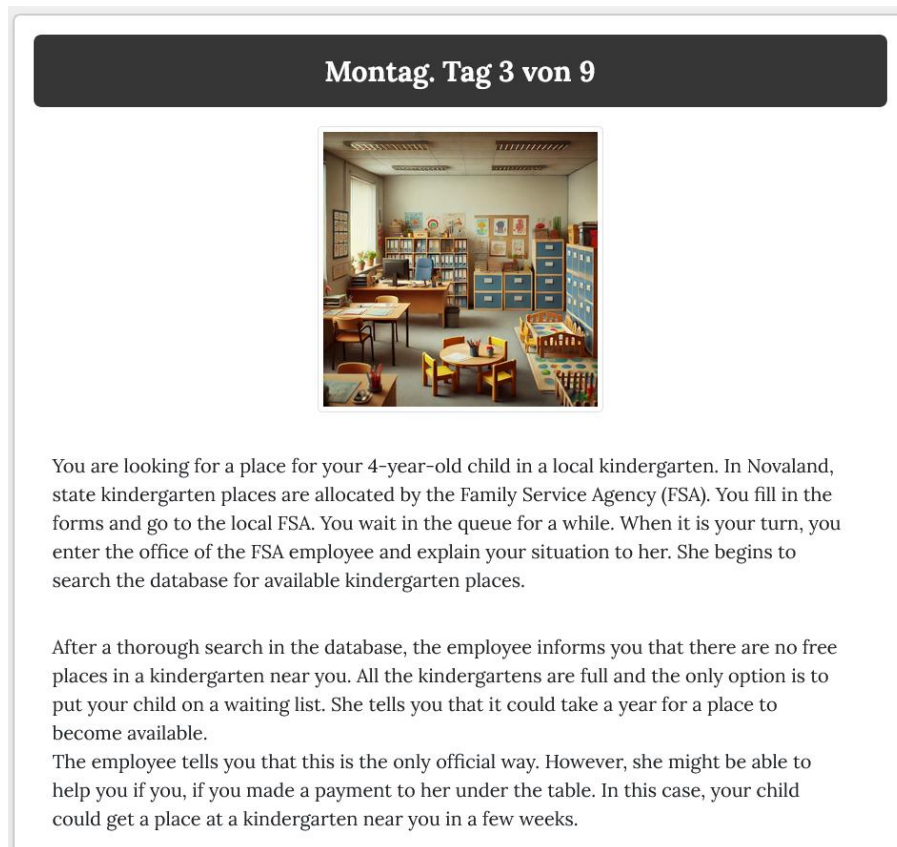


Figure 3: Screenshot of the kindergarten vignette with corrupt service quality translated to English (the original German version can be found in Supplementary Information, Appendix S1.2)

The vignettes capture theoretically relevant variation: whether the service is provided by the state or by a private actor, whether realistic exit options exist, and whether the service belongs to the redistributive welfare state. This variation allows us to examine whether citizens respond specifically to public administration or whether negative service experiences produce a more general dissatisfaction effect.

Table 1 provides an overview of the four vignettes, describing the quality of the service that we varied experimentally and the three possible outcomes – positive, negative, and negative and corrupt – that participants were exposed to.

Table 1: Overview of all four vignette situations embedded in the Novaland experience

	<i>Public Services</i>		<i>Private Service</i>	
	Welfare state		Non-welfare state	
<i>Vignette scenario</i>	Kindergarten placement	Doctor's appointment	Issuing new passport	Technician service for broken washing machine
<i>Quality of service</i>	Availability of places in local kindergartens	Availability of doctoral appointments	Processing time of passport issuing	Availability of the technician's appointments for fixing the private washing machine
<i>Positive</i>	Getting a place in a local kindergarten this year	Getting a doctor's appointment within three weeks	Receiving a new passport within a few weeks, on time for an already paid international vacation	The technician repairs the washing machine within five days
<i>Negative</i>	Not getting a place in a local kindergarten and having to wait until next year	Getting a doctor's appointment after three months	Receiving a new passport after several months and thus too late to go on an already paid international vacation	The technician repairs the washing machine after several weeks
<i>Negative and corrupt</i>	Not getting a place in a local kindergarten and having to wait until next year, unless paying a bribe	Getting a doctor's appointment after three months, unless paying a bribe	Receiving a new passport after several months and thus too late to go on an already paid international vacation, unless paying a bribe	The technician repairs the washing machine after several weeks, unless paying a bribe

We use a mixed within-subject/between-subject variation. Each participant was exposed to the same four vignettes, but the quality of services described in these vignettes varied. We randomly assigned participants to different combinations of outcomes of each quality to measure the cumulative effects of service quality on political attitudes. We call these combinations “decks”. Each deck corresponds to a different level of state performance.⁵

We deliberately restricted randomization to six “decks” that map onto substantively meaningful and plausible state-performance profiles. This restriction preserved adequate per-deck cell sizes while allowing us to compare isolated versus repeated failures and non-corrupt versus corrupt service problems. Table 2 summarizes the logic of each deck.

Table 2. Experimental Decks and Their Role in Testing Immediate and Cumulative Service-Experience Effects

Deck profile	Pos	Neg	Cor	Treatment logic	Main hypothesis tested
Fully efficient	4	0	0	Baseline condition in which all services are delivered effectively and without corruption.	Reference category for cumulative effects on trust and general welfare-spending demand.
Mostly efficient	3	1	0	One isolated low-quality service encounter in an otherwise well-functioning state.	Tests whether a single negative encounter affects domain-specific spending preferences without necessarily reducing general trust.
Mostly efficient with corruption	3	0	1	One isolated corrupt service encounter in an otherwise well-functioning state.	Tests whether a single corrupt encounter differs from a single non-corrupt service failure.
Mixed	2	1	1	Participants experience both non-corrupt poor service quality and petty service-access corruption.	Tests whether citizens distinguish between capacity failure and integrity failure within the same broader service environment.
Mostly inefficient	1	3	0	Repeated low-quality public-service encounters without corruption.	Tests cumulative effects of repeated poor service delivery on trust and general welfare-spending demand.
Mostly corrupt	1	0	3	Repeated corrupt service encounters.	Tests whether repeated petty corruption has stronger cumulative effects on trust than repeated non-corrupt low-quality service delivery.

This deck structure allows us to distinguish immediate and cumulative responses to service delivery. The mostly efficient and mostly efficient-with-corruption decks capture the effect of a single adverse encounter against an otherwise positive service environment. The mostly inefficient and mostly corrupt decks capture cumulative exposure to repeated failures. The mixed deck allows us to compare low-quality and corrupt encounters within the same participant experience. Together, the decks allow us to test whether citizens react differently to capacity failures and integrity failures, and whether these reactions remain domain-specific or accumulate into broader evaluations of government.

Minimizing Demand Effects and Maximizing Participant Engagement

To reduce demand effects and support the immersive setting, the Novaland sequence included ordinary non-state smokescreen situations, such as choosing a pet or a restaurant. Supplementary Information, Appendix S1.2 provides the original German texts and associated image assets. Post-survey responses and behavioral indicators suggest that participants were engaged while still bringing their real-world attitudes into the experience.

Description of Dependent and Independent Variables

Within each vignette, our main dependent variable was participants' domain-specific support for public spending. We use this term rather than "willingness to pay" because the item asks whether the state should spend more or less money in the relevant domain, while reminding respondents that higher expenditure can also require higher taxes. The measure therefore captures support for additional public spending in the specific service domain, not a direct individual payment decision.

