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The Effects of Protesters' Demographics
and Policy Preferences on the Political
Agenda

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Asymmetric Responsiveness: The Effects of Protesters' Demographics and Policy Preferences on the Political Agenda*

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Abstract

Previous research predicts that politicians are responsive to citizens with whom they share demographics or policy preferences. I argue that protests are particularly susceptible to politicians' differential responsiveness. First, protesters' demographics are relatively easy to identify, potentially increasing politicians' felt responsibility to respond to protesters they descriptively represent. Second, protests are often perceived as less legitimate than other forms of participation, justifying politicians' responsiveness to those they substantively represent. In a pre-registered experiment, I tested how 1124 Swedish local politicians respond to protests that vary in who is protesting and what policy demands they raise. Uncertainty is large around the effect of shared demographics. In contrast, shared policy preferences increase responsiveness asymmetrically: Left-wing politicians are more responsive but show greater differentiation, favoring co-partisan protesters over others. Exploratory analyses reveal that politicians' priors on protest legitimacy explain why right-wing politicians differentiate less and are less responsive to protests, even right-wing protests.

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Introduction

To whom politicians are responsive matters for political representation. When politicians choose which concerns to listen to, engage their own party in, or set on the political agenda, they can determine which policies are eventually implemented and whose interests are represented. Protest is an arguably increasingly popular way for citizens to voice their concerns. Yet, we know little to what extent politicians differentiate to whom they are responsive.

Recent literature highlights that citizens' demographics, such as ethnicity and gender, affect their chances of responsive outcomes (e.g., Naunov, 2024; Manekin and Mitts, 2022; Gause, 2020). Politicians tend to be more responsive to individuals with whom they share demographic traits (e.g., Costa, 2021; Lowande et al., 2019), implying that the majority of politicians will be less responsive to minority protesters. This implication overlooks, however, that protesters usually voice specific policy preferences, and demographic traits correlate with policy preferences. To account for this, studies control for declared vote intentions in letters and find that politicians are nevertheless less responsive to ethnic minorities (e.g., Dinesen et al., 2021). However, declared vote intentions differ from actual policy preferences, as they may incentivize a response without requiring politicians to engage with policy concerns they do not share. Additionally, whether this holds in the context of protests remains untested.

To understand the full extent of politicians' differential responsiveness (that politicians are more responsive to some than others), I reassess the effects of shared demographics and policy preferences with protesters while controlling for each factor. I focus on shared age, migration background, and gender, as well as shared left-wing or right-wing policy preferences.

I argue that two protest characteristics make protesters susceptible to politicians' differential responsiveness. First, protesters' demographics are relatively easy to identify and shape the perception of a protest (see for example, Edwards and Arnon, 2021; Manekin and Mitts, 2022). Recognizing that protesters share similar traits with themselves, politicians might feel the responsibility to react responsively to those who they descriptively represent. However, politicians who themselves face hardships due to their minority status in parliament (for example women) might be more aware of the increased efforts minority protesters must make to have their voices heard (Gause, 2020). Therefore, I expect politicians to react responsively to protesters with whom they share demographics, and I expect female politicians to react responsively not only to female protesters but also to minority protesters.

Second, protests are a less institutionalized form of political participation and, in contrast to elections, do not give politicians a mandate for political decision-making. The perceived lower legitimacy of protests affects whether the public and party colleagues think that responsive reaction is justifiable. I hypothesize that politicians are more likely to react responsively to policy demands they perceive as aligned with their own to justify their responsiveness, even when they don't share protesters' demographics.

A pre-registered online survey experiment with local politicians in Sweden ($N = 1124$) exposes respondents to protest scenarios that differ in who is protesting and what policy demands they voice. Sweden provides a case where local politics is contentious and politicians are expected to be highly responsive to local demands (e.g., Öhberg and Naurin, 2016). The protest concerns the allocation of schooling budgets, which are the responsibility of local governments and highly salient to constituents. Building on Leuschner

(2024), I measure politicians' responsive reactions to protest as first steps towards policy changes that are not exclusive to non-responsive reactions such as policing. I asked politicians how likely they are to meet protesters, engage their party colleagues with protesters' issue, and set the issue on the assembly's agenda.

The results show that uncertainty is large around the effects of shared demographic traits on politicians' responsive reactions. There is no evidence that politicians differentiate between protesters who are demographically similar or dissimilar to them when controlling for protesters' policy preferences. This finding is surprising given previous studies on politicians' racial discrimination of constituents writing letters (e.g., Dinesen et al., 2021; Costa, 2021) and questions to what extent previous findings hold for the case of protests.

In contrast, protesters' policy preferences and whether politicians agree with them lead to differential responsiveness that is asymmetric. While left- and right-wing politicians react more responsively to protesters they share policy preferences with, left-wing politicians are overall more responsive and show greater differentiation in their responsiveness, favoring co-partisan protesters over others. These results are robust across all measures of responsive reactions to protesters' demands and when considering within party variation of politicians' attitudes toward school budgeting in Sweden. I explore whether responsiveness is driven by politicians' priors on protest legitimacy (see also Giugni and Grasso, 2018; Gilljam et al., 2012) and find that those who considered protests to be not useful for political decision-making (mostly right-wing politicians from the Moderate Party) are least responsive to protests overall. This likely explains why left-wing politicians react more responsively to left-wing protesters than right-wing politicians do

to right-wing protesters.

These findings have strategic implications. Whether protesters effectively communicate their policy preferences in line with a political camp or party will determine which politicians react responsively to them. Moreover, while left-wing protesters gain the most when left-wing politicians see their demands as aligned with their interests, right-wing protesters benefit more if both right-wing *and* left-wing politicians recognize their demands as relevant to their party interests.

Protests and responsiveness

When politicians face a protest and decide whether to react responsively to protesters' demands, who the protesters are and what they demand can provide important information cues about how representative protesters are of the general population, how affluent the protest group is, or what policy preferences the protest group has. Such characteristics can influence politicians' consideration of how beneficial responsiveness to these protesters would be for their electoral support and chances at reelection. For example, politicians might reason that reacting responsively to affluent protesters will secure their electoral support and suggest that these protesters influence the vote choices of other voters as well.

Whoever protesters are, what might be detrimental to their chances of being heard is whether politicians recognize shared demographic traits and policy preferences between them and the protesters. Sharing traits and preferences means politicians are likely to represent or feel an increased responsibility to represent the protesters' interests in parliament. Previous research finds that politicians are more responsive to constituents' requests via let-

ters if they have the same racial background (e.g., Broockman, 2013) and politicians offer more in negotiations with constituents they perceive as their co-partisans with whom they share policy preferences (Sheffer et al., 2023). Similarly, female representatives are more likely to represent the interests of female than male voters (e.g., Magni and Ponce de Leon, 2021).

In the following, I theorize how sharing demographic traits or policy preferences increases politicians' responsiveness to protesters' demands. More specifically, I focus on shared demographic traits such as migration background, gender, or age and shared left-wing or right-wing policy preferences. These factors are not exhaustive but are common characteristics that vary between protest groups. Additionally, they have been widely studied in the broader literature, which goes beyond the case of protests and examines politicians' responsiveness to constituents' demands.

By studying the case of protests as a form of political participation¹ for constituents, I propose two alterations to the wider literature on constituents' identities and politicians' responsiveness. On the one hand, most recent experimental studies focus on constituents' political participation in the cases of writing letters or e-mails to representatives (e.g., Dinesen et al., 2021; Magni and Ponce de Leon, 2021; Mendez and Grose, 2018; Broockman, 2013). Overlooking other ways in which constituents aim to influence policy risks masking variation in responsiveness to different forms of political participation. Studying the case of politicians' responsiveness to protests

¹Political participation can be defined as those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take" (Verba and Nie, 1972, 2). In later works, this definition is extended to include various forms of political participation such as protest (Verba et al., 1993).

examines a form of political participation that is increasingly common and that allows politicians to update their beliefs about public opinion in between elections. Studying the effects of shared demographics in the case of protests further improves on previous designs in which constituents' demographics are only revealed in the constituents' names. Names can be overlooked or misinterpreted by the politician reading the letter, which increases the risk of measuring an intent-to-treat effect. Researchers cannot be certain that the representative who received a letter noticed the name of the signatory (e.g., Dinesen et al., 2021; Gell-Redman et al., 2018; Mendez and Grose, 2018; Broockman, 2013).

On the other hand, while research on political participation and responsiveness emphasizes the importance of constituents' demographic traits (e.g., Costa, 2021; Gell-Redman et al., 2018; Lowande et al., 2019), evidence is less robust for the effects of demographics when accounting for constituents' policy preferences (e.g., Leighley and Oser, 2018, 330). Constituents' demographics are correlated with their policy preferences and therefore with their party vote choice (e.g., Bornschier et al., 2021; Junn and Masuoka, 2020). Thus, assessing how responsive politicians are to constituents with varying demographics risks capturing politicians' ability to infer whether the constituents are their voters.

Notably, Dinesen et al. (2021) account for the declared voting intention of constituents writing letters to politicians and find that politicians are nevertheless less responsive to constituents who are racial minorities. However, this approach is different from accounting for shared policy preferences, as politicians either receive an additional incentive to be responsive (the declared vote intention) or not. Additionally, declaring a vote intention instead of a policy preference is different as it could be read by politicians as a simple

phrase added by the constituent to gain attention and incentivize a response. An improved control would be to inform every politician in the sample about the constituent's policy preference and vary whether politicians agree with the policy preference or not. This enables estimating the effects of shared demographics while controlling for shared policy preferences. Thus, to increase the precision of estimates, I suggest reassessing the effects of constituents' demographic traits on politicians' responsiveness by including constituents' policy preferences as a covariate.

With these two alterations to the wider literature, I further contribute to the protest literature an argument on why shared traits and preferences between politicians and protesters play particularly important roles during protests. I argue that two protest characteristics increase their importance for politicians' responsiveness. First, the identities of the constituents protesting are usually visible and relatively easy to identify, potentially increasing politicians' felt responsibility to represent those who are similar to themselves. Second, protests are not institutionalized and are often perceived as less legitimate means to influence political decision-making than other forms of participation. This increases politicians' need to justify their responsive reaction to protesters' demands, incentivizing responsiveness to protesters with whom the politician clearly shares policy preferences.

Responsiveness to shared demographics

Sharing demographic traits with constituents can be a signal of a similar upbringing, background, or deep-running values that transcend political camps. Research on political participation and responsiveness suggests that constituents' demographic traits, and whether these traits match those of politicians, affect the likelihood that their demands are considered (Lowande et al.,

2019). This is most often studied in the case of shared ethnicity or race. Politicians are more likely to respond to members of their own ethnic group (Dinesen et al., 2021; Grose, 2005; McClendon, 2016), which also applies to black legislators being more responsive to minority constituents (Broockman, 2013). Similarly, female legislators are found to respond at higher rates to women (Magni and Ponce de Leon, 2021). Many experimental studies have focused on the effects of shared demographics revealed by constituents' names on e-mails sent to politicians. Here, constituents' identities are only revealed via their names. Thus, shared demographics are found to be important for politicians' responsiveness to other forms of political participation — even when they are not as easily identifiable. It seems likely that politicians will be differentially responsive to stronger signals as in the case of protests.

