

# Who Said or What Said? Estimating Ideological Bias in Views Among Economists\*

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## Abstract

There exists a long-standing debate about the influence of ideology in economics. Surprisingly, however, there is no concrete empirical evidence to examine this critical issue. Using an online randomized controlled experiment involving 2425 economists in 19 countries, we examine the effect of ideological bias on views among economists. Participants were asked to evaluate statements from prominent economists on different topics, while source attribution for each statement was randomized without participants' knowledge. For each statement, participants either received a mainstream source, an ideologically different less-/non-mainstream source, or no source. We find that changing source attributions from mainstream to less-/non-mainstream, or removing them, significantly reduces economists' reported agreement with statements. This contradicts the image economists have of themselves, with 82% of participants reporting that in evaluating a statement one should only pay attention to its content. Using a framework of Bayesian updating we examine two competing hypotheses as potential explanations for these results: unbiased Bayesian updating versus ideologically-/authority-biased Bayesian updating. While we find no evidence in support of unbiased updating, our results are consistent with biased Bayesian updating. More specifically, we find that changing/removing sources (1) has no impact on economists' reported confidence with their evaluations; (2) similarly affects experts/non-experts in relevant areas; and (3) has substantially different impacts on economists with different political orientations. Finally, we find significant heterogeneity in our results by gender, country, PhD completion country, research area, and undergraduate major, with patterns consistent with the existence of ideological bias.

**Keywords:** Ideology, ideological bias, authority bias, Bayesian updating, views among economists.

**JEL Codes:** A11, A14.

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# 1. Introduction

*“[E]conomists need to be more careful to sort out, for ourselves and others, what we really know from our ideological biases.”*

*(Alice Rivlin, 1987 American Economic Association presidential address)*

One of the dominant views in mainstream (Neoclassical) economics emphasises the positivist conception of the discipline and characterizes economists as objective, unbiased, and non-ideological. Friedman (1953) describes in his famous essay that “positive economics is, or can be, an 'objective' science, in precisely the same sense as any of the physical sciences.”<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Alchian asserts that “[i]n economics, we have a positive science, one completely devoid of ethics or normative propositions or implications. It is as amoral and non-ethical as mathematics, chemistry, or physics.”<sup>2</sup> Boland (1991) suggests that “[p]ositive economics is now so pervasive that every competing view has been virtually eclipsed.” There exists, however, a long-standing debate about the role of ideology in economics, which some argue has resulted in rigidity in the discipline, rejection and isolation of alternative views, and narrow pedagogy in economic training (e.g. Backhouse 2010, Chang 2014, Colander 2005, Dobb 1973, Fine and Mikonakis 2009, Fullbrook 2008, Frankfurter and McGoun 1999, Galbraith 1989, Harcourt 1969, Hoover 2003, Krugman 2009, Morgan 2015, Robinson 1973, Romer 2015, Rubinstein 2006, Samuels 1992, Stiglitz 2002, Thompson 1997, Wiles 1979, and others).

In this study, we are not directly investigating the credibility of the different arguments about the influence of ideological bias in economics by checking the validity of their evidence and the consistency of the conclusions drawn. We will instead take an agnostic view on these discussions and rather take them as alarming signs that invoke important questions which require further investigation. We believe that the answer to whether there is an ideological bias among economists has important intellectual implications, both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it will help us investigate the extent to which the theoretical arguments behind the positivist methodology of neoclassical economics are consistent with empirical evidence. In terms of

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, Coase (1994) suggests that Friedman’s essay is a normative rather than a positive theory and that “what we are given is not a theory of how economists, in fact, choose between competing theories, but [...] how they ought to choose.” (see van Dalen (2019) for more details).

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Armen Alchian to Glenn Campbell, January 20, 1969. See Freedman (2016).

practical implications, there is growing evidence that suggests value judgments and political orientation of economists affect different aspects of their academic life including their research (Jelveh et al. 2018, Saint-Paul 2018), citation network (Önder and Terviö 2015), faculty hiring (Terviö 2011), as well as their position on positive and normative issues related to both public policy and economic methodology (e.g. Beyer and Pühringer 2019; Fuchs, Krueger and Poterba 1998; Mayer 2001; van Dalen 2019).

These results are consistent with the views of some prominent economists who emphasize the role of value judgments and ideology in economic analysis. For example, Modigliani (1977: 10) suggests that “there is no question but that value judgments play a major role in the differences between economists. And I think it is unfortunate, but true, that value judgments end up by playing a role in your assessment of parameters and of the evidence we consider. [...] And there is no question that Milton [Friedman] and I, looking at the same evidence, may reach different conclusions as to what it means. Because, to him, it is so clear that government intervention is bad that there cannot be an occasion where it was good! Whereas, to me, government discretion can be good or bad. I'm quite open-minded about that, and am therefore willing to take the point estimate. He will not take the point estimate; it will have to be a very biased estimate, before he will accept it.” Similarly, Tobin (1976: 336) argues that “[d]istinctively monetary policy recommendations stem less from theoretical or even empirical findings than from distinctive value judgments.” Therefore, the answer to whether economists are influenced by ideological bias will further inform this debate about the various factors underpinning economists’ views and its practical implications, which will also inform the discussion about the evolution of the mainstream economics discourse and economic training.

In order to examine the effect of ideological bias on views among economists, we use an online randomized controlled experiment involving 2425 economists in 19 countries.<sup>3</sup> More specifically, we ask participants in our online survey to evaluate statements from prominent (mainly mainstream) economists on a wide range of topics (e.g. fairness, inequality, role of government, intellectual property, globalization, free market, economic methodology, women in economics, etc.). All participants receive identical statements in the same order. However, source

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<sup>3</sup> By economists we mean those with a graduate degree in economics who are either academics, or work in government agencies, independent research institutions, or think tanks. The majority of economists in our sample (around 92%) are academics with a PhD degree in economics. See the data section and Table A3 in our [online appendix](#) for more details.

attribution provided for each statement is randomized without participants' knowledge. For each statement, participants randomly receive either a mainstream source (Control Group), a relatively less-/non-mainstream source (Treatment 1), or no source attribution at all (Treatment 2).

We then measure whether economists agree/disagree with identical statements to different degrees when statements are attributed to authors who are widely viewed to adhere to different views (ideologies), which put them at different distances to mainstream economics, or when no source attributions are provided for the statements. Implementing two different treatments *potentially* allows us to distinguish between the influences of ideological bias and authority bias, which could lead to similar results. For example, finding an effect *only* for treatment 2 would be consistent with the existence of authority bias but not ideological bias. Similarly, finding an effect *only* for treatment 1 would be in line with the existence of ideological bias but not authority bias. Finding an effect for both treatments would be consistent with the existence of both ideological bias and authority bias.

We find clear evidence that changing or removing source attributions significantly affects economists' level of agreement with statements. More specifically, we find that changing source attributions from mainstream to less-/non-mainstream on average reduces the agreement level by around one-fourth of a standard deviation. These results hold for 12 out of 15 statements evaluated by participants, across a wide range of topics and ideological distances between sources. Similarly, we find that removing mainstream source attributions on average reduces the agreement level by more than one-third of a standard deviation. These result holds for all 15 statements evaluated by participants.

We implement several tests to examine two competing hypotheses as potential explanations for our results: unbiased Bayesian updating versus ideologically-/authority-biased Bayesian updating (we also develop a model of Bayesian updating in our [online appendix](#) that further informs the intuition behind these tests in distinguishing between the two hypotheses). Under unbiased Bayesian updating, higher level of agreement with statements that are attributed to mainstream sources is justified by *objective* differences in credibility of mainstream sources relative to less-/non-mainstream sources. In contrast, under ideologically-biased Bayesian updating, economists *interpret* mainstream sources as more credible, not based on objective evaluation but because they are more (less) likely to confirm (disconfirm) their prior views as mainstream economists. Similarly, under authority-biased Bayesian updating, while economists

might not have any particular priors or ideological views, they are more likely to agree with statements attributed to mainstream sources since they are considered as authority figures in the profession. Since these different mechanisms are likely to generate similar treatment effects, we use our empirical tests to examine their validity.

While we find no evidence in support of unbiased Bayesian updating, our results are all consistent with biased updating among economists. More specifically, and in contrast (consistent) with the implications of unbiased (biased) Bayesian updating, discussed in more detail in [Section 5.2](#), we find that changing/removing sources (1) has no impact on economists' confidence with their evaluations; (2) similarly affects experts/non-experts in relevant sub-fields of economics; and (3) has substantially different impacts on economists with different political orientations. Moreover, as it is discussed in more detail in [Section 5.2.3](#), differences in our estimated effects of treatment 1 and treatment 2, and in their heterogeneity patterns by political orientation, highlight the distinct role of both ideological bias and authority bias in influencing views among economists. More specifically, our results suggest that the reduction in agreement level caused by changing sources (i.e. treatment 1) seems to be mainly driven by ideological bias while the reduction in agreement due to removing sources (i.e. treatment 2) seems to be mainly driven by authority bias.

In addition to the aforementioned empirical tests that support the existence of ideological/authority bias, participants' own expressed views on how to evaluate a statement lends more credibility to the hypothesis that biased updating is the driving mechanism behind our estimated treatment effects. More specifically, in an accompanying questionnaire *at the end of the survey*, a majority of participants (82 percent) report that a statement should be evaluated based on its content only, as opposed to its author (0.5 percent), or a combination of both (around 18 percent), which is in sharp contrast with how they actually evaluate statements. This suggests that perhaps part of the ideological/authority bias evident in our results operates through implicit or unconscious modes (Bertrand and Duflo 2017).

We also use background information collected from participants to examine whether our results vary systematically by characteristics such as gender, country, area of research, country where PhD was completed, and undergraduate major. We find that the estimated ideological bias among female economists is around 40 percent less than their male counterparts. Interestingly, on one statement in our survey which examines the issue of gender gap in economics, there is a clear and significant disagreement between male and female economists, with women much more

strongly agreeing with the existence of a serious and persisting gender gap in the discipline. In addition, on this specific statement, while men still exhibit strong ideological bias, women display no signs of ideological bias. This is perhaps due to the fact that when it comes to the important issue of gender gap in economics, which involves female economists at a personal level, women put aside ideology and focus on the content of the statement as opposed to its source.

We also find systematic and significant heterogeneity in ideological/authority bias by country, area of research, country where PhD was completed, and undergraduate major, with some groups of economists exhibiting no ideological bias (towards mainstream) and some others showing very strong bias (towards mainstream). In addition, the heterogeneity patterns found in our results remain consistent with the existence of ideological bias.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. [Section 2](#) provides a brief overview of the discussion about economics and ideology. [Section 3](#) describes our experimental design. [Section 4](#) discusses our data and empirical methodology. [Section 5](#) presents and discusses our results. [Section 6](#) concludes.

## **2. Economics and Ideology: a Brief Overview**

Our hypothesis regarding the potential influence of ideological bias among economists is rooted in a long-standing debate about the influence of ideology in economics. Therefore, a better understanding of this literature will better inform our analysis and the interpretation of any results associated with ideological bias. Milberg (1998) elegantly summarizes the long-standing debate about the influence of ideology in economics by stating that “the history of economic thought can in fact be read as a series of efforts to distance knowledge claims from the taint of ideology, a continuing struggle to establish the field’s scientific merit.”

About a century ago, Irving Fisher, in his presidential address to the American Economic Association, raised his concern about ideological bias in economics by stating that, “academic economists, from their very open-mindedness, are apt to be carried off, unawares, by the bias of the community in which they live.” (Fisher 1919). Other prominent economists such as Joseph Schumpeter and George Stigler also made substantial contributions to this discussion over the next few decades (see Schumpeter (1949) and Stigler (1959, 1960, 1965) for examples). However, the change in the nature of economic discourse, the increasing use of mathematics and statistics, and the increasing dominance of the positivist methodology, represented by Friedman’s “Methodology

of Positive Economics”, have reduced the concern with ideological bias in economics, which has gradually given way to a consensus that “economics is, or can be, an objective science.”<sup>4</sup>

Due to this prevailing consensus, the issue of ideological bias has been largely ignored within mainstream economics in the last few decades. Critics, however, argue that the increasing reliance of economics on mathematics and statistics has not freed the discipline from ideological bias; it has simply made it easier to disregard it (e.g. Myrdal 1954, Lawson 2012).

There also exists evidence that could suggest that economics has not successfully rid itself of ideological bias. For example, Hodgson and Jiang (2007) argue that due to ideological bias in economics, the study of corruption has been mainly limited to the public sector, when there is abundant evidence of corruption in the private sector (sometimes in its relation to the public sector but also internally). Jelveh et al. (2018) point to ideological overtones that could be identified in public debates between prominent economists over public policy during the last financial crisis as an example of ideological bias in economics. They also point out that these perceptions of ideological bias among economists have even affected the selection of economists as experts for different government positions.<sup>5</sup> Yet another example could be found in a 2006 interview with David Card by the Minneapolis Fed.<sup>6</sup> Talking about his decision to stay away from the minimum wage literature after his earlier work on the topic, which according to the article “generated considerable controversy for its conclusion that raising the minimum wage would have a minor impact on employment,” he laments that one of the reasons was that “it cost me a lot of friends. People that I had known for many years, for instance, some of the ones I met at my first job at the University of Chicago, became very angry or disappointed. They thought that in publishing our work we were being traitors to the cause of economics as a whole.”

Other prominent manifestations of ideological bias in economics include the so-called fresh-water/salt-water divide in macroeconomics (Gordon and Dahl 2013) and its impact on citation networks (Önder and Terviö 2015) as well as faculty hiring (Terviö 2011), the conflicts

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<sup>4</sup> See Friedman (1953).

<sup>5</sup> They point out to the following two examples: “The rejection of Peter Diamond, a Nobel laureate in economics, by Senate Republicans, as the nominee to the Federal Reserve Board, with one of the top Republicans on the Banking Committee calling him “an old-fashioned, big government, Keynesian” at the nomination hearing (see [here](#)). And, the withdrawal of Larry Summers from his candidacy for the chairmanship of the Federal Reserve Board due to strong opposition from a coalition group over several issues related to ideology, including his role to “push to deregulate Wall Street”” (see [here](#)).

<sup>6</sup> Interview with David Card, by Douglas Clement, The Region, Minneapolis Fed, December 2006 (Interview: October 17, 2006).

between liberal/conservative camps in economics (especially regarding the possible distribution-efficiency trade-off), the Borjas versus Card debate on immigration, and the ideologically charged debates over the controversial book by Thomas Piketty (2014) or over Paul Romer (2015) and his criticism that “mathiness lets academic politics masquerade as science.” Finally, recent results from the Professional Climate Survey conducted by the American Economic Association also highlight some of the challenges in the profession that are *potentially* driven by ideological bias. For example, 58% of economists feel that they are not included intellectually within the field of economics.<sup>7</sup> In addition, 25% of economists report that they have been discriminated against or treated unfairly due to their research topics or political views.

