

Executive Accountability Beyond Outcomes: Experimental Evidence on Public Evaluations of Powerful Prime Ministers

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Abstract

While executives in many democracies have constitutional powers to circumvent the majoritarian legislative process to make policy, political scientists know relatively little about whether and when ordinary people hold executives accountable for the process they use. To study this issue beyond the American presidency, we conduct three large survey experiments in France, where the institution of the confidence procedure puts the government in a strong position relative to parliament. Our experiments highlight that public evaluations of the executive reflect a fundamental trade-off between policy and process. If they face significant opposition in the legislative process, executives either have to accept policy failure or risk punishment for the use of procedural force. People dislike both results, and the average popularity gain of using the confidence procedure over not delivering the policy is modest. Moreover, in some contexts executives are strictly better off not legislating rather than applying force.

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According to much of political science, government leaders have reasons to expect that they may be held accountable by voters for the outcomes they produce (or fail to produce). However, scoring major legislative accomplishments is hard because it requires confronting competing interests and ideas. When facing opposition to their policy agenda, executives in many contemporary democracies have the constitutional power to use procedures that circumvent the majoritarian legislative process to make policy. Prominent examples of such powers are state-of-emergency declarations, executive orders, and confidence vote procedures. Political opponents are usually quick to criticize the use of “procedural force” by executives as unfair or anti-democratic in spirit, or portray it as a signal of political weakness and incompetence. But these procedural critiques often go together with self-interested disagreements about policy or political posturing. At the same time, executives can be reluctant to use their constitutional powers despite anticipated policy gains.

How ordinary people assess the legislative performance of the executive is crucial for executives’ incentives to practice institutional forbearance rather than constitutional hardball politics as well as the policies resulting from political bargaining. In the long-run, the interplay between citizens and executives’ actions shapes democratic legitimacy and stability. While institutional theories demonstrate how the formal powers of executives influence policy (Howell, 2003; Huber, 1996*b*), we know much less about the microfoundations of how people assess executives facing tough choices over policy and legislative process. Do voters focus on outcomes and ignore the process through which they have been achieved? Or do considerations about process matter independently of policy preferences and partisan attachments? If so, does this depend on context? While standard spatial models or theories of retrospective voting focus on outcome-based political evaluations and accountability¹, in recent years

¹Following Downs (1957), a large literature examines voting based on policy positions (Iversen, 1994; Tomz and Houweling, 2008) or policy decisions (Healy and Malhorta, 2009; Wlezien, 2017). Another large literature studies voter responses to the economy (Achen and

political scientists have started to pay more attention to process. However, several empirical challenges related to the strategic use of constitutional force make it difficult to study the role of process in accountability. Moreover, existing research is almost exclusively focused on the United States and its presidential constitution (Christenson and Kriner, 2017*a,b*; Graham and Svobik, 2019; Reeves and Rogowski, 2016, 2018).

In this paper, we go beyond the case of the American presidency and provide new insights on whether and when citizens hold executives accountable beyond outcomes for the process they use to make policy, with implications for political incentives of government leaders and democratic governance. Conceptually and empirically, we focus on the institution of the confidence vote procedure as the strongest constitutional weapon available to executives (i.e., prime ministers) in many parliamentary and semi-presidential democracies.² By invoking this procedure, prime ministers credibly fuse the vote on a policy issue with a vote on the survival of the government, and in some countries the government's proposal may become law without an explicit vote in parliament as long as there is no majority to break the government. Bargaining theory shows that this institution can decidedly shift policy outcomes in favor of the prime minister relative to backbenchers, coalition partners, and parliament more broadly (Diermeier and Feddersen, 1998; Huber, 1996*b*; Huber and McCarty, 2001). Its introduction into democratic constitutions has at times been very contentious (Huber, 1996*a*, 54).

Using the confidence procedure to make policy is a highly visible and salient political event. For example, in 1993 British prime minister John Major invoked the confidence pro-

Bartels, 2016; Duch and Stevenson, 2008; Kramer, 1971; Lewis-Beck, 1997).

²It exists in most of Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand. In 9 of the 17 cases documented by Huber (1996*b*, 271), the prime minister can unilaterally invoke the procedure. After 1990, many democracies in central and Eastern Europe adopted it (e.g., Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia). It is also featured in several constitutions in Africa, some closely modeled on the French constitution (e.g., Senegal). See <https://www.constituteproject.org>.

cedure to ratify the Maastricht treaty against the opposition of rebels within his own party, thereby deciding an acrimonious debate over European integration. But several observers also remarked that the process had significant costs. The prime minister “emerged bloodied and bruised”, unpopular in the electorate and presiding over a divided party.³ In Germany, chancellor Gerhard Schröder used the procedure to force his Green coalition partner to support the war in Afghanistan.⁴ Although not the “nuclear option” the confidence vote procedure is sometimes referred to in the media, it has often been used in a restrained and highly selective way, even in situations where the prime minister does not have comfortable legislative majority. For instance, in France the procedure was used, on average, 1.5 times per year between 1958 and 2018 – affecting a small number (51) of the more than 5000 laws passed in that period.

This is puzzling from the perspective of purely outcome-oriented theories. The spatial model assumes that people have induced preferences over the process of lawmaking based on their policy preferences. It implies that policy ends can justify the procedural means (Acemoglu, Robinson and Torvik, 2013). Theoretically, however, people evaluating executives may care about both outcomes and process (Huber, 1996*b*). This suggests that prime ministers who face veto hurdles and care about their popularity can face a stark trade-off between getting punished for not getting things done or using procedural force. We argue that this dilemma varies by political and economic context.

Empirically, we analyze three large survey experiments embedded in a French election panel. France is a theoretically relevant case because its 1958 constitution, which influenced constitutional design around the world, provides the prime minister with a strong confidence procedure to circumvent the normal parliamentary process to make laws (Huber, 1996*a*).

³Eugene Robinson. “Major survives vote of confidence.” *Washington Post*, July 24, 1993.

⁴Steven Erlanger. “Pressing Greens, German leader Wins Historic Vote on Sending Troops to Afghanistan.” *The New York Times*, November 17, 2001.

Our experimental design overcomes several vexing empirical problems. Strategic selection, endogeneity, and multiple attributes of executives and their performance as lawmakers make it difficult to establish whether democratic process matters for accountability using observational data. The few existing survey-experimental studies most directly addressing these issues focus on whether presidents in the U.S. are punished for pursuing a particular policy by procedural force rather than working through the legislature (Christenson and Kriner, 2017*a,b*; Reeves and Rogowski, 2018). This is clearly important. However, the executive's incentives are also shaped by how voters respond to the alternatives of trying but failing to pass policy or taking no action. Not considering these counterfactuals can understate the trade-off voters and executives face between policy and process.

Our experiments randomize different vignettes concerning the attributes and performance of the prime minister that may come to power after the upcoming election: partisanship, which policy is proposed, whether the policy is enacted by majority vote or constitutional force or is not passed, as well as the political and economic context. We find that ordinary people evaluating prime ministers put significant weight on policy and party. But we clearly reject the null hypothesis that they do not care about process. A prime minister who enacts a policy using constitutional force through the confidence procedure is evaluated significantly more harshly than a prime minister who passes the same policy through majority voting in the assembly. Importantly, there is a substantive willingness to punish prime ministers for the use of procedural force even among co-partisans and those who prefer the policy to the status quo. If passing policy without constitutional force is not feasible, prime ministers either have to accept policy failure or risk punishment for the use of procedural force. We find that people dislike both results. The average popularity gain of using the confidence procedure over not delivering the policy is modest. Moreover, our results suggest that prime ministers who care about their popularity can be strictly better off accepting legislative defeat rather than applying force. In the context of an improving economy, using constitutional force

is counterproductive even if the alternative is not passing a major policy. This is consistent with political economy theories emphasizing the trade-off between electoral “surfing” and policy manipulation (Kayser, 2005).

It almost goes without saying that the advantages of any survey experimental approach are not without costs. Our approach requires exposing respondents to vignettes with varying probabilities of being realized after the election. However, all scenarios used are plausible given the political context, and results are robust to excluding those seen as less probable. Moreover, the results are robust across different policy issues with varying ideological content and salience. Finally, the experimental evidence on public penalty of the confidence vote is consistent with observational evidence.

Taken together, our findings underscore the importance of both outcome and process evaluations for political accountability. They are broadly consistent with recent evidence from the U.S. (Christenson and Kriner, 2017*b*; Reeves and Rogowski, 2018). Going further, we study a political institution that is absent in presidential systems but takes a central place in the constitutional architecture elsewhere. Our design accounts for missing counterfactuals and generates new evidence on the importance of context in shaping the trade-off between policy and process. As a result, we can better explain the real-world behavior of prime ministers and the functioning of representative democracy under stress.

Theoretical motivation

Following the theory of Huber (1996*b*), we start from the premise that public evaluations of executives may reflect both their policy achievements and their actions with respect to process. Theoretically, their relative importance shapes political incentives to use constitutional force and the resulting policy outcomes. However, the theory is agnostic about the empirical importance of process considerations. To motivate the empirical analysis, we review the case

for why process may be more important than purely outcome-based perspectives suggest, and we argue that context matters for when that is more likely to be the case.

Informational accounts of policymaking and accountability suggest that rational voters can rely on highly visible actions of executives —such as confidence votes or executive decrees— as a heuristic to attribute responsibility or as a signal about the quality of their leadership. Hence, process may factor into citizens’ calculus of accountability according to these theories. While this mechanism concerns expectations about (future) outcomes, the informational logic can provide a foundation for public limits on the use of executive power.

Holding executives accountable requires attributing outcomes for which they are responsible. Evidently, this is a difficult task in large-scale polities where policymaking involves multiple players, governments face a large number of policy issues and citizens have little incentives to be attentive to politics (Duch and Stevenson, 2008; Powell and Whitten, 1993). Experimental research has started to examine what attribution heuristics people may use to address this problem. For instance, there is evidence that individuals punish unfair allocations in a modified dictator game by concentrating on the proposer and the decision-maker with the largest voting weight (Duch, Przepiokra and Stevenson, 2015). The visible use of executive power can also provide a signal about qualities of the executive. In particular, the use of executive power in lawmaking may be seen as a signal that the executive lacks crucial skills to govern, such as the ability to select and manage a competent staff, formulate compelling policy and forge legislative alliances (Huber, 1996*a*, 119).

Process-based evaluations may also reflect an intrinsic value. Prime ministers’ use of constitutional procedural force to circumvent collective decision-making in the legislative assembly stands in conflict with the notion that democratic decision making, in the legislative stage, requires voting on the policy. Simple majority voting in particular “is widely seen as *the* democratic method and departures from it are usually seen as requiring some special justification” (Ward and Weale, 2010, p. 40). In normative political theory, this view has

been justified based on the principle of political equality. When there are fundamental disagreements about policy, the ideal of democracy “supports a roughly majoritarian way of making final decisions” (Christiano, 2008, 103). Relatedly, social choice theory has shown that the method of majority rule applied to pair-wise alternatives best embodies basic notions of fairness and equality (May, 1953). It is well-known that majority rule may not lead to a decisive winner in some situations. Following Arrow’s Impossibility Theorem, however, it is clear that the pathologies of majority rule apply to any non-dictatorial decision method, and some theorists have argued that majority rule is the most robust voting rule as it works well for the largest domain of preferences (Dasgupta and Maskin, 2008).

Of course, actual legislative procedures almost never resemble pure majority voting, as there are inequalities in agenda setting and amendment rights, and citizens are not political theorists. What matters is that, comparatively, majoritarian decision making processes in real-world assemblies tend to be closer to the democratic norm than executive unilateralism. This is not to say that the latter has no place in democratic constitutions. For instance, constitutional designers in countries like France have argued that government stability and effectiveness merit the price of “rationalizing” parliament (Huber, 1996*a*, ch. 2).

