

Comparative Perspectives on Electoral Integrity Beliefs: A Case Study of Austria and Germany

Maïke Bernhard-Rump 

Department of Social Sciences, Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf, Germany

Correspondence: Maïke Bernhard-Rump (maike.bernhard-rump@hhu.de)

Submitted: 27 October 2025 **Accepted:** 18 February 2026 **Published:** 8 April 2026

Issue: This article is part of the issue “Causes and Consequences of Confidence in Democratic Elections” edited by Shaun Bowler (University of California – Riverside) and Todd Donovan (Western Washington University), fully open access at <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.i478>

Abstract

This article examines the perception of electoral integrity in Austria and Germany, two established democracies with robust electoral systems. Despite their high standards, both countries have faced significant challenges regarding electoral integrity. In Austria, the 2016 presidential election was annulled by the Constitutional Court due to procedural irregularities affecting postal ballots. In Germany, widespread organizational failures during the 2021 federal election—including missing ballot papers—prompted the Federal Constitutional Court to order a partial rerun. Although no evidence of intentional fraud was found, these breaches were deemed sufficient to undermine public confidence in the electoral process and raise the question to what extent is electoral fraud perceived in Austria and Germany and whether electoral integrity is therefore rated low in both countries. The analysis proposes a multidimensional conceptualization of electoral integrity, incorporating fraud risk perception (voting by mail vs. in the polling station), populist voting, and feelings of economic insecurity. Methodologically, the study applies a harmonized set of survey indicators to enable explorative cross-national comparison and uses multivariate regression models to identify individual-level predictors of electoral confidence. Drawing on two surveys—conducted in Austria in 2020 and Germany in 2025—the analysis reveals that the perceived risk of voting in person or by post is linked to a negative assessment of institutional integrity, but not to external influences such as foreign interference or manipulation through biased information on social media platforms. This is particularly interesting because, in the two well-functioning democracies studied, the former risks are objectively considered to be significantly lower than, for example, the influence of misinformation on social media.

Keywords

Austria; economic insecurity; electoral integrity; Germany; populism

1. Introduction

Public confidence in the integrity of democratic elections is fundamental to the legitimacy and stability of democratic systems. When citizens doubt whether elections are conducted fairly and competently, trust in political institutions erodes and the willingness to accept electoral outcomes declines, posing a serious challenge to democratic governance (Birch, 2011; Garnett & James, 2023; Norris, 2013). Importantly, such doubts need not be grounded in proven electoral fraud. Even in contexts where robust institutional safeguards render deliberate manipulation highly unlikely, perceptions of threats to electoral integrity can nonetheless gain traction, shaped by political narratives, administrative irregularities, and heightened media scrutiny (Garnett & James, 2021). These perceptions alone—irrespective of their factual accuracy—can undermine democratic legitimacy, depress political participation, and foster political cynicism (Banducci & Karp, 1999; Birch, 2010; Bowler et al., 2015; Schnaudt, 2024a; Vliegthart et al., 2024).

Crucially, citizens rarely evaluate elections in legalistic terms or make precise accusations of fraud. Instead, they assess whether elections are conducted with integrity, attributing potential problems to different sources. On the one hand, concerns may focus on the performance and fairness of domestic electoral institutions, such as election administration or vote counting. On the other hand, elections may be perceived as vulnerable to external or systemic influences, including foreign interference, coordinated manipulation, or distortions arising from digital information environments. These attribution patterns point to analytically distinct types of perceived threats to electoral integrity, which are likely to be shaped by different political experiences and individual-level factors.

Despite the centrality of these issues, much of the existing research treats public evaluations of electoral integrity as a unidimensional phenomenon, typically capturing a general sense of whether elections are trustworthy or compromised (Norris, 2018; Norris et al., 2020; Schnaudt, 2023a; Schnaudt & Wolf, 2023). Recent scholarship has increasingly emphasized the need for a more differentiated conceptualization. Studies highlight that citizens distinguish between trust in the competence and impartiality of domestic electoral institutions and concerns about external threats, such as foreign interference, coordinated disinformation, or algorithmic amplification on social media platforms (Graham & Svobik, 2020; Partheymüller et al., 2022; Tucker et al., 2018; van Prooijen & Douglas, 2018). Building on these insights, this article conceptualizes public evaluations of electoral integrity as a two-dimensional construct. The first dimension, institutional electoral integrity, captures perceptions of procedural fairness, administrative competence, and balanced media coverage. The second dimension, external threats to electoral integrity, refers to perceived risks arising from actors or processes external to electoral institutions, including foreign organizations and distortions within the digital information environment. These dimensions reflect fundamentally different attribution logics and are therefore expected to respond to different individual-level determinants.

Austria and Germany offer compelling cases for examining these dynamics. Both are consolidated democracies with long-standing electoral institutions and high international standards of electoral administration. Yet, in recent years, both countries have experienced high-profile disruptions that triggered public debates about electoral reliability. In Austria, the Constitutional Court annulled the result of the 2016 presidential election due to procedural violations in the handling of postal ballots. Although no evidence of deliberate fraud was found, the ruling directly implicated the institutional integrity of electoral administration. In Germany, widespread organizational failures during the 2021 federal election—most

notably missing ballot papers and logistical breakdowns at polling stations—led the Federal Constitutional Court to order a partial rerun. Here, too, investigations revealed no intentional manipulation, but the events raised concerns about administrative capacity and procedural competence. In both cases, media coverage and political debate amplified public attention to electoral vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities, however, remain analytically distinct from concerns about manipulation by external actors.

The present study addresses the following research question: How do individual-level factors—such as perceived voting risks, economic dissatisfaction, populist orientations, and political alignment—shape evaluations of institutional electoral integrity and perceptions of external threats to electoral integrity? By answering this question, the article contributes to the literature on democratic confidence and electoral legitimacy in three ways. First, it advances a theoretically grounded, multidimensional conceptualization of electoral integrity perceptions. Second, it leverages harmonized survey data to provide a rare comparative assessment of these dimensions in Austria and Germany. Third, it offers new insights into the distinct mechanisms through which citizens evaluate institutional performance and external vulnerability in contemporary democracies.