There also exists a long-standing charge laid mainly by non-neoclassical economists regarding the prevalence of ideological bias among neoclassical economists (e.g. Backhouse 2010, Fine and Milonakis 2009, Fullbrook 2008, Frankfurter and McGoun 1999, Morgan 2015, Samuels 1992, Thompson 1997, Wiles 1979). For example, summarizing the views of the Post-Autistic economics movement in France, Fullbrook (2003) argues that the economic profession is the “opposite of pluralistic” and is “dogmatically tied to value-laden neoclassical orthodoxy.” Samuels (1980) suggests that economics is much more a “system of belief than it is a corpus of verified logical positivist knowledge” and that many uses of economics “may represent only the clothing of normativism with the garments of science”. Rothbarb (1960) criticizes what Hayek calls ‘scientism’ in economics and argues that it is a “profoundly unscientific attempt to transfer uncritically the methodology of the physical sciences to the study of human action.” McCloskey (2017) asserts that economics has “deliberately clad itself in a garb of positivism, even when scholars knew the critical importance of the historical, social, and political embeddedness of their interventions.”

There are also studies that point to the ideological biases in economic training. Based on a survey of graduate students in economics, Colander (2005) raises concerns regarding how graduate training in economics may lead to biases in students’ views. For example, he argues that graduate training in economics induces conservative political beliefs in students. Allgood et al. (2012) also find evidence that suggests that “undergraduate coursework in economics is strongly associated with political party affiliation and with donations to candidates or parties”. Using laboratory experiments, other studies find that compared to various other disciplines, economics students are

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<sup>7</sup> AEA Professional Climate Survey: Main Findings. Released on March 18, 2019.



more likely to be selfish (Frank et al. 1993 and 1996, Frey et al. 1993, Rubinstein 2006), free-riding (Marwell and Ames 1981), greedy (Want et al. 2012), and corrupt (Frank and Schulze 2000).

Frey et al. (1993) attribute these results to the economic training which “neglects topics beyond Pareto efficiency [...] even when trade-offs between efficiency and ethical values are obvious.” Frank et al. (1993) highlight the exposure of students to the self-interest model in economics where “motives other than self-interest are peripheral to the main thrust of human endeavor, and we indulge them at our peril.” Rubinstein (2006) argues that “students who come to us to 'study economics' instead become experts in mathematical manipulation” and that “their views on economic issues are influenced by the way we teach, perhaps without them even realising.” Stiglitz (2002) also argues that “[economics as taught] in America’s graduate schools ... bears testimony to a triumph of ideology over science.”

Surprisingly, however, there is very thin empirical evidence to rule out or establish the existence of ideological views among economists. We are only aware of few studies that examine this issue *to some extent*. Gordon and Dahl (2013) use data from a series of questions from the IGM Economic Expert Panel to examine to what extent prominent economists (51 economists) from the top seven economics departments disagree about key economic issues. Their results suggest that “there is close to full consensus among these panel members when the past economic literature on the question is large. When past evidence is less extensive, differences in opinions do show up.”<sup>8</sup> They also find that “there is no evidence to support a conservative versus liberal divide among these panel members, at least on the types of questions included so far in the surveys.”<sup>9</sup>

Van Gunten et al. (2016) suggest that Gordon’s and Dahl’s focus on testing factionalism, which reduces the social structure of the discipline to discrete and mutually exclusive group memberships, is a poor model for economics. They instead suggest an alignment model according to which “the field is neither polarized nor fully unified but rather partially structured around the ‘state versus market’ ideological divide.” They use principle component analysis to reanalyze the data used by Gordon and Dahl (2013) and find that, in contrast to their findings, there exists a

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<sup>8</sup> The variable that measures the size of the economic literature related to a certain question is constructed based on judgment calls by Gordon and Dahl (2013).

<sup>9</sup> They use two approaches here. First, they use different distance-based clustering methods to examine whether panel members are clustered into “two or even a few roughly equal-sized camps” based on their responses. As their second approach, they identify a subset of questions that are likely to generate disagreement among panel members, and then classify answers to these questions as either consistent with “Chicago price theory” or consistent with concerns regarding distributional implications or market failures. They then test whether participants’ responses are homogenous as a panel or are divided into two groups. They find evidence that supports the former.

“latent ideological dimension clearly related to contemporary political debates and, more importantly, show that ideological distance between economists is related to partisan and departmental affiliations—as well as to the similarity of respondents’ informal social networks.” They argue that “our results suggest that paradigmatic consensus does not eliminate ideological heterogeneity in the case of the economics profession. Although there is indeed substantial consensus in the profession, we show that consensus and ideological alignment are not mutually exclusive.” Finally, they suggest that “one implication of our findings is that consumers of economic expertise must exercise healthy skepticism faced with the claim that professional opinion is free of political ideology.”

Jelveh et al. (2018) use purely inductive methods in natural language processing and machine learning to examine the relationship between political ideology and economic research. More specifically, using the member directory of the AEA, they identify the political ideology (i.e. Republican versus Democrat) of a subset of these economists by (fuzzily) matching their information to publicly disclosed campaign contribution and petition signings (35 petitions). Next, using the set of JSTOR and NBER papers written by these economists with an identified political ideology, they estimate the relationship between ideology and word choice to predict the ideology of other economists.<sup>10</sup> Finally, examining the *correlation* between authors’ predicted ideology and their characteristics, they find that predicted ideology is “robustly correlated with field of specialization as well as various department characteristics.” They suggest that results are suggestive of “substantial ideological sorting across fields and departments in economics.”

Van Dalen (2019) uses an online survey of Dutch economists to examine the effect of personal values of economists on (1) their positive or normative economic views; (2) their attitudes towards scientific working principles; and (3) their assessment of assumptions in understanding modern-day society. To measure the personal values of economists, he uses 15 questions “as formulated in the European Social Survey (2014) and in some cases the World Values Survey (2012)” and employs factor analysis to summarize the results into three dominant categories: achievement and power, conformity, and public interest. He finds a significant variation in opinions and a clear lack of consensus among economists when it comes to their views of *both*

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<sup>10</sup> These estimates are relied on the strong assumption that the relationship between word choice and ideology is the same among economists whose political ideology is identified through their campaign contributions and petition signings and those whose political ideology is unidentified.

*positive and normative* economic issues as well as their views regarding scientific working principles in economics and their adherence to specific assumptions in economic theory. He also finds clear evidence that personal values of economists have significant impacts on their views and judgments in all these three areas.

Finally, Beyer and Pühringer (2019) use petitions signed by economists as an indicator for ideological preferences to analyze the social structure of the population of politically engaged economists and to uncover potentially hidden political cleavages. Their sample includes 14,979 signatures from 6,458 signatories using 68 public policy petitions, addressing a wide range of public policy issues, and 9 presidential anti-/endorsement letters from 2008 to 2017 in the US. They find “a very strong ideological division among politically engaged economists in the US, which mirrors the cleavage within the US political system” with three distinct clusters: a non-partisan (13 petitions), a conservative (27 petitions), and a liberal cluster (37 petitions). Estimating the closeness centrality and the clustering coefficients of the petitions, they also find that while petitions on some public policy issues (e.g. benefits of immigration, preserving charitable deductions, etc.) exhibit non-partisan status, others on issues such as tax policy, labour market policy and public spending exhibit strong partisan status. Moreover, analyzing the network structure of 41 fiscal policy petitions, they find evidence of a strong ideological divide among economists. They conclude that their results “support the hypothesis that political preferences also imprint on economic expert discourses.”

### **3. Experimental Design**

It is well understood that examining issues such as the impact of bias, prejudice, or discrimination on individual views and decisions is very challenging, given the complex nature of these types of behaviour. For example, the issue of discrimination in the labour market has long been an issue of importance and interest to labour economists. However, as Bertrand and Duflo (2017) put it, “it has proven elusive to produce convincing evidence of discrimination using standard regression analysis methods and observational data.” This has given rise to a field experimentation literature in economics that has relied on the use of deception, for example through sending out fictitious resumes and applications, to examine the prevalence and consequences of discrimination against different groups in the labour market (see Bertrand and Duflo (2017) and Riach and Rich (2002) for a review. Also see Currie et al. (2014) as another example of experimental audit studies with deception).

Given that answering our question of interest is subjected to the same challenges, we take a similar approach, namely using fictitious source attributions, in order to produce reliable results (see Section 1 in our [online appendix](#) for a more detailed discussion on the use of deception in economics). More specifically, we employ a randomized controlled experiment embedded in an online survey. Participants are asked to evaluate a series of statements presented to them by choosing one of the following options: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. They are also asked to choose a confidence level on a scale from 1 to 5 for their selected answer. These statements are on a wide range of topics in economics and while they are mainly from prominent (mainstream) economists, most of them challenge, to different extents, certain aspects of mainstream economics discourse (see Table A15 in our [online appendix](#)).

Our choice of critical statements, as opposed to neutral or supportive statements such as those in the IGM Expert Panel analyzed by Gordon and Dahl (2013), is based on the idea that ideological reactions are more likely to be invoked, especially through changing sources, when one encounters views that are in contrast to his views/ideologies. Changing sources on views that one agrees with are less likely to induce an ideological reaction. Van Gunten et al. (2016) also emphasize this issue by arguing that the IGM Expert Panel survey is not designed to elicit ideology and “includes many didactic items that illustrate the implications of textbook economics, such as the benefits of free trade (3/13/12), the impossibility of predicting the stock market (10/31/2011), the disadvantages of the gold standard (1/12/12), the state-controlled Cuban economy (5/15/12), and the proposition that vaccine refusal imposes externalities (3/10/2015). Although these items usefully illustrate mainstream professional opinion on particular issues, for the purposes of strictly testing the hypothesis of aggregate consensus, these ‘softball’ items have dubious value, because few observers doubt that there is a consensus on such issues within this mainstream. Had the survey included ‘heterodox’ or ‘Austrian’ economists, it may have encountered a wider range of opinion.”

Another issue to highlight is that most of our statements are not clear-cut one-dimensional statements. Given the complex nature of ideological bias, it is more likely to arise, or to be revealed by individuals, in situations where the issues discussed are more dense, complex and multi-dimensional. This is partly due to the fact that ideological arguments are more easily concealed when it comes to more complex multi-faceted issues. Moreover, we believe that many of the issues that are a subject of disagreement and ideological divide in economics are not simple clear-cut issues.

All participants in our survey receive identical statements in the same order. However, source attribution for each statement is randomized without participants' knowledge.<sup>11</sup> For each statement, participants randomly receive either a mainstream source (Control Group), or a relatively less-/non-mainstream source (Treatment 1), or no source attribution (Treatment 2). See [Table 1](#) for a list sources for each statement. Table A15 in our [online appendix](#) provides a complete list of statements and sources.

Participants who are randomized into treatment 2 for the first statement remain there for the entire survey. However, those who are randomized into control group or treatment 1 are subsequently re-randomized into one of these two groups for each following statement. Moreover, those randomized into treatment 2 were clearly informed, before starting to evaluate the statements, that “All the statements that you are going to evaluate are made by scholars in economics, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the researchers. We have not provided the actual sources of these statements to make sure they are evaluated based on their content only.”

Three points are worth highlighting here. *First*, our dichotomization of the sources into “mainstream” and “less-/non-mainstream” is meant to simplify and summarize the relative ideological differences between sources, even though we believe these differences are more appropriately understood as a continuum rather than a dichotomy. Of course, it is well-understood that this classification does not readily apply to some sources, such as older ones (e.g. Marx or Engels) or sources from other disciplines (e.g. Sandel or Freud) in the same way it applies to others. However, to remain consistent and to avoid confusion for the reader, we stick to the same naming convention for all sources.

*Second*, statements were carefully selected so that their attribution to fictitious sources is believable by participants. All selected statements were also relatively obscure so the misattribution would not be easily noticed by participants. Although we cannot rule out the possibility that some participants might have identified some of the misattributions, this seems to be a very rare incidence at least based on the emails we received.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, participants'

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<sup>11</sup> For the most part, the randomization was done across countries. Participants got randomized into different groups upon visiting the online survey. Since in most cases the survey was run concurrently in different countries, this led to randomization of subjects across countries.

<sup>12</sup> We received less than a dozen emails from people who had recognized the misattribution of a statement to a source. In all but one of these cases, the statement identified as being misattributed was statement 13, which is perhaps the least obscure statement used in our survey. All the emails we received, however, made it clear that this was perceived as a mistake in our survey and not part of our survey design.

identification of misattributions will lead to one of the following two outcomes: some people will stop completing the survey, while some others will continue the survey to its completion. As we explain in more detail in our data section, the first group is not part of our analysis since we restrict our sample to only those who completed the entire survey. Any attrition introduced as a result will affect our control and treatment 1 similarly since randomization of real and fictitious sources occurs at the statement level and not at the individual level. As for the second group, they will either consider the misattribution a mistake and will therefore evaluate the statement based on the real source, or will become aware that this is part of our survey design to examine bias. Both of these scenarios will lead to an underestimation of the true bias. In the first case, any potential bias the treatment could have revealed is eliminated by the discovery of the true source, while in the second case the self awareness about the purpose of the study will likely induce people to reveal less bias. It is very hard to imagine people exhibiting *stronger* bias if they find out about the fictitious sources and the true objective of the survey.

*Third*, the two sources for each statement were carefully paired such that they can be easily associated to commonly known but different views (such as different schools of thoughts, political leanings, disciplines, attitudes towards mainstream economics, etc.). In addition, for each source, we also provide information on their discipline, their affiliation, and the title of one of their publications. This is to further accentuate the ideological differences between each pair, especially in cases where sources might be less known.<sup>13</sup> We therefore assume that most of our participants, who are mainly academic economists, are able to identify the ideological differences between each pair of sources. We believe it is quite reasonable to expect from those with reasonable knowledge about economics, which we assume economists possess, to be able to identify the ideological differences between Marx versus Smith, Mill versus Engels, Summers versus Varoufakis, Keynes versus Arrow, Levine versus Wolff, Romer versus Keen, Rodrik versus Shaikh, and Coase versus Milberg, especially given the additional information provided for each source.

We also included few pairs where these ideological differences are arguably less distinct, such as Rodrick versus Krugman or Deaton versus Piketty. This is to examine whether smaller

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<sup>13</sup> For example, while some economists might not know Richard Wolff or Anwar Shaikh, knowing that they are affiliated with the University of Massachusetts Amherst or the New School for Social Research, the two famous heterodox schools in economics, makes it more likely to induce an ideological reaction. Similarly, titles of selected publication for each source, such as “*Rethinking Marxism*”, “*The Crisis of Vision in Modern Economic Thought*”, or “*What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets*”, serve the same purpose.

ideological differences, especially between two economists who are both mainstream, can also induce ideological reactions among economists. Finally, three of the less-/non-mainstream sources selected are not economists (i.e. Freud, Sandel, Gigerenzer), although they are prominent scholars in their fields evident by their reputation and affiliations. These sources are carefully paired with equally prominent economists (Hayek versus Freud, Sen versus Sandel, Thaler versus Gigerenzer) to empirically test the common view that “economists tend to look down on other social scientists, as those distant, less competent cousins.”<sup>14</sup> The statements used in these three cases were carefully selected so that they do not favour expertise in economics and scholars from these other disciplines can equally weigh in on the discussion.