After all vignettes, we measured respondents' political attitudes towards Novaland as a whole. We measured general demand for welfare spending on an 11-point Likert scale and rescaled to range from -0.5 to 0.5. -0.5 is a preference for lowering taxes and reducing social benefits and +0.5 represents a preference for raising taxes and increasing social benefits. Trust in government was measured on an 11-point scale, rescaled to range from 0 to 1 (0 = '*Don't trust at all*', 1 = '*Complete trust*').

We also included binary variables on whether participants had received information of the social norm on bribing in Novaland at the beginning of their fictional stay and whether participants had previously had experiences with on-the-spot corruption in real-life. Control variables included participants' age, gender, education, employment, income, and real-life political orientation on the left-right scale (recoded as: "Left" [1-4], "Middle" [5-7, reference category], "Right" [8-11]).

Recruitment and Data Quality Checks

For the main online data collection, we recruited 1,630 German-speaking participants based in Germany via CloudResearch's Prime Panels between 3 and 10 October 2024. CloudResearch's Sentry application screened for bots, language skills, and attentiveness before entry, and we additionally excluded participants who failed comprehension checks embedded in our questionnaire. The study was implemented in oTree (Chen et al., 2016) and hosted on Heroku. Socio-demographic distributions are reported in SI Table 3.

Empirical Results

Evaluating Proposition 1: Do Negative or Corrupt Experiences Increase Domain-Specific Willingness to Fund Public Services?

Proposition 1 expects individuals to become more willing to fund a public service after a negative or corrupt rather than positive encounter in that domain, with a smaller increase for corrupt than for non-corrupt negative encounters. Figure 4 shows the estimated effects of negative and corrupt service quality on domain-specific spending support. The models are random-intercept OLS models with standard errors clustered at the participant level and controls for age, gender, income, education, employment, and political left-right orientation. Consistent with the first part of our proposition, participants who encountered a negative quality service indicated a significant 16 percentage-points higher support for state spending than those who experienced a positive service. The second part of the proposition is also supported: Participants who experienced corrupt services supported state spending significantly more by about 11 percentage-points, compared to those who experienced a positive service. The effect of corrupt services is significantly smaller than the effect of negative service quality.

Both treatment effects are substantially larger than the largest significant effects of our control variables (the underlying model including all control variables can be found in SI Table 2, Domain-Specific Willingness to Fund Public Services Model 1). The effects are robust in several alternative model specifications (see SI Table 2).

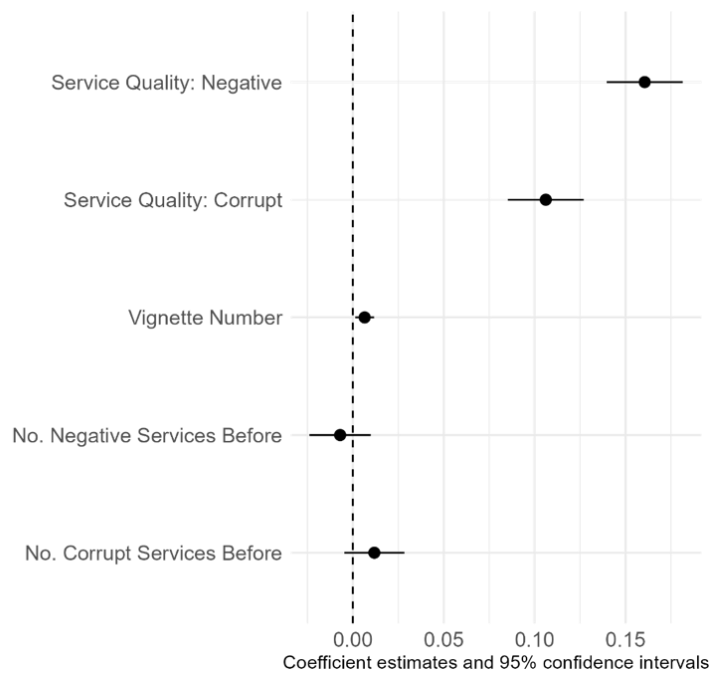


Figure 4: Effects of Service Quality and Vignette Position on Domain-Specific Willingness to Fund Public Services

We find null effects for the number of negative and corrupt service-quality experiences before the current vignette. This suggests participants evaluated domain-specific spending support mainly in relation to the current service encounter, not prior vignettes. Participants are predicted to support state spending by about 2 percentage points more in the last vignette than in the first, which may indicate that longer immersion increased concern for Novaland.⁶

Evaluating Proposition 2: Does Public-Service Quality have Cumulative Effects on Demand for General Welfare Spending and Trust in Government?

We now examine the cumulative effects of service quality on demand for general welfare spending (Prop. 2a) and trust in government (Prop. 2b). We estimated our models using OLS with heteroskedasticity-consistent (HC2) standard errors, and included the same control variables as in the models above (see Models 1 to 3 in SI Table 4 and SI Table 5, respectively). Against our expectations, negative and corrupt service-quality experiences do not significantly increase general welfare-spending demand. This null finding is substantively important. Participants do not simply generalize from concrete administrative failures to broader demand for welfare-state expansion. Instead, they distinguish between a specific service that may need repair and the overall level of welfare spending in Novaland.

In contrast, the number of positive experiences has a small but significant negative effect on general welfare-spending demand. One interpretation is that repeated positive encounters make participants perceive existing service provision as adequate, reducing the perceived need for additional spending. This result strengthens the central distinction of the paper: citizens react differently to domain-specific service problems, general welfare spending, and trust in government.

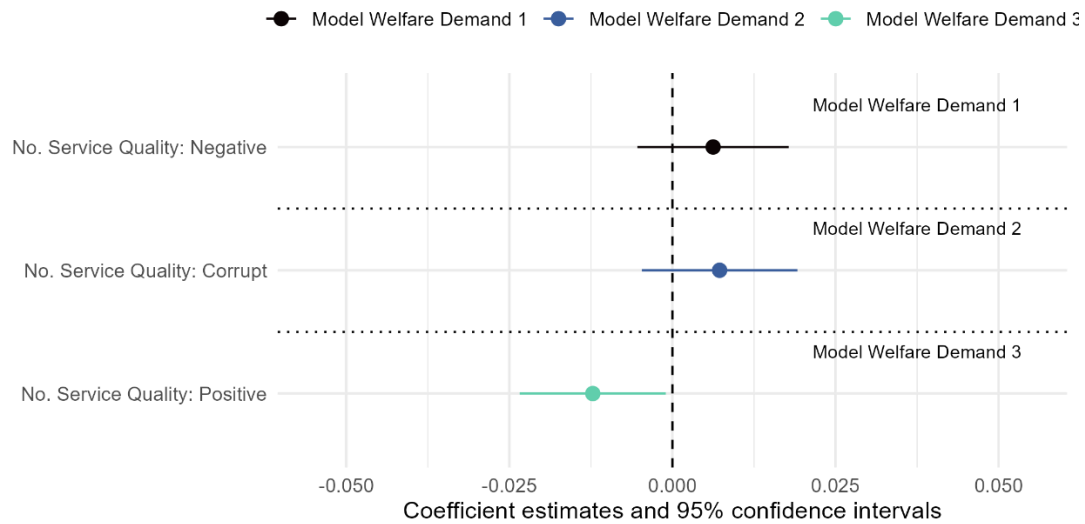


Figure 5: Effect of the number of service-quality experiences on general welfare demand (Prop. 2a).

Note: In the respective models of this plot, we controlled for age, gender, income, education, employment status, and political left–right orientation. The respective models can be found in SI Table 4, Welfare Demand Models 1 to 3.

Repeated negative and corrupt public-service experiences do erode trust in government. The effect is modest for non-corrupt negative experiences but substantially larger for corrupt encounters. This contrast is theoretically important: poor service quality can still be interpreted as a capacity problem, but petty corruption signals that the rules of access are themselves compromised. The trust results therefore provide the clearest evidence that integrity failures have cumulative political costs.

