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# Why Do (Some) Ordinary Americans Support Tax Cuts for the Rich? Evidence From a Randomized Survey Experiment\*

David Hope<sup>†</sup>     Julian Limberg<sup>‡</sup>     Nina Weber<sup>§</sup>

## Abstract

Why do (some) ordinary citizens support tax cuts for the rich? We test four prominent explanations — unenlightened self-interest, fairness considerations, prospect of upward mobility, and trickle-down beliefs — using a randomized, online information provision experiment, embedded in a representative survey of around 3,000 US Americans. The results show that preferences for taxing the rich are fundamentally affected by information that shifts citizens' core fairness beliefs, as well as information on the past trajectory of top tax rates. In contrast, we find no evidence in support of the unenlightened self-interest or prospect of upward mobility explanations. Overall, our results align with theories of tax policy preferences that emphasize the importance of fairness perceptions and reference points.

**Keywords:** Top Income Tax, Inequality, Redistributive Preferences, Top 1%, Tax Cuts

**JEL Codes:** D63, D83, D91, H24

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<sup>†</sup>Corresponding author: Department of Political Economy, King's College London, Bush House (North East), 40 Aldwych, London, WC2B 4PX, [david.hope@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:david.hope@kcl.ac.uk).

<sup>‡</sup>Department of Political Economy, King's College London, [julian.limberg@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:julian.limberg@kcl.ac.uk).

<sup>§</sup>Department of Political Economy, King's College London, [nina.s.weber@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:nina.s.weber@kcl.ac.uk).



# 1 Introduction

One of the most enduring political economy puzzles of the past 40 years in the United States is why so many ordinary Americans support tax cuts for the rich. A third of Americans approved of President Trump's 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) ([FiveThirtyEight, 2017](#)), which disproportionately benefitted the top 5% of the income distribution ([Tax Policy Center, 2018](#)). This was in spite of most Americans believing the TCJA helped large corporations (65%) and wealthy people (61%) ([CBS News, 2019](#)).

The continued support of a sizeable portion of the American population for tax cuts for the rich is even more surprising given the trajectories of income inequality and taxes on the rich since the 1980s. The pre-tax income share of the top 1% of Americans rose from 10.5% in 1980 to 18.8% in 2019.<sup>1</sup> The top 1% income share in 2019 was equivalent to the income share of the bottom 58% of adults in the US (around 142m people).<sup>2</sup> The rich are also being taxed less. Top marginal income tax rates ([Piketty, Saez, & Stantcheva, 2014](#)) and overall tax progressivity ([Piketty & Saez, 2007](#)) have fallen substantially since the 1980s; the top federal income tax rate was 70% in 1980 but now stands at just 37%.<sup>3</sup> Why do (some) ordinary citizens support tax cuts for the rich?

In this article, we provide new experimental evidence on this question. While there are substantial theoretical and empirical literatures on the determinants of redistributive preferences (for reviews, see [Alesina & Giuliano, 2011](#); [Iversen & Goplerud, 2018](#)) spanning all the way back to Meltzer and Richard's (1981) seminal median-voter model of redistribution, we know much less about what drives ordinary Americans' preferences for cutting taxes on the rich. Crucially for this study, preferences for redistribution may differ substantially from preferences for cutting taxes on the rich. While the former cover general attitudes toward the size and shape of the tax and transfer

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<sup>1</sup>Top 1% income shares taken from World Inequality Database, accessed 30 July 2021.

<sup>2</sup>Calculation based on US Census Bureau 2020 Demographic Analysis Estimates by Age and Sex, April 1 2020. The income share data is for all adults 21 and over.

<sup>3</sup>Tax rates taken from: Tax Policy Center, Historical Highest Marginal Income Tax Rates, Feb 4 2020; and Internal Revenue Service 2021.

system, including on the (welfare) spending side, the latter focus solely on the very top of the income distribution. Furthermore, looking at support for top tax rate cuts allows to investigate preference formation around a specific policy change rather than just exploring general attitudes to redistribution. We focus on preferences for cutting the top federal income tax rate, as this is a highly progressive and visible tax policy tool that only applies to the top 1% of income earners in the US. Top marginal income tax rates are also a frequently used measure in the existing academic literature on taxing the rich ([Hope & Limberg, 2021](#); [Piketty et al., 2014](#); [Scheve & Stasavage, 2016](#)).

To determine the causal drivers of preferences for cutting top federal income tax rates, we run a randomized, online information provision experiment, embedded in a representative survey of around 3,000 Americans. Our subjects are randomly divided into five groups for the experiment. Each group receives a short statement and a simple column chart. The control group receive factual information on the longest rivers in the United States. The four treatment groups receive factual information relating to potential drivers of preferences for tax cuts for the rich identified from the extensive literature on redistributive and tax policy preferences, namely 1) unenlightened self-interest ([Bartels, 2005](#)); 2) fairness considerations ([Almås, Cappelen, & Tungodden, 2020](#); [Bastani & Waldenström, 2021](#)); 3) prospects of upward mobility ([Benabou & Ok, 2001](#); [Piketty, 1995](#)); and 4) trickle-down beliefs ([Stantcheva, 2021](#)).

The unenlightened self-interest explanation argues that citizens are ignorant about the tax system and consistently fail to gauge whether they are directly affected by tax reforms. If people do not have an accurate picture of their individual tax exposure, this will crucially affect their preference formation. For our first treatment, we therefore inform individuals of whether their current income exceeds the threshold of the top income tax rate bracket. The effect of receiving information about top federal income tax exposure is close to zero and statistically insignificant, hence we find no support for the unenlightened self-interest explanation. Similarly, we find statistically insignificant results for the prospect of upward mobility (POUM) treatment, which informs individuals of the (low) probability that they will be in the top 1% of income

earners at some point in their lifetime.

In contrast, we find strong support for fairness-based explanations. Our fairness treatment, which provides individuals with information about the role of luck in being a top income earner by informing subjects about the level of inherited wealth amongst the richest US citizens, has a substantial and statistically significant effect on core fairness beliefs, as well as on preferences for cutting the top federal income tax rate. On average, the fairness treatment reduces tax cut support by roughly 5 percentage points.

Furthermore, informing respondents that previous cuts to top income tax rates did not coincide with higher economic growth leads to substantially lower support (of around 6 percentage points) for cutting taxes on the rich. However, this effect cannot be explained by individuals changing their core beliefs about the macroeconomic benefits of cutting taxes on the rich. Across models, beliefs in potential "trickle-down effects" are surprisingly stable. Instead, the treatment causes respondents to update their beliefs about how taxes on the rich have evolved. Knowing taxes on the rich have fallen substantially in recent decades provides a reference point for respondents, making them significantly less likely to support (further) tax cuts for the rich.

In addition to preferences over tax cuts for the rich, we investigate support for tax hikes. We find that the effects are mostly symmetric. Similar to preferences for tax cuts, the unenlightened self-interest and prospect of upward mobility treatments have no significant effect on support for tax hikes. In contrast, the fairness and trickle-down information treatments increase political appetite for raising top federal income tax rates. Furthermore, when running subgroup analyses by party affiliation, we find that the effects are almost twice as big for Republicans. On average, the fairness treatment raised support for tax hikes amongst Republicans by 13 percentage points. The trickle-down information treatment increased support even more dramatically, by about 17 percentage points.

Our research connects closely with the growing body of experimental work in economics and political science aiming to identify causal links between perceptions and

redistributive preferences (see [Stantcheva \(2021\)](#) for a review). A number of these papers use online survey tools similar to ours to assess how respondents' beliefs and redistributive preferences are affected by the provision of specific pieces of information. Prominent papers have explored the effect on redistributive preferences of providing information about the evolution of income inequality and taxes ([Kuziemko, Norton, Saez, & Stantcheva, 2015](#)); informing individuals of their position in the income distribution ([Cruces, Perez-Truglia, & Tetaz, 2013](#); [Fernández-Albertos & Kuo, 2018](#); [Karadja, Mollerstrom, & Seim, 2017](#)); providing pessimistic information about social mobility ([Alesina, Stantcheva, & Teso, 2018](#)); exposing individuals to information that violates equal treatment fairness beliefs ([Scheve & Stasavage, 2021](#)); and providing instructional videos about different aspects of tax policy (i.e. efficiency vs. redistribution) ([Stantcheva, 2021](#)).

Online and laboratory experiments have also been used to explore how redistributive preferences are affected by perceptions of fairness ([Almås et al., 2020](#); [Durante, Putterman, & van der Weele, 2014](#)) and individuals' position in the income distribution relative to important reference groups (e.g. the bottom ranking income group) ([Fisman, Gladstone, Kuziemko, & Naidu, 2020](#); [Kuziemko, Buell, Reich, & Norton, 2014](#)). Lastly, there is a small but growing literature utilising survey experiments to look at preferences for wealth taxation ([Bastani & Waldenström, 2021](#); [Fisman et al., 2020](#)).

Our paper contributes to the existing literature in two main ways. First, rather than looking at redistributive preferences more broadly, we focus explicitly on preferences for cutting taxes on the rich. Hence, we look at an actual policy proposal – cutting the top federal income tax rate – rather than investigating general preferences for redistribution. This difference is crucial as previous research has detected a mismatch between general redistributive preferences and preferences for specific tax policy changes ([Bartels, 2005](#)).

Second, we use a suite of treatments to test multiple potential drivers in a single experiment. So far, most studies have either provided "omnibus" information treat-

ments that do not allow different explanatory factors to be disentangled (Kuziemko et al., 2015) or looked at a subset of explanatory factors (Durante et al., 2014; Scheve & Stasavage, 2021). To the best of our knowledge, our survey experiment provides the first causal evidence on what drives the preferences of ordinary Americans for cutting taxes on the rich.

Overall, our paper provides new causal evidence contradicting the prominent argument that ordinary citizens' preferences for taxing on the rich are primarily driven by economic self-interest (Bartels, 2005). Instead, we find that fairness considerations (Almås et al., 2020; Bastani & Waldenström, 2021; Durante et al., 2014) and reference points (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Köszegi & Rabin, 2006; O'Donoghue & Sprenger, 2018) are particularly important when it comes to the formation of preferences on taxing the rich.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. Section 2 reviews the prominent explanations in the existing literature on what drives individuals' preferences for cutting taxes on the rich. Section 3 sets out the design of our online survey experiment, before Section 4 explains our data and methods. Section 5 then presents the main results of the survey experiment, as well as a number of sensitivity and robustness checks. Finally, Section 6 concludes and points to some potentially fruitful avenues for future research.

## 2 What Drives Preferences for Cutting Taxes on the Rich?

In this section, we summarise the four most prominent explanations in the literature for what drives individuals' preferences for redistribution, and more specifically, cutting taxes on the rich.

First, looking at observational survey data about the regressive 2001 Bush tax cuts, which mostly benefitted the very wealthy, Bartels (2005) finds that preference formation was largely uninformed and at times 'ignorant'. He argues that people often failed to connect proposed tax policy changes to their values or material interests, as

well as their general preferences for redistribution. He also finds that support for the Bush tax cuts was driven by people's preferences about their own tax burdens rather than their preferences for taxing the rich, despite the rich being the primary beneficiaries of the tax cuts. According to [Bartels \(2005\)](#) support of ordinary Americans for tax cuts for the rich is therefore driven by unenlightened self-interest. A related experimental literature looks at the role of income misperceptions in the formation of redistributive preferences ([Cruces et al., 2013](#); [Fernández-Albertos & Kuo, 2018](#); [Karadja et al., 2017](#)). This literature stresses that while poorer people tend to overestimate their relative position in the income distribution, the rich tend to underestimate their position and that informing individuals of their true relative income position affects demand for redistribution. [Cansunar \(2020\)](#) also finds that *perceived* income positions are more strongly correlated with preferences for progressive taxation than *actual* income positions. This literature has so far mostly focused on misperceptions of relative income positions, however, and less on perceptions of actual tax policy exposure (with the exception of [Krupnikov, Levine, Lupia, and Prior \(2006\)](#)). Overall, unenlightened self-interest explanations, which focus on uninformed or misinformed citizens forming preferences in a self-interested manner, might help to explain the enduring support for cutting taxes on the rich, even in times of rising inequality.

Second, and in contrast to the unenlightened self-interest theory, fairness-based explanations stress the role of other-regarding preferences ([Dimick, Rueda, & Stegmueller, 2018](#); [Durante et al., 2014](#); [Fong, 2001](#)). More specifically, scholars have argued that (mis-)perceptions of individual economic gains are only one of many factors that influence preference formation ([Fehr & Schmidt, 1999](#)). Instead, it matters whether other people's income and wealth is seen as "fair" or not ([Durante et al., 2014](#)). Citizens are less likely to support higher taxes on the richest members of society if their economic success is perceived as deserved, e.g. because of hard work and merit as opposed to luck ([Alesina & La Ferrara, 2005](#); [Fong, 2001](#)). A growing literature highlights the importance of fairness beliefs for distributional choices in the laboratory ([Almås et al., 2020](#); [Cappelen, Moene, Sørensen, & Tungodden, 2013](#); [Cherry &](#)

Shogren, 2008; Gee, Migueis, & Parsa, 2017; Lefgren, Sims, & Stoddard, 2016). Recent work in political science, has also linked fairness perceptions to preferences for progressive taxation. Scheve and Stasavage (2021) run survey experiments in Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and find that equal treatment fairness beliefs — the belief that as citizens have one vote each, the state should treat them equally on all policy dimensions (including taxation) — are linked to lower support for progressive taxation. In sum, fairness-based approaches suggest that the perception of the rich in a society is central for tax policy preferences. Thus, perceptions of the rich as deserving their economic success could explain enduring support for tax cuts.

Third, several studies have highlighted the importance of expectations about future economic gains (Alesina et al., 2018; Piketty, 1995). This work is often collectively referred to as the 'prospect of upward mobility' theory (Benabou & Ok, 2001; Piketty, 1995). The idea is straightforward: it is not only current economic circumstances that affect redistributive preferences, but also expectations about future economic gains. If an individual expects to climb the economic ladder, preferences for progressive taxation will be lower. Hence, even if people do not benefit from tax cuts for the rich immediately, they might expect to gain from these cuts in the future. This, in turn, could help to explain support for such tax reforms.

Finally, ideas about the macroeconomic effects of tax policy reforms matter (Barnes, 2021). If people think that progressive taxes harm economic growth and slow down employment creation, they might be more likely to support tax cuts for the rich. In particular, people might expect gains to the wider economy and those lower down the income distribution from the 'trickle-down effects' of cutting taxes on the rich (Stantcheva, 2021). Thus, although most citizens are not directly affected by tax cuts for the richest members of society, they could expect indirect economic benefits. This is another potential explanation for why (some) ordinary citizens support tax cuts for the rich.

### 3 Experimental Design

In order to test which factors drive support for tax cuts for the rich, we run an information provision experiment with a representative US American subject pool.<sup>4</sup> The survey experiment was conducted between May 2 and May 7 2021. By May 7, 3,157 participants had taken part in our survey. 115 respondents were dropped prior to treatment assignment, e.g. because of lacking information on household income or because they earned more than the top federal income tax threshold. Thus, 3,042 individuals took part in the experiment. We purposely chose to exclude respondents in the top federal income tax bracket for two reasons. First, we are interested in what drives ordinary (i.e. non-rich) Americans' preferences for taxing the rich. Hence, excluding top income earners is in line with the substantive focus of our study. Second, all four theories we are looking at try to provide an answer to the question of why people who do not pay the top income tax rate (may) support cutting it. In contrast, support for cutting the top tax rate among people in the top income tax bracket could simply be explained by income maximising self-interest. Hence, excluding top income earners ensures that our theoretical focus aligns with our empirical approach. The survey had a very low dropout rate of only 3%. On average, it took respondents eight and a half minutes to complete the survey.<sup>5</sup>

Figure 1 provides an overview of our experimental design. The between-subject survey experiment is divided into three main parts. In the first part, respondents are asked a battery of demographic questions prior to receiving the treatment. These cover, among others, age, gender, marital status, education, partisan affiliation, household income, and self-assessed economic policy knowledge. Furthermore, we include a question at the end of the demographics section where we ask respondents whether they have devoted their full attention to the survey so far. This item mainly serves the purpose of increasing respondents attention prior to treatment assignment (Meade &

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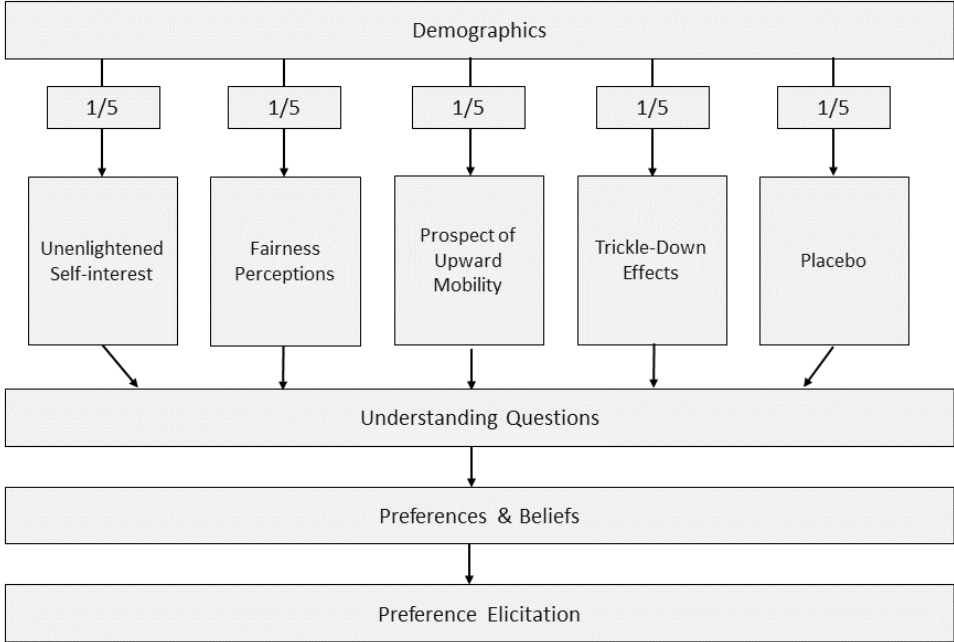
<sup>4</sup>We used quota sampling based on several socioeconomic characteristics (age, gender, income, party affiliation). Further details of the sampling and survey implementation can be found in Appendix A.

<sup>5</sup>The experiment was pre-registered via the American Economic Association registry for Randomized Controlled Trials (AEARCTR-0007620) and was granted ethical clearance from the King's College London College Research Ethics Committee (reference number MRSP-20/21-22999).



Craig, 2012).

Figure 1: Experimental Design



The second part of the survey randomly assigns participants to five groups. Four groups receive a treatment and one group receives a placebo. The treatments and the placebo consist of a short text and a column chart. Each of the treatments is designed to provide respondents with a negative shock to a particular core belief. We use negative shocks across our four treatments for two main reasons: 1) it allows us to use factual information and thereby avoid deception; and 2) it allows us to directly compare effect sizes across treatments and thereby assess the relative importance of the four explanations in driving preferences for cutting taxes on the rich.

The first treatment looks at the role of unenlightened self-interest by using information about individuals' self-declared household income to inform them whether they are currently paying the top federal income tax rate (i.e. whether they have an annual income above the top income tax rate threshold of \$523,600). Hence, it provides them with information about their tax exposure. Specifically, the figure displayed to respondents in this treatment depends on the income bracket they selected

for their own household and compares the upper threshold of this value with the threshold for the top federal income tax bracket. The second treatment investigates fairness-based explanations. More specifically, this fairness treatment compares the wealth of the richest US Americans who inherited their wealth to the wealth of the bottom 50%. Since inherited wealth is the result of luck and not the result of an individual's own hard work and effort, this is likely to affect fairness perceptions (Fong, 2001; Limberg, 2020). Information on the wealth of the richest Americans is taken from the Forbes 400 list of 2020 and of the bottom 50% from the Federal Reserve DFA 2021.<sup>6</sup>

The third treatment, which looks at prospects of upward mobility, shows the unconditional probability of an individual becoming part of the top 1% income earners for at least five years over their lifetime. It contrasts that with the probability of not becoming part of the top 1%. Crucially for our treatment, the chances of becoming part of the top 1% are very slim, with a likelihood of just 2.2%. This value is calculated using data from Hirschl and Rank (2015) and the Internal Revenue Service 2015. We report the unconditional probability of becoming part of the top 1% income earners as opposed to the conditional probability, because the likelihood of upward mobility depends on too many demographic factors beyond household income to calculate a meaningful value for each respondent, while maintaining large enough subgroups to estimate treatment effects. The fourth treatment focuses on the potential macroeconomic trickle-down effects from cutting taxes on the rich. It informs respondents that the top rate of federal income tax has almost halved since 1979. The accompanying figure then shows average annual economic growth in two time periods: the post-war period up until 1979 and the period since then. The data to create this figure is taken from the US Bureau of Economic Analysis 2021 and the Tax Policy Center 2020. Against what we might expect from 'trickle-down' arguments, both taxes on the rich and economic growth were substantially lower in the latter period.