Although we believe our assumption regarding the ability of participants to identify the ideological differences between provided sources is quite reasonable, given that a strong majority of participants (92%) are academics with a PhD in economics, we nevertheless implement several empirical tests to provide further support for this assumption. These tests are based on the idea that if ideological differences between our “mainstream” versus “less-/non-mainstream” sources are identified by participants, then we should observe that participants with different views and ideologies react differently to these ideologically-different sources.

Findings from these tests are discussed in detail in Section 2 in our [online appendix](#). To summarize the results, we find clear evidence that conditional on observed characteristics, participants with different ideologies (measured using their self-reported political orientation, and political/economic typology) respond differently to statements when they are attributed to ideologically-different less-/non-mainstream sources. More specifically, those whose political ideology is more oriented towards right, or are less progressive, or are stronger supporters of the free market, are significantly less likely to agree with a statement, even with a mainstream source. More importantly, this disagreement systematically and significantly widens when the source is less-/non-mainstream, but stays unchanged when no source is provided. This suggests that participants in our sample are able to locate the ideological coordinates of the “mainstream” versus “less-/non-mainstream” sources, and react to them according to their own personal views and ideologies. However, when the differences are eliminated by entirely removing the source, differences by participants’ ideology also disappear.

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<sup>14</sup> Dani Rodrik, [2013 interview with the World Economic Association](#).

## 4. Data

The target population for this study were economists from 19 different countries.<sup>15</sup> We used Economics Departments, Institutes and Research Centers in the World (EDIRC) website, which is provided by the Research Division of the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, to identify economic institutions (economics departments, government agencies, independent research institutions, and think tanks) in each target country. We then used the website of each institution to manually extract the email addresses of economists in each institution. The extracted email addresses were then used to send out invitations and reminders to ask economists to participate in the survey. The survey was conducted between October 2017 and April 2018. While the survey's exact opening and closing dates were different for some countries, the survey was open in each country for approximately two months.

In many cases during email extraction, especially in the case of multidisciplinary departments, research institutions, and government agencies, it was not clear from the institution's website which listed faculty members or researchers were economists and which ones held a degree from other disciplines. In these cases, we asked our team of research assistants to extract all listed email addresses. Our rationale was that sending email invitations to some non-economists was clearly better than risking to exclude some economists, especially since this exclusion could be systemically related to the type of institution and lead to sample selection. We made sure however that non-economists who received the survey invitation were self-filtered out by making it clear in our email invitation as well as on the first page of the survey that the target population of the survey are economists.<sup>16</sup>

As a result, we are not able to provide a reliable estimate of the participation rate in our survey since that would require the total number of economists in the target population, which is considerably smaller than the total number of email addresses we extracted online, for the reason discussed above. In addition, this calculation is further complicated by the fact that upon sending email invitations we received a considerable number of auto-replies from people who had left their institution, were on sabbatical, parental, or sick leave, or temporarily had no access to their email.

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<sup>15</sup> These countries include Australia, Austria, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK, and the US. The entire (English) survey was translated into French, Italian, Japanese and Brazilian Portuguese to allow participants from corresponding countries to complete the survey in their own native language if they choose to.

<sup>16</sup> As expected, we received many emails from faculty members who were not economists (historians, statisticians, sociologists, political scientists, engineers, etc.) asking us to remove them from the email list.



With these in mind, a very rough estimate of the participation rate in our survey is around 15%.<sup>17</sup> Although we cannot measure a reliable participation rate for our survey for the reasons discussed above, our summary statistics (Table A3 in our [online appendix](#)) suggest that we have a very diverse group of economists in our final sample. We have also reported the distribution of responses by institution of affiliation in the US, Canada, and the UK in figures A4 to A6 in our [online appendix](#) as examples to show that participants in our survey come from a very diverse group of institutions in each country and are not limited to certain types of institutions.

Participants in our survey were required to complete each page in order to proceed to the next page. As a result, they could not skip evaluating some statements. However, participation in the survey was entirely voluntary and participants could choose to withdraw at any point during the survey, without providing any reason, by simply closing the window or quitting the browser. Participants were assured that any responses collected up until the point of withdrawal will not be included in the study. For this reason, we are not allowed, *by the terms of our ethics approval*, to use data collected from people who did not complete the entire survey. As a result, we have restricted our sample to participants who completed the entire survey.<sup>18</sup> Our final sample includes 2,425 economists from 19 different countries. We run several tests to ensure that our focus on participants who completed the entire survey does not introduce sample selection bias in our results and we find no evidence of such a bias. See Section 3 in our [online appendix](#) for more details.

The primary dependent variable in our analysis is the reported agreement level with each statement. In our baseline analysis, we estimate linear regression models in which the agreement variable is coded as 1 for “strongly disagree”, 2 for “disagree”, 3 for “neutral”, 4 for “agree”, and 5 for “strongly agree”. We also estimate ordered logit models for robustness check. The agreement level of participant  $i$  with statement  $j$  is represented by the variable  $y_{ij}$  and is modeled as:

$$y_{ij} = \alpha + \gamma_1 S1_{ij} + \gamma_2 S2_{ij} + X_i \beta + \epsilon_{ij}, \quad (1)$$

where  $S1_{ij}$  and  $S2_{ij}$  are indicators that are equal to one if for statement  $j$  participant  $i$  received a less-/none-mainstream source, or no source, respectively. The estimated coefficients of interest are

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<sup>17</sup> This estimate was obtained by simply dividing the number of participants by the total number of emails addresses without excluding non-economists or those with their emails set to auto-reply. It therefore underestimates the true participation rate in our survey.

<sup>18</sup> A total of 3,288 economists participated in our survey. There were 454 participants who quit the survey at the very beginning (in the questionnaire section where they were asked to provide background information). Another 409 people withdrew from the survey at some point after they started evaluating the statements. See Table A5 in our [online appendix](#) for more details.

$\gamma_1$  and  $\gamma_2$  and measure average difference in agreement level between those who randomly received a less-/non-mainstream source or no source, respectively, compared to those who received a mainstream source. We also include several individual-level control variables ( $X_i$ ) in some of our specifications.<sup>19</sup> However, if our randomization is carried out properly, including these control variables should not affect our results (and as reported later on we find that they don't).

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Main Findings

Figure 1 displays the probability of different agreement levels for each statement as well as their relative entropy index which measures the comparative degree of consensus with each statement. The relative entropy index is derived from information theory and has a theoretical range of 0 for perfect consensus and 1 for no consensus at all.<sup>20</sup> Results reported in Figure 1 suggest that there is a significant dissensus on the wide variety of issues evaluated by economists. Despite this consistent pattern of dissensus, there exists some variation across statements in the relative entropy index with economists exhibiting the highest degree of consensus on statements 1 and 8 and the lowest degree of consensus on statements 5, 6, 9, 11, and 12. We find similar patterns if we restrict the sample to economists who only received mainstream sources or no sources. As we discussed before, our statements either deal with different elements of the mainstream economics paradigm, including its methodology, assumptions, and the sociology of the profession (e.g. Statements 3, 6, 7, 11, 14, 15), or issues related to economic policy (e.g. Statements 1, 2, 4, 5, 10). Therefore, the significant disagreement evident in Figure 1 highlights the lack of both paradigmatic and policy consensus among economists on evaluated issues.

These results stand in sharp contrast with Gordon and Dahl (2013) who find strong consensus among their distinguished panel of economists on different policy-oriented economic questions from IGM Expert Panel survey. One potential explanation for this stark difference could be the critical nature of our statements, as well as the fact that they are not clear-cut and one-

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<sup>19</sup> Our primary control variables include: gender, PhD completion cohort (15 categories), Current Status (8 categories), Country (19 categories), Research Area (18 categories). Additional control variables used in some specifications include age cohort (13 categories), country/region of birth (17 categories), English proficiency (5 categories), department of affiliation (8 categories), country/region where PhD was completed (16 categories). See Table A3 in the [online appendix](#) for more detail on different categories.

<sup>20</sup> The entropy index is given by  $\sum -p_i \log p_i$ , where  $p_i$  is the observed relative frequencies for our five response categories. The relative entropy index is then calculated by dividing the entropy index by the maximum possible entropy (i.e.  $p_i = 0.2$ ).

dimensional. However, several other studies that use positive and clear-cut statements on both public policy and economic methodology issues also find results that do not support the strong consensus found by Gordon and Dahl (2013) and exhibit patterns of dissensus that are more similar to our findings (e.g. Beyer and Pühringer 2019, Fuchs 1996; Frey et al. 1984, Fuchs, Krueger and Poterba 1998; Mayer 2001; van Dalen 2019; Whaples 2009). Van Gunten et al. (2013) suggest that the strong consensus found by Gordon and Dahl might be driven by what they refer to as “softball questions”.<sup>21</sup> Consistent with this idea, Wolfers (2013) also suggests that rather than testing the professional consensus among economists, “a founding idea of the IGM Expert Panel seems to be to showcase the consensus among economists.” It is also important to note that Gordon and Dahl (2013) use a very small and a highly-selective sample of economists which is a serious limitation for the purpose of demonstrating consensus among economists (Van Gunten et al. 2016).

[Table 2](#) displays the results from linear models that estimate how these agreement levels are influenced by our two treatments. Column (1) uses a simplified model with no additional control variables, while columns (2) to (4) add personal and job characteristics as well as individual fixed effects.<sup>22</sup> We find clear evidence that changing source attributions from mainstream to less-/non-mainstream significantly reduces the agreement level by 0.26 points. This is around one-fourth of a standard deviation or a 7.3 percent reduction in an average agreement level of 3.6 in our control group. Our results also suggest that removing mainstream sources (i.e. providing no source) also significantly reduces the agreement level by 0.41 points (an 11.3 percent reduction which is equal to 35% of a standard deviation).

As estimates reported in Columns (2), (3), and (4) suggest, controlling for different individual characteristics and individual fixed effects does not change our results, which provides further support that our randomization protocol was implemented properly. In addition, results from our specification with individual fixed effects suggests that our estimate of treatment 1 is unlikely to suffer from sample selection bias due to non-random attrition across treatment groups. Finally, as the results reported in Table A12 in our [online appendix](#) suggest, estimating the same specifications while clustering the standard errors at the individual level does not have any appreciable impact on our results. More specifically, clustering has virtually no impact on standard

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<sup>21</sup> Van Gunten et al. (2016) note that “overall, on 30 percent of [IGM Expert Panel] items, not a single respondent took a position opposite the modal view (i.e., agreed when the modal position was disagree or vice versa).”

<sup>22</sup> Refer to Table A4 in our [online appendix](#) for the estimated coefficients of our control variables.

errors for treatment 1, while slightly increasing standard errors for treatment 2.<sup>23</sup> However, the t-statistics for estimates of treatment 2 are so large (around 27 before clustering) that this slight increase has virtually no impact on the outcomes of our hypothesis testing.

While OLS estimates are perhaps easier to summarize and report, given the discrete ordered nature of our dependent variable, perhaps a more appropriate model to use in this context is an ordered logit model. Another advantage of using ordered logit is that it allows us to examine whether our treatments have polarizing effects. More specifically, those who (strongly) agree with a statement that is critical of mainstream economics are potentially more likely to be less-/non-mainstream, and therefore treatment 1 might induce higher agreement among them. On the other hand, those who (strongly) disagree with the same statement are potentially more likely to be mainstream, and therefore treatment 1 might induce higher disagreement among them.<sup>24</sup> These polarizing effects will not be captured by our OLS model.

[Table 3](#) reports the estimates from our ordered logit model. Overall, we find results similar to those reported in [Table 2](#) using OLS.<sup>25</sup> We find that changing sources from mainstream to less-/non-mainstream, or to no source, significantly increases (decreases) the probability of disagreement (agreement) with statements. More specifically, we find that providing a less-/non-mainstream source on average increases the probability of “strong disagreement” by 2.2 percentage points or 44 percent, increases the probability of “disagreement” by 5 percentage points or 30 percent, increases the probability of reporting “neutral” by 2.1 percentage points or 12.6 percent, reduces the probability of “agreement” by 3.6 percentage points or 9 percent, and reduces the probability of “strong agreement” by 5.7 percentage points or 27 percent. This suggests that regardless of the extent to which participants agree or disagree with a statement when the attributed source is mainstream, changing the source to less-/non-mainstream significantly decreases (increases) their agreement (disagreement) level. In addition, while the effect of treatment 1 on

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<sup>23</sup> These changes are consistent with Abadie et al (2017) who suggest clustering is relevant “when clusters of units, rather than units, are assigned to a treatment.”

<sup>24</sup> This potential heterogeneous effect might also be responsible for the larger effect estimated for treatment 2. For example, providing a less-/non-mainstream source might generate biases in two directions, with the positive effect on agreement partially canceling out the negative effect. Removing the source however might only introduce a negative effect. As a result, our treatment 2 will have a larger effect than treatment 1. Ordered logit model will allow us to examine this possibility as well.

<sup>25</sup> We also estimate multinomial logit models for robustness check. Results from these models are very similar to those from ordered logit models.

increasing the probability of (strong) disagreement is larger relative to its impact on reducing the probability of (strong) agreement, we find no evidence of polarizing effects.

Moreover, similar to our linear estimates, we also find larger effects in the same direction when no sources are provided for the statements. Also, in line with our linear estimates, we get almost identical results when we include control variables in our specification. Several other robustness checks performed (see Section 5 in our [online appendix](#)) also fully confirm the robustness of our results.

One point is worth emphasizing here. The lack of polarizing effects, which we discussed above, does not necessarily rule out the possibility of heterogeneous treatment effects. More specifically, our treatments could theoretically induce two different effects in two directions. Some participants might agree relatively less with the statements when sources are less-/non-mainstream (i.e. a negative treatment effect), while some others might agree relatively more (i.e. a positive treatment effect). However, since a strong majority of our participants are mainstream economists, as most academics in the discipline are, the former effect is much more likely to be present than the latter. We also examine the potential existence of positive treatment effects in our sample. More specifically, we run regressions similar to those reported in [Table 2](#) where we restrict our sample to only self-reported heterodox economists, or economists who self-identify as very left. If positive treatment effects are likely to occur, we should find some evidence of it among these groups who are potentially more prone to it. However, we find no evidence of a positive treatment effect among any of these subgroups.