Should we thus expect ordinary people to hold executives accountable for how they achieve policy ends? Some public opinion research indeed claims that people’s intrinsic views about the democratic decision-making process matter independently of their policy preferences or partisan leanings, and have the potential to shape the behavior of executives (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2001; Reeves and Rogowski, 2016, 2018). This perspective also draws on research on procedural fairness in psychology and behavioral economics. Procedural justice theory argues that people’s evaluations of allocation decisions or leaders responsible for them are not only responsive to outcomes but also to perceptions about the fairness of the allocation process, such as whether a leader considered views from multiple sides or took enough time to make a careful decision (Tyler, Rasinski and McGraw, 1985; Doherty

and Wolak, 2012). Most studies in this body of research have focused on implementation decisions rather than policymaking and they often focus on process perceptions rather than variation in actual decision-making procedures (Esaiasson et al., 2016). As a result, we know little about the relevance of process for the evaluation of chief executives (cf. Christenson and Kriner, 2017*a,b*; Reeves and Rogowski, 2016, 2018), especially beyond the American executive.

Empirical implications

Our discussion suggests several empirical implications that have not been tested experimentally outside the US or not at all.

First, process matters for the accountability of executives independently of policy and partisanship. Moreover, people penalize the use of procedural force by the executive over a roughly majoritarian decision-making process even if they like the policy outcome or share the executive's political identity. The latter hypothesis constitutes a harder test for the relevance of process and it shapes executives' incentives to practice forbearance. Incentives are stronger when some citizens who like a policy nonetheless hold the executive accountable if it is achieved using procedural force. Our first experiment examines these implications.

Second, political context matters. If process is valued in part for normative reasons, procedural force should be viewed negatively when used to coerce legislators in an internally divided majority government but less so in the face of minority obstructionism. This reflects the egalitarian logic underlying the process norm. In line with this, our second experiment varies political context.

Third, process shapes individuals evaluations of the executive's performance even when people are provided with information about economic performance. In addition, political economy theories suggest the possibility that the relative cost of using procedural force versus failing to make policy varies with the state of the economy. Theories of the political

business cycle distinguish between electoral incentives to manipulate (economic) policy or “surfing” on good economic times by calling an early election without manipulation (Kayser, 2005). Extending this logic to choosing the procedural means suggests it may be better in some contexts to sit back rather than use force.

Experimental design

To test these empirical implications, we implemented a series of three conjoint survey experiments. They were embedded in the French National Election Survey conducted before the parliamentary and presidential elections held in May and June of 2017 (for a timeline, see Online Appendix Figure A1).⁵ Using a sample that is representative of the French electorate is important as survey experiments from convenience samples may not recover real-world political behavior (Hainmueller, Hangartner and Yamamoto, 2015). In the experiments, we randomly vary multiple dimensions of prime ministers and their performance as lawmakers: party, policy issue, democratic process, policy outcome, economic conditions and political context. The survey experimental approach enables us to take advantages of the strengths generally attributed to experiments (higher internal validity) and those of representative public opinion polls (external validity) (Hainmueller, Hangartner and Yamamoto, 2015; Mutz, 2011).

⁵This is a panel survey conducted online by IPSOS. As nearly all surveys in France, sampling is done with a quota method based on age, gender, occupation, region and type of residential area (Gschwend, 2005). The sample closely approximates the subsequent voting behavior in the first round of the presidential election: the mean absolute error of the vote intentions in last wave of the panel before the elections was very low (.6) and the (close) ranking of the four leading candidates was accurate. See <https://www.enef.fr/>.

Constitutional setting

France provides an ideal setting for the experiments. The constitution of the French Fifth Republic adopted in 1958 is a textbook case of semi-presidentialism and rationalized parliamentarism that puts an emphasis on government effectiveness and stability and has been widely emulated (Duverger, 1980; Huber, 1996*a*). The constitution endows the prime minister, as the head of government designated by the president but responsible to the lower house of parliament (*Assemblée nationale*), with strong powers to curtail or bypass legislative debate and majoritarian voting procedures. In this setting, it is natural and important to ask whether governments are held accountable for process beyond outcomes.

The strongest and most controversial legislative power is contained in Article 49.3 of the constitution. It provides the prime minister with a confidence vote procedure that is incorporated into our experiments. The procedure enables the government to enact policies with the force of law without a vote in the *Assemblée nationale* unless a majority of deputies votes to censure and thus break the government. Formal theory demonstrates that this procedure significantly strengthens the bargaining position of the prime minister (Diermeier and Feddersen, 1998; Huber, 1996*b*).

However, the procedural legitimacy of this institution has been contested since its inception. As is detailed by Huber (1996*a*, 54), it is “one of the most controversial aspects of the Constitution”. It is often described as unfair, heavy-handed or anti-democratic by politicians and democratic theorists. Of course, such criticisms from politicians may be part of political mobilization against the government rather than sincere qualms about procedure. Michael Debré, one of the writers of the constitution, called it a “troublesome last resort” before it was adopted (Huber, 1996*a*, 55). This did not prevent Debré from making use of the procedure three times as the first prime minister under the new constitution. Similarly, François Hollande called the procedure a “denial of democracy” and proposed to change the constitution to get rid of it. After being elected president, however, the prime minister selected by him

relied on the confidence vote procedure multiple times to pass unpopular economic reforms.⁶ Altogether, the confidence procedure has been invoked 88 times since 1958.⁷ A confidence-vote is material for front-page news (Becher, Brouard and Guinaudeau, 2017; Huber, 1996*a*) and the public has a fairly good knowledge of the process (Online Appendix, p. 1.)

The confidence procedure was a salient feature of French politics during the time of the first survey. Prime minister Manuel Valls relied on the procedure three times to “ram through parliament” his labor market reform against opposition in his parliamentary party and mass protests in the street.⁸ As was widely reported in the media, these episodes featured public controversy over the policy and the method of lawmaking. They occurred in the month before and in the month after our first experiment and almost one year before our third experiment. Our experimental results are consistent across this time span.

Design principles

Our approach shares with existing survey experiments the ability to address the strategic selection problem. Theoretically, executives strategically choose the means to pursue a policy (Huber, 1996*b*). If the use of procedural force is constrained by voter evaluations, they will occur for some policies but not others, diminishing the ability of researchers to find comparable observations in non-experimental data (Reeves and Rogowski, 2018).

Moreover, all three experiments share several important design principles. They ask respondents to consider a hypothetical but plausible political situation that may emerge after the upcoming election (for a similar approach, see Tomz and Houweling 2008). Each exper-

⁶Jim Jarassé. “Hollande en 2006: ‘Le 49-3 est une brutalité, un déni de démocratie’.” *Le Figaro*, February 2, 2015.

⁷See <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/connaissance/engagements-49-3.asp>.

⁸Anne-Sylvaine Chassany. “French government bypasses parliament to force through jobs bill.” *The Financial Times*, May 10, 2016.

iment randomly assigns different vignettes about the legislative actions of a potential future prime minister and then asks respondents to evaluate the prime minister's overall performance. We focus on the prime minister because the constitutional power to use procedural force, by means of the confidence vote, belongs to the prime minister, not the president. Consistent with this, the media reports the use of this procedure as a decision of the prime minister (for examples, see Online Appendix p. 2). Moreover, under unified government popular evaluations of the prime minister are highly predictive of evaluations of the president⁹, and under divided government the prime minister is the main focus of accountability for domestic matters (Lewis-Beck, 1997).

Multiple attributes. The vignettes deliberately confront respondents with a rich set of information about the prime minister's action with respect to policy and process as well as other attributes, such as party or economic conditions, all of which are varied experimentally. While the goal is to capture how respondents react to goal conflicts between policy outcomes and legislative process, there is information, as in the real-world, about multiple attributes. Respondents may only be responsive to some attributes, perhaps party or policy, or none at all. We also vary the policy issues to increase external validity. In comparison to single-attribute experiments, this design approximates a more realistic environment and thus enhances the theoretical and external validity of the results (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2014).

Multiple counterfactual policy outcomes. A policy may be adopted by majority vote in the national assembly or it may be adopted using the confidence vote procedure. This enables us to compare whether using procedural force matters compared to majority voting.

⁹Aggregate presidential and prime ministerial popularity over the 1981-2018 period are highly correlated ($r=0.69$) according to Kantar SOFRES surveys.

In addition, a policy may be proposed but not adopted. While governments in many non-presidential systems are rarely defeated in a parliamentary vote, this does not mean that they always manage to pass their agenda. A government’s policy proposals may die in committee, expire with the end of the parliamentary session or be withdrawn for lack of support. Our experiments capture this possibility of proposing but failing to enact a policy. In the third experiment, we also account for the possibility that governments may abstain from making a legislative proposal. It would be incomplete to only focus on the comparison of how a policy is passed. Theoretically, the counterfactual that the government may not get things done is key to the incentives of governments considering the use of procedural force. Our design thus improves upon existing designs that focus on the comparison of executives that use unilateral action or try to work with the legislature without varying the outcome.

Outcome variable. After being shown a particular vignette, respondents are asked to evaluate the prime minister on a 11-point scale that asks about the satisfaction with the prime minister’s action, ranging from absolutely not satisfied (0) to absolutely satisfied (10).¹⁰ The dependent variable does not specifically ask whether respondents approve of the use of the confidence vote because the goal of the experiments is to assess how voters assess executive performance more broadly, which is what ultimately matters for accountability. Respondents have to weight potentially competing considerations to come to a summary judgement (as in Reeves and Rogowski, 2018). In all analyses reported below, the dependent variable is rescaled to vary between 0 and 1.

Respondents are only asked to rate a single prime minister rather than explicitly comparing two different prime ministers. In the real-world, voters only get to observe a single prime minister at any particular time and so asking about multiple hypothetical prime min-

¹⁰The question is asked in the following way: “In this instance, would you be satisfied or not with the Prime Minister’s action?”

isters is more artificial. This is different, for instance, from the evaluation of immigrants for admission into a host country (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2015). For this reason, we opt for simpler design with a single vignette (or profile) rather than a paired design.¹¹

Sample size. Each respondent is shown only one vignette per experiment. This is made possible by our unusually large sample size ($N > 19,000$ in experiment 1, $N > 6,000$ in experiment 2 and $N > 15,000$ in experiment 3), which ensures that we have several hundred respondents for a particular vignette (we are more precise below). This avoids carryover effects from exposing respondents to repeated rating tasks (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2014), which is frequently done in existing studies to preserve statistical power. Moreover, limiting the experiment to one question discourages respondent disengagement, which may lead to questionnaire satisficing (Hainmueller, Hangartner and Yamamoto, 2015). The sample size also facilitates the theoretically-driven analysis of heterogeneity in the treatment effects.

Experiment 1: Party, policy and process

The first experiment is designed to answer the following questions that adjudicate between different theoretical perspectives on the relevance of process in accountability: First, holding policy outcomes and party fixed, are prime ministers punished by the public for the use of procedural force—in the form of the confidence procedure—compared to making policy by majority rule? Second, are process effects mainly driven by those who disagree with the

¹¹In a validation study using experimental and real-world referendum data on immigrant admissions in Switzerland, Hainmueller, Hangartner and Yamamoto (2015, p. 2397) find that survey experiments “match the behavioral benchmark rather well, with the important exception of the student sample.” They also find that paired designs perform better than simpler designs. However, the nature of the rating task was different from ours and our findings are consistent with a non-experimental study.

policy content or do not share the prime minister’s partisanship? Third, how large is the procedural punishment compared to the punishment for not getting things done?

The experiment was included in the wave of the French National Election Survey administered on the internet between June 17 and 27, 2016 (with a sample size of 19,383 respondents). The topic was introduced by a short paragraph on the confidence vote procedure as well as the main advantages and drawbacks usually associated with it in public debate¹², directly followed by a factual question about the use of confidence vote in the last 12 months. Only 10% of the respondents did not report any knowledge of at least one of the three uses of the confidence vote between mid-June 2015 and mid-June 2016. The prompt and information question were not repeated in experiments 2 and 3 conducted several months later. The fact that we find similar process effects in these experiments indicates that the initial priming was not crucial. Furthermore, Online Appendix Figure A5 reports additional evidence that respondents that were never primed react very similarly to the use of constitutional force compared to those primed once months before.

In the subsequent experiment, each respondent was presented with a relatively short and straightforward vignette where the party of the prime minister, the issue of the policy proposal, and the legislative process and outcome were randomly allocated. Table 1 provides the full wording for each profile of experimental conditions (translated into English, French versions are available upon request). The wording resembles factual newspaper reports. Altogether, there are 24 different vignettes (or attribute profiles) and there are around 800 respondents for each of them. A randomization check shows that the vignettes are balanced across pre-treatment co-variates (Online Appendix Table A2).

As the use of procedural force is only meaningful when there is political conflict, the policy proposal is always presented as being associated with “heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority”. In the vignette, the prime minister belongs to one

¹²See Online Appendix, p. 2.

Table 1: Vignette question wording for experiment 1

	Majority vote condition	Confidence vote condition	Withdrawal condition
Wealth tax	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to <i>increase the wealth tax</i> . Then the reform is adopted <i>by a majority in the National Assembly</i> after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to <i>increase the wealth tax</i> . Then the reform is adopted <i>without a parliamentary vote on the bill as the Prime minister invoked a confidence vote (article 49.3)</i> after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to <i>increase the wealth tax</i> . Then the reform is <i>not adopted as the Prime Minister withdrew the bill</i> after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.
Refugees	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to <i>to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France</i> . Then the reform is adopted <i>by a majority in the National Assembly</i> after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to <i>to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France</i> . Then the reform is adopted <i>without a parliamentary vote on the bill as the Prime minister invoked a confidence vote (article 49.3)</i> after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to <i>to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France</i> . Then the reform is <i>not adopted as the Prime Minister withdrew the bill</i> after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.

Notes: *Party is a random allocation of one of the following: Left Party, the Socialist party, the Republicans, the National Front. In total, there are 24 different experimental conditions. Original survey wording is in French.

of the four parties that were at the time of the survey the four most important parties in France (from left to right): the Left Party, the Socialist party (PS), the Republicans, and the National Front. The survey was conducted 10 months before the elections and there was considerable political uncertainty. In this context, considering that different parties may win the government is plausible. The Socialist and the Republicans (under various names) were the two main parties for most of the Fifth Republic and the four included parties received 82% of the vote in the last election that occurred before the experiment (regional elections in December 2015). However, public dissatisfaction with the incumbent Socialists and scandals involving the Republicans meant that it was by no means a foregone conclusion that one of them would again win the premiership (indeed, neither of them did).¹³ A strong performance of the National Front, similar to radical right parties in other European countries, was a possibility. (Excluding profiles in which the prime minister either belongs to the National Front or Left Party does not change the results. See Online Appendix Figure A4.)

Furthermore, as detailed in Table 1, each vignette was randomly assigned to one of two concrete policy issues and to one of three legislative conditions. In terms of policy, the prime minister proposes either “to increase the wealth tax” or “to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France”. Survey experiments on public evaluations of unilateral actions by American presidents emphasize the importance of studying concrete policy issues that may conflict with attitudes about process (Christenson and Kriner, 2017*b*; Reeves and Rogowski, 2018). We selected these two policies because both issues are salient in France (and many other countries) and they have opposite ideological direction: the wealth tax increase is a left-leaning proposal whereas the limitation of refugees is a right-leaning one. The dramatic increase in the number of refugees and migrants arriving in continental

¹³The party of the president elected in June 2017 (*En Marche*) was created only two months before the survey and E. Macron was neither candidate for the 2017 presidential election nor a front runner in the polls at the time. Note that experiment 3 differs.

Europe in 2015 led to proposals aimed at limiting the inflow of refugees. Rising economic inequality over the last decades has also increased calls on the left to increase redistribution, and the evolution of the existing wealth tax has been a prominent policy issue in France in this election. Prior surveys suggested that a little more than half of the public favored each proposal (Online Appendix, p. 2). While left prime ministers may be seen as more inclined to propose increasing the wealth tax and less inclined to reduce immigration than right prime ministers, in Europe governments of all colors have strengthened immigration controls and right governments facing the European Unions’ fiscal rules have not been beyond increasing taxes. All possible profiles are plausible. Again, a robustness test excludes profiles interpreted as being less likely (Online Appendix Figure A4).

There are three possible legislative outcomes. In the *Majority vote* condition, the prime minister’s proposal is adopted by “a majority in the National Assembly”. In the *Confidence vote* condition, the prime minister’s proposal is adopted “without a parliamentary vote on the bill as the Prime minister invoked a confidence vote (article 49.3).” In the *Withdrawal* condition, the prime minister’s proposal “is not adopted as the Prime Minister withdrew the bill”. Withdrawing a bill from further consideration is the main form of legislative defeat for the government in France. Consistent with the theory of Huber (1996*b*), there has been no case where a prime minister was defeated in a confidence vote. In each scenario, the prime minister proposes the policy. By design, this controls information about who is responsible for the policy action (Duch, Przepiokra and Stevenson, 2015).

Main results

We are interested in the marginal effect of a particular experimental condition rather than differences between individual vignettes.¹⁴ For instance, we like to know how much satis-

¹⁴Online Appendix Figure A3 displays results for each vignette.

faction with the prime minister changes, on average, when the policy is adopted using the confidence vote procedure rather than by majority vote. This is what Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto (2014) call the average marginal component effect (AMCE). Intuitively, it is the effect of changing one feature in a profile, say the confidence vote, averaged across all other conditions, in this case party and policy proposals. Given the completely independent randomization of conditions, the AMCE is non-parametrically identified and can be estimated using an ordinary least squares regression that includes dummy variables for each component of each experimental condition (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2014). Thus, the statistical model we employ includes a dummy for the confidence vote condition, another for the withdrawal condition and uses the majority vote condition as the baseline. By the same logic, it also includes three party dummies (PS is the baseline) and one policy dummy (wealth tax is the baseline), plus an intercept.

Figure 1 reports the main results from the first experiment. Recall that, throughout, the dependent variable was rescaled to range between 0 and 1. Panel (a) shows the estimated AMCEs with 95% confidence intervals. Clearly, respondents evaluate prime ministers more favorably when they manage to pass a policy by majority vote rather than by procedural force using the confidence vote. Using procedural force leads to a drop in satisfaction of 0.084. This effect is precisely estimated ($p < 0.001$) and substantively relevant. It corresponds to a 16% reduction compared to average satisfaction with prime ministers in the majority vote condition. Given the well-known relationship between satisfaction with the prime minister and vote choice (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000, 201; estimated in Online Appendix Table A2 for this electoral cycle), the magnitude of the process effect is electorally relevant.¹⁵ At the same time, policy outcomes are clearly important. The experiment reveals that failing

¹⁵A back-of-the-envelope calculation suggests the procedural penalty may reduce the vote intention for the prime minister by up to 23% (see Online Appendix p. 9). Assuming time discounting, this is an upper bound for the effect that may materialize in an election.

to adopt the policy leads to significantly lower evaluations of the prime minister compared to the majoritarian policy. The negative effect of 0.13 corresponds to a 25% reduction of satisfaction in the majoritarian baseline. Clearly, respondents neither like executives who use procedural force nor those who are not effective policymakers.

To get a sense of the implied trade-off, it is also instructive to consider the effect of the confidence vote relative to bill withdrawal as the reference category. On average, using the confidence vote to pass the policy improves the satisfaction with the prime minister compared to not passing the policy by 0.048 (± 0.01). However, this boost is small, about one-third, compared the effect achieving the same outcome through a majority vote (0.13 ± 0.01). Relying on the confidence procedure neutralizes much of the popularity gain from delivering the policy. This suggests a hard choice for prime ministers.

Unsurprisingly, party also matters for evaluations. But partisan considerations do not override considerations based on process or outcomes. There are also some differences between policy issues, with a policy aimed at reducing the inflow of immigrants leading to marginally higher satisfaction compared to wealth taxation.

Panels (b) and (c) of Figure 1 demonstrate that the results on the confidence vote and bill withdrawal are substantively similar across both policy issues, wealth taxation and refugees. For each policy, using procedural force or failing to pass the policy causes a significant decline in popular satisfaction. The effects are slightly larger for wealth taxation.¹⁶

¹⁶For the confidence vote effect, the difference between plot (b) and (c) is marginally significant ($p=0.09$), for withdrawal the gap is more precisely estimated ($p = 0.01$).

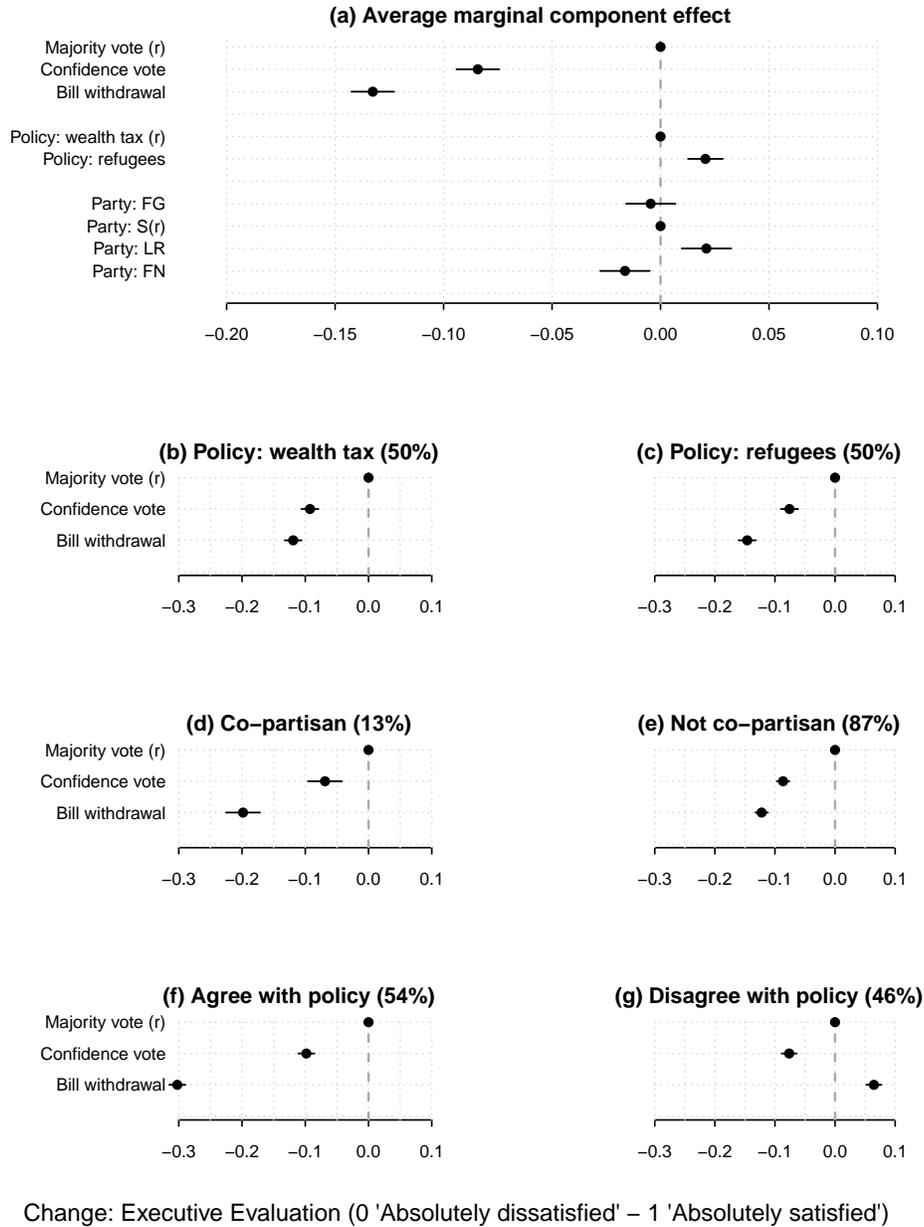


Figure 1: Effects of the executive’s legislative performance and party affiliation on public evaluations. Based on experiment 1 (N=19,283) embedded in French election study (June 2016), these plots show the effects of randomly assigned attributes on the satisfaction with the prime minister, rescaled to vary from 0 (“Absolutely dissatisfied”) to 1 (“Absolutely satisfied”). Plot (a) shows the Average Marginal Component Effects for all attributes. The remaining plots show conditional effects of confidence vote and bill withdrawal across experimental/background conditions (policy/party attributes are included but not displayed). Linear regression estimates; horizontal bars represent 95% confidence intervals; points without bars denote reference category.

Examining the heterogeneity of the AMCEs by partisanship and policy preferences is of substantial theoretical interest. Following purely outcome-based views, the procedural effect may be mainly driven by those who disagree with the policy content or do not share the prime minister’s partisanship. If so, this would weaken prime minister’s incentives to refrain from using constitutional force. However, the additional results reported in Figure 1 show that this is not the case. Panels (d) and (e) plot the AMCEs conditional on whether the respondent is a co-partisan of the prime minister. The partisanship of respondents was measured in a separate survey wave one month before the experiment. Co-partisans evaluate “their” prime minister significantly less favorably after the use of procedural force. The effect is of similar magnitude than that of people who do not share the prime minister’s partisanship.¹⁷

Panels (f) and (g) plot the AMCEs conditional on whether respondents agree or disagree with the policy. Earlier in the survey, respondents were asked questions about both policy issues, which allows us to identify who agrees and who disagrees with the proposal.¹⁸ Again, the confidence vote effect is similar across policy preferences. Even people who like the policy hold the prime minister accountable or the use of procedural force.¹⁹ Intuitively, the results for policy withdrawal strongly vary with respondents’ policy preferences. Those that agree with the prime ministers policy proposal harshly punish legislative defeat, those who disagree with the proposal modestly improve their assessment. Bill withdrawal is also punished more harshly by co-partisans.

In an additional analysis reported in the Online Appendix (Figure A6), we find that

¹⁷The small difference in confidence vote effects between plots (d) and (e) is not statistically significant ($p=0.22$).

¹⁸Binary coding at the mid-point on a 11-point scale between “decrease a lot” (0) and “increase a lot” (10) (see Online Appendix, p. 2).

¹⁹The difference in the confidence vote effect between plot (f) and (g) is statistically significant ($p=0.02$) but substantively small.

the procedural effect varies with broader democratic norms. People favoring a strongman who has not concerned himself with parliament and elections are significantly less inclined to punish prime ministers for the use of constitutional force than those who oppose such a leader. This is consistent with normative considerations, in addition to signaling, explaining the process effect.

In short, the first experiment shows that public evaluations of executive performance reflect a trade-off between policy and process. Rather than being overwhelmed by partisan considerations or policy, process plays a substantively important role. Reassuringly, the experimental evidence is consistent with a time-series study of the use of the confidence vote and prime ministerial popularity in France 1979-2008 (Becher, Brouard and Guinaudeau, 2017), which finds that French prime ministers experience a significant decline in popularity after using the confidence vote. In contrast to the observational study, our research design rules out concerns about strategic selection bias and that process effects are an artifact of policy or partisan motivations. The experimental evidence also corroborates the views of selected French politicians revealed in qualitative interviews (Huber, 1996*a*, 119). For instance, one deputy associated with the government states that the confidence vote “embarrasses the government because it gives the impression that there is not a majority in the country – that there is no direction and the Prime Minister has become authoritarian.” Similarly, an assistant to the prime minister explains that using the confidence vote “is not a sign of force, but an admission of failure.”

Experiment 2: Political context

If the confidence vote effect reflects (in part) an implicit majoritarian norm, it should be weaker when it is used against obstructionism by a minority rather than disagreement among the governing coalition or broader societal dissent. Our second experiment is designed to

test this hypothesis.

The general structure of the design is as in the first experiment.²⁰ In addition, we randomly vary the political context. We consider three scenarios. First, there is substantial internal dissent about the proposed policy and the government majority is split. More specifically, respondents in this condition are told that the policy is passed or withdrawn “after many MPs from the government majority announced that they did not support the prime minister’s proposal.” In this context, using the confidence vote may be the only means to pass the policy because it forces legislators into a trade-off between bringing down their government or conceding on policy (Diermeier and Feddersen, 1998; Huber, 1996*b*). This clearly departs from the majoritarian notion of policymaking, so we expect the same effect of procedural force compared to majority voting as in the first experiment.

Second, there are mass demonstrations against the policy proposed by the prime minister. This is an indication of significant societal opposition to the reform. Mass demonstrations against government bill proposal are common in France. In this condition the vignette mentions “the multiplication of mass demonstrations against the prime minister’s proposal since the beginning of the parliamentary debate.” Again, in this context the use of constitutional force rather than majoritarian voting undermines the procedural legitimacy of the government’s action. Considering process as an intrinsic value, this should translate into worse evaluations of executive performance.

Third, a minority in the assembly obstructs the government’s policy. One possibility of delaying the passage of a law by the opposition is to introduce and debate a very large number of amendments. In France, the parliamentary opposition regularly uses amendments as a filibustering strategy, sometimes scheduling thousands of amendments.²¹ This includes

²⁰With the exception that the second experiment focuses on immigration/refugees as the policy issue did not matter much in the first experiment.

²¹Sylvain Mouillard. “L’obstruction parlementaire, une vieille pratique.” *Libération*. Jan-

the contested labor-market reform passed by the Vall’s government using the confidence procedure a few months before the survey was conducted. Almost 5,000 amendments were introduced. Hence, respondents assigned to the obstructionism condition are informed that “the opposition introduced thousands of amendments to delay the adoption of the prime minister’s proposal.” In this context, the confidence procedure is a defensive move to pursue a policy that is backed by the parliamentary majority. Hence its use is less clearly a violation of a democratic norm and the process effect should be smaller.

The second experiment was included in the wave of the French National Election Survey fielded between November 8, 2016 and November 14, 2016 (with a sample size of 25,028 respondents from which 6,438 respondents were randomly allocated to the experiment). Altogether, there are 18 different experimental conditions. Table A4 in the Online Appendix provides the full wording.

Results

Figure 2 reports the main results from the second experiment. It plots the AMCEs for the confidence vote effect and the withdrawal effect (each relative to the baseline of passing the same policy by majority vote in the assembly) by political context. For each context, we also report AMCEs conditional on policy agreement. The main result is that there is a significant negative effect of using constitutional force unless it is used to counter opposition obstructionism. This context-variation in the process effect strengthens the interpretation that it taps into intrinsic concerns about democratic decision making.

Given internal dissent within the government (panel (a)) or massive protests (panel (b)), result is as in the first experiment: Prime ministers suffer a significant decline in satisfaction. Again, this holds for respondents that agree and those that disagree with the policy.

uary 29, 2013.

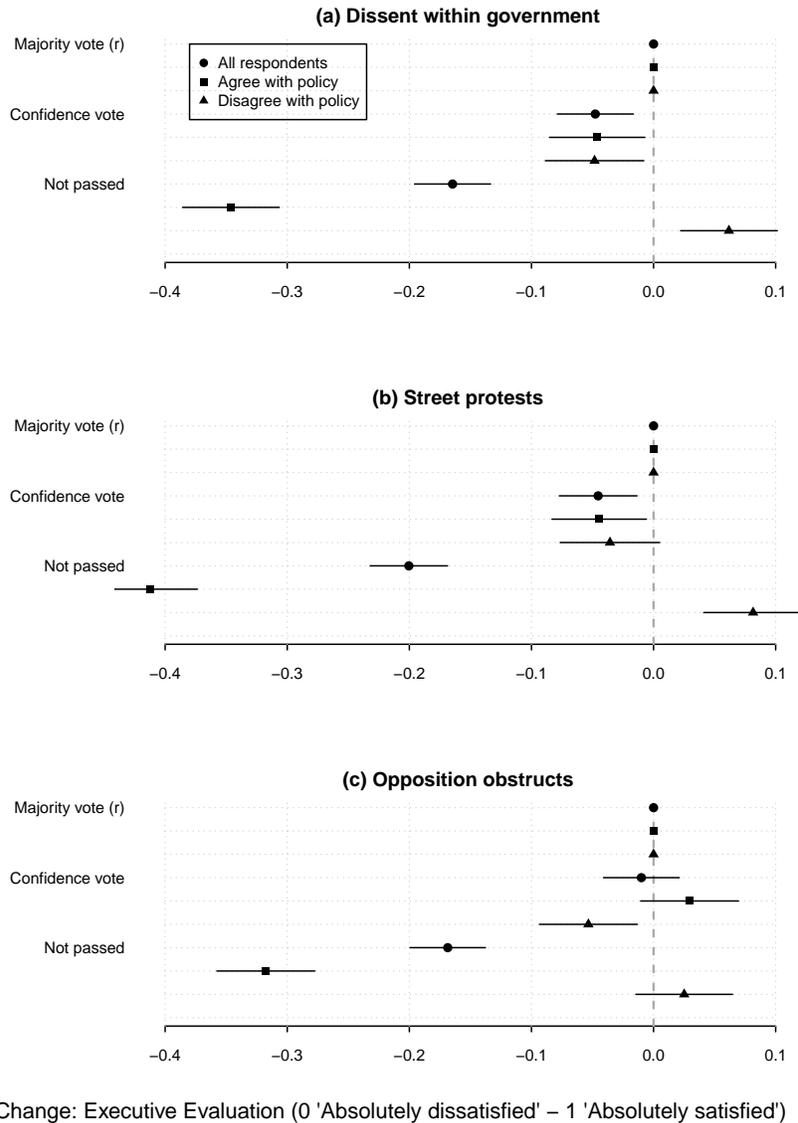


Figure 2: Effects of the executive’s legislative performance on public evaluations across different contexts of political opposition and varying by respondents’ policy preference. Based on an experiment (N=6,438) embedded in the French election study (November 2016), these plots show the effects of randomly assigned attributes on the satisfaction with the prime minister, rescaled to vary from 0 (“Absolutely dissatisfied”) to 1 (“Absolutely satisfied”). Plot (a) shows the Average Marginal Component Effects when there is internal dissent among government; plot (b) when there are massive street protests; plot (c) when the opposition obstructs the proposal with a large number of amendments. Linear regression estimates; horizontal bars represent 95% confidence intervals; points without bars denote reference category; party effects are not shown to save space.

However, the effect is close to zero in the context of obstructionism (panel (c)).²² In this context, the effect for all respondents masks heterogeneity by preferences. People who do not like the policy are inclined to punish the prime minister while those that like the policy are inclined to reward the prime minister, though the latter effect is less precisely estimated. Furthermore, bill withdrawal leads to a large decline in popular satisfaction with the prime minister across all three contexts. As in the first experiment, this negative effect is polarized by policy preferences.

Experiment 3: Adding the economy

The third experiment adds information about the state of the economy to the vignettes. This serves two purposes. First, a large body of scholarship documents that changes in macroeconomic condition shape voting and government approval (Duch and Stevenson, 2008; Kramer, 1971; Kayser, 2012; Lewis-Beck, 1997; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2007). Hence, the economy provides a natural benchmark as well as a robustness check for process effects. Recent experiments on voter reactions to the opportunistic calling of early elections find that economic conditions are much more important than procedural concerns (Schleiter and Tavits, 2018). Second, following political economy theories we explore whether voter responses to the actions of the prime minister vary with the economy.

The experiment was included in the wave of the French National Election Survey fielded between March 31, 2017 and April 4, 2017 (with a sample size of 15,623 respondents). Again, the basic design is as in the first experiment. It omits information about the party of the prime minister because the experiment was conducted closer to the first-round of the national

²²The confidence vote effect in the internal dissent context is 4.8 times larger than in the obstructionism context ($p=0.12$).

elections and electoral uncertainty was lower.²³

As unemployment has been for years the main issue in France, the vignette now starts with describing the state of the economy “at the end of the first year in power of the next Prime Minister”: “there are 350,000 people less unemployed”, “there is the same number of unemployed people” or “there are 350,000 people more unemployed”. This amounts to a change of 1 percentage point in the unemployment rate. The focus on changes (rather than levels) is consistent with the large literature on economic voting. We keep exactly the same three conditions regarding the legislative process (*Majority vote*, *Confidence vote*, *Withdrawal*) but add a new default no-bill condition in which the prime minister does not propose any policy. This captures the possibility of making no legislative initiative.

To take into account the potential effect of difference in issue salience, along with the high salience proposal regarding refugees used in the first and second experiment, we also introduce a low-salience policy proposal without a clear ideological direction aimed “to increase subnational governments’ powers” and omit the wealth tax proposal.²⁴ Altogether, there are 21 different experimental vignettes (for full wording see Table A5).

When surfing is better than legislating by force

Figure 3 summarizes the main results from the third experiment. Panel (a) plots the AMCEs. The effect of the economy works in the standard way: improving conditions (i.e., less unemployment) lead to higher satisfaction with the prime minister and deteriorating conditions (i.e. more unemployment) lead to less satisfaction compared to the baseline of no change in the economy. Reassuringly, the process effect plays out as in the previous experiments even when voters get information on the state of the economy. The use of the confidence vote

²³Justified because the first experiment found that the effects of policy and process are robust across co-partisans and other respondents.

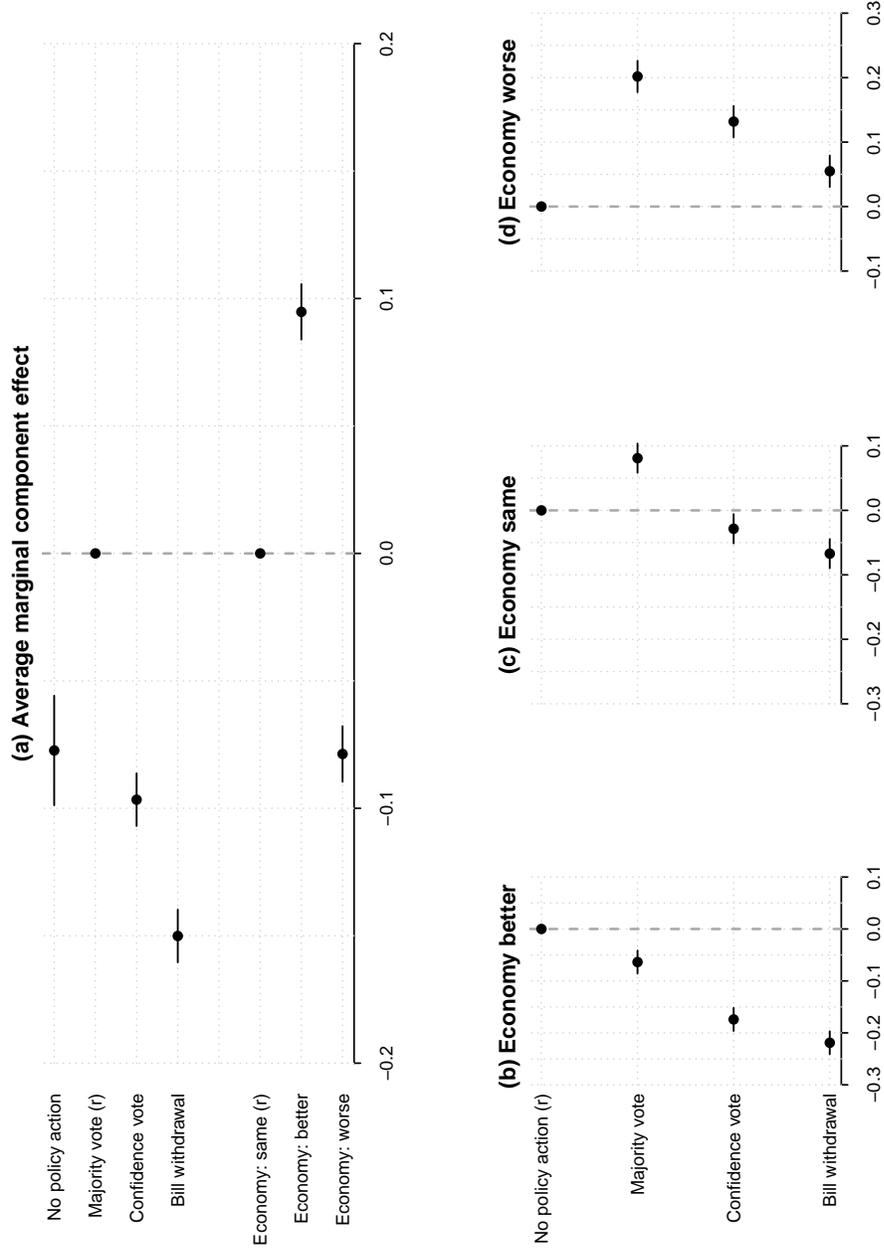
²⁴See Online Appendix p. 15.

leads to significantly more negative evaluation of the prime minister's performance compared to the majority voting condition. In the experiment, the confidence vote effect is of similar magnitude than a substantive decline in unemployment.

While taking no policy action also leads to more negative evaluations compared to majoritarian policymaking, the magnitude of this effect is similar to the penalty of using the confidence vote. This suggests that prime ministers that care about their popular satisfaction do not generally have incentives to use constitutional force to pass a policy rather than refrain from taking legislative action when they anticipate legislative roadblocks. Again, bill withdrawal is evaluated most harshly.

To explore the logic of surfing rather than costly policymaking, panels (b) - (d) of Figure 3 plot the effects of different legislative actions relative to the added potential outcome of doing nothing by economic conditions. The evidence suggest that economic context shapes the incentives when and how to legislate. When the economy is improving, taking any policy action hurts the popularity of the prime minister. This makes sense if one thinks of the economy as a valence issue and recognizes that many policy issues, even if supported by a majority, are divisive and generate some losers. When the economy is deteriorating, on the other hand, there are clear benefits from taking action and passing policy even using the confidence procedure. In the intermediate case of a stable economy, the prime minister gains in popularity by passing policy using majority voting but loses in popularity when passing policy using constitutional force. In this situation, there are incentives to not use the confidence procedure even though passing policy without it would be beneficial compared to inaction.²⁵

²⁵The confidence vote effect is present for both the low-salience and high-salience policies (Online Appendix Figure A7).



Change: Executive Evaluation (0 'Absolutely dissatisfied' - 1 'Absolutely satisfied')

Figure 3: Effects of the executive's legislative performance and economic conditions on public evaluations. Based on experiment 3 (N=15,623) embedded in French election study (March/April 2017), these plots show the effects of randomly assigned attributes on the satisfaction with the prime minister, rescaled to vary from 0 ("Absolutely dissatisfied") to 1 ("Absolutely satisfied"). Plot (a) shows the Average Marginal Component Effects. Plots (b) - (d) show conditional effects of no policy action, confidence vote and bill withdrawal across randomly varied economic conditions. Linear regression estimates; horizontal bars represent 95% confidence intervals; points without bars denote reference category.

Conclusion

While an immense body of scholarship emphasizes the importance of policy, partisanship or the economy for the accountability of government leaders, we know much less about whether or when executives are held accountable by the public for the process they chose to make policy. Building on and extending recent survey experimental work focused on American presidents, we study process-based accountability in a different constitutional setting common in many parliamentary regimes. Based on a design that accounts for multiple potential actions of the executive, our experiments highlight that public evaluations of the executive reflect a fundamental trade-off between policy and process. They also underline that political and economic context shape the relative weight of process.

Our findings have implications for the political incentives of government leaders and the workings of representative democracy. Theoretically, a higher public disapproval of using constitutional force increases the set of policies the prime minister is willing to accept without it (Huber, 1996*b*). Thus, somewhat ironically, the relative importance of process-based accountability has consequences for the choice of policy outcomes that lies at the core of outcome-based theories. Moreover, scholars have identified institutional forbearance as being fundamental to a functioning democracy (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018). Chief executives in many countries have potent constitutional powers that, if employed to the hilt, may enable them to marginalize the elected assembly. Institutional forbearance means that executives' unilateral powers are deployed with restraint. In its absence, constitutional hardball may undermine mutual toleration and procedural legitimacy. Our findings can explain why procedural force is often used restrictively. Finally, they suggest that further integrating economic cycles into the analysis of process-based accountability is a fruitful avenue for future research.

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Online Appendix

April 2019

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Experiment 1

Measurement, sample characteristics, and covariate balance

Timeline. Figure A1 on the next page shows the timing of three survey experiments embedded in the French panel election study 2015-2017. Following a baseline survey in November 2015, the first experiment was conducted in June 2016. This was 10 months ahead of the first round of the presidential election and about a year before the first round of the parliamentary election for the National Assembly. The follow-up experiments were conducted several months after the first experiment.

Knowledge of institution. Three Kantar-SOFRES surveys (1500 respondents each) from September 2016, December 2016 and April 2017 show that between 79% and 82% of the respondents correctly identify that according to the constitution, the prime ministers can engage the responsibility of their government to adopt a bill without a vote in National Assembly. Results are available at <http://www.cevipof.com/fr/dynamiquespolitiques/resultats/>.

Media and confidence procedure. For examples of media reports of the confidence procedures invoked by the prime minister, see Anne de Guigné. “Valls précipite l’adoption définitive de la loi travail.” *Le Figaro*, July 20, 2016; *Le Monde*, “Projet de loi travail : Manuel Valls recourt au 49-3.” May 10, 2016.

Prompt. The wording of the prompt before experiment 1 is as follows: “The French constitution (article 49.3) allows the Prime minister, with the approval of the ministers’ council, to use the confidence vote to adopt a bill. In this case the bill is adopted without a vote in the National Assembly provided no censure resolution is adopted. Some people feel that the 49.3 is a legitimate tool to enable the Prime minister to govern efficiently and to hasten the adoption of bills. Others feel that it is undemocratic and allows the adoption of governments’ proposal that are not supported by a parliamentary majority.” There is no such prompt in the follow-up experiments. On the relevance of this priming, see page 7 below.

Policy issues. In six Kantar-SOFRES surveys (1500 respondents each) conducted in May 2015 and April 2017, between 47% and 52% of the respondents are in favor of an increase of the wealth tax. Surveys from October 2015 and February 2016 show that respectively 55% and 57% favored decreasing the number of refugees. Results are available at <http://www.cevipof.com/fr/dynamiquespolitiques/resultats/>

Sample characteristics. See Table A1.

Covariate balance. Figure A2 shows that pre-treatment covariates, measured in the baseline survey (November 2015), are balanced across the 24 different experimental conditions (vignettes).

Coding of policy agreement (Figure 1 panels f and g). Respondents’ preferences concerning the two issues, wealth taxation and refugees, were measured before the experiment on a 11-point scale between “decrease a lot” (0) and “increase a lot” (10). In particular, respondents were asked to indicate their relative preference on both issues: “According to you, in France, the wealth tax should decrease, stay stable, or increase?; According to you, in France, the number of refugees and asylum seekers welcome in France should decrease, stay stable, or increase?” For the analysis of the effect heterogeneity in panels (f) and (g) of Figure 1, we code that respondents agree with the policy proposal either when they favor an increase of the wealth tax (>5) and the policy allocated in the experiment is the wealth tax or when they favor a decrease of the number of refugees and asylum seekers (<5) and the policy allocated in the experiment is the number of refugees and asylum seekers.

Table A1: Sample characteristics for experiment 1

	Mean	SD
Age (years)	46.3	15.7
Female	0.56	0.50
Education (university degree)	0.52	0.50
Occupation	0.23	0.42
City > 100k	0.55	0.50
Ideology	0.53	0.25
Co-partisan	0.13	0.34
Policy congruent	0.54	0.50

Notes: Sample characteristics of experiment 1 (embedded in June 2016 French election study). Ideology refers to left-right self-placement rescaled to 0-1. Based on a recoding of the 13-category professional classification following the National Institute for Statistics (Insee), occupation is a dummy equal to 1 for Cadre supérieur, Profession indépendante or Agriculteur exploitant and 0 for all other (Profession intermédiaire, Employé, Ouvrier). Co-partisan and policy congruent refer to partisanship and policy preferences (measured before the experiment) relative to the randomly assigned prime minister and policy proposal in the vignette.

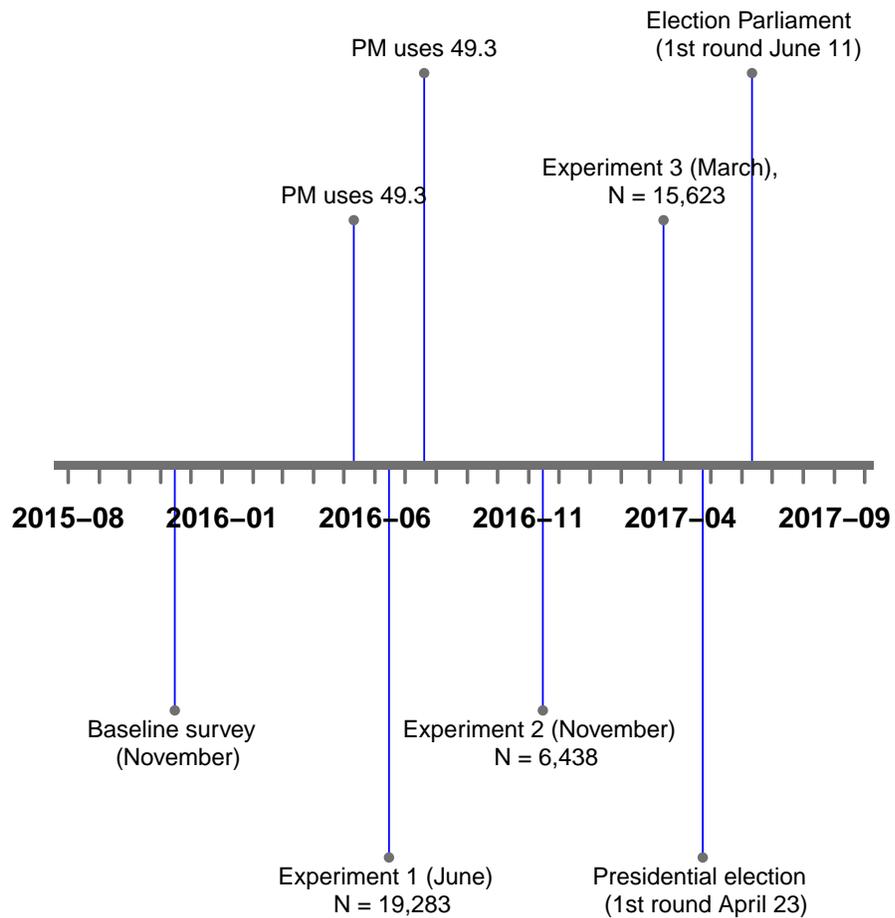


Figure A1: Timing of three survey experiments embedded in the French election study. The plot also shows the months (May and July 2016) during which prime minister Valls used the confidence vote procedure established by article 49.3 of the constitution to advance the government’s labor market reform.

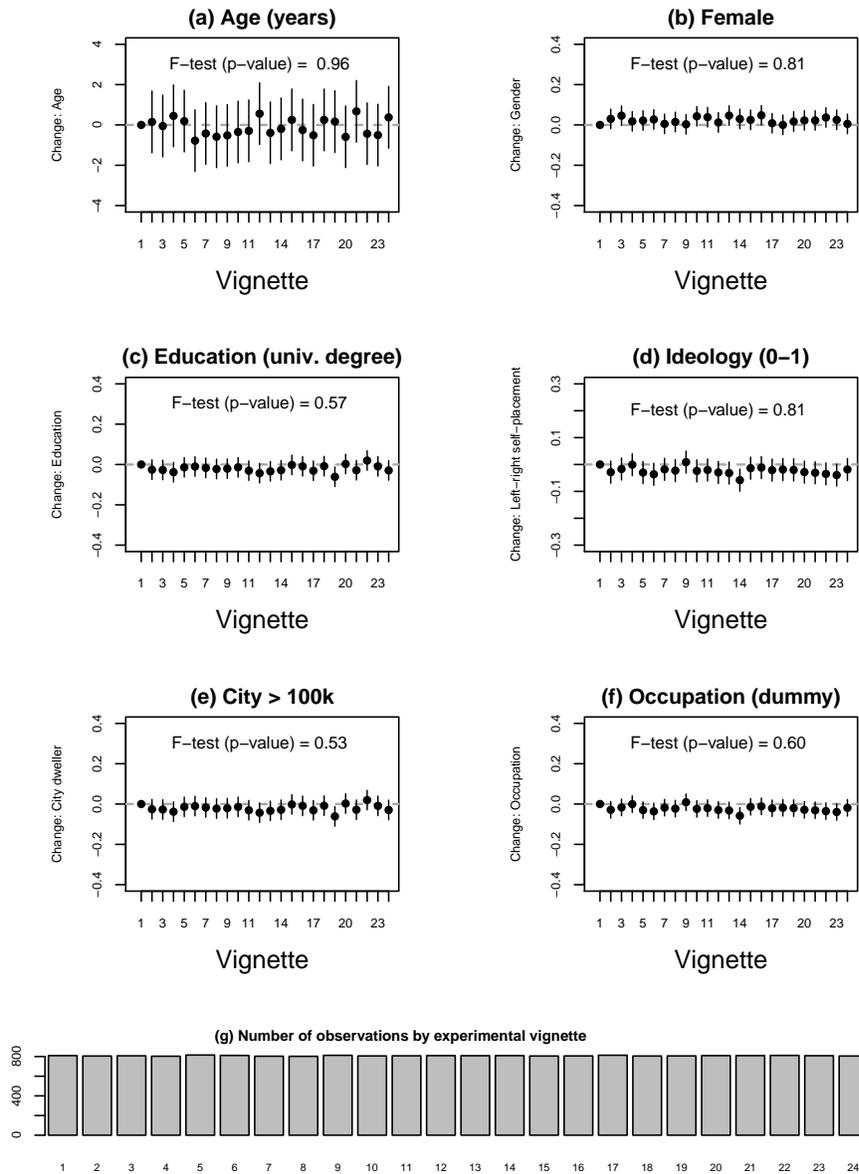


Figure A2: Balance of pre-treatment covariates in experiment 1 (embedded in June 2016 French election study). Plots (a) - (f) show difference in covariates (measured in the baseline survey of November 2915 before the experiment) across the 24 randomized vignettes (vignette 1 is reference category) with 95% confidence intervals and p-value for joint F-test. (Recall that each vignette contains 3 independently randomized features: party of PM (4 attributes), policy (2 attributes), legislative process and outcome (3 attributes).) For covariates, ideology refers to left-right self-placement rescaled to 0-1; occupation is a dummy equal to 1 for Cadre supérieur, Profession indépendante or Agriculteur exploitant and 0 for all other (Profession intermédiaire, Employé, Ouvrier).

Additional experimental results

Description of outcome by experimental vignette Figure A3 plots the outcome variable, satisfaction with the action of the prime minister, for each experimental vignette. Each bar represents the average satisfaction (on the scale ranging from 0 to 1) for one of the 24 experimental vignettes defined by party of the prime minister, policy proposal, and whether the bill is passed by majority vote, confidence vote or is withdrawn. Given the randomization of the experimental features, differences between bars can be interpreted as average causal profile effects. While we are ultimately interested in the AMCEs reported in the main text, these profile effects are already informative. They yield the same conclusion as the main results reported in the paper and also make clear that the process effects vary little across party or policy. Moreover, the large variation in responses across vignettes indicates that questionnaire satisficing (Hainmueller, Hangartner and Yamamoto, 2015) is not a problem in this experiment. If responses mainly reflect a simple rule regardless of the prime ministers' actions (e.g., choose the midpoint or one of the endpoints of the scale), this pattern would not emerge.

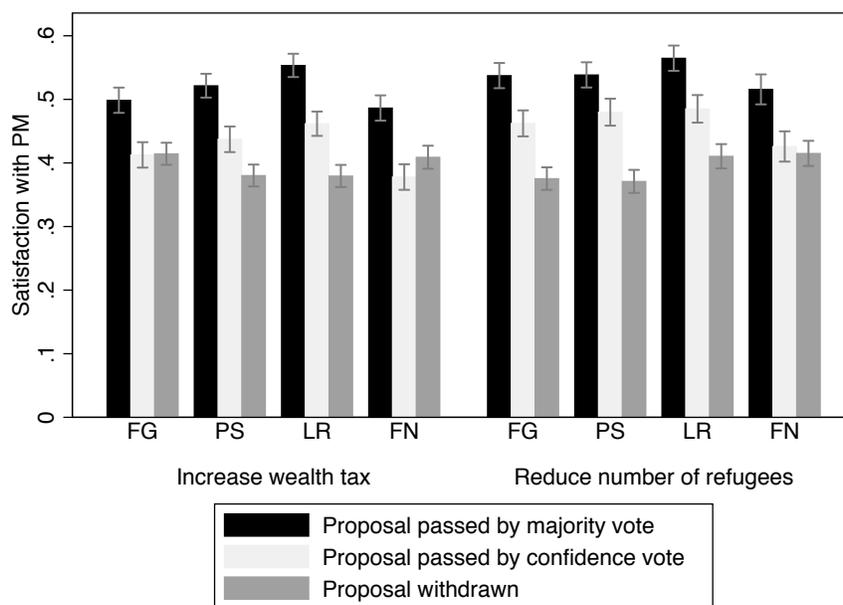


Figure A3: Summary of outcome across experimental conditions in experiment 1 (embedded in June 2016 French election study).

Excluding profiles. All possible experimental profiles, especially party-policy combinations, are plausible potential outcomes given a political context where concerns about immigration and redistribution are high on the public agenda and the two main established parties have no guarantee of winning. This does not mean that all profiles are equally likely to occur in the real-world, compared to say realized outcomes in other countries. What matters is that

there was political uncertainty about the result of the election. It is nonetheless noteworthy that the experimental results are robust to excluding somewhat less likely profiles, even if we take a broad definition of what is less likely. More specifically, as a robustness test we only include vignettes where a Socialist prime minister propose a traditional left policy (i.e., increasing the wealth tax) and where a right (LR) prime minister proposes a traditionally more conservative policy (i.e., reducing immigration). Figure A4 shows that the estimated effect of the confidence vote is virtually identical to that estimated including all profiles. Something that one can also eyeball based on Figure A3.

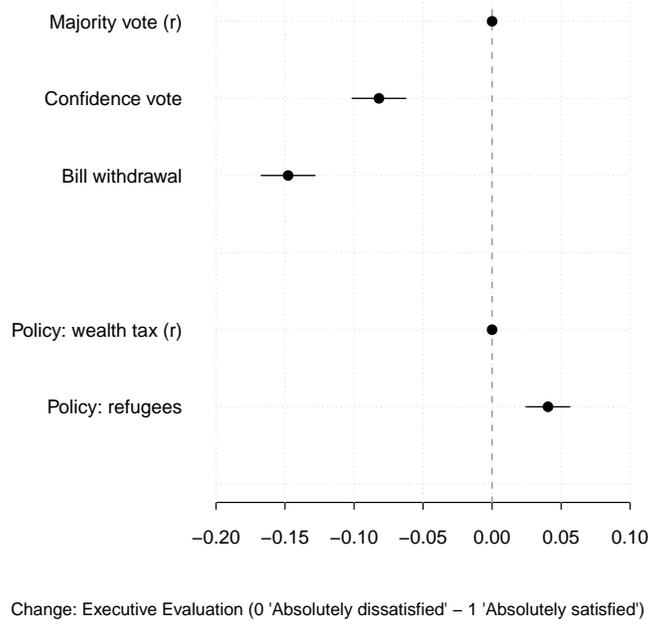


Figure A4: Robustness. Based on experiment 1 (N=4,832) embedded in French election study (June 2016), this analysis excludes vignettes where the prime minister (PM) either belongs to National Front or Left Party. It also excludes vignettes where a Socialist PM proposes to limit immigration or a Republican PM proposes to increase the wealth tax. Horizontal bars represent 95% confidence intervals; points without bars denote reference category.

Priming. Experiment 1 is preceded by a prompt and information question about the confidence vote. The wording for the prompt is as follows: “The French constitution (article 49.3) allows the Prime minister, with the approval of the ministers’ council, to use the confidence vote to adopt a bill. In this case the bill is adopted without a vote in the National Assembly provided no censure resolution is adopted. Some people feel that the 49.3 is a legitimate tool to enable the Prime minister to govern efficiently and to hasten the adoption of bills. Others feel that it is undemocratic and allows the adoption of governments’ proposal

that are not supported by a parliamentary majority.” The wording reflects the advantages and disadvantages associated with the procedure in public debate going back to the adoption of the procedure in the 1950s (Huber, 1996), reflecting a trade-off between efficiency and majoritarian process, and it does not take a particular side on the issue. The wording is not particularly strong and avoids partisan or other political references.

One may nonetheless be concerned that the experimental results are shaped by the initial priming of the issue. However, multiple pieces of evidence suggest that this is not the case. First, the prompt and information questions are not repeated before experiments 2 and 3, which take place 5 months and 9 months after the first experiment – a long time for any initial priming to be diluted. The fact substantively and statistically significant process effects emerge in these follow-up experiments indicates that priming is unlikely to be an issue. Second, as additional test we can leverage that some respondents were never primed because they did not participate in the initial experiment. While exposure to the initial prime is not random, we can explore the heterogeneity of the results in experiment 3 and compare those primed in experiment 1 (N=14,449) and those not primed because they did not participate in the first experiment (N=599). The results are reported in Figure A5. Process effects are present regardless of the initial exposure to the prime. Among those never primed, the confidence vote leads to a substantial decline of satisfaction with the executive. This effect is somewhat smaller than that for respondents who had participated in the initial experiment, though this difference is not statistically significant. The same pattern holds for bill withdrawal.

Democratic norms. So far, the evidence does not address whether the results reflect normative concerns about process or other instrumental considerations about prime ministerial competence or the quality or desirability of the law. For the incentives of the prime minister and spatial theories of lawmaking that incorporate an audience cost for the use of procedural force, this distinction is not essential. However, it speaks to the relevance of normative considerations for political accountability. In a first step, we make use of the rich question battery of the election panel into which our experiment was embedded to explore this issue.

We analyze whether process effects vary by support for broad democratic norms. In a first wave of the French election study conducted 7 months before the experiment (November 2015) respondents were asked whether France should be led by a strongman that has not concerned himself with parliament and elections. People that care less about parliament and elections should also be less concerned about executives’ use of procedural force in lawmaking. They may punish the executive for appearing weak or less competent, but not for anti-majoritarianism per se. To the extent that the confidence vote penalty varies by support for a strongman, this indicates that a process norm is contributing to accountability.

The results from an analysis interacting the experimental treatments with a dummy for previous support for a strongman are displayed in Figure A6. Support for strongman is coded as 1 for all respondents who agree with the statement or do not oppose it and 0 for respondents who oppose it. Those who favor a strongman are significantly less inclined to punish the executive for the confidence vote than those who oppose a strongman. The

confidence vote effect is 30 percent smaller. This clearly indicates that intrinsic process concerns matter. Pro-strongman respondents react more negatively to bill withdrawal. This is consistent with them taking a more purely instrumental view. The next experiment is designed to examine this issue from a different angle.

Vote choice regressions

The outcome variable in the experiments is the satisfaction with the actions of the prime minister. Research on executive popularity shows that satisfaction with the executive strongly predictive of vote choice in France (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2000, 201). Conceptually and empirically they are so closely related that satisfaction is excluded from most vote models. The experiments deliberately refrain from asking a vote choice question as this requires comparing the incumbent with an alternative that may also vary on multiple dimensions. However, we can use the observational data from the election survey to show that satisfaction with the real-world prime minister is a strong predictor of vote choice after controlling for ideology, socio-demographics and even party identification in the context of our experiments.

Specifically, we use data from the November 2016 wave French election study that includes the required data during the period of our experimental studies. First, the wave includes an item about the satisfaction with incumbent Socialist prime minister Manuel Valls on a 10-point scale ranging from absolutely not satisfied (1) to absolutely satisfied (10), which we rescale to range between 0 and 1. Second, the survey also asks about respondents' vote intention in the first round of the upcoming presidential election. As the primaries for several parties had not been concluded at the time of the survey, the survey asks multiple questions with varying sets of potential candidates. Two scenarios include Manuel Valls, who was one of the two main contenders in the primary of the Socialist Party (in January 2017, he lost against Benoit Hamon in the second round). The variables are re-coded as binary vote intention for Valls (1 = if support for Valls, = 0 if support for any other candidate).

Columns 1-4 of Table A2 display the results from Logistic regressions of vote choice (supporting the incumbent prime minister) as a function of satisfaction with the prime minister, the respondents' ideology, measured as the left-right self-placement scaled to range between 0 and 1, and a large number of socio-demographic control variables (age, gender, 15 occupational categories capturing class, education, urbanization). Extended specifications in columns 2 and 4 also include include partisanship, measured as a series of 15 dummy variables, each one indicating for a particular party whether a respondent is close to it; this variable was measured in a previous wave of the panel. In all four specifications, satisfaction with the prime minister has the expected positive and precisely estimated effect on vote choice ($p < 0.001$), despite partialing out ideology and partisanship. Moreover, columns 5 and 6 show that satisfaction of the prime minister also is a significant predictor of vote intention for incumbent president Hollande, in a scenario where he is the candidate of the Socialist Party. A few weeks after the survey, Hollande announced that he would not seek re-election.

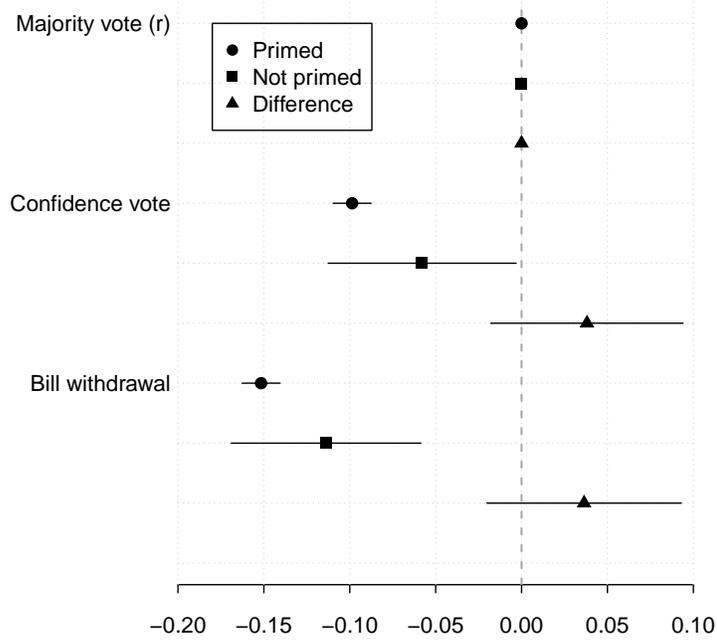
These results suggest that a reduction of prime ministerial popularity through the use of confidence vote can lead to a politically significant decline in political support in the voting

booth. Combining the AMCE of the confidence vote on satisfaction with the prime minister from the first experiment (-0.084) with the estimation results from the extended vote choice equation in column (2), we can do a back-of-the-envelope calculation of the implied effect of the confidence vote on electoral support. The basic idea is to compare, using first differences, the predicted support for Valls with the counterfactual support for Valls assuming that each respondent experiences a decline in satisfaction corresponding to the experimental effect of the confidence vote (for a similar approach, see Duch and Stevenson, 2008). We left-censor the change for respondents whose satisfaction is already at or close to the lower bound so that satisfaction stays within the variable range. This simulation exercise suggests that the use of the confidence vote reduces the vote intention for the prime minister by 23 percent. This is a large drop in electoral support. For incumbent president Hollande, based on model (5) the corresponding reduction in electoral support is 16 percent. These numbers are just meant to be suggestive. We interpret them as an upper bound for the effect of constitutional force on voting because the effect of the former on satisfaction is likely to decay over time.

Table A2: Evaluations of prime minister Valls and vote choice

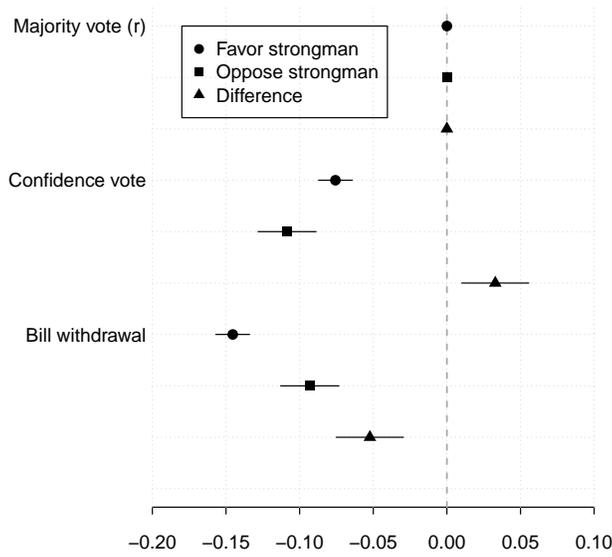
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
PM Satisfaction	8.51 (0.20)	7.40 (0.24)	8.32 (0.20)	7.36 (0.25)	4.96 (0.22)	4.93 (0.21)
Ideology	-2.72 (0.15)	-0.77 (0.26)	-2.94 (0.16)	-0.91 (0.26)	-1.98 (0.27)	-2.08 (0.26)
Age	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Gender	0.06 (0.07)	0.00 (0.08)	0.03 (0.07)	-0.02 (0.08)	-0.14 (0.09)	-0.07 (0.08)
Occupation (13 dummies)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Education (4 dummies)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Urbanization (5 dummies)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Partisanship (15 dummies)		✓		✓	✓	✓
Observations	13,862	11,079	14,315	11,384	10,972	11,310

Notes: Dependent variable: vote intention for prime minister Valls in hypothetical first-round presidential contest with multiple contenders including either Sarkozy (models 1-2) or Juppé (models 3-4) as candidate from LR; vote intention for president Hollande in hypothetical first-round presidential contest with multiple contenders including either Sarkozy or Juppé as competitor from LR (models 5-6); all based on November 2016 round of the French election study. PM satisfaction measures the stated satisfaction with incumbent prime minister Valls, measured on a 10-point scale and re-scaled to range between 0 and 1. Estimation is by Logistic regression. Standard errors in parentheses.



Change: Executive Evaluation (0 'Absolutely dissatisfied' – 1 'Absolutely satisfied')

Figure A5: Process effects in experiment 3 based on exposure to experiment 1. Based on experiment 3 (N=15,623) embedded in French election study (March/April 2017), these plots show heterogeneity in the effects of confidence vote and bill withdrawal between respondents who had participated in experiment 1, being exposed to an information “prime” about the confidence vote, and those who did not participate in experiment 1 and thus were never primed. Process effects are present regardless of the priming and the difference in effects across the prime are not statistically significant. Estimates are from nonparametric estimator implemented via linear regression; horizontal bars represent 95% confidence intervals; points without bars denote reference category.



Change: Executive Evaluation (0 'Absolutely dissatisfied' - 1 'Absolutely satisfied')

Figure A6: Heterogeneity of process effect by respondents' prior support for strongman. Based on experiment 1 (N=19,283) embedded in French election study (June 2016), this plot shows the effects of confidence vote and bill withdrawal varying by respondents' support, in a previous wave of the survey (November 2015), for a non-democratic strongman as a leader for France. Horizontal bars represent 95% confidence intervals; points without bars denote reference category.

Experiment 2

Vignette question wording. See Table A4.

Sample characteristics. See Table A3.

Table A3: Sample characteristics for experiment 2

	Mean	SD
Age (years)	46.4	15.9
Female	0.55	0.50
Education (university degree)	0.52	0.50
Occupation	0.23	0.42
City > 100k	0.56	0.50
Ideology	0.53	0.25
Co-partisan	0.16	0.37
Policy congruent	0.56	0.50

Notes: Sample characteristics of experiment 2 (embedded in November 2016 French election study). Ideology refers to left-right self-placement rescaled to 0-1. Based on a recoding of the 13-category professional classification following the National Institute for Statistics (Insee), occupation is a dummy equal to 1 for Cadre supérieur, Profession indépendante or Agriculteur exploitant and 0 for all other (Profession intermédiaire, Employé, Ouvrier). Co-partisan and policy congruent refer to partisanship and policy preferences (measured before the experiment) relative to the randomly assigned prime minister and policy proposal in the vignette.

Table A4: Vignette question wording for experiment 2

	Majority vote condition	Confidence vote condition	Withdrawal condition
Obstructionism by opposition	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France. Then the reform is adopted by a majority the National Assembly after the opposition introduced thousands of amendments to delay the adoption of the prime minister's proposal.	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France. Then the reform is adopted without a parliamentary vote on the bill as the Prime minister invoked a confidence vote (article 49.3) after the opposition introduced thousands of amendments to delay the adoption of the prime minister's proposal.	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France. Then the reform is not adopted as the Prime Minister withdrew the bill after the opposition introduced thousands of amendments to delay the adoption of the prime minister's proposal.
Internal dissent within government (split majority)	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France. Then the reform is adopted by a majority the National Assembly after many MPs from the government majority announced that they did not support the prime minister's proposal.	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France. Then the reform is adopted without a parliamentary vote on the bill as the Prime minister invoked a confidence vote (article 49.3) after many MPs from the government majority announced that they did not support the prime minister's proposal.	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France. Then the reform is not adopted as the Prime Minister withdrew the bill after many MPs from the government majority announced that they did not support the prime minister's proposal.
Street protests	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France. Then the reform is adopted by a majority the National Assembly after the multiplication of mass demonstrations against the prime minister's proposal since the beginning of the parliamentary debate.	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France. Then the reform is adopted without a parliamentary vote on the bill as the Prime minister invoked a confidence vote (article 49.3) after the multiplication of mass demonstrations against the prime minister's proposal since the beginning of the parliamentary debate.	Suppose that the next Prime minister belongs to [Party]*. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France. Then the reform is not adopted as the Prime Minister withdrew the bill after the multiplication of mass demonstrations against the prime minister's proposal since the beginning of the parliamentary debate.

Notes: * Party is a random allocation of one of the following: the Socialist party, the Republicans. In total, there are 18 experimental conditions. Original survey wording is in French.

Experiment 3

Vignette question wording. See Table A5.

Sample characteristics. See Table A6.

Importance of two issues. In the Kantar-SOFRES survey (1500 respondents each) conducted in February 2016, only 35% of the respondents considered the issue of the power of subnational governments very or extremely important whereas 67% indicated that refugees is a very important issue. Results are available at <http://www.cevipof.com/fr/dynamiquespolitiques/resultats/>

Heterogeneity by policy. As part of the experimental vignette, respondents are either asked about a high-saliency policy, which concerns a reduction in the number of refugees, or a low-saliency policy, political decentralization. Figure A7 presents ACMEs conditional on policy. Pronounced process effects are present under each condition. The confidence vote effect is about one-third larger for the less salient decentralization policy ($p < 0.000$) and the withdrawal effect is twice as large for the more salient refugee policy ($p < 0.000$).

Table A5: Vignette question wording for experiment 3 with example of refugee policy condition

Economy	No bill condition	Majority vote condition	Confidence vote condition	Withdrawal condition
Better	Suppose that at the end of the first year in power of the next Prime there are 350 000 people in power of the next Prime there are 350 000 people less unemployed. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France.* Then the reform is adopted by a majority the National Assembly after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.	Suppose that at the end of the first year in power of the next Prime there are 350 000 people more unemployed. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France.* Then the reform is adopted without a parliamentary vote on the bill as the Prime minister invoked a confidence vote (article 49.3) after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.	Suppose that at the end of the first year in power of the next Prime there are 350 000 people less unemployed. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France.* Then the reform is not adopted as the Prime Minister withdrew the bill after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.	Suppose that at the end of the first year in power of the next Prime there are 350 000 people less unemployed. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France.* Then the reform is not adopted as the Prime Minister withdrew the bill after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.
Same	Suppose that at the end of the first year in power of the next Prime there is the same number of unemployed people. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France.* Then the reform is adopted by a majority the National Assembly after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.	Suppose that at the end of the first year in power of the next Prime there is the same number of unemployed people. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France.* Then the reform is adopted without a parliamentary vote on the bill as the Prime minister invoked a confidence vote (article 49.3) after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.	Suppose that at the end of the first year in power of the next Prime there is the same number of unemployed people. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France.* Then the reform is not adopted as the Prime Minister withdrew the bill after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.	Suppose that at the end of the first year in power of the next Prime there is the same number of unemployed people. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France.* Then the reform is not adopted as the Prime Minister withdrew the bill after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.
Worse	Suppose that at the end of the first year in power of the next Prime there are 350 000 people more unemployed. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France.* Then the reform is adopted by a majority the National Assembly after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.	Suppose that at the end of the first year in power of the next Prime there are 350 000 people more unemployed. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France.* Then the reform is adopted without a parliamentary vote on the bill as the Prime minister invoked a confidence vote (article 49.3) after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.	Suppose that at the end of the first year in power of the next Prime there are 350 000 people more unemployed. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France.* Then the reform is not adopted as the Prime Minister withdrew the bill after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.	Suppose that at the end of the first year in power of the next Prime there are 350 000 people more unemployed. The prime minister proposes to limit the number of refugees and asylum seeker welcome in France.* Then the reform is not adopted as the Prime Minister withdrew the bill after heated debates both with the opposition and within the majority.

Notes: *The experiment also varies the policy issue. In a condition with a low-salience policy, the prime minister proposes "to increase subnational governments' powers". In total, there are 21 experimental conditions. Original survey wording is in French.

Table A6: Sample characteristics for experiment 3

	Mean	SD
Age (years)	46.9	15.7
Female	0.56	0.50
Education (university degree)	0.52	0.50
Occupation	0.23	0.42
City > 100k	0.56	0.50
Ideology	0.53	0.25
Policy congruent	0.53	0.50

Notes: Sample characteristics of experiment 3 (embedded in March/April 2017 French election study). Ideology refers to left-right self-placement rescaled to 0-1. Based on a recoding of the 13-category professional classification following the National Institute for Statistics (Insee), occupation is a dummy equal to 1 for Cadre supérieur, Profession indépendante or Agriculteur exploitant and 0 for all other (Profession intermédiaire, Employé, Ouvrier). Policy congruent refers to policy preferences (measured before the experiment) relative to the randomly assigned prime minister and policy proposal in the vignette.

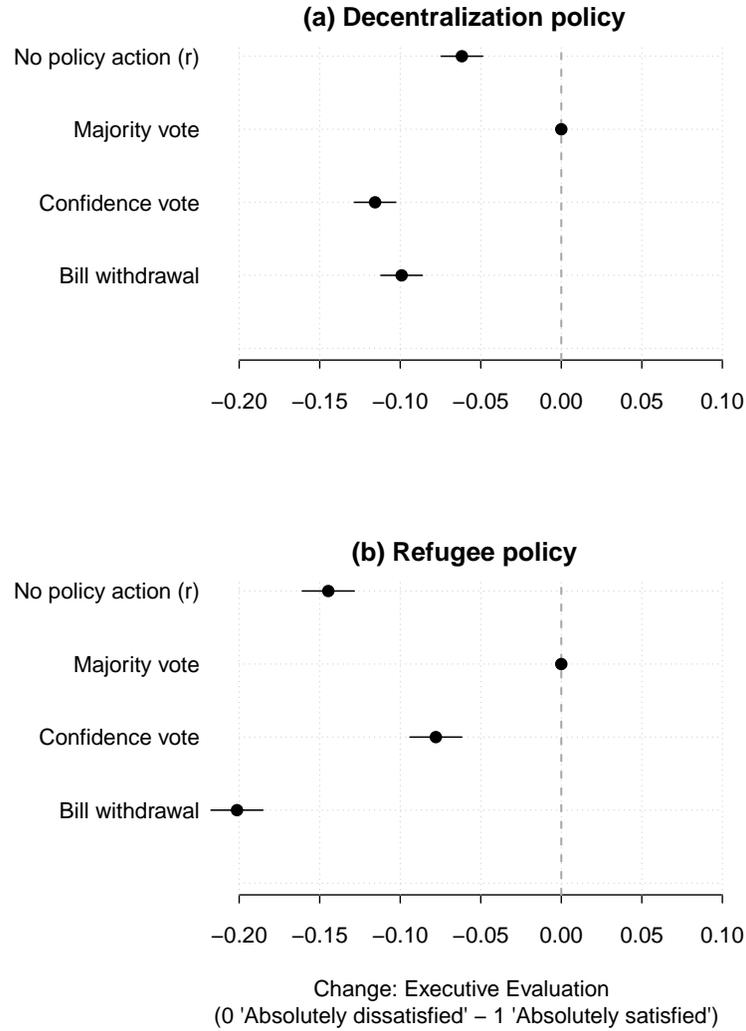


Figure A7: Effects varying by policy. Based on experiment 3 (N=15,623) embedded in French election study (March/April 2017), these plots show heterogeneity in the effects of confidence vote and bill withdrawal across policy issues: political decentralization and reducing the number of refugees. Estimates are from nonparametric estimator implemented via linear regression; horizontal bars represent 95% confidence intervals; points without bars denote reference category; effect of economic conditions omitted.

Appendix References

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