**The interplay of objective group affiliations and subjective feelings of recognition and their influence on democratic preferences**

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In times of democratic backsliding, traditional divides such as the urban-rural divide as well as subjective feelings like deprivation are gaining prominence in research on democratic preferences. In my dissertation I want to connect both, the influence of "objective" forms of underrepresentation and "subjective" feelings of being unseen and unheard and explore their influence on democratic preferences. I ask how citizens who are and/or feel unheard and unseen imagine their ideal form of democracy. Thereby I want to focus on the intersections and the interplay of objective group affiliations (such as belonging to working social class or rural residence) and subjective feelings (such as deprivation).

Regarding democratic preferences, I will analyze the principles that these groups associate with democracy, what problems they perceive and how they evaluate the democratic system they are living in. In addition, I will focus on their process preferences for different governance models (ranging from lottocracy to a representative model, technocracy or strongman-leader) and potential "blendings" thereof. I argue that the complex interplay of their objective status, their principles and values as well as the individual evaluation of the current democratic system affects their democratic preferences. Using an innovative approach, I will analyze how these groups would design their ideal democracy when (1) they receive information and arguments about different governance models and are asked to *reflect* on their choices and (2) there are different conditions under which the democracy is designed: in an empty space without the constraints of the democracy in which they live and without knowing what their status will be (on Mars) or the democratic system in which they live that has to be redesigned (on Earth). Comparing these conditions provides insights about the role of the perceived position in society and evaluations of the current political systems in explaining democratic preferences.

The following draft paper is the first part of my PhD project and includes results from an initial survey conducted in March 2023. The aim is to provide a rough overview of how group identities are related to different democratic understandings, attitudes and regime preferences. In the course of this, I will compare the groups' perceptions of problems and democratic principles in the future. The next step will be a more in-depth examination of political preferences using closed questions and a conjoint experiment that also allows for mixed preferences. The final step is to examine whether these differences exist independently of country-specific restrictions (Mars vs. Earth).

# The 'undemocratic' left behind? Exploring the political preferences of those who are, or feel, unseen and unheard.

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**Abstract**

Research has shown that those groups of citizens whose voices are systematically ignored in democracies are more likely to turn to non-democratic alternatives. In addition to the importance of being objectively disadvantaged, recent research highlights the importance of feeling unheard or unseen in explaining support for certain parties or populist attitudes. But to what extent do the basic political preferences and underlying values of citizens who feel "left behind" really differ from those who do not? And how do they differ from those who are objectively disadvantaged? This paper aims to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between objective and subjective perceptions of one's position in society, democratic values, attitudes, and regime preferences. Based on the results of an online sample of approximately 2,500 citizens from the United States and Germany, it analyzes democratic perceptions and attitudes as well as political preferences for various models of governance (including participatory, representative, technocratic, and strong-leader models). The paper examines whether and to what extent those who are objectively or subjectively disadvantaged hold deeply rooted different democratic values and distinct regime preferences than those who are not or do not feel disadvantaged.

## Introduction

In the eyes of many democracy observers, social conflict and polarization are on the rise (e.g., Inglehart & Norris 2016; Fukuyama 2018). Empirical evidence points to the acceptance of non-democratic practices and forms of government (see, e.g., Foa & Mounk 2016, 2017; Graham & Svolik 2020) and their growing support in some segments of the population (see, e.g., Hibbing & Theiss-Morse 2002; Rovira Kaltwasser & Van Hauwaert 2020). This has important implications for democracy. Research has shown that those groups of citizens whose voices are systematically ignored in democracies are more likely to turn to non-democratic alternatives (Steiner et al. 2022).

However, identifying these groups in an era of globalization and multicomplex societies is challenging. Alongside traditional social cleavages based on socio-structural factors such as social class, recent research has highlighted subjective feelings of disadvantage as a potentially distinct divide. The importance of subjective feelings of disadvantage is particularly emphasized by research on 'new' cleavages such as the transnational cleavage (see Teeney et al. 2014; Steiner et al. 2023). According to this approach, globalization and its aftermath are central to contemporary cleavages (e.g., Hooghe et al. 2002; Kriesi et al. 2008; Bornschier 2010; de Wilde et al. 2019). Furthermore, they seem to divide people not only by their socio-economic characteristics or cosmopolitan attitudes, but also by their self-identification as globalization winners or losers and by their feelings of disadvantage (e.g., Zollinger 2022; Steiner et al. 2023; Bornschier et al. 2021).

The subjective feeling of belonging to the disadvantaged is often seen as a natural consequence of belonging to an objectively disadvantaged group and the resulting lack of recognition in politics and society, combined with different socialization and values. These groups are also referred to as "left behind" (see e.g., Goodwin and Heath 2016; Wuthnow 2018). However, numerous studies emphasize that those who are disadvantaged by their sociostructural characteristics are not always those who perceive themselves as disadvantaged, and vice versa. Rather, citizens with very different socioeconomic profiles can be united in their subjective sense of disadvantage (see Steiner et al. 2022) or deprivation (e.g., Smith et al. 2012). And both individual factors (and their interplay) are found to play a crucial role in the rise of societal polarization, the success of (right-wing) populist parties and candidates (Goodwin and Heath 2016; Arzheimer and Berning 2019; Gest 2016; Gidron and Hall 2019; Hochschild 2016).