Protesters' demographics are usually relatively easy to identify and shape the perception of a protest.² Who protesters represent affects how bystanders perceive a protest, such as its peacefulness. For example, ethnic minorities protesting are perceived as more violent and less peaceful, regardless of whether they are more violent or not (Edwards and Arnon, 2021). Such biased perceptions can have negative policy implications for protesters, as the comparative advantage of using nonviolent tactics decreases for minorities (Manekin and Mitts, 2022), diminishing their policy successes. Similarly, youth protests are likely to be perceived differently than other protests. Youth activism is often associated with more violent and radical tactics. This might lead older politicians to favor protesters who are older as well,

²An exception might be more violent protests or protests in repressive contexts during which protesters veil themselves to stay unrecognized. However, in democratic contexts, these are rare events and the large majority of protests are peaceful.

whereas younger politicians might sympathize with younger protesters who are under-represented in parliaments and are more likely to vote for younger politicians such as themselves (e.g., Sevi, 2021).

Facing protests that vary in who protesters represent (i.e., an ethnic minority, mostly women, mostly youth), politicians might feel an increased responsibility to represent constituents with whom they share traits to adhere to the idea of descriptive representation. I hypothesize that *politicians are likely to be more responsive to constituents with whom they share demographic traits (H1)*.

A caveat could be that politicians might consider the effort protesters are making when protesting (i.e., their costs). This effort varies across groups. For example, minorities tend to have fewer resources and face higher risks of repressive policing, which increases their costs to protest. Gause (2020) theorizes that representatives consider the costs protesters face when protesting as a signal of how important an issue is for constituents. The fact that protesters choose to go out on the street despite the high risk of facing police violence shows that their demands are highly salient to them. Therefore, representatives are more responsive to minority protesters as protesting is more costly for them than for other majority members. The results show that roll-call voting from 1991 to 1997 in the US was responsive to civil rights protests at the time and that effects were mostly driven by Democrats who shared policy preferences with the protesters and female representatives. Further research emphasizes increased responsiveness from female politicians. In the United States, female legislators are more likely to respond to requests than their male colleagues, particularly in conservative districts where their election is most contested (Thomsen and Sanders, 2020), and to contact agencies on behalf of female constituents (Lowande et al., 2019). This implies that

female legislators might have different incentives to be responsive than male legislators, which is corroborated by studies showing that citizens' expectations are higher for female- and lower for male legislators (Butler et al., 2022; Costa, 2021).

Thus, female politicians who are under-represented themselves are likely more aware of the increased costs for other under-represented groups when protesting than their male colleagues, which should increase politicians' incentives to react responsively to protesters. I expect that *female politicians are likely to be more responsive not only to female constituents but other under-represented groups, such as ethnic minorities (H2)*.

Responsiveness to shared policy preferences

When politicians share constituents' policy preferences, responsive reactions to constituents' demands are likelier than when their policy preferences differ. Politicians can stick to their political program and it can even offer an opportunity to act upon a policy proposal that hasn't been implemented yet.

Studies have examined which policy preferences politicians engage with, focusing on how they respond to partisan versus non-partisan influences. For example, Öhberg and Naurin (2016) find that Swedish politicians are less responsive to citizens who make policy demands via e-mail that are not in line with the politicians' party position. This holds even when politicians have strong personal incentives to respond to non-partisan interests. Similarly, politicians offer more to co-partisans than to non-partisans in bargaining situations (Sheffer et al., 2023).

Vis-à-vis constituents who vary in demographics and policy preferences, it seems likely that politicians would care more about shared policy preferences than demographics. Sitting politicians have the duty to fulfill their mandate and represent their party's political interests. However, this in-

tuitive expectation is questioned by studies that vary politicians' electoral incentives to respond to constituents. Broockman (2013) varies citizens' residency and therefore eligibility to vote, finding that black legislators remain more likely to respond to black citizens. Varying citizens' declared voting intention, Dinesen et al. (2021) find that Danish legislators demonstrate ethnocentric responsiveness despite strong electoral incentives. Further, in the US, legislators remain less likely to respond to immigrants, regardless of the constituent's nativity or vote intention (Gell-Redman et al., 2018). Yet, in the case of internal migrants from the same country, politicians in India do care about electoral incentives and whether migrants are likely to vote in their constituency or not (Gaikwad and Nellis, 2021). Moreover, Dinesen et al. (2021) add that Danish legislators with more pro-immigration attitudes are more likely to respond to ethnic minorities who are likely to be immigrants. Thus, among politicians who are substantially interested in minorities' interests, shared demographics are less relevant to their responsiveness.

While there are some differing findings on the importance of shared policy preferences for politicians' responsiveness, there are strong reasons to expect them to be detrimental in the case of *protests*. Protests differ from other forms of political participation as they are less institutionalized and often perceived as a less legitimate form of political participation to affect political decision-making (Gilljam et al., 2012). In contrast to election outcomes, protests do not offer a political mandate to make political decisions. Moreover, opinions vary on how representative protests are of public opinion. It is not apparent how many people share protesters' views. While it is easy to identify how many people are on the streets, chances are high that many more share protesters' opinions. Due to collective action problems, individuals are likely to free-ride and stay away from the streets even if they agree with the

protesters. At the same time, it could also be that a protest event leads the public to overestimate how popular protesters' demands are. Protests can be a form of participation that enables a small group to gain a lot of attention and raise awareness for a marginal issue.

Thus, it is uncertain to what extent the public or party colleagues approve of responsive reactions to protesters' demands. This is likely to shape politicians' incentives to favor protesters with whom they share policy preferences. If protesters raise demands that are in line with a politician's and their party's policy preferences, it is clear that there is a mandate to respond to these interests. Additionally, it is easier for a politician to justify their responsive reaction to protesters' demands to their own party.

I expect that *politicians are likely to be more responsive to protesters who raise demands that are in line with the politician's policy preferences (H3)*. I further expect that politicians need to consider first and foremost their electoral popularity and re-election. When protesters' demands align with politicians' interests, engaging with these protesters can enhance politicians' credibility and support among their existing voter base. However, it is less certain whether protesters with whom a politician shares demographic traits are part of the existing voter base. This uncertainty incentivizes politicians to prioritize protesters with whom they share policy preferences. I hypothesize that *politicians are likely to be more responsive to protesters with whom they share policy preferences than demographics (H4)*.

Experimental design

To test the hypotheses, I conducted a 16-factorial pre-registered³ vignette experiment with local politicians in Sweden. In the following, I explain why Sweden is relevant for studying politicians' differential responsiveness to protests, how treatment and outcome measures were designed, and what implications the sample demographics have on the empirical tests.

The case of Sweden

To estimate the effect of shared demographics and policy preferences between protesters and politicians on responsiveness, it is particularly relevant to examine the responsiveness of local politicians in Swedish municipalities. First, protests are usually local events during which protesters raise demands toward their local governments and politicians. Local politicians are therefore exposed much more directly to protests than national politicians. Additionally, Swedish local governments bear widespread responsibility for popular protest issues, such as primary and secondary schools, health care, housing, roads, and sanitation. They decide over large budgets, levy income taxes, and have large autonomy. Local self-governance is an important trait of Swedish politics and is anchored in the constitution. Voters in Sweden care deeply about local politics (e.g., Gren and Leuschner, 2024), and public goods provision, which is administered at the local level, is a common topic for contention and protests (Taghizadeh, 2015; Uba, 2016). In turn, previous research points out that Swedish local politicians are highly responsive to

³The pre-registration can be accessed here: https://osf.io/yzn3j/?view_only=199e4fc4c8354e12845cd5e5a5d12741.

their voters' preferences (Butler et al., 2016; Öhberg and Naurin, 2016).

Second and in terms of protests, data from ACLED (Raleigh et al., 2023) between 2021 and 2022 suggest that Sweden experiences an above-average number of protests, compared to other European countries and adjusting for population size (see Figure C1). These protests occur across the country (see Figure C2) and only some municipalities with very low population densities did not experience any protests between 2021 and 2022.

Overall, Sweden is a mobilized country in which local politics is salient, and local politicians are incentivized to be highly responsive to local demands. Empirical evidence shows that local politicians often adhere to these expectations and react responsively to constituents' demands. This makes Sweden a highly salient case where high responsiveness to constituents' demands can be expected.

Survey sample

The experiment was included in the survey panel of politicians (round 21) and fielded between November 2023 and January 2024. The panel has been active since 2011 and surveys politicians twice a year. Politicians are sent an e-mail containing a link to the survey. Experience shows that the likelihood that politicians themselves (and not their staff members) open this link is very high since local politicians' offices are small and only a few employ staff. The response rate was 39% (Table D2) and the sample consists of 1124 respondents (34% female, $M_{Age} = 4.57$ where 5 means 60 to 69 years old, $SD_{Age} = 1.33$, see Table D1 for further summary statistics). I excluded 41 respondents as they dropped out of the survey before the outcome measure. A comparison between politicians who were invited to the survey and participated, and those who did not, shows that there are no observable sys-

tematic differences between the two groups (Table D2). There are slightly more men and fewer women who have participated in the survey and slightly more politicians with a university degree.

Treatment

The treatment vignette (Figure 1) contains four treatments varying protesters' migration background, policy preference, age, and gender with each two levels ($2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$). The vignette describes a fictitious protest that is described to occur in the politician's municipality. It is fictitious to avoid deceiving politicians (see Naurin and Öhberg, 2021) and allow a targeted manipulation of individual protest traits. The protest concerns the municipality's budget for schools, which lies within the responsibility of local governments in Sweden and is a common protest issue in Sweden (see Appendix A).

Protesters' demographics are described in different ways. Protesters' migration background is varied by describing the neighborhood in which the protest is taking place. Treating migration background risks inducing a strong social desirability bias if the treatment is too obvious⁴. Therefore, the migration background treatment is included as an informative description of where the protest is taking place. This description takes advantage of the circumstance that neighborhoods are highly ethnically segregated in Sweden (Malmberg et al., 2018). Residential segregation measured as the

⁴In the analysis, I check that none of the treatments, including the migration background treatment increased politicians' likelihood to opt out of the survey (see Table F1).

Imagine the following scenario: In your municipality, a group of residents assembled to protest peacefully on the matter of schooling. The 100 protesters are from a [MIGRATION BACKGROUND] live. The protest organizer spoke to the crowd: “We want to be loud and clear: We protest [POLICY PREFERENCE]!” The crowd, mostly [AGE 1] [GENDER] in their [AGE 2], cheered in support.

- MIGRATION BACKGROUND: [segregated neighborhood where mostly people with a migration background] or [neighborhood where mostly Swedes]
- POLICY PREFERENCE: [against our system of school choice for our children! We need more investments in our public schools and less independent schools.], or [for more freedom to choose a school for our children! We need more investments in independent schools.]
- AGE 1: [younger] or [older]
- AGE 2: [20s] or [60s]
- GENDER: [women] or [men]

Figure 1: **Treatment vignette.**

variability in population composition⁵ has steadily increased in Sweden since the 1990s (Malmberg and Clark, 2021). Focusing on a neighborhood introduces a bundled treatment as a neighborhood where mostly people with a migration background live is usually characterized by a lower socio-economic status as well. Keeping this limitation in mind, I prefer the more subtle description of the neighborhood to a direct description of protesters' migration background. In the case of the latter, respondents would most likely also think about their socio-economic status, which is a general limitation of studies varying constituents' migration background, ethnicity, or race. Age is manipulated by explicitly mentioning that protesters' are either younger and in their 20s or older and in their 60s. The age groups are chosen to be clearly distinct but still reasonable ages for a parent or teacher. Gender is varied by describing that either mostly women or mostly men are present.