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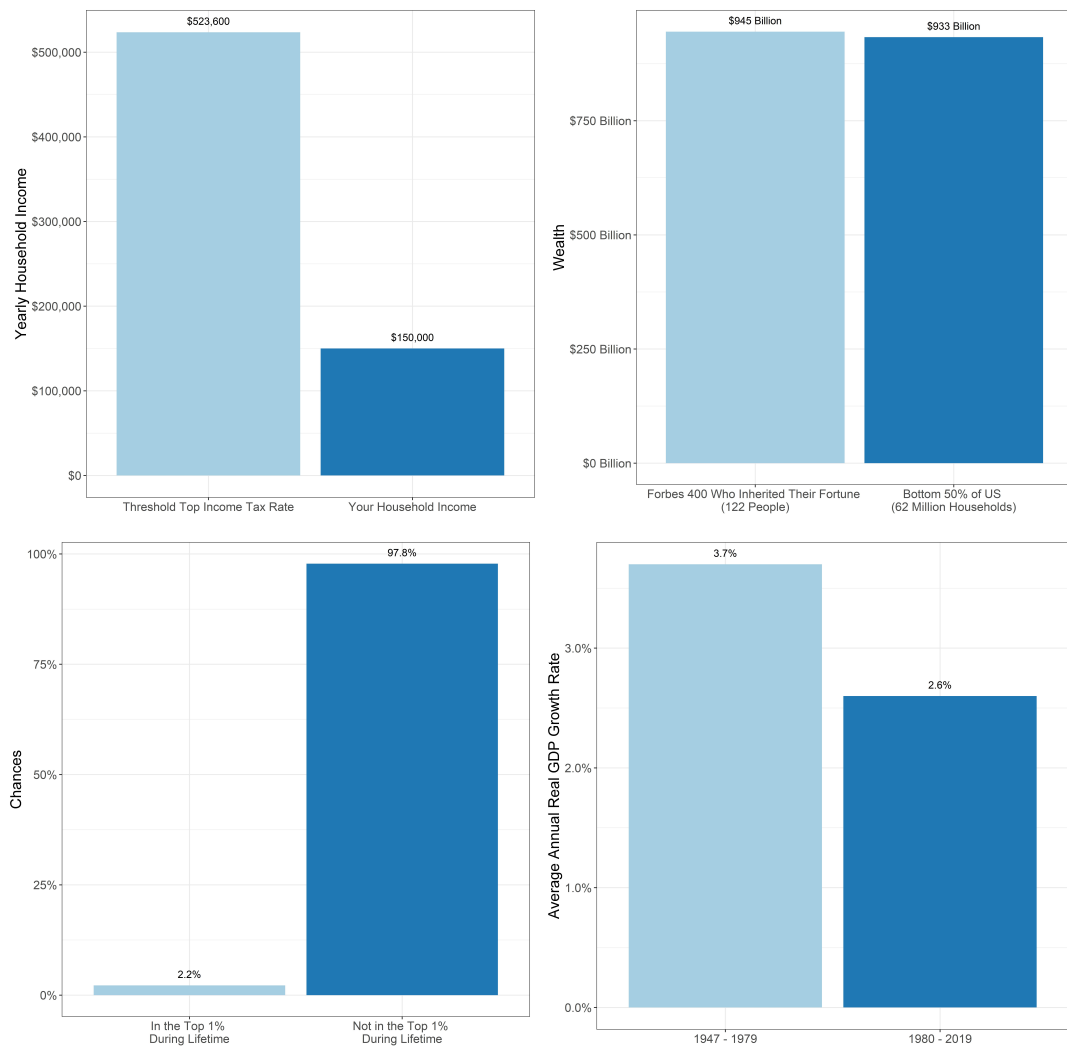
<sup>6</sup>For comparability in the figure, we take the average of the Q1 to Q4 values for 2015 to calculate the share of wealth of the bottom 50% of Americans. The DFA data we use (from April 2021) can be accessed [here](#).

Finally, our placebo treatment presents individuals with information about the two longest rivers in the US. To ensure that individuals are exposed to treatments/placebo for a sufficient amount of time and to increase attention, we set a minimum time of 8 seconds for respondents to view the treatments. Furthermore, we ask a multiple-choice question to test respondents' understanding of the treatments (and placebo) to ensure participants have paid sufficient attention to the provided information. 95% of respondents in the first treatment, 99% of respondents in the second, 97% in the third treatment, and 98% in the fourth treatment correctly answer these understanding questions. We show that the main treatment effects are robust to excluding those respondents who did not answer these questions correctly in Figure C15 in the Appendix. Figure 2 illustrates the information displayed to respondents in each of the treatments. The complete survey instrument, including the accompanying explanatory text to each of the treatment figures and the placebo, can be found in Appendix E.1. Table B1 in the Appendix reports the balance statistics for treatment assignment. We cannot detect any major and systematic imbalances. Hence, randomisation was successful.

The third and final part of the survey measures post-treatment preferences and beliefs. To avoid demand effects (De Quidt, Haushofer, & Roth, 2018) and concerns of consistency bias (Falk & Zimmermann, 2013), we did not elicit prior beliefs but only posterior beliefs, and we use a between subject design. This is in line with current best practice in information provision experiments (Haaland, Roth, & Wohlfart, 2020). In this third part of the survey experiment, we ask respondents whether they support or oppose a reduction in the top federal income tax rate. Possible answers range from 1 – "Very Unsupportive" to 5 – "Very Supportive". Furthermore, we ask them about the rationale behind their preference towards tax cuts for the rich via an open-ended answer field. To check whether the effects of our treatments are similar for reforms that increase taxes on the rich, we also ask respondents whether they support or oppose an increase in the top federal income tax rate.

In addition, we ask a battery of core belief questions. For each of these questions,

Figure 2: Treatment Screens



*Note:* From top left to bottom right, the panels show the figure displayed to respondents in the USI treatment, the fairness treatment, the prospect of upward mobility treatment, and finally the trickle-down treatment. The short explanatory text that accompanied each figure can be found in Part E.1 of the Appendix.

respondents answer on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 10. Most importantly, we ask people (1) whether they think they would personally benefit from lowering the top federal income tax rate; (2) whether they think they would personally benefit from lowering the top federal income tax rate in the future; (3) whether they think they are personally affected by a reduction in the top federal income tax rate; (4) whether they think there are benefits for the economy (e.g. jobs created / higher growth) from a reduction in the top federal income tax rate; (5) whether they think people in the top tax bracket deserve a lower tax rate; and (6) what has more to do with why a person is

in the top federal income tax bracket - hard work or more advantages than others. To check whether expressed preferences align with elicited preferences, we also provide respondents with the option of signing up to a mailing list of an organisation that opposes a reduction in the top federal income tax rate, as well as a mailing list of an organisation that supports a reduction of the top federal income tax rate. We then track whether respondents click on either of the links. Both organisations appear next to one another on respondents' screens and their order is randomised.

## 4 Data and methods

The data sample used for our analysis covers 3,042 individuals from the United States. Table 1 shows the summary statistics for the sample. We can see that our quota sampling has led to good coverage across different levels of income and age, as well as (near) balance on the gender dimension.<sup>7</sup> The sample also contains respondents from across the political spectrum, which allows us to dig into the effects of partisan affiliation on tax preferences and core beliefs, as well as on the estimated treatment effects.

To estimate the treatment effects on support for cutting the top federal income tax rate, we run ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions. Our dependent variable measures whether a respondent supports cutting the top tax rate. It is a dummy variable, which is 1 if they are either "Supportive" or "Fully supportive" of lowering the top federal income tax rate, and zero otherwise. Here, we follow [Alesina and Giuliano \(2011\)](#) and [Corneo and Grüner \(2002\)](#) in coding support for tax cuts as a binary variable as differences between the five possible answer categories may not be as meaningful to some respondents. We then create dummy variables for each of our treatments, while respondents who received the placebo form the reference group. This allows us to directly compare the effect sizes of our four treatments. In addition, we include a battery of covariates in our model. These cover a wide range

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<sup>7</sup>In Table 1, we merged the original 12 income groups into 6 to conserve space. In the regression analysis, we use the mean of each individual income group in order to control for income as a metric variable.

of individual socio-economic characteristics. Among others, we control for income, gender, age, education, children, employment status, and party affiliation.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the estimated equation takes the following form:

$$TaxPref_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 U_i + \beta_2 F_i + \beta_3 P_i + \beta_4 T_i + \sum_{k=1}^K \beta_k Z_{ki} + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

Where,  $TaxPref_i$  measures the support of individual  $i$  for cutting taxes on the rich,  $\beta_1$  is the estimated coefficient of the unenlightened self-interest treatment,  $\beta_2$  denotes the coefficient of the fairness treatment,  $\beta_3$  is the coefficient for the prospects of upward mobility treatment, and  $\beta_4$  is the coefficient for the trickle-down information treatment. The placebo river length information treatment is our main reference group.  $\beta_0$  is the intercept,  $\sum_{k=1}^K \beta_k$  denotes the coefficients for up to  $K$  covariates, and  $\varepsilon_i$  is the error term.

In a second step, we look at the effects of the treatments on core beliefs. In this set of regression models, we use exactly the same specification but our dependent variables are our six core belief items.

## 5 Results

### 5.1 Support for cutting the top rate of federal income tax

Looking first at the placebo group allows us to ascertain the baseline level of support for cutting the top rate of federal income tax in the United States. While around 57% of respondents in the placebo group oppose a reduction in the top tax rate, roughly 20% neither support nor oppose such a reform and another 23% support a reduction (Figure B1 in the Appendix).<sup>9</sup> Given that we exclude all respondents in the top federal income tax rate bracket, the responses show that a substantial number of Americans support a tax cut for the rich despite not paying the top rate of federal income tax themselves.

<sup>8</sup>For a full list of covariates, see Table C1 in the Appendix.

<sup>9</sup>For the distribution of the different core beliefs among the placebo group, see Figure B7 in the Appendix.

Table 1: Summary Statistics

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Pctl. 25	Pctl. 75	Max
Tax Cut Support	2856	0.205	0.404	0	0	0	1
Tax Increase Support	2904	0.608	0.488	0	0	1	1
Age	3017	39.167	13.931	18	28	49	90
Children	3042	0.443	0.497	0	0	1	1
College Education	3042	0.893	0.31	0	1	1	1
Economic Knowledge	3041	2.833	0.637	1	2	3	4
Social Class	3031	2.795	0.874	1	2	3	5
Affected By COVID-19	3019	0.3	0.459	0	0	1	1
Income	3042						
... \$0 - \$20,000	352	11.6%					
... \$20,001 - \$40,000	569	18.7%					
... \$40,001 - \$60,000	522	17.2%					
... \$60,001 - \$100,000	752	24.7%					
... \$100,001 - \$200,000	730	24%					
... \$200,001 - \$500,000	117	3.8%					
Gender	3042						
... Female	1603	52.7%					
... Male	1423	46.8%					
... Other	13	0.4%					
... Prefer not to say	3	0.1%					
Place of Residence	3042						
... Rural	519	17.1%					
... Suburban	1725	56.7%					
... Urban	798	26.2%					
Party Affiliation	3042						
... Democratic Party	1574	51.7%					
... Republican Party	825	27.1%					
... Other	544	17.9%					
... Don't know	99	3.3%					
Employment Status	3042						
... Full-time employee	1486	48.8%					
... Part-time employee	340	11.2%					
... Self-employed or small business owner	289	9.5%					
... Student	233	7.7%					
... Retiree	200	6.6%					
... Unemployed and looking for work	264	8.7%					
... Not currently working and not looking for work (e.g. full-time parent)	218	7.2%					
... Prefer not to answer	12	0.4%					

Furthermore, we explore whether the baseline support for tax cuts is correlated with partisanship and a range of socio-economic characteristics (Figure B2 in the Appendix). While we only see marginal differences when looking at gender, age, and income levels, partisan differences are substantial. Among Republicans, more than 38% support cutting the top federal income tax rate. In contrast, only about 15% of Democrats are in favor of this policy.

In addition to preferences over tax cuts, we asked respondents about their preferences regarding potential *increases* of the top federal income tax rate. We find almost the exact mirror image of the tax cut question. While around 56% support higher top federal income tax rates, 20% oppose such tax hikes (Figure B3 in the Appendix). Furthermore, we see a similar division along party lines (Figure B4 in the Appendix).<sup>10</sup>

Next, we turn to our treatment groups. Figure 3 shows how support for lowering taxes on the rich compares across the control and treatment groups. We do not see big differences in support among those people who received the placebo and those who received the unenlightened self-interest (USI) information treatment. Support for tax cuts is almost identical in the USI group (23.2%) compared to the placebo group (23.3%). Thus, our results offer little empirical support for the theory that people's lack of knowledge about the tax system and their individual exposure to tax reforms explains enduring support for cutting taxes on the rich. Informing people that they do not pay the top tax rate does not fundamentally alter preferences for cutting the top federal income tax rate. In contrast, we can see that support for top federal income tax rate cuts is substantially lower among respondents who received the fairness treatment (18.4%), the prospect of upward mobility treatment (20.4%), and the trickle-down treatment (17.4%).

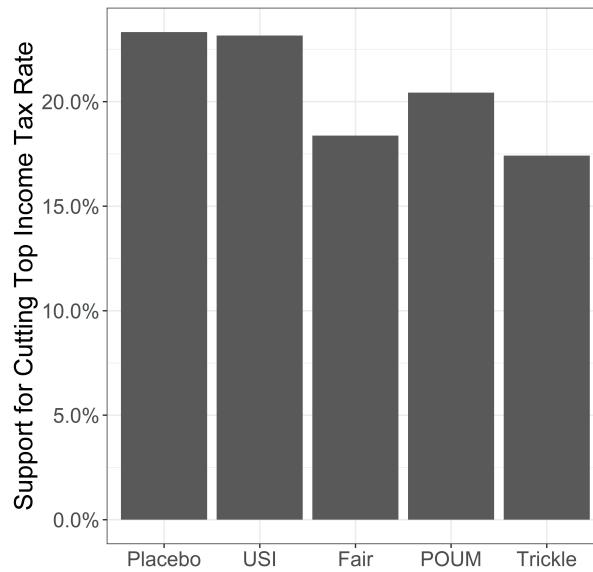
We also check whether we see a similar pattern when looking at support for tax increases (Figure B5 in the Appendix). In line with our findings above, the unen-

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<sup>10</sup>An important but often overlooked factor when doing experimental research on tax policy preferences is whether survey respondents perceive the researchers or the survey as politically biased. To guard against perceptions of bias affecting our results, we also gathered information on whether respondents perceived the survey to be biased. We found no evidence for a widespread perception of bias (Figure B6 in the Appendix).



Figure 3: Support for Lowering the Top Federal Income Tax Rate For Control and Treatment Groups



*Note:* The figure shows the share of respondents in the control group as well as in the different treatment group who were "Supportive" or "Very supportive" of lowering the top federal income tax rate.

lightened self-interest information treatment does not increase support for top tax rate hikes. In fact, support is even slightly lower in the unenlightened self-interest group (54.5%) compared to the control group (58.1%). In contrast, support is substantially higher in the treatment groups that received the fairness information treatment (64.2%), the trickle-down information treatment (67%), and support is also slightly higher in the group that received the prospects of upward mobility treatment (60.5%).

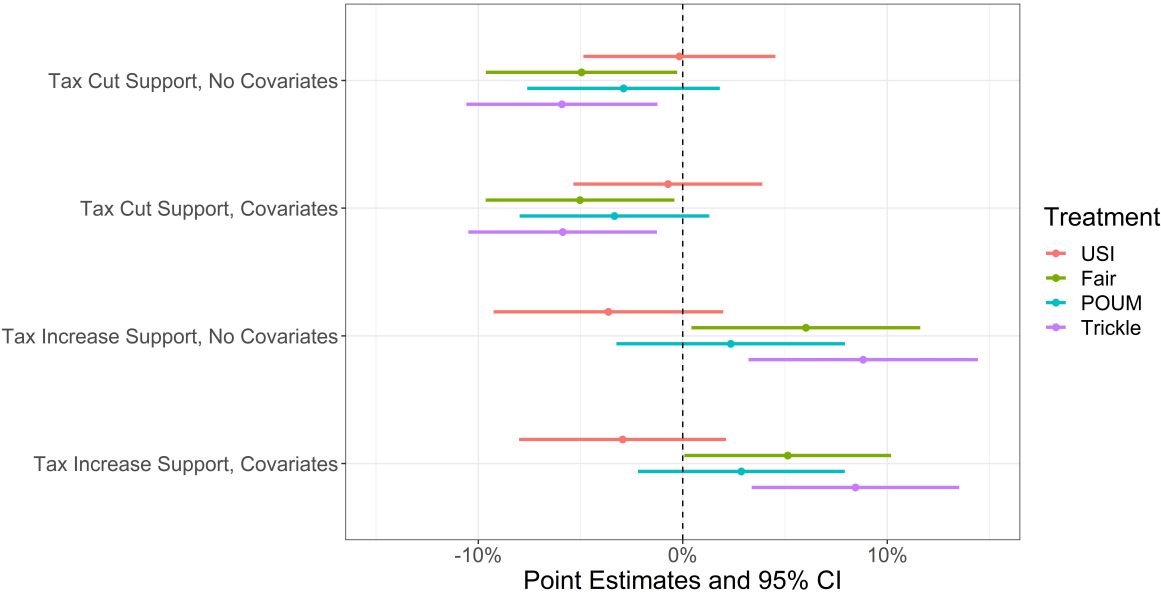
## 5.2 Treatment Effects on Tax Preferences

We estimate the treatment effects on tax preferences using OLS regressions. Since we are mainly interested in the effects of our information treatments, we present the main estimates including confidence intervals as a coefficient plot in Figure 4 (the full regression results including all covariates are shown in Table C1 in the Appendix). First and foremost, we cannot see any effect of the unenlightened self-interest treatment on support for cutting the top federal income tax rate. The treatment effect is close to zero and statistically insignificant. This finding holds when adding covariates.

Furthermore, the finding is similar for support for tax hikes: informing individuals that they do not fall into the top income tax bracket has no effect on their support for increasing top tax rates.

In contrast, the fairness information treatment significantly reduces support for tax cuts by around 5 percentage points. Overall, these findings indicate that fairness perceptions are a crucial driver of support for tax cuts for the rich. We also find a similar, yet mirrored effect on support for tax increases. The effect of the prospect of upward mobility treatment on support for tax cuts is negative with an effect size of around 3 percentage points. However, the treatment effect is statistically insignificant across models. Finally, we find a strong negative effect of our trickle-down treatment (around 6 percentage points). The effect size is even higher when looking at support for tax hikes (8.5 percentage points).

Figure 4: Treatment Effects on Support for Tax Cut and Tax Increase



Note: The figure shows the effect of the different treatments on support for cutting/raising the top federal income tax rate. Table C1 in the Appendix shows the full regression results.

We run a series of alternative specifications to check our results. Among others, we run models where we use a re-coded 3-point scale (1=Support, 2=Neither Support Nor Oppose, 3=Oppose) as the dependent variable (Figure C10 in the Appendix), weight observations to ensure representativeness (Figure C11 in the Appendix), ex-

clude those participants who did not find the information presented believable (Figure C12 in the Appendix), rerun the analysis while excluding all respondents who either completed the survey in less than 200 seconds or who looked at the treatment for less than 15 seconds (Figure C13 in the Appendix), and exclude individuals who report inconsistent preferences for tax policy-making by supporting both tax cuts and hikes (Figure C14 in the Appendix). The main results of our analysis are robust to these alternative specifications.