In real life, comparable trust dynamics would likely unfold over longer periods. The narrative experiment compresses that process and allows us to observe its early causal logic: repeated poor and especially corrupt encounters gradually reduce confidence in government.

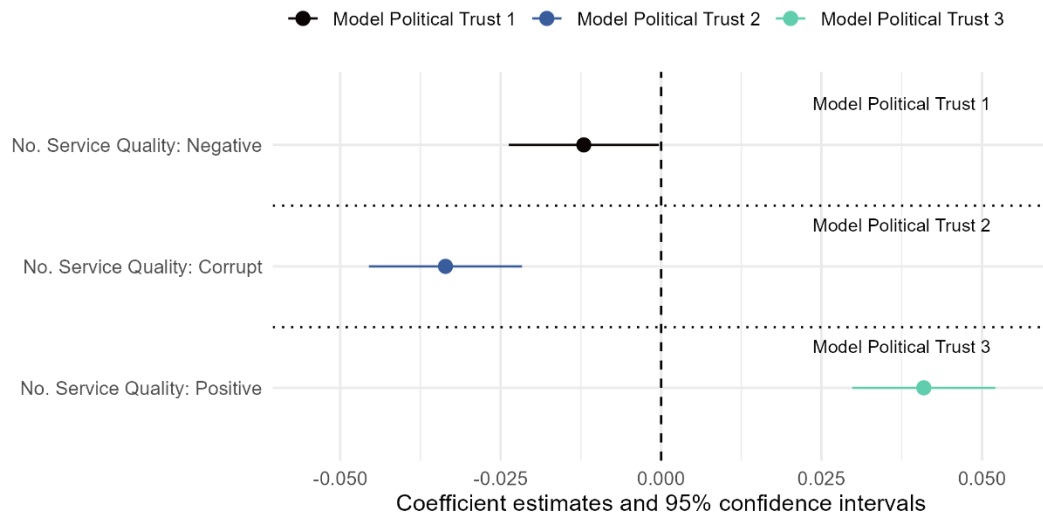


Figure 6: Effect of number of service-quality experiences on trust in government (Prop. 2b)

Note: In the respective models of this plot, we controlled for the following variables: age, gender, income, education, employment status, and political left-right orientation. The respective models can be found in SI Table 5, Trust in Government Models 1 to 3.

Evaluating Proposition 3: Do Social Norms on Bribing and Political Orientation Shape Reactions to Public-Service Quality?

With our third proposition, we expected social norms on bribing and participants' political orientation to affect how participants respond to negative or corrupt public-service experiences. We first investigate the effects of the social norm on bribing treatment on participants' reactions to public-service quality. Remember that treated participants received the information that a majority of fellow citizens in Novaland thought it acceptable to bribe in order to get better access to public services. Those in the control condition did not receive any information on norms of bribing.

We find no evidence that the social-norm treatment changes reactions to service quality. Neither the treatment itself nor its interaction with service-quality conditions significantly affects domain-specific spending support. This null result should be presented as a boundary condition rather than as a failed auxiliary story: direct service encounters appear to dominate abstract information about what other citizens may do.

Similarly, we see an overall null effect of the social norm treatment on trust in government and the demand for general welfare spending, as well as no significant interactions with the service-quality treatment conditions. Likelihood-ratio tests reveal no significant improvement of the model fit when including the direct or interaction effect of the social norm treatment ($p = 0.52, 0.58, 0.63$, and 0.75 ; see SI Table 12).

We find a small direct effect of political orientation on support for domain-specific willingness to fund public services, but no interaction effects with the service-quality treatments. Likelihood-ratio tests show that including interactions between political orientation and service quality does not improve model fit for domain-specific spending support, general welfare demand, or trust in government ($p = 0.79, 0.42$, and 0.29 , respectively; see SI Tables 13 and 14).

Overall, the results for Proposition 3 suggest that the main effects of service quality are robust across the norm and ideology measures included in the study.

Conclusions

We examine how poor and corrupt public-service encounters shape support for public spending and trust in government. The central finding is not simply that bad administration reduces support for the state. Citizens distinguish between meanings of administrative failure. Poor service delivery can trigger a domain-specific repair logic, increasing support for more

spending in the affected area. Petty corruption weakens this repair logic and, when repeated, substantially erodes trust in government.

When participants faced poor public-service delivery in a given domain, they became more supportive of spending in that domain. This is best understood as an investment or repair response: participants seem to assume that additional resources may help the state restore service quality. The effect is targeted, domain-specific, and conditional on the failure not being framed as corrupt.

Support weakens when poor services are accompanied by on-the-spot corruption. Petty corruption violates the expectation that public services are allocated according to equal rights and formal rules. As a result, citizens may still want the service problem fixed, but they become less willing to endorse additional spending than after a non-corrupt failure. This distinction between capacity failure and integrity failure is one of the paper's main contributions to research on regulatory governance.

Methodologically, the narrative virtual-state design offers a way to study dynamic citizen-state encounters under experimental control. By embedding several service encounters in one coherent fictional polity, the design separates immediate reactions to a specific administrative episode from cumulative reactions to repeated capacity and integrity signals. This design is very flexible and allows to explore citizen experiences in narrated scenarios from real life or thought experiments (for example see Levi-Faur, Forthcoming).

Several limitations apply. The fictional setting simplifies the cultural norms, interpersonal cues, and institutional histories that shape real encounters with street-level bureaucracy. Participants were recruited in Germany, a context with relatively strong expectations of administrative capacity and impartiality. The study also captures short-term cumulative reactions within a compressed narrative, not long-term opinion formation.

The implications are direct but should not be overstated. Governments may receive targeted support for investing in visibly underperforming services, especially when citizens perceive failures as capacity problems. But this support does not automatically become broader demand for welfare-state expansion. Corruption is more damaging because it changes the interpretation of failure from repairable underperformance to a violation of impartial administration. For public managers, the lesson is that maintaining integrity at the point of service access is not only an ethical requirement; it is also central to preserving citizen trust. Regaining trust can thus be part of a broader strategy of winning hearts and minds of citizens back after systemically failed service delivery (see Rangoni, 2026).

Notes

1 Preregistration:

https://osf.io/4yz9d/overview?view_only=3be8f05b7374497889ccd1ce30e4ab9f

² Because this article focuses on attitudinal responses, we do not analyse voting behaviour in the national election and the referendum.

³ The dependent variable asks about participants' willingness to fund the specific public service related to the policy field of the service they encountered. Because a "no-service" vignette would leave respondents without a concrete service to assess, a pure control condition could not be included.

⁴ The pictures were generated using Chat GPT-4o with various prompts on September 23, 2024. Details and prompt references are available in Supplementary Information, Appendix S2.

⁵ To rule out order effects, we applied three steps of randomization for each participant: First, we randomly assigned each participant to a deck that defined the number of outcomes of each type. Second, we randomly distributed this set of outcomes among the four vignettes. Third, we randomized the order of the vignettes.

⁶ We also found significant differences in participants' domain-specific willingness to fund public services: participants are more willing to fund welfare-related than non-welfare public domains after positive experiences. We found no significant interactions between service quality and domains.

⁷ All deck-level models include one observation per participant, resulting in 1630 observations. All vignette-level models include 4179 observations because they include the three state-related vignettes per participant and exclude the all-positive deck, which has no dependent-variable variance for those models.

Data Availability Statement

The replication package for this study, including the data, codebook, analysis scripts, and output files, will be deposited in the journal's repository upon acceptance.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

Ethical statement

This study was approved by the authors' university ethics board before any data were collected.