The results show that the perceived risk of voting in person or by post is linked to a negative assessment of institutional integrity, but not to external influences such as foreign interference or manipulation through biased information on social media platforms. This is particularly interesting because, in the two well-functioning democracies studied, the former risks are objectively considered to be significantly lower than, for example, the influence of misinformation on social media. In addition, the analysis reveals that institutional competence and external vulnerability are shaped by separate mechanisms. Assessments of institutional integrity hinge mainly on procedural issues and winner-loser dynamics, whereas partisan alignment—especially populist support—plays a central role in shaping perceived external threats. Economic dissatisfaction further conditions these relationships, strengthening negative evaluations in Austria but contributing little to explanations in Germany.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Conceptualizing Electoral Integrity Beliefs in Austria and Germany

Perceptions of electoral integrity differ fundamentally from empirically verified instances of fraud. While the latter are rare in established democracies and typically subject to judicial review and institutional redress, the former are shaped by subjective interpretations, political narratives, and contextual cues (Garnett & James, 2021; Norris, 2018; Sheagley & Udani, 2021). Following Birch (2011) and Norris (2013), this study adopts the concept of electoral integrity beliefs—the belief that elections are conducted fairly, transparently, and competently—as the central lens for understanding public evaluations of electoral integrity. Prior research has often conceptualized electoral integrity beliefs in overly simplistic terms—as a binary judgment of whether elections are generally fair or manipulated (Norris, 2018; Norris et al., 2020; Schnaudt, 2023b; Schnaudt & Wolf, 2023).

Many large-scale surveys, such as the European Social Survey, rely on single-item indicators to measure electoral trust, typically asking respondents to rate the overall fairness or freedom of elections. While useful for general cross-national comparisons, such measures lack the granularity required to capture the nuanced

ways in which citizens may differentiate between various types of concerns, such as administrative failures, media distortion, or foreign interference (Schnaudt, 2024a). This one-dimensional approach risks flattening a complex attitude structure into a single evaluative dimension, thereby obscuring the underlying sources of electoral skepticism. Recent theoretical and empirical contributions argue for a more refined conceptualization. For example, the Election Perception Index explicitly adopts a multidimensional framework to account for different stages and aspects of the electoral process (Garnett et al., 2024). However, this multidimensionality has not yet been implemented in cross-country surveys. Similarly, Norris (2013) emphasizes that irregularities—and by extension, perceptions thereof—can emerge at any point across the electoral cycle, from registration and campaigning to vote counting and post-election adjudication. Building on these insights, it follows logically that citizens' perceptions of electoral integrity are also likely to be structured along multiple, distinguishable dimensions, rather than reducible to a single judgment about overall electoral fairness. Building on this literature, we propose a two-dimensional framework of perceived electoral integrity (Garnett et al., 2024; Norris, 2013).

Norris (2013) differentiates between first-order and second-order electoral malpractices based on their impact on democratic processes. First-order irregularities—such as the suppression of opposition candidates or the denial of free voter choice—are typically associated with authoritarian regimes and directly undermine the core principles of electoral democracy (Norris, 2013, p. 564). In contrast, second-order malpractices are more subtle and commonly observed within established democracies. These include technical shortcomings, administrative errors, or procedural irregularities that, although not necessarily intentional, can still undermine public confidence in the integrity of elections (Norris, 2013, p. 566). This study focuses on perceptions of such second-order issues, emphasizing how they are interpreted by citizens in the absence of verified fraud. This is because these second-order malpractices are also those that already occurred in both countries under investigation in 2016 and 2021.

Within second-order malpractices, we propose distinguishing between two dimensions: the assessment of institutional integrity and the assessment of external threat. The first dimension reflects institutional skepticism, encompassing concerns about vote counting and misconduct by electoral authorities. The second dimension captures external and media-related threats, including fears of foreign interference or manipulation through biased information on social media platforms. These threats, while often less directly tied to electoral administration, can similarly distort perceptions of democratic fairness. By distinguishing between internal institutional concerns and systemic or exogenous influences, this framework enables a more differentiated understanding of how electoral distrust is structured in democratic societies.

2.2. Explaining Electoral Integrity Beliefs: Three Core Mechanisms

Although electoral fraud is extremely rare in established democracies such as Austria and Germany, a substantial share of citizens perceives elections as manipulated or untrustworthy (Partheymüller et al., 2022; Schnaudt, 2023a, 2024b). This raises the question of why individuals develop such perceptions in the absence of concrete evidence. Building on existing research, we identify three mechanisms that shape these beliefs: First, perceived procedural vulnerabilities may lead citizens to question the competence and fairness of electoral institutions; second, ideological mobilization by populist actors can frame elections as manipulated by corrupt elites; and third, broader societal dissatisfaction, particularly linked to economic insecurity, may foster generalized skepticism toward the electoral system (Auerbach & Pierson, 2021;

Beaulieu, 2014; Birch & ElSafoury, 2017; Foster & Frieden, 2017; Norris et al., 2020; Pérez-Curiel et al., 2021).

These mechanisms map naturally onto two distinct dimensions of electoral integrity. Concerns about institutional electoral integrity reflect perceptions of domestic procedural competence, such as the fairness of vote counting or the reliability of election administration, whereas perceptions of external threats to electoral integrity capture beliefs about manipulation by outside actors, including foreign interference or social media distortion. This two-dimensional framework allows us to test targeted hypotheses linking procedural risk, partisan cues, winner–loser dynamics, and economic dissatisfaction to each dimension, providing a more nuanced understanding of how citizens form beliefs about electoral trustworthiness.

2.2.1. Perceived Procedural Risk

The first mechanism focuses on how individuals evaluate the technical and procedural integrity of elections. Even in the absence of documented fraud, perceived risks associated with the administration of elections may undermine confidence in the integrity of electoral institutions. In particular, perceived risks related to election day procedures, such as overcrowded polling stations, organizational failures, or inadequate oversight, directly implicate the capacity of electoral authorities to conduct elections in a competent and impartial manner. Such concerns are therefore closely linked to evaluations of institutional electoral integrity, as they reflect doubts about the effectiveness and reliability of the organizations responsible for administering elections:

H1a: Higher perceived risk of voting at the polling station is associated with a negative assessment of institutional electoral integrity.

In contrast, perceptions of risk associated with postal voting tend to activate a distinct interpretive framework. Postal voting is often perceived as especially vulnerable to fraud due to its reliance on mail systems, the absence of public oversight during ballot casting, and its perceived exposure to third-party interference. Unlike in-person voting, postal ballots are completed in private settings and handled outside the immediate control of election officials, which can foster beliefs that they are susceptible to manipulation by external actors rather than institutional mismanagement (Herron & Smith, 2021; Nemčok & Peltoniemi, 2023; Wagner & Lichteblau, 2020). As a result, perceived fraud risks in postal voting are more likely to translate into concerns about external threats to electoral integrity, rather than into generalized doubts about institutional competence:

H1b: Higher perceived risk of fraud in postal voting is associated with a negative assessment of external threats to electoral integrity.