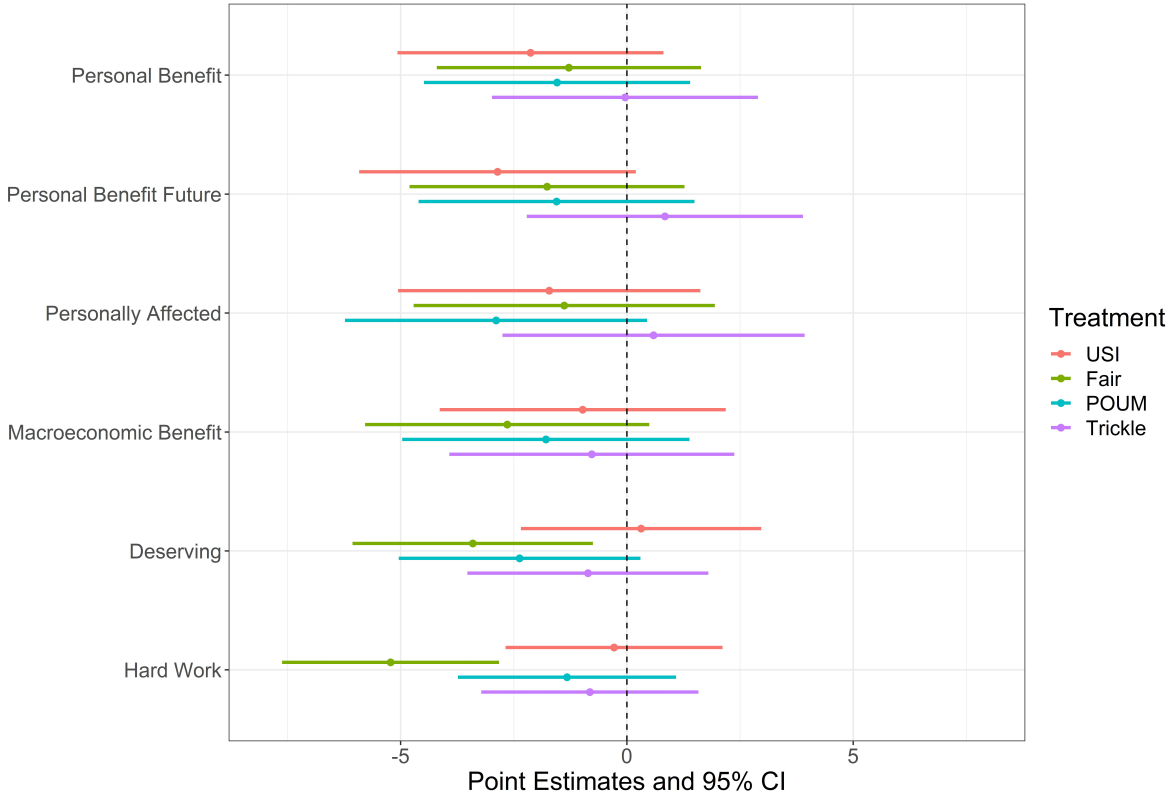
### 5.3 Treatment Effects on Core Beliefs

Next, we look at the effects of the treatments on core beliefs. More specifically, we look at six core belief items. The first three items ask respondents: (1) whether they think they would personally benefit from cutting the top tax rate; (2) whether they think they will personally benefit from such cuts in the future; and (3) whether they think they are personally affected by such cuts in any way. We also ask respondents whether they think there are benefits for the economy (e.g. jobs created / higher growth) from a reduction in the top federal income tax rate. Finally, we ask two items that measure core beliefs related to fairness and deservingness perceptions: (1) whether respondents think households in the top federal income tax bracket deserve a lower tax rate; and (2) whether they think people in the top federal income tax bracket have worked harder than others. Respondents answer these questions on a 0-10 Likert scale and answers are standardised to range from 0 to 100.

Figure 5 shows the results. The unenlightened self-interest information treatment does not affect any of the core belief dimensions. In particular, we find no effects on individuals beliefs about being affected by tax cuts. People who received the unenlightened self-interest information treatment are not less likely to believe that they profit from cutting top tax rates now or in the future. Furthermore, they are not less likely to believe that they are affected by tax cuts for the rich in any way. Hence, information of tax exposure does not lead to a change in beliefs regarding tax exposure. By and large, people seem to be fairly well-informed about whether they

are affected by a cut in the top federal income tax rate (or not).

Figure 5: Treatment Effects on Core Beliefs



Note: The figure shows the effect of the different treatments on core beliefs. All values have been standardised to a 0 to 100 scale. Table C3 in the Appendix shows the full regression results.

The fairness information treatment has a statistically significant effect on the two core belief questions about fairness and deservingness. Respondents who received this treatment are less likely to think that households in the top federal income tax bracket deserve a lower tax rate and that people in the top federal income tax bracket have worked harder than others. Hence, our fairness treatment affects core fairness beliefs as intended.

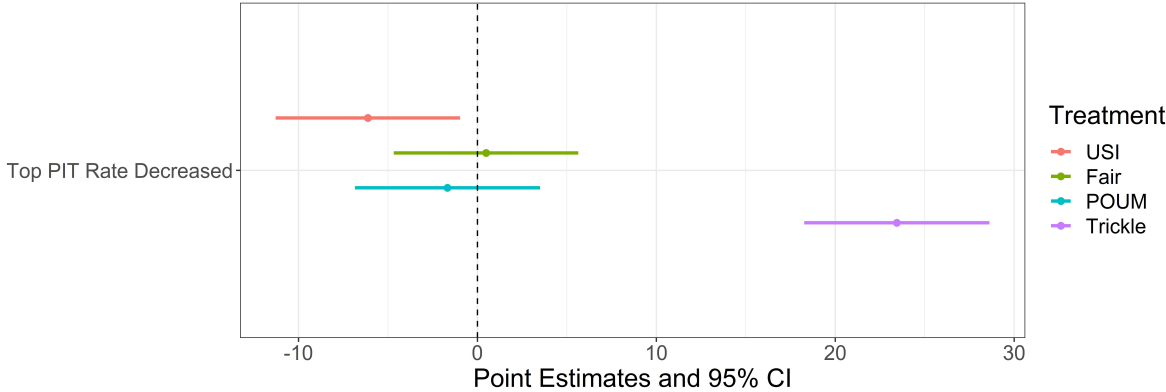
The coefficients for the prospect of upward mobility treatment are mostly statistically insignificant. The treatment does not fundamentally affect people’s beliefs about whether they benefit from tax cuts now or in the future. The effect on beliefs about being generally affected narrowly misses statistical significance at the 95% level. The same applies to deservingness beliefs. This is an interesting finding, which might indicate a potential overlap between perceptions of personal income mobility and

fairness beliefs.

Finally, the trickle-down treatment does not have a significant effect on any of the core belief items. Most strikingly, the treatment does not affect people’s belief about the economic benefits of cutting taxes for the rich. Macroeconomic beliefs seem to be extremely sticky. However, in an additional analysis we find that this treatment has a statistically significant impact on people’s knowledge about past policy trajectories of the top federal income tax rate (Figure 6). More specifically, we look at the effect on the likelihood of stating that top federal income tax rates have declined in recent decades. The effect is substantial. It increases the share of people who state that top tax rates have declined by around 23 percentage points.

In other words, informing people that top tax rates have declined and that this decline did not coincide with higher economic growth does not lead to updated beliefs about trickle-down effects. The main thing that respondents seem to take away from the treatment is that taxes for the rich have been cut in recent decades. This, in turn, decreases the likelihood of supporting further cuts. The fairness and the prospect of upward mobility treatments do not affect perceptions about the development of the top tax rate. Interestingly, however, we find that informing people that they are not paying the top federal income tax rate makes them slightly less likely to believe that the top tax rate has declined in recent decades.

Figure 6: Treatment Effects on Knowledge About Historical Development of Top Federal Income Tax Rates



Note: The figure shows the effect of the different treatments on stating that the top federal income tax rate has declined in recent decades. Table C4 in the Appendix shows the full regression results.

## 5.4 Mechanism for Trickle-Down Treatment Effect

In the previous section we reported that the trickle-down treatment significantly reduced support for tax cuts by providing information about past tax cuts rather than by updating beliefs about trickle-down effects. While this finding is in itself interesting, it raises the question of why providing this information has such a large effect on preferences. To try to answer this question, we ran a follow-up experiment with a new sample of subjects to test two potential mechanisms.<sup>11</sup>

First, given the importance of our fairness treatment, we consider the possibility that respondents' fairness perceptions were affected by the information provided to the trickle-down treatment group. When being informed of recent cuts to the top rate of federal income, respondents may have compared these cuts to the (smaller) tax cuts in their own tax bracket leading to a sense of unfairness. While all our initial questions aimed at measuring fairness beliefs were unaffected by the trickle-down treatment (see Figure 5), a question more specifically aimed at capturing the potential unfairness created through the trickle-down information may be able to capture any potential treatment effects.

Second, the observed effect may be due to the information of the trickle-down treatment providing a reference point for respondents. It is well known that reference points influence a variety of preferences (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Köszegi & Rabin, 2006; O'Donoghue & Sprenger, 2018). In particular, if subjects have little knowledge about the historical development of the top federal income tax rate, the information provided in the trickle-down treatment may be significant to respondents' subsequently expressed preferences.

To test both potential explanations, we re-ran our main analysis for the trickle-down and placebo treatments and asked two additional questions. To test the fairness-based explanation, we asked respondents for their agreement with the statement "Because households in the top federal income tax bracket have received tax cuts over the past 40 years, they don't deserve another tax cut." To test the reference point ex-

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<sup>11</sup>Details of this follow-up experiment can be found in Part A.3 of the Appendix.

planation we asked for respondents for their agreement with the statement “Because the top federal income tax rate is lower now than it was 40 years ago, it should be increased.”<sup>12</sup>

Figure 7 shows the results. Again, the placebo information treatment is the reference category and we present models calculated with and without a set of covariates. While all coefficients are positive, the effect of the trickle-down information treatment on fairness perceptions of past tax cuts fails to reach conventional levels of statistical significance. Hence, the fact that the trickle-down treatment significantly reduces support for cutting top tax rates cannot be explained by fairness perceptions connected to past tax cuts. This is also in line with our reported findings in Section 5.3, where we do not find an effect of the trickle-down treatment on general fairness and deservingness beliefs.

In contrast, the trickle-down treatment does have a statistically significant effect on support for the statement that the top federal tax rate should be increased because it is lower than it was 40 years ago. On average, support for the statement increases by around 9 percentage points. Given this significant effect, we further probe the reference point explanation by asking respondents what they would consider an appropriate rate for the top federal income tax rate. We find that respondents in the trickle-down treatment answer with a significantly higher appropriate rate than respondents in the placebo group.<sup>13</sup>

Hence, the findings show strong support for a reference point explanation. Because respondents know that top tax rates have been higher in the past, they take historical tax rates as a reference point and oppose further tax cuts. In sum, these findings indicate that informing individuals about the fact that past top tax rate cuts have not been accompanied by more economic growth does not alter beliefs about the economic efficiency of tax cuts. Instead, it provides respondents with a new reference

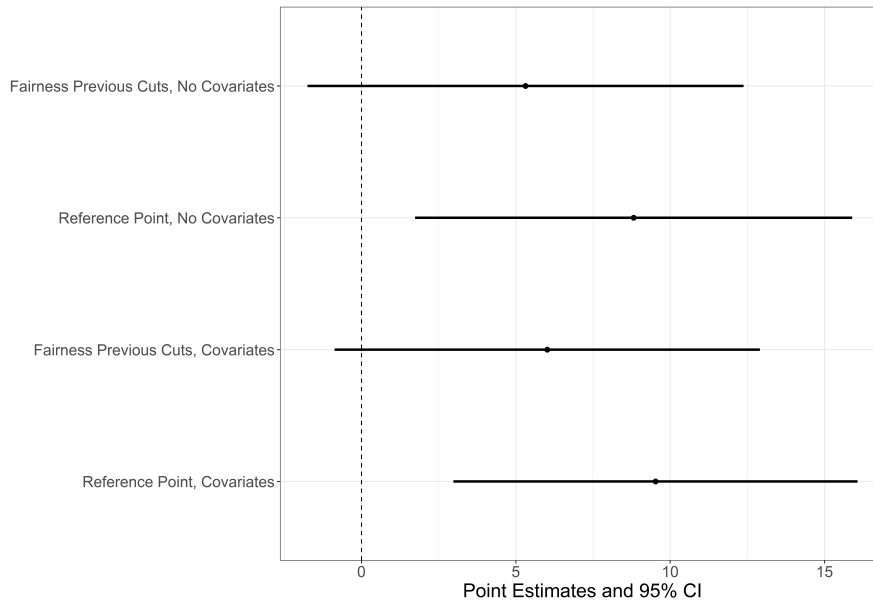
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<sup>12</sup>These questions were added at the end of the survey experiment, just before the preference elicitation, to avoid the information referenced in the statements influencing the answers to the earlier questions on core beliefs and preferences. The exact wording of the additional questions included in the robustness check experiment can be found in Part E.3 of the Appendix.

<sup>13</sup>The results of this additional test can be found in Part C.7 of the Appendix.

point which ultimately lowers demand for further tax cuts.

Figure 7: Treatment Effects of Trickle-Down Treatment on Beliefs Connected to Past Tax Policy Reforms



*Note:* The figure shows the effect of the trickle-down information treatment on agreement with the statement “Because households in the top federal income tax bracket have received tax cuts over the past 40 years, they don’t deserve another tax cut” as well as with the statement “Because the top federal income tax rate is lower now than it was 40 years ago, it should be increased.” Table C5 in the Appendix shows the full regression results.

## 5.5 Subgroup Effects

The previous sections have shown that the unenlightened self-interest treatment has no effect on preferences for tax cuts and core beliefs about tax exposure. However, it is important to note that unenlightened self-interest treatment varies by household income status. Thus, one might expect that the treatment effect is moderated by income status. We check this by running interaction effects between unenlightened self-interest and household income. Across models, the interaction effect is statistically insignificant (Table C2 in the Appendix). Figure C1 in the Appendix visualises this by plotting the marginal effect of the unenlightened self interest treatment. Furthermore, it also shows the results when using a binning estimator. This approach can test whether there is a conditional treatment effect for subgroups of the moderator



variable (Hainmueller, Mummolo, & Xu, 2019). We divide the sample into 8 groups of equal sample size. Across these groups, we do not find an effect of the unenlightened self-interest information treatment on preferences for tax cuts. Furthermore, we get similar results when looking at tax increases (Figure C2 in the Appendix).

We also recalculate our models by splitting the sample into people with income below and above the median US household income (roughly \$70,000). The effect of the unenlightened self-interest treatment on tax preferences remains statistically insignificant for both subgroups (Figures C3 & C4 in the Appendix). When looking at the impact of the unenlightened self-interest treatment on core beliefs in the two subgroups, we find no effect on the perception of recent or future personal benefits. However, for people with a household income above \$70,000, we do find that the unenlightened self-interest treatment has a negative effect on perceptions of being generally affected by cutting the top tax rate (Figures C5 & C6 in the Appendix).

In addition to subgroup effects for different levels of household income, we check whether our treatment effects vary for Democrats and Republicans. Since we have sampled our respondents based upon partisan affiliation, around a third of respondents do not affiliate with any of the two major US parties. Hence, we lose statistical power when differentiating between Republicans and Democrats and, as a consequence, treatment effects are more likely to become statistically insignificant. Figure C7 in the Appendix shows the results. First and foremost, the unenlightened self-interest treatment does not affect tax policy preferences for either Democrats or Republicans. For Democrats, the results show that the fairness treatment reduces support for top tax rate cuts. Interestingly, the results are slightly asymmetric for Republicans when looking at the treatment effects on support for tax cuts and tax hikes. The fairness and trickle down treatments have a negative, yet statistically insignificant, effect on support for tax cuts. In contrast, both factors lead to significantly more support for tax increases. Furthermore, the effect size increases substantially for both treatments. While the fairness treatment raises support for tax hikes amongst Republicans by 13 percentage points, the trickle down treatment boosts support by 17

percentage points.

Figure C8 in the Appendix shows the effect of the treatments on core beliefs by party affiliation. While the unenlightened self-interest has a slight negative effect on beliefs about being generally affected by top tax rate cuts, this effect disappears for Republicans. In contrast, the fairness treatment has a much stronger impact on core fairness and deservingness beliefs for Republicans. One potential explanation for this could be a ceiling effect for fairness beliefs. Since Democrats are much more likely to view the economic success of the rich as undeserved, our fairness information treatment poses a weaker negative shock to their beliefs than for Republicans.

## 5.6 Validity Checks

In order to check the validity of our findings, we perform three additional sets of analyses. First, we rerun the experiment by providing a USI treatment with unconditional treatment information. While we also do not find treatment effects for the USI treatment when testing for subgroup effects, the fact that the information was provided conditional on respondents' household income may have nonetheless influenced the results. To provide an unconditional USI treatment we rephrase the treatment information to refer to average household income as opposed to the specific income bracket the respondent is in. In other words, we compare the threshold of the top federal income tax bracket with the income of the average household income in the US, while still informing individuals that they are not paying the top federal income tax rate.<sup>14</sup> The results are in line with our previous findings: the USI treatment has no statistically significant impact on preferences for tax cuts (Figure C9 in the Appendix). These findings hold when adding a set of covariates and when looking at preferences for top tax rate tax hikes instead of cuts. Across all models, the USI information treatment does not affect tax policy preferences.

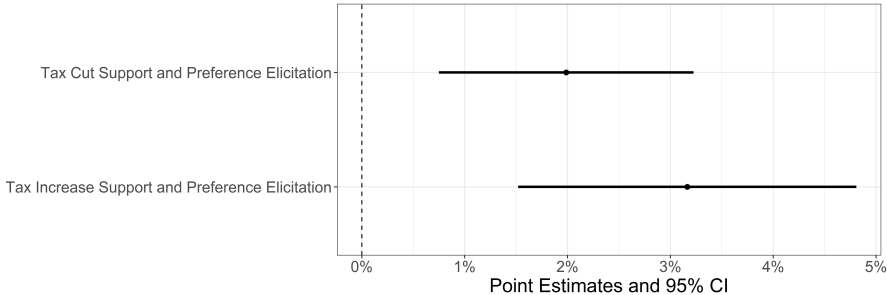
Second, we check whether our main independent variables – preferences for/against tax cuts and hikes – correlate with elicited preferences. We run regression

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<sup>14</sup>The treatment information and figure provided in our unconditional USI treatment can be found in Part E.2 of the Appendix.

analyses where we check whether people who stated support for tax cuts (tax hikes) are more likely to click on the link that gives them the option of signing up to a mailing list of a US organisation that supports a reduction (increase) in the top federal income tax rate. Figure 8 shows the results. We see clear support for the assumption that *stated* preferences for tax cuts (tax hikes) are strongly correlated with *elicited* preferences for tax cuts (tax hikes). The coefficient on stated preferences is positive and statistically highly significant for both tax cuts and tax hikes.

Figure 8: Connection Between Stated and Elicited Preferences



*Note:* The figure shows the coefficients of stated support for cutting/raising the top federal income tax rate when regressed on elicited preferences. Results are based on linear probability models with a full battery of covariates. Table C7 in the Appendix shows the full regression results.

Third, we investigate whether individuals refer to a set of dominant core beliefs when explaining their tax policy preferences. To do so, we analyse respondents' answers to our open-ended question about the rationale for their expressed preference over tax cuts for the rich. Figure 9 reports the terms used by respondents across all our treatments to justify their stated preference. By far the most frequently used term is "fair share". While we do not find evidence for differences in terms used across treatments (see Figure B8 in the Appendix), the expressed sentiment in the answers to this question mirrors our main finding - respondents are primarily concerned with fairness when thinking about their preferences for tax cuts for the rich.

In addition, Table B2 in the Appendix reports the most-used terms by respondents depending on their stated support for cutting taxes on the rich. We see the term "fair share" is only used by respondents who are unsupportive of tax cuts. These respondents also refer primarily to terms related to class and income inequality. In



representative survey of around 3,000 Americans. The subjects are randomly assigned into five equal-sized groups and then receive a placebo or one of four treatments. The treatments contain factual information relating to each of the four main drivers of preferences for cutting taxes on the rich, which allows us to compare their relative importance. We find no evidence that unenlightened self-interest affects preferences for reducing the top rate of federal income tax. The same goes for the prospect of upward mobility. On the other hand, we find strong support for fairness-based explanations. We also find that informing individuals about the past trajectory of taxes on the rich fundamentally alters their policy preferences.

Our results are in line with a growing body of experimental work that finds fairness considerations are a crucial influence over preferences for redistribution and tax policies (Almås et al., 2020; Bastani & Waldenström, 2021; Durante et al., 2014). Furthermore, our findings stress the importance of reference points (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Köszegi & Rabin, 2006; O'Donoghue & Sprenger, 2018) in the formation of preferences for taxing the rich. In contrast, we find no support for explanations that focus on economic self-interest (Bartels, 2005; Benabou & Ok, 2001; Piketty, 1995). All treatments which referred to individual benefits of tax cuts – whether direct, indirect, or temporally lagged – did not change people's support for or against tax cuts for the rich. Choices about redistributive decisions affecting the top of the income distribution seem to be primarily driven by other-regarding preferences rather than self-centered preferences (Dimick et al., 2018).

This study opens up several interesting avenues for future research. First, research could explore whether the results generalize outside of the United States. This is particularly pertinent, as other experimental work has found fairness views can differ substantially across countries (Almås et al., 2020). Second, the top federal income tax rate is only one tax on the rich (Hope & Limberg, 2021). It would be important to know the extent to which our results also apply to other taxes on the rich that have declined over recent decades such as the inheritance tax (Kuziemko et al., 2015). Crucially, exposure to inheritance taxation is rarer than exposure to income

taxation. Thus, voters could be ill-informed about their individual exposure to inheritance taxation. This could mean preferences are more malleable, and preference formation might be more likely to be affected by unenlightened self-interest. Third, our unenlightened self-interest treatment focuses on biased perceptions of individual tax exposure. However, it might be the case that policy packages which combine large tax cuts for the rich with small tax cuts for lower income earners cause distorted perceptions of individual benefits from tax reforms. Future work could look at whether such policy packaging affects support for cutting taxes for the richest members of society. Lastly, our findings show how sticky trickle-down beliefs are, even in the face of empirical evidence that lower taxes on the rich have been associated with slower economic growth. Future research could further investigate both the origin and persistence of trickle-down beliefs.

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# Online Appendix

## Part A: Materials and Methods

### A.1 Overview

We conducted our survey experiment using Qualtrics for the design of the study and Prolific Academic for the recruitment of participants. Prolific Academic is a web-based panel with about 42,891 participants currently resident in the US as of June 2021. Participants on Prolific have been found to pay significantly more attention and provide responses of higher quality than those registered on mTurk ([Peer, Brandimarte, Samat, & Acquisti, 2017](#)).