AI usage statement

The authors used DeepL Write and ChatGPT for language editing and ChatGPT to assist with the coding of the analysis. After using these tools/services, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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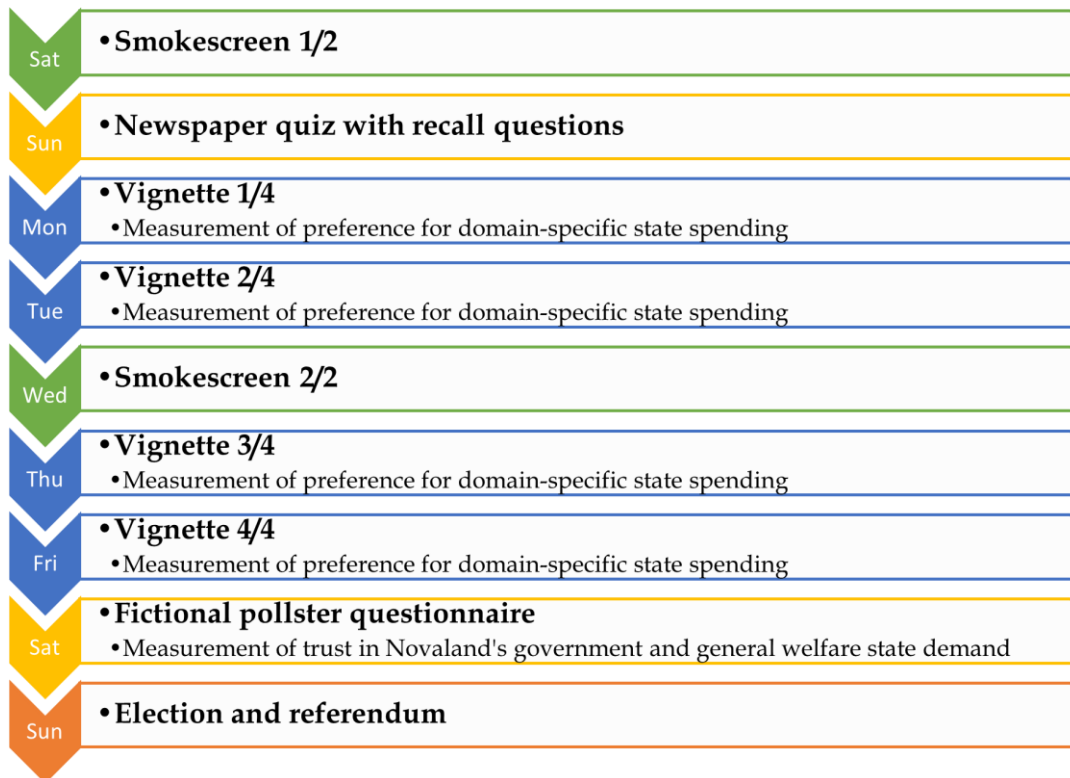
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Supplementary Information

Appendix S1. Novaland materials, vignette texts, screenshots, and flowchart

Appendix S1 compiles the original German narrative materials of the Novaland experiment that are distributed across the oTree source files and the project documentation. It also includes representative screenshots of the participant experience and the flowchart of the nine-day Novaland stay.

Section S1.1. Flowchart and representative screenshots



SI Figure 1. Flowchart of the nine-day Novaland stay.

Sonntag, Tag 2 von 9



Sie sitzen an diesem Sonntagmorgen an Ihrem Küchentisch und lesen eine Zeitung. Beim Durchblättern werden Sie auf ein Quiz aufmerksam. Sie entscheiden sich, es zu versuchen und die Fragen zu beantworten:

Wie gut kennen Sie Novaland?

Machen Sie mit beim dieswöchigen Quiz in der Allgemeinen Zeitung! Beantworten Sie unsere ausgewählten Fragen und testen Sie jetzt Ihr Wissen zum Leben in Novaland.

Frage 1:

Welches öffentliche Ereignis steht in den nächsten Tagen in Novaland an?

Präsidentschaftswahl

Nationale Parlamentswahl

Nationale Haustierausstellung

Frage 2:

Wie viele Menschen in Novaland sind laut einer Umfrage bereit, eine Zahlung unter der Hand zu machen, um einen schnelleren Zugang oder eine bessere Qualität bei staatlichen Dienstleistungen zu erhalten?

Zwei von zehn

Fünf von zehn

Sechs von zehn

Frage 3:

Wie hoch ist im Durchschnitt das monatliche Bruttoeinkommen (also vor Abzug von Steuern und Abgaben) in Novaland?

etwa 2500 Novas

etwa 3000 Novas

etwa 3300 Novas

SI Figure 2. Representative screenshot of the newspaper quiz.

SI Figure 3. Representative screenshot of a vignette page.

SI Figure 4. Representative screenshot of a vignette with a corrupt repeated ending.

Wahlen in Novaland. Tag 9 von 9

Es ist Wahltag in Novaland. Sie dürfen nun entscheiden, welcher der beiden Parteien Sie bei der Parlamentswahl in Novaland Ihre Stimme geben. Mit ihrer Stimme können Sie die Regierungsbildung in Novaland beeinflussen und gemeinsam mit den anderen Menschen in Novaland die nächste Regierung in Novaland mitbestimmen.

Die derzeit regierende Partei ist Soziale Partei Novaland.

Sie haben eine Stimme. Welche Partei wählen Sie?



☐ Konservative Partei Novaland



☐ Soziale Partei Novaland

Weiter

SI Figure 5. Representative screenshot of the election stage of the Novaland experience.

Section S1.2. Original German texts of the four vignette scenarios

Doctor's appointment

Common opening text. Seit einiger Zeit leiden Sie unter gesundheitlichen Problemen. Sie suchen eine Ärztin auf. Nach einer kurzen Untersuchung, einigen weiteren Kontrollen und Tests bestätigt die Ärztin, dass die Situation möglicherweise eine intensivere Behandlung erfordert. Sie verweist Sie an eine Mitarbeiterin, um einen nächsten Termin für eine weitere Untersuchung und einen möglichen Eingriff zu finden. Sie betreten das Büro der Sprechstundenhilfe und bitten sie, den nächsten Termin zu finden.

Positive outcome. Nachdem die Sprechstundenhilfe den Terminplan der Ärztin geprüft hat, teilt sie Ihnen mit, dass in den nächsten drei Wochen mehrere Termine zur Verfügung stünden. Sie suchen sich einen geeigneten Termin aus.

Negative outcome. Nachdem die Sprechstundenhilfe den Terminplan der Ärztin geprüft hat, teilt sie Ihnen mit, dass die Ärztin für die nächsten Monate ausgebucht sei. Der früheste verfügbare Termin sei erst in einem halben Jahr.

Corrupt outcome. Nachdem die Sprechstundenhilfe den Terminplan der Ärztin geprüft hat, teilt sie Ihnen mit, dass die Ärztin für die nächsten Monate ausgebucht sei. Der früheste verfügbare Termin sei erst in einem halben Jahr. Die Sprechstundenhilfe sagt, dass dies der einzige offizielle Weg sei. Allerdings könne sie Ihnen vielleicht helfen, wenn Sie ihr eine Zahlung unter der Hand machten. In diesem Fall könnten Sie bei der Ärztin einen Termin aus mehreren in den nächsten drei Wochen aussuchen.

Kindergarten placement

Common opening text. Sie suchen für Ihr 4-jähriges Kind einen Platz in einem örtlichen Kindergarten. In Novaland werden die staatlichen Kindergartenplätze von der örtlichen Familienserviceagentur (FSA) vergeben. Sie füllen die Formulare aus und gehen zur örtlichen FSA. Sie warten eine Weile in der Schlange. Als Sie an der Reihe sind, betreten Sie das Büro der FSA-Mitarbeiterin und erklären ihr Ihre Situation. Sie beginnt, in der Datenbank nach freien Kindergartenplätzen zu suchen.