An open question, however, is whether these groups also differ in their fundamental attitudes toward democracy and in their democratic preferences. In other words, it is unclear whether previous findings on the link between deprivation and populist or undemocratic attitudes reflect an underlying rejection of democracy and sympathy for non-democratic forms of government. After all, democratic stability depends on a basic consensus about the fundamental values that constitute a good form of government and about how government should be organized (Lipset 1959; Easton 1965, 1975). In order to build bridges across these divides, it is therefore essential to know how deep they really are.

Previous research on democratic preferences and attitudes has rarely focused on getting a basic overview of the values of different groups that are or feel disadvantaged and what they want from democracy. Existing studies point to socio-structural factors (lower status, lower income, lower social class, or living in a rural area) being associated with lower democratic satisfaction, (in some cases) lower support for democracy or the status quo and authoritarian and populist attitudes (see e.g., Krieckhaus et al. 2014; Andersen 2012; Kölln & Aarts 2021; Lago 2021; Ceka and Magalhães 2020).

I argue that in order to analyze how deep the rifts between the "left behind" and the ones who are not really are, we need to systematically analyze how subjective feelings of being unheard and unseen, as well as socio-structural factors, relate to different democratic imaginaries and regime preferences.

To address this question, I use data from a representative online survey conducted in March 2023 with about 2,500 respondents each in the United States and Germany. I proceed as follows. First, I discuss existing theoretical approaches to how socio-structural and subjective factors influence political attitudes and behavior. Next, I ask if and how both factors might potentially structure deeper divides in democratic attitudes and regime preferences. Using mean comparisons and regression analysis, I examine how different socioeconomic factors (income, social class, education, rural residence) and subjective factors (social recognition and relative deprivation) are related to democratic attitudes, support, and satisfaction, and whether they are related to different (undemocratic) regime preferences. Finally, I discuss whether the differences between perceived and objective deprivation and voting behavior or populist attitudes are also reflected in differences in core values and regime preferences, and give an outlook on what the next steps are.

**Method and Operationalization**

I use data collected via an online survey in March 2023 in Germany and the US, where quotas by age and income in both countries and additionally by type of region in Germany were applied. Therefore, the data is representative for the population between the ages of 18-74 regarding age, income and (in Germany only) degree of urbanity. The study includes 2.632 respondents from Germany and 2.637 respondents from the US[1].

To measure *objective disadvantage*, I use social class, income and urbanity. Binary variables were then created to use belonging to a lower social class, having a low income, and living in a rural area as grouping variables in the regression analyses to account for objective disadvantage (see Table 1).

*Table 1. Operationalization and Distribution of objective disadvantage.*

| Construct | Item(s) | Binary variables | GER | US |
|---|---|---|---|---|

[1] Quality checks were applied to this data, which excluded speeders or respondents that failed two incorporated attention checks.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Social class* | There is a lot of talk about social class these days: What social class would you describe yourself as belonging to?<br><br>lower social class (1), working social class (2), middle social class (3), upper middle social class (4), upper social class (5), none of these social classes (6) | Low Social class (Social class = 1 \| 2) | 958 (36,5%) | 941 (35,7 %) |
| *Income* | Which figure describes your household's monthly (*Germany*) / annual income (*US*) from all sources? If you don't know the exact figure, please give an estimate.<br><br>*Germany:* low (1): up to under 1500 euros; medium (2):1500 to under 2500 euros, 2500 to under 3500 euros; high (3): 3500 to under 5000 euros; higher (4): 5000 euros and more<br><br>*US:* lower (1): less than 25,000; low (2): 25,000 - 49,999; middle (3): 50,000 - 74,999, 75,000 - 99,999; high (4): 100,000 - 200,000; higher (5): More than 200,000 | Low Income (Income = 1) | 555<br><br>(21,1 %) | 455 (17,3 %) |
| *Urbanity*[2] | Which of the following categories on this list best describes where you live?<br><br>Big city (1), Suburb or outskirts of a big city (2), Small city or town (3), Country village (4), Farm or home in the country (5) | Rural (Urbanity = 4 \| 5) | 483<br><br>(18,4 %) | 259 (9,8 %) |

To assess *subjective feelings of disadvantage*, I include variables that aim to measure subjective feelings of not being recognized in society as well as relative deprivation. To measure societal recognition, I use an adapted version of the societal marginalization scale from Bollwerk et al. (2021). I use these variables to create three indices that include the variables of the three dimensions on which respondents might perceive their own group as outsiders – namely cultural, economic and political spheres (each item was measured by a 5-point Likert scale). Table 2 shows the operationalization of attitudes as well as societal recognition on three dimensions including the respective items (see Appendix Table 4 for an overview of the distributions).

Relative deprivation was measured using a standard closed question about the respondent's own assessment of receiving his or her fair share compared to others ("Compared to how others live in the

[2] In addition, I conducted all analyses with categories assigned based on zip codes. However, zip codes are not as useful, especially when dealing with very small communities, as they are often assigned a zip code from the "next largest" community. Since we are primarily interested in respondents living in rural areas, I therefore chose subjective assignment (this has the advantage that the sense of belonging can be measured more realistically; see Nemerever and Rogers 2021).

Germany/ the US: Do you think you get ... your fair share, more than your fair share, somewhat less than your fair share, very much less than your fair share?"). Respondents who reported receiving very much less than their fair share were considered "deprived" and the binary variable was included in the regression analyses.

*Table 2. Operationalization of societal recognition.*

| | **Variables** |
|---|---|
| **Attitudes** | |
| ***Cultural*** | - *The cultural interests of people like me are given too little consideration in society.*<br>- *The values of people like me are becoming less and less important in society.*<br>- *People like me are no longer allowed to express their opinions freely in public.*<br><br>Completely disagree (1) – completely agree (5) |
| ***Economic*** | - *The work of people like me is not recognized enough in society.*<br>- *The economic situation of people like me receives too little attention in society.*<br><br>Completely disagree (1) – completely agree (5) |
| ***Political*** | - *The problems of people like me are unimportant to most politicians.*<br>- *The concerns of people like me are not noticed by politicians.*<br><br>Completely disagree (1) – completely agree (5) |

To examine the relationship between democratic attitudes and regime preferences, I include democratic satisfaction, democratic relevance (as a proxy for democratic support), an index about democratic understandings and regime preferences.

To assess their democratic values, respondents were asked to rate the importance of various characteristics of a democracy on a 7-point scale ranging from "not at all important" to "extremely important. The statements on the characteristics of a good democracy are based on an index introduced by Wunsch et al. (2022) and supplemented by statements used in the European Social Survey to assess attitudes towards social-democratic democracy. Each statement/rating is assigned to one of four "understandings": liberal, authoritarian, majoritarian, and social-democratic. The corresponding items are then calculated into an additive index for each understanding.

*Table 3. Operationalization of different understandings of democracy.*

| Understanding | Items |
|---|---|
| *Liberal understanding* | (1) People choose their leaders in free elections.<br>(2) Civil rights protect people from state oppression.<br>(3) The courts are able to stop the government acting beyond its authority. |
| *Majoritarian understanding* | (1) The majority can always overrule the minority.<br>(2) Any law can be changed if there is a majority for it.<br>(3) The minority must accept the will of the majority in all circumstances. |
| *Authoritarian understanding* | (1) The government uses violence to enforce public order.<br>(2) Elections only serve to confirm the ruling party in office.<br>(3) The government limits civic freedoms to rule efficiently. |
| *Social-democratic understanding* | (1) The government protects all citizens against poverty.<br>(2) The government takes measures to reduce differences in income levels.<br>(3) Society shows solidarity towards the weak and those in need of help. |

To test respondents' support for the status quo and sympathy for (authoritarian) alternatives, respondents were asked to rate different types of decision-making in their country on a 7-point scale ranging from "strongly oppose" to "strongly support". We divide the different types of decision-making into the following groups

- status quo (elected representatives)
- participatory alternative (referendums and citizen forums)
- technocratic alternative (experts)
- authoritarian alternative (military or strong leader)

Finally, I include gender, the youngest age group (under 30 years old) and living in a southern state (US) or East Germany (Germany) as controls for all regression analyses.

**Results**

I first look at the interplay of objective and subjective disadvantage to see how both are connected and how many respondents feel unseen or unheard even though they are objectively not disadvantaged and vice versa. After that I will introduce the individual variables in regression analyses to explore their relationship with democratic attitudes, democratic understandings and regime preferences.

Only around 3% (67 respondents) in Germany and 2% (41 respondents) in the US fall into all three categories of objective disadvantage (low social class; low income and living in a rural area). Around 4

% (96 respondents) in Germany and 3 % (77 respondents) in the US are perceiving a lack of recognition in all areas and are considered as deprived (stating that they do not at all receive their fair share) at the same time.

63% of the objectively disadvantaged in Germany and the US (those who belong to at least one of the three groups) also feel subjectively disadvantaged. Of the subjectively disadvantaged, around 65% in Germany and 52% in the US are also objectively disadvantaged. This indicates a significant convergence between objective and subjective disadvantage. However, a significant proportion of people who are objectively disadvantaged do not feel or perceive themselves to be disadvantaged, while others perceive themselves to be disadvantaged despite not being objectively disadvantaged (based on the included variables).

The overlap between objective and subjective disadvantage is particularly evident when individual characteristics associated with objective disadvantage are compared with their counterparts (e.g., rural respondents versus urban respondents, low income versus high income, low social class versus high social class).

For example, while nearly 30% of German respondents who can be considered low social class say they receive much less than their fair share, only about 2% of those who can be considered high social class can be considered as "deprived". Similar distributions can be seen in the US and in the low vs high income groups. Differences (albeit smaller ones) can also be observed between respondents living in urban or rural areas (see Table 4 and 5).

*Table 4. Interplay between objective and subjective disadvantage (1).*

| | Rural | | Urban | | Lower Social class | | Higher Social class | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | DE | US | DE | US | DE | US | DE | US |
| Very much less than fair share | 16,5 % | 14,7 % | 13,6 % | 11,5% | 29,6 % | 20 % | 2,4 % | 3,8 % |
| Less than fair share | 44,6 % | 38,8 % | 37,2 % | 28,2 % | 49,6 % | 46,8 % | 22,2 % | 15,3 % |
| Fair share | 28,3 % | 33,3 % | 32,3 % | 39,2 % | 12,7 % | 24,5 % | 54,5 % | 50,5 % |
| More than fair share | 10,6 % | 13,2 % | 16,9 % | 21,1 % | 8,2 % | 8,7 % | 21 % | 30,3 % |

*Table 5. Interplay between objective and subjective disadvantage (2).*

| | Low Income | | High Income | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | DE | US | DE | US |
| Very much less than fair share | 32,2 % | 21,8 % | 4,3 % | 4,5 % |
| Less than fair share | 45,6 % | 43,8 % | 29 % | 19,9 % |
| Fair share | 13,3 % | 21,1 % | 50,5 % | 54,1 % |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| More than fair share | 8,9 % | 13,2 % | 16,2 % | 21,6 % |

The group comparisons using t-tests (Appendix Table 6) also show that respondents living in rural areas, respondents with a low income and those belonging to the low social class have higher mean values for lack of recognition in all areas (cultural, economic, political). These differences are significant in Germany, while in the US only low-income respondents consistently show significantly higher ratings on lack of recognition. In addition, low-income US respondents have significantly higher scores for lack of economic recognition and rural respondents have higher scores for lack of political recognition.

These results show in a first overview that objective and subjective disadvantage overlap, but that there are also enough cases in which objectively disadvantaged people do not feel subjectively disadvantaged and vice versa. In a next step, I will now look at the relationship between the different types of disadvantage and their effects on democratic attitudes, democratic understandings and regime preferences.

These preliminary results show a convergence between objective and subjective disadvantage. However, it is noteworthy that there is a significant proportion of individuals who experience objective disadvantage who do not perceive subjective disadvantage, and vice versa. The following part now explores the links between different forms of disadvantage and their impact on democratic attitudes, understandings, and preferences for political regimes.

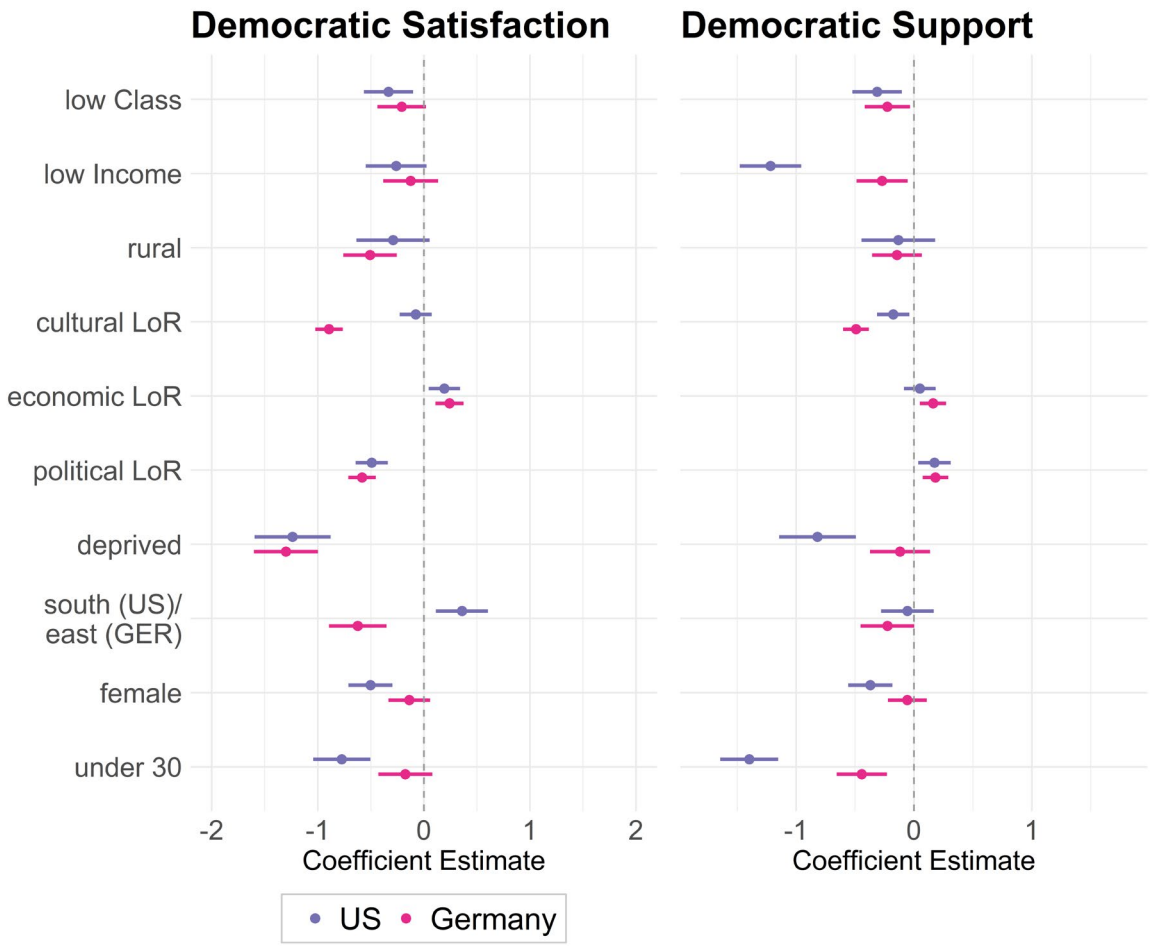
*Regression analyses*

To examine the relationships between objective and subjective disadvantage and democratic attitudes, democratic understandings, and regime preferences, I conduct multiple regression analyses. All regressions include three characteristics of objective disadvantage (low social class, low income, rural); four characteristics of subjective disadvantage (lack of cultural, economic, and political recognition, and deprivation); and three control variables that may also represent a form of objective disadvantage (under 30 years of age, female, and living in the southern states in the US or eastern Germany in Germany).

The results of the regression analyses for the two more general variables "democratic satisfaction" and "democratic support" show remarkable differences between the US and Germany. While in Germany living in a rural area is the only objective (socio-structural) variable that has a negative effect on democratic satisfaction, in the US it is membership in a low social class. A perceived lack of political recognition as well as being deprived have a negative effect on democratic satisfaction in both countries; a perceived lack of economic recognition surprisingly has a positive effect in both countries. In Germany, those who feel that their culture and values are not recognized in society are also less satisfied with democracy. Female respondents and younger respondents show lower levels of democratic satisfaction in the US. And while respondents living in eastern Germany are less satisfied, those living in the southern states of the US are more satisfied with how democracy works.

The comparison of democratic support and satisfaction also shows that dissatisfaction with the current democracy does not necessarily translate into less democratic support. However, low social class and low income are also negatively associated with democratic support in both countries. Lack of recognition seems to have different effects. Respondents who feel politically disadvantaged/not seen are significantly more dissatisfied, but have significantly higher levels of democratic support. Respondents that perceive a lack of cultural recognition, on the other hand, appear not only to be more dissatisfied, but also to be less supportive of democracy in general. This is also the case for deprived respondents in the US. Younger respondents in both countries appear to be associated with lower levels of support for democracy (as are female respondents in the US).

*Figure 1. Objective and subjective disadvantage variables on democratic satisfaction and support.*




These first results show that the different variables have different effects in the two countries. However, both factors, objective and subjective disadvantage, seem to be related to democratic satisfaction and support in the expected way.

A closer look at the respondents' understanding of democracy reveals that the objective variables (low social class, low income) are negatively correlated with a liberal understanding of democracy in the US, while this is only the case for respondents living in rural areas in Germany. Lack of political recognition is positively correlated with a liberal understanding of democracy in both countries, while lack of cultural recognition is negatively correlated with a liberal understanding. In the US, deprived respondents also seem to have a significantly lower liberal understanding. Both those under 30 and women have a lower liberal understanding.

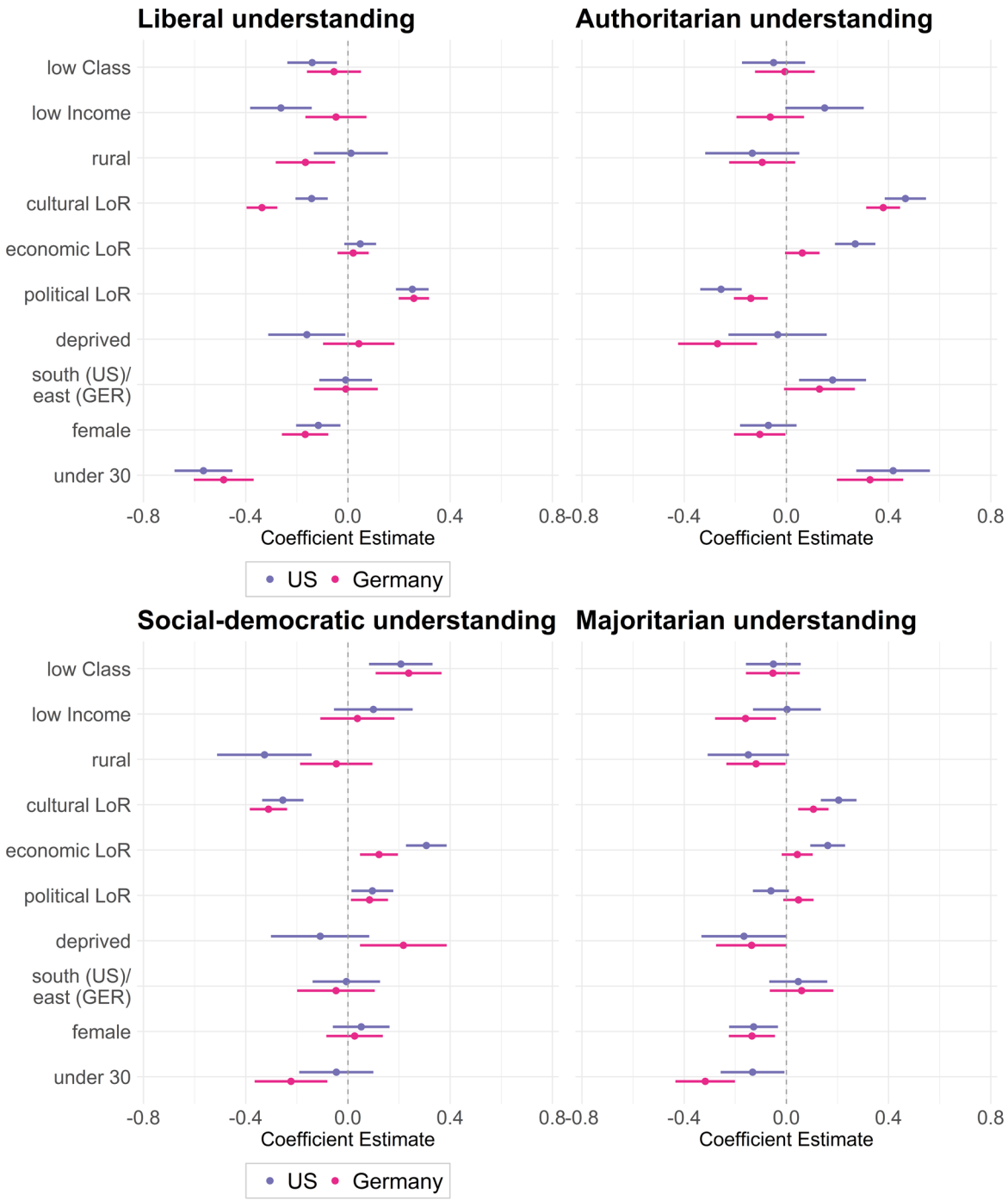
In terms of a social-democratic understanding, members of a lower social class and respondents who perceive a lack of economic or political recognition are more likely to have a social-democratic understanding in both countries. On the other hand, lack of cultural recognition, rural residence (only in the US), and age under 30 (only in Germany) are negatively associated with a social-democratic understanding of democracy.

The results for an authoritarian understanding show no effects of the socio-structural variables in either country. However, there are some interesting correlations between the various areas of lack of recognition and an authoritarian understanding: lack of cultural recognition and lack of economic recognition show a significant positive correlation with this understanding, while lack of political recognition shows a negative one. In both countries, respondents that are under 30 years old also have a significantly higher levels of an authoritarian understanding of democracy.

Furthermore, respondents who perceive a lack of cultural or economic recognition are more likely to have a majoritarian understanding of democracy. People under 30 and female respondents are negatively associated with this understanding in both countries. This is also the case for low-income and deprived respondents in Germany.

In summary, differences in the understanding of democracy are particularly evident among the subjectively disadvantaged, female respondents, and respondents that are under 30 years old. The area in which a lack of recognition is perceived is particularly important. While a lack of cultural recognition is negatively associated with a liberal or social-democratic understanding of democracy, it is positively associated with an authoritarian and majoritarian understanding. Based on the finding of a more authoritarian understanding combined with low democratic support and low democratic satisfaction, one can speculate about a more deeply rooted undemocratic attitude of respondents who perceive a lack of cultural recognition. This is not the case when a lack of recognition is perceived in one of the other two areas. As expected, it is primarily the economically disadvantaged (both objectively and subjectively) who have a social-democratic understanding. Respondents who do not feel seen and heard in politics, on the other hand, have a liberal and social-democratic understanding and seem to reject an authoritarian one. Combined with high democratic support and low democratic satisfaction, it seems that this group is dissatisfied but still holds deeply rooted democratic values.

*Figure 2. Objective and subjective disadvantage variables on different understandings of democracy.*




But how do these different variables relate to preferences about how to be governed? Figure 3 shows the results of regression analyses on different regime preferences.

In the US, lower social class and rural residence are negatively associated with support for the status quo (preference for representative democracy). Respondents who perceive a lack of political recognition; are considered "deprived"; are female and/or are younger than 30 years old are also associated with lower support for the status quo in both countries. While lack of cultural recognition is positively correlated with support for the status quo in the United States, it is negatively correlated in

Germany. These results correspond well with the findings on democratic satisfaction: most of the groups that are dissatisfied with the way democracy works are also associated with lower support for the status quo.

But what is the relationship between different alternatives and objective and subjective deprivation? An authoritarian alternative in the form of an assertive leader seems to be particularly attractive to low-income respondents (in the US), female respondents (in Germany), respondents under the age of 30, and respondents who perceive a lack of cultural and economic recognition (both countries). Respondents who perceive a lack of political recognition are less likely to support an authoritarian alternative, as are lower social class and rural respondents in the US and respondents with a low income in Germany.

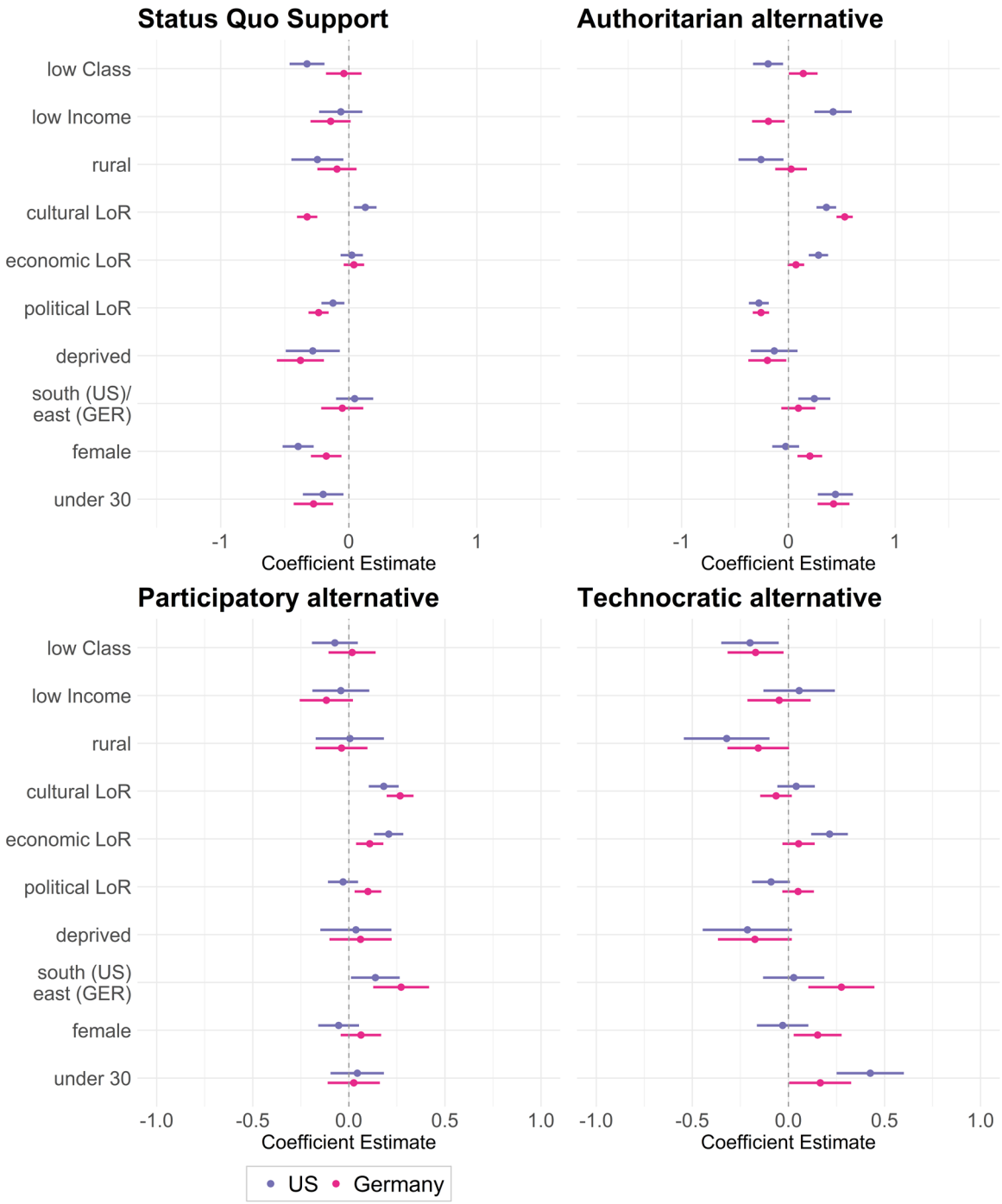
Economic and cultural lack of recognition are also positively associated with preference for a participatory alternative, as are living in a southern state in the US and living in East Germany.

Objective factors seem to be negatively associated with technocratic alternatives (at least lower social class and rural residence). However, respondents under 30, female respondents, and East German respondents in Germany are positively associated with a preference for technocratic alternatives. In the US, respondents who lack economic recognition are also positively associated with a preference for technocratic alternatives.

Overall, there are no clear general patterns regarding objective and subjective factors and regime preferences. However, the differences between different variables of lack of recognition show once again that lack of recognition in general does not translate into undemocratic regime preferences. Rather, it depends on the area and dimension in which the lack of recognition is perceived. While lack of cultural and economic recognition is related to attitudinal sympathy for participatory alternatives, only lack of cultural recognition is also related to higher support for authoritarian alternatives. This shows that (1) objective and subjective factors are related to different regime preferences, but in complex ways, and (2) preferences for a particular regime can be based on different understandings of democracy and therefore for different reasons. Respondents who do not feel culturally recognized show low democratic support, authoritarian and majoritarian tendencies, but also seem to support participatory alternatives, while respondents who do not feel politically recognized show high democratic support, are positively associated with liberal and social-democratic understandings of democracy, and also support participatory alternatives. This suggests that there are different drivers of process preferences that need to be further disentangled.

The regression analyses show that both objective and subjective factors are associated with different democratic attitudes, democratic understandings, and regime preferences. Objective and subjective factors do not always point in the same direction, and even within perceptions of disadvantage there are differences depending on the dimension on which the disadvantage is perceived. The results also reveal groups that appear to be deeply undemocratic, such as respondents who perceive that their values, traditions and culture are no longer valued in society. These respondents consistently show low democratic support, dissatisfaction, and higher support for an authoritarian understanding and alternative. However, the other groups cannot be categorized as "undemocratic" or "democratic" citizens, as the effects show complex relationships and preferences.

*Figure 3. Objective and subjective disadvantage variables on regime preferences.*




## Outlook

Building on this analysis, I want to carry out several more analyses. First, it will be interesting to know whether the groups "(only) objectively disadvantaged"; "(only) subjectively disadvantaged" and "subjectively and objectively disadvantaged" differ in their democratic attitudes, democratic understanding and regime preferences and how this plays out with different combinations of the individual factors. Here I will form different combinations of the variables that aim to measure objective and subjective disadvantage and carry out the regression analyses again with the respective groups. This

could show, for example, whether people who are objectively disadvantaged and feel that way have a stronger aversion to the status quo than people who are objectively disadvantaged but do not perceive themselves that way.

In addition, the analyses will be repeated with different operationalizations and thresholds of low social class, low income, and rural residence (e.g., postal codes or social class by occupation) or additional factors such as education or other socio-structural characteristics (e.g., an additional in-depth analysis of age and gender).

The currently used variable of self-assignment to a social class may already be part of a perceived disadvantage due to the subjective measurement. The available survey data did not allow for class assignment based on objective variables. However, most studies use the subjective classification (for an overview of the discussion on social class measurement, see e.g., Rubin et al. 2014; Romero-Vidal 2021; Oesch and Vigna 2023). Focusing on subjective assessments of social class has the advantage, among others, of relying on respondents' self-identification rather than on objective (and changeable) criteria, and results in fewer missing values. Moreover, Romero-Vidal (2021) shows that subjective social class is more robustly associated with political preferences and behavior than objective social class.

However, since I want to use objective indicators of disadvantage, I will conduct an additional analysis using occupational classes and education. In addition, the next planned survey will allow for a full objective measure of social class, and the results can then be compared with the measure of subjective class placement. This is particularly important to check the robustness of the results and to compare differences between objective and subjective measures (e.g., social class or self-assessed social class and rural residence based on postal codes or self-classification).

Additionally, different thresholds for categorization as "low-income", "low social class" or "rural" can also show whether "extremely" disadvantaged people have different democratic attitudes, a different understanding of democracy or different regime preferences. I also plan to analyze the answers to two open-ended questions in terms of objective and subjective disadvantage. One is about what democracy means to the respondents and one is about what they think are the biggest problems of democracy. Combined with closed questions about democratic principles and problems, I will analyze how perceptions of problems and democratic imaginations and principles differ between objectively and subjectively disadvantaged respondents.

This will help to get a better picture of the possible differences between objectively and subjectively disadvantaged people and to assess how deep these differences are. Since perceptions of problems and democratic values are two of the possible explanatory factors for democratic preferences, such analyses help to examine how deep the social divide really is and to what extent there is consensus on fundamental values and characteristics of good governance.

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## Appendix

*Figure 4. Distribution Lack of Recognition in Germany and the US.*

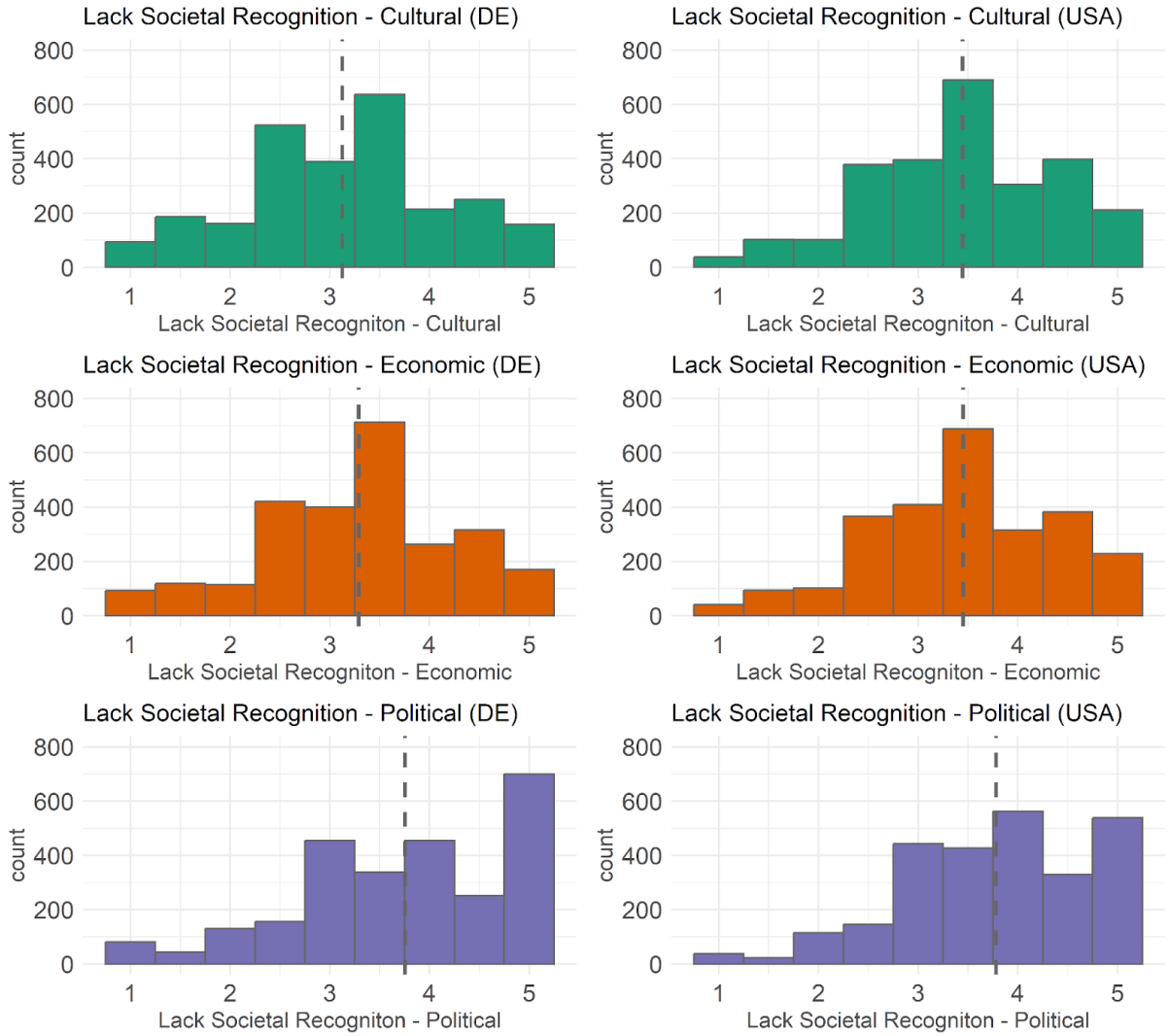



*Table 6. Group comparisons objective disadvantaged groups and their perceived lack of recognition.*

| | | Lack of cultural recognition | | Lack of economic recognition | | Lack of political recognition | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | DE | US | DE | US | DE | US |
| Rural | 0 | 3,1 * | 3,43 | 3,26 * | 3,44 | 3,71 * | 3,76 * |
| | 1 | 3,22 * | 3,55 | 3,42 * | 3,52 | 3,96 * | 3,98 * |
| Lower Social class | 0 | 2,98 * | 3,36 * | 3,08 * | 3,29 * | 3,54 * | 3,66 * |
| | 1 | 3,37 * | 3,59 * | 3,65 * | 3,74 * | 4,12 * | 4 * |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Low Income | 0 | 3,08 * | 3,43 | 3,22 * | 3,42 * | 3,69 * | 3,77 |
| | 1 | 3,27 * | 3,5 | 3,56 * | 3,58 * | 3,99 * | 3,84 |