Our main experiment was conducted between the 2nd and 7th of May 2021. The average completion time was 8 minutes and 30 seconds and respondents earned on average the equivalent of £5.82/hr for their participation. The full survey instrument we used is available in Part E of this Appendix.

### A.2 Sampling and Survey Implementation

To generate a representative sample of the US population, we conducted quota-based sampling and ran our survey experiment on 360 individual subgroups. We used the US Current Population Survey ([US Census Bureau, 2018](#)) to create our subgroups based on age, gender, party affiliation and household income. Table [A1](#) reports the number of targeted subjects per subgroup, assuming a total (targeted) sample size of 5,000 subjects. Table [A2](#) reports the subgroups that we could not fill entirely on Prolific. We were unable to fill these subgroups as too few participants with the specified attributes, in particular older age groups, are signed up on the platform. To account for this, we ran additional analyses where we count these subgroups accordingly to ensure representativeness (Figure [C11](#)).

Table A1: Stratification: Target by Subgroup

	<b>Gender</b>									
	Female					Male				
	<b>Age group</b>					<b>Age group</b>				
	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
<i>Democrats</i>										
<b>Income</b>										
< \$10,000	5	7	7	6	16	5	7	7	6	15
\$10,000s	8	12	11	10	25	7	11	10	10	24
\$20,000s	8	12	11	10	25	7	11	10	10	24
\$30,000s	7	12	11	10	25	7	11	10	10	24
\$40,000s	8	12	11	10	25	7	11	10	10	24
\$50,000s	7	11	10	9	22	7	10	9	9	22
\$60,000s	6	9	9	8	20	6	9	8	8	19
\$70,000s	5	8	8	7	18	5	8	7	7	17
\$80,000s	5	7	7	6	16	5	7	6	6	15
\$90,000s	4	7	6	6	14	4	6	6	6	14
\$100,000s	15	23	21	20	48	14	22	20	19	47
> \$150,000s	17	27	25	24	58	17	26	24	23	56
<i>Republicans</i>										
<b>Income</b>										
< \$10,000	4	6	5	5	12	4	6	5	5	12
\$10,000s	6	9	8	8	20	6	9	8	8	19
\$20,000s	6	9	8	8	20	6	9	8	8	19
\$30,000s	6	9	8	8	19	6	9	8	8	19
\$40,000s	6	9	8	8	20	6	9	8	8	19
\$50,000s	5	8	8	7	18	5	8	7	7	17
\$60,000s	5	7	7	6	16	5	7	6	6	15
\$70,000s	4	7	6	6	14	4	6	6	6	14
\$80,000s	4	6	5	5	12	4	6	5	5	12
\$90,000s	3	5	5	5	11	3	5	5	4	11
\$100,000s	11	18	16	15	38	11	17	16	15	37
> \$150,000s	14	21	19	18	45	13	20	19	18	44
<i>Others</i>										
<b>Income</b>										
< \$10,000	6	10	9	9	21	6	10	9	8	21
\$10,000s	10	16	14	14	34	10	15	14	13	33
\$20,000s	10	16	14	14	34	10	15	14	13	33
\$30,000s	10	15	14	14	33	10	15	14	13	32
\$40,000s	10	16	14	14	34	10	15	14	13	33
\$50,000s	9	14	13	12	30	9	14	13	12	29
\$60,000s	8	12	11	11	27	8	12	11	11	26
\$70,000s	7	11	10	10	24	7	11	10	10	23
\$80,000s	6	10	9	9	21	6	9	9	8	20
\$90,000s	6	9	8	8	19	6	9	8	8	18
\$100,000s	20	30	28	27	65	19	30	27	26	63
> \$150,000s	23	36	33	32	78	23	35	32	31	75

Table A2: Stratification: Share of respondents reached by subgroup

	Gender									
	Female					Male				
	Age group					Age group				
	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
<i>Democrats</i>										
<b>Income</b>										
< \$10,000	✓	✓	✓	83.33%	18.75%	✓	✓	✓	66.67%	6.67%
\$10,000s	✓	✓	✓	✓	68.00%	✓	✓	✓	80.00%	33.33%
\$20,000s	✓	✓	✓	90.00%	80.00%	✓	✓	✓	60.00%	54.17%
\$30,000s	✓	✓	✓	✓	48.00%	✓	✓	✓	20.00%	33.33%
\$40,000s	✓	✓	✓	70.00%	52.00%	✓	✓	✓	30.00%	16.67%
\$50,000s	✓	✓	✓	✓	81.82%	✓	✓	✓	55.56%	40.91%
\$60,000s	✓	✓	✓	✓	70.00%	✓	✓	✓	✓	31.58%
\$70,000s	✓	✓	✓	✓	55.56%	✓	✓	✓	✓	52.94%
\$80,000s	✓	✓	✓	✓	62.50%	✓	✓	✓	✓	20.00%
\$90,000s	✓	✓	✓	✓	42.86%	✓	✓	✓	83.33%	42.86%
\$100,000s	✓	✓	✓	85.00%	37.50%	✓	✓	✓	84.21%	19.15%
> \$150,000s	✓	✓	✓	62.50%	17.24%	✓	✓	✓	65.22%	7.14%
<i>Republicans</i>										
<b>Income</b>										
< \$10,000	✓	✓	✓	60.00%	16.67%	✓	33.33%	80.00%	0.00%	0.00%
\$10,000s	50.00%	88.89%	50.00%	75.00%	25.00%	66.67%	77.78%	25.00%	50.00%	26.32%
\$20,000s	✓	66.67%	25.00%	✓	55.00%	✓	63.64%	30.00%	30.00%	8.33%
\$30,000s	57.14%	✓	63.64%	✓	56.00%	57.14%	✓	✓	20.00%	29.17%
\$40,000s	✓	50.00%	✓	70.00%	20.00%	✓	✓	50.00%	60.00%	4.17%
\$50,000s	42.86%	✓	✓	✓	54.55%	42.86%	✓	66.67%	55.56%	31.82%
\$60,000s	16.67%	✓	✓	✓	30.00%	50.00%	✓	✓	37.50%	31.58%
\$70,000s	✓	✓	✓	✓	22.22%	✓	✓	42.86%	28.57%	23.53%
\$80,000s	20.00%	✓	✓	33.33%	18.75%	60.00%	✓	✓	16.67%	20.00%
\$90,000s	✓	✓	✓	66.67%	21.43%	✓	✓	✓	50.00%	36.36%
\$100,000s	72.73%	✓	81.25%	80.00%	15.79%	✓	✓	✓	✓	13.51%
> \$150,000s	28.57%	52.38%	21.05%	38.89%	8.89%	76.92%	86.67%	73.68%	33.33%	9.10%
<i>Others</i>										
<b>Income</b>										
< \$10,000	✓	✓	✓	33.33%	28.57%	✓	✓	✓	25.00%	9.52%
\$10,000s	✓	✓	✓	92.86%	41.18%	✓	✓	✓	15.38%	12.12%
\$20,000s	✓	✓	✓	35.71%	38.24%	✓	✓	85.71%	46.15%	24.24%
\$30,000s	✓	✓	✓	78.57%	21.21%	✓	✓	✓	69.23%	25.00%
\$40,000s	✓	✓	✓	78.57%	35.29%	✓	✓	✓	53.85%	33.33%
\$50,000s	✓	✓	✓	91.67%	23.33%	✓	✓	✓	83.33%	17.24%
\$60,000s	✓	✓	✓	54.55%	22.22%	✓	✓	✓	72.73%	23.08%
\$70,000s	✓	✓	✓	40.00%	20.83%	✓	✓	✓	50.00%	13.04%
\$80,000s	✓	✓	55.56%	66.67%	28.57%	✓	✓	✓	87.50%	45.00%
\$90,000s	✓	✓	✓	✓	26.32%	✓	✓	✓	75.00%	22.22%
\$100,000s	✓	✓	82.14%	44.44%	9.23%	✓	✓	✓	57.69%	11.11%
> \$150,000s	73.91%	27.78%	42.42%	43.75%	7.69%	56.52%	62.86%	62.50%	12.90%	8.00%

### **A.3 Robustness Check Experiment**

We conducted a follow-up experiment on the 6th of August 2021 with a total of 1,200 additional participants. The aim of this follow-up study was to test the robustness of our USI treatment and the potential mechanisms underlying the observed effect of the trickle-down treatment.

The average completion time was 9 minutes and respondents earned again, on average, the equivalent of £5.82/hr for their participation. The additional questions and treatment we added for this follow-up experiment can be found in Parts E.2 and E.3 of this appendix.

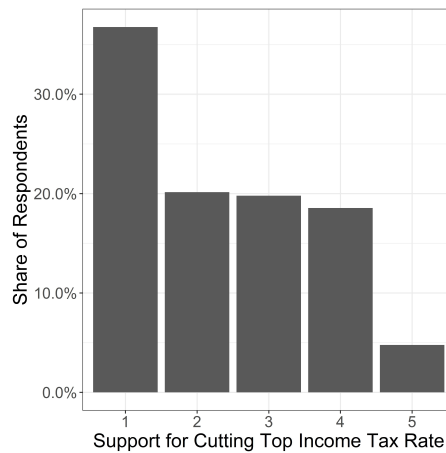
Given the reduced sample size of our robustness check experiment, we did not use the same quota-based sampling as in the main experiment. Instead, we only created subgroups based on political affiliation. Specifically, using the same weights used to generate our subgroups for political affiliation as described in Part A.2 of this appendix. We recruited 384 Democrats, 300 Republicans, and 516 participants who identify with neither Democrats nor Republicans.

## **Part B: Additional Descriptives**

### **B.1 Support for Tax Cuts**

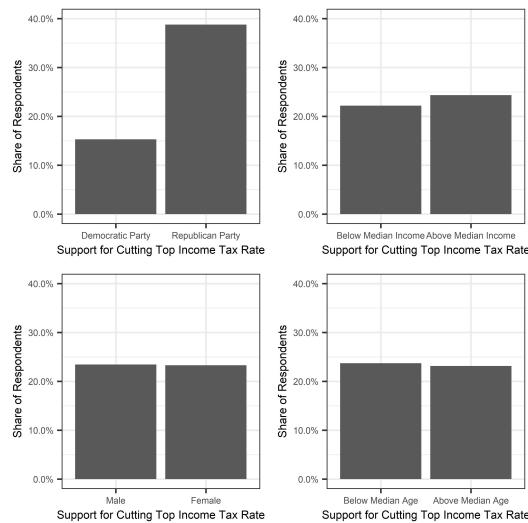
Figure [B1](#) shows how support for cutting the top rate of federal income tax is distributed in the placebo group. Figure [B2](#) then shows how support for cutting taxes on the rich in the placebo group differs by partisanship and a range of socio-economic characteristics.

Figure B1: Support for Cutting the Top Federal Income Tax Rate



*Note:* The figure shows the relative frequency of answers for all individuals in the survey that received the placebo. Answer options range from 1="Very unsupportive" to 5="Very supportive".

Figure B2: Support for Cutting the Top Federal Income Tax Rate, by Partisanship and Different Socio-Economic Characteristics



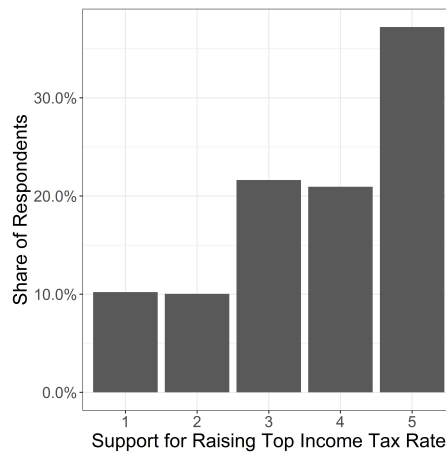
*Note:* The figure shows the relative frequency of answers who were "Supportive" or "Very supportive" of lowering the top federal income tax rate, by partisanship and different socio-economic characteristics. Data covers all individuals in the survey that received the placebo.

## B.2 Support for Tax Increases

Figure B3 reports preferences among the placebo group for increasing the top federal income tax rate. The graph almost mirrors Figure B1. The majority of respondents are either supportive or very supportive of raising the tax rate while less than 20% of respondents state that they are unsupportive or very unsupportive.



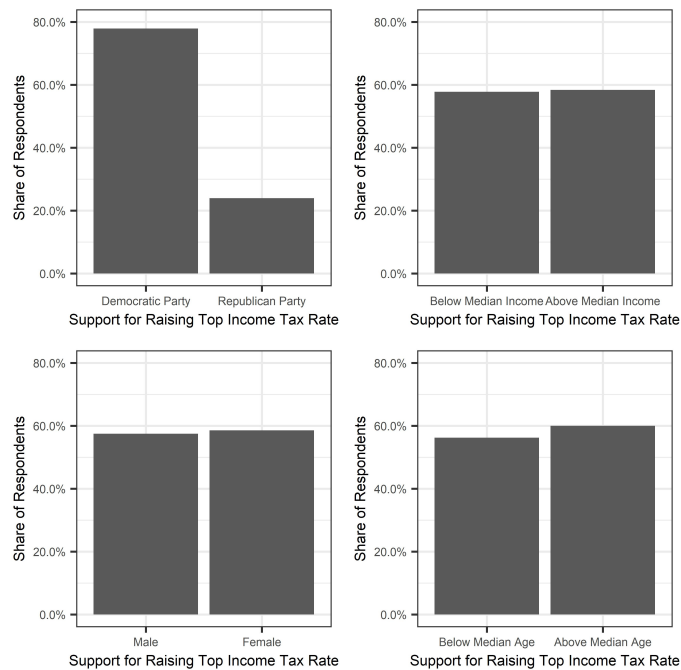
Figure B3: Support for Raising the Top Federal Income Tax Rate



*Note:* The figure shows the relative frequency of answers for all individuals in the survey that received the placebo. Answers options range from 1="Very unsupportive" to 5="Very Supportive". "Don't know" answers were excluded and made up around 6% of all observations.

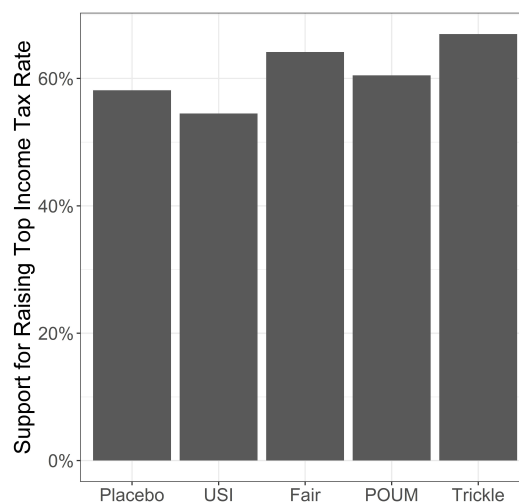
Figure B4 disaggregates the data from Figure B3 by party affiliation and different socio-economic characteristics. Similar to Figure B2, we find plausible patterns of support across parties: Democrats overwhelmingly state strong support for raising the top federal income tax rate while Republicans do not.

Figure B4: Support for Raising the Top Federal Income Tax Rate by Partisanship and Different Socio-Economic Characteristics



*Note:* The figure shows the relative frequency of answers who were "Supportive" or "Very supportive" of raising the top federal income tax rate by partisanship and different socio-economic characteristics. Data covers all individuals in the survey that received the placebo.

Figure B5: Support for Raising the Top Federal Income Tax Rate For Different Treatments



*Note:* The figure shows the share of respondents in the control group as well as in the different treatment group who were "Supportive" or "Very supportive" of raising the top federal income tax rate.

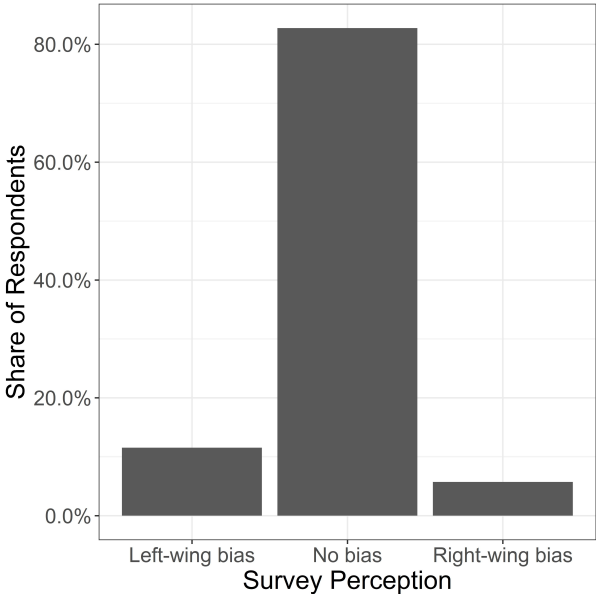
Figure B5 compares the average support for tax increases in the control group

with the average support in each of the four treatment groups. We again measure support for tax increases by looking at the share of respondents who were either "Supportive" or "Fully supportive" of increasing the top federal income tax rate. We find that support for tax increases is highest amongst individuals that received the fairness and trickle-down information treatments.

### B.3 Political Bias

Figure B6 shows the distribution of perceived political bias amongst our respondents. 82.7% of respondents state that they did not perceive the survey as biased, whilst 11.5% sensed a left-wing and 5.7% a right-wing bias.

Figure B6: Perception of Political Bias



*Note:* The figure shows the relative frequency of answers to the question on the perceived political bias of the survey.

## B.4 Balance Checks

Table B1 shows the balance statistics for each treatment compared to the placebo treatment. Overall, we cannot detect any major and systematic covariate imbalances. Hence, randomisation was successful. Out of the 80 coefficients, only 3 are statistically significant on the 5% level. People who received the fairness treatment are slightly more likely to come from a suburban region. Furthermore, there are a few more people from lower social classes as well as students who received the POUM treatment compared with the placebo group. Throughout our analyses, we deal with these random remaining imbalances by additionally running regression models that include all covariates listed in Table B1. Finally, we can also see that all treatment groups are of almost identical size. The trickle-down treatment group had slightly fewer observations than the other treatment groups, but this is due to missing covariates as well as "Don't Know" answers for the tax preference question. Overall, however, these differences are negligible and insignificant. In total, there are around 14 fewer full observations for the Trickle-Down treatment group, accounting for less than 2.5% of each treatment group size and less than 0.5% of the overall sample size.