Positive outcome. Nach einer gründlichen Suche in der Datenbank teilt Ihnen die Mitarbeiterin mit, dass es einen freien Platz in einem Kindergarten in Ihrer Nähe gebe. Der Kindergarten werde Ihr Kind in einigen Wochen aufnehmen können. Die FSA-Mitarbeiterin händigt Ihnen die erforderlichen Unterlagen aus, die Sie für die verbindliche Anmeldung vor Ort benötigen.

Negative outcome. Nach einer gründlichen Suche in der Datenbank teilt Ihnen die Mitarbeiterin mit, dass es keinen freien Platz in einem Kindergarten in Ihrer Nähe gebe. Alle Kindergärten seien voll und die einzige Möglichkeit sei, Ihr Kind auf eine Warteliste zu setzen. Sie sagt Ihnen, dass es ein Jahr dauern könne, bis ein Platz frei werde.

Corrupt outcome. Nach einer gründlichen Suche in der Datenbank teilt Ihnen die Mitarbeiterin mit, dass es keinen freien Platz in einem Kindergarten in Ihrer Nähe gebe. Alle Kindergärten seien voll und die einzige Möglichkeit sei, Ihr Kind auf eine Warteliste zu setzen. Sie sagt Ihnen, dass es ein Jahr dauern könne, bis ein Platz frei werde. Die Mitarbeiterin sagt, dass dies der einzige offizielle Weg sei. Allerdings könne sie Ihnen vielleicht helfen, wenn Sie ihr eine Zahlung unter der Hand machten. In diesem Fall könne ihr Kind schon in einigen Wochen einen Platz in einem Kindergarten in Ihrer Nähe erhalten.

Passport renewal

Common opening text. Ihr Urlaub im Ausland beginnt in einigen Wochen. Sie stellen fest, dass Ihr Reisepass bald abläuft. Als Bürgerin oder Bürger von Novaland benötigen Sie einen Reisepass, um international reisen zu können. Ihren alten Pass können Sie nicht verlängern. Sie benötigen also schnell einen neuen Pass, sonst können Sie die bereits bezahlte Reise nicht antreten. Also bemühen Sie sich um einen Termin bei dem nächsten Bürgerbüro. Sie suchen eine Weile nach einem freien Antragstermin im Internet.

Positive outcome. Schließlich finden Sie einen freien Termin in den nächsten Wochen. Bei dem Termin teilt Ihnen die Sachbearbeiterin mit, dass Ihr Vorgang in vier Wochen erledigt werde. Dies wird für Sie ausreichen, um Ihren Reisepass rechtzeitig vor Ihrem Urlaub zu erhalten.

Negative outcome. Schließlich finden Sie einen freien Termin in den nächsten Wochen. Bei dem Termin teilt Ihnen die Sachbearbeiterin mit, dass die Erledigung Ihres Vorgangs mehrere

Monate dauern werde. Es gebe keine Möglichkeit, den Reisepass früher zu erhalten. Sie realisieren, dass Sie Ihren neuen Reisepass nicht mehr vor Ihrem Urlaub erhalten werden.

Corrupt outcome. Schließlich finden Sie einen freien Termin in den nächsten Wochen. Bei dem Termin teilt Ihnen die Sachbearbeiterin mit, dass die Erledigung Ihres Vorgangs mehrere Monate dauern werde. Es gebe keine Möglichkeit, den Reisepass früher zu erhalten. Sie realisieren, dass Sie Ihren neuen Reisepass nicht mehr vor Ihrem Urlaub erhalten werden. Die Sachbearbeiterin sagt, dass dies der einzige offizielle Weg sei. Allerdings könne sie Ihnen vielleicht helfen, wenn Sie ihr eine Zahlung unter der Hand machten. In diesem Fall werde Ihr Vorgang in vier Wochen erledigt. Dies würde für Sie ausreichen, um Ihren neuen Reisepass rechtzeitig vor Ihrem Urlaub zu erhalten.

Washing-machine technician

Common opening text. Sie wollen Wäsche waschen. Sie haben die Waschmaschine bereits gefüllt, als Sie feststellen, dass diese kaputt ist. Sie versuchen Ihr Bestes, um das Problem zu finden. Schließlich rufen Sie beim Kundendienst der Herstellerfirma Ihrer Waschmaschine an und vereinbaren einen Termin mit einer Technikerin. Die Technikerin stellt fest, dass ein wichtiges Teil der Maschine ersetzt werden müsse, das nur von einer geschulten Fachkraft getauscht werden könne.

Positive outcome. Sie sagt Ihnen, dass sie in fünf Tagen mit dem Ersatzteil wiederkommen werde, um das Problem zu beheben.

Negative outcome. Sie habe derzeit zu viele Aufträge und könne die Waschmaschine daher erst in einigen Wochen reparieren. Es gibt keine Möglichkeit, die Maschine früher zu reparieren.

Corrupt outcome. Sie habe derzeit zu viele Aufträge und könne die Waschmaschine daher erst in einigen Wochen reparieren. Die Technikerin sagt, dass dies der einzige offizielle Weg über die Herstellerfirma sei. Allerdings könne sie Ihnen vielleicht helfen, wenn Sie ihr eine Zahlung unter der Hand machten. In diesem Fall könne sie die Waschmaschine in fünf Tagen mit dem Ersatzteil reparieren.

Section S1.3. Original German texts of the smokescreen scenarios

Pets smokescreen

Prompt text. Sie haben bei einem Preisausschreiben teilgenommen und haben einen Gutschein für ein teures Haustier, einen Hund oder eine Katze, gewonnen. Eine Mitarbeiterin der Züchtervereinigung ruft Sie an, und erklärt Ihnen, worauf Sie beim Halten einer Katze oder eines Hundes achten müssen. Im Anschluss müssen Sie sich entscheiden. Wofür entscheiden Sie sich?

Response code	Answer option
1	Sie adoptieren einen Hund.
2	Sie adoptieren eine Katze.
3	Sie entscheiden sich gegen ein Haustier.

Restaurant smokescreen

Prompt text. Heute wollen Sie mit einigen Freunden etwas Zeit verbringen und ein leckeres Abendessen genießen. Wie üblich gehen die Vorschläge Ihrer Freunde in unterschiedliche Richtungen. Ihre Stadt bietet viele Möglichkeiten, aber um den Geschmack und die Essensvorlieben aller zu treffen, stehen drei Lokale in der engeren Auswahl. Ihre Freunde fragen Sie, welches Restaurant Sie am liebsten besuchen würden:

Response
code

Answer option

1	Ein Barbecue-Restaurant, das viele deftige Speisen in einem rustikalen Ambiente anbietet.
2	Ein Sushi-Restaurant mit einer modernen, minimalistischen Einrichtung.
3	Ein Restaurant mit italienischer Küche und einem großen Außenbereich.

Section S1.4. Original German wording of the newspaper quiz

Intro text. Sie sitzen an diesem Sonntagmorgen an Ihrem Küchentisch und lesen eine Zeitung. Beim Durchblättern werden Sie auf ein Quiz aufmerksam. Sie entscheiden sich, es zu versuchen und die Fragen zu beantworten:

Wie gut kennen Sie Novaland?
Machen Sie mit beim dieswöchigen Quiz in der Allgemeinen Zeitung. Beantworten Sie unsere ausgewählten Fragen und testen Sie jetzt Ihr Wissen zum Leben in Novaland.