Nevertheless, since our OLS and logit estimates are average treatment effects, they measure the average of the two effects, if both are present. Therefore, to the extent that some participants might agree more with less-/non-mainstream sources, although we find no evidence of it, our estimated treatment effects should be interpreted as *underestimations* of the true effect. Theoretically, the true effect of interest would be the sum of the absolute value of the two effects, if one is interested in measuring potential bias both towards and against mainstream. Alternatively, it could be only limited to the negative effect, if one is interested in specifically measuring bias towards the mainstream.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> The justification for focusing on the negative effect as the effect of interest could be that while there might also exist biases against mainstream views in economics, it is reasonable to focus on bias towards the mainstream since it is by far the most dominant and the most influential discourse in economics.

## 5.2. Ideological/Authority Bias or Unbiased Bayesian Updating?

As our results clearly suggest, the significant reduction in agreement level we find is distinctly driven by changing the source attributions, which influences the way economists perceive the statements. However, one could argue that these results might not be necessarily driven by ideological bias induced by attributed sources and the extent to which their views are aligned with mainstream economics. Therefore, in order to organize and examine different potential explanations for our results, we use Bayesian updating as a guiding framework that fits reasonably well with different elements of our experiment.

More specifically, our experiment involves evaluating statements in an environment with imperfect information about the validity of the statements. This imperfect information could be due to not having enough knowledge about the subject, lack of conclusive empirical evidence, the statements being open to interpretation, etc.. Bayesian updating models suggest that in such an environment with imperfect information, individuals make judgement using a set of prior beliefs that are updated using Bayes' rule as new information arrives. In the context of our study, this translates into prior beliefs held by economists on each statement's validity, which is then updated using a signal they receive regarding the validity of the statement in form of an attributed source.

It is important to note however that the process of updating the priors could be both biased or unbiased. Bayes' Theorem does not say anything about how one should interpret the signals received in the process of updating priors and therefore does not preclude the influence of cognitive biases or ideological biases in interpreting signals and updating priors (Gerber & Green 1999, Bartels 2002, Bullock 2009, MacCoun & Paletz 2009, Fryer et al. 2017). Unbiased Bayesian updating requires the processing of information to be independent from one's priors (Fischle 2000, Taber and Lodge 2006, Bullock 2009). In contrast, under ideologically-biased Bayesian updating, one selectively assigns more weight to information that is more likely to confirm one's ideological views (Bartels 2002, Taber and Lodge 2006, Gentzkow and Shapiro 2006).

In the context of our study, lower agreement level associated with less-/non-mainstream sources could be attributed to unbiased Bayesian updating under the assumption that mainstream sources systematically provide *objectively* more credible signals regarding the validity of the statements compared to less-/non-mainstream sources. Alternatively, mainstream sources could be perceived as more credible not based on objective evaluation unrelated to priors, but rather based on the fact that mainstream sources are more likely to confirm a mainstream economist's views.

The distinction with unbiased updating therefore is that this *interpretation* is not made objectively and independent from prior beliefs, but that it is made based on the fact that mainstream (less-/non-mainstream) sources are more likely to confirm (disconfirm) mainstream views.

There exists extensive evidence that suggests individuals tend to agree more with findings or views that are more (less) likely to confirm (disconfirm) their beliefs (e.g. McCoun 1998, Gerber and Green 1999, Bartels 2002, Bullock 2009, Hart et al. 2009, MacCoun and Paletz 2009, Fryer et al. 2017, and others). This is broadly referred to as the confirmation bias. Beliefs that one seeks to confirm have different natures and could be formed by ingrained, ideological or emotionally charged views. If beliefs that an individual is trying to confirm or validate are shaped by her ideological views, we are dealing with what is often referred to as ideological bias.<sup>27</sup>

For example, MacCoun and Paletz (2009) conducted an experiment to examine how ordinary citizens evaluate hypothetical research findings on controversial topics. They find that, when findings challenge their prior beliefs, people are more skeptical of the findings. Their results also suggest that “citizens, especially those holding conservative beliefs, tended to attribute studies with liberal findings to the liberalism of the researcher, but citizens were less likely to attribute conservative findings to the conservatism of the researcher.” They interpret this as effects of “partisanship and ideology”.

Determining whether less/non-mainstream sources are more or less *objectively* credible than mainstream sources is of course extremely difficult since both groups include individuals who are prominent scholars in their fields with views that put them at different distances, sometimes relatively close and sometimes rather far, to mainstream economics. Therefore, one main problem with unbiased Bayesian updating as a potential explanation is that there are no *objective* measures that could be used to assess the credibility of our sources. Any claims of systematic differences between these sources in terms of credibility is inevitably based on subjective metrics that correlate with where one stands relative to mainstream views and its academic norms. It is exactly for this reason that traditional norms of modern science suggest that any serious evaluation of an argument

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<sup>27</sup> As Eagleton (1991) suggests, the term “ideology” has been used in different ways by different social scientists. This is partly due to the complex and multi-dimensional nature of the concept, which does not yield itself very easily to a neat definition. We therefore see little advantage in providing a narrow definition by singling out one trait among a complex of traits. It is the complex itself that we are interested in, and in this paper, we examine a clearly-defined manifestation of this complex notion.

should be based on the content of the argument as opposed to the source attributed to it (Merton 1973, McCoun 1998).

In fact, economists in our sample strongly agree with this view. More specifically, as part of the questionnaire that appears *at the end* of the survey, we ask participants to express their own views regarding several issues including how they believe “a claim or argument should be rejected?” A strong majority of participants (around 82%) report that “a claim or argument should be rejected only on the basis of the substance of the argument itself.” Around 18% of participants report that “a claim or argument should be rejected based on what we know about the views of the author or the person presenting the argument as well as the substance of the argument.” There exists only a tiny minority (around 0.5%) who report “a claim or argument should be rejected based on what we know about the views of the author or the person presenting the argument.”<sup>28</sup>

Despite the aforementioned issue related to unbiased Bayesian updating as a potential explanation, we nevertheless propose three empirical tests that would allow us to examine the validity of biased versus unbiased updating. See Section 4 in our [online appendix](#) for a Bayesian updating model we developed to more formally inform these empirical tests.

### **5.2.1. Test 1: Differences in Confidence Level**

As our first test, we examine how changing or removing attributed sources influences the participants’ reported level of confidence in their evaluations. More specifically, we estimate models similar to those reported in [Table 2](#) but instead use as our dependent variable the level of confidence reported for one’s evaluation of a statement (on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being least confident and 5 being most confident).<sup>29</sup> If economists agree more with statements attributed to mainstream sources because mainstream sources are objectively more credible/reliable, then this higher degree of credibility should also inspire more confidence in the evaluation of statements attributed to mainstream sources. In the language of Bayesian updating, assuming that mainstream sources are objectively more credible would mean that they are also considered more likely to be

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<sup>28</sup> We also examine differences in our estimated treatment effects between those who claim statements should be evaluated only based on their content versus those who claim both the content and the views of the author matter. We find almost identical estimates for treatment 1 (-0.22 versus -0.20) and treatment 2 (-0.34 versus -0.35) for both groups. This suggests that our results are not driven by one of these two group.

<sup>29</sup> See Figure A7 in our [online appendix](#) for the probability of different confidence levels by statement.



unbiased *and* more precise.<sup>30</sup> It therefore follows that the precision of the posterior beliefs, proxied by reported confidence, will be higher when signals are considered more precise (more credible).<sup>31</sup>

As the results reported in [Table 4](#) suggest, however, altering or removing source attributions does not influence participants' confidence in their evaluations (the estimated coefficients are quantitatively very small and statistically insignificant).<sup>32</sup> These results therefore are in contrast with unbiased updating, which is expected to be associated with higher confidence in evaluations when statements are attributed to mainstream sources. They are consistent, however, with ideologically-/authority-biased updating that could affect the level of agreement with little or no impact on confidence level. For example, an ideologically-biased individual is likely to put the same level of confidence in accepting a story if it comes from the Fox News and in rejecting the same story if it comes from the New York Times. That is, ideological bias affects one's judgement often without casting doubt on one's confidence with the judgement.

### **5.2.2. Test 2: Differences Between Experts and Non-Experts**

As our second test, we examine whether our estimated treatment effects are different among experts and non-experts. It is reasonable to assume that experts have more precise priors regarding the validity of a statement that is in their area of expertise. Therefore, compared to non-experts who are engaged in *unbiased updating*, experts should rely more heavily on their own priors and less on the signals to inform their evaluation. As a result, changing the signal from mainstream to less-/non-mainstream is expected to have a smaller effect on experts relative to non-experts under unbiased updating.<sup>33</sup> In contrast, under ideologically-biased updating, mainstream experts' stronger views on a subject, and/or their higher ability at interpreting how mainstream or non-mainstream a source is, could create a stronger bias in favour of mainstream sources among experts. Therefore, in contrast to unbiased updating, which results in smaller treatment effects for experts, under biased updating the combination of the two opposing forces (i.e. more precise priors which give rise to smaller treatment effects, and stronger mainstream biases which produces larger

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<sup>30</sup> While unbiasedness and precision are two separate concepts from a statistical point of view, the two concepts are likely to be inter-related in the context of our study. It seems reasonable to consider the perception regarding a source's degree of unbiasedness to also affect the perception regarding source's degree of precision. For example, if a source is considered to be biased to some extent, it is hard to know the exact degree of bias to subtract it from the signal in order to achieve an unbiased signal to use to update priors. Therefore, not knowing the exact level of bias is likely to affect the perception regarding the source's level of precision with more biased sources being considered less precise.

<sup>31</sup> See Implication 1 of the Bayesian updating model developed in Section 4 of the [online appendix](#) for a formal proof.

<sup>32</sup> Results from ordered logit (not reported here) also suggest that our treatments have no impact on confidence level. Our estimated differences in predicted probabilities are all small and statistically insignificant for all five categories.

<sup>33</sup> See Implication 2 of the Bayesian updating model in Section 4 of the [online appendix](#) for a formal proof.

treatment effects) could result in similar or larger treatment effects among experts compared to non-experts.

We create an indicator that is equal to 1 if a participant's reported area of research is more likely to be relevant to the area of an evaluated statement and zero otherwise (see Table A14 in our [online appendix](#) for more details). If our categorization reasonably separates experts from non-experts, one would expect that those categorized as experts will be on average more confident with their evaluations, especially when the source is mainstream. We find this to be true in our sample, where, conditional on observed characteristics, experts in the control group are 12% of a standard deviation more confident with their evaluations compared to similar non-experts.

Next, we estimate linear models similar to those reported in [Table 2](#) where we allow our treatment effects to vary between experts and non-experts. Results from this model are reported in [Table 5](#). First, and conditional on observed characteristics, we find no difference in average agreement levels between experts and non-experts in the control group. In other words, one's expertise in the subject area does not affect one's evaluation of a statement when sources are mainstream. Second, we find that both treatments similarly reduce the agreement level among experts and non-experts. These findings are therefore inconsistent with unbiased updating which suggests higher level of expertise is expected to result in smaller treatment effects. However, they are consistent with biased updating which could result in similar treatment effects between experts and non-experts as discussed above.

One could argue however that, apart from the precision of the priors and stronger biases, experts and non-experts may also systematically differ along other dimensions, which would make the interpretation of the above results more complicated. For example, those categorized as experts might have a different likelihood to be mainstream, which could in turn induce different treatment effects, or their priors may be more centered giving them more space to update up or down. We address these potential caveats in Section 6 in our [online appendix](#) and find results similar to those reported above.

### **5.2.3. Test 3: Differences by Political Orientation**

As our third and perhaps *most important test*, we examine whether our estimated treatment effects vary across different groups with different political orientations/ideologies. If the reduction in agreement level associated with changes in sources is based on *objective* differences in credibility of the sources, by definition this objective difference should not depend on one's

political views. As a result, our estimates should not vary systematically by political orientation under unbiased updating. In fact, if anything, those on the right should be less affected by changing the source attributions since they are significantly more likely to report that a statement should be evaluated based on its content only. More specifically, among those at the far right, 86.7 percent of participants report that in evaluating a statement only its content matters, while 13.3 percent report that both content and author matter. In contrast, among those at the far left, these numbers are 73.8 percent and 25.1 percent, respectively.

In contrast, evidence suggesting that the effect of treatment 1 varies systematically by political orientation is consistent with ideological bias. More specifically, our less-/non-mainstream sources often represent views or ideologies that are (politically) to the left of mainstream sources.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, if our results are driven by ideological bias, reduction in agreement level should be larger among those more to the right of the political spectrum since altering the sources creates a larger contrast with their prior beliefs which will in turn induce a larger ideological reaction among this group.<sup>35</sup>

We estimate linear models similar to Equation (1) above where we allow the effect of each treatment to vary by political orientation. Political orientation is reported by participants on a scale from -10 (far left) to 10 (far right). We use the reported values to group people into 5 categories.<sup>36</sup> Results from this model are reported in [Table 6](#). Estimates reported in Column (1) suggest that there exists a very significant difference in the average agreement level among economists with different political orientations, *even when the sources are all mainstream*. For example, the average agreement level among economists categorized as left is one-fourth of a standard deviation lower than those categorized as far left. This already large difference increases *consistently* as we move to the far right, reaching a difference of 60% of a standard deviation, which is an increase of 150 percent. This strong effect of political orientation, which does not change after controlling for a wide set of observed characteristics, seems to be a clear manifestation of ideological bias. These results are also consistent with other studies that suggest economists with different political

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<sup>34</sup> Our results, discussed in detail in Section 2 of our [online appendix](#), which we also discussed briefly in Section 4 above, clearly demonstrate this.

<sup>35</sup> See Implication 3 of the Bayesian updating model in Section 4 of the [online appendix](#) for a more formal treatment of this proposition.

<sup>36</sup> Far left = [-10 -7], Left = [-6 -2], Centre = [-1 1], Right = [2 6], Far Right = [7 10].

leanings adhere to different views regarding different economic issues and policies (Beyer and Pühringer 2019; Horowitz and Hughes 2018; Mayer 2001).

Estimates reported in Column (2) suggest an even more drastic effect by political orientation which further reinforces the influence of ideological bias. More specifically, for those on the far left, altering the source only reduces the average agreement level by 4.6% of a standard deviation, which is less than one-fourth of the overall effect we reported in [Table 2](#) (22% of a standard deviation). However, moving from the far left to the far right of the political orientation distribution consistently and significantly increases this effect, with the effect of altering the source being almost 7 times (678 percent) larger at the far right compared to the far left (-0.36 versus -0.046, respectively). We reject the null hypothesis that the effect at the far left (left) is equal to the effect at the far right at 0.1% (5%) confidence level. We also reject the null that the effects are equal across all five groups (F-statistic = 17.27) or across all four groups excluding the far left (F-statistic = 3.12).

Our estimates reported in Column (3) suggest that for every given category of political orientation, removing the sources has a larger effect on reducing the agreement level compared to altering the sources. However, this difference becomes smaller as we move towards right, suggesting that for those more oriented towards right receiving a less-/non-mainstream source or no source at all makes little difference compared to those more oriented towards left. Another important pattern to highlight is that while the estimated effect of treatment 1 consistently and very significantly increases as we move to the far right, we fail to reject the null that the estimated effect of treatment 2 is similar across all five groups.