Next, protesters' left-right policy preferences are varied by changing protesters' demands. The vignette introduces the protest to be about more investments into schools, which is a common demand among Swedish protesters concerned with schooling⁶. An issue that delimits the political left from the political right in Sweden is the freedom of choice policy for school entry. The freedom to choose between a public and an independent school ("friskola") was first introduced in the 1990s and continues to be a line of contention between

⁵Variability in population composition is defined as the "standard deviation in the proportion of the neighborhood population that are non-European migrants across neighborhoods" (Malmberg and Clark, 2021, 263).

⁶See for example the statement by the president of Sweden's Teacher union in Stockholm <https://via.tt.se/pressmeddelande/demonstration-mot-nedskarningarna-inom-skolan?publisherId=3236597&releaseId=3346968>.

both political camps. Freedom of choice or freedom to choose a school are common slogans that are associated with the political right in Sweden. The right-wing protest demand incorporates this slogan therefore directly and calls for more investments into independent schools⁷, which should be a clear sign for politicians that protesters are leaning toward the right. In contrast, the left-wing demand states opposition to the freedom of choice and calls for more investments in public schools.

Outcome

To measure responsiveness, I asked politicians how they would react to the described protest. The response options include different efforts a politician can take to place protesters' issue on the political agenda as well as to avoid any form of responsiveness (Leuschner, 2024). To capture different forms of responsiveness, I vary whether politicians respond in a way that is visible to the public or only to the party. This builds on work by Naurin and Öhberg (2018) who find that party politicians in Sweden have strong norms about how party colleagues should respond to citizens and prefer responses that allow for within-party changes but dislike responses that are visible to the public.

⁷While freedom of choice is uncontested among the political right, *more* investments into independent schools might be less popular. This might imply that right-wing politicians are less responsive to the right-wing demand than left-wing politicians are to the left-wing demand. I discuss this possibility extensively in the results and discussion section and provide evidence suggesting that right-wing politicians are in general less responsive, regardless of the less popular right-wing demand.

A first responsive reaction might be to organize a meeting with protesters to familiarize oneself with the demands and initiate dialogue. Next, talking with party colleagues and discussing with them protesters' demands is a way to place the issue on the party's agenda. This survey item has been used in previous research to measure responsiveness (Öhberg and Naurin, 2016). Finally, a direct way to put forward the protesters' issue is to make it a talking point in the assembly. Importantly, since protesters are described as raising a financial matter, the assembly is an appropriate arena to discuss this issue. The responsive items are combined to a responsiveness index reaching from 1 to 5.

I further add non-responsive reactions. Simply ignoring a protest can be a low-cost option (see also Bishara, 2015). Another way to act dutifully but avoid being responsive to protesters is to make sure that a protest is peaceful and not a disturbance to others. In Sweden, politicians have no direct control over the deployment of police officers, confining them to get informed about the security status. Therefore, the response item suggests the politician would "make sure" that protesters were peaceful. The wording of the question is displayed in Figure 2.

Measurements and empirical tests

I measure whether politicians share demographic traits (age, migration background, gender) or policy preferences (being either left- or right-wing) with protesters. For shared demographic traits, I asked how old politicians were on a categorical scale ranging from below 30 to over 70, whether they were born in Sweden or another country, and whether they identified as female, male, or with another gender category.

In terms of policy preferences, I capture whether politicians are left- or right-wing based on their party affiliation. Parties are clustered in two ide-

What do you do? Please indicate how likely you are to choose the following options:

Responsive

- Suggest a personal meeting with protesters.
- Take the matter of new investments further and get others in your party to listen to the protesters' arguments.
- Try to put the matter of new investments into schools on the agenda of an upcoming assembly meeting.

Non-responsive

- Avoid any hasty response from you.
- Make sure that the protest event was peaceful and that no disturbances occurred.

Figure 2: **Outcome survey items.**

ological camps in Sweden, where the Feminist Initiative, Left Party, Green Party, and Social Democrats belong to the left camp and the Center Party, Liberal Party, Christian Democrats, and the Moderate Party belong to the right camp. As a populist radical right party, the Sweden Democrats are politically right but deviate in economic values from the other right-wing parties. While the right-wing camp holds economically liberal values, the Sweden Democrats support social welfare and the public sector for Swedish citizens. I therefore exclude politicians from the Sweden Democratic Party from the right-wing camp in the pre-registered analyses ($N = 35$). The robustness checks include Sweden Democrats and the results remain robust (see Figure 4).

To test whether politicians react more responsively to protesters with whom they share demographics or policy preferences, I rely on interacting politicians' self-reported traits and (party) preferences with protesters' traits and demands. In the Appendix, I show the power analyses for the empirical tests (Figures E1, E2, E3, E4). This is most relevant for models that include politicians' demographics as power decreases when comparing, for example, how younger politicians react to younger or older protesters as there are few young politicians. The limited variation in demographic traits among survey respondents reflects, however, the demographics of Swedish local politicians.

Results

I test whether politicians' differential responsiveness to protesters depends on whether they share demographic traits or policy preferences⁸. I calculate the average marginal interaction effects (AMIE, see further Egami and Imai (2019)) between politicians' and protesters' age, migration backgrounds, and gender (H1), politicians' gender and protesters' migration background (H2), and politicians' and protesters' policy preferences (H3). These estimates represent the effects induced by the treatment combination beyond the sum of the marginal effects of each treatment (Egami and Imai, 2019, 531). I further evaluate H4, whether politicians are more responsive to shared policy preferences than to shared demographics.

Results are displayed in Figure 3 (see Table F3 for a tabular view). Shared demographics in terms of age (AMIE of 0.06 (p-value 0.20)), migration background (AMIE of 0.19 (p-value 0.26)), or gender (AMIE of 0.14 (p-value 0.26)) do not significantly affect responsiveness. Further, female and male politicians react to a similar extent responsively to native protesters and protesters with a migration background from a segregated neighborhood (AMIE of -0.18 (p-value 0.16)). These findings suggest that uncertainty is large on whether shared demographic traits increase politicians' responsiveness. Together, the results fail to provide evidence in line with H1 and H2.

⁸To check if politicians were attentive and read the protest scenario carefully, I asked whether the protest was peaceful. The treatment vignette specified that the protest was peaceful. The large majority of politicians agreed that the protest was peaceful ($M = 4.3$, $SD = 0.86$, $Median = 5$ on a 5-point Likert scale).

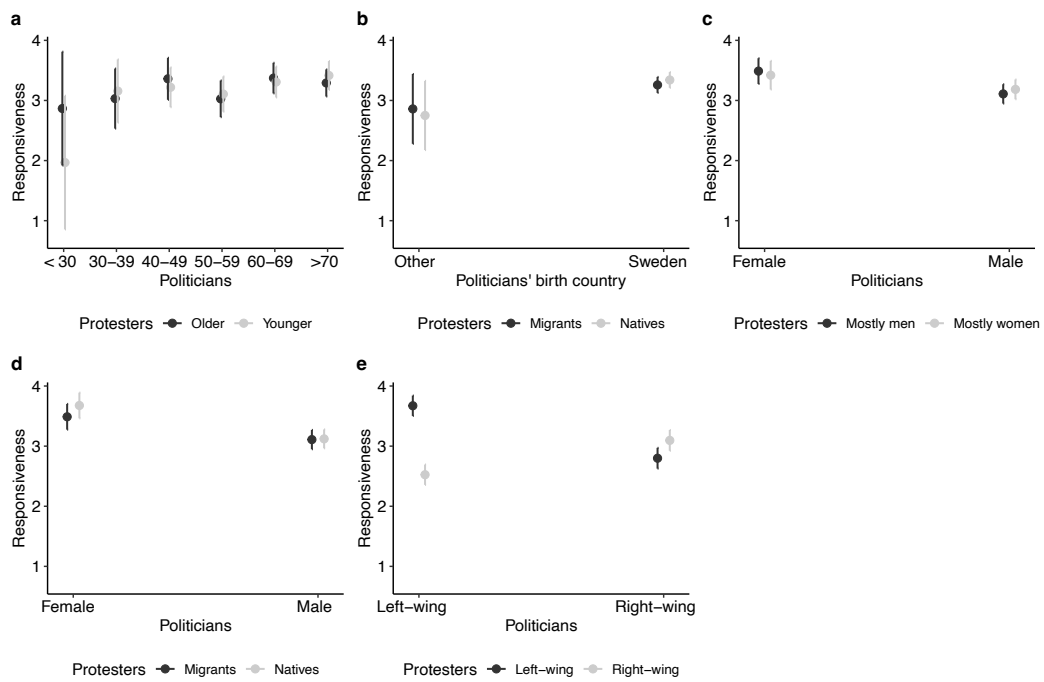


Figure 3: **Protesters' demographics and policy preferences on responsiveness.** The interaction plots show the effects of protesters' demographics and left-right policy preferences on politicians' responsiveness, dependent on politicians' demographics and left-right policy preferences.

Figure 3e shows that there are significant differences in line with H3 that show that shared policy preferences predict increased responsiveness. Left-wing politicians are significantly more likely to react responsively to left-wing protesters than to right-wing protesters (AMIE of 1.44 (p-value < 0.01)). The difference in responsiveness between protest groups is asymmetric as it is overall larger for left-wing politicians than for right-wing politicians. When comparing the coefficients of interest for the effects of shared demographic traits to the effects of shared policy preferences, unsurprisingly, the latter affects responsiveness to a greater extent than shared demographics, which is in line with H4 (see Table F4).

Given the evidence presented, I fail to reject the null hypotheses regarding demographic traits. I make sure that the results do not stem from a lack of statistical power (Figures E1, E2, E3) and ensure that these results are not due to politicians being unable to relate to some of the protest scenarios presented in the vignette. Table F2 shows that politicians could relate the most to a protest where mostly women were present (0.19 points on a 5-point Likert scale). This might reflect that the protest's issue is schooling, which is commonly perceived as important for women as mothers or caretakers. Politicians could relate the least to the scenario in which protesters raised right-wing demands, which is likely less popular and more controversial than the left-wing demand. I address this circumstance in the following section. In any case, right-wing politicians are found to be more responsive to right-wing demands, and the differences in their ability to relate to described protest scenarios do not appear to explain the null effects of shared demographic traits.

Asymmetric responsiveness to shared policy preferences

To ensure that the results concerning shared policy preferences hold across the three measured forms of responsiveness, I disaggregate the index of responsiveness into its components of listening to protesters' demands, engaging party colleagues, or setting protesters' issue on the assembly's agenda⁹. Figure 4 shows that left- and right-wing politicians are similarly likely to listen to both groups, even though left-wing politicians are slightly less inclined to listen to right-wing protesters (see also Table F5). The asymmetry in differential responsiveness to protesters increases between left- and right-wing politicians for two outcomes. In terms of engaging party colleagues or placing protesters' issues on the assembly's agenda, left-wing politicians are highly responsive to left-wing protesters but only minimally responsive to right-wing protesters. Right-wing politicians do not differentiate between left- and right-wing protesters as much.

To check the robustness of the findings regarding policy preferences, I rerun the models with an alternative measure for politicians' policy preferences. So far, I have used party affiliation as an indicator of a politician's attitude toward budgeting and independent schools, where right-wing parties are favorable toward independent schools (excluding Sweden Democrats) and left-wing parties are not. While the political divide between the right and left camps in Sweden is strong and long-lasting, categorizing politicians based on their party affiliation might overlook variation in attitudes toward

⁹Note that the robustness checks are exploratory. However, the pre-registration specified that the index would be disaggregated into its sub-components and that I would run regression models on the five outcome options separately. See further in Appendix B.

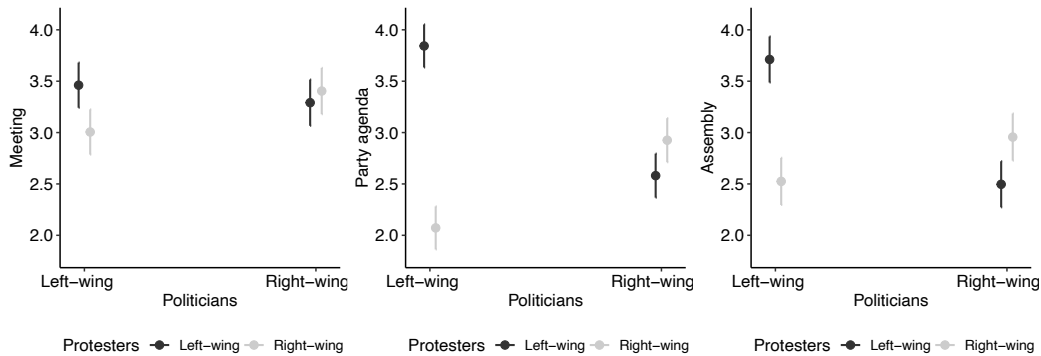


Figure 4: **Protesters' policy preferences on responsiveness indicators.** The interaction plots show the effects of protesters' left-right policy preferences on politicians' responsiveness, disaggregated by indicator and dependent on politicians' left-right policy preferences.

the schooling system within parties. To take this into account, I use a measure of politicians' attitudes toward the policy proposal of banning for-profit schools. For-profit schools are the most common type of independent school owned by companies allowed to profit from providing education. Therefore, the debate about independent schools mostly centers around for-profit schools. The survey item on for-profit schools was included in the previous survey round half a year earlier and asked "What is your attitude to the following policy proposals? Prohibit for-profit companies from running schools".¹⁰

I begin by looking at the variation in attitudes toward for-profit schools among the left-wing and right-wing camps, and the Sweden Democrats in Figure 5. Apart from the Feminist Initiative, left-wing parties strongly favor banning for-profit schools. In contrast, right-wing parties disfavor a ban but variation is much larger in the right-wing camp, including Sweden Democrats.

¹⁰From the sample, 163 politicians did not take part in the previous survey round and are therefore excluded from the following analysis.

This overview shows that protesters' right-wing demand can be expected to be much less popular for left-wing politicians than the left-wing demand for right-wing politicians.

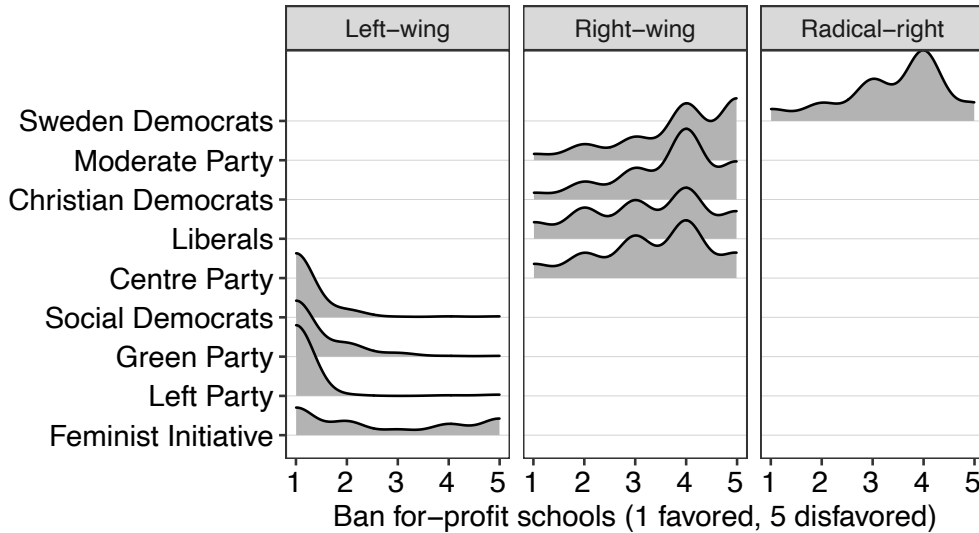


Figure 5: **Variation in politicians' for-profit school preferences.** Politicians' preferences towards the policy proposal of banning for-profit schools distributed across parties.

Next, I model heterogeneous treatment effects of protesters' demands on responsive reactions, conditional on politicians' attitudes toward for-profit schools. As an extension to the main results, these models allow for within-party differences in attitudes and include politicians from the Sweden Democrats. Figure 6 is in line with the main results and shows that politicians are more responsive to protesters with whom they share policy preferences (see also Table F6). As shown in Figure 4, politicians are similarly likely to listen to protesters with opposing views but strongly differentiate when choosing to set protesters' issue on the party's or assembly's agenda. Politicians who remain undecided and neither agree nor disagree with banning for-profit schools are as responsive to right-wing as to left-wing protesters. Further, the gap in re-

sponsiveness toward protesters with opposing views is larger among left-wing politicians who favor a ban on for-profit schools, while left-wing politicians have a higher baseline for responsiveness.

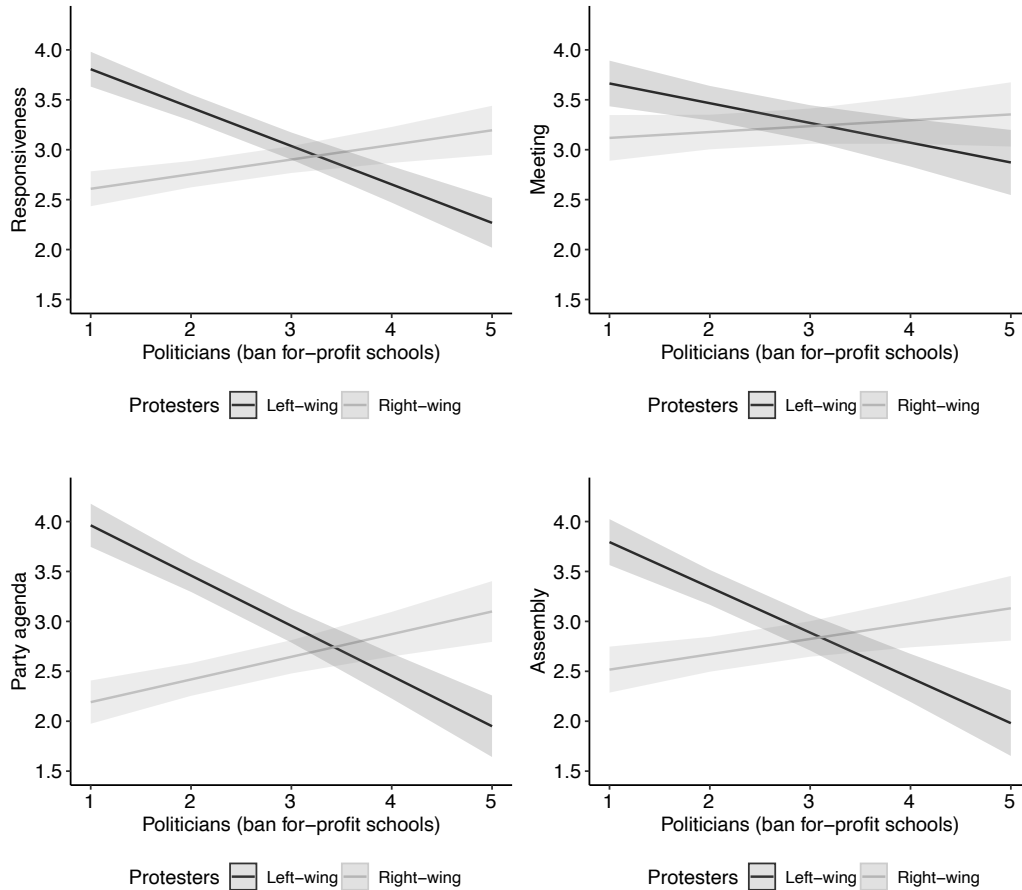


Figure 6: **Politicians' for-profit school preferences and responsiveness.** The interaction plots show the effects of protesters' left-right policy preferences on politicians' responsiveness, dependent on politicians' preferences towards banning for-profit schools in Sweden, where 1 means strongly agreeing to ban for-profit schools and 5 strongly disagreeing to banning for-profit schools.

Partisan norms on protests as political participation

The results so far consistently show that politicians react more responsively to protesters with whom they share policy preferences. Further, the analyses show that this responsiveness is asymmetric: Left-wing politicians differentiate more strongly between protesters with whom they share policy preferences and those with whom they do not, compared to right-wing politicians. However, left-wing politicians are overall more responsive than right-wing politicians. The different baselines in responsiveness between both political camps question whether this difference is an artifact of the less popular right-wing protester demand or a result of different partisan norms on responsiveness to protesters.

I run an exploratory analysis¹¹ and estimate politicians' responsiveness to right-wing and left-wing protest demands by party in Figure 7. Results for the three left-wing parties (Left Party, Green Party, Social Democrats) depict that differential responsiveness holds across the left camp. The right-wing parties Center Party, Liberals, and Christian Democrats are similarly responsive to left- as to right-wing protesters.

The Moderate Party stands out as the least responsive party within this survey context. While politicians in this party are significantly more responsive to right-wing protesters than to left-wing protesters, it is also the least responsive party to right-wing demands within the right-wing camp. Politicians from the Moderate Party also favored for-profit schools the most, making them likely to be the most favorable toward right-wing protesters' demands compared to other parties. The party's average responsiveness across

¹¹I pre-registered an analysis including politicians' attitudes toward protest legitimacy, see Appendix B.

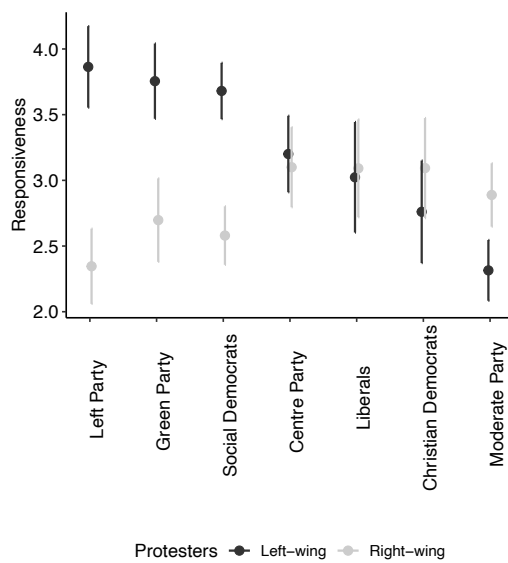


Figure 7: **Protesters’ left-right policy preferences on responsiveness by party.** The interaction plots show the effects of protesters’ policy preferences on politicians’ responsiveness, dependent on politicians’ party affiliation. The Feminist Initiative and Sweden Democrats were excluded due to the small number of responses.

all protest scenarios confirms that the Moderate Party is significantly less responsive than any other party (Figure 8, Table F7). This suggests that the gap in responsiveness between left-wing and right-wing politicians toward protesters with shared policy preferences stems from right-wing politicians, particularly those within the Moderate Party, being less responsive to protests in general. The Moderate Party’s low responsiveness to the right-wing demand further suggests that partisan norms, instead of the unpopularity of protesters’ demand, drive politicians’ responsive reactions.

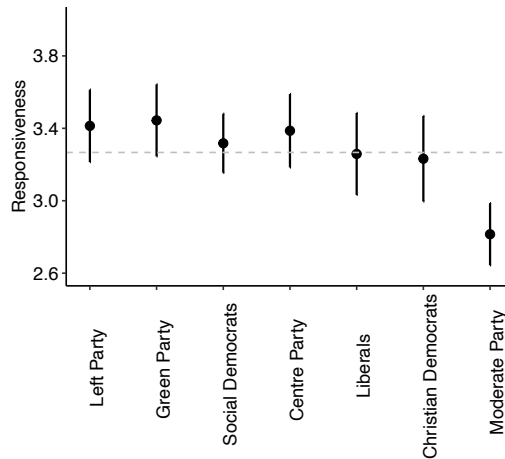


Figure 8: **Average responsiveness by party.** Marginal means of politicians’ responsiveness (by party) across all protest treatments. The dashed line shows the average responsiveness across all parties. The Feminist Initiative and Sweden Democrats were excluded due to the small number of responses.

Why would politicians from the Moderate Party react less responsively? The Moderate Party is a conservative and economically liberal party in Sweden that historically represented the economic and social elite (Berglund, 1978). In contrast to other parties to the left, the Moderate Party is not rooted in a tradition of social movements and popular protest (as is the

case for the Social Democrats, for example) and is therefore likely to relate to protests as a form of political participation differently. This might be reflected in politicians' attitudes toward protests as a form of political participation, which I explore with survey items included before the treatment. I asked politicians to what extent they agree with the statements that protests are a legitimate form of political participation, serve democracy, and are useful to local decision-makers (on a 5-point Likert scale, the order of the items was randomized).

I plot the marginal means of politicians' perceptions of protest per party and for all three outcome questions in Figure 9 (see also Table F8). Results show that politicians mostly agree that protests are legitimate and promote democracy but responses are ordered ideologically from right to left. Variation is larger in attitudes of whether protests are useful for local political decision-making. On average, politicians from the Moderate party found protests to be *not* useful for political decision-making, while politicians from the Liberals and Christian Democrats responded that they neither agreed nor disagreed on the usefulness of protests. The Left Party and Green Party agree the most with the statement that protests are useful for local decision-making, followed by the Social Democrats.

These results reveal large differences among politicians in the understanding of the role of protests in local politics. These differences are ordered on a left-right dimension, where left-wing politicians think of protests as significantly more legitimate, democracy-promoting, and useful for local decision-making than right-wing politicians. Within the right-wing camp, politicians from the Moderate Party are particularly skeptical of how useful protests are for their political decision-making and generally disagree that they are useful. These priors predict politicians' likelihood to react responsively to

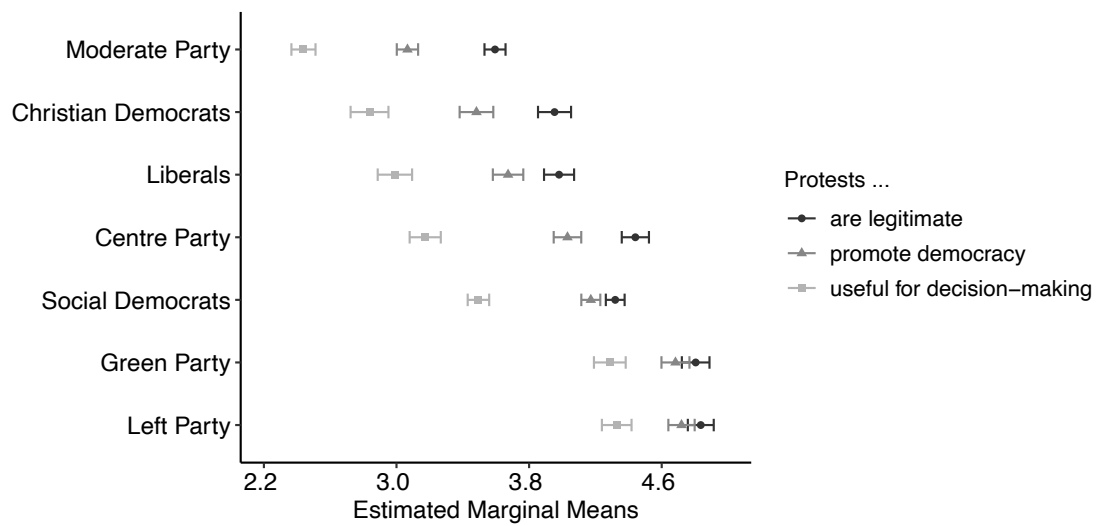


Figure 9: **Protest legitimacy perceptions across parties.** Marginal means of politicians' perceptions (by party) of whether protests are legitimate, promote democracy or are beneficial for local decision-making. The dashed lines show the average responsiveness across all parties for each survey item. The Feminist Initiative and Sweden Democrats were excluded due to the small number of responses.

protesters' demands (Table F9) and imply that right-wing politicians are more hesitant to be responsive, not only to left-wing protesters but also to right-wing protesters. While right-wing politicians are, just like left-wing politicians, more responsive to protesters with whom they share policy preferences, they are not as responsive to protesters of their own political camp as left-wing politicians are.

Discussion and conclusion

In this paper, I set out to examine the importance of shared demographic traits and policy preferences between politicians and protesters. Research finds that politicians are differentially responsive and favor constituents they perceive to share demographics like ethnicity (e.g., Dinesen et al., 2021; Costa, 2021; Lowande et al., 2019) and policy preferences (e.g., Öhberg and Naurin, 2016; Sheffer et al., 2023). In addition to previous findings, I argue that two protest characteristics make politicians' differential responsiveness to protesters more likely. First, as protesters' demographic traits are relatively easy to identify, politicians might feel an increased responsibility to react responsively to constituents with whom they share demographics and who they descriptively represent. Second, as protests are often perceived as a less legitimate form of political participation, politicians may feel an increased need to justify their responsive reactions, favoring protests that align with their policy preferences.

The results do not provide sufficient evidence in line with the hypotheses concerning shared demographics. Uncertainty is large around the estimates of the shared traits such as migration background, gender, and age. These results do not replicate previous findings on the importance of shared demo-

graphic traits in the case of constituents raising issues via written requests (e.g., Dinesen et al., 2021; Magni and Ponce de Leon, 2021; Gell-Redman et al., 2018; Mendez and Grose, 2018; Broockman, 2013). The differing results could stem from two refinements from previous experimental designs on estimating the effect of shared demographics on responsiveness. First, I took into account potential confounding as constituents with different demographics are likely to hold different policy preferences as well. Second, I addressed the risk of measuring intent to treat effects when disclosing constituents' demographics only with their name by conducting a vignette experiment in which protesters' demographic traits are explicitly mentioned.

Future studies could compare differential responsiveness across several forms of political participation to pinpoint whether the case of protests explains the lack of a significant effect of shared demographics. Additionally, while this study varies important traits such as gender, age, and migration background, this list of demographics is not exhaustive. Future research could expand this study to further traits, such as constituents' income, class background, or education.

In terms of shared policy preferences, the results show that when facing left- or right-wing protesters, politicians differentiate their responses and favor constituents who raise a demand that is aligned with their political camp (being either left- or right-wing). This further holds when measuring politicians' policy preferences with an attitude measure toward a ban on for-profit schools, the most common type of independent school in Sweden. The findings are in line with instances when politicians bargain with citizens (Sheffer et al., 2023) or when responding to citizen-initiated contact (Öhberg and Naurin, 2016).

However, the results point towards an asymmetry between left and right-

wing politicians. Left-wing politicians are more likely to differentiate and set a left-wing protest issue on the party or assembly agenda than right-wing politicians are to do the same for a right-wing issue. I investigated whether this difference in responsiveness stems from the circumstance that protesters' right-wing demand was inherently less popular than the left-wing demand and provided evidence that this is not the case. Disaggregating responsiveness by party shows that lower responsiveness from the political right mostly results from low responsiveness from the Moderate Party. At the same time, politicians from the Moderate Party on average disfavor a ban on for-profit schools the most, which lets me expect that this party should be most responsive to the right-wing demand. Bear in mind that while the right-wing demand is more unpopular, it nevertheless provides a strong partisan cue that makes clear that protesters are not left-wing, due to the included slogan "freedom to choose" that is used and popularized by Sweden's political right. The Moderate Party is significantly more responsive to the right-wing demand than to the left-wing demand but still, on average, the least responsive to the right-wing demand. Additional data shows that politicians from the Moderate Party hold the most negative views about protests as a legitimate and useful form of political participation. These views predict politicians' likelihood of engaging with protesters' demands.

The findings replicate previous research finding that right-wing parties have a lower acceptance for protests (Gilljam et al., 2012) and are found to meet less often with different interest organizations, including protest groups (Giugni and Grasso, 2018). Further research could investigate whether the found pattern of low responsiveness among right-wing parties extends to populist radical right parties. This paper is limited in investigating responsiveness to protest among the populist radical right party of the Sweden

Democrats due to the low number of respondents. However, the responsiveness of these parties to protests could be interesting to study, as they share the understanding to represent “the people” for whom protest is considered a common form of participation and some parties even share ties with social movements (for example the protest group PEGIDA in the case of the AfD in Germany). Scholars could test whether populist parties are more inclined to react responsively to protesters than other right-wing parties.

In conclusion, protesters’ policy demands affect their chances of receiving a responsive reaction and setting an issue onto the political agenda. Yet, protest is a form of political participation that comes with priors about its relevance for political decision-making. The perceived legitimacy of political participation is important to consider not just empirically, but also theoretically, as it shapes politicians’ incentives to be responsive to their constituents. The strategic implications for protesters are that left-wing protesters need to ensure the support from left-wing politicians as their responsiveness is high when it is clear that they share policy preferences. In contrast, right-wing protesters face the challenge that right-wing politicians perceive protests less favorably than left-wing politicians, and these perceptions affects their responsiveness to protests in general. This means that right-wing protesters have an incentive to formulate demands that are moderate and partly appeal to left-wing politicians as well.

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Appendices A to F for “Asymmetric Responsiveness: The Effects of Protesters’ Demographics and Policy Preferences on the Political Agenda”

Contents

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A Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in compliance with the American Political Science Association's *Principles and Guidance for Human Subjects Research* and the researchers' responsible Ethics Review Board. The survey participants were recruited through the pre-existing online survey panel of local politicians via e-mail. Before participation, participants were informed that they would participate in a survey that was conducted for research purposes, what their participation entailed, that they could terminate participation at any time, that the study was anonymous, that the study would not pose any physiological or psychological harm, and that the anonymized data was intended for publication in scientific journals. While I did not deceive participants, I manipulated participants' perceptions of political behavior. However, the treatment vignette did not deviate from what participants are exposed to in everyday life and specified that it was a fictive text. Participants received contact details if they had concerns or questions. The data was fully anonymized and due to the large sample size, the risk of participant identification is minute.

B Pre-registration

The survey was fielded between November 2023 and January 2024. Before obtaining the data in March, I pre-registered the analysis. The following pre-registration for the study is also available on OSF under the link https://osf.io/yzn3j/?view_only=199e4fc4c8354e12845cd5e5a5d12741.

I followed the pre-registration in the main analysis of the manuscript. There are the following deviations between the manuscript and pre-registration:

First, note that the preregistration does not mention of migration background as a shared demographic to be tested. At the time of the pre-registration and before the data collection, it was not clear whether the survey would include a question about politicians' migration background due to ethical reasons. The final data do include an item asking politicians in which country they were born (Sweden, outside of Sweden in a European country, outside of Sweden in a non-European country). I use this item to estimate whether politicians born in Sweden are differentially responsive to protesters who are either natives or have a migration background (see Figure 3 and Table F3). This is an additional test of H3 stating that politicians are more responsive to protesters with whom they share demographic traits. The previous research discussed in the main manuscript and this paper's theoretical framework suggest that politicians are likely to be more responsive to protesters with whom they share an ethnic background and therefore a demographic. Note that the design of the treatment was unaffected.

Second, the pre-registration names the main outcome of interest "Engagement" instead of "Responsiveness". Apart from the name, all measures stayed the same. Therefore, the hypotheses in the pre-registration use the word "to engage" instead of reacting responsively. The direction of the hypotheses is not affected by this difference in wording.

Third, the description of the dependent variable mentions that politicians could take "the matter of new investments into roads on the agenda". This is a typo in the pre-registration and the survey measured the correct item of matter of new investments into schools on the agenda as described in the main text.

Fourth, instead of "ethnicity", I use the words "migration background to label this treatment level in the main text, as this better describes what the treatment varies. Similarly, instead of "ideology", I write "policy preference" in the main text.

Preregistration Template from AsPredicted.org

Data collection

No, no data have been collected for this study yet.

Hypothesis **Updated**

H1: Politicians are more likely to engage with protesters with whom they share demographic characteristics, such as gender and age.

H2: Politicians are more likely to engage with protesters with whom they share political attitudes.

H3: Female politicians are more likely to engage with minority protesters than male politicians.

H4: Politicians are more likely to engage with protesters with whom they share political attitudes than with protesters with whom they share demographic characteristics, such as gender and age.

Dependent variable

The outcome is the respondents' likelihood to engage with the protesters. The variable is measured as an index with three sub-components. These sub-components ask respondents whether they would suggest a personal meeting with protesters, take the matter of new investments further and get others in your party to listen to the protesters' arguments, try to put the matter of new investments into roads on the agenda of an upcoming assembly meeting.

If internal consistency justifies it, I will construct an index from the engagement outcomes. The index averages respondent's likelihood across the three outcome measures that capture whether a respondent would suggest a personal meeting with protesters, take the matter of new investments further and get others in your party to listen to the protesters' arguments, try to put the matter of new investments into roads on the agenda of an upcoming assembly meeting.

In addition to the three engagement outcomes, I include two outcomes that avoid engagement with protesters.

Survey items will be shown in a randomized order and ideally shown on the same page as the treatment. The response scale is a 5-point Likert-scale from 'Very likely' to 'Very unlikely'.

Below are all outcome response options:

What do you do? Please indicate how likely you are to choose the following options:

[ENGAGEMENT OUTCOMES]

Suggest a personal meeting with protesters.

Take the matter of new investments further and get others in your party to listen to the protesters' arguments.

Try to put the matter of new investments into roads on the agenda of an upcoming assembly meeting.

[NON-ENGAGEMENT OUTCOMES]

Avoid any hasty response from you.

Make sure that the protest event was peaceful and that no disturbances occurred.

Conditions

The manipulated variable is the perception of who the protest participants are.

To test my hypotheses, I included a vignette experiment for Swedish local politicians in the Swedish online survey panel "Panel of Politicians". The experiment follows a 2x2x2x2 factorial design, where protesters' ethnicity, ideology, age, and gender are randomly varied.

To estimate how politicians respond to different protest characteristics, every participant reads a vignette that describes a local protest for which four identities (ethnicity, ideology, age, and gender) are randomly varied. The protest concerns the issue of schooling. The treatment vignette avoids any deception of the respondents. I follow the research practice by Naurin and Öhberg (2021) and begin the experimental vignette with: "Imagine the following scenario".

The treatment vignette is structured the following:

Imagine the following scenario: In your municipality, a group of residents assembled to protest peacefully on the matter of schooling. The 100 protesters are from a [ETHNICITY] live. The protest organizer spoke to the crowd: "We want to be loud and clear: We protest [IDEOLOGY]!" The crowd, mostly [AGE 1] [GENDER] in their [AGE 2], cheered in support.

ETHNICITY: [segregated neighborhood where mostly people with a migration background] or [neighborhood where mostly Swedes]

IDEOLOGY: [against our system of school choice for our children! We need more investments into our public schools and less independent schools.], or [for more freedom to choose a school for our children! We need more investments in independent schools.]

AGE: [younger; 20s] or [older; 60s]

GENDER: [women] or [men]

Analyses **Updated**

First, if internal consistency justifies it, I will construct an index from the engagement outcomes. The index averages respondent's likelihood across the three outcome measures that capture whether a respondent would suggest a personal meeting with protesters, take the matter of new investments further and get others in your party to listen to the protesters' arguments, try to put the matter of new investments into roads on the agenda of an upcoming assembly meeting.

Second, I will test the stated hypotheses:

H1: Politicians are more likely to engage with protesters with whom they share demographic characteristics, such as gender and age.

H2: Politicians are more likely to engage with protesters with whom they share political attitudes.

H3: Female politicians are more likely to engage with minority protesters than male politicians.

H4: Politicians are more likely to engage with protesters with whom they share political attitudes than with protesters with whom they share demographic characteristics, such as gender and age.

I test these hypotheses by making the following comparisons:

H1 for gender: female politicians' likelihood of engagement with female protesters and male politicians' likelihood of engagement with male protesters vs. female politicians' likelihood of engagement with male protesters and male politicians' likelihood of engagement with female protesters.

H1 for age: The older a politician is, the less likely they are to engage with young protesters (the treatment level specifies the young protester to be 27 years old)

H2: The more left-wing/right-wing a politician is, the more likely they are to engage with protesters that raise a left-wing/right-wing political demand (left-wing treatment level: "against our system of school choice for our children! We need more investments in our public schools and less independent schools") and the less likely they are to engage with protesters that raise a right-wing/left-wing political demand (right-wing treatment level: "for more freedom to choose a school for our children! We need more investments into independent schools."). I exclude politicians that

identify as Sweden Democrats from the right-wing category as they do not converge with other Swedish right-wing parties on the matter of independent schools.

H3: Female politicians' likelihood of engagement with protesters from a segregated neighborhood where mostly people with a migration background vs. male politicians' likelihood of engagement with protesters from a segregated neighborhood where mostly people with a migration background

If statistical power allows it, I will test H4 the following way: Among protesters with whom politicians do not share demographic characteristics, the more left-wing/right-wing a politician is, the more likely they are to engage with protesters that raise a left-wing/right-wing political demand (left-wing treatment level: "against our system of school choice for our children! We need more investments in our public schools and less independent schools") and the less likely they are to engage with protesters that raise a right-wing/left-wing political demand (right-wing treatment level: "for more freedom to choose a school for our children! We need more investments into independent schools.").

I exclude politicians that identify as Sweden Democrats from the right-wing category as they do not converge with other Swedish right-wing parties on the matter of independent schools.

The experiment follows a 2x2x2x2 factorial design, where protesters' ethnicity, ideology, age, and gender are randomly varied. I calculate average marginal component effects and average component interaction effects.

Outliers and Exclusions

The data will be collected through the online survey panel Panel of Politicians in Sweden. After collecting the data, the survey results will be anonymized and shared with the researcher.

The researcher will exclude participants who do not self-identify as Swedish local politicians, do not pass the attention checks, or show conspicuous response behavior (e.g., straightlining, short participation duration).

Sample Size

All participants of the survey (if they are a Swedish local politician) will be analyzed, excluding participants who failed attention checks or who show conspicuous response behavior (e.g., straightlining, short participation duration). The total sample size was unknown before the completion of the data collection.

Sample size rationale:

Following the hypotheses, the analysis is dependent on subgroup analyses comparing, for example, female politicians' engagement with female protesters and male politicians' engagement with male protesters to female politicians' engagement with male protesters and male politicians' engagement with female protesters. The sample size and the size of the relevant subgroups (see hypotheses) were unknown beforehand but previous surveys from the panel let me anticipate around 1000 participants.

An a-priori power analysis (performed in R, using the "pwr" package) showed that with a power of 0.8 and an expected small effect size of 0.15, I would at least need 346 respondents per subgroup. Previous survey rounds suggested that this number of respondents would be available per subgroup. For this reason, I chose to avoid repeated tasks (e.g., repeating the treatment two times for every respondent), which could risk biasing the results as respondents learn about the nature of the task.

Other

In addition to the hypotheses, I will disaggregate the engagement index into its sub-components and regress the treatments on all five response options (see description of the dependent variable). If statistical power allows it, I will further test for heterogeneous treatment effects depending on respondents' attitudes toward protest legitimacy and expect voter share in the protest scenario described in the treatment vignette.

I might conduct further explanatory analyses with additional demographic characteristics and attitude responses included in the survey panel.

Name

Protester Identities and Politicians' Engagement - Study Description

Type of Project

Experiment

Other

No response

C Case description

Protests in Sweden

Figure C1 shows the occurrences of protests in a selection of European countries with similar population sizes as Sweden with the inclusion of Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. Together, Figures C1a and b show that Sweden is a highly mobilized country experiencing many protests, especially in relation to the country's population size. These protests in recent years include protests that concern schooling and in particular schooling budgets. Teachers, students, and members of the public have been noted to attend these protests.

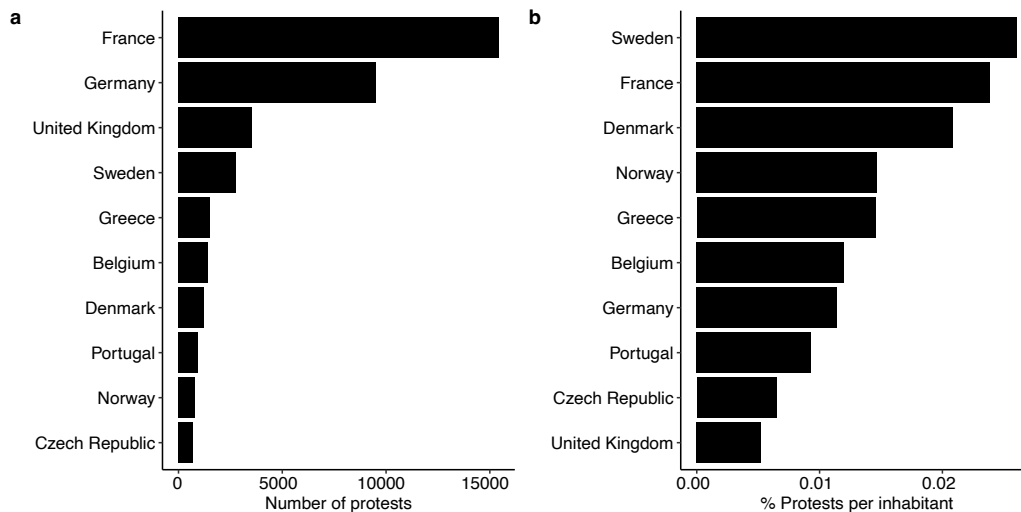


Figure C1: **Protest occurrence across European countries.** The occurrence of protest in European countries with similar population sizes as Sweden with the inclusion of Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. Figure (a) shows the absolute number of protests per country between 2021 and 2022 and (b) the number of protests relative to a country's population size. Data source: (Raleigh et al., 2023).

Figure C2 shows the number of protest events in Sweden at the level of municipalities between 2021 and 2022. The map depicts variation in the number of protests across municipalities. Municipalities with low population density experience fewer protests than more urban areas, such as Stockholm.

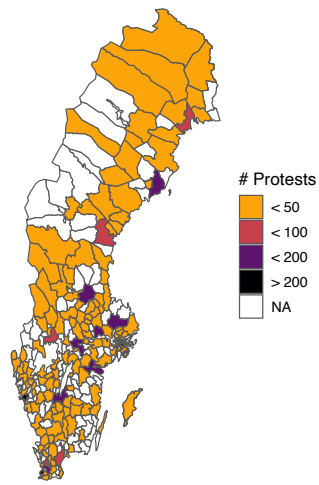


Figure C2: **Protest occurrence across Sweden.** Number of protest events in Swedish municipalities between 2021 and 2022. Data sources: ACLED and ThenMap API.

D Descriptive statistics

Table D1: Summary statistics

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Survey day	1,124	10.05	12.52	1	53
Duration	1,124	37,098.69	270,635.20	209	4,552,786
Completed survey	1,124	0.98	0.14	0	1
Protest legitimacy	1,124	1.17	0.38	1	2
Protest democratic	1,123	4.23	1.03	1	5
Protest local decision-making	1,122	3.93	1.12	1	5
DV: Meeting	1,123	3.32	1.26	1	5
DV: Party agenda	1,124	3.38	1.21	1	5
DV: Assembly	1,124	2.94	1.31	1	5
DV: Ignoring	1,124	2.94	1.31	1	5
DV: Securing	1,124	4.05	1.04	1	5
Related to protest	1,124	3.89	1.14	1	5
Peaceful protest	1,101	3.03	1.25	1	5
Large protest	1,116	4.27	0.86	1	5
Organized protest	1,115	2.72	0.98	1	5
Voter share	1,116	3.56	0.92	1	5
Politicians: reputation	1,090	33.09	24.89	0	100
Politicians: solution-oriented	1,112	3.57	0.94	1	5
Politicians: media	1,115	3.34	0.98	1	5
Politicians: re-electoin	1,114	3.60	1.00	1	5
Politicians: other	1,115	3.59	1.05	1	5
Age	258	3.23	1.38	1	5
Education	1,123	4.59	1.33	1	6
Party	1,122	6.70	1.93	1	9
For-profit school attitude	1,123	3.96	2.20	1	10
Treatment: migration	612	2.97	1.43	1	5
Treatment: left-wing	1,121	3.53	1.41	1	5
Treatment: female	961	2.45	1.54	1	5
Treatment: young	660	3.00	1.22	1	5
Male	674	3.34	1.51	1	5
Left-wing party	675	3.28	1.45	1	5
Responsiveness	1,124	0.49	0.50	0	1
Female	1,124	0.33	0.47	0	1
Responsiveness	1,124	3.09	1.02	1.00	5.00

Table D2: Analysis of non-responses in the survey round

	PP21 - invited sample	PP21 - answered sample	Difference
	N = 3003	N = 1165	
Gender			
Men	61.94	65.98	4.04
Women	38.06	34.02	-4.04
Age			
Under 30	2.64	2.15	-0.49
30-39	7.68	6.27	-1.41
40-49	14.27	13.32	-0.95
50-59	20.72	20.27	-0.45
60-69	23.58	26.2	2.62
70 or older	31.11	31.79	0.68
Education			
Not finished elementary school	0.25	0.35	0.1
Elementary school	3.48	2.42	-1.06
High school or equivalent, shorter than 3 years	7.99	7.25	-0.74
High school or equivalent, 3 years or longer	9.6	9.07	-0.53
Post-secondary education, not university, shorter than 3 years	9.48	9.07	-0.41
Post-secondary education, not university, 3 years or longer	2.36	1.73	-0.63
University, shorter than 3 years	12.71	12	-0.71
University, 3 years or longer	50.41	53.97	3.56
Degree from doctoral education (PhD)	3.73	4.15	0.42
Party			
Left Party (V)	11.39	12.47	1.08
Social Democrats (S)	27.38	24.08	-3.3
Centre Party (C)	11.1	11.18	0.08
Liberal Party (L)	8.67	9.37	0.7
Moderate Party (M)	18.5	18.74	0.24
Christian Democrats (KD)	7.73	7.82	0.09
Green Party (MP)	10.16	10.75	0.59
Sweden Democrats (SD)	3.3	3.18	-0.12
Feminist Initiative (Fi)	1.78	2.41	0.63

E Statistical power analyses

I run several power analyses for the empirical tests I conduct in the main results section. All analyses show the statistical power to detect a small effect (effect size of 0.1). The horizontal line indicates a statistical power of 0.8.

For testing the interaction effects between politicians' and protesters' age, I plot the results for four different age groups. There are so few politicians below 30 that I exclude them from the analysis as statistical power is insufficient even a large effect. Figure E1 shows that the smallest effect can be detected among politicians over the age of 70.

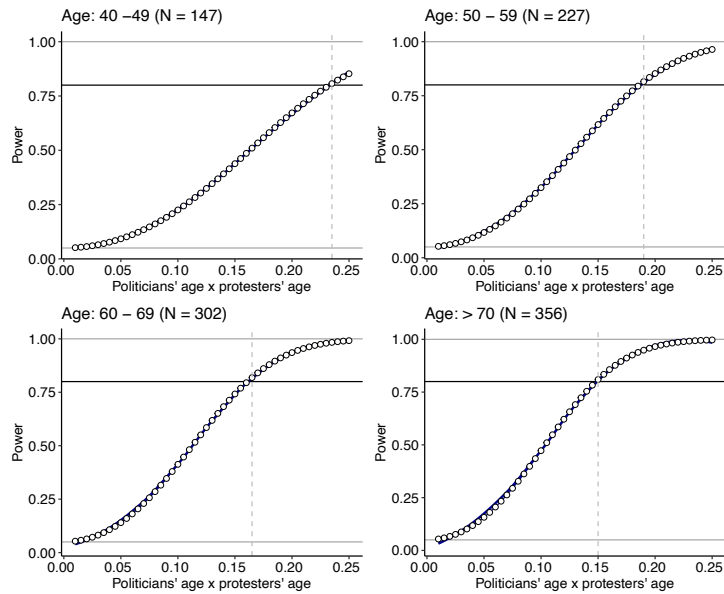


Figure E1: **Power analysis for interactions between politicians' and protesters' age.**

In terms of shared migration background, the analysis is limited to present results for how politicians who were born in Sweden react to native protesters or protesters who have a migration background. The number of politicians who indicate to have been born outside of Sweden is too small for a statistical analysis. Therefore, Figure E2 shows the statistical power for politicians in the sample who were born in Sweden ($N = 1062$). This subsample is large enough to detect a small effect of below 0.1.

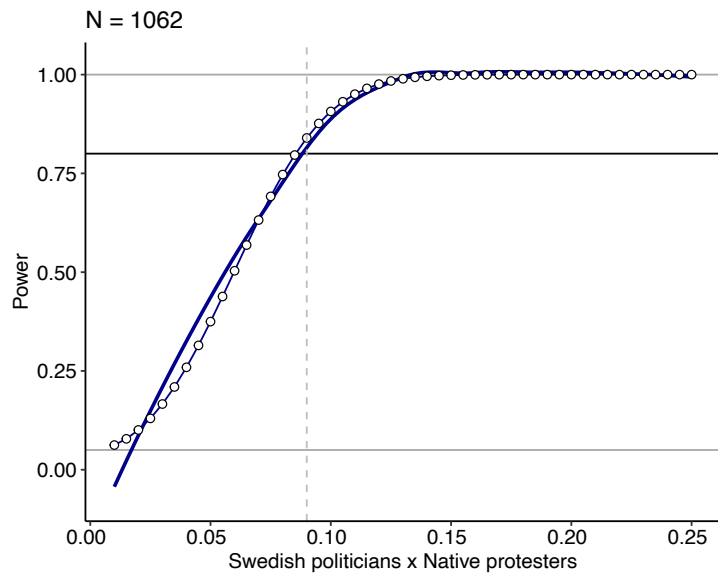


Figure E2: **Power analysis for interactions between politicians' and protesters' migration backgrounds.**

Hypotheses 3 and 4 expect that female politicians are more responsive to female or migrant protesters. Figure E3 shows the statistical power for the smaller group of female politicians ($N = 377$).

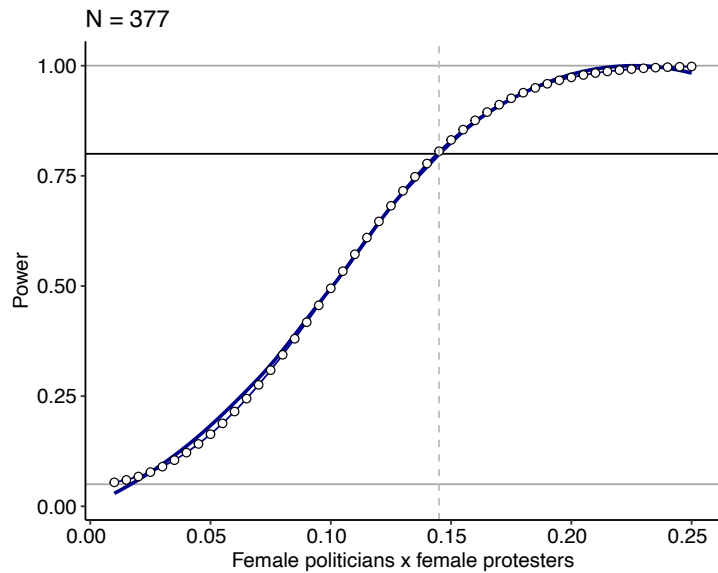


Figure E3: **Power analysis for interactions between female politicians and female or migrant protesters.**

In the test for the interactions between right-wing politicians and right-wing protesters (Figure E4). There are 564 right-wing politicians in the sample, which means that there is very high statistical power for interaction effects larger than 0.125.