Table B1: Balance Test For Treatment Assignment

	USI	FAIR	POUM	TD
Income	0.000001 (0.000000)	0.000000 (0.000000)	0.000000 (0.000000)	0.000000 (0.000000)
Age	0.001288 (0.001412)	0.000882 (0.001375)	0.001886 (0.001384)	0.001712 (0.001405)
Children	0.013866 (0.033926)	0.009064 (0.034645)	-0.042693 (0.035207)	0.009777 (0.034543)
College Education	-0.013399 (0.049612)	-0.001143 (0.050203)	-0.026931 (0.047973)	0.037770 (0.051989)
Male (Ref. Female)	0.015063 (0.030595)	0.011451 (0.030847)	0.040257 (0.030374)	0.013236 (0.030931)
Other (Ref. Female)	0.377915 (0.207761)	0.363229 (0.192514)	-0.442565 (0.504716)	0.003552 (0.360221)
Social Class	-0.017770 (0.021379)	-0.037611 (0.021915)	-0.045148* (0.021292)	-0.033090 (0.022530)
Economic Knowledge	0.031718 (0.024718)	0.018876 (0.023994)	0.004700 (0.024441)	0.010696 (0.024151)
Urban (Ref. Rural)	-0.014851 (0.045014)	0.061409 (0.047660)	0.032404 (0.046765)	0.016261 (0.046280)
Suburban (Ref. Rural)	-0.011880 (0.039537)	0.097632* (0.041983)	0.061382 (0.041241)	0.034913 (0.040963)
Republican (Ref. Democrat)	0.019354 (0.035100)	-0.020255 (0.036262)	0.014421 (0.035543)	0.009137 (0.036013)
Other Party (Ref. Democrat)	-0.001743 (0.041341)	0.014377 (0.040564)	0.024553 (0.040370)	0.044696 (0.040775)
No Party (Ref. Democrat)	0.115346 (0.089800)	0.112260 (0.087170)	0.111175 (0.082568)	-0.034548 (0.101754)
Part-Time (Ref. Full-Time Employment)	-0.029223 (0.050773)	0.015636 (0.049610)	0.025220 (0.049525)	-0.023090 (0.051638)
Unemployed (Ref. Full-Time Employment)	0.047412 (0.055905)	-0.012717 (0.057868)	0.033533 (0.055651)	0.001037 (0.059786)
Retiree (Ref. Full-Time Employment)	-0.136512 (0.073459)	-0.024974 (0.068801)	-0.055041 (0.069060)	-0.053661 (0.069157)
Self-Employment (Ref. Full-Time Employment)	0.011490 (0.055676)	0.011850 (0.055901)	0.046235 (0.054523)	0.031591 (0.055417)
Student (Ref. Full-Time Employment)	0.013539 (0.063803)	-0.025198 (0.065070)	0.126654* (0.058505)	0.077225 (0.062602)
Not Looking for Work (Ref. Full-Time Employment)	-0.074843 (0.058833)	-0.111031 (0.059986)	-0.087459 (0.060106)	-0.026725 (0.056886)
Affected By COVID-19	0.033617 (0.033849)	0.019800 (0.034442)	-0.006444 (0.033522)	0.017730 (0.034503)
AIC	1763.662510	1762.277927	1752.261767	1753.745946
BIC	1880.695912	1879.311329	1874.363536	1870.508983
Num. obs.	1198	1198	1197	1184

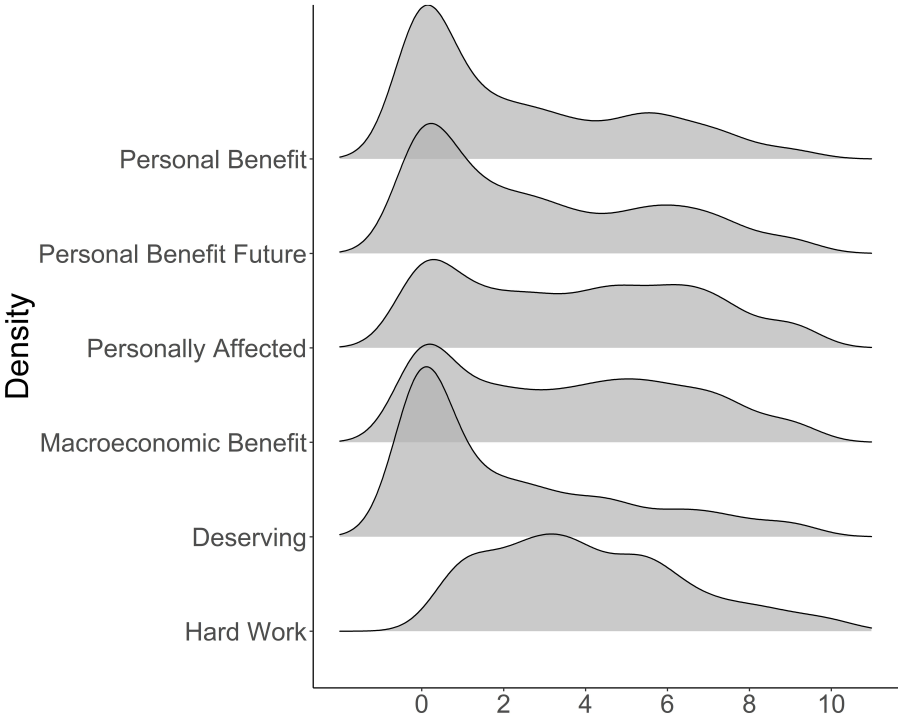
\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

*Note:* The models check for covariate balance by comparing respondents in each treatment group with respondents in the control group, i.e. with the individuals who received the placebo on river length. The results are based on linear probability models with a binary dependent variable that takes the value 1 if an individual has received the respective treatment and 0 if the individual has received the placebo.

### B.5 Core Beliefs

Figure B7 shows the distribution of the different core beliefs for all respondents in the survey that received the placebo. The median of all respondents think that they neither benefit now nor in the future from tax cuts for the rich. Furthermore, most people do not think that there are economic benefits to cutting taxes on the rich or that top personal income earners deserve a tax cut. Beliefs about whether hard work or other advantages have more to do with why a person is in the top federal income tax bracket stands out as being noticeably more evenly distributed than the other core beliefs.

Figure B7: Distribution of Responses to Core Belief Questions



*Note:* The figure shows the density function of responses to the different questions on core beliefs. All distributions are presented with an automatically optimised joint bandwidth of 0.685.

## B.6 Text Analysis of Rationale for Tax Cut Preferences

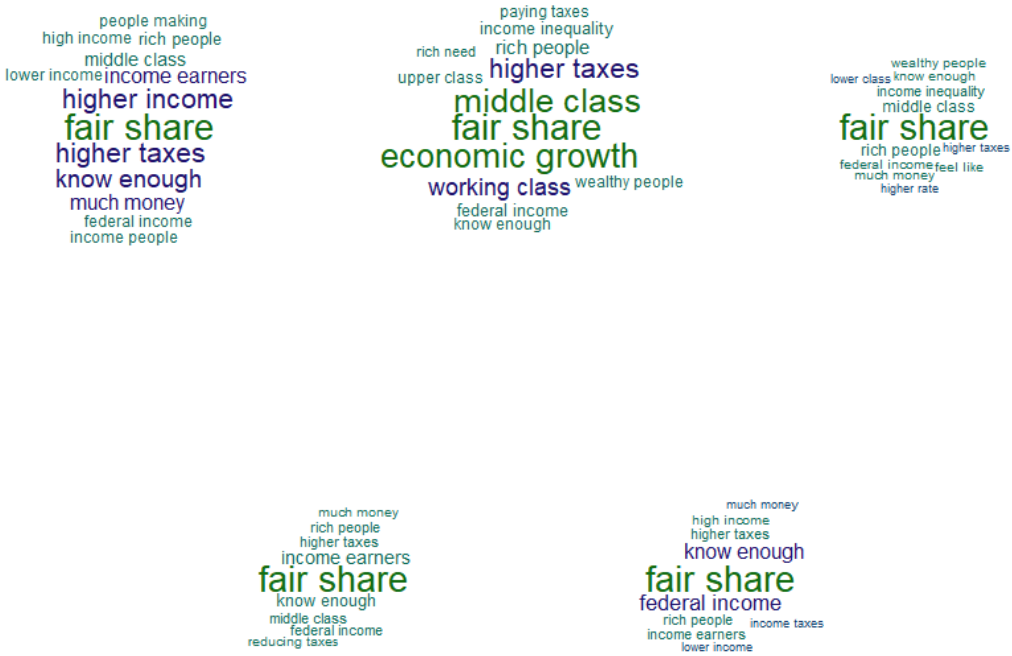
We use simple text analysis approaches to analyse the answers respondents provide to our open-ended question about the rationale for their expressed preference over cutting the top rate of federal income tax. Table B2 reports the most frequently used terms by respondents who support tax cuts for the rich and those that do not. We then look at whether the rationale provided by respondents differs across our treatment groups. Figure B8 reports the terms used by respondents in the placebo and each of our treatments to justify their stated preference. There are no obvious differences across our treatment conditions in the terms used. "Fair share" is used frequently in all treatments, although it is used particularly often in the fairness and POUM treatments and relatively less in the USI and Trickle-Down treatments. "Economic growth" is used only in the Trickle-Down treatment, suggesting that subjects understood the argument being made with the information provided in that treatment.

Table B2: Terms most Frequently used to Justify Stated Preference, by Support for Top Income Tax Cuts

	No Support			Support			
	Total Frequency	Documents	Relative	Total Frequency	Documents	Relative	
Fair share	181	177	0.072	Lower taxes	20	20	0.034
Know enough	80	80	0.032	Federal income	19	17	0.029
Higher taxes	65	63	0.026	Higher taxes	15	14	0.024
Middle class	63	60	0.024	Middle class	15	15	0.025
Rich people	59	57	0.023	Much money	14	14	0.024
Federal income	53	50	0.020	Working class	10	9	0.015
Income earners	53	49	0.020	Rich people	10	10	0.017
Income inequality	50	48	0.019	Federal government	9	8	0.013
Much money	44	43	0.017	Income earners	9	9	0.015
Working class	42	40	0.016	Economic growth	8	8	0.013
Observations	2,470	2,470	2,470	593	593	593	

*Notes:* The table reports the most frequently used terms used by respondents to justify their stated preferences, depending on whether they indicated support or no support for top income tax cuts. Total frequency reports the number of times a term was used overall. Documents reports the number of statements by individual subjects in which a term was used at least once. Relative reports the proportion of subjects' statements within the preference-dependent subgroup that refer to the given term.

Figure B8: Wordcloud of Terms Most Frequently Used to Justify Stated Preference by Treatment



*Note:* From top left to bottom right, the word clouds include terms which are used at least 10 times by respondents in the USI, Trickle-Down, Fairness, POUM and Placebo treatments. The size of the term reflects the frequency with which it is used.

## Part C: Additional Results

### C.1 Treatment Effects

Table C1 shows the full regression results from our models estimating the treatment effects on tax preferences. In Models 1 and 2, the dependent variable is support for cutting the top rate of federal income tax. In Models 3 and 4, the dependent variable is support for raising the top rate of federal income tax. Models 2 and 4 include a full battery of control variables.



Table C1: Main Regression Models

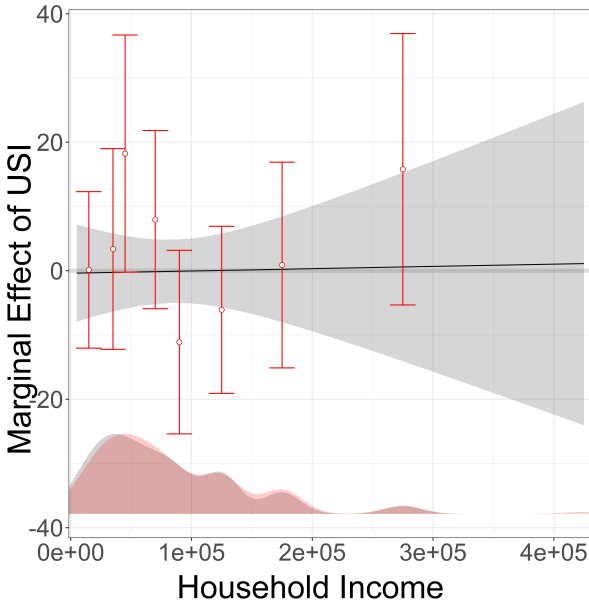
	DV: Support For Tax Cut		DV: Support For Tax Increase	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Unenlightened Self-Interest	-0.163660 (2.394136)	-0.723696 (2.356325)	-3.633218 (2.862042)	-2.937366 (2.581952)
Fairness	-4.950671* (2.386889)	-5.021608* (2.352184)	6.019456* (2.855899)	5.131300* (2.579091)
POUM	-2.895267 (2.401540)	-3.337454 (2.365523)	2.345514 (2.851051)	2.868677 (2.580773)
Trickle-Down	-5.907762* (2.383830)	-5.872044* (2.354206)	8.823529** (2.862042)	8.445031** (2.587500)
Income		-0.000023 (0.000015)		-0.000022 (0.000016)
Age		-0.111297 (0.071075)		0.152692 (0.078311)
Children		5.225836** (1.736696)		-4.939672** (1.911530)
College Education		-5.171262* (2.573617)		9.961548*** (2.794325)
Male (Ref. Female)		0.915184 (1.568237)		-0.567653 (1.721629)
Other (Ref. Female)		1.124453 (11.483032)		32.566336** (12.254484)
Social Class		1.933374 (1.113414)		-2.420227* (1.217745)
Economic Knowledge		2.578221* (1.261651)		4.348978** (1.385485)
Urban (Ref. Rural)		5.086689* (2.393940)		0.073920 (2.620816)
Suburban (Ref. Rural)		4.528113* (2.118936)		-0.112994 (2.315736)
Republican (Ref. Democrat)		19.936764*** (1.798901)		-47.440213*** (1.974943)
Other Party (Ref. Democrat)		7.875429*** (2.080336)		-26.025957*** (2.286714)
No Party (Ref. Democrat)		6.752810 (4.764164)		-29.279288*** (5.219134)
Part-Time (Ref. Full-Time Employment)		-3.277629 (2.594953)		-0.736948 (2.821536)
Unemployed (Ref. Full-Time Employment)		0.234850 (2.945249)		-4.626835 (3.191906)
Retiree (Ref. Full-Time Employment)		-0.857913 (3.574064)		-3.445605 (3.938326)
Self-Employment (Ref. Full-Time Employment)		-3.895468 (2.752141)		2.216098 (3.019203)
Student (Ref. Full-Time Employment)		8.683208** (3.204691)		-4.891334 (3.517750)
Not Looking for Work (Ref. Full-Time Employment)		-8.737706** (3.201788)		0.941731 (3.480952)
Affected By COVID-19		2.094092 (1.723140)		-2.473338 (1.886771)
AIC	29232.110625	28532.575508	30810.811273	29811.005993
BIC	29267.853689	28698.831998	30846.654339	29977.924358
Num. obs.	2856	2801	2904	2868

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

## C.2 Subgroup Effects

We perform a range of subgroup analyses. First, our USI treatment differs across individuals based on their respective income level. Hence, we need to check whether the treatment effect varies by income level, too. In order to do so, we run interaction effects between the unenlightened self-interest treatment and a person’s monthly household income level. Table C2 shows the results. Across models, the interaction effects is statistically insignificant. Plotting average marginal effects and checking whether treatment varies across subgroups shows that the USI treatment remains insignificant for different income groups (Figure C1). In addition, Figure C3 shows the average marginal effect of the USI treatment when looking at preferences for top tax rate hikes. Whilst the coefficient of the interaction effect is negative, the impact of the USI treatment remains insignificant across all income groups.

Figure C1: Treatment Effects of Unenlightened Self-Interest on Support for Tax Cuts Conditional on Household Income



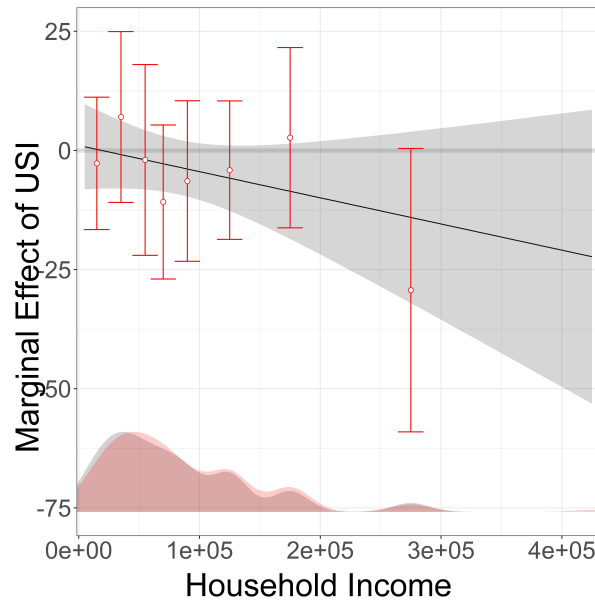
*Note:* The figure shows the marginal effect of the unenlightened self-interest information treatment. Respondents who received the river information placebo form the reference category. Table C2 shows the full regression results.

In addition to running interaction effects in order to detect subgroup effects along income levels, we split the sample into people with income below and above the median US household income (roughly \$70,000). The effect of the unenlightened

Table C2: Interaction Effects for Unenlightened Self-Interest

	Support Tax Cuts		Support Tax Hikes	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Unenlightened Self-Interest	-0.394084 (4.109584)	-0.603139 (4.100456)	1.048929 (4.763489)	2.126143 (4.252120)
Income	-0.000011 (0.000030)	-0.000048 (0.000034)	0.000010 (0.000034)	0.000031 (0.000035)
Unenlightened Self-Interest * Income	0.000004 (0.000039)	0.000003 (0.000039)	-0.000055 (0.000046)	-0.000064 (0.000041)
Covariates	✗	✓	✗	✓
AIC	11738.316141	11470.916425	12312.752622	11900.189072
BIC	11763.492484	11596.309236	12338.016228	12026.246227
Num. obs.	1136	1114	1156	1144

Figure C2: Treatment Effects of Unenlightened Self-Interest on Support for Tax Increases Conditional on Household Income

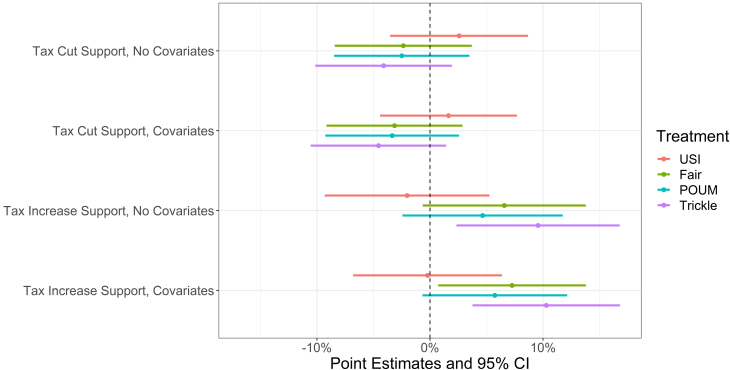


*Note:* The figure shows the marginal effect of the unenlightened self-interest information treatment. Respondents who received the river information placebo form the reference category.

self-interest treatment on tax preferences remains statistically insignificant for both subgroups (Figures C3 & C4). When looking at the impact of the unenlightened self-interest treatment on core beliefs in the two subgroups, we find no effect on the perception of recent or future personal benefits. However, for people with a house-

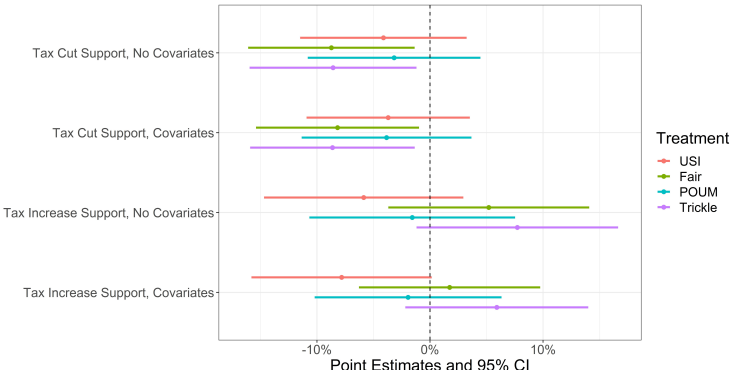
hold income above \$70,000, we do find that the unenlightened self-interest treatment has a negative effect on perceptions of being generally affected by cutting the top tax rate (Figures C5 & C6).

Figure C3: Treatment Effects on Support for Tax Cut and Tax Increase, Income Below or Equal \$70,000



Note: The figure shows the effect of the different treatments on support for cutting/raising the top federal income tax rate.

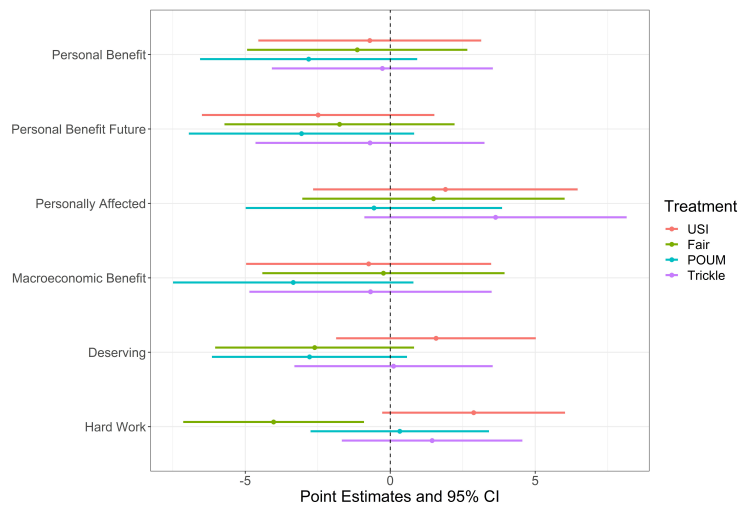
Figure C4: Treatment Effects on Support for Tax Cut and Tax Increase, Income Above \$70,000



Note: The Figure shows the effect of the different treatments on support for cutting/raising the top federal income tax rate.

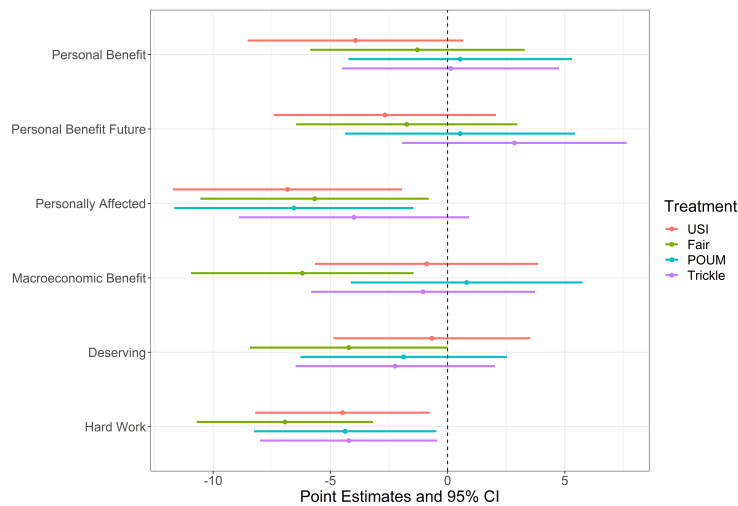
We also check for subgroup effects along party lines. More specifically, we look at treatment effects amongst Republicans and Democrats. Importantly, this reduces our sample and, hence, explanatory power substantially. Therefore, results are more likely to turn out statistically insignificant. Nevertheless, we can see some interesting patterns. First, the USI treatment does neither impact Republicans nor Democrats tax policy preferences (Figure C7). The fairness treatment has negative coefficients for tax cuts and positive coefficients for tax increases for Democrats and Republicans

Figure C5: Treatment Effects on Core Beliefs, Income Below or Equal \$70,000



Note: The figure shows the effect of the different treatments on core beliefs. All values have been standardised to a 0 to 100 scale.