Question	Answer options	Correct answer in code
Welches öffentliche Ereignis steht in den nächsten Tagen in Novaland an?	1 Präsidentschaftswahl 2 Nationale Parlamentswahl 3 Nationale Haustierausstellung	2
Wie viele Menschen in Novaland sind laut einer Umfrage bereit, eine Zahlung unter der Hand zu machen, um einen schnelleren Zugang oder eine bessere Qualität bei staatlichen Dienstleistungen zu erhalten? This question is shown only when corruption_info == 1.	1 Zwei von zehn 2 Fünf von zehn 3 Sechs von zehn	3
Wie hoch ist im Durchschnitt das monatliche Bruttoeinkommen (also vor Abzug von Steuern und Abgaben) in Novaland?	1 etwa 2500 2 etwa 3000 3 etwa 3300	Novas 2 Novas

Section S1.5. Timeline of the Novaland stay

The implementation in the oTree project assigns the core stay in the following order: first smokescreen, quiz, first two vignettes, second smokescreen, last two vignettes. The broader project documentation then continues the nine-day sequence with a pollster stage on the following Saturday and an election stage on the following Sunday.

Appendix S2. Additional models, design details, and AI image prompts

Appendix S2 contains the supplementary materials cited in the manuscript for the non-state handyman robustness check and the AI-generated image documentation.

Section S2.1. Non-state handyman robustness check

The models with dependent variables welfare state support, trust in the government of Novaland, and vote choice in the referendum show no significant effects of experiencing the negative or positive non-state handyman scenario on any outcome measure.

SI Table 1. Null-effect models for the non-state handyman scenario

	Welfare state support	Trust to N2 gov	Referendum outcome
Negative Handyman Scenario	-0.165	0.116	0.088
	(0.178)	(0.177)	(0.145)
Positive Handyman Scenario	0.018	-0.107	0.122
	(0.163)	(0.162)	(0.133)
Number of Positive Outcomes	-0.157*	0.447***	-0.165**
	(0.066)	(0.066)	(0.054)
Num. Obs.	1558	1558	1558
R-squared	0.066	0.046	
Biographic Controls	YES	YES	YES, w/o age

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Section S2.2. AI-generated image references and prompt links

All images that were used in the study and that have not been created by the authors themselves were generated using artificial intelligence. The table lists the image, prompt reference, model, date, and prompt link for each AI-generated asset.

Image	Prompt reference and link
-------	---------------------------

	OpenAI. Response to 'A cozy, sunlit breakfast table in a German setting, with slight variations. The table features breakfast items such as fresh bread rolls, butter, cheese, sliced meats, and a cup of coffee or tea. A newspaper is open on the table, displaying only the word 'Quiz' in bold letters with no additional text or images on the page. The room is filled with warm sunlight streaming through a nearby window, with subtle changes in the arrangement of items, creating a slightly different but equally relaxed and inviting atmosphere.' Image Creator of ChatGPT-4o, 23.09.2024. https://chatgpt.com/share/67ee3df9-c11c-800f-a58c-1719e9487b84
	OpenAI. Response to 'A view from approximately 2 meters above the ground, looking down on an upright washing machine standing on the floor. The washing machine has nothing on top, just its clean surface. The room features typical laundry room elements such as shelves, detergent, and a functional atmosphere. The perspective gives a clear view of the washing machine and the surrounding items in the room from a slightly elevated angle. The ladders, pipes, cables, tools, and carpet are removed from the scene, leaving only the bare floor.' Image Creator of ChatGPT-4o, 23.09.2024. https://chatgpt.com/share/67ee3d8f-b448-800f-9dec-24537b8bd86e
	OpenAI. Response to 'A realistic image of a very simple and modest standing reception counter in a small doctor's office in a fictional country similar to Germany. The scene is basic and utilitarian, with minimalistic, plain furniture that is purely functional. The walls have a few simple medical illustrations, such as anatomical diagrams. The reception area is clean and very basic, with no stylish elements, just essential furniture. A small potted plant is placed on the counter, along with a few pens in a holder and a stack of patient files. The lighting is soft and warm, adding a touch of warmth to the otherwise sterile environment. There are no people, no flags visible in the image.' Image Creator of ChatGPT-4o, 23.09.2024. https://chatgpt.com/share/67ee3db7-0804-800f-87b6-1ba1d6309ff4
	OpenAI. Response to 'A smaller and less stylish office in a fictional country where passports are issued. The office is functional and somewhat plain, with simple furniture and a utilitarian design. The walls feature plain maps, with no references to Germany, emblems, crests, or text visible. The desk has a basic computer monitor and a few official documents, with no high-tech gadgets. The lighting is standard, giving the room a more subdued and ordinary atmosphere. No people are present, maintaining the quiet and official nature of the setting.' Image Creator of ChatGPT-4o, 23.09.2024. https://chatgpt.com/share/67ee3df9-c11c-800f-a58c-1719e9487b84
	OpenAI. Response to 'An office where kindergarten places are centrally allocated, featuring an organized and official setting with desks and filing cabinets. The walls have a few colorful children's drawings or paintings displayed, adding a cheerful touch. In one corner of the room, there's a small play area for toddlers, with toys and a soft mat. The scene is quiet, with no people present, creating a sense of waiting or preparation. There are no flags or text visible in the room.' Image Creator of ChatGPT-4o, 23.09.2024. https://chatgpt.com/share/67ee3df9-c11c-800f-a58c-1719e9487b84
	OpenAI. Response to 'A woman holding a clipboard with a questionnaire and a pen enters the frame from the right side. Only the hands and arms of the woman are visible in the image. The background shows a European pedestrian zone on a Saturday, with European-style architecture, cobblestone streets, small shops, and cafes. The scene includes a few pedestrians walking around, creating a lively yet relaxed atmosphere. The day is still a beautiful summer day with clear skies and bright sunlight. The focus remains on the clipboard and hands, with the background slightly out of focus.' Image Creator of ChatGPT-4o, 23.09.2024. https://chatgpt.com/share/67ee3cd3-bf10-800f-819f-0d74fd2f47be

SI Tables

This section contains the empirical tables that are cited in the manuscript.

SI Table 2. Domain-specific spending support models

	Domain-Specific State Spending Model 1	Domain-Specific State Spending Model 2	Domain-Specific State Spending Model 3	Domain-Specific State Spending Model 4	Domain-Specific State Spending Model 5	Domain-Specific State Spending Model 6
(Intercept)	1.972**	1.948**	1.945**	1.967**	1.978**	2.001**
	(0.721)	(0.726)	(0.726)	(0.721)	(0.721)	(0.720)
Service Quality: Negative	0.161***	0.161***	0.175***	0.161***	0.164***	0.163***
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.011)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Service Quality: Corrupt	0.106***	0.106***	0.123***	0.106***	0.101***	0.107***
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.011)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Vignette Number	0.006*	0.006*	0.006*	0.006*	0.006*	0.006*
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
No. Negative Services Before	-0.007	-0.007	-0.007	-0.007	-0.007	-0.007
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
No. Corrupt Services Before	0.012	0.012	0.012	0.012	0.012	0.012
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Left	0.019*	0.019*	0.020*	0.019+	0.019+	0.020+
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.012)
Right	0.023+	0.023+	0.023+	0.023+	0.023+	0.026
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.017)
Real-life Corruption Experience (own)		-0.003	0.022+			
		(0.009)	(0.012)			
Social Norm on Bribing				0.011	0.010	
				(0.008)	(0.011)	
Service Quality: Corrupt x Real-life Corruption Experience			-0.052**			
			(0.017)			
Service Quality: Negative x Real-life Corruption Experience			-0.048**			
			(0.018)			
Service Quality: Corrupt x Social					0.009	

