24 April 2023

University of Zurich UZH
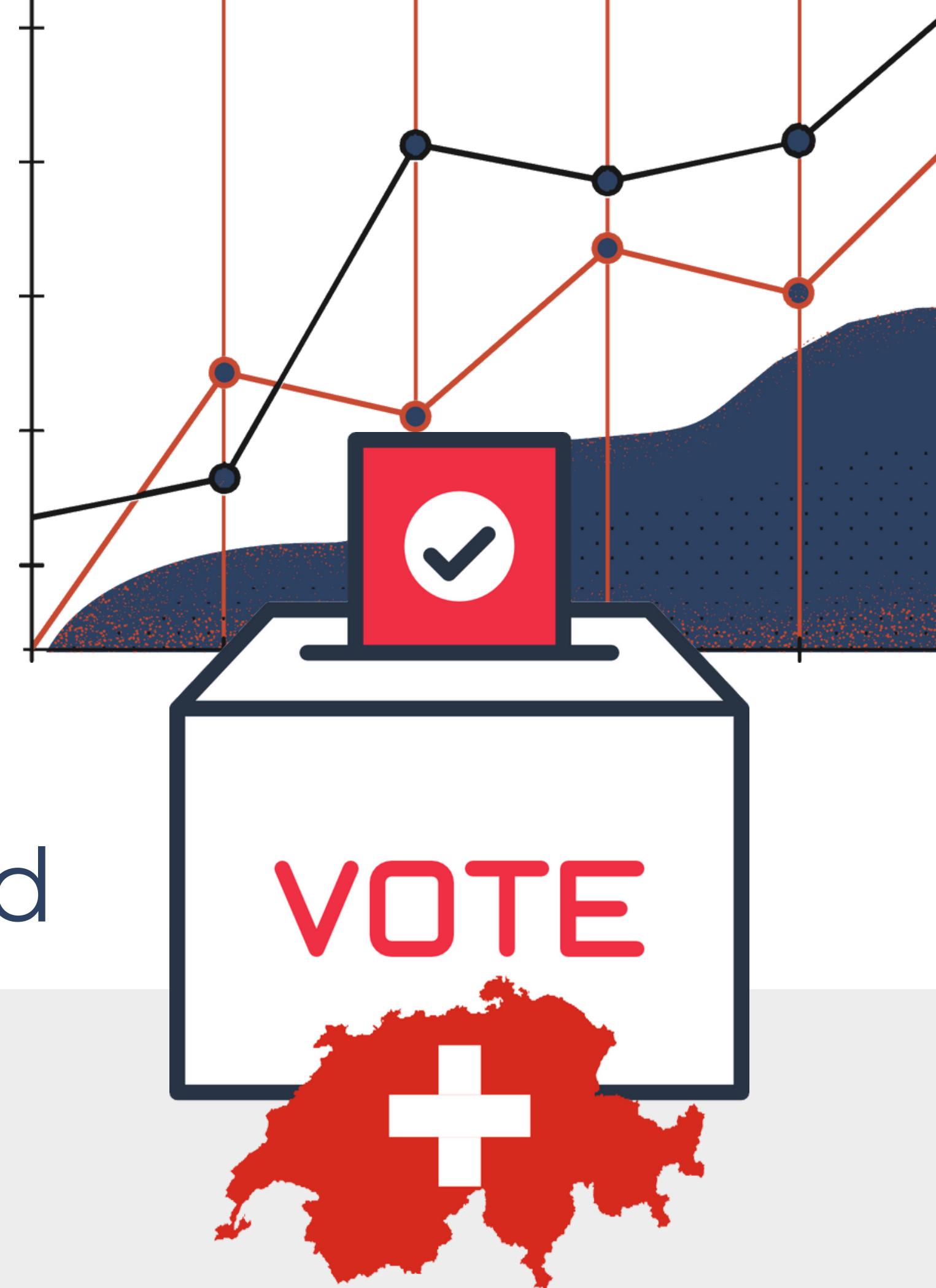
Increasing Voter Turnout in Switzerland

GROUP

- Andrin Pluess
- Benjamin Hesselbarth
- Gregor Lauter
- Line Andreina
- Vita Volgemut

PROFESSOR

- Guilherme Lichand

VOTE

Voter turnout in Switzerland was less than **50%** *in 2022 [1]*

We consider low voter turnout a social problem for two reasons:

- Low voter turnout forfeits positive externalities [8,9]

- Voting outcomes do not necessarily coincide with the opinion of the median voter [2,3]

Persona

Persona: Swiss citizens, aged 18-45

✓ Most accessible for us to conduct the interviews

✓ Young people are particularly underrepresented in popular votes

Differences in voter participation rates at the example of the popular vote from 19.4.2019 (measured in percentage points)
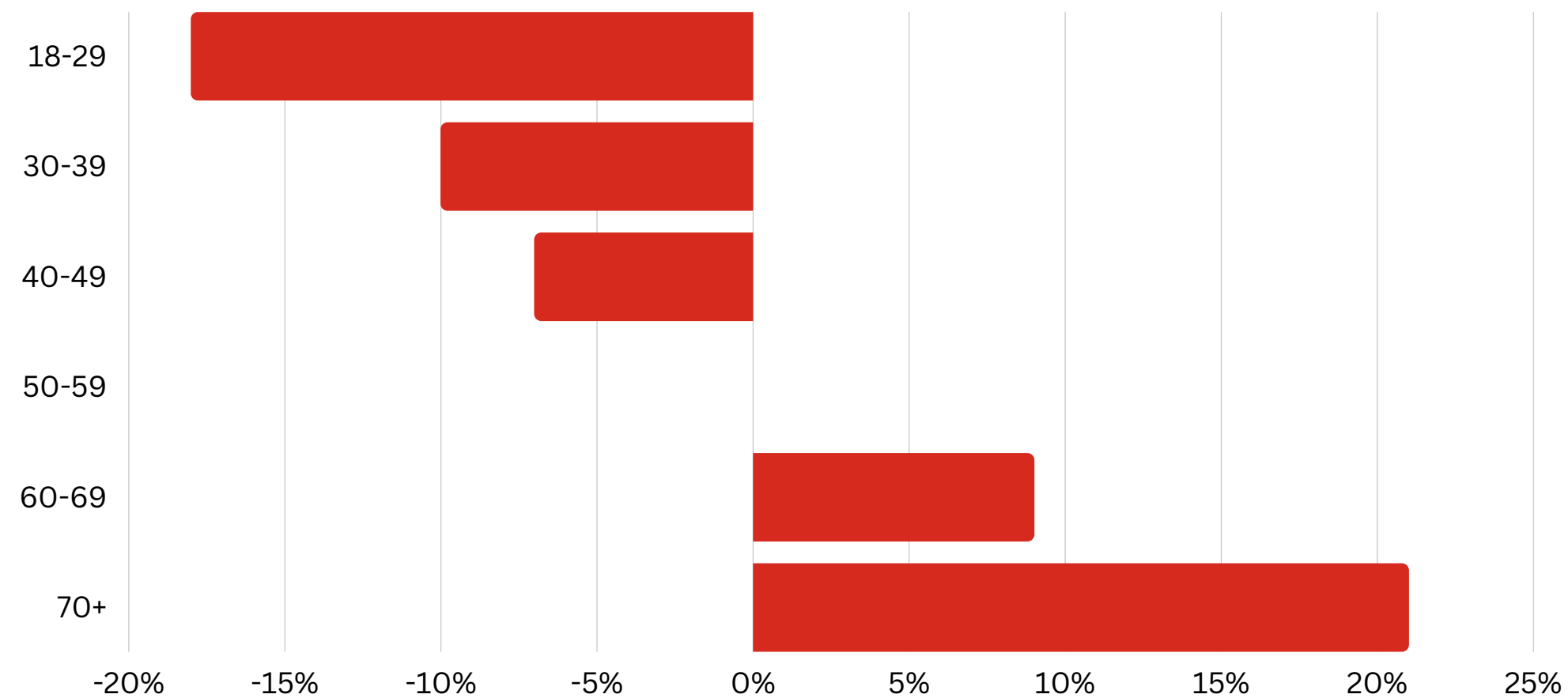
Source: [10]

90%

Mail-in voting is used by around 90% of voters. Its introduction has increased turnout by 4.1 percentage points
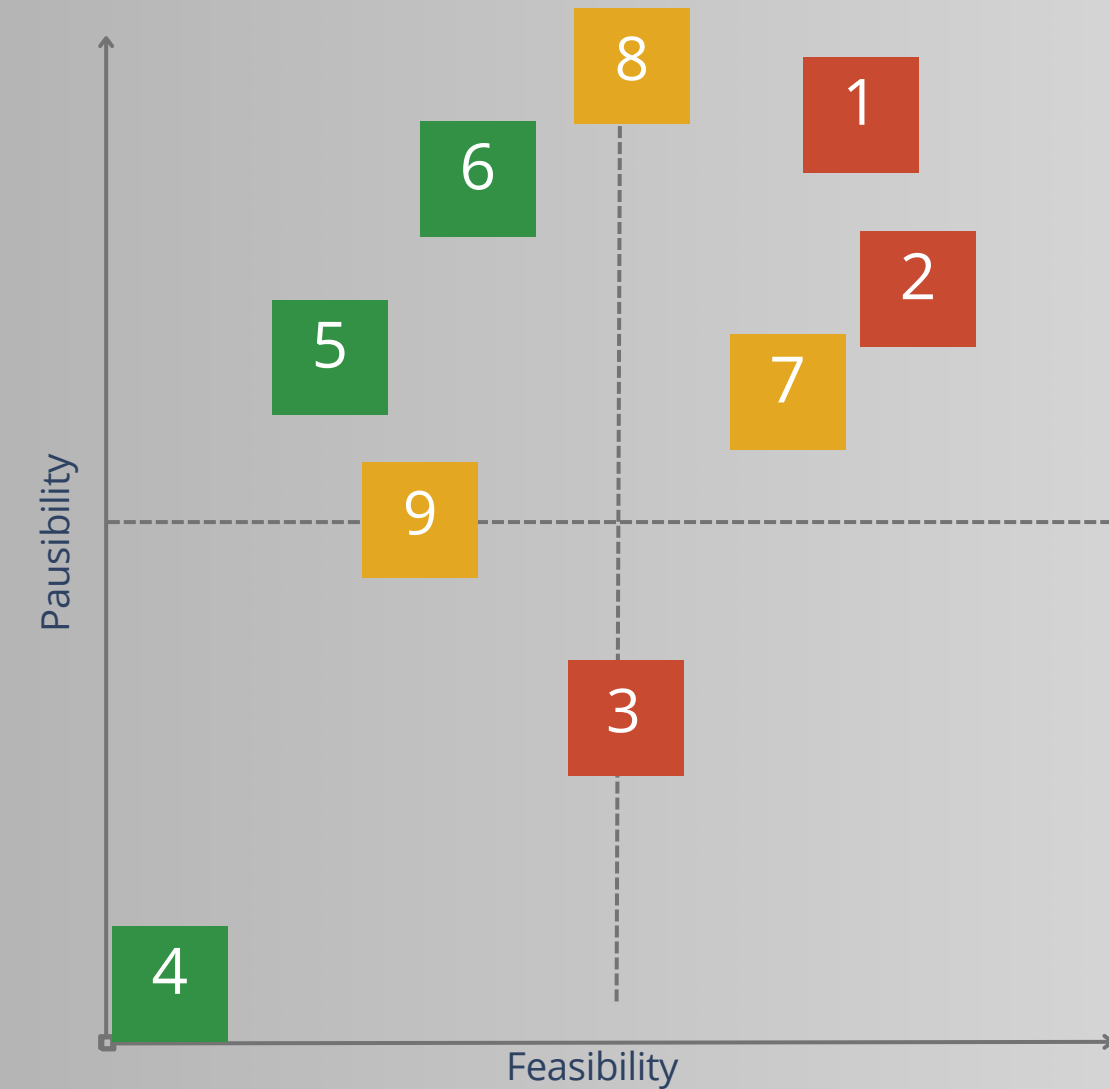
FREE