Figure C6: Treatment Effects on Core Beliefs, Income Above \$70,000



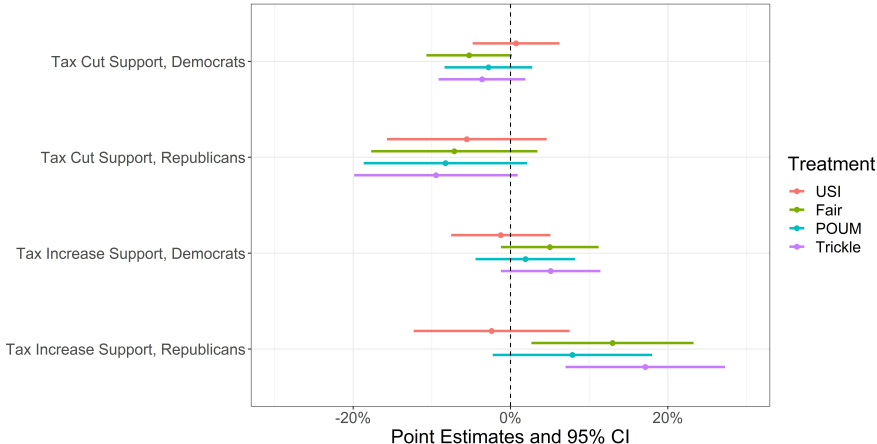
Note: The figure shows the effect of the different treatments on core beliefs. All values have been standardised to a 0 to 100 scale.

alike. However, only the models looking at tax cut preferences amongst Democrats and tax hike preferences amongst Republicans are statistically significant. Whilst the POUM treatment coefficients are negative for tax cuts and positive for tax hikes, they are statistically insignificant across models. Finally, the trickle-down treatment seems to have a particularly strong effect on Republicans. Most strikingly, support for tax hikes increases by 17 percentage points amongst Republicans.

Turning to the treatment effects on core beliefs, Figure C8 shows how they vary by party affiliation. The most striking difference across party lines is that the fairness

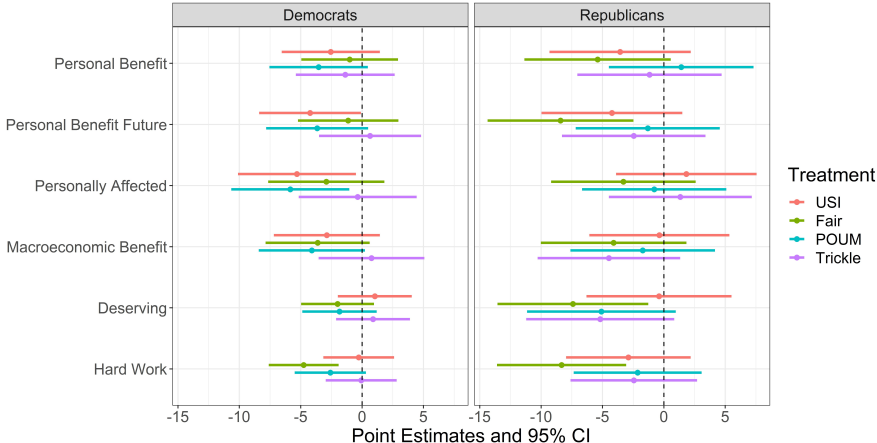
treatment has a much larger effect on deservingness and fairness beliefs for Republicans than Democrats. This could be due to ceiling effects, however, as Democrats are considerably more likely to hold a baseline view that the economic success of the rich is undeserved.

Figure C7: Treatment Effects on Support for Tax Cut and Tax Increase for Democrats and Republicans



Note: The figure shows the effect of the different treatments on support for cutting/raising the top federal income tax rate for Democrats and Republicans

Figure C8: Treatment Effects on Core Beliefs By Party Affiliation

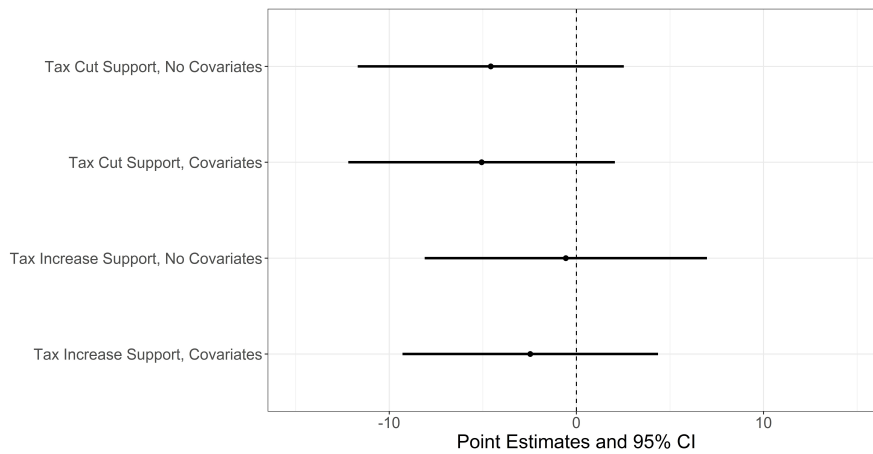


Note: The figure shows the effect of the different treatments on core beliefs. All values have been standardised to a 0 to 100 scale.

### C.3 Validity checks

Figure C9 shows the treatment effects of our unconditional USI treatment on support for cutting/raising the top federal income tax rate.

Figure C9: Treatment Effects of Unconditional Unenlightened Self-Interest on Support for Tax Cuts and Tax Increases

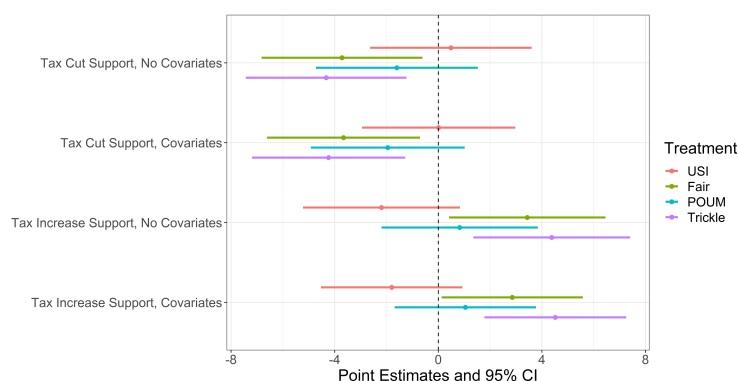


*Note:* The figure shows the effect of the unconditional unenlightened self-interest treatment on support for cutting/raising the top federal income tax rate. Table C6 shows the full regression results.

### C.4 Alternative Dependent Variable

In the main models, we look at a binary variable that looks at support for tax cuts/hikes. However, we check our results using an alternative dependent variable, which is measured on a 3-point scale (3=Support, 2=Neither Support Nor Oppose, 1=Oppose). Figure C10 presents the results. Across specifications, results are almost identical to the original models.

Figure C10: Treatment Effects on Support for Tax Cut and Tax Increase, 3-Point Scale Dependent Variable

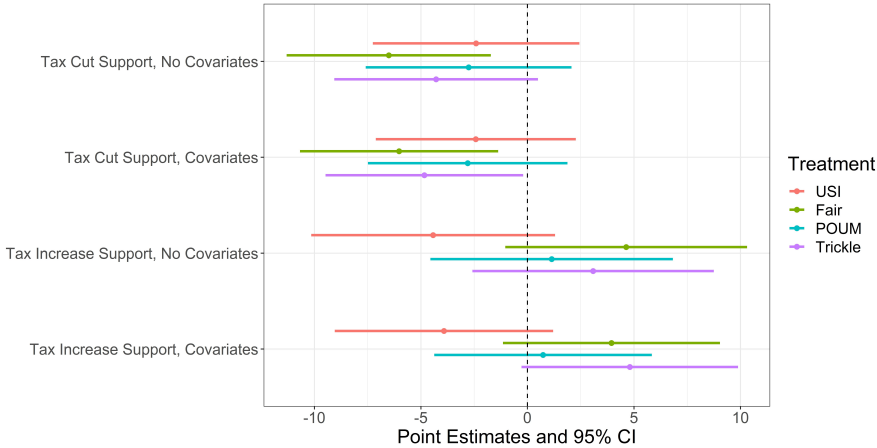


*Note:* The figure shows the effect of the different treatments on support for cutting/raising the top federal income tax rate. Dependent variable is measured on a 3-point scale (3=Support, 2=Neither Support Nor Oppose, 1=Oppose) and values have been standardised to a 0 to 100 scale.

### C.5 Analyses With Weightings

Since some of our subgroups could not be filled completely as too few participants with the specified attributes, in particular older age groups, are signed up on Prolific, we run additional analyses where we weight participants accordingly. Figure C11 shows the results. Again, the USI treatment does not affect tax policy preferences across models. Our main results regarding the impact of the fairness treatment and the trickle-down treatment on preferences for tax cuts hold. Interestingly, both treatments narrowly fail to reach conventional levels of statistical significance when looking at preferences for tax cuts when performing a weighting procedure. One potential explanation for this finding is that our weighting procedure assigns older people, who might have a higher preference for the status quo, are assigned considerably higher weights.

Figure C11: Treatment Effects on Support for Tax Cut and Tax Increase, Weighted Regression Analyses



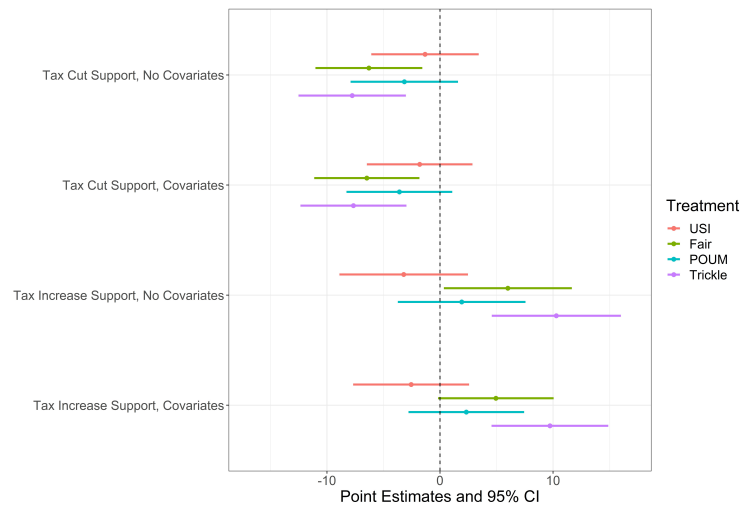
*Note:* The figure shows the effect of the different treatments on support for cutting/raising the top federal income tax rate. Observations have been weighted to ensure representativeness.



## C.6 Analyses With Varying Samples

In addition to our main analysis which includes all full observations, we run additional robustness checks with varying samples. First, we exclude individuals who stated that they did not find the information provided believable (Figure C12). Results prove to be robust. Unsurprisingly, effect sizes of the fairness treatment and of the trickle-down treatment even increase slightly when solely looking at individuals who state that they believe the provided information.

Figure C12: Treatment Effects on Support for Tax Cut and Tax Increase, Excluding Individuals That Did Not Find the Information Provided Believable

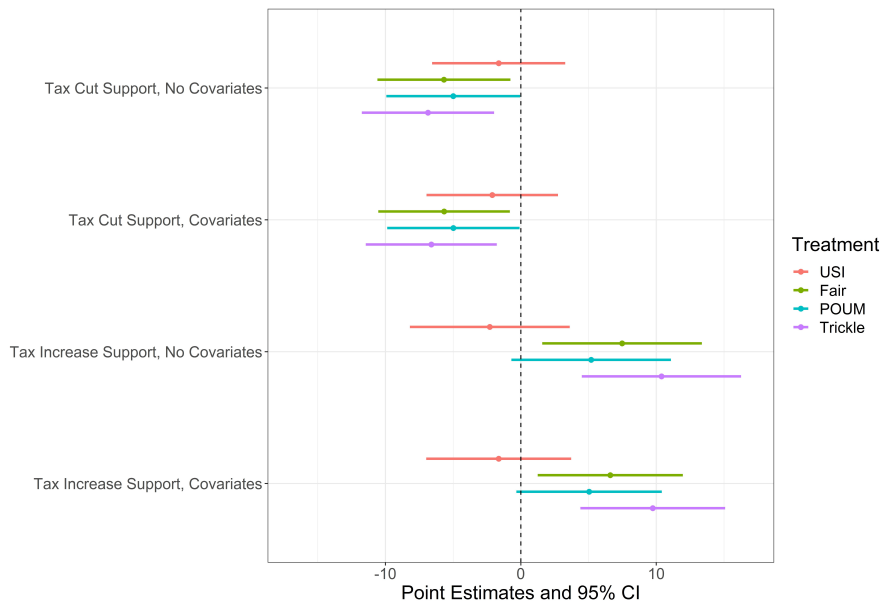


*Note:* The figure shows the effect of the different treatments on support for cutting/raising the top federal income tax rate.

Second, we exclude individuals who either completed the survey in less than 200 seconds or who looked at the treatment for less than 15 seconds (Figure C13). Overall, this covers roughly 9% of respondents. Overall, our results remain robust to excluding lower quality answers. Again, treatment effects for the fairness and the trickle-down treatment tend to be slightly higher. Furthermore, the effect of the POUM treatment turns borderline statistically significant for the models that look at support for tax cuts.

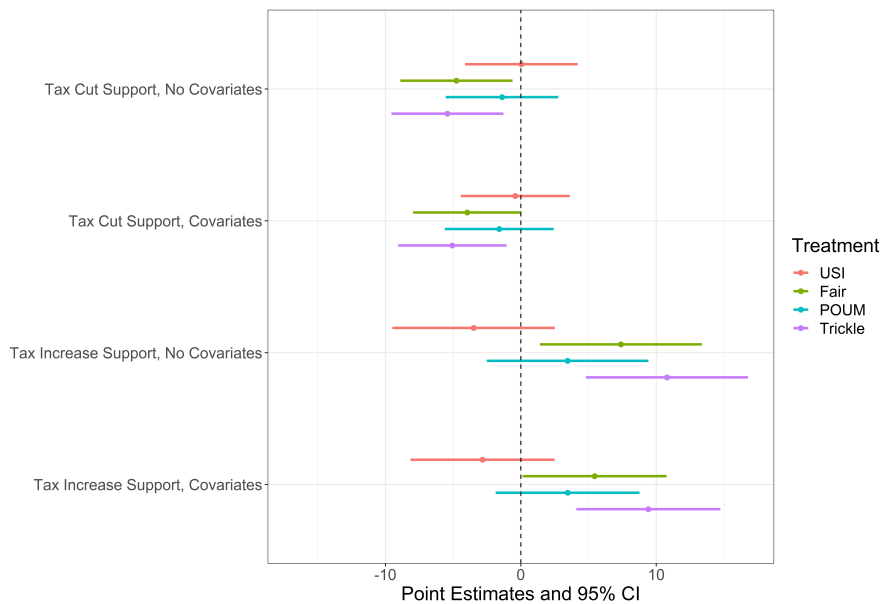
Third, we exclude all individuals who report inconsistent preferences for tax policymaking by supporting both tax cuts and increases (Figure C14). Again, our results remain robust.

Figure C13: Treatment Effects on Support for Tax Cut and Tax Increase, Low-Quality Responses Excluded



*Note:* The figure shows the effect of the different treatments on support for cutting/raising the top federal income tax rate.

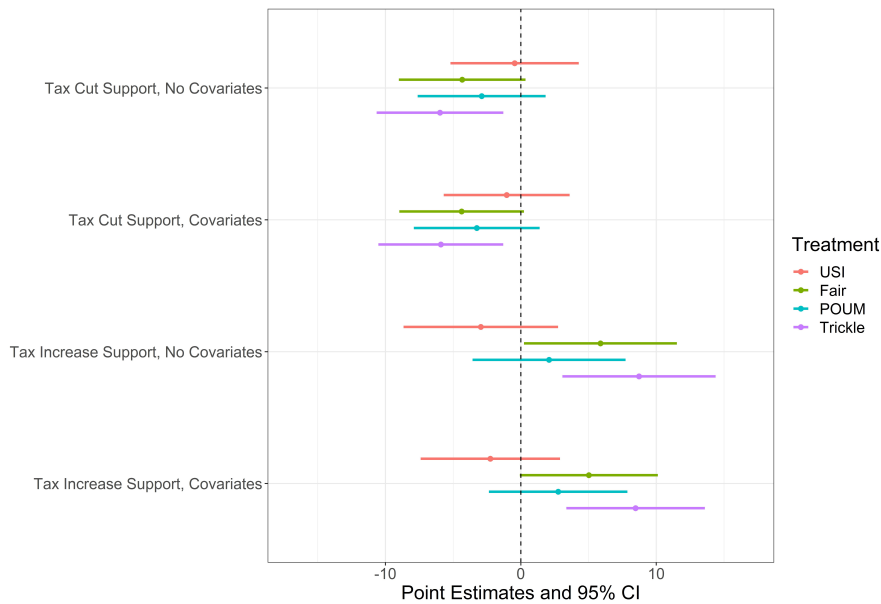
Figure C14: Treatment Effects on Support for Tax Cut and Tax Increase, Excluding Individuals Who State Support For Both Tax Cuts and Increases



*Note:* The figure shows the effect of the different treatments on support for cutting/raising the top federal income tax rate.

Fourth, we exclude all respondents that have answered post-treatment understanding questions incorrectly (Figure C15). The empirical results are in line with the analysis of the full sample.

Figure C15: Treatment Effects on Support for Tax Cut and Tax Increase, Excluding Individuals Who Answered the Post-Treatment Understanding Questions Incorrectly



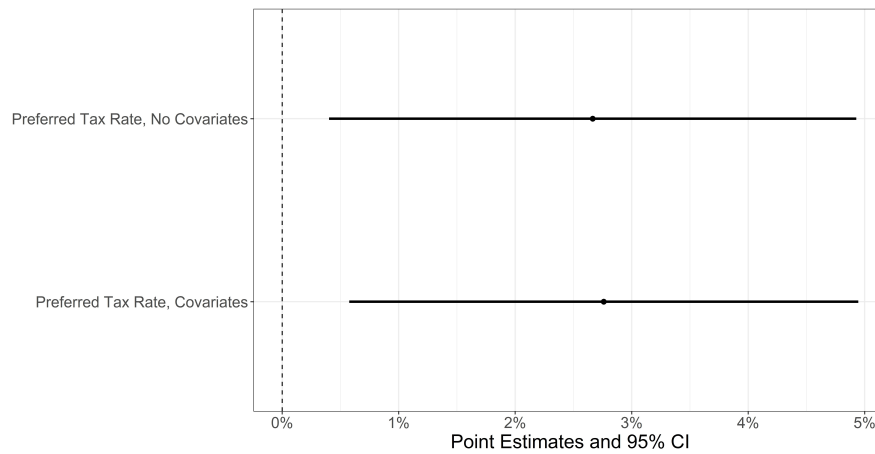
*Note:* The figure shows the effect of the different treatments on support for cutting/raising the top federal income tax rate.

## C.7 Additional Analyses of Robustness Check Experiment

To further probe our reference point explanation for the strong trickle-down treatment effect reported in the main text, we also analyse differences between treatments for question R1. This question states that the current top federal income tax rate is 37% and asks respondents what they think would be an appropriate rate for the top federal income tax rate. If the trickle-down treatment indeed provided a reference point for respondents by informing about the tax rate having halved over the past 40 years, then we would expect respondents in this treatment to state a higher appropriate tax rate than respondents in the placebo group. To avoid creating additional reference points for respondents when asking this question, we did not provide possible answer options. Instead, respondents were asked to fill out a free text entry box.

Figure C16 shows the results. In line with the reference point explanation, we find that respondents in the trickle-down treatment state a significantly higher appropriate rate for the top federal income tax rate than the placebo group. On average, the preferred top income tax rate was around 2.7 percentage points higher for respondents who received the trickle-down treatment.

Figure C16: Treatment Effect of Trickle-Down Treatment on Preferred Top Federal Income Tax Rate



Note: The figure shows the effect of the trickle-down treatment on the preferred top federal income tax rate.