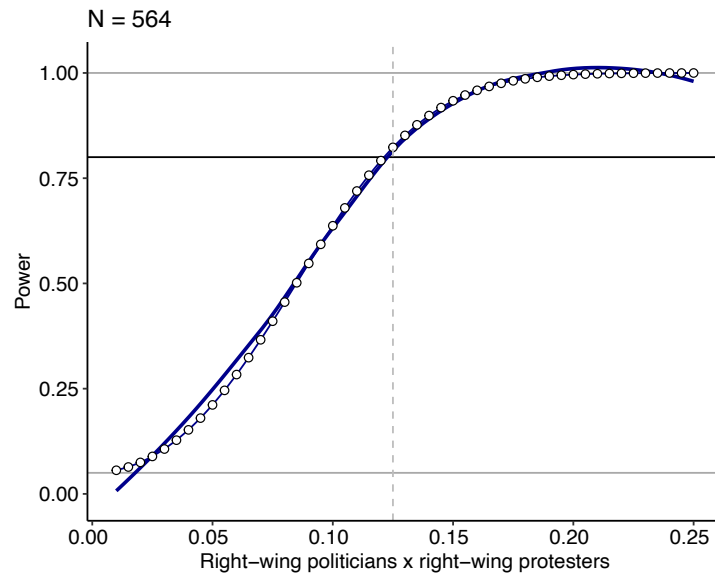


Figure E4: Power analysis for interactions between right-wing politicians and right-wing protesters.

F Main results

Table F1: Effect of the treatments on whether a respondent completed the survey (coded as 1) or not (coded as 0).

	Completed survey
Right-wing protesters	0.002 (0.01)
Female protesters	0.02* (0.01)
Young protesters	0.004 (0.01)
Native protesters	0.002 (0.01)
Constant	0.94*** (0.01)
Observations	1,165
R ²	0.003

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table F2: Effects of the treatments on whether a respondent could relate to the given protest scenario.

	Could relate to the protest scenario
Right-wing protesters	-0.53*** (0.07)
Mostly women protesters	0.19*** (0.07)
Younger protesters	0.14* (0.07)
Native protesters	-0.10 (0.07)
Constant	3.19*** (0.08)
Observations	1,101
R ²	0.05

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table F3 presents the main results from Figure 2 in a tabular format. Previous tests for statistical power show that not all tests have enough statistical power to detect a small effect. This is the case for the interaction effects between politicians below 40 and younger protesters (Figure 2b, see Figure E1 for the statistical power test) and for the interaction effects between politicians who were born outside of Sweden and migrant protesters (Figure 2c, see Figure E2 for the statistical power test). Even when excluding these two tests from the interpretation of the results, the conclusion remains the same. Politicians of different age groups and above 39 do not differentiate between younger or older protesters. Similarly, politicians born in Sweden are as responsive to migrant protesters as to native protesters. These results are relevant, as I expect older politicians or politicians born in Sweden to be differentially responsive to a similar extent as younger politicians or politicians born outside of Sweden.

Table F3: Interactions between politicians' and protesters' characteristics.

	Responsiveness			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Politician (right-wing)	-0.87*** (0.12)			
Politician (Male)		0.04 (0.05)		
Politician (Age)			0.40 (0.30)	
Politician (Sweden birth country)				-0.38*** (0.14)
Right-wing protesters	-1.15*** (0.08)	-0.05 (0.22)	0.18 (0.28)	-0.72*** (0.10)
Female protesters	-0.05 (0.08)	-0.17 (0.22)	0.42 (0.27)	-0.07 (0.10)
Young protesters	0.10 (0.08)	-0.25 (0.22)	-0.09 (0.28)	0.06 (0.10)
Native protesters	0.21*** (0.08)	0.07 (0.22)	-0.11 (0.26)	0.19* (0.10)
Right-wing*right-wing protesters	1.44*** (0.11)			
Right-wing*female protesters	0.14 (0.11)			
Right-wing*young protesters	-0.11 (0.11)			
Right-wing*native protesters	-0.30*** (0.11)			
Age*right-wing protesters		-0.08* (0.05)		
Age*female protesters		0.04 (0.05)		
Age*young protesters		0.06 (0.05)		
Age*native protesters		-0.002 (0.05)		
Swedish*right-wing protesters			-0.61** (0.29)	
Swedish*female protesters			-0.40 (0.28)	
Swedish*young protesters			0.09 (0.29)	
Swedish*native protesters			0.19 (0.26)	
Male*right-wing protesters				0.47*** (0.13)
Male*female protesters				0.14 (0.13)
Male*younger protesters	17			-0.07 (0.13)
Male*native protesters				-0.18 (0.13)
Constant	3.67*** (0.09)	3.05*** (0.23)	2.86*** (0.30)	3.49*** (0.11)
Observations	1,087	1,123	1,124	1,124
R ²	0.20	0.05	0.05	0.06

Table F4: Differences in interaction terms

Difference.between.estimates	Coefficient	Standard.Error	P.value
Shared gender - shared interest	-1.30	0.17	0
Shared age - shared interest	-1.39	0.12	0
Female pol.*migrants - shared interes	-1.62	0.17	0

Table F5: Interactions for left- or right-wing politicians' responsiveness to left- or right-wing protesters, by responsiveness indicator. Table for Figure 2.

	Meeting (1)	Party agenda (2)	Assembly (3)
Right-wing politician	-0.17 (0.16)	-1.26*** (0.15)	-1.19*** (0.16)
Right-wing protesters	-0.46*** (0.10)	-1.77*** (0.10)	-1.21*** (0.10)
Female protesters	0.09 (0.10)	-0.09 (0.10)	-0.14 (0.10)
Young protesters	0.17* (0.10)	0.17* (0.10)	-0.03 (0.10)
Native protesters	0.27*** (0.10)	0.18* (0.10)	0.19* (0.10)
Right-wing*right-wing protesters	0.57*** (0.15)	2.12*** (0.14)	1.65*** (0.15)
Right-wing*female protesters	-0.04 (0.15)	0.27* (0.14)	0.20 (0.15)
Right-wing*young protesters	-0.15 (0.15)	-0.18 (0.14)	0.0004 (0.15)
Right-wing*native protesters	-0.48*** (0.15)	-0.24* (0.14)	-0.19 (0.15)
Constant	3.46*** (0.11)	3.84*** (0.11)	3.71*** (0.11)
Observations	1,087	1,087	1,087
R ²	0.04	0.26	0.15

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table F6: Interactions for politicians' responsiveness to left- or right-wing protesters, dependent on politicians' attitudes toward banning for-profit schools where 1 means strongly agreeing to ban for-profit schools and 5 strongly disagreeing to banning for-profit schools. Table for Figure 4.

	Responsiveness (1)	Meeting (2)	Party agenda (3)	Assembly (4)
For-profit school ban attitude	-0.38*** (0.04)	-0.20*** (0.06)	-0.50*** (0.05)	-0.45*** (0.06)
Right-wing protesters	-1.73*** (0.11)	-0.80*** (0.15)	-2.50*** (0.14)	-1.88*** (0.15)
Female protesters	-0.16 (0.11)	-0.12 (0.15)	-0.19 (0.14)	-0.17 (0.15)
Young protesters	-0.02 (0.11)	0.01 (0.15)	0.05 (0.14)	-0.10 (0.15)
Native protesters	0.15 (0.11)	0.22 (0.15)	0.12 (0.14)	0.10 (0.15)
For-profit school ban*right-wing	0.53*** (0.04)	0.26*** (0.05)	0.73*** (0.05)	0.61*** (0.05)
For-profit school ban*female	0.07* (0.04)	0.05 (0.05)	0.10** (0.05)	0.07 (0.05)
For-profit school ban*younger	0.01 (0.04)	0.03 (0.05)	-0.01 (0.05)	0.02 (0.05)
For-profit school ban*native	-0.04 (0.04)	-0.08* (0.05)	-0.03 (0.05)	-0.01 (0.05)
Constant	4.19*** (0.12)	3.86*** (0.16)	4.47*** (0.15)	4.25*** (0.16)
Observations	961	961	961	961
R ²	0.23	0.04	0.27	0.17

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table F7: Politicians' responsiveness (by party) across all protest treatments.
Table for Figure 5.

	Responsiveness
Green Party	0.03 (0.12)
Social Democrats	-0.10 (0.10)
Center Party	-0.03 (0.12)
Liberal Party	-0.15 (0.12)
Christian Democrats	-0.18 (0.13)
Moderate Party	-0.60*** (0.11)
Right-wing protesters	-0.46*** (0.06)
Female protesters	0.03 (0.06)
Younger protesters	0.003 (0.06)
Native protesters	0.12* (0.06)
Constant	3.41*** (0.10)
Observations	1,059
R ²	0.10

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table F8: Politicians' perceptions (by party) of whether protests are legitimate, promote democracy, or are beneficial for local policymaking. The Feminist Initiative and Sweden Democrats were excluded due to the small number of responses. Table for Figure 6.

	Protests are ...		
	legitimate (1)	promote democracy (2)	useful for decision-making (3)
Green Party	-0.03 (0.11)	-0.04 (0.12)	-0.04 (0.13)
Social Democrats	-0.52*** (0.10)	-0.55*** (0.10)	-0.83*** (0.11)
Center Party	-0.39*** (0.11)	-0.69*** (0.11)	-1.16*** (0.13)
Liberal Party	-0.85*** (0.12)	-1.05*** (0.12)	-1.34*** (0.14)
Christian Democrats	-0.88*** (0.13)	-1.24*** (0.13)	-1.49*** (0.15)
Moderate Party	-1.24*** (0.10)	-1.65*** (0.10)	-1.89*** (0.12)
Constant	4.84*** (0.08)	4.72*** (0.08)	4.33*** (0.09)
Observations	1,058	1,057	1,058
R ²	0.18	0.28	0.28

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table F9: The effects of politicians' perceptions of whether protests are legitimate, promote democracy, or are beneficial for local policymaking on politicians' engagement.

	Responsiveness		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Protest legitimacy	0.10*** (0.03)		
Protests for democracy		0.18*** (0.03)	
Protests for decision-making			0.19*** (0.02)
Constant	2.66*** (0.13)	2.38*** (0.11)	2.46*** (0.08)
Observations	1,123	1,122	1,123
R ²	0.01	0.04	0.05
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01		

References

Raleigh, Clionadh, Roudabeh Kishi, and Andrew Linke, “Political instability patterns are obscured by conflict dataset scope conditions, sources, and coding choices,” *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 2023, *10* (1), 74.