	Domain-Specific State Spending Model 1	Domain-Specific State Spending Model 2	Domain-Specific State Spending Model 3	Domain-Specific State Spending Model 4	Domain-Specific State Spending Model 5	Domain-Specific State Spending Model 6
Bribing Norm					(0.016)	
Service Quality: Negative x Social Bribing Norm					-0.006	
					(0.016)	
Service Quality: Corrupt x Left						0.010
						(0.019)
Service Quality: Corrupt x Right						-0.026
						(0.026)
Service Quality: Negative x Left						-0.014
						(0.018)
Service Quality: Negative x Right						0.011
						(0.026)
Age	-0.001**	-0.001**	-0.001**	-0.001**	-0.001**	-0.001**
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Female (ref. Male)	0.015	0.015	0.015	0.015	0.015	0.015
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Diverse (ref. Male)	-0.127+	-0.128+	-0.129+	-0.128+	-0.128+	-0.128+
	(0.069)	(0.069)	(0.069)	(0.069)	(0.069)	(0.069)
Employment: Part-time working	-0.011	-0.011	-0.012	-0.012	-0.012	-0.012
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Employment: Unemployed and searching	-0.049+	-0.049+	-0.049+	-0.050*	-0.051*	-0.049*
	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.025)
Employment: Self-employed	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)
Employment: Still in training	0.008	0.008	0.007	0.008	0.008	0.008
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Employment: Pensioner	-0.022	-0.022	-0.022	-0.022	-0.023	-0.023
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Employment: Housewife/Househusband	-0.032	-0.032	-0.033	-0.033	-0.034	-0.033

	Domain-Specific State Spending Model 1	Domain-Specific State Spending Model 2	Domain-Specific State Spending Model 3	Domain-Specific State Spending Model 4	Domain-Specific State Spending Model 5	Domain-Specific State Spending Model 6
	(0.037)	(0.037)	(0.037)	(0.037)	(0.037)	(0.037)
Employment: Currently unable to work	-0.014	-0.014	-0.013	-0.015	-0.016	-0.014
	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.032)
Employment: Other	0.048	0.048	0.047	0.049	0.049	0.048
	(0.051)	(0.051)	(0.051)	(0.051)	(0.051)	(0.050)
Education: Without elementary/secondary school leaving certificate	-0.047	-0.047	-0.048	-0.045	-0.044	-0.048
	(0.053)	(0.053)	(0.053)	(0.053)	(0.053)	(0.053)
Voluntary/secondary school certificate, 8th or 9th grade, Polytechnic High School (POS) leaving after the 8th grade	0.063*	0.063*	0.061+	0.064*	0.065*	0.063*
	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.031)
Real school diploma, 10th grade diploma, diploma from the Polytechnic High School (POS) of the GDR	0.042	0.042	0.039	0.043	0.043	0.042
	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)
Fachuniversity entrance qualification (12th grade)	0.036	0.036	0.034	0.037	0.038	0.036
	(0.030)	(0.030)	(0.030)	(0.030)	(0.030)	(0.029)
The general or subject-specific university entrance qualification (12th or 13th grade, extended secondary school (EOS), also EOS with apprenticeship)	0.021	0.021	0.019	0.022	0.022	0.021
	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)
Income [500 Euros]	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Num. Obs.	3939	3939	3939	3939	3939	3939
R-squared	0.116	0.116	0.119	0.116	0.116	0.116
+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001						
Random Intercept Models. Reference category for the employment variable is 'Full Time'. For the education variable it is 'I am still a student'						

SI Table 3. Sample characteristics

Comparison of participant characteristics based on completion status							
	All participants N = 4,147		Did not complete N = 2,517		Did complete N = 1,630		p-value (Wilcoxon rank sum test; Pearson's Chi-squared test)
Age (years)	Mean: 36	SD: 18	Mean: 33	SD: 16	Mean: 41	SD: 19	<0.001
Education	Mean: 12.8	SD: 5.0	Mean: 12.4	SD: 5.9	Mean: 13.5	SD: 3.0	<0.001

(years)							
Gender							<0.001
Man	1,777		969		808		
Woman	2,342		1,525		817		
Other	28		23		5		

SI Table 4. Welfare demand models

	Welfare Demand Model 1	Welfare Demand Model 2	Welfare Demand Model 3	Welfare Demand Model 4	Welfare Demand Model 5	Welfare Demand Model 6
No. Service Quality: Negative	0.006					
	(0.006)					
No. Service Quality: Corrupt		0.007				
		(0.006)				
No. Service Quality: Positive			-0.012*	-0.012*	-0.009	-0.020**
			(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.008)	(0.007)
Social Bribing Norm				-0.007	0.007	
				(0.012)	(0.029)	
Left	0.067***	0.067***	0.066***	0.067***	0.066***	0.030
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.033)
Right	-0.036+	-0.036+	-0.035+	-0.036+	-0.036+	-0.087+
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.046)
No. Service Quality: Positive x Social Bribing Norm					-0.006	
					(0.011)	
No. Service Quality: Positive x Left						0.016
						(0.013)
No. Service Quality: Positive x Right						0.022
						(0.018)
Age	-0.001*	-0.001*	-0.001*	-0.001*	-0.001**	-0.001*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Female (ref. Male)	-0.018	-0.018	-0.018	-0.017	-0.017	-0.018
	(0.015)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)

	Welfare Demand Model 1	Welfare Demand Model 2	Welfare Demand Model 3	Welfare Demand Model 4	Welfare Demand Model 5	Welfare Demand Model 6
Diverse (ref. Male)	-0.160	-0.168	-0.166	-0.165	-0.164	-0.167
	(0.104)	(0.104)	(0.104)	(0.104)	(0.104)	(0.104)
Employment: Part-time working	-0.003	-0.001	-0.002	-0.002	-0.002	-0.001
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)
Employment: Unemployed and searching	0.102**	0.097**	0.101**	0.102**	0.102**	0.101**
	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.034)
Employment: Self-employed	0.013	0.011	0.011	0.011	0.011	0.012
	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.031)
Employment: Still in training	0.026	0.027	0.028	0.028	0.028	0.026
	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)
Employment: Pensioner	0.017	0.018	0.017	0.017	0.016	0.017
	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.023)
Employment: Housewife/Househusband	0.094+	0.093+	0.094+	0.095+	0.094+	0.093+
	(0.050)	(0.050)	(0.050)	(0.050)	(0.050)	(0.050)
Employment: Currently unable to work	0.070	0.070	0.069	0.070	0.070	0.071
	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.045)
Employment: Other	0.102	0.098	0.098	0.098	0.098	0.103
	(0.072)	(0.072)	(0.072)	(0.072)	(0.072)	(0.072)
Education: Without elementary/secondary school leaving certificate	0.045	0.046	0.048	0.046	0.046	0.044
	(0.073)	(0.073)	(0.073)	(0.073)	(0.073)	(0.073)
Voluntary/secondary school certificate, 8th or 9th grade, Polytechnic High School (POS) leaving after the 8th grade	0.117**	0.115**	0.116**	0.116**	0.116**	0.114**
	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.043)
Real school diploma, 10th grade diploma, diploma from the Polytechnic High School (POS) of the GDR	0.126**	0.124**	0.126**	0.125**	0.125**	0.124**
	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.040)
Fachuniversity entrance qualification (12th grade)	0.089*	0.087*	0.089*	0.088*	0.088*	0.087*
	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.041)
The general or subject-specific university entrance qualification (12th or 13th grade, extended secondary school (EOS), also EOS with apprenticeship)	0.118**	0.115**	0.117**	0.116**	0.116**	0.115**
	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.040)

	Welfare Demand Model 1	Welfare Demand Model 2	Welfare Demand Model 3	Welfare Demand Model 4	Welfare Demand Model 5	Welfare Demand Model 6
Income [500 Euros]	-0.001	-0.001	-0.001	-0.001	-0.001	-0.001
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Num. Obs.	1535	1535	1535	1535	1535	1535
R-squared	0.062	0.062	0.064	0.064	0.064	0.065
Socio-demographic Controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001						