The lack of difference in the estimated effect of treatment 2 by political orientation could be due to the fact that removing the source induces what is known as authority bias. Authority bias is the tendency to assign more credibility to views that are attributed to an authority figure (Milgram 1963). Under ideological bias, individuals' interpretation of the signals and their level of agreement with statements are influenced by their ideological views, including their political orientation/ideology. Therefore, as discussed before, the significant effect of political orientation on the estimated effect of treatment 1 is consistent with the existence of ideological bias. In contrast, under authority bias, it is the presence/absence of an authority figure that affects individuals' interpretation of signals and agreement level, while they might not hold any particular

ideological views on the subject or their perception of authority.<sup>37</sup> This implies that, under authority bias, political orientation does not necessarily influence the agreement level, which is consistent with out estimated effect of treatment 2.

Given that we found a robust and significant estimated effect for both treatment 1 and treatment 2, up until this point, we could not rule out that both ideological bias and authority bias contribute to each treatment effect. However, we find that the estimated effect of treatment 2 does not follow the same meaningful pattern by political orientation as treatment 1. This is consistent with the aforementioned distinction between ideological and authority biases. This suggests that there are important differences in underlying forces driving our estimated effects of treatment 1 and treatment 2, with the former (latter) more likely to be driven by ideological (authority) bias.

It is reasonable to argue, however, that the self-reported measure of political orientation used to categorize people depends on political environments and contexts that could vary significantly from one country to another. For example, someone who is considered a centrist or centre-right in the UK could perhaps be categorized as left in the US. This could complicate the interpretation of our results. To address this issue, we use participants' answers to a series of questions at the end of our survey that are designed to identify their political and economic typology.<sup>38</sup> More specifically, we regress our self-reported political orientation measure on a series of indicators created based on answers to these questions. We then use predicted values from this regression to categorize people into five groups based on its distribution quintiles. These results are reported in Table A11 in our [online appendix](#) and remain similar to those discussed above.

Two points are worth highlighting in relation to the results discussed above. First, as an alternative explanation for our overall findings, it could be argued that given the low stake nature of our survey, economists did not have the incentive to exert much effort and read each statement carefully. Therefore, when the attributed source for a statement was a prominent mainstream economist who they recognized and trusted as a scholar, they glossed over the statement and relied on the source for their evaluation. As a result, statements attributed to mainstream sources received

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<sup>37</sup> From a theoretical perspective, the main distinction we draw between ideological bias and authority bias is that, under ideological bias, individuals are more likely to agree with views that confirm their own ideological views. However, under authority bias, individuals are more likely to agree with views that are attributed to an authority figure regardless of their own ideological position. For example, authority bias will result in higher admiration for a poem if it is attributed to a famous poet, but lower admiration if it is attributed to a school teacher, with neither of the two assessments influenced by ideology.

<sup>38</sup> Participants were asked to read a series of binary statements and for each pair pick the one that comes closest to their view. See Table A15 in our [online appendix](#) for a list of these statements.

a higher level of agreement. However, results discussed in this section stand in contrast to this hypothesis. These results suggest that even conditional on sources being mainstream, there still exists significant difference in agreement level by political orientation. Furthermore, treatment 1 has systematically and significantly different impacts on people with different political ideologies. In other words, in evaluating the statements, the identified ideological contours of different sources clearly interact with participants' own political ideologies.

Furthermore, if this alternative explanation is valid, then one of its implications is that participants in our control group should have spent less time completing the survey compared to those in the two treatment groups. However, our estimates reported in Table A7 in our [online appendix](#) suggest that there are no differences in average survey completion time between control group and treatment 1. We find that those randomized into treatment 2 on average took less time to complete the survey, but the estimated difference is very small (less than a minute) and is to be expected since people in this group had less text to read, given that there were no source attributions provided. Consistent with these results, our estimates in Table A8 in our [online appendix](#) suggest that restricting our sample to individuals with different survey completion times (a potential proxy for different levels of effort exerted to read the statements) also has no impact on our results.

The second point to highlight is that as discussed in [Section 5.1](#), our treatments could theoretically induce two type of biases: bias towards mainstream (i.e. a negative treatment effect) and bias against mainstream (i.e. a positive treatment effect). In addition to the previously discussed potential impact this could have on our overall results (i.e. underestimation of the true effect), the potential heterogenous effects also have a potential implication for results that compare treatment effects across different subgroups *depending on the true effect of interest*. More specifically, if the effect of interest is bias both towards and against the mainstream, then it should be kept in mind that a smaller average treatment effect for one group compared to another does not strictly imply that the former group is less biased.

The following example might make this point clearer. Consider two groups, A and B. For group A, treatment 1 reduces the agreement level for everyone by 20%. However, for group B, treatment 1 reduces the agreement level by 40% for half of the people, and increases it by 30% for the other half. Therefore, the estimated treatment effect for group A will show a 20% reduction in

agreement level, while for group B this number will be 10%. This is despite the fact people in group A are more biased than those in group B.

At the same time, it should be also noted that since a strong majority of our participants are mainstream economists, the existence of a positive treatment effect is not very likely. In fact, as discussed before in [Section 5.1](#), we find no empirical evidence of positive treatment effects among participants who are expected to be positively affected (i.e. heterodox economists, or those who identify as very left). In addition, if the effect of interest is *bias towards mainstream*, then comparing estimated treatment effects as indicators of bias towards mainstream won't be subjected to the aforementioned caveat (in the example above, group A is still more biased towards mainstream than group B). Focus on *bias towards mainstream views* could be justified by the fact that we are examining a discipline that is strongly dominated by the mainstream discourse and the tiny minority who are non-mainstream, even if biased, cannot exercise much influence.

Altogether, our results presented and discussed above are consistent with the existence of ideological and authority biases in views among economists and are in contrast with the implications of unbiased Bayesian updating. We would like to emphasize that, while some of our results might be considered (at least by some of our readers) as more compelling than others, it is the entirety of the body of evidence we have provided that should be considered when one ponders the validity of these two competing hypotheses (i.e. biased versus unbiased updating), or other potential hypotheses. This is of course consistent with the methodology of modern economics, that the relative superiority of a hypothesis, relative to other alternative hypotheses, is determined by its relative degree of success in explaining the observed patterns. Therefore, to suggest that ideological/authority bias is not driving our results, one needs to posit an alternative hypothesis that is on average more successful in explaining all the observed patterns, and not only a cherry-picked few.

### **5.3. Statistical Power and Reproducibility of Findings**

A growing body of literature is raising concern regarding the dominant practice in empirical studies to restrict attention to type-I-error and highlights the importance of statistical power as a critical parameter in evaluating the scientific value of empirical findings (see Maniadis and Tufano (2017) for a review). This is especially important since there is growing evidence that suggests empirical findings in economics, and several other disciplines, are significantly underpowered. For example, assessing more than 6,700 empirical studies in economics, Ioannidis

et al. (2017) find that “half of the areas of economics research assessed have nearly 90% of their results under-powered. The median statistical power is 18%, or less.” As Maniadis and Tufano (2017) suggest, “an important implication of the overall inadequate power of empirical research in economics is that a sizable majority of its studies have less than 50% probability of detecting the phenomenon under investigation.”

Following List et al. (2011) and Maniadis et al. (2017), we calculate the optimal sample size for our control and treatment groups that allows us to calculate a minimum economically relevant treatment effect at what is considered a reasonable significance level ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) and statistical power ( $1-\beta=0.80$ ) in the literature (e.g. List et al. 2011, Ioannidis et al. 2017). We find that *for a given statement*, in order to find a treatment effect equal to 15% of a standard deviation, which we consider an economically relevant treatment effect in our study, we need to have approximately 800 participants in each group, which is the number of participants we actually have. This suggests that, given our sample size, the treatment effects we have estimated *for each individual statement* meet a high standard in terms of statistical power and degree of reproducibility. Doing the same exercise for our analysis of all statements combined, which is most of our analysis, suggests that our sample size of 36,375 individual-statements allows us to find a treatment effect as small as 6% of a standard deviation at  $\alpha=0.01$  and  $1-\beta=0.99$ .

Another important and related question raised by Maniadis et al. (2017) is that, “given publication of a newly discovered finding, how much confidence should we have that it is true?” Maniadis et al. (2014) propose a measure of post-study probability (PSP) that allows one to measure “the probability that a declaration of research finding, made upon reaching statistical significance, is true.” As Maniadis et al. (2014) show, the value of PSP depends on significance level  $\alpha$ , statistical power  $\beta$ , and priors about the true probability of association between two phenomena,  $\pi$ . In the context of our study,  $\pi$  translates into priors regarding the probability that the existence of ideological bias among economists is a true phenomenon. We consider a low, a medium, and a high prior to measure how much these priors should change in light of our results. We use  $\beta=0.99$  and  $\alpha=0.01$  which we showed above are reasonable numbers given our sample size and estimated effects when all statements are combined.

We find that, if one holds a prior that there is only a 10% probability that the existence of ideological bias among economists is a true phenomenon ( $\pi=0.1$ ), then the probability that our estimated treatment effects are true is  $\text{PSP}=91.6\%$ . This probability is 99% and 99.8%, for  $\pi=0.5$



and  $\pi=0.9$ , respectively. This suggests significant updating in those prior beliefs in light of our results.<sup>39</sup>

#### **5.4. Heterogeneity Analysis**

In this section, we examine how our estimated treatments vary by statement as well as by different characteristics including gender, country of residence, country where PhD was completed, undergraduate major, and main research area. It is interesting and important to understand how the biases we have found in our analysis vary across different groups. This could help to shed more light on some of the factors underlying ideological/authority bias. As it is discussed in more detail in the next section, we find evidence of significant and systematic heterogeneity in our estimated treatment effects. Consistent with our previous results, we cannot square these findings with unbiased Bayesian updating since we cannot think of compelling reasons to explain why unbiased updating will lead to systematically different treatment effects for people from a certain gender, country, or research area, especially after controlling for a wide set of observed characteristics. However, as we discuss in more detail in the following section, these differences by personal characteristics remain consistent with the existence of ideological/authority bias among economists.

We continue to use OLS to estimate treatment effects since its estimates are easier to summarize and present, and since they are similar to estimates from ordered logit models as discussed before.

##### **5.4.1. Heterogeneity by Statement**

First, we investigate the effect of our two treatments on agreement level separately for each statement. These results are summarized in Figure 2. Consistent with our overall results, we find that for all but three statements, changing source attributions to a less-/non-mainstream source significantly reduces the agreement level. The estimated reductions range from around one-tenth of a standard deviation to around half of a standard deviation. Interestingly, we find that the largest reduction in agreement level for treatment 1 occurs for Statement 6, which is arguably the statement that is most critical of mainstream economics and its methods, and also brings up the issue of ideological bias in mainstream economics.<sup>40</sup> This again is consistent with ideological bias

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<sup>39</sup> Even for a prior of 1%, the PSP = 50%.

<sup>40</sup> The statement reads: “Economic discourse of any sort - verbal, mathematical, econometric-is rhetoric; that is, an effort to persuade. None of these discursive forms should necessarily be privileged over the others unless it is agreed by the community of scholars to be more compelling. Only when economists move away from the pursuit of universal knowledge of 'the economy' and towards an acceptance of the necessity of vision and the historical and spatial

where views that are more likely to disconfirm previously held beliefs are more strongly discounted when the source is less-/non-mainstream.

Regarding the three statements with no reduction in agreement level (i.e. statements 1, 3, and 7), one potential explanation is that the ideological distance between the sources is not large enough to induce ideological bias. Taking a closer look at the sources for each statement seems to suggest that this is indeed a plausible explanation. The sources for these statements are Dani Rodrick vs. Paul Krugman, Hayek vs. Freud, and Irving Fisher vs. Kenneth Galbraith. Interestingly and consistent with authority bias, we find that, for the same three statements, removing the source attribution significantly reduces the agreement level, highlighting again the difference in driving forces behind the estimated effects of treatment 1 and treatment 2.

Results displayed in the right panel of Figure 2 suggest that removing the source attributions significantly reduces the agreement level for all 15 statements. Similar to our results reported in [Table 2](#), the estimated effects of treatment 2 are larger than treatment 1 in almost all of the statements. Results reported in Figure 2 also suggest that it is not just extreme differences in views (e.g. Smith vs. Marx) that invoke ideological bias among economists. Even smaller ideological differences (e.g. Deaton vs. Piketty or Sen vs. Sandel) seem to invoke strong ideological reactions by economists.

#### **5.4.2. Heterogeneity by Gender**

Next, we examine gender differences in our estimated treatment effects. These results are reported in [Table 7](#) and suggest that on average female economists who are randomized into control group agree more with our statements compared to their male counterparts in the control group. The estimated difference in agreement level is around 6 percent of a standard deviation. In addition, we find that the estimated ideological bias is 44% larger among male economists as compared to their female counterparts (24% of a standard deviation reduction in agreement level versus 14%, respectively), a difference that is statistically significant at 0.1%. These results are consistent with studies from psychology which suggest that women exhibit less confirmation bias than men (Meyers-Levy 1986, Bar-Tal and Jarymowicz 2010). Gordon and Dahl (2013) also find

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contingency of knowledge will the concern over ideological 'bias' begin to fade. Such a turn would have important implications for economic method as well, as knowledge claims would increasingly find support, not in models of constrained optimization, but with such techniques as case studies and historical analyses of social institutions and politics. Increasing reliance of economics on mathematics and statistics has not freed the discipline from ideological bias, it has simply made it easier to disregard.”

evidence that suggests that male economists are less cautious in expressing an opinion. This seems to be consistent with stronger ideological bias among male economists found in our results, since ideological bias and assigning higher levels of certainty to our own views usually work hand in hand. Finally, these results are consistent with van Dalen (2019) who finds that female economists are more likely to believe that economic research is not affected by one's political views, perhaps because they more strongly aspire to be less ideologically biased.

We find, however, that the gender difference in authority bias is much smaller (34% of a standard deviation reduction for males versus 35% for females) and statistically insignificant. In other words, removing mainstream sources seems to affect men and women in similar ways. These results hold even after including our extensive set of indicators for political orientation and political/economic typology to control for potential gender differences. We also find similar results when we estimate gender differences in treatment effects separately for each statement. In 9 out of 15 statements, the estimated ideological bias is larger for men than for women, while the results are more mixed for our estimates of authority bias (see Figure A3 in our [online appendix](#)).