## C.8 Additional Information For Results Provided in Main Manuscript

Table C3: Regression Models for Core Beliefs

	Pers. Benefit	Pers. Benefit Future	Macroec. Benefit	Deserving	Hard Work	Pers. Affected
Unenlightened Self-Interest	-2.129488 (1.499209)	-2.859483 (1.559331)	-0.976669 (1.611915)	0.312905 (1.354037)	0.283715 (1.222729)	-1.714668 (1.703767)
Fairness	-1.281736 (1.488731)	-1.765037 (1.549880)	-2.645247 (1.601674)	-3.406690* (1.354947)	5.221289*** (1.222573)	-1.383943 (1.697866)
POUM	-1.542008 (1.500154)	-1.554726 (1.555393)	-1.789984 (1.619192)	-2.371972 (1.362059)	1.323066 (1.229282)	-2.891269 (1.702749)
Trickle-Down	-0.041558 (1.499197)	0.839401 (1.555922)	-0.775081 (1.605772)	-0.861667 (1.357986)	0.819552 (1.224611)	0.588476 (1.702607)
Income	0.000022* (0.000009)	0.000028** (0.000010)	-0.000015 (0.000010)	-0.000003 (0.000009)	-0.000007 (0.000008)	0.000025* (0.000011)
Age	-0.282813*** (0.045301)	-0.385064*** (0.047087)	-0.078016 (0.048887)	-0.094743* (0.041243)	-0.049734 (0.037176)	-0.058684 (0.051789)
Children	4.985699*** (1.107866)	4.299242*** (1.147891)	3.736557** (1.194009)	2.746012** (1.007392)	-1.237058 (0.909219)	3.426909** (1.264779)
College Degree	-4.347577** (1.638439)	-1.294848 (1.691437)	-6.296975*** (1.775513)	-3.922017** (1.481356)	1.009767 (1.327409)	-0.689364 (1.873945)
Male (Ref. Female)	0.616098 (0.995593)	1.219051 (1.032292)	1.517675 (1.070577)	3.026246*** (0.902822)	-3.692340*** (0.817010)	0.753821 (1.132059)
Other (Ref. Female)	-10.468490 (7.254930)	-16.258096* (7.229675)	-21.338071** (7.784883)	-11.851246 (6.449590)	14.360590* (5.827042)	8.824411 (7.962638)
Social Class	3.219176*** (0.709040)	3.920277*** (0.734734)	2.732837*** (0.763397)	2.777921*** (0.641816)	-2.533884*** (0.577799)	-1.696294* (0.805805)
Economic Knowledge	-0.846444 (0.807270)	-0.552299 (0.838776)	-0.175129 (0.871480)	0.911701 (0.728726)	-0.211947 (0.649950)	3.443152*** (0.917304)
Urban (Ref. Rural)	4.486975** (1.522019)	4.866729** (1.574076)	5.314138** (1.637332)	3.935467** (1.379898)	-0.083679 (1.243505)	0.528611 (1.739294)
Suburban (Ref. Rural)	1.412565 (1.350231)	1.422432 (1.395954)	4.529700** (1.449915)	1.186687 (1.221771)	0.661931 (1.103043)	-0.617619 (1.542157)
Republican (Ref. Democrat)	10.153532*** (1.142371)	10.975419*** (1.183454)	21.407247*** (1.232038)	24.269595*** (1.043267)	-24.397245*** (0.943279)	0.898272 (1.305266)
Other Party (Ref. Democrat)	-1.144025 (1.326380)	1.028334 (1.383087)	7.388411*** (1.424691)	9.776268*** (1.200447)	-9.171756*** (1.076385)	1.287840 (1.502974)
No Party (Ref. Democrat)	10.115965** (3.109634)	7.666254* (3.203468)	11.765227*** (3.367684)	11.702056*** (2.667921)	-12.665037*** (2.404843)	0.346129 (3.415701)
Part-Time (Ref. Full-Time Employment)	-2.167136 (1.637474)	-0.717928 (1.708514)	-1.026982 (1.783036)	-1.925797 (1.487423)	-0.119447 (1.343140)	-0.339658 (1.876393)
Unemployed (Ref. Full-Time Employment)	-1.317611 (1.852909)	0.815985 (1.908610)	-0.788017 (1.977767)	-0.862615 (1.672037)	1.559175 (1.517675)	6.526894** (2.116570)
Retiree (Ref. Full-Time Employment)	2.168754 (2.291123)	3.928411 (2.371340)	2.719477 (2.435831)	2.318189 (2.069587)	-2.117499 (1.866232)	3.610491 (2.614264)
Self-Employment (Ref. Full-Time Employment)	0.878135 (1.756579)	1.993855 (1.837298)	-1.954357 (1.877048)	-0.471614 (1.592246)	0.845146 (1.436826)	5.441268** (2.004110)
Student (Ref. Full-Time Employment)	2.442300	2.742244	6.141336**	3.648592*	-3.766815*	2.145265

	Pers. Benefit	Pers. Benefit Future	Macroec. Benefit	Deserving	Hard Work	Pers. Affected
	(2.029807)	(2.104669)	(2.196343)	(1.828305)	(1.651828)	(2.284748)
Not Looking for Work (Ref. Full-Time Employment)	-4.470186*	-3.894660	-5.756427**	-4.034583*	0.355731	-0.813345
	(2.060668)	(2.117377)	(2.184762)	(1.855863)	(1.649332)	(2.314980)
Affected By COVID-19	2.766264*	1.311472	1.104664	1.123539	1.730384	3.520062**
	(1.095359)	(1.134605)	(1.180054)	(0.994309)	(0.896811)	(1.248867)
AIC	25543.862707	25734.215867	25855.535008	26137.907733	25636.505791	26457.287046
BIC	25709.675862	25900.018865	26021.256610	26304.835860	25803.521616	26623.292503
Log Likelihood	-12743.931353	-12839.107934	-12899.767504	-13040.953867	-12790.252896	-13200.643523
Num. obs.	2757	2756	2748	2869	2878	2776

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$

Table C4: Regression Models for Knowledge About Historical Top PIT Rate Developments

	Top PIT Rate Decreased
Unenlightened Self-Interest	-0.061169* (0.026296)
Fairness	0.004862 (0.026309)
POUM	-0.016705 (0.026390)
Trickle-Down	0.234457*** (0.026407)
Income	0.000000 (0.000000)
Age	0.004742*** (0.000802)
Children	-0.105250*** (0.019601)
College Degree	0.179910*** (0.028293)
Male (Ref. Female)	0.066621*** (0.017576)
Other (Ref. Female)	0.414643** (0.127589)
Social Class	-0.019110 (0.012427)
Economic Knowledge	0.121057*** (0.013872)
Urban (Ref. Rural)	-0.097547*** (0.026772)
Suburban (Ref. Rural)	-0.046074 (0.023691)
Republican (Ref. Democrat)	-0.281688*** (0.020340)
Other Party (Ref. Democrat)	-0.062287** (0.023124)
No Party (Ref. Democrat)	-0.249943*** (0.049001)
Part-Time (Ref. Full-Time Employment)	0.022696 (0.028829)
Unemployed (Ref. Full-Time Employment)	0.035443 (0.032516)
Retiree (Ref. Full-Time Employment)	0.008511 (0.040542)
Self-Employment (Ref. Full-Time Employment)	0.010575 (0.030970)
Student (Ref. Full-Time Employment)	-0.041390 (0.035416)
Not Looking for Work (Ref. Full-Time Employment)	0.008720 (0.035107)
Affected By COVID-19	-0.017994 (0.019317)
AIC	3776.021051
BIC	3944.040225
Log Likelihood	-1860.010526
Num. obs.	2983

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$



Table C5: Regression Models for Treatment Effects of Trickle-Down Treatment on Beliefs Connected to Past Tax Policy Reforms

	Fairness Previous Cuts	Reference Point	Fairness Previous Cuts	Reference Point
Trickle-Down	5.314648 (3.603907)	8.818086* (3.612133)	6.019440 (3.515502)	9.526960** (3.339527)
Income			0.000023 (0.000033)	0.000064* (0.000031)
Age			0.977954** (0.324325)	0.879137** (0.308090)
Children			-14.225348* (5.897445)	-13.485804* (5.602237)
College Education			1.217426 (5.375190)	6.134962 (5.106125)
Male (Ref. Female)			-1.664380 (5.199774)	-0.061540 (4.939490)
Other (Ref. Female)			11.646649 (10.754850)	20.306792* (10.216496)
Social Class			0.369208 (2.538504)	-0.613855 (2.411435)
Economic Knowledge			3.006412 (2.927391)	5.765081* (2.780855)
Urban (Ref. Rural)			-3.370099 (5.733706)	6.106013 (5.446695)
Suburban (Ref. Rural)			5.072339 (5.191569)	0.228816 (4.931696)
Republican (Ref. Democrat)			-32.422763*** (4.219165)	-45.033888*** (4.007967)
Other Party (Ref. Democrat)			-7.360035 (4.991565)	-7.914575 (4.741703)
No Party (Ref. Democrat)			-28.770045*** (7.697176)	-34.321939*** (7.311879)
Part-Time (Ref. Full-Time Employment)			-6.084050 (5.244069)	-2.562230 (4.981567)
Unemployed (Ref. Full-Time Employment)			1.327904 (6.717017)	3.890041 (6.380785)
Retiree (Ref. Full-Time Employment)			-46.041220 (28.736250)	-36.701087 (27.297804)
Self-Employment (Ref. Full-Time Employment)			-8.521221 (8.808835)	-18.902995* (8.367892)
Student (Ref. Full-Time Employment)			-7.145957 (4.959072)	0.812962 (4.710837)
Not Looking for Work (Ref. Full-Time Employment)			13.604235 (9.032719)	13.195702 (8.580569)
Affected By COVID-19			3.848385 (3.628151)	1.263605 (3.446537)
AIC	7841.186373	7844.551781	7700.929404	7625.953818
BIC	7854.998204	7858.363613	7815.755517	7740.779932
Log Likelihood	-3917.593186	-3919.275891	-3825.464702	-3787.976909
Num. obs.	738	738	730	730

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$



Table C6: Regression Models for Treatment Effects of Unconditional Unenlightened Self-Interest on Support for Tax Cuts and Tax Increases

	Tax Cut Support	Tax Cut Support	Tax Increase Support	Tax Increase Support
Unenlightened Self-Interest	-4.574406 (3.627998)	-5.066320 (3.634258)	-0.563725 (3.847544)	-2.463815 (3.484253)
Income		-0.000013 (0.000036)		0.000001 (0.000035)
Age		-0.400602 (0.294824)		0.255460 (0.292429)
Children		14.365036* (6.314386)		1.470670 (6.160634)
College Education		-12.046692* (5.740444)		-1.122357 (5.425151)
Male (Ref. Female)		2.780998 (5.029701)		2.283839 (4.952284)
Other (Ref. Female)		-21.386270 (14.014645)		28.951519* (12.895738)
Social Class		-1.346252 (2.591995)		-0.499248 (2.515769)
Economic Knowledge		-2.522224 (3.281308)		11.473635*** (3.188076)
Urban (Ref. Rural)		8.443080 (6.362310)		-1.349702 (6.087893)
Suburban (Ref. Rural)		6.215165 (5.620645)		-1.647625 (5.387497)
Republican (Ref. Democrat)		11.909044** (4.433081)		-52.337136*** (4.276656)
Other Party (Ref. Democrat)		6.560468 (4.971339)		-18.534836*** (4.833785)
No Party (Ref. Democrat)		21.214628* (8.684025)		-34.626405*** (8.144186)
Part-Time (Ref. Full-Time Employment)		1.373977 (5.389999)		0.782938 (5.139887)
Unemployed (Ref. Full-Time Employment)		6.054771 (7.123695)		-1.757170 (6.992018)
Retiree (Ref. Full-Time Employment)		-27.801775 (21.357595)		-0.530596 (21.218739)
Self-Employment (Ref. Full-Time Employment)		6.056534 (10.149337)		0.905234 (9.568803)
Student (Ref. Full-Time Employment)		0.331738 (5.166452)		0.967037 (4.910611)
Not Looking for Work (Ref. Full-Time Employment)		-24.921987** (9.546297)		-5.841118 (9.241706)
Affected By COVID-19		6.661624 (3.821435)		-4.331782 (3.669347)
AIC	6637.426927	6575.451936	7211.921977	7016.602334
BIC	6650.778339	6682.034653	7225.470557	7124.776999
Log Likelihood	-3315.713464	-3263.725968	-3602.960989	-3484.301167
Num. obs.	633	627	676	670

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

Table C7: Regression Models for Connection Between Stated and Elicited Preferences

	Elicited Preference Tax Cut	Elicited Preference Tax Increase
Tax Cut Support	0.019877** (0.006318)	
Tax Increase Support		0.031644*** (0.008389)
Income	0.000000 (0.000000)	0.000000 (0.000000)
Age	0.000189 (0.000237)	0.000346 (0.000352)
Children	-0.005578 (0.005794)	0.008412 (0.008587)
College Education	-0.016678 (0.008581)	0.008685 (0.012571)
Male (Ref. Female)	0.003903 (0.005225)	0.004458 (0.007728)
Other (Ref. Female)	-0.013017 (0.038199)	-0.046784 (0.054972)
Social Class	0.001917 (0.003711)	-0.004902 (0.005467)
Economic Knowledge	0.006885 (0.004208)	0.008598 (0.006230)
Urban (Ref. Rural)	0.004129 (0.007982)	0.008432 (0.011755)
Suburban (Ref. Rural)	-0.003365 (0.007061)	-0.002944 (0.010377)
Republican (Ref. Democrat)	-0.001593 (0.006125)	-0.022644* (0.009720)
Other Party (Ref. Democrat)	-0.005312 (0.006949)	0.000960 (0.010491)
No Party (Ref. Democrat)	0.038827* (0.015868)	0.069899** (0.023532)
Part-Time (Ref. Full-Time Employment)	0.013205 (0.008649)	0.020081 (0.012663)
Unemployed (Ref. Full-Time Employment)	-0.009964 (0.009814)	0.007976 (0.014332)
Retiree (Ref. Full-Time Employment)	0.006034 (0.011904)	0.040355* (0.017674)
Self-Employment (Ref. Full-Time Employment)	-0.003229 (0.009175)	0.020264 (0.013556)
Student (Ref. Full-Time Employment)	0.008174 (0.010682)	0.041930** (0.015771)
Not Looking for Work (Ref. Full-Time Employment)	0.028217** (0.010676)	0.035939* (0.015615)
Affected By COVID-19	0.004978 (0.005744)	0.009543 (0.008472)
AIC	-3423.287828	-1200.350272
BIC	-3274.844533	-1051.316016
Log Likelihood	1736.643914	625.175136
Num. obs.	2801	2868

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

## Part D: Description of Variables

**Support for Tax Cuts I.** Ordinal variable capturing respondents' answer to the question "Do you support a reduction in the top federal income tax rate?"

- 1: Very unsupportive
- 2: Unsupportive
- 3: Neither supportive nor unsupportive
- 4: Supportive
- 5: Very supportive

**Support for Tax Cuts II.** Recoded variable capturing respondents' answer to the question "Do you support a reduction in the top federal income tax rate?". We recode this variable so that respondents who were "Supportive" and "Very supportive" get the value 3, respondents who are "Neither supportive nor unsupportive" get the value 2, and respondents who are "Unsupportive" or "Very supportive" get the value 1

- 1: No Support
- 2: Neither supportive nor unsupportive
- 3: Support

**Support for Tax Cuts III.** Binary variable capturing respondents' answer to the question "Do you support a reduction in the top federal income tax rate?". We recode this variable so that respondents who were "Supportive" and "Very supportive" get the value 1 and all other responses get the value 0.

- 0: No Support
- 1: Support

**Support for Tax Increases I.** Ordinal variable capturing respondents' answer to the question "Do you support an increase in the top federal income tax rate?"

- 1: Very unsupportive

- 2: Unsupportive
- 3: Neither supportive nor unsupportive
- 4: Supportive
- 5: Very supportive

**Support for Tax Increases II.** Recoded variable capturing respondents' answer to the question "Do you support an increase in the top federal income tax rate?". We re-code this variable so that respondents who were "Supportive" and "Very supportive" get the value 3, respondents who are "Neither supportive nor unsupportive" get the value 2, and respondents who are "Unsupportive" or "Very supportive" get the value 1

- 1: No Support
- 2: Neither supportive nor unsupportive
- 3: Support

**Support for Tax Increases III.** Binary variable capturing respondents' answer to the question "Do you support an increase in the top federal income tax rate?". We re-code this variable so that respondents who were "Supportive" and "Very supportive" get the value 1 and all other responses get the value 0.

- 0: No Support
- 1: Support

**Treatment.** Categorical variable capturing the treatment respondent  $i$  is assigned to.

- 1: Unenlightened Self-Interest
- 2: Fairness
- 3: Prospects of Upward Mobility
- 4: Trickle-Down

5: Placebo

**Household Income.** Metric variable measuring a person's household income. Recoded from a categorical variable taking each household income category's mean value.

Covering answers ranging from \$5000 to \$425000

**Age.** Metric Variable measuring a person's age in years.

**Children.** Binary variable measuring whether an individual has any children.

0: No children

1: At least one child

**Education.** Binary variable measuring whether an individual has received any college education.

0: No college education

1: College education

**Gender.** Categorical variable capturing a person's gender.

Female

Male

Other

**Social Class.** Ordinal variable capturing a person's self-assessed social class.

1: Lower class or poor

2: Working class

3: Middle class

4: Upper-middle class

5: Upper class

**Economic Knowledge.** Ordinal variable capturing a person's self-assessed economic knowledge.

- 1: Not knowledgeable at all
- 2: Not very knowledgeable
- 3: Somewhat knowledgeable
- 4: Highly knowledgeable

**Neighbourhood.** Categorical variable capturing a person's neighbourhood.

- Urban
- Suburban
- Rural

**Party Affiliation.** Categorical variable capturing a person's answer to the question "Which party do you feel closest to?"

- Democratic Party
- Republican Party
- Other
- Don't know

**Employment Status.** Categorical variable capturing a person's current employment status.

- Full-time employee
- Part-time employee
- Self-employed or small business owner
- Medium or large business owner
- Unemployed and looking for work
- Student
- Not currently working and not looking for work (e.g. full-time parent)

Retiree

**Affected by COVID-19.** Binary variable capturing a person was negatively affected by COVID-19. People are coded as affected if they stated that they either a) lost their job, b) were temporarily suspended from their job, or c) had to reduce their working hours due to COVID-19.

0: Not affected

1: Affected

**Personal Benefit.** Subject i's response to the question "Do you think you would personally benefit from a reduction in the top federal income tax rate?" ranging from 0 to 100 with 0 indicating no perceived personal benefit and 100 indicating a lot of perceived personal benefit from a reduction of the top federal income tax rate.

**Personal Benefit Future.** Subject i's response to the question "Do you think you would personally benefit from a reduction in the top federal income tax rate at some point in the future?" ranging from 0 to 100 with 0 indicating no perceived personal benefit in the future and 100 indicating a lot of perceived personal benefit in the future from a reduction of the top federal income tax rate.

**Personally Affected.** Subject i's response to the question "Do you think you are personally affected by the consequences of a reduction in the top federal income tax rate?" ranging from 0 to 100 with 0 indicating that the subject does not believe themselves to be affected and 100 indicating that they believe themselves to be very much affected from a reduction of the top federal income tax rate.

**Macroeconomic Benefit.** Subject i's response to the question "Do you think there are benefits for the economy (e.g. jobs created / higher growth) from a reduction in the top federal income tax rate?" ranging from 0 to 100 with 0 indicating no belief in

potential benefits and 100 indicating a belief in a lot of benefits for the economy from a reduction of the top federal income tax rate.

**Deserving.** Subject *i*'s response to the question "Do you think households in the top federal income tax bracket deserve a lower tax rate?" ranging from 0 to 100 with 0 indicating no belief that these households deserve a tax cut and 100 indicating a definite belief that households in the top federal income tax bracket deserve a lower tax rate.

**Hard Work.** Subject *i*'s response to the question "What has more to do with why a person is in the top federal income tax bracket? Because they have worked harder than others or because they have had more advantages than others?" ranging from 0 to 100 with 0 indicating a belief in harder work and 100 indicating a belief in more advantages.

**Top Pit Rate Decreased.** Binary variable capturing whether subject *i* believes that the top federal income tax rate in the U.S. has decreased over the past 40 years. We recoded K3 with responses "It has decreased by a lot" and "It has decreased somewhat" being coded as 1 and all other responses being coded as 0.

0: Top Pit rate decreased

1: Top Pit rate did not decrease

**Elicited Tax Cut Support.** Binary variable equal to 1 if respondent *i* clicked on the link provided at the end of the survey to join the mailing list of the organisation "Americans for Tax Reform" which campaigns for a reduction of the top federal income tax rate. The variable is equal to 0 otherwise.

0: No Support

1: Support



**Elicited Tax Increase Support.** Binary variable equal to 1 if respondent  $i$  clicked on the link provided at the end of the survey to join the mailing list of the organization "Americans for Tax Fairness" which campaigns for an increase in the top federal income tax rate. The variable is equal to 0 otherwise.

0: No Support

1: Support

# Part E: Survey Instrument

## E.1 Survey Instrument for Main Experiment

### Introduction

Thank you for participating in this study. In the following, you will be asked a series of questions about your policy preferences and beliefs about society. Your answers will be used solely for academic research. The study is being carried out by non-partisan academic researchers seeking to advance our knowledge of society. It is important for the research that you answer as accurately as you can, so please read the questions carefully.