Country-specific experiences further shape the salience of these perceptions. In Austria, the annulment of the 2016 presidential runoff due to procedural irregularities in the handling of postal ballots—despite the absence of deliberate fraud—has heightened public sensitivity toward mail voting and reinforced its association with electoral manipulation (Liechtenstein, 2024; Snyder, 2025). In Germany, by contrast, controversies surrounding election administration, such as the partial rerun of the 2021 Berlin elections, primarily concerned election day logistics rather than postal voting, while allegations of mail-in ballot fraud have largely been propagated through partisan narratives lacking empirical support (“Mostly false,” 2022;

Witting & Bateson, 2021). These differing experiences suggest that perceptions of postal voting fraud may be particularly potent in shaping beliefs about external threats to electoral integrity, especially in the Austrian context.

2.2.2. Populist Mobilization and the Winner--Loser Effect of Electoral Integrity

A second explanatory mechanism emphasizes the role of political communication and ideological framing in shaping public perceptions of electoral integrity (Birch & ElSafoury, 2017; Brown & Cormack, 2021; Pérez-Curiel et al., 2021). Right-wing populist parties, in particular, frequently portray elections as instruments of elite manipulation and employ fraud narratives to challenge the legitimacy of democratic institutions. As conceptualized by Akkerman et al. (2014) and Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2018), populism is grounded in a moral dichotomy between a virtuous and homogeneous people and a corrupt elite. This worldview inherently encourages skepticism toward established political procedures, including electoral administration.

Rather than emerging from detailed evaluations of electoral procedures, beliefs about electoral fraud—especially those concerning external threats to electoral integrity, such as manipulation or interference—are often shaped by partisan cues and repeated elite messaging. Longitudinal research demonstrates that persistent electoral defeat reinforces distrust in elections, while repeated electoral victories only partially restore confidence (Daniller & Mutz, 2019; Schnaudt, 2023b). Beyond this winner–loser dynamic, populist supporters are particularly susceptible to fraud narratives, as populist elite rhetoric frames political outcomes as the product of elite manipulation rather than fair democratic competition.

In both Austria and Germany, populist parties actively disseminate such narratives, though their resonance may vary across contexts. In Germany, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) has repeatedly questioned the integrity of elections by highlighting alleged vulnerabilities of postal voting, despite a lack of empirical evidence supporting these claims (“Mostly false,” 2022; Witting & Bateson, 2021). In Austria, the Freedom Party (FPÖ) operates in a context where judicially documented—but largely technical—irregularities can be rhetorically leveraged to suggest broader institutional failure (Liechtenstein, 2024). Exposure to and acceptance of these narratives increases the likelihood that supporters of populist parties perceive elections as threatened by external forces (because these narratives transform perceptions of administrative shortcomings into claims about external manipulation), even in the absence of direct personal evaluation of electoral procedures (Partheymüller et al., 2022; Schnaudt, 2023a):

H2a: The vote intention for a populist party should be accompanied by a negative assessment of external threats to the integrity of the elections.

Beyond ideological framing, evaluations of electoral integrity are strongly shaped by winner–loser effects. Extensive research shows that individuals whose preferred party wins an election exhibit higher levels of political trust and more favorable evaluations of democratic institutions, whereas electoral losers are significantly more likely to express dissatisfaction with political processes and outcomes (Daniller & Mutz, 2019). These effects extend beyond short-term emotional reactions and systematically influence perceptions of institutional fairness and legitimacy.

From this perspective, support for a governing—or electorally successful—party should be associated with a more positive assessment of institutional electoral integrity, reflecting greater acceptance of electoral outcomes and confidence in the procedures that produced them. Conversely, electoral losers are more inclined to question the integrity of electoral institutions, independent of objective indicators of electoral quality:

H2b: The vote intention for a winning party should be accompanied by a higher rating in the assessment of institutional electoral integrity.

2.2.3. Economic Dissatisfaction: Electoral Distrust as a Symptom of Broader Discontent

Economic dissatisfaction is likely to be a decisive factor in the negative assessment of electoral integrity. This is based on the well-known negative correlation between economic performance and political support. Kölln and Aarts (2021) show that a positive economic assessment is one of the main factors for satisfaction with democracy. Electoral integrity beliefs should be understood less as a precise assessment of electoral procedures and more as an expression of diffuse socio-political dissatisfaction. Individuals who perceive themselves as economically insecure or socially marginalized are more likely to experience political alienation, manifested in a weakened sense of political efficacy and reduced attachment to democratic institutions. This alienation, in turn, fosters institutional distrust, heightens cynicism toward political elites, and promotes skepticism about the fairness and legitimacy of democratic processes more broadly (Foster & Frieden, 2017; Ivanov, 2023; Kölln & Aarts, 2021).

Prior research consistently demonstrates that subjective economic dissatisfaction—that is, individuals' perceptions of their personal economic situation—is closely linked to lower levels of political trust and institutional confidence (Foster & Frieden, 2017; Goubin, 2020; Sahin et al., 2024). Citizens who feel economically disadvantaged may therefore be more inclined to question the integrity of elections, both by expressing negative assessments of institutional electoral integrity and by endorsing beliefs that elections are threatened by external manipulation or interference. In this perspective, electoral integrity beliefs function as cognitive shortcuts that help individuals make sense of perceived systemic failure and unmet economic expectations:

H3: Reported economic dissatisfaction is associated with higher levels of both (a) a negative assessment of institutional electoral integrity and (b) a negative assessment of external threats to the integrity of elections.

We expect this relationship to be stronger in Germany than in Austria. The German populist discourse—especially that of the AfD—more frequently ties economic grievances to systemic political failure, reinforcing a narrative that elections are controlled by elites who ignore the needs of ordinary citizens (Jung & Jung, 2022; Lengfeld & Dilger, 2018). In Austria, while the mechanism is still relevant, slightly higher levels of economic satisfaction and different populist framing may attenuate its explanatory power.

In sum, this study advances the understanding of electoral integrity beliefs by integrating three complementary mechanisms within a two-dimensional framework. First, perceived procedural vulnerabilities (H1a, H1b) shape evaluations of institutional competence and external threats by highlighting how specific

features of election administration—such as polling station organization or postal voting—can be interpreted as risky or manipulable. Second, ideological mobilization by populist actors and winner–loser effects (H2a, H2b) influence perceptions of electoral integrity beyond procedural realities, as partisan narratives and repeated electoral losses or victories condition citizens’ trust in institutions and susceptibility to claims of external interference. Third, diffuse societal dissatisfaction, particularly economic insecurity (H3), fosters generalized skepticism toward both institutional integrity and external threats, reflecting broader discontent with the political system. By combining these mechanisms within a two-dimensional conceptualization, this study provides a theoretically grounded and nuanced explanation for why citizens in consolidated democracies may perceive elections as untrustworthy, even in contexts with minimal documented fraud.

3. Methodology, Datasets, and Measurements

To investigate the determinants of electoral integrity beliefs in Austria and Germany, we draw on two independently collected but methodologically harmonized survey datasets. Both surveys include rich information on political attitudes, populist orientations, economic evaluations, and sociodemographic characteristics, along with a shared item battery measuring perceived electoral fraud.

3.1. Case Selection

This study compares Austria and Germany to examine public opinion on electoral fraud and its negative consequences for the assessment of electoral integrity. The case selection follows a most similar systems design, as both countries share key structural and institutional characteristics that are central to the research question. Austria and Germany are consolidated parliamentary democracies with proportional electoral systems, high administrative capacity, comparable media landscapes, and historically high electoral integrity, according to the Electoral Integrity Project (Garnett et al., 2024). The Electoral Integrity Project uses expert opinions to assess the integrity of elections worldwide and awards Austria a score of 85.7 out of 100 for the last election prior to the survey data used here (2019) and Germany a score of 84.4 out of 100 for the last election prior to the survey data used here (2021; Garnett et al., 2024). These similarities allow for a controlled comparison in which observed differences in citizens’ beliefs about electoral fraud are less likely to be driven by institutional variation and more plausibly linked to attitudinal factors.

The analysis draws on survey data from Austria collected in 2020 and from Germany collected in 2025. A key contribution and novelty of this study lies in the unique level of cross-national comparability enabled by the use of identically worded survey items to measure the dependent variable in both countries. The employment of word-for-word equivalent items substantially reduces concerns regarding measurement error, semantic ambiguity, and cultural interpretation, which frequently limit comparative research on perceptions of electoral integrity. This high degree of measurement equivalence strengthens the validity of the cross-national comparison and allows differences in reported beliefs in electoral fraud to be interpreted with greater confidence as substantive rather than artefactual.

Despite the advantage of using identical wording for the central items in both analyses, there are also differences between the two countries and surveys, which make the study an exploratory one. First of all, it is comparable that both countries had to deal with allegations of electoral fraud and election reruns for formal reasons in the run-up to the respective surveys. However, in the case of Austria in 2016, this involved

a complete repeat of the federal presidential runoff election (Kazim, 2016), while in the case of Germany, it involved a partial repeat of the 2021 federal election in some districts of Berlin (“Wahlwiederholung in Berlin,” 2024). The time lag between the original election and the subsequent legal correction or rerun also varies. While in Austria the FPÖ quickly lodged an appeal and the Constitutional Court ruled on it in 2016 (Kazim, 2016), the procedure in Germany took two years and also had implications for the Bundestag (“Wahlwiederholung in Berlin,” 2024). This means that the two events may have had a different impact on the presence of the topic among respondents at the time of the 2020 and 2025 surveys.

Secondly, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the popularity of postal voting and the possible consequences for the risk assessment of postal voting security in both countries are only comparable in some respects. There is a debate in right-wing and right-wing populist forums about the integrity of postal voting in Austria (Kern, 2024), while Germany attempted to counter false information on social media about the 2021 election and postal voting with a dedicated website set up by the Bundeswahlleiterin (2021). By acknowledging these temporal differences explicitly, the study refrains from making causal claims about temporal dynamics and instead adopts an exploratory perspective.

3.2. Austria: The Austrian Corona Panel Project

For Austria, we use data from wave 16 (October 2020) of the Austrian Corona Panel Project, a longitudinal online survey initiated in March 2020 to monitor public responses to the Covid-19 pandemic. While the panel was originally designed to track health-related, psychological, and socio-economic developments, later waves included political variables such as vote intention, trust in institutions, and attitudes toward democracy. From March to July 2020, surveys were conducted weekly, and thereafter monthly (Kittel et al., 2021).

Wave 16 is particularly relevant for this study, as it introduced a newly developed item battery measuring perceptions of electoral integrity. Unlike expert-based assessments (Garnett & James, 2021; Norris, 2013) or vague single-item measures, this approach operationalizes fraud perception as the subjective probability that various types of electoral malpractice may occur (Sheagley & Udani, 2021). Respondents were presented with six randomized statements addressing different facets of potential fraud, such as incorrect vote counting, misconduct by electoral officials, and external influences via social media or foreign organizations. From these items, we construct a multidimensional index of perceived electoral integrity.

3.3. Germany: Post-Election Survey Following the 2025 Bundestag Election

For Germany, we use data from a post-election survey conducted in the immediate aftermath of the early federal election held on 23 February 2025. The survey was fielded by Bilendi GmbH and funded by the Fritz Thyssen Foundation. It targeted a sample of residents in Germany aged 18 to 74, using a quota sampling strategy stratified by gender, age group (five categories), and federal state. Fieldwork took place within one week after the election and was optimized for mobile devices to ensure accessibility and high response quality. The realized gross response rate was 40.59%, with an average interview length of 29 minutes and up to 289 questions, depending on filter routing (Marschall & Bernhard-Rump, 2025).

The questionnaire included an extensive set of variables on media consumption, ideological orientation, trust in political institutions, populist attitudes, and perceptions of electoral fraud, using the same six-item battery

as in the Austrian dataset. This deliberate harmonization allows for direct cross-national comparison, while the German case offers a relevant context following notable organizational failures during the 2021 election and renewed public attention to electoral integrity in 2025 (Marschall & Bernhard-Rump, 2025).

3.4. Dependent Variable: Two Dimensions of Electoral Integrity Beliefs

To measure electoral integrity beliefs, we rely on items used in the Austrian Corona Panel Project (Kittel et al., 2021) and a previous study by Partheymüller et al. (2022), which employed a multidimensional electoral integrity item battery. This battery captures different aspects of perceived electoral malpractice, ranging from procedural concerns (e.g., incorrect vote counting, misconduct by electoral boards) to external threats (e.g., foreign interference, social media manipulation). Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with six randomized statements on an 11-point scale. Because a variable for assessing the risk of postal voting is to be analysed to test H1b, one of the six items is removed from the dependent variable. This item originally asked whether respondents believed that postal votes were counted correctly. The same item wording and response scales were used in both surveys. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for all six items. Higher values indicate stronger beliefs in electoral fraud. However, compared to the original study, the item “Postal votes are manipulated” was removed, as a variable for the perception of the risk of postal votes is to be used in the regression analysis.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the dependent variable.

Variable	Min	Max	Austria		Germany	
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Institutional electoral integrity concerns						
Votes are not counted correctly. (recoded)	0	10	2.53	2.75	2.52	2.61
The media do not report in a balanced way. (recoded)	0	10	4.55	2.85	4.67	3.11
The electoral board does not behave correctly. (recoded)	0	10	2.72	2.68	2.61	2.62
External threats to electoral integrity						
Foreign organizations intervene in the election.	0	10	4.37	3.04	5.44	3.00
Social media, like Twitter and Facebook, bias the election.	0	10	5.61	2.78	5.65	2.98
N (listwise)				1,171	1,645	

Notes: Higher values indicate more negative electoral integrity evaluation; data not weighted. Sources: Austria: Kritzinger et al. (2020), Germany: Marschall and Bernhard-Rump (2025).

In both datasets, we construct composite indices of electoral integrity beliefs using exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation and Kaiser normalisation to check how many factors could be formed from the five items and whether the same three dimensions found by Partheymüller et al. (2022) could be identified (Table 2). Two consistent components with an eigenvalue greater than 1 emerge: (a) institutional electoral integrity concerns (e.g., vote counting, board misconduct) and (b) external/media-related electoral integrity concerns (e.g., social media bias, foreign interference). These serve as dependent variables in our regression models. It is not surprising that the two items addressing the role of traditional and social media fall into two different factors in the empirical analysis. The item addressing the general balance of reporting belongs to factor 1 because both Germany and Austria have a publicly funded media system that is supposed to ensure balanced reporting (Grassmuck & Thomass, 2023). The second item, which addresses

the external influence of social media on elections, empirically fits well to the second factor because it concerns an external threat to the integrity of elections.

Table 2. Results of the exploratory factor analysis.

	Austria		Germany	
	Factor 1 Institutional concerns	Factor 2 External threats	Factor 1 Institutional concerns	Factor 2 External threats
Institutional electoral integrity concerns				
Votes are not counted correctly. (recoded)	0.89		0.89	
The media do not report in a balanced way. (recoded)	0.65		0.73	
The electoral board does not behave correctly. (recoded)	0.89		0.89	
External threats to electoral integrity				
Foreign organizations intervene in the election.		0.76		0.89
Social media, like Twitter and Facebook, bias the election.		0.86		0.87
Eigenvalue	2.1	1.3	2.3	1.4

Notes: Exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation; data not weighted. Sources: Austria: Kittel et al. (2020), Germany: Marschall and Bernhard-Rump (2025).

3.5. Independent Variables and Controls

For the regression analysis, only comparable variables were selected from both data sets, or harmonized where necessary, as in the case of vote choice and education. The perceived risk of fraud at polling stations and in postal voting was measured on a 5-point scale (0 = *very low risk*, 4 = *very high risk*) to test H1a and H1b. Respondents' voting intention was included as a dichotomous variable indicating support for populist parties in both countries (H2a), and a dummy variable for governing parties was used to control for the winner-loser effect (H2b). In Austria, vote choice was measured prospectively. Support for governing parties—the Österreichische Volkspartei (ÖVP, Austrian People's Party) and Die Grünen (The Greens)—captured the winner-loser effect, while support for the FPÖ assessed populist vote choice. In Germany, vote choice was measured retrospectively based on the 2025 Bundestag election. Support for governing parties—the Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (CDU, Christian Democratic Union), the Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern (CSU, Christian Social Union), and the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD, Social Democratic Party)—captured the winner-loser effect, while support for the AfD indicated populist vote choice. In addition, we tested an alternative operationalization of winner-loser status based on support for the single strongest party rather than for the governing coalition. Across both countries, this specification does not yield a statistically significant winner effect. We interpret this as further evidence that winner-loser dynamics in coalition systems are sensitive to how electoral alignment is operationalized. To avoid overinterpreting unstable effects, we retain the coalition-based measure in the main analysis.

Personal economic circumstances were assessed on a 5-point scale ranging from *very poor* (0) to *very good* (4). Gender (female = 1), age in years, and two education dummies (lower and medium education, with

high education as the reference category) were included as control variables. The independent variables show comparable demographic distributions between Austria and Germany (Table 3).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the independent and control variables.

	Austria				Germany			
	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Independent variables								
(H1) Fraud risk: Polling station (0–4)	0	4	0.83	1.08	0	4	1.03	1.20
(H1) Fraud risk: Postal voting (0–4)	0	4	1.59	1.30	0	4	1.54	1.35
(H2) FPÖ (Austria) / AfD (Germany) (Ref: all others)	0	1			0	1		
Winner-Coalition (Ref: all others)	0	1			0	1		
(H3) Personal economic situation (0–4)	0	4	2.51	1.04	0	4	2.11	1.02
Control variables								
Dummy: Gender (Female = 1)	0	1			0	1		
Age (in years)	16	87	42.18	17.45	18	74	47.03	15.19
Dummy: Education low (High = 1)	0	1			0	1		
Dummy: Education medium (High = 1)	0	1			0	1		
N (listwise)	1,040				1,726			

Sources: Austria: Kittel et al. (2020), data not weighted, Germany: Marschall and Bernhard-Rump (2025), data not weighted.

4. Results

This study aimed to identify the individual-level determinants of electoral integrity beliefs in Austria and Germany—two consolidated democracies with recent procedural disruptions to their electoral processes. Drawing on a multidimensional framework of electoral integrity, we formulated three hypotheses relating to procedural risk perceptions, economic dissatisfaction, and populist orientation, controlling for the well-established winner–loser effect. Table 4 presents the regression results for Austria and Germany, distinguishing between two analytically distinct dependent variables. Model 1 captures skepticism toward the integrity of core electoral institutions, combining perceptions of vote counting accuracy, media impartiality, and the behavior of electoral authorities. Model 2 focuses on perceptions of external and informational interference, including foreign intervention and the role of social media in biasing elections.

The results provide nuanced support for the proposed hypotheses, revealing distinct mechanisms underlying citizens' perceptions of electoral integrity. Regarding H1a, perceived risks associated with voting at polling stations are positively and significantly related to negative evaluations of institutional electoral integrity in both Austria and Germany, indicating that procedural and administrative vulnerabilities strongly shape perceptions of institutional performance. In contrast, H1b—linking perceived risks in postal voting to external threats—is not supported in either country; in Austria, the relationship is even slightly negative, suggesting that concerns about postal ballots are interpreted primarily in terms of institutional procedures rather than as indicators of external interference.

Table 4. Regression results.

	Austria		Germany	
	Model 1 Institutional concerns	Model 2 External threats	Model 1 Institutional concerns	Model 2 External threats
(H1) Fraud risk: Polling station (0–4)	0.97***	0.45	0.45***	0.23**
(H1) Fraud risk: Postal voting (0–4)	–0.40***	0.03	0.49***	–0.01
(H2) FPÖ (Austria) / AfD (Germany) (Ref: all others)	–0.23***	–0.03	–0.37***	0.19***
Winner-Coalition (Ref: all others)	0.67***	0.10	1.30***	–1.63
(H3) Personal economic situation (0–4)	0.48***	0.40***	–0.28**	–0.18
Dummy: Gender (Female = 1)	–0.03	–0.23	–0.05	–0.39**
Age (in years)	0.00	0.01*	–0.01*	0.01*
Dummy: Education low (High = 1)	0.04	–0.02	–0.01	–0.40
Dummy: Education medium (High = 1)	0.00	0.20	0.13	–0.28
N	873	873	1,526	1,526
Adjusted R ²	0.41	0.07	0.46	0.07

Notes: Standardised beta values; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .005$; data not weighted. Sources: Austria: Kittel et al. (2020), Germany: Marschall and Bernhard-Rump (2025).

With respect to populist support, H2a is confirmed in Germany: Voters of the AfD report higher perceptions of external threats to electoral integrity, reflecting the party's framing of elections as vulnerable to manipulation by outside actors. In Austria, however, FPÖ support does not significantly predict external threat perceptions, likely because the party emphasizes institutional irregularities over narratives of external manipulation. Consistent with H2b, alignment with the governing coalition is associated with more positive evaluations of institutional electoral integrity in both countries, demonstrating a clear winner–loser effect: Governing party supporters perceive elections as more competent and fair, while opposition supporters report greater institutional skepticism.

Finally, regarding H3, the relationship between economic dissatisfaction and perceptions of electoral integrity appears context-dependent. In Austria, reported economic dissatisfaction is associated with greater concern about both institutional integrity and external threats, supporting the hypothesis that broader socio-economic disaffection amplifies skepticism toward electoral processes. In Germany, by contrast, economic dissatisfaction shows a weak or inconsistent relationship with these perceptions. This finding contrasts with the expectations outlined in Section 2.2.3, where prior research suggested a stronger relationship in Germany, indicating that other factors—such as partisan cues or populist messaging—may play a more prominent role in shaping citizens' evaluations of electoral integrity there.

In addition to the main explanatory variables, we included several socio-demographic controls—gender, age, and education level—to account for potential confounding factors. Gender and age exhibit occasional significant effects, while educational attainment is largely unrelated to electoral skepticism. Model fit is substantially higher for institutional integrity skepticism (Model 1) than for skepticism toward external interference (Model 2) in both countries, indicating stronger explanatory power for evaluations of domestic electoral institutions.

Overall, these findings underscore that perceptions of institutional competence and external vulnerabilities are influenced by different mechanisms. Procedural concerns and winner–loser status primarily shape assessments of institutional integrity, while partisan alignment—particularly support for populist parties—has a more pronounced effect on perceptions of external threats.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

This study provides a nuanced understanding of citizens' perceptions of electoral integrity by distinguishing between institutional electoral integrity and external threats. The findings indicate that procedural risks, such as concerns about voting at polling stations, primarily shape evaluations of institutional performance, while support for populist parties is more strongly associated with perceptions of external manipulation. Alignment with the governing coalition further reinforces confidence in institutional integrity, reflecting the well-established winner–loser effect. Economic dissatisfaction amplifies these perceptions in Austria, highlighting the interplay between socio-economic disaffection and skepticism toward electoral processes. In Germany, however, economic dissatisfaction has a weaker and less consistent effect than expected based on prior research. This suggests that citizens' evaluations of electoral integrity there are shaped more strongly by partisan cues and populist narratives than by socio-economic considerations.

While this study advances the understanding of electoral integrity beliefs in consolidated democracies, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the analysis focuses on Austria and Germany—two high-functioning democratic systems that have experienced procedural controversies but virtually no documented large-scale electoral fraud. This selective case design necessarily limits the generalizability of the findings beyond comparable Western European contexts. At the same time, existing cross-national research suggests that similar mechanisms linking procedural concerns, political alignment, and institutional trust can be observed across a broader set of European democracies, indicating that the patterns identified here are unlikely to be entirely case-specific (Birch, 2008; Daniller & Mutz, 2019; Garnett & James, 2023; Schnaudt, 2024a).

Second, the surveys were conducted at different points in time—Austria in 2020 and Germany in 2025—each following salient electoral controversies that heightened public attention to procedural issues. In Austria, the annulment of the 2016 presidential election shaped subsequent debates, while in Germany the partial rerun of the 2021 Bundestag election renewed concerns about electoral integrity. Although these temporal differences introduce potential contextual variation, the shared post-crisis nature of both cases provides a meaningful basis for comparison.

Third, the use of cross-sectional survey data and regression analysis allows for identifying systematic associations but does not permit causal inference. Reverse causality and unobserved confounding factors therefore remain possible. Prior research using longitudinal and panel designs suggests that economic evaluations and repeated electoral losses can exert lasting effects on political trust and democratic satisfaction (Daniller & Mutz, 2019; Kölln & Aarts, 2021). Future studies employing longitudinal or experimental designs would thus be well-suited to further disentangle causal pathways and to trace the evolution of electoral integrity beliefs over time.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the findings offer several robust insights. Perceptions of electoral integrity are shaped by distinct mechanisms across the two examined dimensions. Perceived risks associated with voting at polling stations are primarily linked to negative evaluations of institutional electoral integrity in both Austria and Germany, while concerns about postal voting do not consistently predict assessments of external threats. This pattern suggests that procedural and administrative vulnerabilities are more strongly associated with institutional evaluations than with perceptions of external interference.

In addition, support for populist parties is associated with heightened perceptions of external threats to electoral integrity, particularly in Germany where AfD voters exhibit significantly greater concern for such threats. By contrast, in Austria, support for the FPÖ does not significantly increase perceptions of external threats, possibly reflecting the party's stronger emphasis on institutional irregularities rather than external manipulation in its public messaging. Furthermore, alignment with the winning coalition parties is consistently linked to more positive evaluations of institutional electoral integrity, demonstrating a clear winner–loser effect in both countries.

Taken together, the results demonstrate the importance of analytically differentiating between institutional and external dimensions of electoral integrity beliefs in order to more accurately assess the sources and implications of negative electoral integrity evaluations in contemporary democracies.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank Nadine Zwiener-Collins for feedback on earlier versions of this manuscript and editorial suggestions.

Funding

The author gratefully acknowledges the generous funding for the data collection provided by the Fritz Thyssen Foundation (Az. 20.25.0.001PO) and the financial support for publication provided by the University and State Library (ULB) of Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

The data for Austria are available at <https://doi.org/10.11587/28KQNS>. The data for Germany are available subject to data protection rules at <https://researchdata.hhu.de/handle/entry/208>.

References

- Akkerman, A., Mudde, C., & Zaslove, A. (2014). How populist are the people? Measuring populist attitudes in voters. *Comparative Political Studies*, 47(9), 1324–1353. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414013512600>
- Auerbach, J., & Pierson, S. (2021). Does voting by mail increase fraud? Estimating the change in reported voter fraud when states switch to elections by mail. *Statistics and Public Policy*, 8(1), 18–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2330443X.2021.1906806>
- Banducci, S. A., & Karp, J. A. (1999). Perceptions of fairness and support for proportional representation. *Political Behavior*, 21(3), 217–238.
- Beaulieu, E. (2014). From voter ID to party ID: How political parties affect perceptions of election fraud in the U.S. *Electoral Studies*, 35, 24–32. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2014.03.003>

- Birch, S. (2008). Electoral institutions and popular confidence in electoral processes: A cross-national analysis. *Electoral Studies*, 27(2), 305–320. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2008.01.005>
- Birch, S. (2010). Perceptions of electoral fairness and voter turnout. *Comparative Political Studies*, 43(12), 1601–1622. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414010374021>
- Birch, S. (2011). *Electoral malpractice*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199606160.001.0001>
- Birch, S., & ElSafoury, F. (2017). Fraud, plot, or collective delusion? Social media and perceptions of electoral misconduct in the 2014 Scottish independence referendum. *Election Law Journal: Rules, Politics, and Policy*, 16(4), 470–484. <https://doi.org/10.1089/elj.2016.0393>
- Bowler, S., Brunell, T., Donovan, T., & Gronke, P. (2015). Election administration and perceptions of fair elections. *Electoral Studies*, 38, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2015.01.004>
- Brown, H., & Cormack, L. (2021). Angry about fraud: How Congress took up Trump's claims of fraud. *The Forum*, 19(1), 77–95. <https://doi.org/10.1515/for-2021-0004>
- Bundeswahlleiterin. (2021). *Bundestagswahl 2021: Erkennen und Bekämpfen von Desinformation*. <https://www.bundeswahlleiterin.de/bundestagswahlen/2021/fakten-fakenews.html>
- Daniller, A. M., & Mutz, D. C. (2019). The dynamics of electoral integrity: A three-election panel study. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 83(1), 46–67. <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfz002>
- Foster, C., & Frieden, J. (2017). Crisis of trust: Socio-economic determinants of Europeans' confidence in government. *European Union Politics*, 18(4), 511–535. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116517723499>
- Garnett, H. A., & James, T. S. (2021). Measuring electoral integrity: Using practitioner knowledge to assess elections. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 31(3), 348–367. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2020.1824186>
- Garnett, H. A., & James, T. S. (2023). Electoral backsliding? Democratic divergence and trajectories in the quality of elections worldwide. *Electoral Studies*, 86, Article 102696. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2023.102696>
- Garnett, H. A., James, T. S., Caal-Lam, S. (2024). *Electoral integrity global report 2024*. Electoral Integrity Project. <https://www.electoralintegrityproject.com/reports>
- Goubin, S. (2020). Economic inequality, perceived responsiveness and political trust. *Acta Politica*, 55(2), 267–304. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41269-018-0115-z>
- Graham, M. H., & Svobik, M. W. (2020). Democracy in America? Partisanship, polarization, and the robustness of support for democracy in the United States. *American Political Science Review*, 114(2), 392–409. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055420000052>
- Grassmuck, V., & Thomass, B. (2023). The media in Northwestern Europe in the last three decades. In S. Papathanassopoulos & A. Miconi (Eds.), *The media systems in Europe* (pp. 69–97). Springer.
- Herron, M. C., & Smith, D. A. (2021). Postal delivery disruptions and the fragility of voting by mail: Lessons from Maine. *Research & Politics*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168020981434>
- Ivanov, D. (2023). Economic insecurity, institutional trust and populist voting across Europe. *Comparative Economic Studies*, 65(3), 461–482. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41294-023-00212-y>
- Jung, M., & Jung, L. (2022). Ökonomische Bestimmungsgründe der Bundestagswahl 2017. In H. U. Brinkmann & K.-H. Reuband (Eds.), *Rechtspopulismus in Deutschland* (pp. 137–161). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-33787-2_7
- Kazim, H. (2016, July 1). Bundespräsidentenwahl. Österreichs große Blamage. *Spiegel*. <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/oesterreich-muss-bundespraesidentenwahl-wiederholen-die-grosse-blamage-a-1100886.html>

- Kern, J. (2024, October 5). Wahlbetrug mit Briefwahlkarten: Was steckt hinter den Vorwürfen? *Profil*. <https://www.profil.at/faktiv/wahlbetrug-mit-briefwahlkarten-was-steckt-hinter-den-vorwuerfen-bei-der-nationalratswahl/402958091>
- Kittel, B., Kritzinger, S., Boomgaarden, H., Prainsack, B., Eberl, J.-M., Kalleitner, F., Lebernegg, N. S., Partheymüller, J., Plescia, C., Schiestl, D. W., & Schlogl, L. (2021). The Austrian Corona Panel Project: Monitoring individual and societal dynamics amidst the Covid-19 crisis. *European Political Science*, 20(2), 318–344. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-020-00294-7>
- Kölln, A.-K., & Aarts, K. (2021). What explains the dynamics of citizens' satisfaction with democracy? An integrated framework for panel data. *Electoral Studies*, 69, Article 102271. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2020.102271>
- Kittel, B., Kritzinger, S., Boomgaarden, H., Prainsack, B., Eberl, J.-M., Kalleitner, F., Lebernegg, N. S., Partheymüller, J., Plescia, C., Schiestl, D. W., & Schlogl, L. (2020). *Austrian Corona Panel Project (W1-29_ACPP_V20220225)* [Data set]. The Austrian Social Science Data Archive. <https://doi.org/10.11587/28KQNS>
- Lengfeld, H., & Dilger, C. (2018). Kulturelle und ökonomische Bedrohung. Eine Analyse der Ursachen der Parteiidentifikation mit der „Alternative für Deutschland“ mit dem Sozio-oekonomischen Panel 2016. *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 47(3), 181–199. <https://doi.org/10.1515/zfsoz-2018-1012>
- Liechtenstein, S. (2024, September 30). Austria's Freedom Party secures first far-right national election win since World War II. AP. <https://apnews.com/article/austria-national-election-far-right-freedom-party-1a22057b230a2576e0ca0ee69607cf6e>
- Marschall, S., & Bernhard-Rump, M. (2025). *Wählen in Zeiten der Verunsicherung - Fragiles Vertrauen in Informationsangebote und demokratische Verfahren im Kontext der Bundestagswahl 2025 (DE_142946)* [Data set]. Research Data HHU. <https://researchdata.hhu.de/handle/entry/208>
- Mostly false: “Postal voting is a big problem and electoral fraud is a sad truth in Germany.” (2022, February 14). *Hochschule der Medien Stuttgart*. <https://eufactcheck.eu/factcheck/mostly-false-postal-voting-is-a-big-problem-and-electoral-fraud-is-a-sad-truth-in-germany>
- Mudde, C., & Rovira Kaltwasser, C. (2018). Studying populism in comparative perspective: Reflections on the contemporary and future research agenda. *Comparative Political Studies*, 51(13), 1667–1693. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414018789490>
- Nemčok, M., & Peltoniemi, J. (2023). Distance and trust: An examination of the two opposing factors impacting adoption of postal voting among citizens living abroad. *Political Behavior*, 45(2), 419–443. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-021-09709-7>
- Norris, P. (2013). The new research agenda studying electoral integrity. *Electoral Studies*, 32(4), 563–575. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2013.07.015>
- Norris, P. (2018). *Do public perceptions of electoral malpractice undermine democratic satisfaction? The U.S. in comparative perspective* (HKS Faculty Research Working Paper Series RWP18-022). Harvard Kennedy School.
- Norris, P., Garnett, H. A., & Grömping, M. (2020). The paranoid style of American elections: Explaining perceptions of electoral integrity in an age of populism. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 30(1), 105–125. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2019.1593181>
- Partheymüller, J., Müller, W. C., Rabitsch, A., Lidauer, M., & Grohma, P. (2022). Participation in the administration of elections and perceptions of electoral integrity. *Electoral Studies*, 77, Article 102474. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2022.102474>
- Pérez-Curiel, C., Rivas-de-Roca, R., & García-Gordillo, M. (2021). Impact of Trump's digital rhetoric on the US

- elections: A view from worldwide far-right populism. *Social Sciences*, 10(5), Article 152. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10050152>
- Sahin, N. M., Braga, A. A., & Apel, R. (2024). Procedural fairness, socioeconomic status, and driver perceptions of the police during traffic stops: A test of the invariance thesis. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 20(4), 1175–1191. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-023-09575-9>
- Schnaudt, C. (2023a). Exit or voice? Behavioral implications of electoral-integrity beliefs in Germany. *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 64(1), 79–105. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11615-022-00403-9>
- Schnaudt, C. (2023b). Mind the gap(s): Winning, losing, and perceptions of electoral integrity in mixed-member proportional systems. *Electoral Studies*, 83, Article 102611. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2023.102611>
- Schnaudt, C. (2024a). Conspiracy beliefs and perceptions of electoral integrity: Cross-national evidence from 29 countries. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 88(SI), 814–827. <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfae027>
- Schnaudt, C. (2024b). Perceptions of electoral integrity and election-related (non-)compliance: Evidence from Germany. *Political Studies*, 73(3), 1292–1314. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00323217241290584>
- Schnaudt, C., & Wolf, C. (2023). Electoral integrity and voting: The interplay of individual perceptions and contextual conditions. In T. Faas, S. Huber, M. Krewel, & S. Roßteutscher (Eds.), *Informationsflüsse, Wahlen und Demokratie* (pp. 485–512). Nomos. <https://doi.org/10.5771/9783748915553-485>
- Sheagley, G., & Udani, A. (2021). Multiple meanings? The link between partisanship and definitions of voter fraud. *Electoral Studies*, 69, Article 102244. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2020.102244>
- Snyder, R. (2025, January 18). Austria's electoral integrity: Is voting fraud a concern? *Shun Culture*. <https://shunculture.com/article/is-voting-fraud-a-problem-in-austria>
- Tucker, J., Guess, A., Barbera, P., Vaccari, C., Siegel, A., Sanovich, S., Stukal, D., & Nyhan, B. (2018). *Social media, political polarization, and political disinformation: A review of the scientific literature*. SSRN. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3144139>
- van Prooijen, J., & Douglas, K. M. (2018). Belief in conspiracy theories: Basic principles of an emerging research domain. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 48(7), 897–908. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2530>
- Vliegenthart, R., Van Ham, C., Kruikemeier, S., & Jacobs, K. (2024). A matter of misunderstanding? Explaining (mis)perceptions of electoral integrity across 25 different nations. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 88(SI), 495–515. <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfae021>
- Wagner, A., & Lichteblau, J. (2020). Germany going postal? Comparing postal and election day voters in the 2017 German federal election. *German Politics*, 31(4), 602–625. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2020.1759553>
- Wahlwiederholung in Berlin. SPD bleibt knapp vor Grünen. (2024, February 12). *Tagesschau*. <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/berlin-wiederholung-bundestagswahl-102.html>
- Witting, V., & Bateson, I. (2021, September 25). Is Germany's postal vote fraud-proof? *DW*. <https://www.dw.com/en/german-election-the-postal-vote-and-fraud-claims/a-58844693>

About the Author

Maïke Bernhard-Rump is a postdoctoral researcher at Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf. Her research focuses on political trust, voting behavior, and perceptions of electoral integrity in established democracies.