We would like, however, to highlight the estimated gender difference in ideological bias for Statement 5, which involves the issue of gender gap in economics.<sup>41</sup> Overall, and without considering group assignment, there exists a very large difference in the level of agreement with this statement between male and female economists. More specifically, conditional on observed characteristics, the average agreement level among male economists is 0.78 points lower than female economists, a very large difference that is around 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of a standard deviation and statistically significant at the 0.1%. Taking group assignment into account, female economists who randomly receive *Carmen Reinhart* as the statement source (i.e. control group) report an agreement level that is on average 0.73 points higher compared to their male counterparts in the control group. Moreover, while switching the source from *Carmen Reinhart* to the left-wing economist/sociologist *Diane Elson* does not affect the agreement level among female economists (estimated effect is 0.006 points), it significantly decreases the agreement level among male

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<sup>41</sup> The statement reads: "Unlike most other science and social science disciplines, economics has made little progress in closing its gender gap over the last several decades. Given the field's prominence in determining public policy, this is a serious issue. Whether explicit or more subtle, intentional or not, the hurdles that women face in economics are very real." The actual (mainstream) source of the statement is *Carmen Reinhart, Professor of the International Financial System at Harvard Kennedy School and the author of This Time is Different: Eight Centuries of Financial Folly (2011)*. The altered (less-/non-mainstream) source of the statement is *Diane Elson, British Economist and Sociologist, Professor Emerita at the University of Essex, and the author of Male bias in the development process (1995)*.

economists by 0.175 points (around 15% of a standard deviation). It seems that when it comes to the important issue of the gender gap in economics, which involves female economists at a personal level, women put aside ideology and merely focus on the content of the statement as opposed to its source.

These results also highlight a large divide between male and female economists in their perception and concerns regarding the gender gap in economics.<sup>42</sup> This is of critical importance since the discussion around the gender problem in economics has recently taken the centre stage. During the recent 2019 AEA meeting, and in one of the main panel discussions titled “how can economics solve its gender problem?”, several top female economists talked about their own struggles with the gender problem in economics. In another panel discussion, Ben Bernanke, the current president of the AEA, suggested that the discipline has “unfortunately, a reputation for hostility toward women....”<sup>43</sup> This is following the appointment of an Ad Hoc Committee by the Executive Committee of the AEA in April 2018 to explore “issues faced by women [...] to improve the professional climate for women and members of underrepresented groups.”<sup>44</sup> AEA also conducted a climate survey recently to “provide more comprehensive information on the extent and nature of these [gender] issues.” It is well-understood that approaching and solving the gender problem in economics first requires a similar understanding of the problem by both men and women. However, our results suggest that there exists a very significant divide between male and female economists in their recognition of the problem.

#### **5.4.3. Heterogeneity by Country of Residence/PhD Completion**

Next, we examine how our estimated effects vary by country of residence. These results are reported in [Table 8](#). Estimates reported in Column (1) suggest that even when sources are mainstream, and conditional on observed characteristics, there are significant differences in average agreement level by country (we reject the null of equality at 0.1%). On one side, we have economists in South Africa, France and Italy who hold the highest level of agreement with the statements when sources are mainstream, while on the other side we have economists in Austria and the US who hold the highest level of disagreement. These results are consistent with Frey et

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<sup>42</sup> Gender differences in perception of gender discrimination is not limited to economics and has been documented in other studies and in various contexts (e.g. Fisman and O’neill 2008, Miller and Katz 2018, Raggins et al. 1998).

<sup>43</sup> Reported in a New York Times article titled “Female Economists Push Their Field Toward a #MeToo Reckoning”, published on January 10, 2019.

<sup>44</sup> American Economic Association, Ad Hoc Committee on the Professional Climate in Economics, Interim Report, April 6, 2018.

al. (1984) who also find significant differences across five countries in views among economists. Similarly, and for both treatments, we find that the estimated effects vary significantly across countries, ranging from around half of a standard deviation to zero. We also reject the null that the estimated effects of treatment 1/treatment 2 are the same across countries at the 0.1% confidence level. More specifically, we find that economists in Austria, Brazil, and Italy exhibit the smallest ideological bias (for Brazil and Austria, the estimated effects are also statistically insignificant). On the other side of the spectrum we find that economists in Ireland, Japan, Australia, and Scandinavia exhibit the largest ideological bias. Economists in countries such as Canada, the UK, France, and the US stand in the middle in terms of the magnitude of the estimated ideological bias. In addition, when we examine the effect of authority bias, these countries maintain their positions in the distribution, although the estimated effects of authority bias remain larger than the estimated effects of ideological bias for most of the countries.

[Table 9](#) reports results that examine heterogeneity by country/region where PhD was completed. We find that economists who completed their PhD in Asia, Canada, Scandinavia, and the US exhibit the strongest ideological bias, ranging from 39% to 25% of a standard deviation. On the opposite end we find that economists with PhD degrees from South America, Africa, Italy, Spain, and Portugal exhibit the smallest ideological bias (statistically insignificant for South America and Africa). These results are somewhat consistent with those reported in [Table 8](#) and suggest that some of the countries where economists exhibit the largest/smallest ideological bias are also those that induce strongest/weakest ideological bias in their PhD students (e.g. Brazil, Italy, Scandinavia). In addition, we find that our estimated effects of authority bias, while larger in size, largely follow the same patterns as our estimates of ideological bias.

#### **5.4.4. Heterogeneity by Area of Research**

In [Table 10](#) we take up the issue of heterogeneity by the main area of research. Results reported in Column (1) suggest that similar to previous heterogeneity patterns, and conditional on observed characteristics, there are significant differences in agreement level among economists from different research areas, even when attributed sources are all mainstream. Estimates reported in Columns (2) and (3) suggest that economists whose main area of research is history of thought, methodology, heterodox approaches; cultural economics, economic sociology, economic anthropology; or business administration, marketing, accounting exhibit the smallest ideological

and authority bias.<sup>45</sup> We find however that economists whose main area of research is macroeconomics, public economics, international economics, and financial economics are among those with the largest ideological bias, ranging from 33% to 26% of a standard deviation.

Another interesting point to highlight is that, while for economists in all research areas the estimated effect of ideological bias is smaller or similar than the estimated effect of authority bias, macroeconomists are the only group for whom the estimated ideological bias is significantly larger than the estimated authority bias ( $1/3^{\text{rd}}$  versus  $1/5^{\text{th}}$  of a standard deviation). This is potentially driven by the fact that our less-/non-mainstream sources induce a stronger reaction in macroeconomists than when we remove the sources altogether.

#### **5.4.5 Heterogeneity by Undergraduate Major**

Lastly, we examine heterogeneity by undergraduate major. As we discussed before, there exists growing evidence that suggests economic training, either directly or indirectly, could induce ideological views in students (e.g. Allgood et al. 2012, Colander and Klamer 1987, Colander 2005, Rubinstein 2006). Consistent with these studies, results reported in [Table 11](#) suggest that economists whose undergraduate major was economics or business/management exhibit the strongest ideological bias ( $1/4^{\text{th}}$  of a standard deviation). However, we find that economists with an undergraduate major in law; history, language, and literature; or anthropology, sociology, psychology, exhibit the smallest ideological bias (statistically insignificant in all three cases).<sup>46</sup>

## **6. Conclusion**

We use an online randomized controlled experiment involving 2425 economists in 19 countries to examine the influence of ideological and authority bias on views among economists. Economists who participated in our survey were asked to evaluate statements from prominent economists on different topics. However, source attribution for each statement was randomized without participants' knowledge. For each statement, participants either received a mainstream source, a less-/non-mainstream source, or no source. We find that economists' reported level of agreement with statements is significantly lower when statements are randomly attributed to less-/non-mainstream sources who hold widely-known views or ideologies that put them at different distances to mainstream economics, even when this distance is relatively small. In addition, we

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<sup>45</sup> For the latter group, this could be driven by lack of familiarity with where different sources stand in relation to mainstream economics and their ideology.

<sup>46</sup> Of course, this systematic difference could be driven by self-selection of individuals into different undergraduate majors and is not necessarily causal.

find that removing the source attribution also significantly reduces the agreement level with statements.

We use a Bayesian updating framework to organize and test the validity of two competing hypotheses as potential explanations for our results: unbiased Bayesian updating versus ideologically-/authority-biased Bayesian updating. While we find no evidence in support of unbiased Bayesian updating, our results are all consistent with the existence of biased updating. More specifically, and in contrast (consistent) with implications of unbiased (biased) Bayesian updating, we find that changing/removing sources (1) has no impact on economists' precision of their posterior beliefs (proxied for by economists' reported level of confidence with their evaluations); (2) similarly affects experts/non-experts in relevant areas; and (3) changes strongly and systematically by economists' political orientation. We also find systematic and significant heterogeneity in our estimates of ideological/authority bias by gender, country, country/region where PhD was completed, area of research, and undergraduate major with patterns consistent with ideological/authority bias.

Scholars hold different views on whether economics can be a 'science' in the strict sense and free from ideological biases. However, perhaps it is possible to have a consensus that the type of ideological bias that could result in endorsing or denouncing an argument on the basis of its author's views rather than its substance, is unhealthy and in conflict with scientific tenor and the subject's scientific aspiration, *especially when the knowledge regarding rejected views is limited*.

Furthermore, it is hard to imagine that the biases that our results uncover will only manifest themselves in a low-stakes environment, such as our experiment, without spilling over to other areas of academic life.<sup>47</sup> After all, political scientists, sociologists, and psychologists have long established the widespread influence of such biases on various important domains of our lives. Therefore, while due to data limitations we cannot examine the influence of these biases on various academic outcomes, there already exists growing evidence that suggests value judgements and political ideology of economists affect not just research (Jelveh et al. 2018, Saint-Paul 2018), but also citation networks (Önder and Terviö 2015), faculty hiring (Terviö 2011), as well as economists' positions on positive and normative issues related to public policy (e.g. Beyer and

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<sup>47</sup> A strong majority of experimental studies in economics and other disciplines are based on low-stake experiments, but we rarely discount the importance of their findings and their implications based on the low-stake nature of the experiments.

Pühringer 2019; Fuchs, Krueger and Poterba 1998; Mayer 2001; van Dalen 2019; Van Gunten, Martin, and Teplitskiy 2016). It is therefore not a long stretch to suggest that biases underlying our results could play an important role in suppressing plurality, narrowing pedagogy, and delineating biased research parameters in economics. We believe that recognizing their own biases, especially when there exists evidence that suggests they could operate through implicit or unconscious modes, is the first step for economists who strive to be objective and ideology-free. This is also consistent with the standard to which most economists in our study hold themselves.

Another important step to minimize the influence of our ideological biases is to understand their roots. As argued by prominent social scientists (e.g. Althusser 1976, Foucault 1969, Popper 1955, Thompson 1997), the main source of ideological bias is knowledge-based, influenced by the institutions that produce discourse. Mainstream economics, as the dominant and most influential institution in economics, propagates and shapes ideological views among economists through different channels.

Economics education, through which economic discourses are disseminated to students and future economists, is one of these important channels. It affects the way students process information, identify problems, and approach these problems in their research. Not surprisingly, this training may also affect the policies they favor and the ideologies they adhere to. For example, Colander and Klammer (1987) and Colander (2005) survey graduate students at top-ranking graduate economic programs in the US and find that, according to these students, techniques are the key to success in graduate school, while understanding the economy and knowledge about economic literature only help a little. This lack of depth in knowledge acquired, not only in economics but in any discipline or among any group of people, make individuals to lean more easily on ideology. Economics teaching not only influences students' ideology in terms of academic practice but also in terms of personal behavior. As we discussed in [Section 2](#), there already exists strong evidence that, compared to various other disciplines, students in economics stand out in terms of views associated with greed, corruption, selfishness, and willingness to free-ride.<sup>48</sup>

Another important channel through which mainstream economics shapes ideological views among economists is by shaping the social structures and norms in the profession. While social

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<sup>48</sup> Even if this relationship is not strictly casual, it suggests that there exists something about economic education that leads to a disproportionate self-selection of such students into economics.



structures and norms exist in all academic disciplines, economics seems to stand out in at least several respects, resulting in the centralization of power and the creation of incentive mechanisms for research, which in turn hinder plurality, encourage conformity, and adherence to the dominant (ideological) views.

For example, in his comprehensive analysis of pluralism in economics, Wright (2019) highlights several features of the discipline that make the internal hierarchical system in economics “steeper and more consequential” compared to most other academic disciplines. These features include: (1) particular significance of journal ranking, especially the Top Five, in various key aspects of academic life including receiving tenure (Heckman and Moktan 2018), securing research grants, invitation to seminars and conferences, and request for professional advice; (2) dominant role of “stars” in the discipline (Goyal et al. 2006, Offer and Söderberg 2016); (3) governance of the discipline by a narrow group of economists (Fourcade et al. 2015); (4) strong dominance of both editorial positions and publications in high-prestige journals by economists at highly ranked institutions (Colussi 2018, Fourcade et al. 2015, Heckman & Moktan 2018; Wu 2007); and the strong effect of the ranking of one’s institution, as a student or as an academic, in career success (Han 2003, Oyer 2006).

As another example, in a 2013 interview with the World Economic Association, Dani Rodrik highlights the role of social structure in economics by suggesting that “there are powerful forces having to do with the sociology of the profession and the socialization process that tend to push economists to think alike. Most economists start graduate school not having spent much time thinking about social problems or having studied much else besides math and economics. The incentive and hierarchy systems tend to reward those with the technical skills rather than interesting questions or research agendas. An in-group versus out-group mentality develops rather early on that pits economists against other social scientists.”<sup>49</sup> Interestingly, a very similar picture of the profession was painted in 1973 by Axel Leijonhufvud in his light-hearted yet insightful article titled “The life among the Econ.”<sup>50</sup>

Some economists might object that economists are human beings and therefore these biases are inevitable. But economists cannot have it both ways! The strong influence of ideological bias

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with Dani Rodrik, World Economics Association Newsletter, Vol. 3, No. 2, April 2013 <https://www.worldeconomicassociation.org/files/newsletters/Issue3-2.pdf>

<sup>50</sup> Leijonhufvud, A. (1973). Life among the Econ. *Economic Inquiry*, 11(3), 327-337.

on views among economists that is evident in our empirical results cannot be reconciled with the positivist methodology most economists claim allegiance to. Once one admits the existence of ideological bias, the widely-held view that “positive economics is, or can be, an 'objective' science, in precisely the same sense as any of the physical sciences” (Friedman 1953) must be openly rejected. This is clearly not the case today, with positive economics “so pervasive that every competing view has been virtually eclipsed.” (Boland 1991). Furthermore, the differences we find in the estimated effects across personal characteristics such as gender, political orientation, country, and undergraduate major clearly suggest that there are ways to limit those ideological effects, and ways to reinforce them.