### Part I: Demographics

**D1: Age.** How old are you?

**D2: Gender.** What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Other
- Prefer not to say

**D3: Marital Status.** What is your marital status?

- Single
- Married
- Legally separated or divorced
- Widowed

**D4: Children.** How many children do you have?

- I do not have children
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more

**D5: Ethnicity.** To which of these groups do you consider you belong? You can choose more than one group.

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African-American
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- Spanish, Hispanic or Latino
- White
- Other group
- Prefer not to answer

**D6: Education.** Which category best describes your highest level of education?

- Primary education or less
- Some high school
- High school degree/GED
- Some college
- 2-year college degree

- 4-year college degree
- Master's degree
- Doctoral degree
- Professional degree (JD, MD, MBA)
- Prefer not to answer

**D7: Household Income.** What is your total (annual) household income before tax?

- Under \$10,000
- \$10,000 - \$20,000
- \$20,001 - \$30,000
- \$30,001 - \$40,000
- \$40,001 - \$50,000
- \$50,001 - \$60,000
- \$60,001 - \$80,000
- \$80,001 - \$100,000
- \$100,001 - \$150,000
- \$150,001 - \$200,000
- \$200,001 - \$350,000
- \$350,001 - \$500,000
- Above \$500,000
- Don't know
- Prefer not to answer

**D8: Employment Status.** What is your current employment status?

- Full-time employee
- Part-time employee
- Self-employed or small business owner
- Medium or large business owner
- Unemployed and looking for work
- Student
- Not currently working and not looking for work (e.g. full-time parent)
- Retiree
- Prefer not to answer

**D9: Occupation.** Which category best describes your main occupation?

- Managers
- Professionals
- Technicians and associate professionals
- Clerical support workers
- Services and sales workers
- Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers
- Craft and related trades workers
- Plant and machinery operators, and assemblers
- Elementary occupations (e.g. cleaners, labourers, refuse workers)
- Armed forces occupations

- Not currently in the labour force (e.g. retired, student, full-time parent)
- Prefer not to answer

**D10: Covid-19 Employment.** At any time since it began, has the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic caused you to... (you can choose more than one option)

- Lose your job (e.g. be laid off by employer)
- Be temporarily suspended from your job (e.g. on unpaid leave or furlough)
- Reduce your working hours
- None of the above
- Prefer not to answer

**D11: Neighbourhood.** Which category best describes the neighbourhood where you live?

- Urban
- Suburban
- Rural

**D12: Political Orientation.** In politics people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place yourself on the following scale?

*[Scale from 0 (Left) to 10 (Right).]*

**D13: Social Class.** If you had to describe your social class, which one of the following five commonly-used terms would you choose?

- Lower class or poor
- Working class
- Middle class
- Upper-middle class

- Upper class
- Don't know
- Prefer not to answer

**D14: Economic Knowledge.** How knowledgeable do you consider yourself on economic policies and issues?

- Highly knowledgeable
- Somewhat knowledgeable
- Not very knowledgeable
- Not knowledgeable at all

**D15: Party Affiliation.** Which party do you feel closest to?

- Democratic party
- Republican party
- Other
- Don't know

**D16: 2020 Vote.** Who did you vote for in the recent 2020 Presidential Election?

- Joe Biden
- Donald Trump
- Other candidate
- Didn't vote
- Don't remember
- Prefer not to say

**D17: Attention Check.** Before proceeding to the next set of questions, we want to ask for your feedback about the responses you provided so far. It is vital to our study that we only include responses from people who devoted their full attention to this study. This will not affect in any way the payment you will receive for taking this survey. In your honest opinion, should we use your responses, or should we discard your responses since you did not devote your full attention to the questions so far?

- Yes, I have devoted full attention to the questions so far and I think you should use my responses for your study.
- No, I have not devoted full attention to the questions so far and I think you should not use my responses for your study.

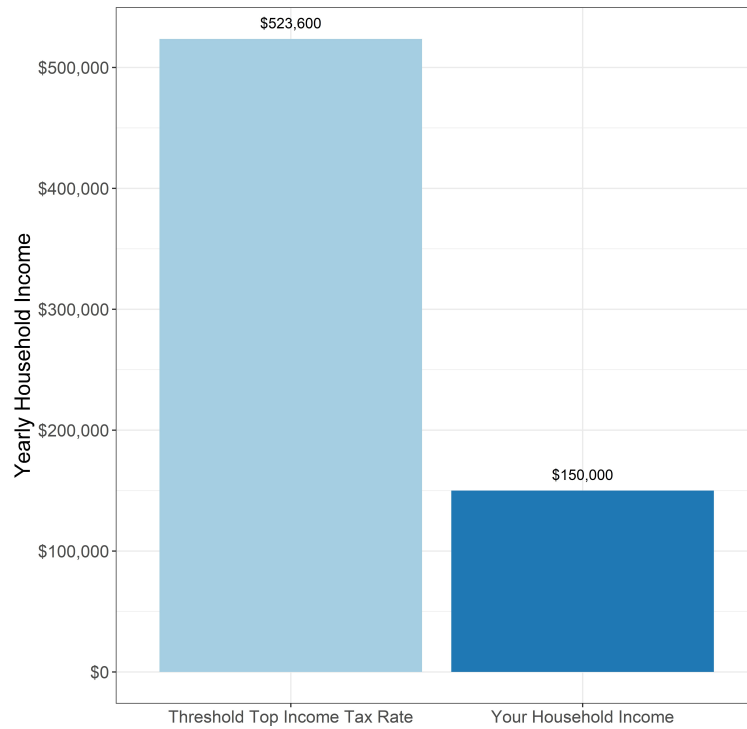
## **Part II: Treatment & Control**

Treatment assigned was randomised and the figure in T1 was based on the subject's response to D7. The treatment information was shown for a minimum of 8sec before subjects had the option to continue to the remainder of the study.



### T1: Unenlightened Self-Interest

This figure shows the threshold for the top federal income tax rate, as well as the upper threshold of your declared annual income. The left bar shows the threshold for the top federal income tax rate. The right bar shows your household income. You are not in the top federal income tax bracket.



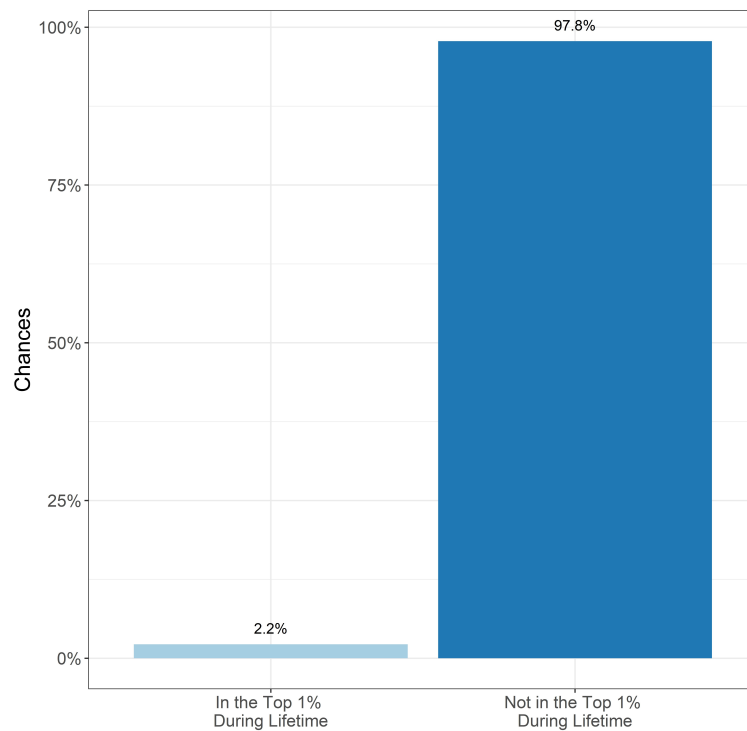
Source: Internal Revenue Service 2021.

TQ1: What is the threshold from which the top federal income tax rate applies?

- \$230,030
- \$523,600
- \$360,002
- \$460,050
- \$150,200

## T2: Prospect of Upward Mobility

This figure shows the proportion of Americans that will be in the top 1% of income earners at some point in their life. The left bar shows that around 1 in 50 people are in the top 1% of income earners for 5 years or more during their lifetime. The right bar shows that 49 in 50 people are not in the top 1% for 5 years or more during their lifetime.



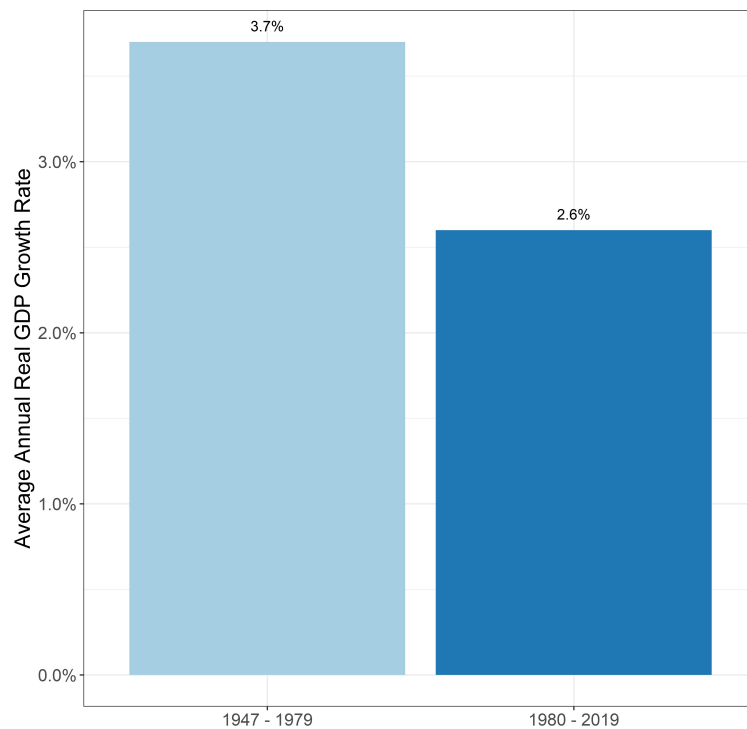
*Source: Internal Revenue Service 2015, Hirschl and Rank 2015.*

**TQ2:** What proportion of Americans will be in the top 1% of income earners for five years or more during their lifetime?

- 9.8%
- 2.2%
- 4.4%
- 50%
- 5.5%

### T3: Trickle-Down

The last four decades have seen a significant fall in taxes on the rich: the top rate of federal income tax has almost halved since 1979. This figure shows that economic growth was higher in the period before taxes on the rich were reduced.



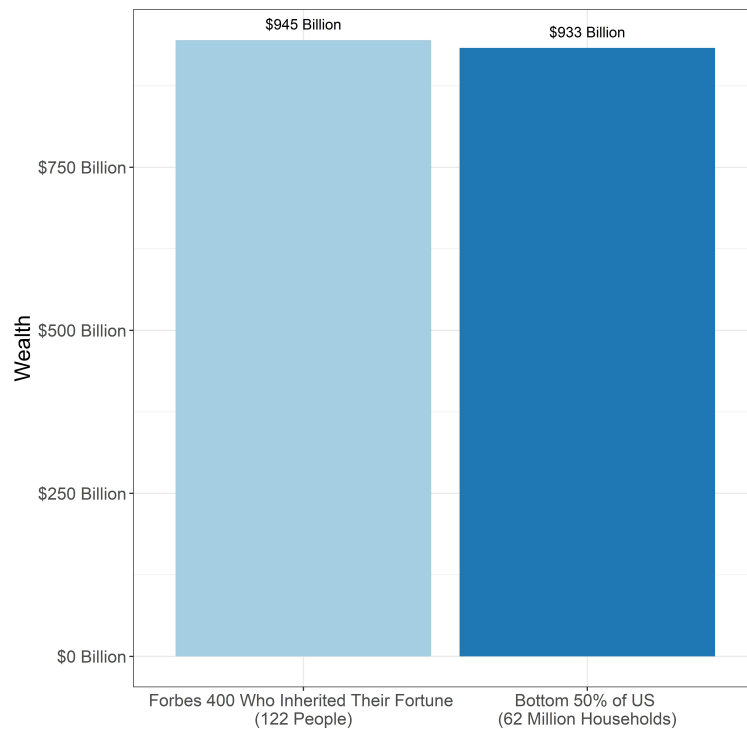
Source: US Bureau of Economic Analysis 2021, Tax Policy Center 2020.

**TQ3:** What was the average annual real GDP growth rate in the United States from 1947 – 1979?

- 2.5%
- 2.9%
- 3.7%
- 4.2%
- 3.6%

#### T4: Fairness

122 of the billionaires on the Forbes 400 list of the richest people in America inherited their fortunes. This figure shows that the amount of wealth held by these 122 billionaires is similar to the amount of wealth held by the bottom 50% of US households (a total of 62 million households) in 2015.



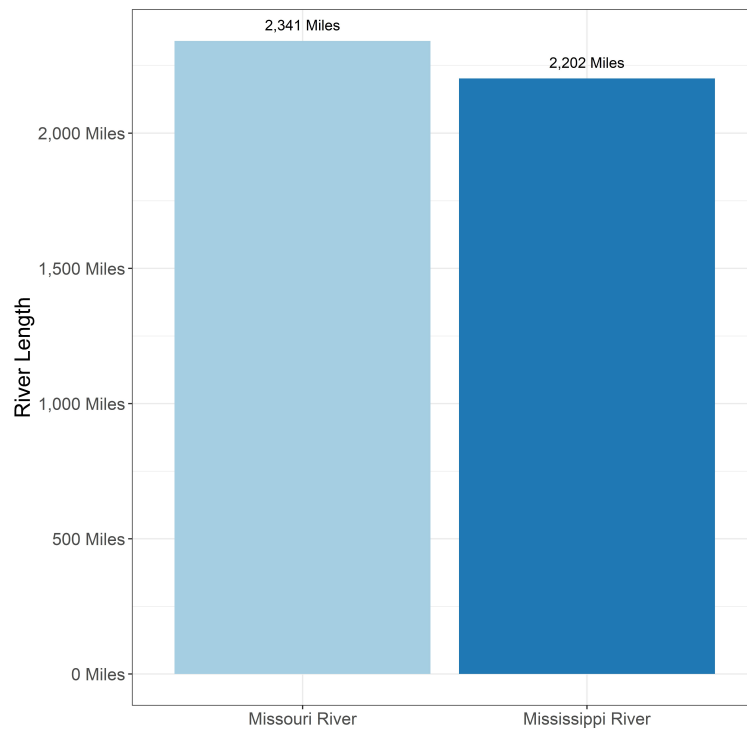
Source: Forbes 400 2020, Federal Reserve DFA 2021.

TQ4: How much wealth was held by the bottom 50% of the US population in 2015?

- \$933bn
- \$830bn
- \$884bn
- \$767bn
- \$995bn

### T5: Control (Rivers)

This figure shows the two longest rivers in the US by main stem. The left bar shows that the Missouri River is the longest river in the US with a length of 2,341 miles. The right bar shows that the Mississippi River is the second longest river with a length of 2,202 miles.



*Source: Benke & Cushing 2005.*

**TQ5:** Which river is the longest river in the US?

- Arkansas River
- Mississippi River
- Rio Grande
- Missouri River
- Yukon River

### **Part III: Post-treatment preferences and beliefs**

**Q1:** Do you support a reduction in the top federal income tax rate?

- Very supportive
- Supportive
- Neither supportive nor unsupportive
- Unsupportive
- Very unsupportive
- Don't know

**Q2:** What is your rationale for the preference you just expressed in the previous question?

**Q3:** Do you think you would personally benefit from a reduction in the top federal income tax rate?

*[Scale from 0 (Not at all) to 10 (Benefit a lot).]*

**Q4:** Do you think you would personally benefit from a reduction in the top federal income tax rate at some point in the future?

*[Scale from 0 (Not at all) to 10 (Benefit a lot).]*

**Q5:** Do you think there are benefits for the economy (e.g. jobs created / higher growth) from a reduction in the top federal income tax rate?

*[Scale from 0 (None at all) to 10 (A lot of benefits for the economy).]*

**Q6:** Do you think households in the top federal income tax bracket deserve a lower tax rate?

*[Scale from 0 (Not at all) to 10 (Definitely).]*

**Q7:** Do you think you are personally affected by the consequences of a reduction in the top federal income tax rate?

*[Scale from 0 (Not at all) to 10 (Very much affected).]*

**Q8:** What has more to do with why a person is in the top federal income tax bracket? Because they have worked harder than others or because they have had more advantages than others?

*[Scale from 0 (Worked harder) to 10 (More advantages).]*

**Q9:** To what extent do you think it is acceptable for people to be in the top federal income tax bracket as a result of having more advantages than others?

*[Scale from 0 (Not acceptable at all) to 10 (Completely acceptable).]*

**Q10:** How much of the time do you think you can trust the government to do what is right?

*[Scale from 0 (Almost never) to 10 (Almost always).]*

**Q11:** Do you support an increase in the top federal income tax rate?

- Very supportive
- Supportive
- Neither supportive nor unsupportive
- Unsupportive
- Very unsupportive
- Don't know

## **Part IV: Knowledge of top federal income taxes and top income shares**

**K1:** Out of 100 households in the U.S., how many are in the top federal income tax bracket?

[]

**K2:** What is the top federal income tax rate in the U.S.?

[]

**K3:** How has the top federal income tax rate in the U.S. evolved over the past 40 years?

- It has increased by a lot
- It has increased somewhat
- It has remained the same
- It has decreased somewhat
- It has decreased by a lot

**K4:** What share of national income do you think goes to the top 1% of income earners?

[]

**K5:** How has the share of national income going to the top 1% of income earners evolved over the past 40 years?

- It has increased by a lot
- It has increased somewhat
- It has remained the same
- It has decreased somewhat
- It has decreased by a lot



## **Part V: Preference elicitation**

Links were presented in randomised order.

### **Tax Cuts**

Americans for Tax Reform is a non-profit organisation campaigning for a reduction in the top federal income tax rate.

You can join their mailing list [here](#).

### **Tax Increases**

Americans for Tax Fairness is a non-profit organisation campaigning for an increase in the top federal income tax rate.

You can join their mailing list [here](#).

## **Part VI: Survey Feedback**

**C1:** Do you feel that this survey was biased?

- Yes, left-wing bias
- Yes, right-wing bias
- No, it did not feel biased

**C2:** Did you find the information we provided you with during the survey believable?

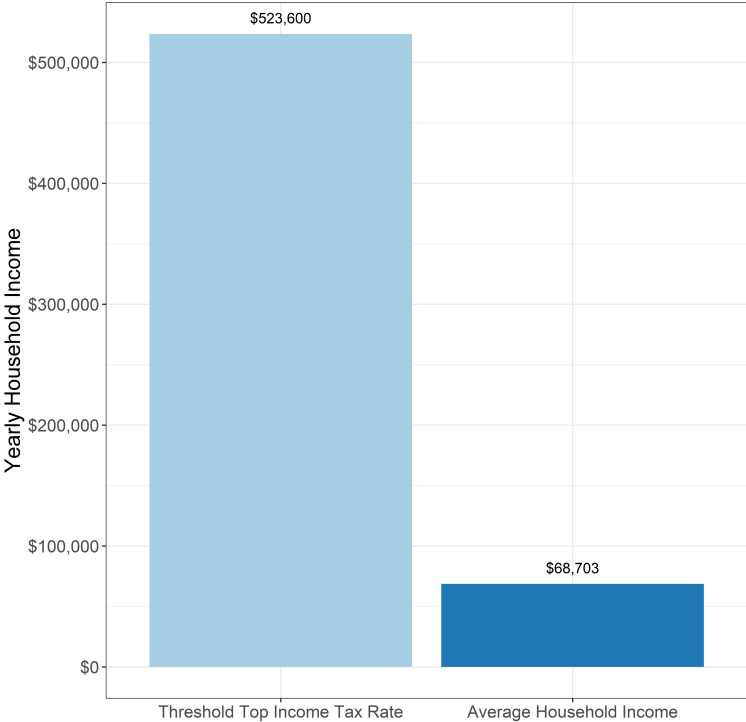
- Yes
- No
- Don't know

**C3:** Do you have any feedback or impressions regarding this survey?

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## E.2 Unconditional USI Treatment

This figure shows the threshold for the top federal income tax rate, as well as the average annual household income. The left bar shows the threshold for the top federal income tax rate. The right bar shows the average household income. Like the average household, you are not in the top federal income tax bracket.



Source: Internal Revenue Service 2021, United States Census Bureau 2021.

**TQ1:** What is the threshold from which the top federal income tax rate applies?

- \$230,030
- \$523,600
- \$360,002
- \$460,050
- \$150,200

### E.3 Additional Questions included in Robustness Check Experiment

**R1:** The current top federal income tax rate in the U.S. is 37%. What do you think would be an appropriate rate for the top federal income tax rate?

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**R2:** How has the top federal income tax rate in the U.S. evolved over the past 40 years compared to the federal income tax rate for the average household?

- It has increased by a lot more
- It has increased somewhat more
- It has evolved the same
- It has decreased somewhat more
- It has decreased by a lot more

**R3:** How much do you agree with the following statement: "Because the top federal income tax rate is lower now than it was 40 years ago, it should be increased."

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

**R4:** How much do you agree with the following statement: "Because households in the top federal income tax bracket have received tax cuts over the past 40 years, they don't deserve another tax cut."

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree

- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree