

Between Preference and Principle:  
How Policy Outcomes Shape Commitment  
to the Rule of Law in the Netherlands



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## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates how outcome favorability of judicial rulings on immigration policy shapes individuals' commitment to the rule of law in the Netherlands. Although public endorsement of the normative principle of rule of law is widespread, academic literature increasingly suggests that support for the rule of law hinges on other factors. Building on theories of legitimacy, motivated reasoning, and negativity bias, this study examines whether unfavorable court rulings weaken commitment to the rule of law and whether this relationship is moderated by prior policy preferences and baseline trust in the judiciary. A randomized between-subjects survey experiment (N = 360) was conducted to test these expectations in the Netherlands. The respondents, recruited through convenience and snowball sampling, were randomly exposed to one of two real-world case vignettes depicting either a permissive or restrictive court ruling on immigration policy. The analysis of the experimental data reveals that individuals whose preferences aligned with the vignette expressed higher support for judicial authority, while incongruent outcomes corresponded to diminished support. However, contrary to expectations of negativity bias, no asymmetrical pattern emerged in the exploratory analysis. Similarly, there was no evidence that salience of prior immigration attitudes or baseline trust attenuates the impact of outcome favorability. Subsequently, these findings underscore that even in a context characterized by high institutional trust and a depoliticized judiciary, evaluations of courts (at least in the short term) are tethered to citizens' policy preferences.

**Keywords:** Rule of law, judicial legitimacy, outcome favorability, immigration policy

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## 1. Introduction

Democracies across the world are facing sustained deterioration. Over the past two decades, the average global level of liberal democracy has been declining. Two trends are observable: autocratic regimes have turned more autocratic, while democracies have, on average, become less democratic (Nord et al., 2025). As of 2024, autocratic regimes outnumber democracies by 91 to 88, while core democratic principles such as the freedom of expression, assembly, and the rule of law are regressing (Burlyuk et al., 2024; Nord et al., 2025). In more recent history, democratic backsliding has seldom resulted from ad hoc breakdowns but rather from a gradual process of deliberate norm and institutional erosion (Jacob, 2025). While autocratic leaders and incumbents typically display hostility toward judicial institutions that constrain their power (Gutmann et al., 2025), the success of democratic institutional deterioration stands and falls with the citizens' willingness to defend these institutions (Jacob, 2025; Saikkonen & Christensen, 2023). Consequently, the durability of democratic regimes hinges not only on the institutional design of checks and balances but also on individual-level support for the values underlying liberal democracies.

Rule of law is one of the defining principles of liberal democracies. Although the European Union (EU) enshrines the rule of law as a foundational value in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union, several member states, most notably Hungary and Poland, have challenged this principle (Burlyuk et al., 2024; Gutmann et al., 2025). Furthermore, the Netherlands is not immune to the wider trends visible across the EU and the globe. Although the Netherlands continues to rank among the world's strongest democracies, placing eighth globally in the 2024 World Justice Project Rule of Law Index (WJP, 2025b), Dutch politics have become increasingly fragmented with increasingly unstable coalitions and heightened polarization. Nonetheless, the Dutch judiciary remains comparatively insulated from partisan appointment, and public confidence in the rule of law is generally high (ESS, 2023).

Courts stand at the heart of democratic governance, ensuring accountability of the executive and interpreting the law impartially. Overall, individuals tend to express support for the abstract term "*rule of law*" (Graham & Svobik, 2020; Gutmann et al., 2025). However, high salience topics during periods of polarization can challenge this supposed support. In the Netherlands, the theme of migration has crystallized itself as a high salience topic (Albada et al., 2021). The question arises: 'When courts decide on polarizing issues, do citizens uphold legal authority even when they lose?' This thesis investigates how citizens' reactions to court rulings on high-salience themes reflect their commitment to the rule of law, even when they disagree with the

outcomes of the decisions. Outcome favorability (OF) is investigated as the perceived congruence between the direction of a judicial ruling and a citizen's prior preferences over the underlying policy. The commitment to the rule of law, defined as the willingness to accept and support the implementation of court rulings even when they contradict one's policy preferences, is at the center of this thesis. The main question guiding this research is:

*How does outcome favorability impact the effect of court rulings on immigration policy on individuals' commitment to the rule of law?*

Building on previous studies of diffuse vs. specific support, procedural fairness, and motivated reasoning (Gibson & Nelson, 2016; Kunda, 1990; Tyler & Rasinski, 1991), this thesis proposes four expectations. First, public approval of court rulings is contingent upon the perceived personal favorability of the result. Individuals often see verdicts that correspond with their preferences as equitable and genuine, but adverse results may incite skepticism and diminish trust in the judiciary (Badas, 2016; Bartels & Johnston, 2013; Grootelaar & Bos, 2018). Secondly, OF creates a negative asymmetry where unfavorable outcomes lower commitment more than positive outcomes enhance it (Christenson & Glick, 2019). Third and fourth, these impacts should be more pronounced in individuals with strong immigration preferences and less pronounced in those with greater pre-existing, dispersed confidence in courts (Grootelaar & Bos, 2018).

Immigration policy provides a revealing setting for this inquiry in the Netherlands. Attitudes toward immigration within the country are divided: Restrictive perspectives are more prevalent among right-leaning and less educated demographics, whereas more permissive attitudes are dominant among the left and those with higher education (Albada et al., 2021). Moreover, Dutch courts have repeatedly ruled on immigration-related cases, providing a realistic opportunity to test whether citizens continue to respect judicial authority even when legal reasoning conflicts with their own moral or political convictions.

To address the central research question, the study utilizes a randomized survey experiment among a sample of the Dutch population, recruited through convenience sampling. Participants are randomly allocated to react to one of two vignettes derived from real-world court cases: one supporting a more permissive immigration policy and the other a more stringent approach. This methodology facilitates a controlled comparison of the impact of outcome favorability on individuals' support for judicial authority. Moreover, the research investigates two moderators

thought to affect these reactions: salience of prior immigration attitudes and baseline trust in courts.

The research question bears societal and academic relevance, as it speaks to a practical governance problem of judicial legitimacy and ruling implementation, and adds to existing literature. The judiciary relies on public acceptance to sustain effective authority, particularly relevant in domains where rulings are implemented under public scrutiny and political pressures. Consequently, if acceptance and support hinge on OF, compliance with court rulings may become more contested. Furthermore, as the judiciary functions as central constraint on executive power in liberal democracies (Burlyuk et al., 2024), outcome-driven declines in individual-level support for judicial authority may weaken institutional safeguards against democratic erosion altogether (Jacob, 2025). Scientifically, the thesis contributes to research on judicial legitimacy by extending evidence on outcome favorability beyond the predominantly U.S.-centric literature to a European multiparty context.

The remainder of this thesis proceeds as follows: Within the next chapter, the existing literature on judicial legitimacy, outcome favorability, and procedural fairness is reviewed and synthesized. Then, the theoretical framework develops the hypotheses and the conceptual model guiding the research. The methodology then outlines the experimental design, data collection, and analytical approach, leading to the results section, after which the findings are discussed. Ultimately, conclusions are drawn, and limitations are addressed.

## 2. Literature Review

Rule of law and legitimacy of courts are widely regarded as cornerstones of liberal democracy (Buyse et al., 2021; Graham & Svobik, 2020; Hertogh, 2024). While citizens frequently express broad support for democratic institutions in name (Graham & Svobik, 2020; Gutmann et al., 2025; Saikkonen & Christensen, 2023), empirical observations suggest that public commitment to this normative principle is often shallow and conditional. Scholars have approached this puzzle from several angles: theories of institutional legitimacy (Gibson & Nelson, 2016; Tyler & Rasinski, 1991), studies of outcome favorability and procedural fairness as moderators (Badas, 2016; Grootelaar & Bos, 2018; Krehbiel & Cropanzano, 2000; Saikkonen & Christensen, 2023; Simon & Scurich, 2011; Tyler & Rasinski, 1991), and analyses of how framing and narration (Christenson & Glick, 2019; Magalhães et al., 2023) impact support for the rule of law.

This review synthesizes these strands and situates them in the context of immigration policy, a polarizing issue in the Netherlands (Albada et al., 2021; Brummel et al., 2024). Subsequently, this chapter seeks to highlight the mechanisms through which unpopular court rulings may erode individuals' commitment to the rule of law, conceptualize relevant variables and theories, and identify the main gaps within the literature.

### 2.1 Conventional Legitimacy Theory

When investigating the support for the rule of law, conventional legitimacy theory and its distinction between *specific* and *diffuse* support posit a reasonable starting point. The former refers to short-term judgments about specific institutional performances bound to throughput and output. On the other hand, diffuse support describes a deeper accumulation of goodwill and loyalty, which protects courts from backlash should certain decisions be met with public disdain. Thus, judicial independence builds onto diffuse support as it allows the judiciary to rule even against majority opinion without jeopardizing its authority (Gibson & Nelson, 2016). In other words, diffuse support refers to the conviction that the institution itself should be trusted and endowed with its full range of powers, despite occasional disagreements with particular outcomes (Baird, 2001).

However, growing literature challenges the notion that diffuse support is impervious to dissatisfaction. Bartels and Johnston (2013), for instance, highlight that even a single ruling misaligned with an individual's policy preferences can reduce legitimacy perceptions. Similarly, another study found that citizens tend to perceive a court as 'legalistic' if they

support the decision outcome but as ‘political’ should they oppose it (Badas, 2016). Although public confidence in the rule of law may fluctuate in the short term in response to outcomes, diffuse support tends to revert to baseline over time (Baird, 2001; Christenson & Glick, 2019). Exposure to symbolism, such as judicial robes or Lady Justice, can reinforce diffuse support, as they emphasize judicial impartiality and independence (Gibson & Nelson, 2016). However, recent literature suggests that support for the rule of law is a conditional resource that can erode under unfavorable conditions.

## 2.2 Procedural Fairness and Outcome Favorability

The literature has identified two main moderators impacting support for the rule of law: (1) procedural fairness and (2) outcome favorability. Citizens are more likely to accept unpopular court rulings if they perceive procedural fairness as high and the court thus as impartial and just (Tyler & Rasinski, 1991). Further research builds on this notion and elucidates that procedural fairness and OF interact (Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996; Grootelaar & Bos, 2018; Krehbiel & Cropanzano, 2000; Wu & Wang, 2013). However, their directionality remains contested. Fair procedures can mitigate the effects of unfavorable outcomes (Baird, 2001; Krehbiel & Cropanzano, 2000), while favorable outcomes matter more when procedures are perceived to be unfair (Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996; Grootelaar & Bos, 2018). Moreover, as the general public is unlikely to possess extensive technical knowledge of court procedures, individuals are inclined to form perceptions of fairness based on their level of support for the institution (Baird, 2001), in a reversed manner.

Outcome favorability, in particular, emerges as a persistent hurdle of legitimacy perceptions (Badas, 2016). Unfavorable outcomes are of particular consequence; more erosive than positive outcomes are drivers for support (Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996; Grootelaar & Bos, 2018). Studies in the U.S. confirm this asymmetry, highlighting that deeply rooted (moral) mandates in regard to judicial outcomes render procedural fairness close to irrelevant (Simon & Scurich, 2011).

## 2.3 Democracy and Polarization

Another strand of research situates rule-of-law support within broader dynamics of polarization and democratic deterioration (Graham & Svobik, 2020; Simon & Scurich, 2011). Many individuals in the U.S. context are willing to sacrifice democratic principles when they conflict with partisan or policy preferences (Graham & Svobik, 2020), especially for salient topics such as the right to abortion (Simon & Scurich, 2011). Even in contexts of high democratic

satisfaction rates such as Finland, support for democratic principles faces strain during multi-dimensional choices that put these norms to the test (Saikkonen & Christensen, 2023). Similarly, Lupia et al. (2000) highlight that politics involves value trade-offs, which citizens then resolve by prioritizing certain principles, such as partisanship, over others, such as the rule of law.

While the right to abortion is a highly politicized topic in the U.S., immigration is one of the most polarizing topics within the Netherlands. Public opinion on the topic is nearly evenly divided, with restrictive views concentrated among the less educated and right-leaning and more lenient views among the better educated and left-leaning (Albada et al., 2021). Dutch courts can find themselves at the center of these disputes, making immigration a particularly instructive environment for researching conditional support for the rule of law. The World Justice Project ranks the state of the rule of law in the Netherlands as 8<sup>th</sup> globally in 2024 (2025). Yet survey data from the European Social Survey show that nearly one in ten Dutch citizens expresses little or no trust in the legal system (2023). Regional evidence from South Holland, collected in 2023, further underscores this dynamic, as around 8 in 10 residents perceive a growing divide within Dutch society, with immigration and asylum identified among the driving forces (Brummel et al., 2024). Nonetheless, within the region, trust in judges is high compared to confidence in other civil servants or politicians, although it is subject to contextual changes over time (Brummel et al., 2024).

#### 2.4 Gaps in the Literature

There is extensive literature on the trade-off between outcome favorability and support for the rule of law. However, three major gaps remain. First, most of the literature thus far is U.S.-centric (i.e., Boddery et al., 2019; Gibson & Nelson, 2016; Graham & Svobik, 2020; Lupia et al., 2000; Song & Bloemraad, 2021), leaving the European, and more specifically, the Dutch context understudied (Grootelaar & Bos, 2018). Secondly, a majority of research focuses on how procedural fairness moderates effects of OF or vice versa, impacting perceived legitimacy (Krehbiel & Cropanzano, 2000; Tyler & Rasinski, 1991). However, evidence remains limited on how these mechanisms operate within specific policy contexts, such as immigration. Lastly, much of the existing academic literature equates rule of law commitment to tightly constricted concepts, such as trust in courts (Hertogh, 2024). In consequence, less is known about how decision-specific legitimacy judgments are shaped by outcome favorability in European multiparty contexts.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

This chapter develops a theoretical framework to address the aforementioned gaps in pre-existing academic literature. It first conceptualizes commitment to the rule of law as the dependent (outcome) variable of this research and introduces OF as the core mechanism shaping the dependent variable. Furthermore, the chapter specifies how policy preferences (in the field of immigration) and baseline trust in courts moderate the effects of OF.

#### 3.1 Support for the Rule of Law

Liberal democracies and the rule of law are deeply intertwined. Support for the rule of law is a significant determinant tracing democratic erosion. However, the conceptualization of the rule of law is contested: formal conceptions focus on the procedural structure of law creation and application, arguing that laws must be clear, stable, and equal in application, whereas substantive conceptions go beyond this notion and assess whether laws protect fundamental rights and freedoms (Buyse et al., 2021). This distinction echoes Gutmann et al.'s (2025) observation that interconnected concepts of the rule of law are not necessarily components of a narrow definition or valued equally by citizens across contexts.

Moreover, recent literature examines 'living rule of law' perspectives, which stress individuals' perceptions in sustaining the rule of law in everyday life (Hertogh, 2024). Subsequently, this paper also takes on a micro-level perspective with individuals as the core unit. Nonetheless, translating this broad normative ideal into measurable concepts remains challenging for empirical research. The World Justice Project (2025a) defines the rule of law as "[...] a durable system of laws, institutions, norms, and community commitment that delivers four universal principles: accountability, just law, open government, and accessible and impartial justice" (para. 2). Its index encompasses nine factors with nearly 50 sub-factors (WJP, 2025a). Other survey-based approaches often measure trust in courts or confidence in judges as proxies (Grootelaar & Bos, 2018; Hertogh, 2024). Yet these indicators capture only a narrow slice of the broader principle. As Hertogh (2024, p. 41) notes, "compliance with the rule of law is much more complicated than is often assumed in the normative and theoretical literature," since the rule of law competes with alternative norms and value systems in the eyes of citizens.

However, this study follows conventional legitimacy theory in its distinction of diffuse and specific support (Baird, 2001; Gibson & Nelson, 2016), conceptualizing the commitment to the rule of law as the willingness to support legal authority even when specific judicial rulings

conflict with substantive policy preferences, mirroring the definition of specific support. The experimental design then allows testing of the normative principle, as opposed to supporting an abstract concept in name only. Accordingly, this study focuses on case-level (specific) support: evaluations of the court's decision, impartiality, and authority of the presented scenario.

### 3.2 Outcome Favorability

Prior research reports a negative association between unfavorable outcomes and support for the rule of law (Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996; Gibson & Nelson, 2016; Graham & Svobik, 2020; Grootelaar & Bos, 2018; Krehbiel & Cropanzano, 2000). According to Brockner and Wiesenfeld (1996), the concept encompasses two dimensions: (1) outcome fairness, the degree to which individuals perceive the outcome as equitable, and (2) outcome valence, the degree to which individuals believe they derive material benefits from the judgment. An outcome may still be considered favorable even if it is considered unjust (Krehbiel & Cropanzano, 2000).

A prominent stream within academic literature finds that OF is tied to perceptions of judicial legitimacy. While early research claims that fair processes can secure acceptance of unfavorable outcomes (Tyler & Rasinski, 1991), subsequent studies show that this assumption is limited. Instead, individuals who disagree with judicial outputs tend to downgrade their assessment of the judicial institution itself (Bartels & Johnston, 2013; Simon & Scurich, 2011), particularly if the ruling pertains to a politicized topic (Badas, 2016). Krehbiel and Cropanzano (2000) frame this as cognitive appraisal theory: individuals first appraise outcomes in terms of personal benefit or harm, producing immediate emotional reactions. These assumptions, therefore, motivate:

*H1: Exposure to an unfavorable court ruling reduces rule-of-law commitment.*

Another relevant mechanism is negativity bias, which holds that unfavorable outcomes are more salient than positive ones. Christenson and Glick (2019) assert that adverse judicial rulings diminish legitimacy more significantly than favorable rulings augment it. This imbalance implies that even if diffuse support serves as a reservoir, it may be exhausted more rapidly by a series of unfavorable outcomes than it can be restored by favorable ones, thus informing:

*H2: Outcome incongruence reduces rule-of-law commitment more strongly than outcome congruence increases it.*

### 3.3 Moderators on the Outcome Effect

Although outcome favorability is a determinant of legitimacy perceptions, its effects may be moderated by (1) the salience of prior policy preferences and (2) baseline trust in courts.

#### (1) Salience of Prior Immigration Attitudes and Motivated Reasoning

Individuals rarely evaluate judicial decisions in a vacuum. (Deeply rooted) policy preferences can alter how outcomes are interpreted, especially if the topic is politically polarized, morally charged, or particularly close to the individual (Badas, 2016; Simon & Scurich, 2011). Kunda's theory of *motivated reasoning* highlights how such a mechanism can come to pass. Citizens tend to interpret information so that it confirms their pre-existing belief systems and overestimate the importance of arguments that support their desired conclusion (Kunda, 1990). Subsequently, highly individual politicization, as in the salient domain of immigration in the Netherlands (Albada et al., 2021), can trigger motivated responses to court rulings that then align with pre-held attitudes.

This implies that individuals with stringent and restrictive immigration preferences tend to apply motivated reasoning to permissive rulings, seeing them as politically driven rather than a product of unbiased legal application. Conversely, those who strongly support more permissive judicial outcomes may tend to interpret restrictive outcomes as politically motivated. These assumptions thus inform:

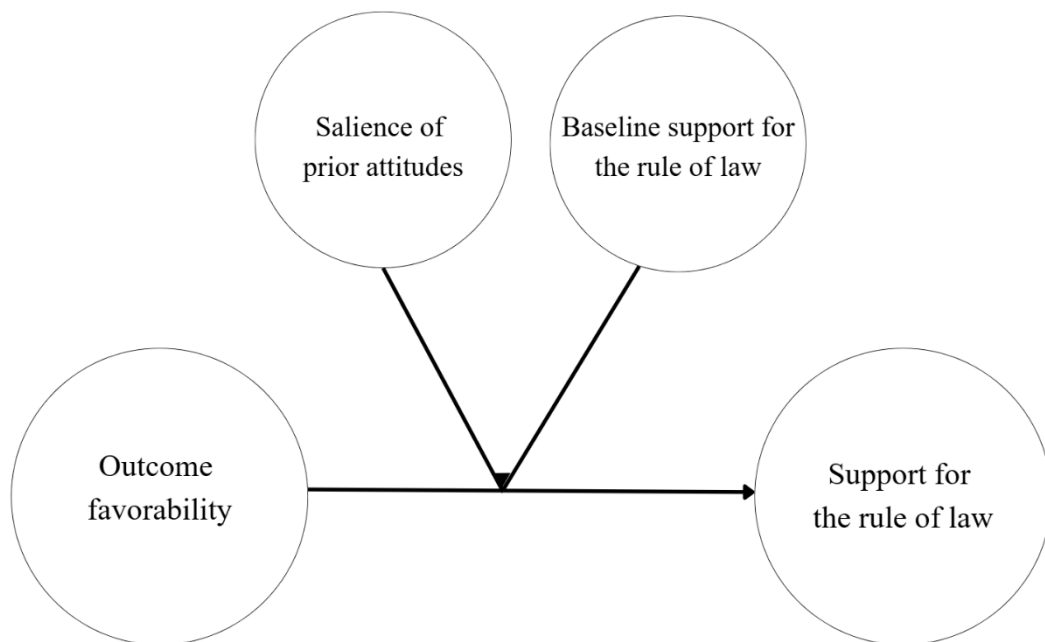
*H3: The negative effect on rule-of-law commitment is stronger among respondents with salient prior immigration preferences.*

#### (2) Baseline Trust in Courts

This study investigates baseline trust in courts as a second potential moderator, grounded in the reservoir of diffuse support (Gibson & Nelson, 2016). As positivity theory posits, people who are consistently exposed to judicial symbols and institutional signals that underscore impartiality foster a sense of support even in the face of unfavorable outcomes (Gibson & Caldeira, 2009). Thus, individuals with a higher baseline of trust are more inclined to view

decisions as legitimate. Similarly, within the Dutch context, perceptions of procedural fairness and favorable outcomes are influenced by overall trust in judges (Grootelaar & Bos, 2018). People who have greater trust are more likely to accept results, even if they deem them unfavorable. This indicates that diffuse support, as measured by baseline trust, serves as a stabilizing element that counteracts the decline of trust in reaction to unfavorable decisions. Subsequently, this research hypothesizes:

*H4: Higher baseline trust in courts attenuates the negative effect of unfavorable rulings on rule-of-law commitment.*



**Figure 1:** Summary of the Theoretical Framework

## 4. Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted to examine how outcome favorability in court rulings on immigration policy affects individuals' commitment to the rule of law. It details the research design, sampling strategy, survey structure, operationalization of variables, and procedures undertaken to ensure validity and ethical compliance.

### 4.1 Research Design

This study utilized a randomized between-subjects survey experiment to investigate how people's commitment to the rule of law reacts to the outcome of court decisions on immigration policy. The dependent variable (DV) of this research is the commitment to the rule of law, taking on a micro-level perspective with individuals as the core unit. Particularly, in politicized and polarizing policy domains, changes of perception on the individual level are relevant, as perceptions of opposing sides may lead to misleading macro-level stability (Christenson & Glick, 2019). Thus, an experimental design is appropriate, isolating the impact of the independent variable (IV) – in this case, outcome favorability – on the DV, namely the commitment to uphold legal authority in spite of policy disagreement.

Furthermore, experiments are prominent research methods in the disciplines of public administration and political science (Hainmueller et al., 2015; Toshkov, 2016), and previous research has effectively utilized survey experiments (Gibson & Nelson, 2016; Graham & Svolic, 2020) and, in particular, vignette-based designs to assess the impacts of OF and procedural fairness on institutional legitimacy (Magalhães et al., 2023; Simon & Scurich, 2011). Therefore, this experiment relies on vignettes, as they allow for controlled measures of outcome congruence or incongruence. Thereby, two contrasting real-world court cases – favoring restrictive or permissive immigration policy, respectively – are introduced. Following the example of Magalhães et al. (2023), this design allows the study to isolate and manipulate key elements in the evaluation of judicial decision-making.

The experiment follows a between-subjects, cross-sectional design. Therefore, the data is collected at only one point in time, and each participant is exposed to only one of the vignettes. Through the random allocation of participants within the experiment, this method assures high internal or causal validity (McDermott, 2017). To ensure randomized treatment allocation and data management, the experiment is administered via Qualtrics. The design offers a controlled yet realistic test of how outcome favorability and salience of prior attitudes shape public commitment to the rule of law in the Dutch immigration context.

#### 4.2 Population and Sampling Strategy

This study is set in the Netherlands, and its target population consists of Dutch residents with a minimum age of eighteen. To reach a wide range and variety of responses, this study relies on convenience and snowball sampling. This includes distribution through personal networks of the author and posting on internet forums such as Reddit, SurveySwap, and SurveyCircle. Data collection occurred for fourteen days between the 14th of November 2025 and the 28th of November 2025. Although a randomized sampling strategy would have been preferred to ensure higher external validity, this extends the scope of this study.

#### 4.3 Survey Structure

Before the start of the survey itself, participants were informed about the purpose of this research, asked for consent and whether they met the required criteria (see [Appendix 1](#)). Refusal of consent or the indication of being a minor led to an automatic discontinuation. All questions within the survey required a response to prevent incomplete responses. Consenting participants were asked about their baseline trust in the judiciary and their policy preferences towards a variety of topics, such as immigration. In order not to alert the participants to the context of the survey too early, such that it may not alter their response behavior, immigration items were embedded among a variety of pre-treatment questions.

Next, one of the two possible vignettes was introduced. The court ruling in vignette (a) champions a more liberal approach to immigration: the District Court of The Hague ruled in 2022 that the Dutch state must provide dignified reception standards not just in regular but also temporary reception shelters (*Stichting Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland tegen de Staat der Nederlanden en het Centraal Orgaan opvang asielzoekers*, 2022). Conversely, the court ruling in vignette (b) protects a more restrictive stance on immigration: in 2015, the highest administrative court of the Netherlands, the Raad van State, upheld a government policy of withholding food and shelter from rejected asylum-seekers who refuse to be repatriated (*De staatssecretaris van Veiligheid en Justitie tegen [de vreemdeling]*, 2015). Both vignettes are real court cases slightly rewritten for readability and neutrality (i.e., omitting the different levels within the judicial hierarchy and omitting dates) and can be found within [Appendix 2](#). Following the example of Simon and Scurich (2011), a comprehension check followed to ensure that the vignettes were not simply overlooked and were fully read. Failure of the comprehension check on two separate occasions led to the exclusion of the participant from the sample.

Next, respondents completed the dependent variable items measuring commitment to the rule of law through four 7-point Likert scales capturing decision-specific judicial support. Finally, the participants were asked to explain their stance in one open question and asked about their demographics, namely age, gender, and highest achieved educational level, as well as voting intent.

#### 4.4. Operationalization of Variables

Relevant concepts are operationalized into indicators as explained in *Table 1*, and an overview of the statistical tests utilized can be found in *Table 6 (Appendix 3)*.

The independent variable of this study, outcome favorability, captures the degree to which a court ruling presented in the vignette aligns with respondents' pre-treatment immigration preferences. It is operationalized as a computed continuous congruence score between the respondent's pre-existing immigration attitude, measured on a 1–7 scale and centered at the midpoint (4;  $< 0$  = permissive respondent;  $> 0$  = restrictive respondent), and the outcome direction described in the vignette ( $-1$  = permissive ruling;  $+1$  = restrictive ruling). Further, the variable is coded such that positive values indicate alignment between the court ruling and the respondent's prior immigration preferences, while negative values indicate misalignment. As a complementary approach, two direct post-treatment evaluations, such as "This outcome reflects what I wanted to happen" and "This ruling makes me angry," are used as manipulation and construct validity checks.

Two moderators were measured pre-treatment: attitude salience on immigration and baseline trust in courts. Most attitudinal items were measured on 7-point Likert-type scales, consistent with standard practice in experimental legitimacy research (Albada et al., 2021; Grootelaar & Bos, 2018; Wu & Wang, 2013). The baseline trust (diffuse support) measurement was operationalized following established legitimacy measures using items on perceived impartiality and respect for court authority (Christenson & Glick, 2019). More specifically, it was measured through four items assessing perceived fairness, impartiality, trustworthiness, and respect for courts. A score was then created by computing the mean across the items, which was centered for use in interaction models. For analytical purposes, immigration attitudes were centered at the scale midpoint. To further capture the salience of these attitudes, a non-directional measure was constructed as the absolute distance from the midpoint.

The dependent variable, commitment to the rule of law, was then measured through four post-treatment items capturing (1) perceived fairness, (2) perceived impartiality, (3) perceived political bias, and (4) acceptance of the ruling as binding (see *Table 1*), combined into a mean index. This is in line with established legitimacy indices (Christenson & Glick, 2019). Lastly, the design incorporated an exploratory post-treatment item: an open-ended reflection question to explore cognitive and affective mechanisms.

**Table 1: Operationalization of Key Variables**

Theoretical Concept	Indicator/Survey Item	Coding
Outcome favorability (IV)	Computed alignment between centered immigration attitudes and court ruling direction.  <b>Manipulation check (post-treatment):</b> (1) “The judgment reflects what I wanted to happen in this case.” (2) “This outcome makes me angry.”	(positive values = aligned; negative values = misaligned).  Likert scale: (1 = strongly disagree ... 7 = strongly agree)
Prior immigration preferences and their salience	<b>Policy preference:</b> Overall, immigration does more harm than good for the Netherlands.	Likert scale: (1 = strongly disagree ... 7 = strongly agree)  Attitude salience =  attitude – midpoint .
Baseline trust	<b>Trust in courts:</b> (1) “I trust Dutch courts to make fair and impartial decisions.” (2) “Even when courts make decisions I dislike, I believe they serve the public interest.”  <b>Perceived impartiality of judges:</b> (3) “Judges in the Netherlands apply the law inconsistently and with political bias.” (reverse-coded)  <b>Respect for judicial decisions:</b> (4) “Governments should always adhere to and respect court rulings.”	Likert scale: (1 = strongly disagree ... 7 = strongly agree)
Commitment to the rule of law (DV)	<b>Trust in courts:</b> (1) “In this case, I believe that the court made a fair and impartial decision.”  <b>Perceived impartiality of judges:</b> (2) “In this case, the law was applied consistently and without political bias.”	Likert scale: (1 = strongly disagree ... 7 = strongly agree)

	(3) “This decision was driven by politics rather than law.” (reverse-coded)	
	<b>Respect for judicial decisions:</b>	
	(4) “The Dutch government should not be bound by this court decision.” (reverse-coded)	
Exploratory	“What mattered most for your evaluation of this decision?”	Open question coded thematically

#### 4.5 Quality Assurance and Ethical Considerations

To ensure validity, reliability, and overall quality of the research, several measures and steps were implemented. Foremost, to address construct validity, the degree to which the empirical measures capture the theoretical constructs (Toshkov, 2016), each survey item and variable was designed to closely align with the conceptual framework of this study. To minimize the risk of conceptual overlap, a common pitfall of experiments (McDermott, 2017), the survey was piloted by peers, and complex variables were broken down into understandable proxies.

To ensure that participants carefully engage with the survey items, the survey overall and in particular the vignettes were kept as concise as possible. A comprehension check tests the attentiveness of the participants (Simon & Scurich, 2011). In consequence, those who failed this check were re-exposed to the treatment. To ensure internal consistency and reliability, some survey items were reverse-coded, as is common in the academic literature (Albada et al., 2021; Grootelaar & Bos, 2018).

By design, the experimental method carries high internal validity (McDermott, 2017). This was further strengthened through randomization to ensure that participants across groups differ only in their exposure to the vignettes. On the other hand, external validity represents a central limitation to this design (Toshkov, 2016). To still ground the research in a real-world setting, the two vignettes incorporated authentic court cases in the Netherlands. However, due to the sample size, especially regarding the conditional hypotheses (H2-H4), they must be interpreted with caution and considered indicative and exploratory rather than definitive.

Moreover, to assess model assumptions, standard OLS diagnostics (multicollinearity, heteroskedasticity, and residual checks) were conducted for all regression models, with results reported in [Appendix 6, Table 7](#). In addition, an influential-case check for H1 (Cook’s

D) shows that excluding flagged cases does not alter the conclusion (see [Appendix 6, Table 8](#)).

Lastly, to address ethical concerns, the survey experiment complies with the ethical standards of Leiden University. Participants were briefed about the research, including its objectives, length, and any potential risks associated with their involvement. The design was reviewed by the thesis supervisor.

## 5. Results

This chapter proceeds in two steps. First, it describes the sample, checks balance across treatment conditions, and summarizes the key variables. Second, it tests the hypotheses: H1 (main effect of outcome favorability), H2 (asymmetry), H3 (attitude-salience moderation), and H4 (baseline-trust moderation), interpreting each model in terms of expected changes on the rule-of-law commitment scale.

The survey obtained a total of 431 responses, of which 360 were deemed valid, meaning that they both met the required criteria and passed the comprehension check (16 respondents failed) and completed the dependent-variable items. Respondents were distributed approximately evenly across the experimental conditions: 177 participants (49%) received Treatment A (permissive), and 183 participants (51%) received Treatment B (restrictive).

Demographic characteristics (*Tables 2 and 3*) of the sample include gender composition, with 52% identifying as male and 46% identifying as female. Education levels were concentrated among highly educated respondents, with more than half of the participants ( $n = 193$ , 54.7%) indicating completion of a degree from a Research University (WO). Only 11% of all respondents received a lower secondary education or no education at all. The average age of respondents was 28 ( $SD = 11$ ), ranging from 18 to 72.

The majority of respondents (76%) indicated Dutch nationality. Among the 84 non-Dutch participants, 56 respondents were from other European countries, while a minority of 28 respondents hail from outside of Europe. Of the 84, 62 reported having lived in the Netherlands for more than a year. To assess the political orientation of the sample, respondents were grouped according to the party they indicated they would vote for in a national election. The following parties were coded as *Progressive*: GL-PvdA, D66, PvdD, Volt, SP, and Denk, yielding support from 64% of respondents ( $n = 234$ ). On the other hand, PVV, VVD, JA21, FvD, BBB, and SGP were coded as *Right/Conservative*, yielding support from 13% of the sample.

**Table 2:** Sample Characteristics for Categorical Variables

Variable	N	Percentage
<b>Treatment Condition</b>		
Permissive	177	49.2%
Restrictive	183	50.8%
Alignment with outcome	135	

Misalignment with outcome	225	37.5%
		62.5%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	183	51.8%
Female	163	46.2%
Non-binary/Other	3	0.8%
Prefer not to say	4	1.1%
<b>Education Level</b>		
No education	1	0.3%
Secondary	39	11.0%
MBO/Vocational	21	5.9%
HBO (Applied University)	99	28.0%
WO (Research University)	193	54.7%
<b>Nationality</b>		
Dutch	270	76.3%
Other	84	23.7%
<b>Political Orientation</b>		
Progressive	234	64.4%
Right/Conservative	48	13.3%
Other	80	22.2%
<b>Total N</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>100%</b>

Respondents showed a slightly negative mean on the outcome-favorability measure ( $M = -0.17$ ,  $SD = 1.87$ ), as 135 respondents found themselves aligning with the vignette and 225 were misaligned. Baseline trust in courts was high ( $M = 5.22$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ), and specific rule-of-law support scored moderately across the sample ( $M = 4.91$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ). Across the 360 respondents, missing data on the demographics section due to early drop-out was minimal, with 353 complete cases.

**Table 3:** Sample Characteristics for Continuous Variables

Variable	M	SD	Min	Max
Outcome Favorability	-0.17	1.87	-3.00	3.00
Immigration Attitudes	3.41	1.78	1.00	7.00
Attitude Saliency	1.59	0.98	0.00	3.00
Baseline Trust	5.22	1.08	2.25	7.00
Rule-of-Law Commitment	4.92	1.27	1.00	7.00
<b>Total N</b>	<b>360</b>			

Random assignment produced well-balanced treatment groups. No significant differences emerged in age ( $t = 1.14, p = .256$ ); gender ( $\chi^2 = 0.40, p = .941$ ); education ( $\chi^2 = 1.78, p = .777$ ); or party preference ( $\chi^2 = 22.26, p = .175$ ) across conditions. Therefore, this balance supports interpreting differences in outcomes as unlikely to reflect pre-treatment group differences.

In summary, the sample consists predominantly of young and highly educated people, which may limit external validity of the research.

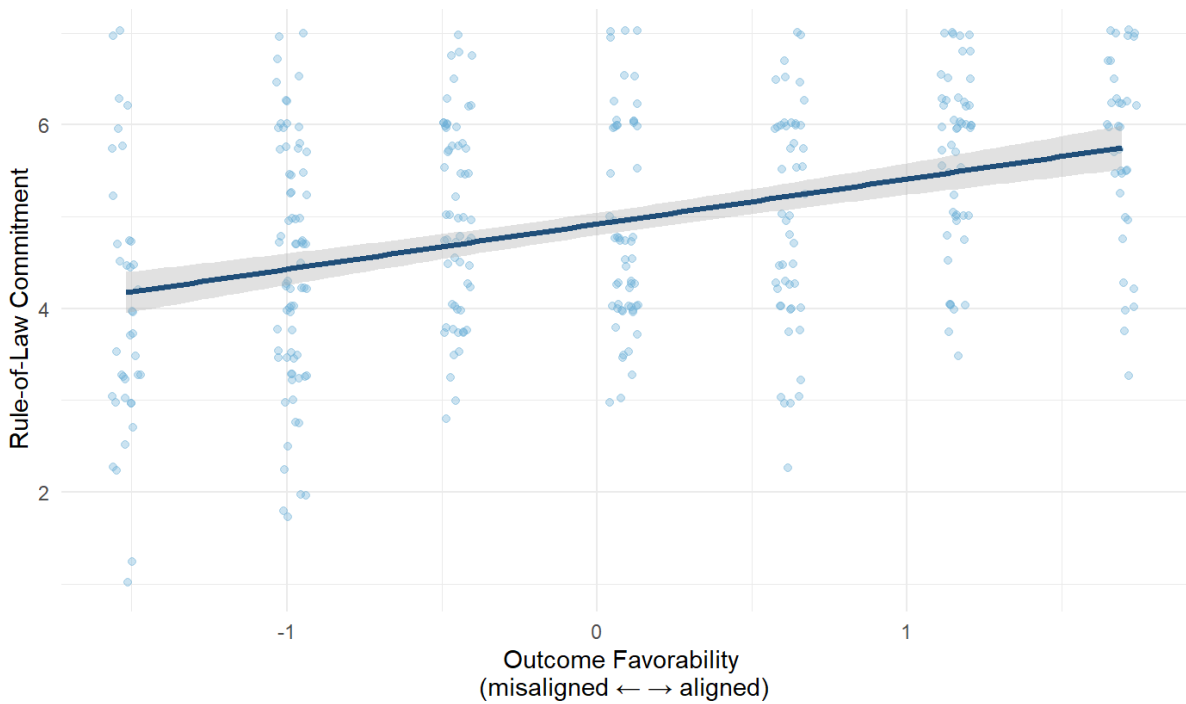
### 5.1 Outcome Favorability: Main Effect Model (H1)

To examine the first hypothesis, “exposure to an unfavorable court ruling reduces rule-of-law commitment,” the commitment to the rule of law had to be constructed and evaluated for reliability. The four-item rule-of-law support scale thereby demonstrated high reliability ( $\alpha = .86$ ) and variation across respondents ( $M = 4.92, SD = 1.27$ ).

OF, the independent variable, was operationalized as a continuous congruence score. Higher values indicate favorable outcomes, and lower values indicate outcomes that contradict respondents’ preferences. The congruence score correlated strongly with post-treatment evaluations of the ruling, indicating these treatment-related measures behave as intended: Respondents who perceived the judgment as reflecting “what [they] wanted to happen” exhibited higher congruence ( $r = .55, p < .001$ ), whereas those who reported anger displayed lower congruence ( $r = -.47, p < .001$ ).

To test the hypothesis, a linear regression evaluated the variation in rule-of-law commitment along with the congruence score for OF. The model showed a positive coefficient, indicating a statistically significant link between outcome favorability and increased support for the rule of law ( $b = 0.49, SE = 0.06, p < .001$ ). This suggests that a one-unit increase of OF corresponds to an expected 0.49-point increase in commitment to the rule of law on the 7-point scale. The model explained around 15% of the variation in rule-of-law commitment ( $R^2 = .15$ ). Ultimately, these results support H1.

*Figure 2* illustrates the effect of outcome favorability by plotting the linear regression fit, together with the individual data points. Respondents with strongly unfavorable outcomes ( $OF \leq -2; n = 110$ ) reported a lower mean commitment of  $M = 4.30$  ( $SD = 1.37$ ) than those with strongly favorable outcomes ( $OF \geq +2; n = 86$ ), who reported  $M = 5.67$  ( $SD = 0.98$ ), resulting in a difference of 1.37 points on the 7-point Likert scale.



**Figure 2:** *Rule-of-Law Commitment by Outcome Favorability (H1)*

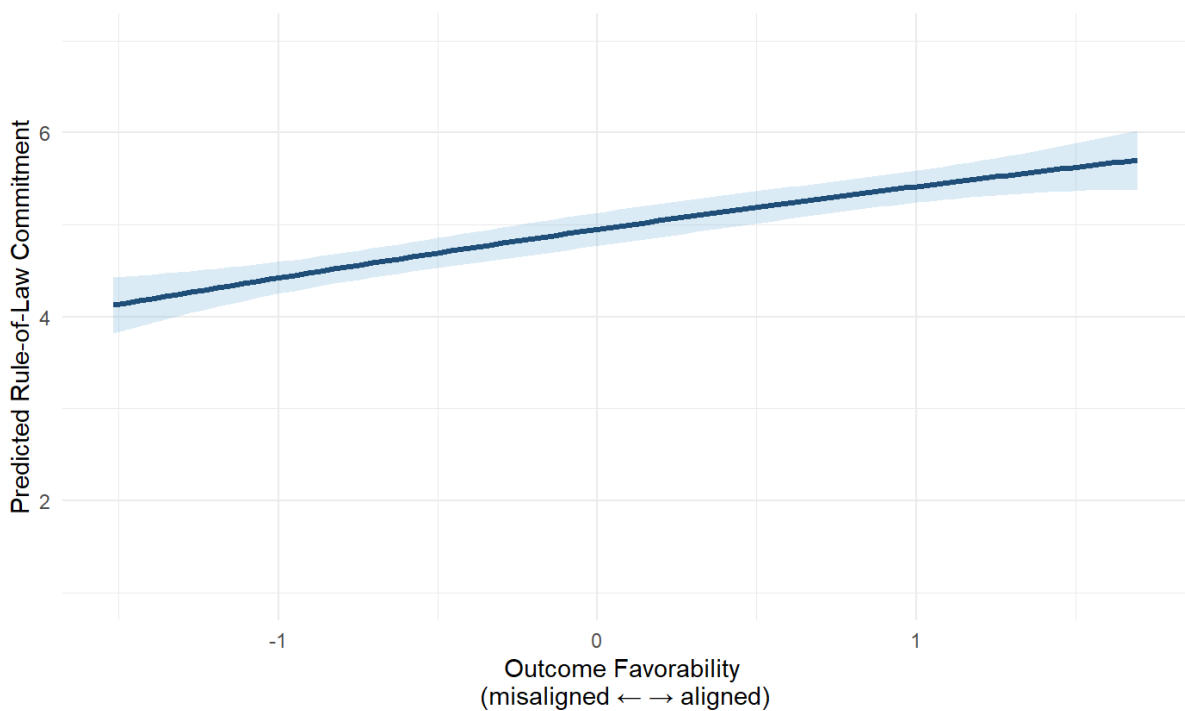
*Higher values on the x-axis indicate greater alignment between the court ruling and respondents' prior preferences. Scatter-points represent individual respondents, while the line shows the linear regression fit.*

Additionally, as a robustness check, H1 was re-estimated with a binary misalignment indicator whilst pre-treatment immigration attitudes were controlled for. Misalignment was associated with lower rule-of-law commitment ( $b = -0.72$ ,  $SE = 0.13$ ,  $p < .001$ ; see [Appendix 4](#)), in line with the main result. In summary, support for the rule of law is contingent, and unfavorable case outcomes may significantly affect people's assessments of the legal system.

## 5.2 Asymmetry: Nonlinearity Models (H2)

To test the asymmetry and nonlinearity of outcome incongruence vs. outcome congruence predicted in H2, a quadratic regression was used. Following the theory of negativity bias, unfavorable outcomes should, as per hypothesis, reduce rule-of-law commitment more sharply than favorable outcomes increase it, implying a nonlinear relationship. The results revealed a positive linear association between OF and rule-of-law support ( $b = 0.50$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $p < .001$ ), consistent with the findings of H1. However, the quadratic term was not statistically significant ( $b = -0.03$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $p = .655$ ,  $R^2 = .149$ ). *Figure 4* plots rule-of-law commitment across the

outcome-favorability scale with the quadratic fit overlaid. The curve appears close to linear, consistent with the non-significant quadratic term.



**Figure 4:** Rule of Law Commitment by Outcome Favorability (H2 – Quadratic Test)

*The relationship between the two variables appears approximately linear, with no strong visible curvature, indicating no evidence for asymmetry in the effect of outcome favorability.*

Additionally, to further probe potential asymmetry, a region-of-effect model differentiated between unfavorable (1 = favorability < 0) and favorable outcomes (0 = favorability ≥ 0). However, the interaction term was not significant ( $b = 0.33$ ,  $SE = 0.27$ ,  $p = .226$ ), and the slopes did not change between regions. Overall, respondents with negative favorability scores reported a weaker overall commitment to the rule of law ( $b = -0.65$ ,  $SE = 0.27$ ,  $p = 0.016$ ). This implies a lower expected level of rule-of-law commitment for respondents in the unfavorable region at  $OF = 0$ . Notwithstanding, the slope of change in commitment as congruence improves did not vary significantly across favorable and unfavorable scores. Thus, this pattern is inconsistent with the hypothesized asymmetry, which would predict the steepest decline at the unfavorable end of the scale.

**Table 4: Regression Models Testing H2**

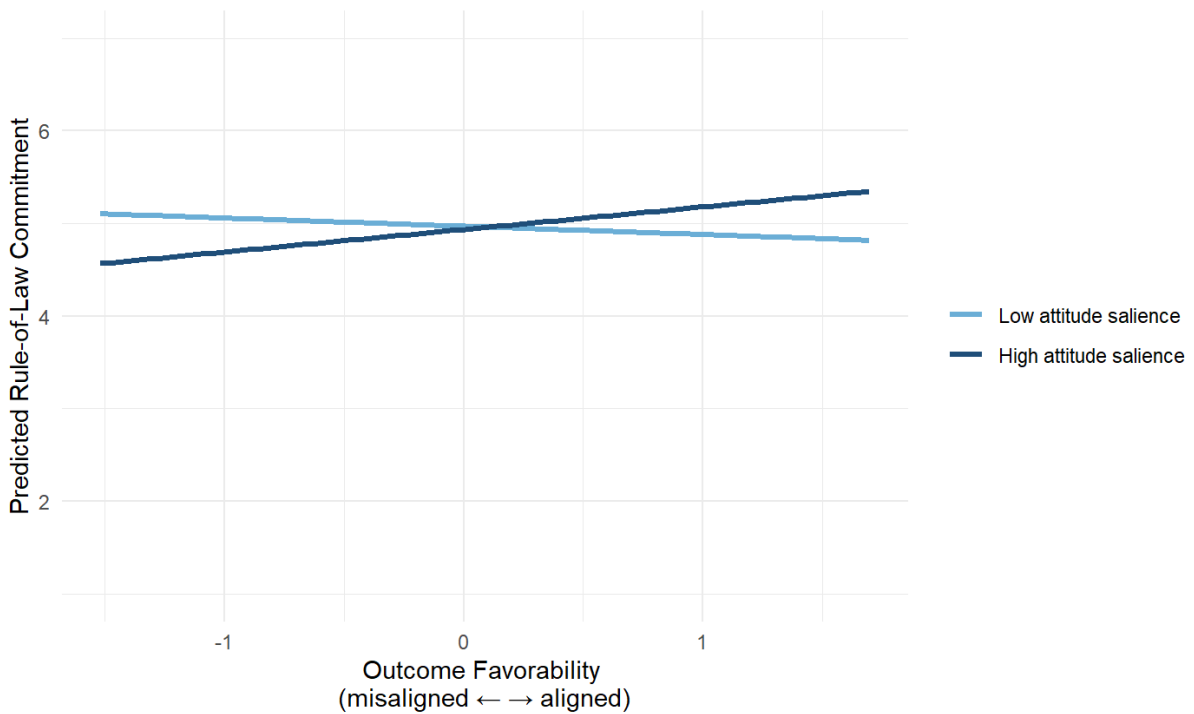
Model	Variable	b	SE	p	R <sup>2</sup>
Quadratic Test	Congruence	0.50	0.06	< .001	.149
	Congruence <sup>2</sup>	-0.03	0.07	.655	
Region of Effect	Congruence	0.62	0.15	< .001	.163
	Unfavorable dummy	-0.65	0.27	.016	
	Congruence x Unfavorable	0.33	0.27	.226	

*Note: b = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; R<sup>2</sup> = coefficient of determination*

Across both specifications, the evidence points to a predominantly linear relationship (see *Table 4*): as outcomes become more unfavorable and less aligned with respondents' preferences, commitment declines at a steady rate. Taken together, both tests indicate a largely linear association rather than the predicted negativity-driven curvature. Consequently, the evidence does not support H2 for the sample but rather contradicts it.

### 5.3 Attitude Salience as Moderator: Interaction Model (H3)

H3 predicts that the effect of outcome misalignment on rule-of-law commitment increases with the salience of respondents' pre-held immigration attitudes. Accordingly, rule-of-law commitment was regressed on outcome favorability, attitude salience (the absolute distance from the midpoint of the immigration-attitudes scale), and their interaction, as visualized by *Figure 5*. The interaction term was positive ( $b = 0.17$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ), indicating a modest tendency for stronger attitudes to amplify the relationship between favorability and rule-of-law support. However, the estimate did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance ( $p = .078$ ). Neither the main effect of OF ( $b = 0.08$ ,  $p = .751$ ) nor the main effect of attitude salience ( $b = -0.02$ ,  $p = .789$ ) reached statistical significance ( $R^2 = .156$ ). In substantive terms, the coefficient suggests that each one-unit increase in attitudinal salience is associated with a 0.17 increase in the slope of outcome favorability; however, the uncertainty around the estimate is too large to draw conclusions.



**Figure 5:** Interaction Between Outcome Favorability and Attitude Salience (H3)

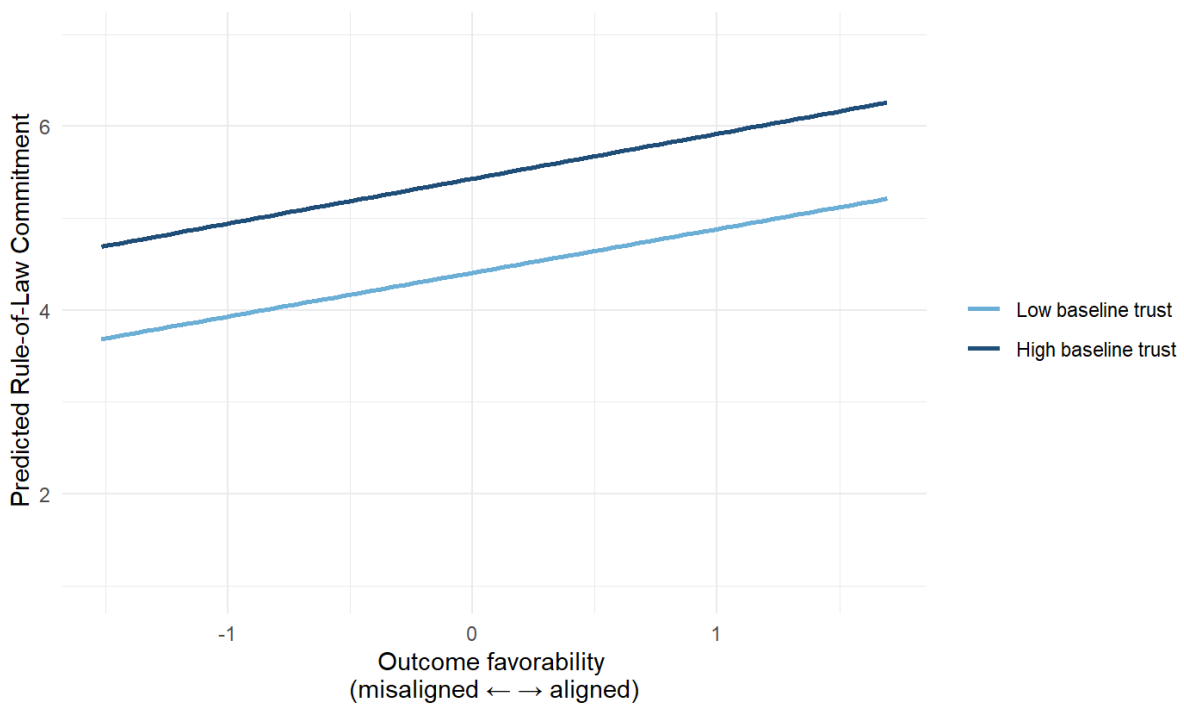
*Predicted rule-of-law commitment and outcome favorability at low (-1) and high (+1) levels of immigration attitude salience. Higher values on the x-axis indicate greater alignment between the court ruling and respondents' prior preferences.*

Exploratory bloc-specific models (permissive vs. restrictive) yielded directionally similar but statistically inconclusive interaction estimates (details are provided in [Appendix 5](#)), consistent with the full-sample pattern. In summary, the data does not provide satisfactory evidence that the negative effect on rule-of-law commitment is stronger among respondents with salient prior immigration preferences: H3 is not supported.

#### 5.4 Baseline Trust as Moderator: Interaction Model (H4)

To probe H4 and whether baseline trust attenuates the negative effect of unfavorable rulings on the DV, baseline trust (diffuse support) in courts was first operationalized through the four items capturing perceptions of judicial fairness, impartiality (reverse-coded), trustworthiness, and respect ( $M = 5.2$ ,  $SD = 1.1$ ,  $\alpha = .77$ ). To test the hypothesis, this trust index was mean-centered and interacted with the continuous measure of outcome favorability.

The moderation model yielded two findings. First, both OF ( $b = 0.48$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and baseline trust ( $b = 0.51$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $p < .001$ ) exhibited strong and independent positive associations with rule-of-law commitment. Holding outcome favorability constant, a one-point increase in baseline trust is, therefore, associated with an expected 0.51-point increase in rule-of-law commitment. Respondents who thought the verdict was closer aligned with their preferences and those who started the experiment with a higher baseline trust in the courts both showed more support for the rule of law after the treatment. Second, and central to H4, the interaction term was small and insignificant ( $b = 0.01$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $p = .902$ ), providing no evidence that trust altered the strength or direction of the favorability effect. *Figure 6* displays the predicted rule-of-law commitment across OF for respondents with low versus high baseline trust.



**Figure 6:** Interaction Between Outcome Favorability and Baseline Trust (H4)

*Higher values of outcome favorability indicate greater alignment between the court ruling and respondents' prior immigration preferences. Lines represent respondents with low (-1) and high (+1) baseline trust in courts. The parallel slopes indicate that baseline trust does not moderate the effect of outcome favorability.*

The results indicate that, for this sample, baseline trust in courts is a predictor of rule-of-law commitment on its own, but it does not buffer individuals against the effects of unfavorable decisions. Therefore, these findings do not support Hypothesis 4 (H4), leading to its rejection.

## 6. Discussion & Conclusion

The last chapter of the research interprets the presented results in light of the theoretical framework and prior research. It first discusses support for the main effect of outcome favorability and the absence of asymmetry and the hypothesized moderation. It then considers plausible explanations for these patterns and closes by outlining implications, limitations, and future research avenues.

This study investigated the influence of outcome favorability of court judgments on immigration policy on people's commitment to the rule of law, emphasizing interaction or the lack thereof of salience of pre-existing immigration attitudes and baseline trust in the judiciary. While much empirical literature on outcome favorability and support for the judiciary has thus far focused on the bipartisan context of the U.S., comparatively little evidence exists on European systems. This study aimed to work in filling that gap by highlighting that even residents of the Netherlands, a country with high trust in the judiciary (ESS, 2023; WJP, 2025b), are not immune to preference-conditioned reactions to court rulings. Across the experimental conditions, patterns could be observed.

Firstly, the results of this study confirmed the claims stated in the literature that OF is a central driver of specific rule-of-law commitment (Christenson & Glick, 2019; Krehbiel & Cropanzano, 2000). Survey respondents who viewed the verdict of the respective vignette as congruent with their immigration preferences showed increased support for judicial authority, while those confronted with misaligned rulings indicated a lower level of commitment. Secondly, contrary to the assumptions based on negativity bias, OF displayed no detectable asymmetry, where incongruent outcomes disproportionately impacted the dependent variable. Instead, the relationship followed a linear pattern. Thirdly, the research found limited evidence in favor of the hypothesis that salience of immigration attitudes influences the impact of OF. Despite interaction effects aligning with Kunda's (1990) theory of motivated reasoning, these trends did not achieve statistical significance. Fourthly, baseline trust in courts emerged as an independent indicator of commitment to the rule of law, yet not as a buffer to unfavorable rulings as was hypothesized.

The strong relationship of outcome favorability (IV) and rule-of-law commitment (DV) substantiates that the public's assessments of courts are not only based on a diffuse accumulation of goodwill but are also significantly shaped by the trajectory of judicial rulings.

Legitimacy theory asserts that courts benefit from a reservoir of entrenched trust that protects them from discontent (Gibson & Nelson, 2016). However, the findings demonstrate that misaligned rulings may diminish respondents' commitment to the rule of law, in line with studies that claim that individuals tend to look at court rulings through the prism of their own preferences (Badas, 2019; Bartels & Johnston, 2013; Simon & Scurich, 2011). Interestingly, this trend was observable across those deemed conservative and those deemed progressive. This sensitivity seems to underscore the vulnerability of specific but also diffuse support (as immediate effect) to issue-based fluctuations, particularly in policy areas where moral and political stakes are salient, such as immigration in the Netherlands.

As an exploratory supplement, the open-ended reflections on what mattered most for respondents' evaluations were analyzed. The themes (see [Appendix 7](#)) suggest that respondents frequently relied on humanitarian/moral reasoning and personal values, alongside institutional trust and procedural legitimacy, aligning with the interpretation that reactions were largely preference- and outcome-oriented.

Nonetheless, the exploratory finding that baseline trust does not moderate the effect of the IV (H4), in this sample, challenges assumptions about the protective role of diffuse judicial support. Although those with higher baseline trust were more likely to communicate commitment to the rule of law, these respondents were still just as sensitive to the outcome of the verdict, in line with findings from other papers (Christenson & Glick, 2019). The lack of a buffering effect may suggest that diffuse trust and OF operate as additive rather than interacting elements. However, specific support as measured through the rule-of-law commitment does not necessarily impact diffuse support for courts significantly (Christenson & Glick, 2019), indicating a different pathway of the concepts altogether. It is possible to be dissatisfied with a decision while still maintaining a high degree of broad-based support (Baird, 2001), suggesting that institutional loyalty may persist even under recurring dissatisfaction. Moreover, the results must be interpreted as exploratory, and statistical relevance could be achieved under a larger and more representative sample.

On the other hand, the study found limited support for the exploratory assumption that attitude salience has a moderating effect on the interaction between outcome favorability and support for the rule of law (H3). Yet, it is noteworthy that this evidence did not reach statistical significance. One possible explanation for this is that immigration sentiments, albeit being polarized (Albada et al., 2021), may not have had sufficient personal significance within the

sample to elicit strong motivated processing. The subgroup analysis revealed minor tendencies among political blocs, suggesting that motivated thinking cannot be completely dismissed.

Despite expectations drawn from theories of negativity bias, the data of this study provides no evidence that incongruent and therefore unfavorable outcomes exert a disproportionately strong effect on the DV. Instead, the relationship between congruence and rule-of-law commitment follows a linear pattern. This symmetry suggests that, in this experimental context, misaligned rulings do not trigger the heightened psychological weight of other studies (i.e., Simon & Scirich, 2011). Yet, preference-conditioned reactions to court rulings also emerge in the Netherlands, a context characterized by comparatively high trust in the judiciary and a depoliticized appointment process.

Several potential explanations follow. First, the vignette format and moderate and impersonal stakes of the manipulated decisions may not generate the kind of emotional intensity needed to activate asymmetrical processing. Second, citizens may differentiate between disliking the policy consequences of a ruling and perceiving a fundamental breach of fairness or legality (Baird, 2001). Finally, the findings were exploratory, and no relationship was found because there is none, or simply due to the limited sample of the study. Nonetheless, the absence of negativity asymmetry during this survey experiment therefore suggests that not all unfavorable judicial outcomes carry equivalent destabilizing potential.

Moreover, practical implications can be derived from the results of this research. As established, outcome favorability can be a driver of commitment to the rule of law in salient policy areas, making it a concept of significance to public administration scholars and street-level bureaucrats alike. Furthermore, since baseline trust in courts did not protect against (short-term) drops in commitment to the rule of law, relying solely on accumulated goodwill may not be a sustainable strategy moving forward. While judges typically already endeavor to explain controversial rulings in technical, neutral, and legalistic language to boost legitimacy perceptions (Baird, 2001), public opinion is also shaped by external stimuli such as news coverage or elite-driven discourse (Magalhães et al., 2023). Nonetheless, those working as judicial or even political agents have an impact on how rulings are perceived. Subsequently, administrative officers surrounding courts should place great emphasis on transparent communication and rationale, particularly when rulings are likely to contradict prevailing public opinion.

These findings are relevant to the field of Public Administration and Public Policy. Courts do not operate in isolation, and their rulings must be translated into practice by administrative agencies, street-level bureaucrats, and political actors despite a lack of public support. This places these agents in a pivotal position as brokers, tasked with translating legally binding but politically contested rulings into enforceable and socially acceptable policy outcomes. The results of this study, therefore, underscore that rule-of-law commitment is not merely a legal or judicial concern but a core administrative resource and an asset.

### 6.1 Limitations

While this study provides insights into how outcome favorability shapes rule-of-law commitment, several limitations must be addressed.

Foremost, the question of external validity must be addressed. As the sample was reached through convenience and snowball sampling, a young, progressive, and highly educated audience was reached, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Another aspect is that the survey was only provided in English and may not have been accessible to Dutch-speaking residents. Nathan & Holt demonstrate that under similar circumstances of sampling, regression coefficients may be skewed, since OLS presumes equal-probability designs that are not applicable in this context (Nathan & Holt, 1980). The observed effects may therefore differ in more heterogeneous or nationally representative samples of the Netherlands. At the same time, the lack of evidence for interaction (H3–H4) suggests limited evidence of effect heterogeneity across the moderators examined. The vignette or treatment design, aimed at making both versions comparable, could have reduced emotional intensity associated with the exposure to real-world cases in the natural context (Hainmueller et al., 2015), which would be accompanied by media framing, public discourse, or political commentary, potentially altering the magnitude or asymmetry of the outcome effects (Magalhães et al., 2023).

Furthermore, in regard to measurement constraints, rule-of-law commitment was measured as a short-term evaluative response, not tapping into the broader, more diffuse, and long-term aspect of the concept. Consequently, durable changes in support and whether they fade with temporal distance from the immediate treatment were not captured.

Another limitation is the lack of statistical power for moderating effects. H2-H4 must be interpreted with caution and as exploratory, as pronounced imbalance across ideological groups is rendering the covariance structure of the data unstable (Nathan & Holt, 1980). For instance,

the restrictive-immigration bloc of H3 contained relatively few respondents, reducing the precision of interaction estimates. Lastly, the findings on immigration policy of this study may not be generalizable to other policy domains where judicial decisions evoke diverse types of emotional stakes.

## 6.2 Future Research Avenues

Subsequent research should investigate if the processes outlined in this work apply beyond immigration to other policy domains where court rulings may elicit more intense moral or emotional responses, such as climate policy, civil rights, or economic redistribution, and to other national (European) environments. Additionally, adding more realistic or intense stimuli, including news coverage, political framing, or longer extracts from court rulings, might also assist in the investigation of whether stronger emotional signals trigger the negative imbalance or motivated reasoning effects that were not observable here. Finally, broadening research to include more varied and representative samples, alongside utilizing longitudinal designs to monitor responses over time, would elucidate the extent to which these results generalize and if outcome-induced alterations in rule-of-law commitment endure or diminish as people grapple with judicial power.

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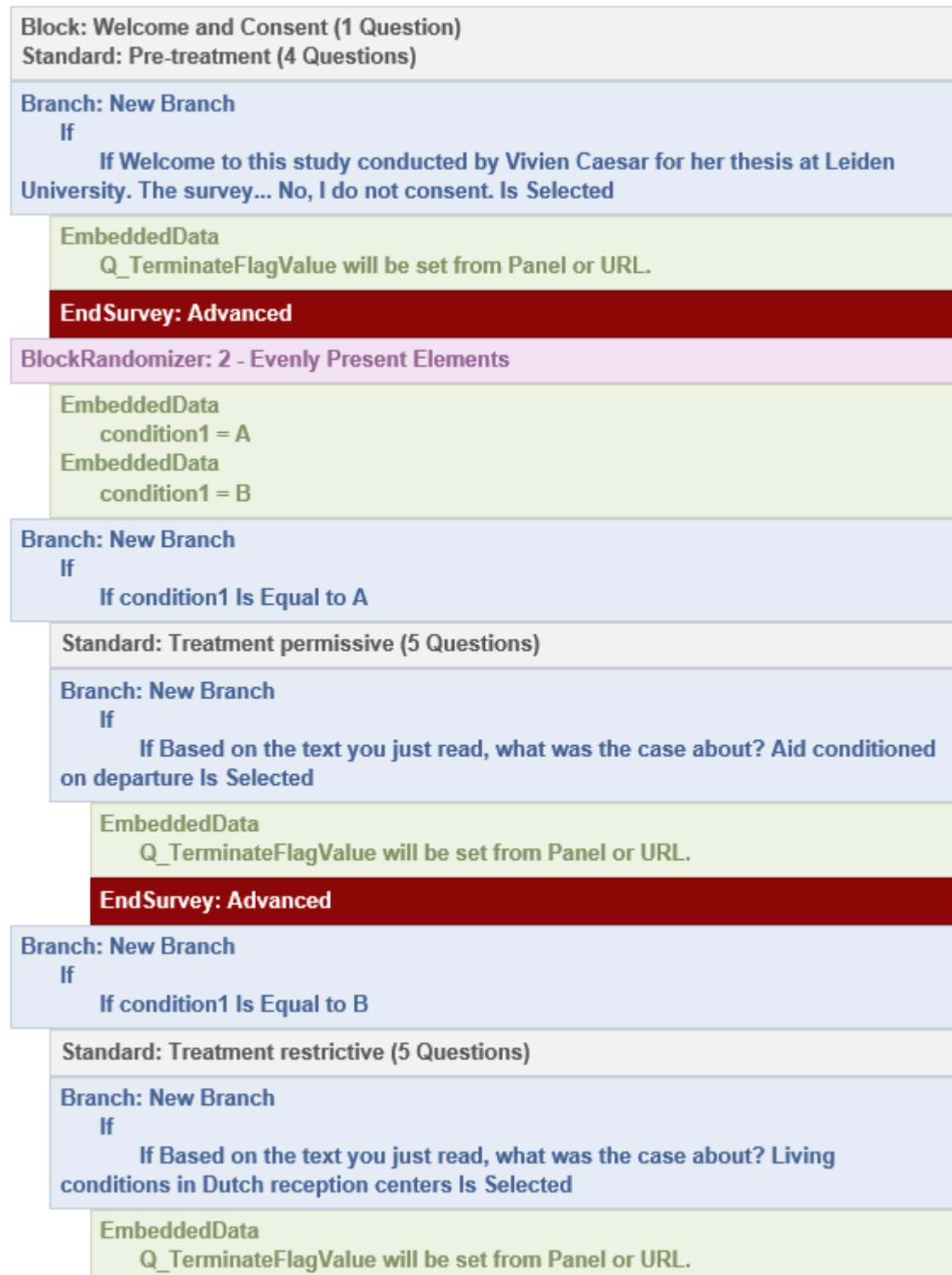
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## 8. Appendices

### Appendix 1: Survey Flow



<b>EndSurvey: Advanced</b>
Standard: Post-treatment (3 Questions) Standard: reflection (1 Question) Standard: Demographics (7 Questions)
<b>Branch: New Branch</b> If <b>If How old are you? Text Response Is Less Than 18</b>
EmbeddedData Q_TerminateFlagValue will be set from Panel or URL.
<b>EndSurvey: Advanced</b>

Page Break

## Appendix 2: Survey Questions

---

### Start of Block: Welcome and Consent

(consent) Welcome to this study conducted by Vivien Caesar for her thesis at Leiden University. The survey explores public opinion regarding the judiciary in the Netherlands. All answers are anonymous, and it takes about 8 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Your participation in this survey is voluntary, and you retain the right to withdraw at any time. To participate, you must be 18 or older and a resident of the Netherlands.

By clicking the button below, you acknowledge  
 Your participation in this study is voluntary, and all information remains confidential.  
 You were informed about the nature of the study.  
 You are at least 18 years old and reside in the Netherlands.

- Yes, I consent. (1)
- No, I do not consent. (2)

### End of Block: Welcome and Consent

---

### Start of Block: Pre-treatment

(narration\_1) As we begin, I would like to ask you a few questions about your political beliefs. Please be reminded that all responses remain **entirely anonymous**.

-----

---

(voting\_behavior) If there were national elections in the Netherlands tomorrow, and you were eligible to vote, which party would you vote for?

- D66 (1)
- PVV (2)
- VVD (3)
- GL-PvdA (4)
- CDA (5)
- JA21 (6)
- FvD (7)
- BBB (8)
- Denk (9)
- SGP (10)
- PvdD (11)
- CU (12)
- SP (13)
- 50+ (14)
- Volt (15)
- Other (16)
- I would not cast my vote. (17)
- I do not know. (18)

---

Page Break

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(policy\_preferences) Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
The Netherlands benefits from being part of the European Union. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Climate change is the most pressing issue of our time. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Netherlands should spend more on defense. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall, immigration does more harm than good for the Netherlands. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Immigrants who live in the Netherlands should fully adapt to Dutch culture rather than retain their own. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
High-income earners in the Netherlands should pay	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
— higher taxes. (6) —							

Page Break

(baseline\_trust) Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement about courts in the Netherlands.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
I trust Dutch courts to make fair and impartial decisions. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Even when courts make decisions I dislike, I believe they serve the public interest. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Judges in the Netherlands apply the law inconsistently and with political bias. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Governments should always adhere to and respect court rulings. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Pre-treatment

---

Start of Block: Treatment permissive

(t\_permissive1) *Next, you will be asked to answer questions about a court case described below. Please read it carefully.*

In recent years, Dutch reception centers faced overcrowding, and many people seeking protection were placed in temporary reception centers under poor living conditions (e.g., limited privacy and sanitation).

---

The state argued that this was a temporary and unavoidable result of an exceptional capacity crisis and that full compliance with EU standards was not feasible. However, the government's actions were contested and brought to court.

A Dutch court ruled that the government **must ensure dignified living conditions** for all people within such centers. The ruling required private sleeping space, adequate sanitary facilities, access to food and drinking water, and necessary healthcare. The court stated that, even in periods of high pressure on reception capacity, **minimum standards must be met** and may only be relaxed for the shortest reasonable period.

---

(timer) Timing

First Click (1)

Last Click (2)

Page Submit (3)

Click Count (4)

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Page Break

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(compr\_check\_a1) Based on the text you just read, what was the case about?

- Living conditions in Dutch reception centers (1)
- Aid conditioned on departure (2)

---

Page Break

---

Display this question:

*If Based on the text you just read, what was the case about? = Aid conditioned on departure*

(t\_permissive2) *Let's try that again.*

*Please take the time to read the presented case **carefully**.*

In recent years, Dutch reception centers faced overcrowding, and many people seeking protection were placed in temporary reception centers under poor living conditions (e.g., limited privacy and sanitation). The state argued that this was a temporary and unavoidable result of an exceptional capacity crisis and that full compliance with EU standards was not feasible. However, the government's actions were contested and brought to court.

A Dutch court ruled that the government **must ensure dignified living conditions** for all people within such centers. The ruling required private sleeping space, adequate sanitary facilities, access to food and drinking water, and necessary healthcare. The court stated that, even in periods of high pressure on reception capacity, **minimum standards must be met** and may only be relaxed for the shortest reasonable period.

-----  
Display this question:

*If Based on the text you just read, what was the case about? = Aid conditioned on departure*

(compr\_check\_a2) Based on the text you just read, what was the case about?

- Living conditions in Dutch reception centers (1)
- Aid conditioned on departure (2)

End of Block: Treatment permissive

---

Start of Block: Treatment restrictive

(t\_restrictive1) Next, you will be asked to answer questions about a court case described below. **Please read it carefully.**

An immigrant without residence rights in the Netherlands asked the government for basic shelter and financial support after a period of homelessness.

The government offered accommodation in a return-oriented facility where staying is conditional on cooperating with departure from the Netherlands; otherwise, outside this facility, no aid would be provided. However, the government's actions were contested and brought to court.

---

A Dutch court ruled that **there is no general right for adults without residence rights to receive state-provided shelter or benefits** (such as food). Therefore, **the state may link accommodation to cooperation with leaving the country.**

-----

(timer) Timing  
First Click (1)  
Last Click (2)  
Page Submit (3)  
Click Count (4)

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Page Break

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(compr\_check\_b1) Based on the text you just read, what was the case about?

- Living conditions in Dutch reception centers (1)
  - Aid conditioned on departure (2)
- 

Page Break

---

*Display this question:*

*If Based on the text you just read, what was the case about? = Living conditions in Dutch reception centers*

(t\_restrictive2) *Let's try that again. Please take the time to read the presented case **carefully**.*

An immigrant without residence rights in the Netherlands asked the government for basic shelter and financial support after a period of homelessness.

The government offered accommodation in a return-oriented facility where staying is conditional on cooperating with departure from the Netherlands; otherwise, outside this facility, no aid would be provided. However, the government's actions were contested and brought to court.

A Dutch court ruled that **there is no general right for adults without residence rights to receive state-provided shelter or benefits** (such as food). Therefore, **the state may link accommodation to cooperation with leaving the country**.

*Display this question:*

*If Based on the text you just read, what was the case about? = Living conditions in Dutch reception centers*

(compr\_check\_b2) Based on the text you just read, what was the case about?

- Living conditions in Dutch reception centers (1)
- Aid conditioned on departure (2)

End of Block: Treatment restrictive

---

Display this question:

If Based on the text you just read, what was the case about? = Living conditions in Dutch reception centers

(t\_restrictive2) Let's try that again. Please take the time to read the presented case **carefully**.

An immigrant without residence rights in the Netherlands asked the government for basic shelter and financial support after a period of homelessness.

The government offered accommodation in a return-oriented facility where staying is conditional on cooperating with departure from the Netherlands; otherwise, outside this facility, no aid would be provided. However, the government's actions were contested and brought to court.

A Dutch court ruled that **there is no general right for adults without residence rights to receive state-provided shelter or benefits** (such as food). Therefore, **the state may link accommodation to cooperation with leaving the country**.

---

Display this question:

If Based on the text you just read, what was the case about? = Living conditions in Dutch reception centers

(compr\_check\_b2) Based on the text you just read, what was the case about?

- Living conditions in Dutch reception centers (1)
- Aid conditioned on departure (2)

End of Block: Treatment restrictive

---

Start of Block: Post-treatment

---

(outcome\_fav) Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about the decision you just read.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
The judgment reflects what I wanted to happen in this case. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The court ruling makes me angry. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

---

Page Break

---

(court\_political) Based on the court's decision, where would you place the court on an ideological scale?

- 1 = Far left (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- 7 (7)
- 8 (8)
- 9 (9)
- 10 = Far right (10)
- The court acted apolitically (no ideology) (11)

---

Page Break

(post\_support) Thinking about this specific decision, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
In this case, I believe the court made a fair and impartial decision. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In this case, the law was applied consistently and without political bias. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This decision was driven by politics rather than law. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Dutch government should not be bound by this court ruling. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Post-treatment

Start of Block: reflection

(reflection) What mattered most for your evaluation of this decision? Feel free to answer in keywords.

---

End of Block: reflection

---

Start of Block: Demographics

(narration2) Lastly, I want to ask you some short questions about yourself.

---

(nationality) Which nationality do you possess?

Dutch (1)

Other (2)

*Skip To: (gender) If Which nationality do you possess? = Dutch*

---

\*

(nationality2) Which nationality do you possess?

---

(duration\_stay) For how long have you been living in the Netherlands?

All my life. (1)

(less than) 1 year. (2)

1 to 5 years. (3)

More than 5 years. (4)

---

(gender) What is your gender?

- Male (1)
  - Female (2)
  - Non-binary / third gender (3)
  - Prefer not to say (4)
- 



(age) How old are you?

---

(education) What is your highest completed level of education?

- No education (geen onderwijs) (1)
- Lower secondary education (high school, basisonderwijs) (2)
- Vocational education (MBO) (3)
- Higher vocational education (University of Applied Sciences, HBO) (4)
- Research Bachelor or higher (WO or higher) (5)

End of Block: Demographics

---

Appendix 3: Overview of Statistical Tests

**Table 6: Overview of Methods**

Analytical Step	Substantive Claim	Statistical Test	Variables
Randomization Checks	Confirm treatment groups are equivalent on demographics.	t-tests, $\chi^2$	Age, gender, education, party choice across treatment groups
Manipulation Checks	Treatment affects perceived ideological direction of the ruling and related emotional reactions.	OLS, t-tests	OF_want, OF_anger, perceived court ideology
Construct Validity	Congruence measure aligns with emotional and preference-based indicators.	Pearson correlations	Outcome favorability with OF_want, OF_anger
Reliability Checks	Multi-item scales form coherent constructs.	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Immigration attitude scale, baseline trust index, rule-of-law commitment
H1	Exposure to an unfavorable court ruling reduces rule of law commitment.	OLS	DV + IV
H2	Outcome incongruence reduces rule-of-law commitment more than congruence increases it.	Quadratic OLS model; region-specific slope model	DV + IV Moderator: unfavorable_dummy Interaction: favorability $\times$ unfavorable_dummy
H3	The negative effect on the DV is stronger among respondents with strong prior immigration preferences.	Moderated OLS	DV + IV Moderator: attitude strength Interaction: favorability $\times$ attitude strength
H4	Higher baseline trust in courts attenuates the negative effect of the IV on the DV.	Moderated OLS	DV + IV Moderator: baseline trust (centered) Interaction: favorability $\times$ trust

#### Appendix 4: Robustness Check (H1)

Using a binary indicator for the continuous favorability score, a basic robustness test compared respondents who received incongruent rulings to the others; see *Figure 3*. The unfavorable-outcome indicator was coded as 1 when the favorability score was  $< 0$ , indicating that the court ruling contradicted the respondent's pre-treatment immigration preference. This unfavorable-outcome indicator exhibited a significant effect on rule-of-law commitment while adjusting for pre-treatment immigration sentiments ( $b = -0.72$ ,  $SE = 0.13$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Therefore, this coefficient implies an average difference of 0.72 points (on the 1–7 scale) between misaligned and aligned outcomes, conditional on pre-treatment immigration attitudes. Consequently, this effect is in line with H1, confirming the overall result of the evaluation of this hypothesis.



**Figure 3:** *Rule of Law Commitment by Misaligned Outcome (H1 – Robustness check)*

*Predicted rule-of-law commitment for respondents receiving misaligned vs. aligned court rulings. Points represent model-based predictions, and the error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.*

### Appendix 5: Exploratory Subgroup Analysis (H3)

To examine whether the moderating effect of the salience of immigration attitudes varies across the political landscape, an exploratory subgroup analysis was conducted, utilizing the respondents' voting intentions. Therefore, the parties were divided into two groups based on their general views on immigration: a permissive bloc (GL-PvdA, D66, PvdD, Volt, SP, Denk) and a restrictive bloc (PVV, VVD, JA21, FvD, BBB, SGP). In the permissive bloc ( $n = 234$ ), the interaction between outcome favorability and attitude salience was positive ( $b = 0.23$ ,  $SE = 0.12$ ,  $p = .064$ ), mirroring the full-sample trend but remaining statistically inconclusive. In the restrictive bloc ( $n = 47$ ), the interaction term was directionally similar ( $b = 0.36$ ,  $SE = 0.24$ ,  $p = .145$ ), but insignificant, and surrounded with uncertainty consistent with the small sample.

**Table 5: Regression Models Testing H3**

Model	Variable	b	SE	p	R <sup>2</sup>
Main Interaction Model	Outcome favorability	0.08	0.24	.751	.156
	Attitude salience	-0.02	0.06	.789	
	Favorability x attitude salience	0.17	0.10	.078	
Permissive Bloc	Interaction term	0.23	0.12	.064	.200
Restrictive Bloc	Interaction term	0.36	0.24	.145	.153

*Note: b = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; R<sup>2</sup> = coefficient of determination*

## Appendix 6: Diagnostics Summary

**Table 7: Overview of Diagnostics**

Model	VIF	BP	W
H1	---	10.70***	.989**
H2 (quadratic)	1.033	11.66**	.990*
H2 (region)	1.000	13.02**	.990*
H3	1.000	12.48**	.991*
H4	1.000	12.65**	.995

*Note:* VIF = Variance inflation factors; BP = Breusch-Pagan test for heteroskedasticity; W = Shapiro-Wilk test for residual normality

\*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$

To check OLS assumptions such as linearity, normality, and constant error variance (Burton, 2021), model diagnostics were conducted for all regression analyses (see Table 7). Multicollinearity diagnostics indicated no problematic variance inflation ( $\approx 1$ ). However, the Breusch–Pagan tests (BP) suggested heteroskedasticity across all models. Therefore, conventional standard errors may be inefficient. However, the main conclusions are robust to the use of heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors. Residual diagnostics, tested via the Shapiro–Wilk test (W), indicated approximate normality with minor deviations at the tails. Visual inspection of residual–fitted plots revealed no evidence of systematic nonlinearity.

**Table 8: Impact of Influential Cases on H1**

N	b	SE	R <sup>2</sup>
360	.491	.062	.149
340	.530	.059	.193

*Note:* b = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; R<sup>2</sup> = coefficient of determination

It is common practice to check OLS regressions for unusual data created through outliers via, for instance, Cook’s D (Burton, 2021). Subsequently, twenty cases were flagged (5.5% of the sample), and H1 was rerun without these outliers, yielding equivalent results. The estimated effect of outcome favorability on rule-of-law commitment remained statistically significant and increased slightly in magnitude (see Table 8), indicating that outliers do not solely drive the main findings.

## Appendix 7: Exploratory Reflection

Responses to the open-ended reflection question (post-treatment) asking, “What *mattered most for your evaluation of this decision?*” were manually coded in a qualitative content analysis. After reviewing all responses, five recurring themes were identified: (1) humanitarian and moral reasoning, (2) institutional trust, (3) personal values and opinions, (4) procedural legitimacy, and (5) pragmatism. Responses that did not clearly address the question, asked for more context, or received an “N/A” were coded as “Other” (6).

The respondents who focused on basic human rights, minimum living standards of treatment, and ethics were coded under humanitarian and moral reasoning. Those who deferred judgment to the court as an institution or its agents were grouped under institutional trust. Closely aligned, but held as a separate theme, those that referenced the procedures of the judiciary were mapped onto procedural legitimacy. On the other hand, the respondents who mentioned the desirability of the outcome, personal emotions, or experiences as self-referential reasoning were placed under personal values and opinions. Lastly, participants who referenced logistics, capacity, and feasibility were coded as pragmatic.

**Table 9:** *Themes of Reflection*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Humanitarian and moral reasoning	101	28.06
Institutional trust	64	17.78
Personal values and opinions	64	17.78
Procedural legitimacy	63	17.50
Pragmatism	10	2.78
Other	58	16.11
<b>Total N</b>	<b>360</b>	

The thematic grouping of the exploratory reflection item offers a descriptive understanding of the factors that the respondents self-identified as significant for their evaluation of the court verdicts. Especially humanitarian and moral considerations were mentioned often (see *Table 9*), suggesting that respondents thought about the decision in terms of outcomes and values rather than solely as a legal process in line with the results of H1. Furthermore, a significant proportion of respondents expressed faith in the judiciary and evaluated procedural fairness as most salient feature. This observation ties to the overall high support for the judiciary in the Netherlands (Brummel et al., 2024; WJP, 2025b). Similarly, personal values and opinions were referenced often. Although these patterns cannot be interpreted as causal, they broadly align

with the quantitative findings, demonstrating that evaluations of court decisions regarding immigration policy are frequently based on substantive and preference-related factors rather than solely institutional ones.