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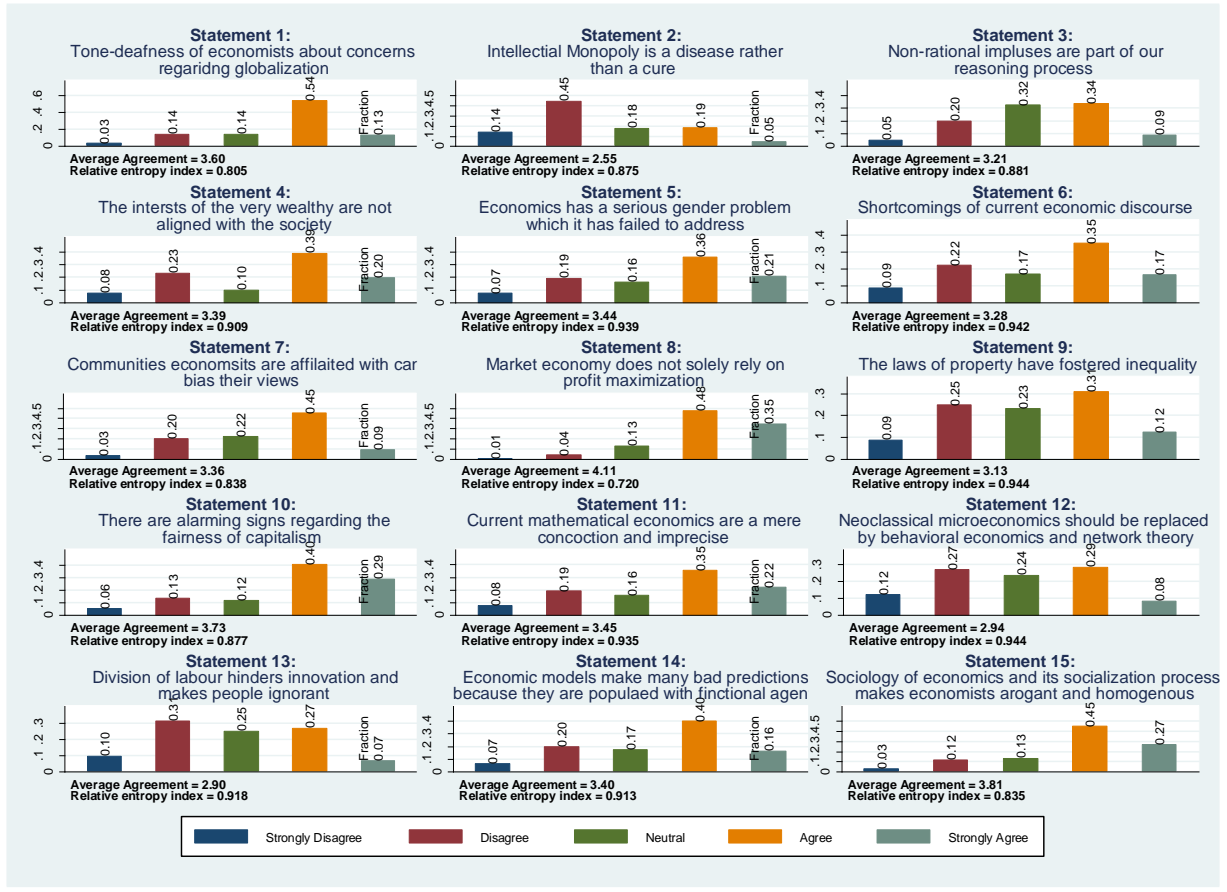
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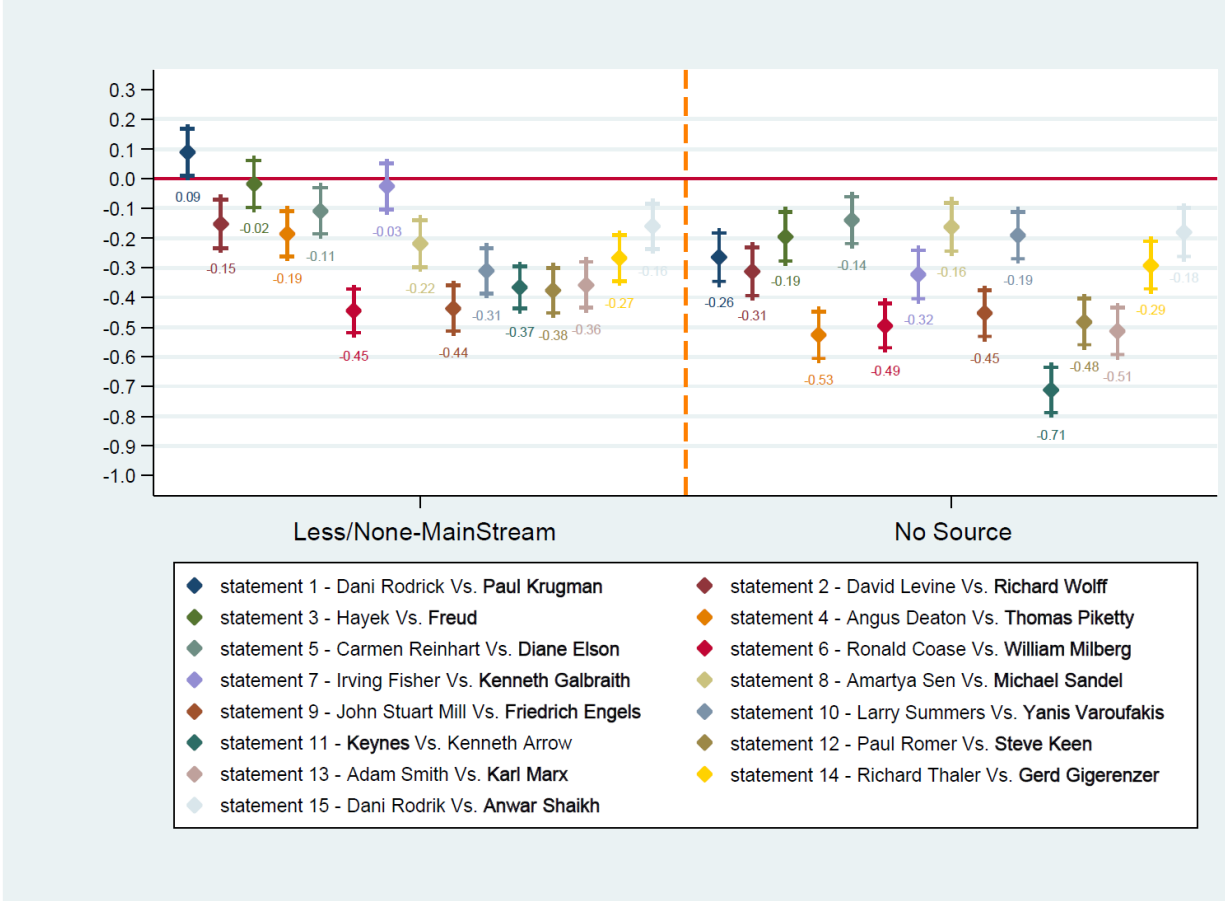
# Tables and Figures

**Figure 1: Probability of different agreement levels – By statement**



Note: See Table A15 in our [online appendix](#) for a complete list of statements and sources.

**Figure 2: OLS estimates of differences in agreement level between control and treatment groups – By statement**



Note: Agreement levels is z-normalized for each statement. Control variables include: gender, PhD completion cohort, current status, country, research area. Both 90% and 95% confidence intervals are displayed for each estimate. The two horizontal lines on each confidence interval band represent where the 90% confidence interval ends.

First (second) listed source for each statement is the actual (altered) source. Bold source for each pair refers to the less-/non-mainstream source. See Table A15 in our [online appendix](#) for more details.

**Table 1: List of Mainstream and Less-/Non-Mainstream Sources for Each Statement**

#	Mainstream Source	Less-/Non-mainstream Source
1	<b>Dani Rodrik</b> , professor of international political economy at Harvard University and the author of <i>The Globalization Paradox: Democracy and the Future of the World Economy</i> (2012).	<b>Paul Krugman</b> , professor of economics at Princeton University, the 2008 recipient of the Nobel Prize in Economics, and the author of <i>The Accidental Theorist and Other Dispatches from the Dismal Science</i> (1999).
2	<b>David Levine</b> , professor of economics at Washington University in St. Louis and the author of <i>Against Intellectual Monopoly</i> (2008).	<b>Richard Wolff</b> , professor of economics emeritus at the university of Massachusetts, Amherst, and the author of <i>Rethinking Marxism</i> (1985).
3	<b>Friedrich von Hayek</b> (1899-1992), professor of economics at University of Chicago and London School of Economics, and the 1974 recipient of the Nobel Prize in economics.	<b>Sigmund Freud</b> (1856-1939), the founder of psychoanalysis and the author of the book <i>Civilization and Its Discontents</i> (1929).
4	<b>Angus Deaton</b> , professor of economics at Princeton University, the 2015 recipient of the Nobel Prize in Economics, and the author of <i>The Great Escape: Health, Wealth, and the Origins of Inequality</i> (2013).	<b>Thomas Piketty</b> , professor of economics at the Paris School of Economics and the author of <i>Capital in the Twenty-First Century</i> (2013).
5	<b>Carmen Reinhart</b> , Professor of the International Financial System at Harvard Kennedy School and the author of <i>This Time is Different: Eight Centuries of Financial Folly</i> (2011)	<b>Diane Elson</b> , British Economist and Sociologist, Professor Emerita at the University of Essex, and the author of <i>Male bias in the development process</i> (1995).
6	<b>Ronald Coase</b> (1910-2013), professor of economics at the University of Chicago Law School and the 1991 recipient of the Nobel Prize in Economics.	<b>William Milberg</b> , dean and professor of economics at the New School for Social Research and the author of <i>The Crisis of Vision in Modern Economic Thought</i> (1996).
7	<b>Irving Fisher</b> (1867-1947), professor of political economy at Yale University	<b>John Kenneth Galbraith</b> (1908-2006), professor of economics at Harvard University and the author of <i>The New Industrial State</i> (1947).
8	<b>Amartya Sen</b> , professor of economics and philosophy at Harvard University and the author of <i>Development as Freedom</i> (1999).	<b>Michael Sandel</b> , American political philosopher and professor of government at Harvard University, and the author of <i>What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets</i> (2012).
9	<b>John Stuart Mill</b> (1806-1873), an English philosopher, political economist, and the author of <i>On Liberty</i> (1859).	<b>Friedrich Engels</b> (1820-1895), a German philosopher and the co-author of <i>The Communist Manifesto</i> (1848).
10	<b>Larry Summers</b> , professor of economics and president emeritus at Harvard University.	<b>Yanis Varoufakis</b> , Greek economist who also served as the Greek Minister of Finance (from January to July 2015, when he resigned), and the author of <i>And the Weak Suffer What They Must? Europe's crisis, America's economic future</i>
11	<b>Joh Maynard Keynes</b> (1883-1946), professor of economics at Cambridge and the author of <i>The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money</i> (1936).	<b>Kenneth Arrow</b> , professor of economics at Stanford University and the 1972 recipient of the Nobel Prize in Economics.
12	<b>Paul Romer</b> , professor of economics at the New York University and the author of <i>The Troubles with Macroeconomics</i> (forthcoming in the <i>American Economic Review</i> ).	<b>Steve Keen</b> , post-Keynesian professor of economics at Kingstone University (UK) and the author of <i>Debunking economics: the naked emperor dethroned?</i> (2011).
13	<b>Adam Smith</b>	<b>Karl Marx</b>
14	<b>Richard Thaler</b> , professor of behavioural science and economics at University of Chicago Booth School of Business and the author of <i>Misbehaving: The Making of Behavioural Economics</i> (2015).	<b>Gerd Gigerenzer</b> , Director at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development, former professor of psychology at the University of Chicago, and the author of <i>Gut feelings: The intelligence of the unconscious</i> (2007).
15	<b>Dani Rodrik</b> , professor of international political economy at Harvard University and the author of <i>The Globalization Paradox: Democracy and the Future of the World Economy</i> (2012).	<b>Anwar Shaikh</b> , professor of economics at the New School for Social Research (New York) and the author of <i>Capitalism: Competition, conflict, Crises</i> (2016).

Note: Our dichotomization of the sources into “mainstream” and “less-/non-mainstream” is meant to simplify and summarize the relative ideological differences between sources, even though we believe these differences are more appropriately understood as a continuum rather than a dichotomy. Of course, it is well-understood that this classification does not readily apply to some sources, such as older ones (e.g. Marx or Engels) or sources from other disciplines (e.g. Sandel or Freud) in the same way it applies to others. However, to remain consistent and to avoid confusion for the reader, we stick to the same naming convention for all sources.

**Table 2: OLS Estimated Treatment Effects**

<i>A: In Units of Agreement Level</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Treatment 1 (none-/less-mainstream source)	-0.264*** (0.014)	-0.261*** (0.014)	-0.262*** (0.014)	-0.268*** (0.014)
Treatment 2 (no source)	-0.415*** (0.015)	-0.404*** (0.015)	-0.406*** (0.015)	†
<i>B: In Units of Standard Deviation</i>				
Treatment 1 (none-/less-mainstream source)	-0.223*** (0.012)	-0.220*** (0.012)	-0.221*** (0.012)	-0.226*** (0.012)
Treatment 2 (no source)	-0.350*** (0.012)	-0.341*** (0.012)	-0.343*** (0.012)	†
P-value: Treatment 1 = Treatment 2	0.000	0.000	0.000	NA
Controls	No	Yes	No	No
More Control	No	No	Yes	No
Fixed Person Effects	No	No	No	Yes
Number of observations	36375	36375	36375	25185

Note: Omitted category is receiving a mainstream source. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. The dependent variable is agreement level on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). For panel (B), the dependent variable is standardized to have mean zero and standard deviation of one. The average agreement level in our sample is 3.35 with standard deviation of 1.185. Significance levels: \*\*\* < 1%, \*\* < 5%, \* < 10%.

Controls include: gender, PhD completion cohort, current status, country, and research area. More Controls include all the previously listed variables as well as age cohort, country/region of birth, English proficiency, department of affiliation, and country where PhD was completed.

† We cannot identify the effect of treatment 2 in models with individual fixed effects since those who are sorted into treatment 2 receive all statements without a source and therefore there is no variation in treatment within a person and across statements. We therefore exclude these participants from the fixed effects model.

**Table 3: Ordered logit estimates of Treatment Effects**

	Outcome:				
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
<b>Panel A: Without Controls</b>					
Predicted probability of outcome <i>Control Group (mainstream source)</i>	0.050*** (0.001)	0.168*** (0.002)	0.166*** (0.002)	0.403*** (0.002)	0.212*** (0.003)
Difference in predicted probability <i>mainstream Vs. less-/non-mainstream</i>	0.022*** (0.001)	0.050*** (0.003)	0.021*** (0.001)	-0.036*** (0.002)	-0.057*** (0.003)
Difference in predicted probability <i>mainstream Vs. no source</i>	0.039*** (0.001)	0.083*** (0.003)	0.029*** (0.001)	-0.067*** (0.002)	-0.085*** (0.003)
<b>Panel B: With Controls</b>					
Predicted probability of outcome <i>Control Group (mainstream source)</i>	0.048*** (0.001)	0.166*** (0.002)	0.169*** (0.002)	0.411*** (0.002)	0.206*** (0.002)
Difference in predicted probability <i>mainstream Vs. less-/non-mainstream</i>	0.021*** (0.001)	0.051*** (0.003)	0.022*** (0.001)	-0.038*** (0.002)	-0.056*** (0.003)
Difference in predicted probability <i>mainstream Vs. no source</i>	0.037*** (0.001)	0.083*** (0.003)	0.030*** (0.001)	-0.068*** (0.002)	-0.082*** (0.003)
Number of observations	36375	36375	36375	36375	36375

Note: Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. Significance levels: \*\*\* < 1%, \*\* < 5%, \* < 10%.  
The dependent variable is agreement level on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).  
Controls include: gender, PhD completion cohort, current status, country, research area.

**Table 4: OLS Estimates of Differences in Confidence Level**

<i>A: In Units of Confidence Level</i>	(1)	(2)
Treatment 1 (none-/less-mainstream source)	0.005 (0.011)	0.008 (0.010)
Treatment 2 (no source)	-0.019 (0.012)	†
<hr/>		
<i>B: In Units of Standard Deviation</i>		
Treatment 1 (none-/less-mainstream source)	0.006 (0.012)	0.009 (0.011)
Treatment 2 (no source)	-0.020 (0.013)	†
P-value: treatment 1 = treatment 2	0.037	NA
Controls	Yes	No
Fixed Person Effects	No	Yes
Number of observations	36088	24984

Note: Omitted category is Control Group (i.e. mainstream source). Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. The dependent variable is confidence level with evaluation on a scale from 1 (least confident) to 5 (most confident). For panel (B), the dependent variable is standardized to have mean zero and standard deviation of one. The average confidence level in our sample is 3.93 with standard deviation of 0.928. Since confidence level was voluntary to report in our survey, compared to agreement level regressions we lose a small number of observations where confidence level is not reported. Significance levels: \*\*\* < 1%, \*\* < 5%, \* < 10%.

Controls include: gender, PhD completion cohort, current status, country, research area.

† We cannot identify the effect of treatment 2 in fixed effects model since those who are sorted into this group receive all statements without a source and therefore there is no variation in treatment within a person and across statements. We therefore exclude these participants from the fixed effects model.

**Table 5: OLS Estimated Treatment Effects – By expertise**

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Control group	Treatment 1	Treatment 2
Expert	-0.002 (0.029)	-0.227*** (0.0184)	-0.344*** (0.0193)
Non-Expert		-0.214*** (0.0160)	-0.338*** (0.0168)
P-value: equality of coefficients		0.580	0.883
F-statistic: equality of coefficients		0.30	0.02
Number of observations	36375		

Note: Control group refers to receiving a mainstream source. Treatment 1 refers to receiving a less-/non-mainstream source. Treatment 2 refers to receiving no source. Omitted category is expert & control group. Expert is an indicator that is equal to 1 of a participant's reported area of research is related to the area of an evaluated statement and zero otherwise. See Table A14 in the [Online Appendix](#) for more details. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. The dependent variable is agreement level on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and is z-normalized. Significance levels: \*\*\* < 1%, \*\* < 5%, \* < 10%.

Controls include: PhD completion cohort, current status, country, research area.

**Table 6: OLS Estimated Treatment Effects – By political orientation**

	Main Results		
	Author-created categories		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Control group	Treatment 1	Treatment 2
Far Left		-0.046*	-0.325***
		(0.024)	(0.0280)
Left	-0.241***	-0.229***	-0.330***
	(0.0217)	(0.018)	(0.0189)
Center	-0.408***	-0.280***	-0.402***
	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.0289)
Right	-0.564***	-0.319***	-0.337***
	(0.028)	(0.032)	(0.0324)
Far Right	-0.607***	-0.358***	-0.388***
	(0.046)	(0.061)	(0.0648)
P-value of equality	0.000	0.000	0.236
F-statistic of equality	70.94	17.27	1.38
# observations	36315		

Note: Control group refers to receiving a mainstream source. Treatment 1 refers to receiving a less-/non-mainstream source. Treatment 2 refers to receiving no source. Omitted category is Far Left & control group. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. The dependent variable is agreement level on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and is z-normalized. Political orientation is self-reported by participants on a scale from -10 (far left) to 10 (far right). Significance levels: \*\*\* < 1%, \*\* < 5%, \* < 10%. Controls include: gender, PhD completion cohort, current status, country, research area.

For Columns (1) to (3), we use self-reported political orientation to group participants into 5 categories: Far left = [-10 -7], Left = [-6 -2], Centre = [-1 1], Right = [2 6], Far Right = [7 10]. Results reported in Columns (4) to (9) are for robustness check. For results reported in columns (4) to (6), we create the five political groups using the quintiles of political orientation distribution. For results reported in columns (7) to (9), we create the five political groups using the quintiles of the adjusted political orientation distribution. Adjusted political orientation measure is created by running a regression of self-reported political orientation on a series of indicators based on questions asked from participants to identify their political typology. See Table A13 in our [online appendix](#) for more details.



**Table 7: OLS Estimated Treatment Effects – By Gender**

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Control group	Treatment 1	Treatment 2
Male		-0.244*** (0.013)	-0.338*** (0.014)
Female	0.0633*** (0.0197)	-0.137*** (0.0248)	-0.353*** (0.027)
P-value: equality of coefficients		0.000	0.638
F-statistic: equality of coefficients		14.13	0.22
Number of observations	36375		

Note: Control group refers to receiving a mainstream source. Treatment 1 refers to receiving a less-/non-mainstream source. Treatment 2 refers to receiving no source. Omitted category is male & control group. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. The dependent variable is agreement level on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and is z-normalized. Significance levels: \*\*\* < 1%, \*\* < 5%, \* < 10%.

Controls include: PhD completion cohort, current status, country, research area.

**Table 8: OLS Estimated Treatment Effects – By country**

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Control Group	Treatment 1	Treatment 2
Australia		-0.325*** (0.055)	-0.536*** (0.059)
Austria	-0.201** (0.081)	0.021 (0.103)	-0.079 (0.101)
Brazil	-0.090 (0.074)	0.017 (0.086)	0.015 (0.108)
Canada	-0.012 (0.045)	-0.282*** (0.034)	-0.396*** (0.037)
France	0.195*** (0.047)	-0.217*** (0.040)	-0.358*** (0.041)
Germany	0.005 (0.055)	-0.178*** (0.060)	-0.233*** (0.064)
Ireland	0.010 (0.112)	-0.440*** (0.148)	-0.428*** (0.151)
Italy	0.118** (0.047)	-0.113*** (0.038)	-0.237*** (0.042)
Japan	0.037 (0.060)	-0.353*** (0.072)	-0.367*** (0.072)
Netherlands	-0.087 (0.065)	-0.249*** (0.076)	-0.125* (0.075)
New Zealand	-0.079 (0.070)	-0.237*** (0.082)	-0.356*** (0.087)
Scandinavia	0.004 (0.048)	-0.295*** (0.044)	-0.385*** (0.048)
South Africa	0.254*** (0.081)	-0.118 (0.107)	-0.330*** (0.097)
Switzerland	0.073 (0.077)	-0.293*** (0.099)	-0.455*** (0.096)
UK	0.012 (0.051)	-0.221*** (0.050)	-0.378*** (0.050)
US	-0.082** (0.040)	-0.214*** (0.020)	-0.349*** (0.021)
P-value: equality of coefficients	0.000	0.000	0.000
F-statistic: equality of coefficients	9.07	2.53	3.40
Number of observations	36375		

Note: Control group refers to receiving a mainstream source. Treatment 1 refers to receiving a less-/non-mainstream source. Treatment 2 refers to receiving no source. Omitted category is Australia & control group. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. The dependent variable is agreement level on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and is z-normalized. Significance levels: \*\*\* < 1%, \*\* < 5%, \* < 10%.

Controls include: gender, PhD completion cohort, current status, research area.

**Table 9: OLS Estimated Treatment Effects – By country/region where PhD was completed**

	(1) Control Group	(2) Treatment 1	(3) Treatment 2
Africa		-0.095 (0.118)	-0.280** (0.117)
Asia	0.0230 (0.115)	-0.390*** (0.097)	-0.360*** (0.091)
Canada	0.0437 (0.101)	-0.316*** (0.045)	-0.464*** (0.051)
Europe 1 (France, Belgium)	0.0966 (0.102)	-0.159*** (0.039)	-0.254*** (0.040)
Europe 2 (Germany, Austria, Netherlands, Switzerland, Luxembourg)	-0.0180 (0.101)	-0.198*** (0.042)	-0.264*** (0.040)
Europe 3 (Italy, Spain, Portugal)	-0.0148 (0.101)	-0.109** (0.045)	-0.216*** (0.052)
Europe 4 (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden)	0.0936 (0.103)	-0.300*** (0.056)	-0.444*** (0.058)
Europe 5 (UK, Ireland)	0.0351 (0.0992)	-0.177*** (0.045)	-0.331*** (0.046)
Not Applicable	-0.128 (0.109)	-0.182*** (0.043)	-0.373*** (0.044)
Oceania	-0.0232 (0.110)	-0.186** (0.080)	-0.329*** (0.079)
Other	-0.273* (0.152)	-0.095 (0.197)	-0.967*** (0.227)
South America	0.133 (0.142)	0.013 (0.113)	-0.041 (0.128)
United States	-0.0578 (0.0957)	-0.251*** (0.018)	-0.372*** (0.019)
P-value: equality of coefficients	0.000	0.004	0.000
F-statistic: equality of coefficients	3.48	2.40	3.25

Number of observations

36375

Note: Control group refers to receiving a mainstream source. Treatment 1 refers to receiving a less-/non-mainstream source. Treatment 2 refers to receiving no source. Omitted category is Africa & control group. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. The dependent variable is agreement level on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and is z-normalized. Significance levels: \*\*\* < 1%, \*\* < 5%, \* < 10%.

Controls include: gender, PhD completion cohort, current status, country, research area. "Other" category includes Central America, Eastern Europe, Rest of Europe, Middle East, The Caribbean. Due to very small cell size for these countries/regions (135 observations in total), we have put them all in one category.

**Table 10: OLS Estimated Treatment Effects – By research area**

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Control Group	Treatment 1	Treatment 2
Teaching		-0.138** (0.060)	-0.398*** (0.059)
History of Thought, Methodology, Heterodox Approaches	0.159*** (0.052)	-0.106** (0.047)	-0.224*** (0.051)
Mathematical and Quantitative Methods	-0.115** (0.052)	-0.256*** (0.046)	-0.298*** (0.048)
Microeconomics	-0.161*** (0.050)	-0.229*** (0.043)	-0.379*** (0.043)
Macroeconomics and Monetary Economics	-0.125*** (0.047)	-0.333*** (0.036)	-0.197*** (0.037)
International Economics	-0.031 (0.050)	-0.265*** (0.044)	-0.489*** (0.049)
Financial Economics	-0.143** (0.059)	-0.263*** (0.063)	-0.271*** (0.060)
Public Economics	-0.088* (0.052)	-0.310*** (0.046)	-0.323*** (0.049)
Health, Education, and Welfare	0.027 (0.052)	-0.227*** (0.048)	-0.485*** (0.055)
Labor and Demographic Economics	-0.028 (0.047)	-0.208*** (0.036)	-0.359*** (0.039)
Law and Economics	0.006 (0.083)	-0.237** (0.112)	-0.412*** (0.122)
Industrial Organization	-0.094* (0.054)	-0.246*** (0.053)	-0.326*** (0.058)
Economic Development, Innovation, Technological Change	0.080 (0.050)	-0.152*** (0.042)	-0.504*** (0.044)
Agricultural and Natural Resource Economics	0.000 (0.050)	-0.167*** (0.042)	-0.363*** (0.044)
Urban, Rural, Regional, Real Estate, and Transportation Economics	-0.054 (0.068)	-0.124 (0.078)	-0.329*** (0.079)
Cultural Economics, Economic Sociology, Economic Anthropology	0.104 (0.110)	-0.071 (0.160)	0.087 (0.169)
Business Administration, Marketing, Accounting	0.290*** (0.075)	-0.223** (0.096)	-0.465*** (0.112)
Other	-0.002 (0.065)	-0.039 (0.073)	-0.025 (0.072)
P-value: equality of coefficients	0.000	0.004	0.000
F-statistic: equality of coefficients	7.82	2.12	4.77
Number of observations		36375	

Note: Control group refers to receiving a mainstream source. Treatment 1 refers to receiving a less-/non-mainstream source. Treatment 2 refers to receiving no source. Omitted category is Teaching & control group. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. The dependent variable is agreement level on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and is z-normalized. Significance levels: \*\*\* < 1%, \*\* < 5%, \* < 10%.

Controls include: gender, PhD completion cohort, current status, country.

**Table 11: OLS Estimated Treatment Effects – By Undergraduate Major**

	(1) Control Group	(2) Treatment 1	(3) Treatment 2
Other Social Sciences (Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology)		-0.062 (0.104)	-0.232* (0.122)
Business, Management	-0.036 (0.083)	-0.218*** (0.049)	-0.257*** (0.053)
Biology, Chemistry, Physics	-0.004 (0.094)	-0.141* (0.080)	-0.338*** (0.087)
Computer Science, Engineering	-0.086 (0.095)	-0.147* (0.081)	-0.386*** (0.084)
Earth and space sciences, Geography	-0.042 (0.095)	-0.191** (0.091)	-0.430*** (0.086)
Economics	-0.043 (0.076)	-0.253*** (0.015)	-0.346*** (0.016)
History, Language and literature	-0.054 (0.103)	0.000 (0.094)	-0.062 (0.095)
Law	0.064 (0.140)	0.077 (0.180)	-0.071 (0.301)
Mathematics, Statistics	-0.084 (0.082)	-0.155*** (0.043)	-0.274*** (0.044)
Philosophy, Political Science, International Affairs	0.090 (0.085)	-0.190*** (0.058)	-0.397*** (0.065)
Agricultural/Environmental Sciences	-0.050 (0.105)	-0.123 (0.101)	-0.587*** (0.106)
Other	0.186 (0.141)	0.153 (0.160)	-0.037 (0.146)
Not Reported	-0.047 (0.082)	-0.220*** (0.047)	-0.419*** (0.046)
P-value: equality of coefficients	0.083	0.035	0.031
F-statistic: equality of coefficients	1.70	1.94	1.97
Number of observations		36375	

Note: Control group refers to receiving a mainstream source. Treatment 1 refers to receiving a less-/non-mainstream source. Treatment 2 refers to receiving no source. Omitted category is Other Social Sciences & control group. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. The dependent variable is agreement level on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and is z-normalized. Significance levels: \*\*\* < 1%, \*\* < 5%, \* < 10%.

Controls include: gender, PhD completion cohort, current status, country, research area.

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