SI Table 5. Trust in government models

	Political Trust Model 1	Political Trust Model 2	Political Trust Model 3	Political Trust Model 4	Political Trust Model 5	Political Trust Model 6
No. Service Quality: Negative	-0.012*					
	(0.006)					
No. Service Quality: Corrupt		-0.034***				
		(0.006)				
No. Service Quality: Positive			0.041***	0.041***	0.044***	0.042***
			(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.008)	(0.007)
Social Bribing Norm				-0.008	0.005	
				(0.012)	(0.029)	
Left	0.017	0.017	0.018	0.018	0.018	0.039
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.032)
Right	-0.011	-0.011	-0.012	-0.012	-0.012	-0.049
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.046)
No. Service Quality: Positive x Social Bribing Norm					-0.005	
					(0.011)	
No. Service Quality: Positive x Left						-0.009
						(0.013)
No. Service Quality: Positive x Right						0.016
						(0.018)
Age	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.001)

Female (ref. Male)	-0.031*	-0.031*	-0.033*	-0.033*	-0.033*	-0.034*
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Diverse (ref. Male)	0.073	0.100	0.088	0.089	0.089	0.087
	(0.105)	(0.104)	(0.103)	(0.104)	(0.104)	(0.103)
Employment: Part-time working	-0.005	-0.009	-0.005	-0.005	-0.005	-0.005
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)
Employment: Unemployed and searching	0.004	0.018	0.002	0.003	0.003	0.003
	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.034)
Employment: Self-employed	-0.025	-0.019	-0.022	-0.022	-0.022	-0.021
	(0.032)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.031)
Employment: Still in training	0.007	0.002	-0.002	-0.001	-0.001	-0.001
	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)
Employment: Pensioner	-0.029	-0.032	-0.028	-0.028	-0.029	-0.028
	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)
Employment: Housewife/Househusband	-0.097+	-0.097+	-0.099*	-0.098+	-0.098+	-0.098*
	(0.051)	(0.050)	(0.050)	(0.050)	(0.050)	(0.050)
Employment: Currently unable to work	0.022	0.021	0.025	0.026	0.026	0.024
	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.045)
Employment: Other	-0.170*	-0.156*	-0.159*	-0.160*	-0.159*	-0.157*
	(0.073)	(0.072)	(0.072)	(0.072)	(0.072)	(0.072)
Education: Without elementary/secondary school leaving certificate	0.007	0.001	-0.001	-0.003	-0.003	-0.003
	(0.074)	(0.073)	(0.073)	(0.073)	(0.073)	(0.073)
Voluntary/secondary school certificate, 8th or 9th grade, Polytechnic High School (POS) leaving after the 8th grade	-0.025	-0.018	-0.025	-0.026	-0.026	-0.026
	(0.044)	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.043)
Real school diploma, 10th grade diploma, diploma from the Polytechnic High School (POS) of the GDR	-0.020	-0.012	-0.020	-0.021	-0.021	-0.021
	(0.041)	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.040)
Fachuniversity entrance qualification (12th grade)	-0.025	-0.016	-0.026	-0.027	-0.027	-0.027
	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.041)
The general or subject-specific university entrance qualification (12th or 13th grade, extended secondary school (EOS), also EOS with apprenticeship)	-0.010	0.001	-0.009	-0.009	-0.010	-0.010
	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.040)

Income [500 Euros]	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Num. Obs.	1535	1535	1535	1535	1535	1535
R-squared	0.017	0.034	0.047	0.047	0.047	0.048
Socio-demographic Controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001						

We also tested the effect of the social norm on bribing and its interaction with service quality on political trust and welfare demand. Again, both the main effects and the interaction effects are insignificant, as SI Table 12 depicts. Adding the social norm on bribing variable does not improve model fit, as the LR tests suggest.

SI Table 12. Effects of the social bribing norm on political trust and welfare demand, including interactions

		Political Trust 3	Political Trust 4	Political Trust 5	Welfare Demand 3	Welfare Demand 4	Welfare Demand 5
No. Service Quality: Positive		0.041***	0.041***	0.044***	-0.012*	-0.012*	-0.009
		(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.008)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.008)
Social Norm on Bribing			-0.008	0.005		-0.007	0.007
			(0.012)	(0.029)		(0.012)	(0.029)
No. Service Quality: Positive x Social Bribing Norm				-0.005			-0.006
				(0.011)			(0.011)
Num. Obs.		1535	1535	1535	1535	1535	1535
R-squared		0.047	0.047	0.047	0.064	0.064	0.064
Socio-demographic Controls		YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
P-value of LR-test with Political Trust 3/ Welfare Demand 3			0.52			0.58	
P-value of LR-test with Political Trust 4/ Welfare Demand 4				0.63			0.75

Note: Results from heteroskedasticity-consistent (HC2), error-corrected OLS models showing estimates and standard errors in parentheses. + p<0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001; see SI Tables 4 and 5 for the full regression results.

Hypothesis 9, which predicted that individuals who place themselves further to the left would exhibit stronger reactions to state experiences in their spending preferences, is not supported. While both left- and right-leaning participants tend to support higher spending than those in the middle, there is no significant interaction between political orientation and service quality, as SI Table 13 shows.

SI Table 13. Ideology interaction test for domain-specific spending support

	Domain-Specific Spending Model 1	State	Domain-Specific Spending Model 6	State
Service Quality: Negative	0.161***		0.163***	
	(0.011)		(0.013)	
Service Quality: Corrupt	0.106***		0.107***	
	(0.011)		(0.013)	
Left	0.019*		0.020+	
	(0.010)		(0.012)	
Right	0.023+		0.026	
	(0.014)		(0.017)	
Service Quality: Corrupt x Left			0.010	
			(0.019)	
Service Quality: Corrupt x Right			-0.026	
			(0.026)	
Service Quality: Negative x Left			-0.014	
			(0.018)	
Service Quality: Negative x Right			0.011	
			(0.026)	
Num. Obs.	3939		3939	
R-squared	0.116		0.116	
Socio-demographic Controls	YES		YES	
P-value of LR-test with Domain-Specific State Spending Model 1			0.79	

Note: Results from random-intercept models showing estimates and standard errors in parentheses. + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$; see SI Table 2 for the full regression results.

Hypothesis 10 anticipated that left-leaning participants would respond more strongly to negative experiences by expressing higher support for welfare state expansion compared to right-leaning participants. The additional models in SI Table 14 do not support this expectation.

SI Table 14. Ideology interaction tests for welfare demand and trust

	Political Trust 3	Political Trust 6	Welfare Demand 3	Welfare Demand 6
No. Service Quality: Positive	0.041***	0.042***	-0.012*	-0.020**
	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.007)
Left	0.018	0.039	0.066***	0.030
	(0.014)	(0.032)	(0.014)	(0.033)
Right	-0.012	-0.049	-0.035+	-0.087+
	(0.019)	(0.046)	(0.019)	(0.046)
No. Service Quality: Positive x Left		-0.009		0.016
		(0.013)		(0.013)
No. Service Quality: Positive x Right		0.016		0.022
		(0.018)		(0.018)
Num. Obs.	1535	1535	1535	1535
R-squared	0.047	0.048	0.064	0.065
Socio-demographic Controls	YES	YES	YES	YES
P-value of LR-test with Political Trust 3/ Welfare Demand 3		0.42		0.29

Note: Results from heteroskedasticity-consistent (HC2), error-corrected OLS models showing estimates and standard errors in parentheses. + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$; see SI Tables 4 and 5 for the full regression results.