In municipalities with free envelopes and postage for mail-in voting, turnout increased by 4.5 percentage points

6SRF

In canton Schaffhausen a symbolic fine of 6SRF is levied on non-participation

Despite those policies, more than 50% of people eligible to vote in Switzerland still don't cast their ballot

| PROBLEM	PLAUSIBILITY	FEASIBILITY
1 Intrinsic Motivation	• Individuals may perceive **flaws in the political system**, struggle to find **alignment with parties/politicians**, and lack intrinsic motivation to vote	• Promote **interest in the political system**, foster a **positive environment for democratic participation**, and cultivate a **sense of competence in making political decisions**
2 Social Expectations	• Social expectations can influence people's voting behavior as **participating in the democratic process is generally perceived as positive**	• Encourage **community, dialogue, and visibility of community members' actions**, while also creating incentives through societal structures
7 Cognitive Bias	• **Limited voter attention to mail-in deadlines** and the tendency to **ignore ballots due to lack of immediate consequences** can impact voter behavior	• Proactively address cognitive biases by setting **reminders**, providing **accurate information from reliable sources**, and making **participation in the political process more memorable**

Anna just turned 21 years old, works full-time and lives near Zurich together with her parents and younger sister Laura. In the winter she is a huge raclette enjoyer and likes to spend her summers traveling around Italy. [...] She just got voting materials for the next voting session on several issues by mail.
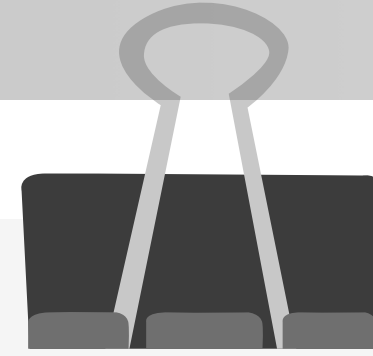
INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

- Even though it is not mandatory for her, Anna served in the army for 1 year.

SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS

- She is always hanging out with her friends. Last summer they travelled to France together. Originally, however, Anna had wanted to go to Italy, but she and her friends agreed on going to Paris after talking out their disagreement. During their last hangout, she and her friends took a stroll down memory lane about their Paris trip. After getting back home she sees that...

COGNITIVE BIAS

- After she had forgotten to buy things the last time she went grocery shopping, Anna started using a shopping list.

QUESTIONS

- From 0 to 10, what is the chance that Anna opens the envelope?

- From 0 to 10, what is the chance that Anna actually votes?

Which of the following best characterizes Anna's voting decision?

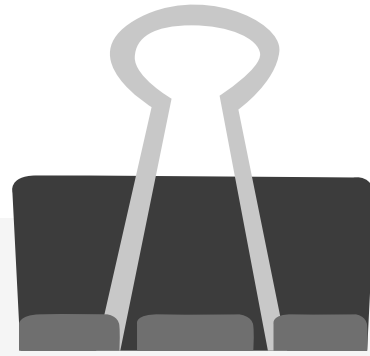| 'I like the sense of belonging to a community' (SOCIAL EXPC.)	'I believe in the Swiss democratic system' (INTRINSIC)	'I like keeping my life organized' (COGNITIVE BIAS)	'I like pondering on challenging problems' (STRUCTURAL)

COSTLY ACTIONS

What about you?

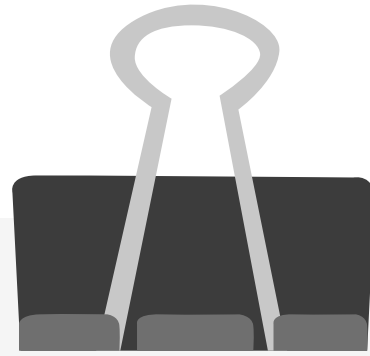- Would you be willing to get some additional information about the upcoming voting topics (Voting day: June 18)

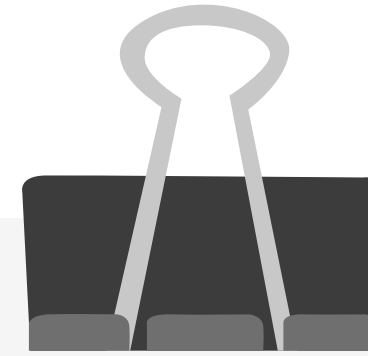- Can I ask someone to send you additional information about it via WhatsApp?

- Do you think you would vote more often if you knew your friends already voted?

COSTLY ACTIONS

What about you?

How much time would you be willing to give to attend a seminar, where you could learn more about the policy?

- As one of the tools to increase voting participation among underrepresented groups we were discussing the option of **sending flyers to underrepresented voter groups** pointing out for example to lower-income individuals that higher-income individuals vote more often in their area.

- As one of the tools to increase voting participation among underrepresented groups we were discussing we wanted to implement a campaign showing that regardless of the culture or religion you have, being a **Swiss citizen offers you the right to vote** and express your opinion.

| No time at all | Max 15min | Max 30min | Max 1h | More than 1h |
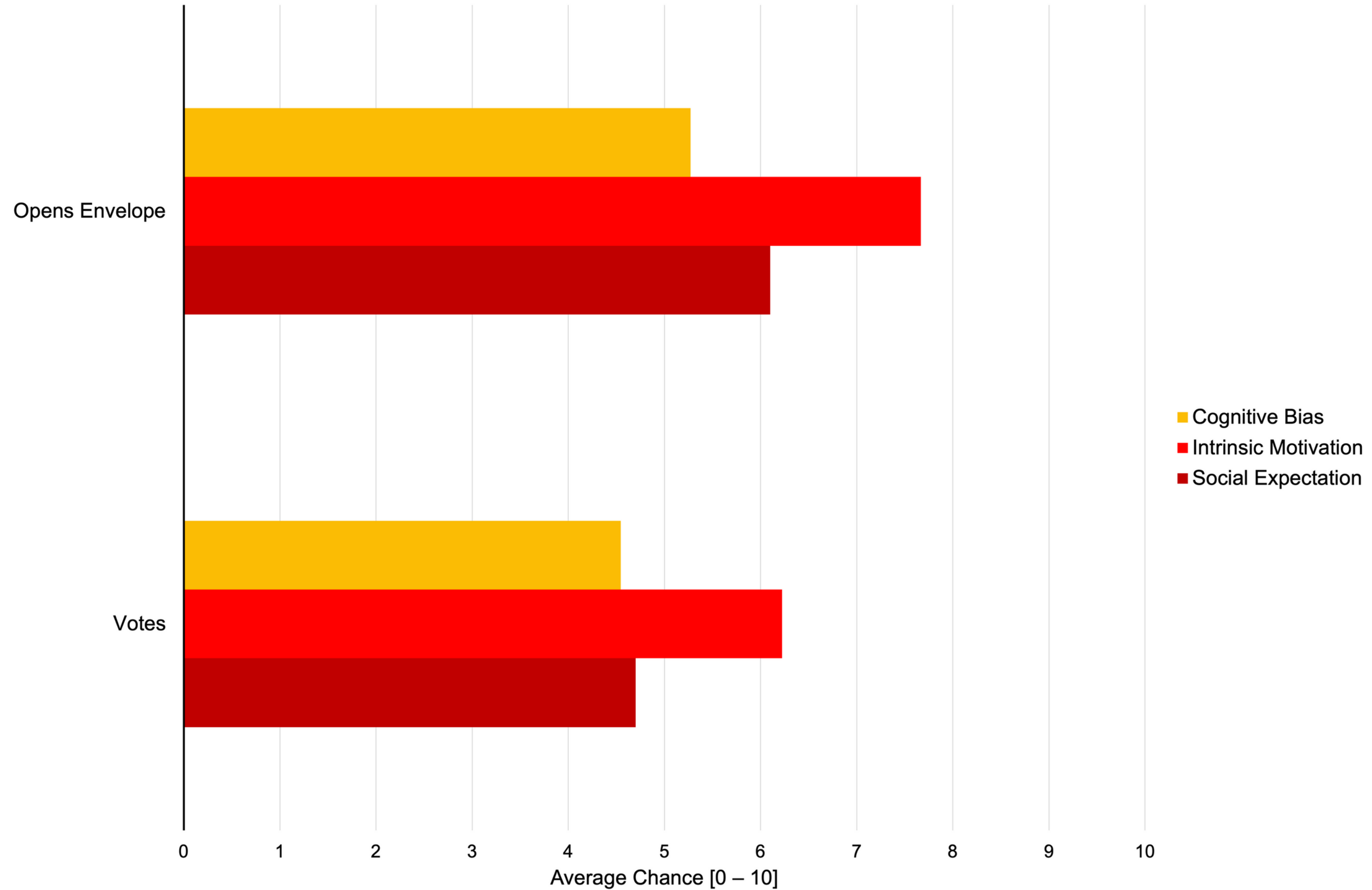
PROTAGONIST'S CHANCE OF ACTION BY SURVEY VARIANT, AVERAGE [0 – 10]
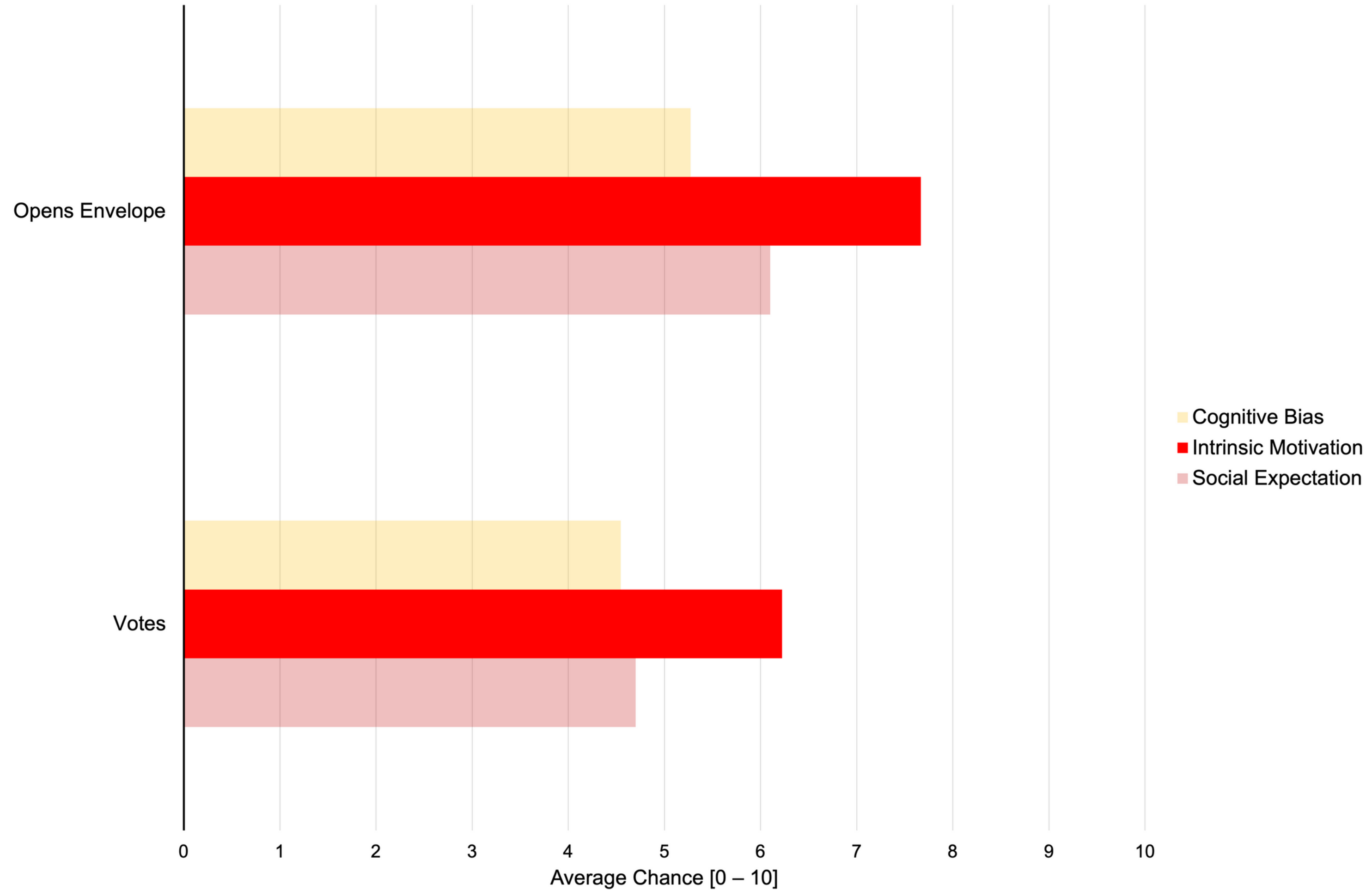
PROTAGONIST'S CHANCE OF ACTION BY SURVEY VARIANT, AVERAGE [0 – 10]
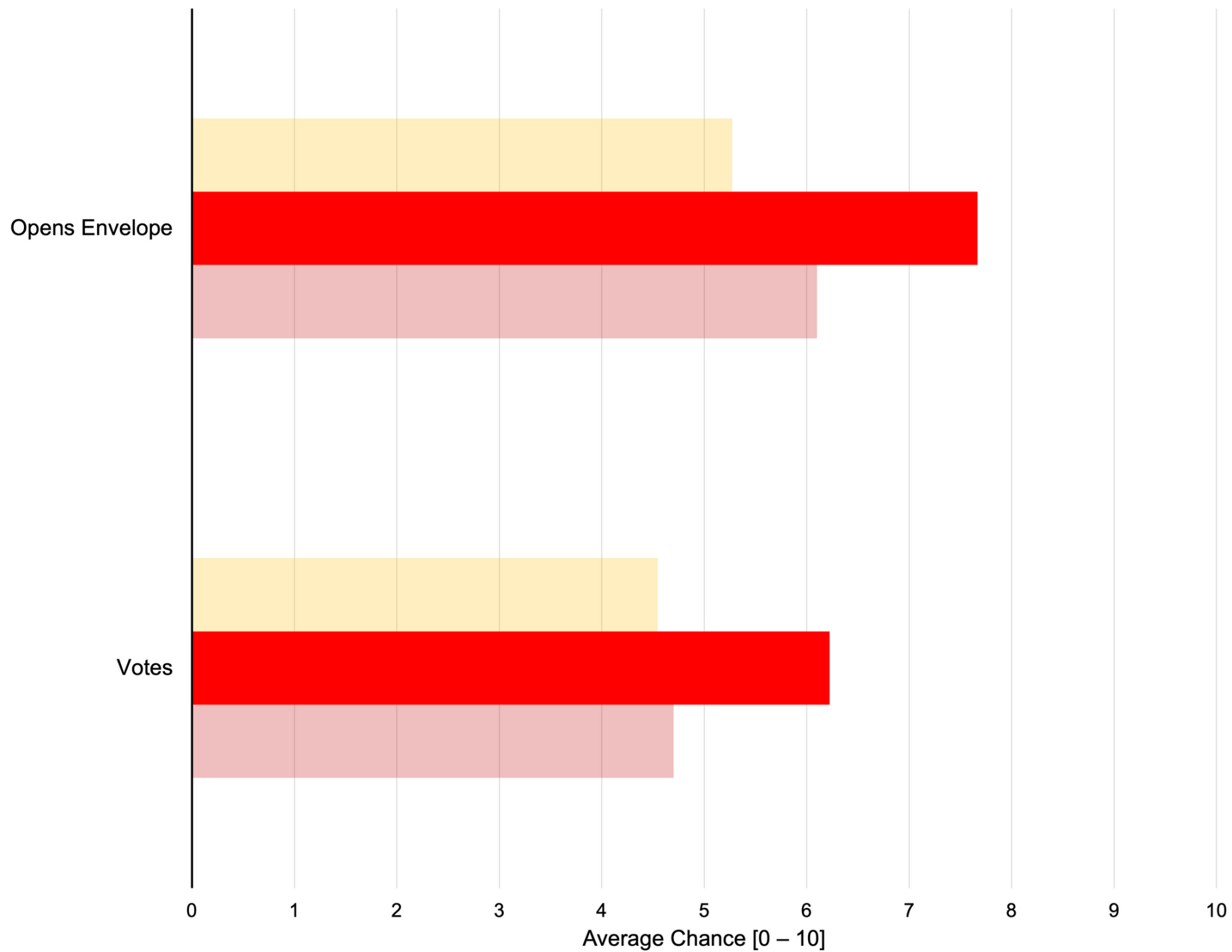
Interpretation
- Intrinsic Motivation wins out
- Can be regarded as a proxy for *Plausibility*, showing the mechanism's effect on behavior
- Controlling assumption: absent information, respondents answer '5' everywhere
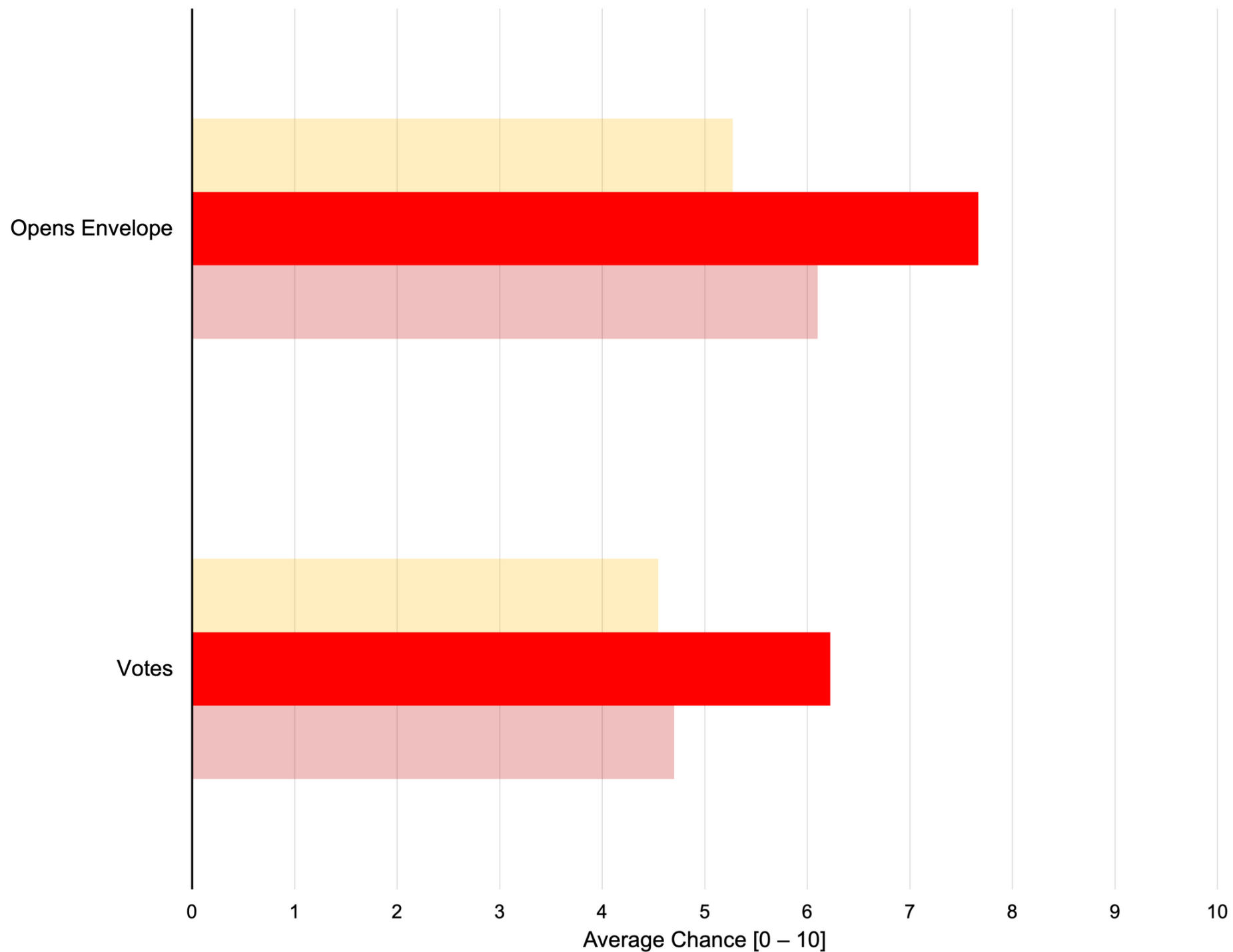
Interpretation
- Intrinsic Motivation wins out
- Can be regarded as a proxy for *Plausibility*, showing the mechanism's effect on behavior
- Controlling assumption: absent information, respondents answer '5' everywhere
- Furthermore: Social expectation not deemed potent among respondents
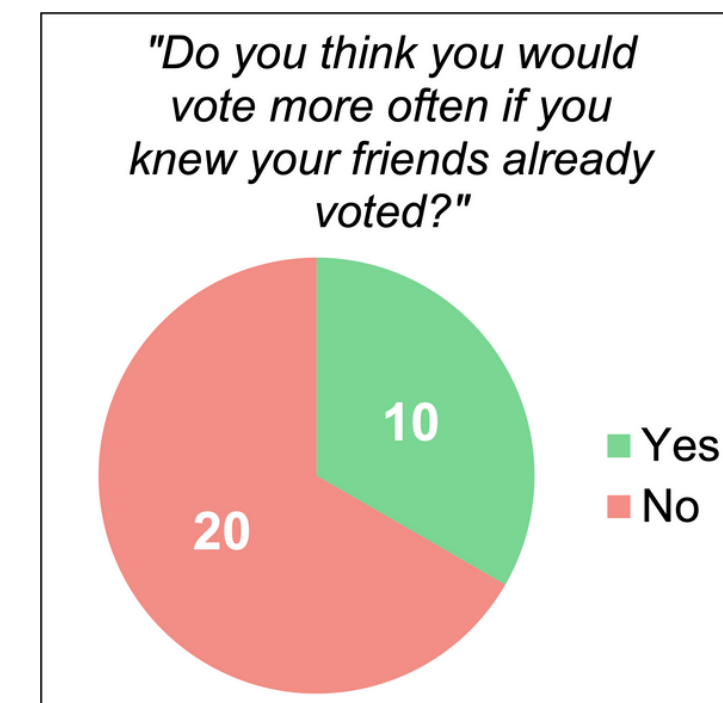
IDENTIFICATION OF VARIANT STATEMENT BY ACCURACY
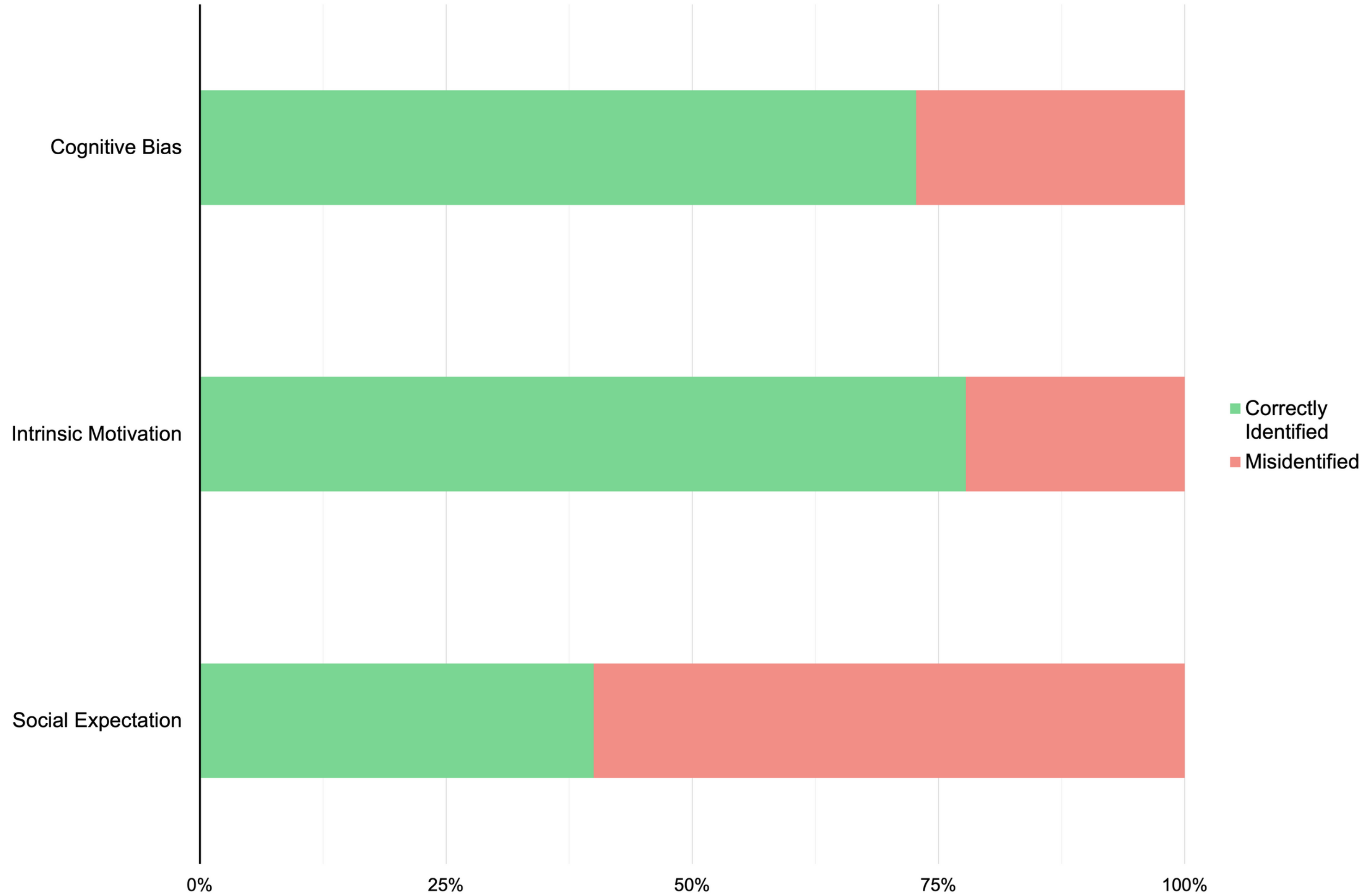
IDENTIFICATION OF VARIANT STATEMENT BY ACCURACY
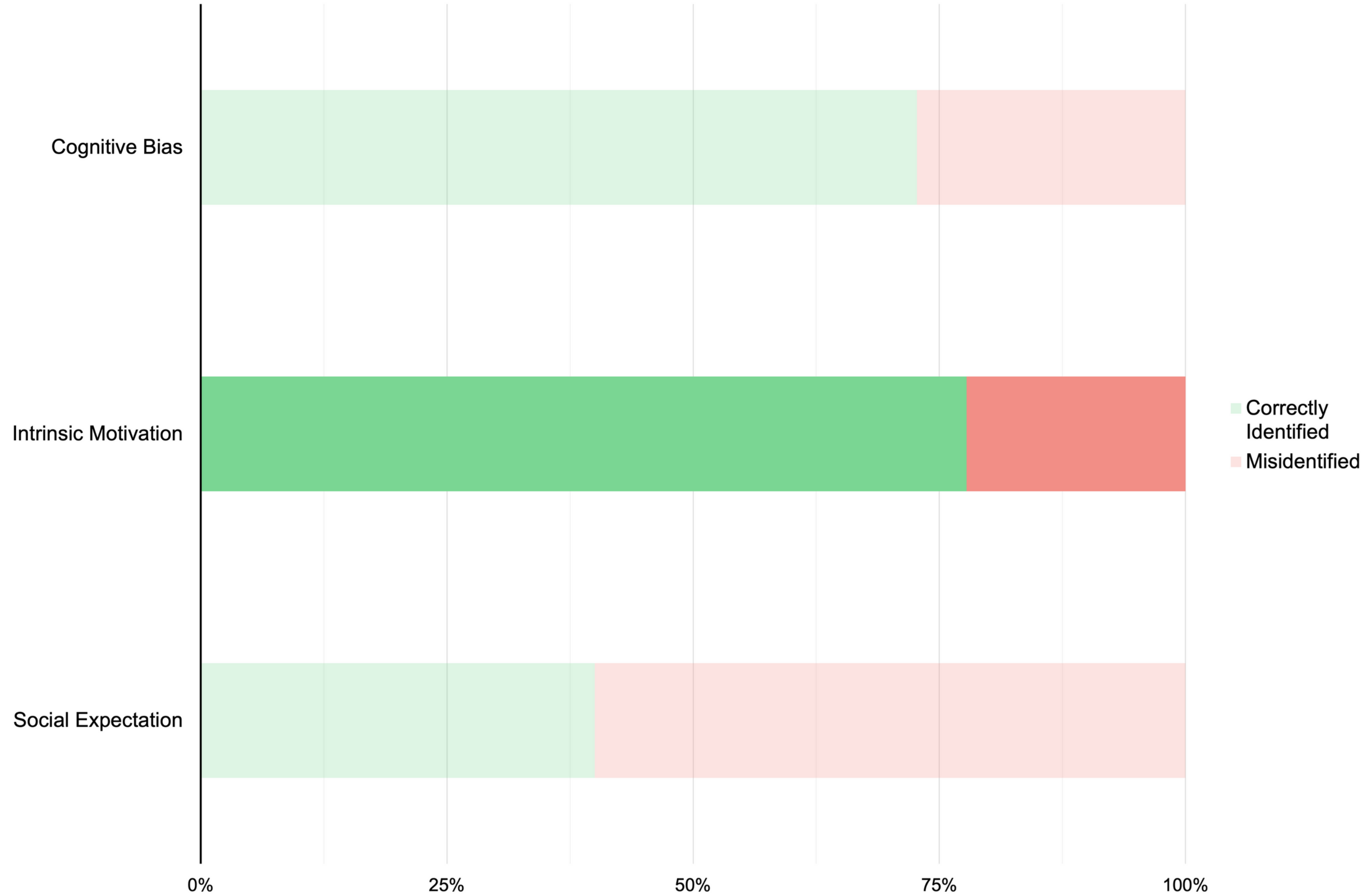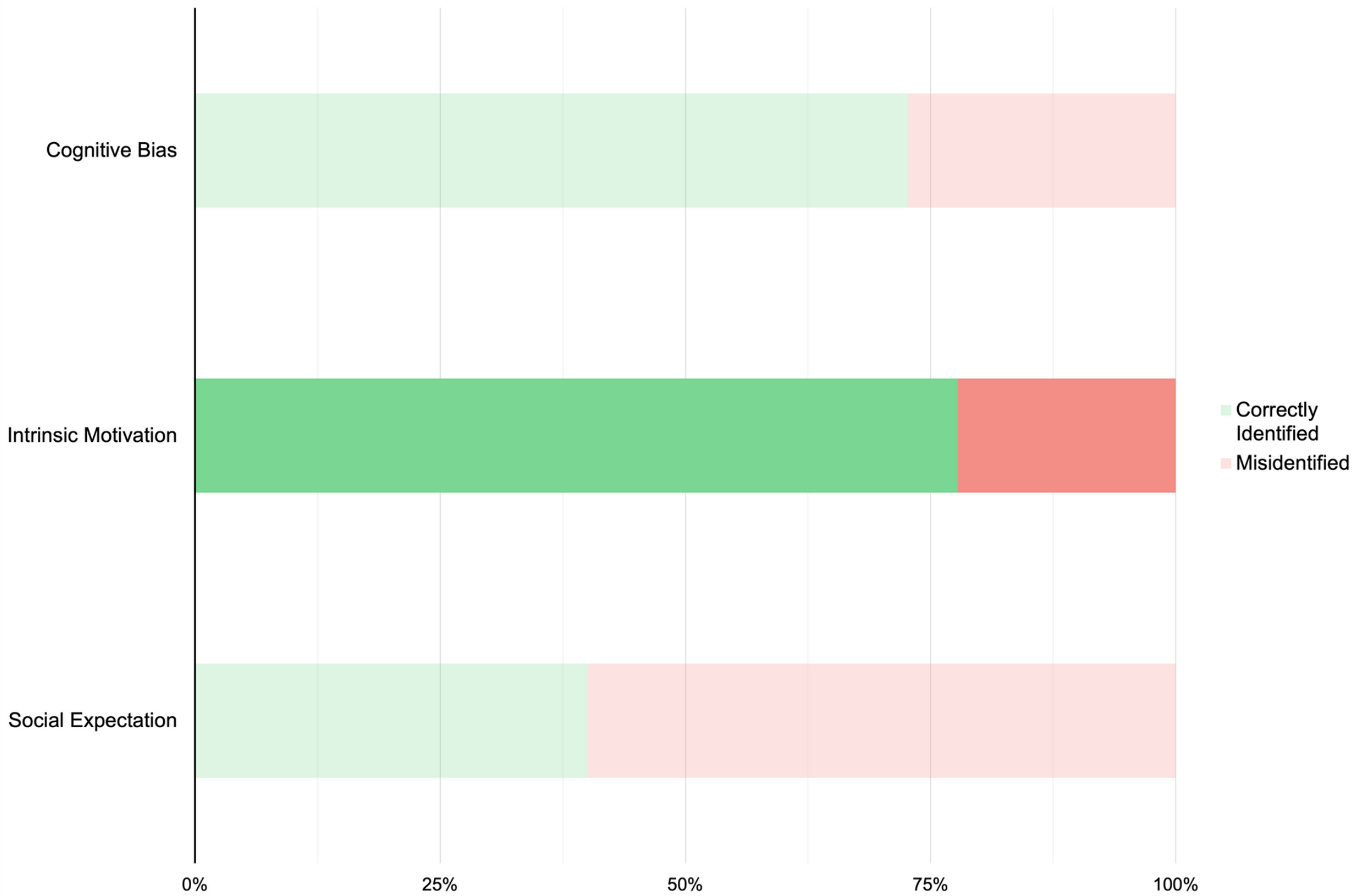
Interpretation
- For Intrinsic Motivation, character statements are most often correctly identified, i.e., ranked first (contrary to second, third, or last)
  - *'I believe in the Swiss democratic system'*
- Shows that the mechanism works and was well-understood by the respondents

13
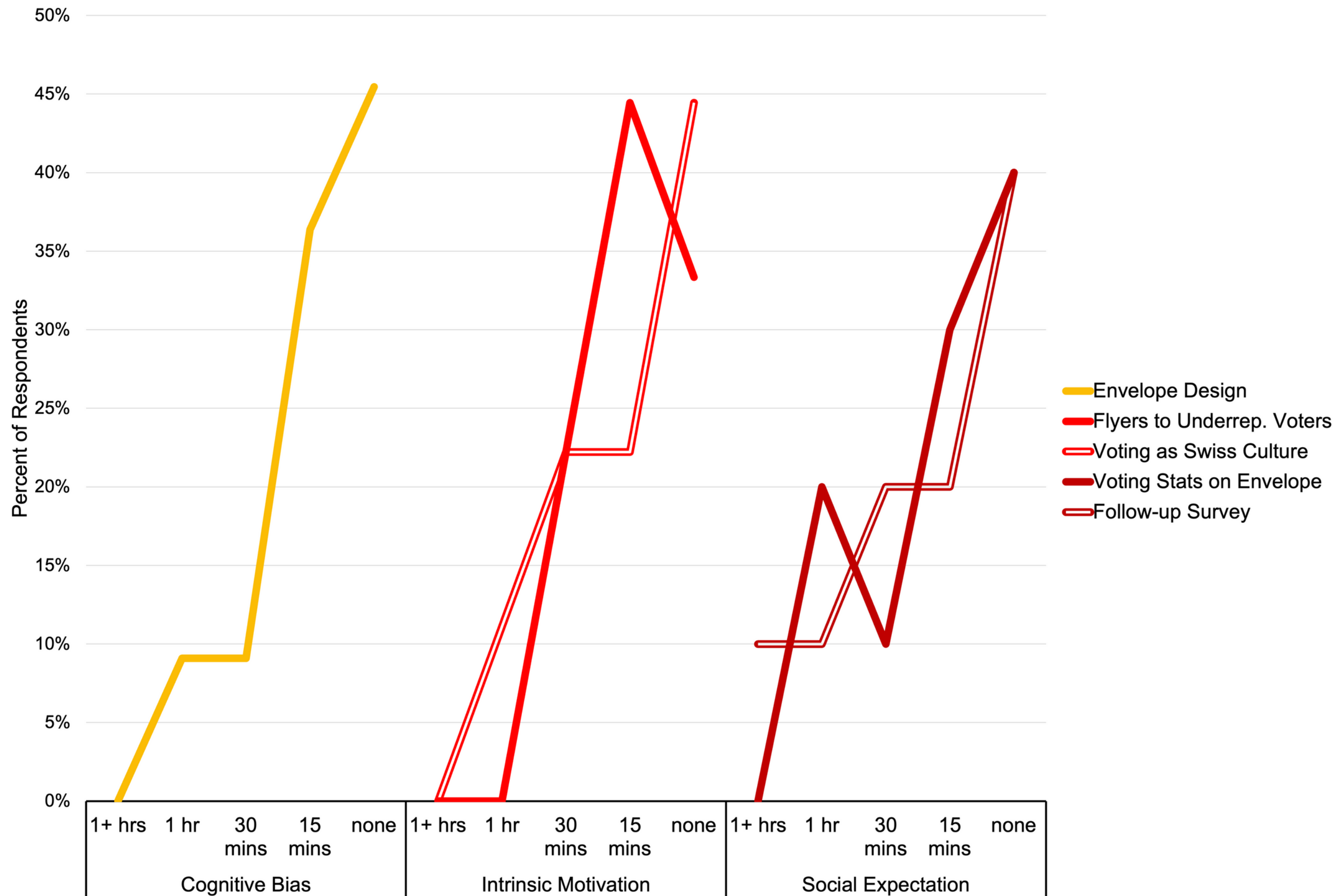
WILLINGNESS [TIME] TO PARTICIPATE IN FOCUS GROUP BY POLICY PROPOSAL
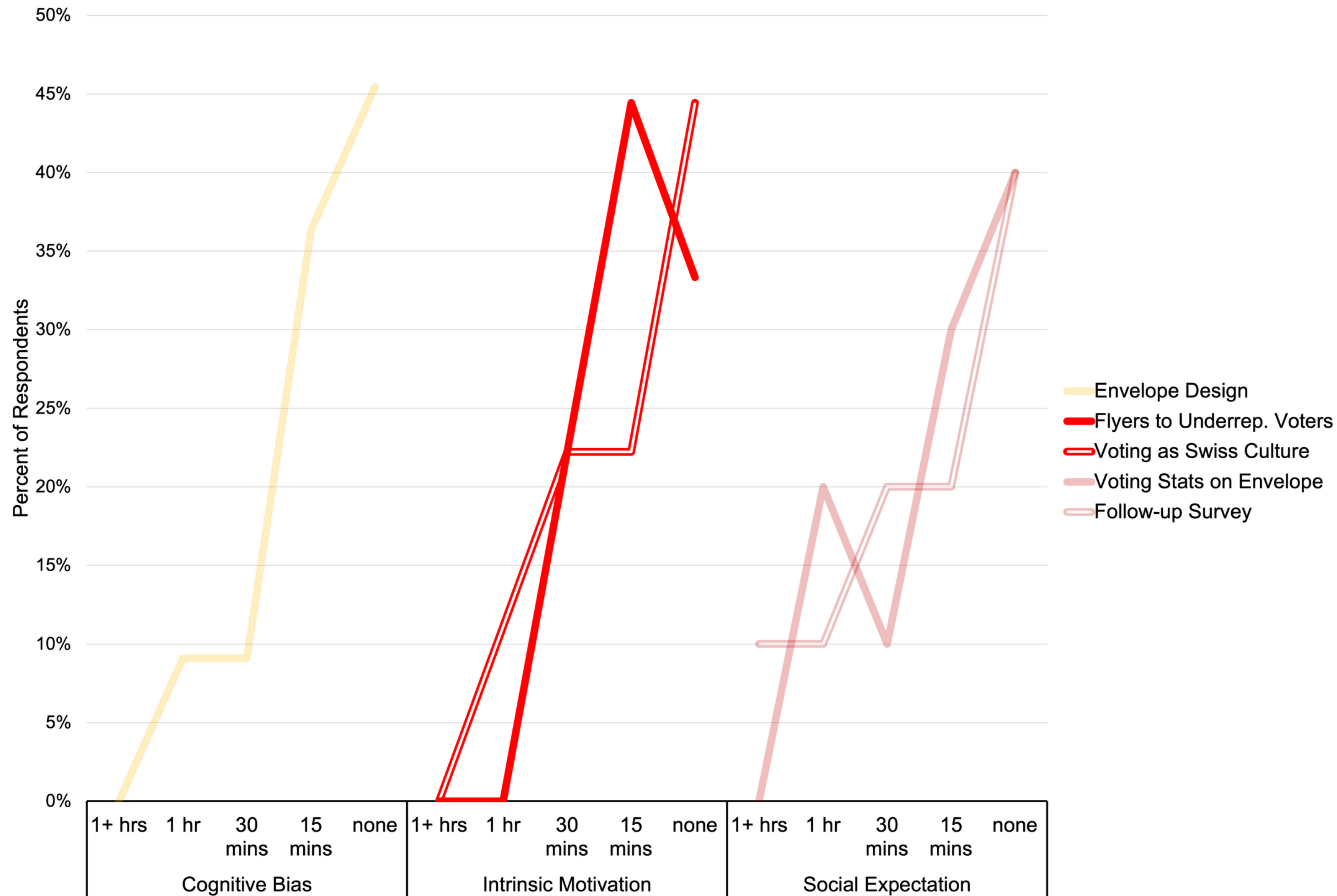
WILLINGNESS [TIME] TO PARTICIPATE IN FOCUS GROUP BY POLICY PROPOSAL
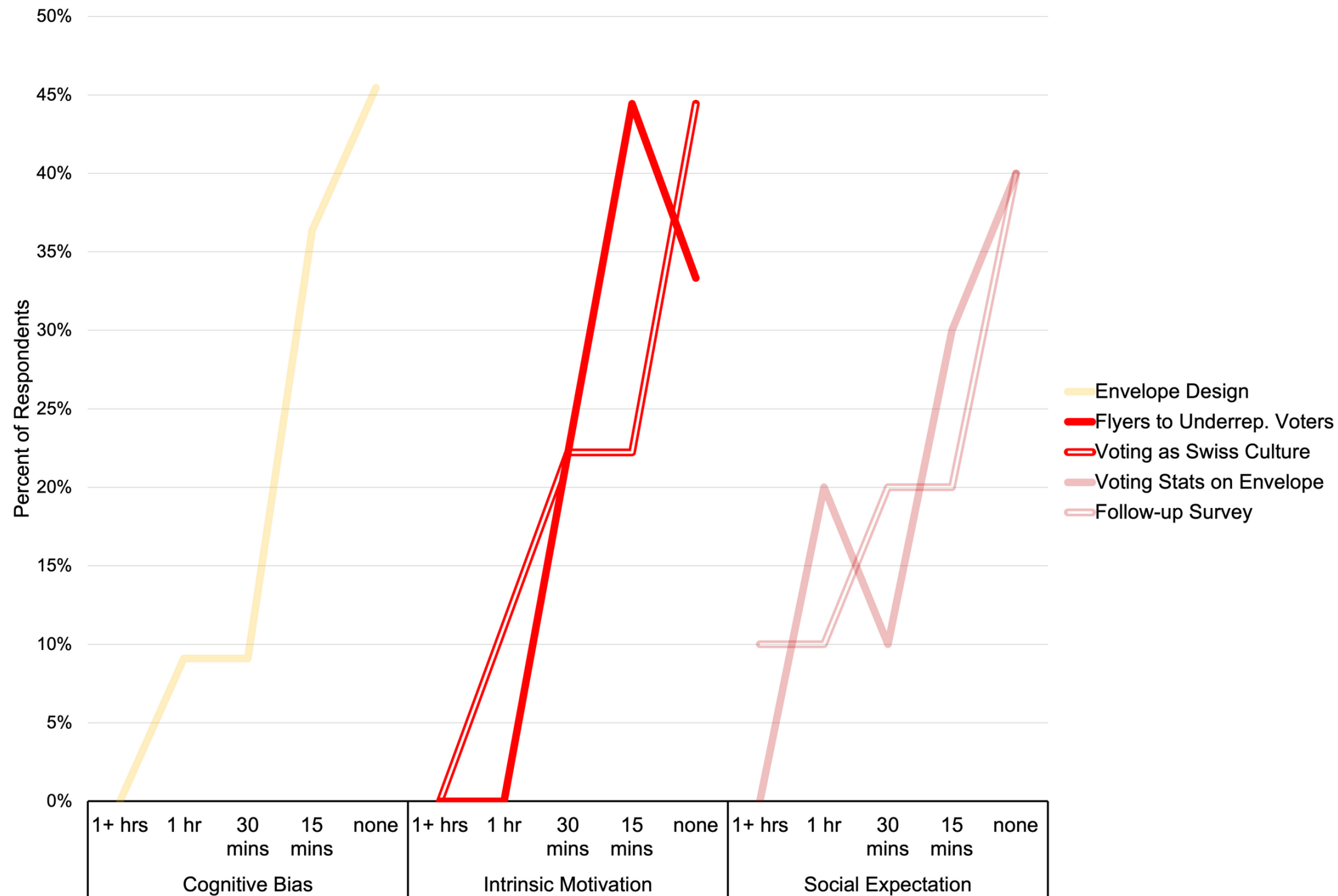
Interpretation
- High enthusiasm for Policy Proposals in the Intrinsic Motivation realm
- Proxy for *Feasibility*, gauging public support for a measure
- But: Strong support also for Social Expectation
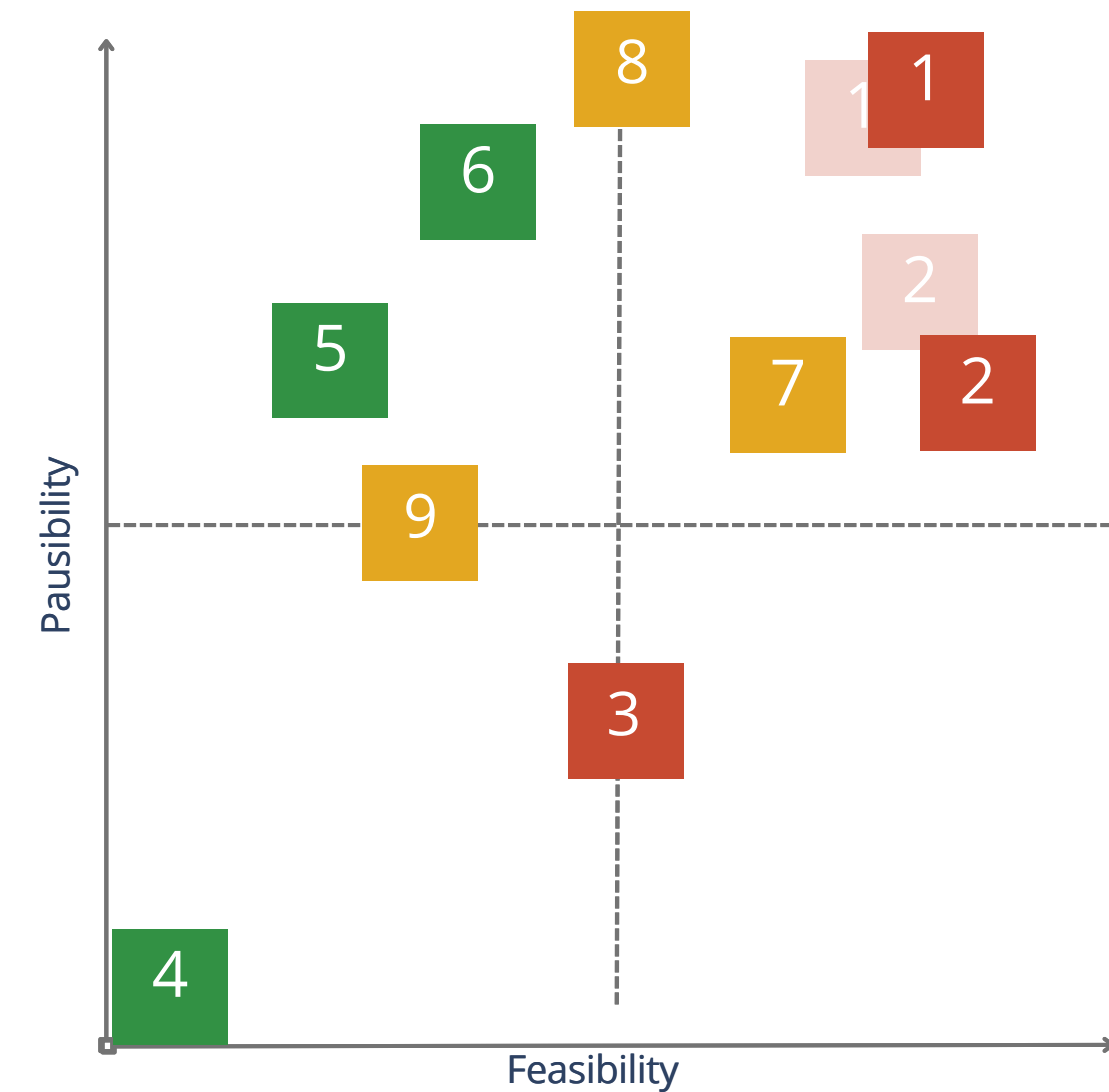
Most Promising: Intrinsic Motivation
- Behavioral mechanism is potent and well-understood by respondents
- Policy Proposals have popular support
- Plausibility-Feasibility-Matrix:
  - Intrinsic Motivation [1] more plausible, more feasible
  - Social Expectation [2] less plausible, more feasible

1
Intrinsic
Motivation

Information Campaigns
- Targeted advertising to young voters stressing that their group is underrepresented in voting
- A campaign showing that regardless of the culture or religion you have, being a Swiss citizen offers you the right to vote and express your opinion
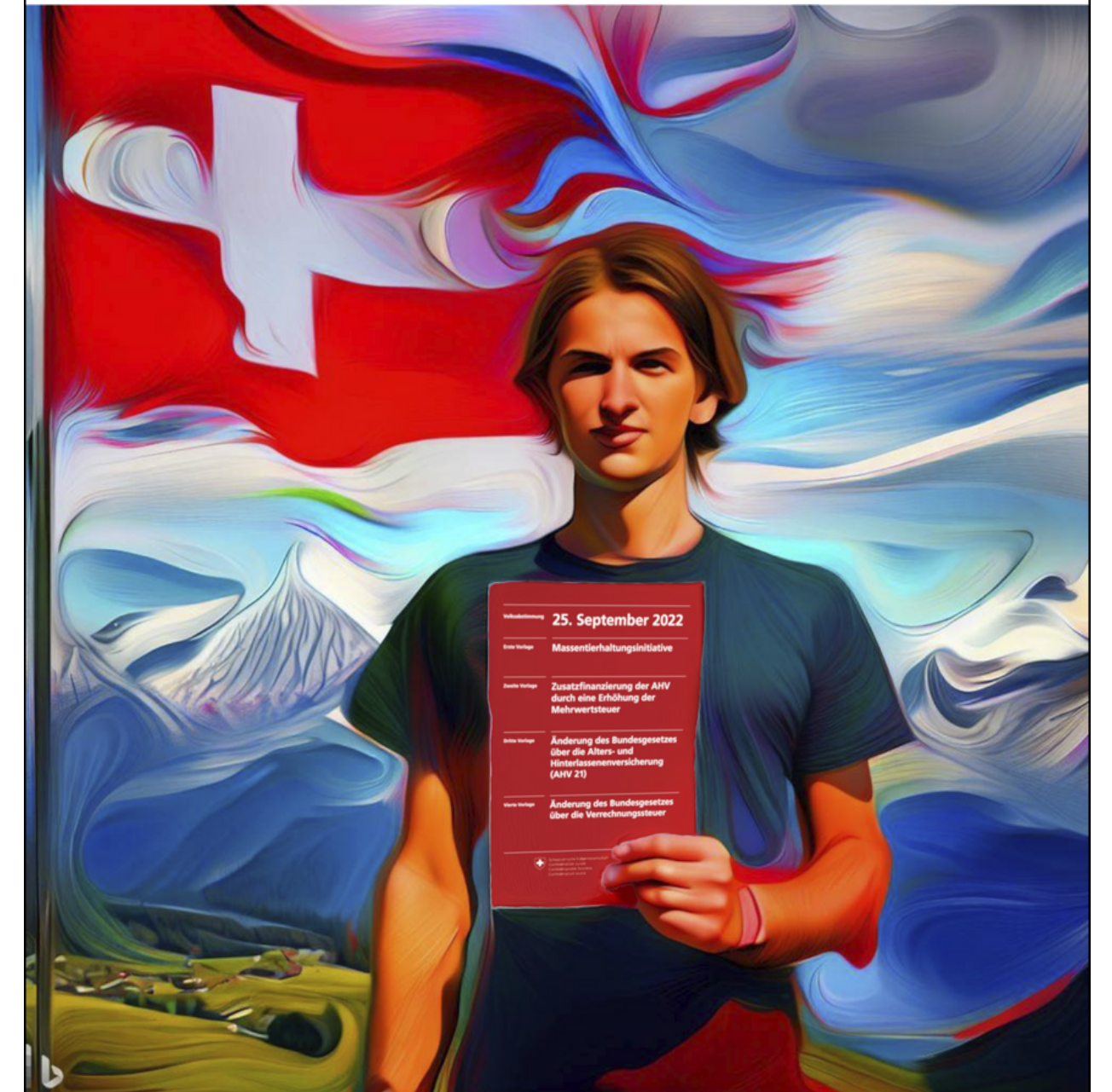
IDEAL CITIZEN

- Acts in own self-interest

- Is fully informed

- Makes rational decisions

- Makes decisions solely based on cost-benefit analyses

REAL CITIZEN

- Unable to perfectly process information about costs and benefits

- Subject to internal conflicts between reason and affect, and influenced by social pressure

- Not always able to follow through on past plans

- Motivation problems (identity, values, culture, religions)

Structural approach: Provide people with more information

Challenging the Rational Choice Assumption: We frame behavior changes so they are consistent with personal values — this <u>should not</u> affect the Ideal Citizen!

The flyers call upon personal values — this should not give Ideal Citizens any costs or benefits, and therefore should not influence their voting behavior

19

APPENDIX
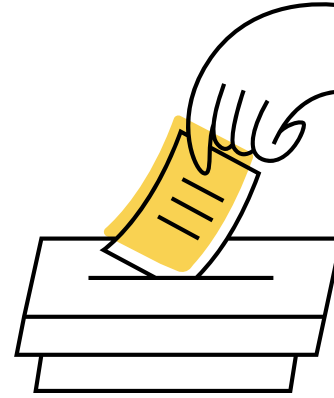
Voter turnout in Switzerland was less than 50% in 2022 [1].

We consider this a social problem for two reasons:

- Not all demographics are equally represented in the political decision-making process. Especially young people or individuals with basic education are underrepresented. Outcomes of popular votes do therefore not necessarily coincide with the median voter's opinion. [2, 3]

- Voting is associated with positive externalities. We believe that people who vote tend to be more knowledgeable about contemporary political and social problems [8, 9]. This increased awareness may translate into action to tackle those issues. Moreover, high voter turnout might act as a reminder of the federal and local government's accountability towards its citizens.

MECHANISM	PLAUSIBILITY	FEASIBILITY

1
Financial Incentives

- Expected to animate people with limited financial means to vote especially

- Financial incentives are hard to apply in context of voting since the line between paying people to vote and paying people to vote for a certain cause is blurry
- Prohibitively expensive

2
Information Campaigns

- Given that voting papers are sent to people's home it is unlikely that a lack of information is the cause for low voter turnout

- Information campaigns are comparably cheap and easy to implement

3
Voting Mandates

- Effectiveness will depend on the form of punishment for non-compliance

- Might contradict the very idea of voting and is thus difficult to enforce politically
- Expensive to implement

Pausibility

3

1

2

Feasibility

To conclude: most of the conventional structural mechanisms which are not implemented already perform poorly either in the plausibility or feasibility domain.
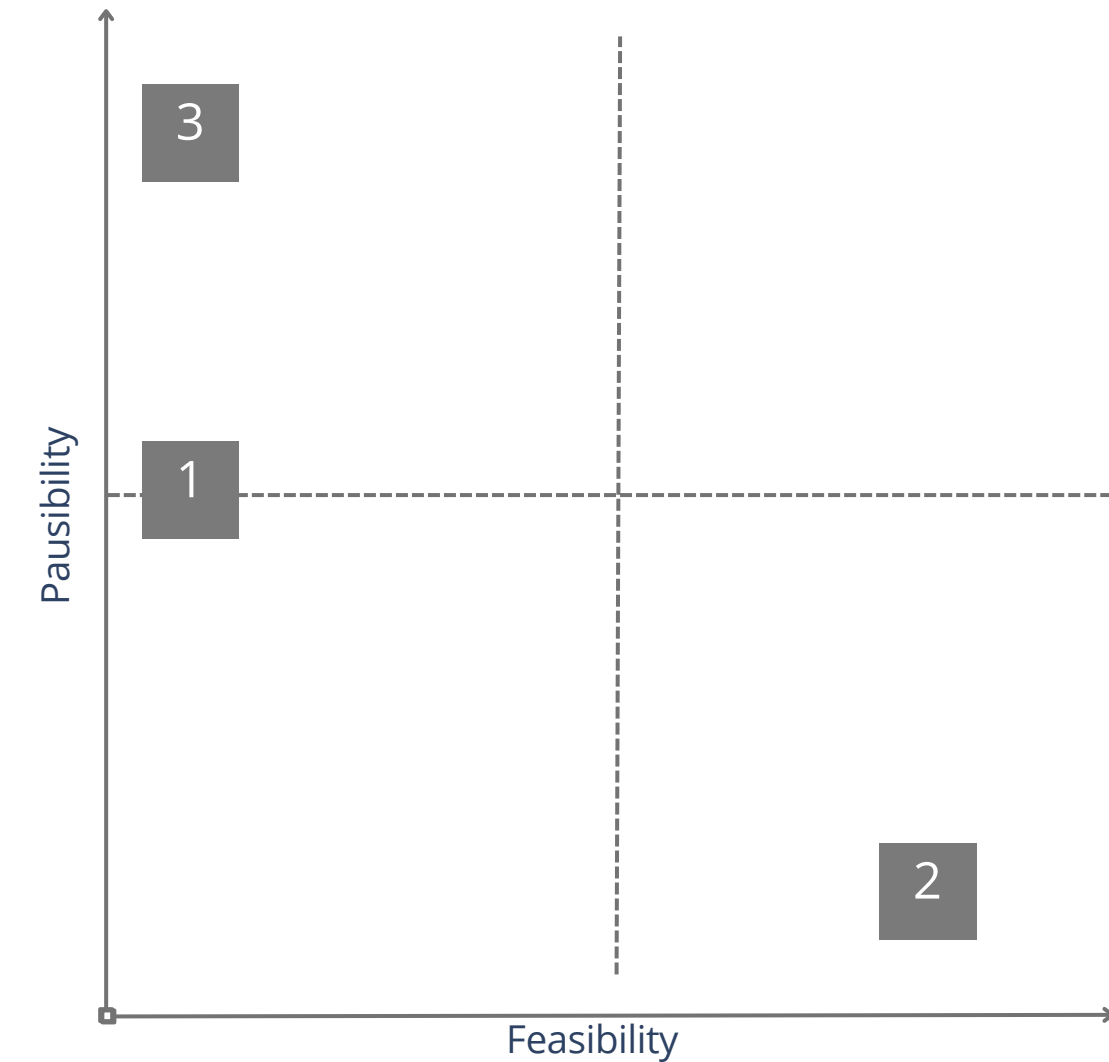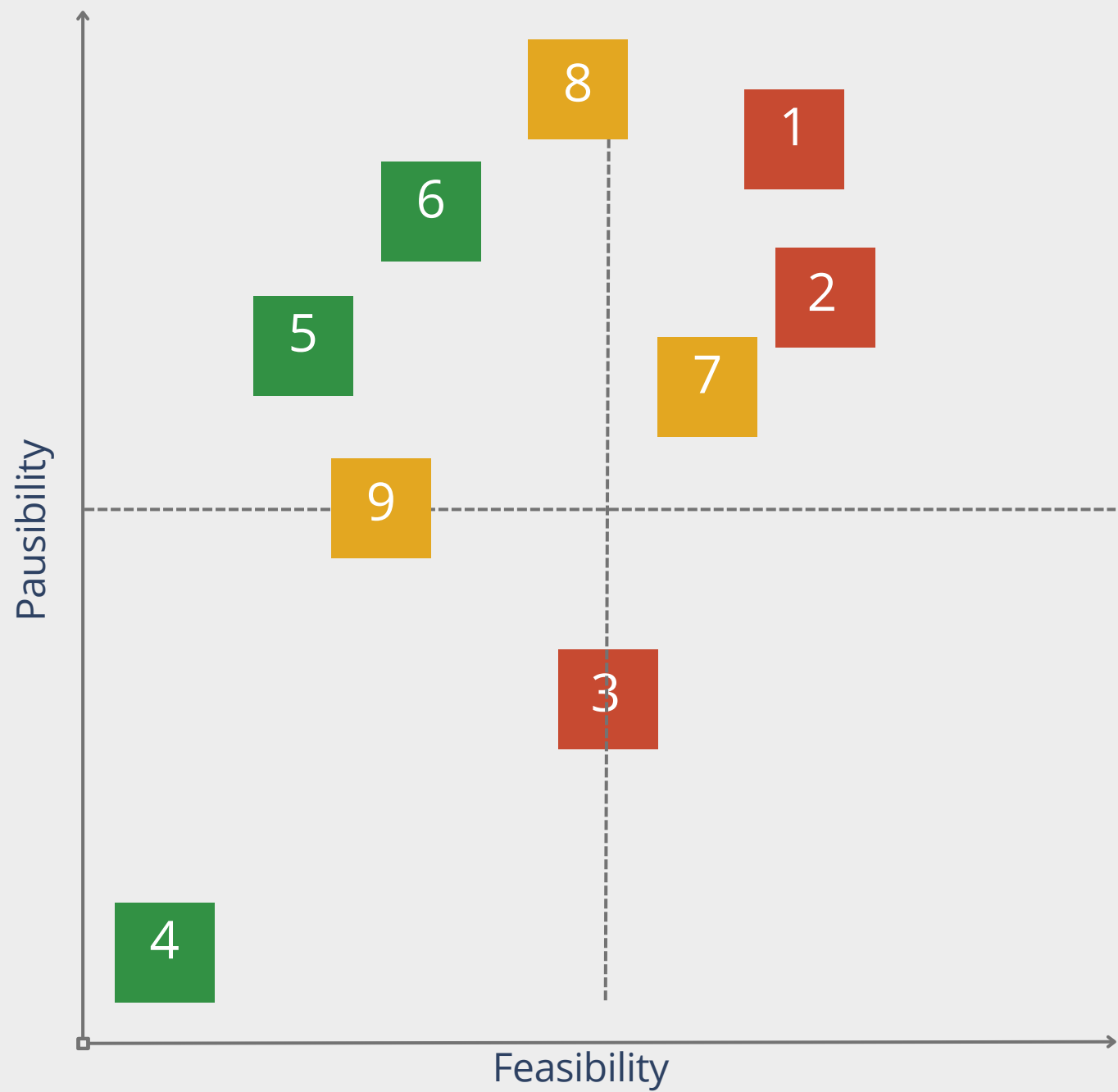
Motivation problems

1 Intrinsic Motivation

- Do values, identity, culture, or religion discourage the desirable action?

2 Social expectations

- Do expectations about group behaviors of conformity pressure discourage the desirable action – even when others cannot observe the action?

3 Social image concern

- Do social image concerns discourage the desirable action – when that action can be observed by others?

Self-control problems

4 Impulsivity

- Does impulsive behavior get in the way of the desirable action – regardless of previous plans?

5 Procrastination

- Does excessive optimism about future plans discourage desirable action in the present?

6 Self-limit beliefs

- Do self-limiting beliefs about one's ability to achieve positive outcomes discourage the desirable action?

Inattention problems

7 Cognitive biases

- Do percentual errors lead to undesirable actions?

8 Cognitive load

- Is the quality of decision-making compromised due to external conditions that compete for one's executive functions, leading to undesirable actions?

9 Learning-through-noticing

- Does ignoring (some of the) available information in recurring decisions lead to undesirable actions?

Motivation Problems

PROBLEM	PLAUSIBILITY	FEASIBILITY

Pausibility (y-axis) / Feasibility (x-axis) — squares labeled 1–9
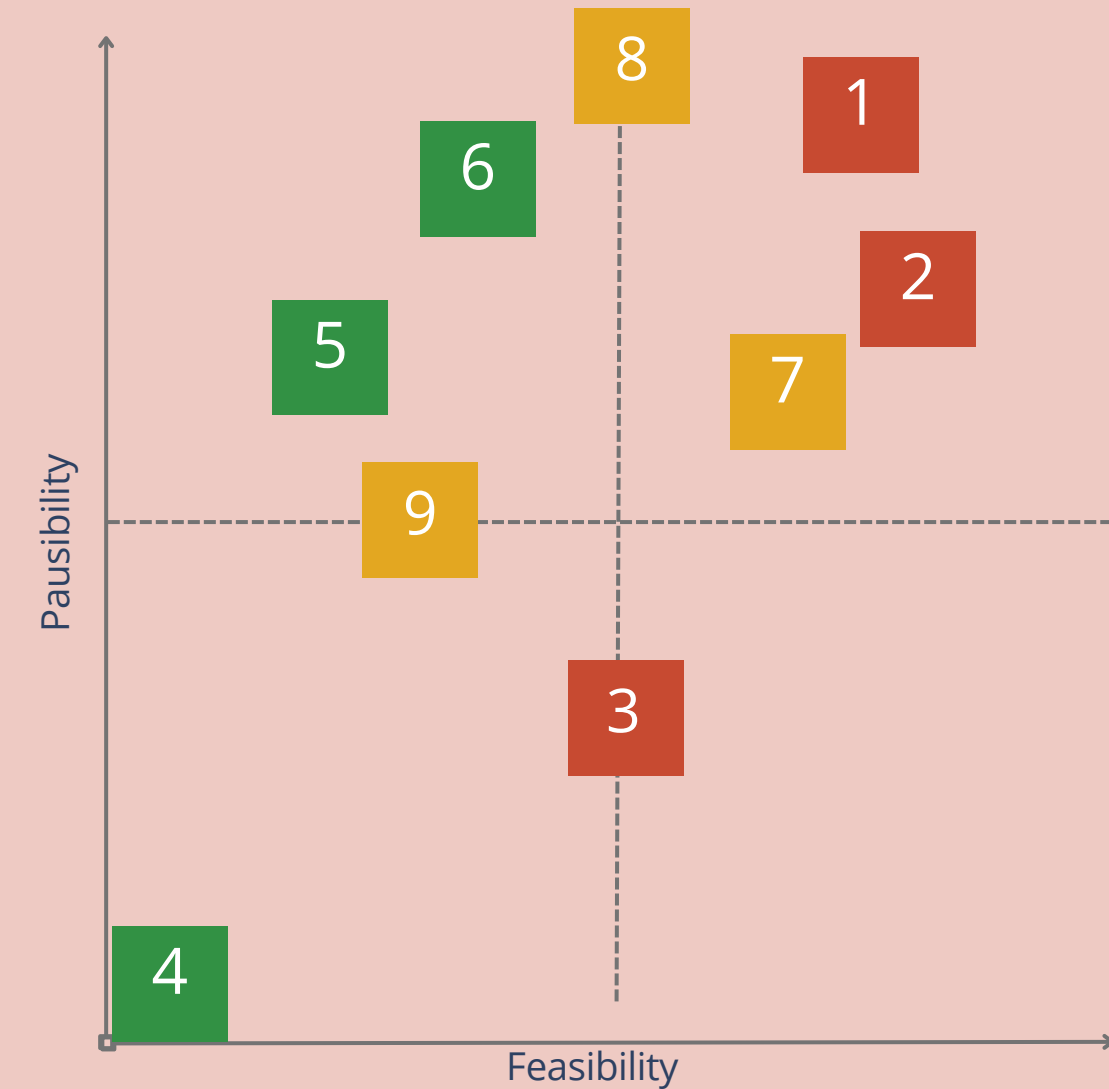
1 Intrinsic Motivation

Plausibility:
- Individuals might believe the political system is flawed
- Individuals might feel there is no party or politicians that align with their views
- Individuals might not feel intrinsically rewarded by casting their vote

Feasibility:
- Develop and foster interest in the political system
- Create a positive environment around participating in democratic decisions
- Cultivate a feeling of competence connected to making political decisions

2 Social Expectations

Plausibility:
- Participating in the democratic process is generally regarded as positive. Social expectations are therefore likely to play a role in people's voting behavior

Feasibility:
- Changing social expectations and pressure is challenging due to the complex yet unique experiences of each individual
- Encourage sense of community and encourage constructive dialogue with others
- Make the actions of other members of the community more visible

3 Social Image Concern

Plausibility:
- In democratic societies, views on participating in the democratic process are usually positive. Therefore, if voting were observable participation is likely to increase

Feasibility:
- Feasibility aspect similar to the behavioral mechanism: "social expectations"
- If the behavior is visible, societal pressure is likely to be stronger

Self-control Problems

Pausibility

Feasibility

PROBLEM

PLAUSIBILITY

FEASIBILITY

4 Impulsivity

- Voting is a low-impulse action. Therefore, there is no impact on the voting rate

- Voting is a complex action that requires being informed about the subject of voting. Solutions such as mobile "pop-up" voting stations could be problematic since they trade of quantity against quality of votes

5 Procrastination

- Voting requires some effort. There is a lot of information to read and understand in order to make a final decision. Citizens tend to procrastinate, and ultimately risk missing the deadline

- Overcome problems causing procrastination such as a lack of motivation, feeling of beeing overwhelmed and a lack of time management skills
- Difficult to overcome since individual reason for procrastination might differ

6 Self-Limiting Beliefs

- A fixed mindset effect could be holding people back from voting. If citizens are convinced that they are unable to fully understand the complexity of politics in order to cast their best vote, they may not even make the effort to vote

- Encourage people to challenge their current beliefs
- Assist people in reframing negative thoughts and show how simple participating in elections can be
- Help people set realistic goals and help build their self-confidence in regard to their political judgement and decision making
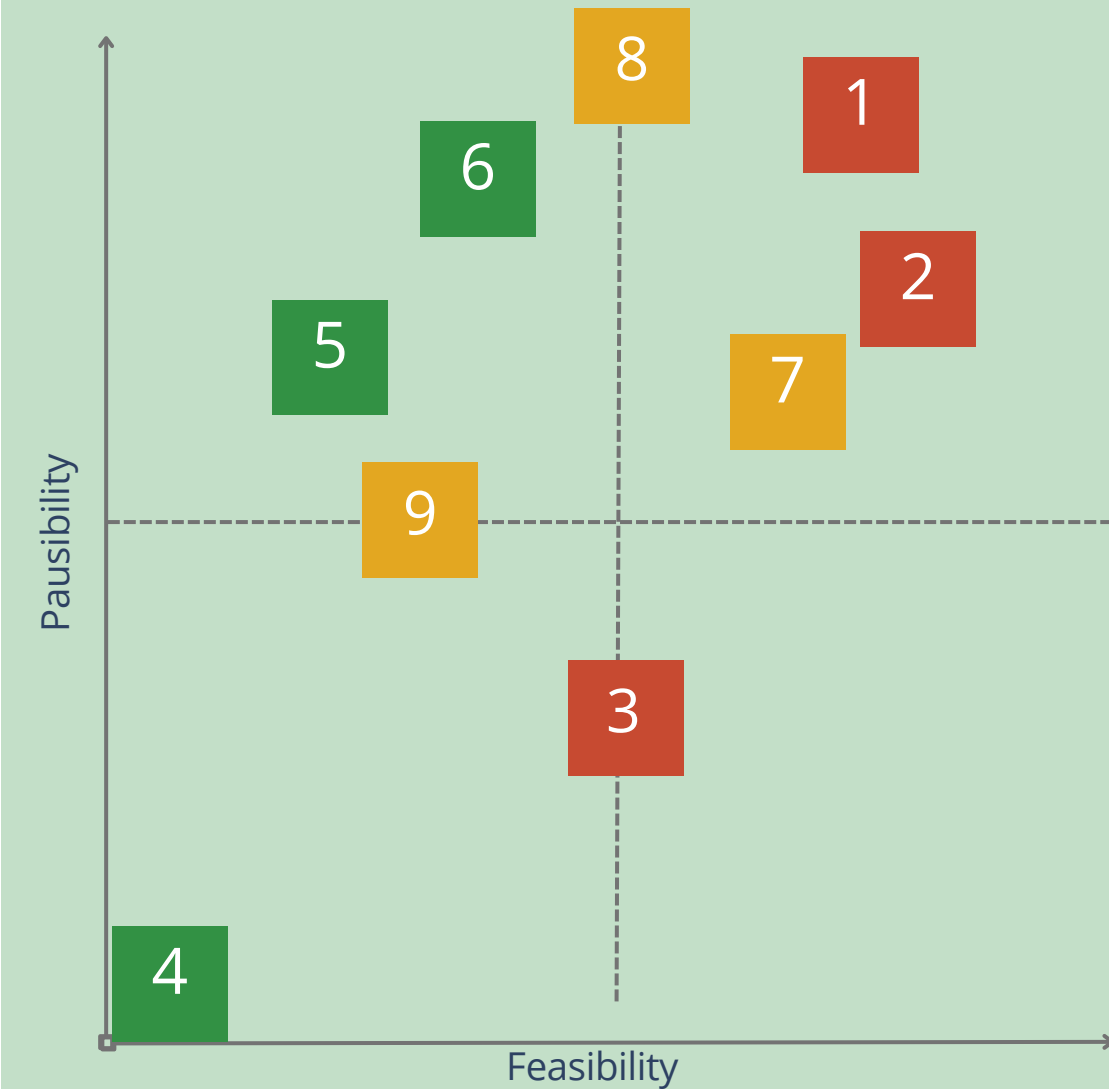
Inattention Problems
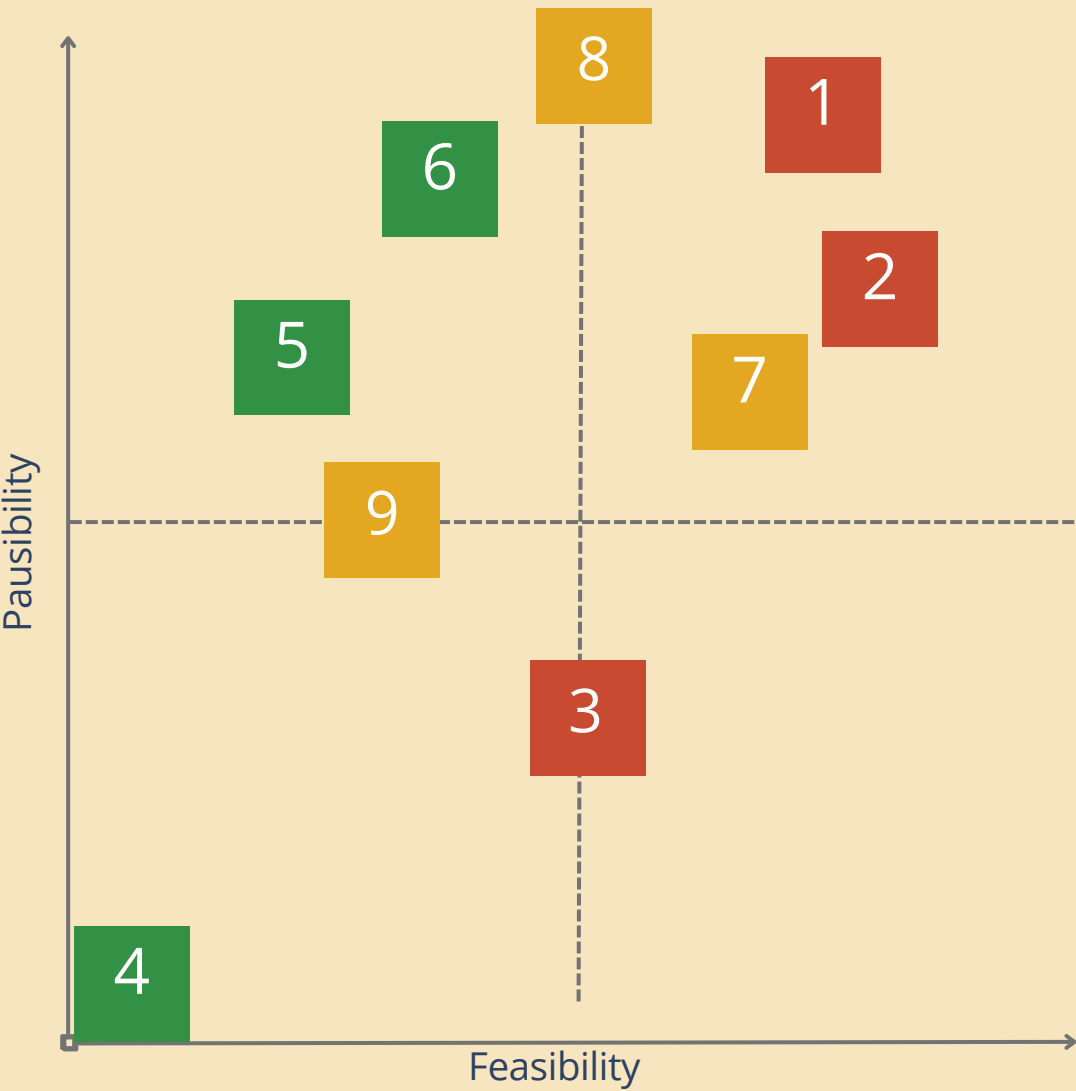
PROBLEM **PLAUSIBILITY** **FEASIBILITY**

7 Cognitive Biases

- Limited attention of voters with regard to the mail-in deadline, misreading it or forgetting about it
- People have limited attention. Individuals are thus tempted to take the mental shortcut of simply ignoring the ballot since it has no immediate consequences

- Proactive effort in overcoming different cognitive biases
- Set clear reminders, provide accurate information from reliable sources and make participation more memorable and appealing

8 Cognitive Load

- Voting requires some effort. There is a lot of information to read and understand in order to make a final decision. Moreover, the process of casting the vote requires time and effort

- Take both behavioral and structural measures into account to tackle the problem
- Incite more awareness to the importance of participating in votes to increase the priority of this action in peoples minds

9 Learning-Through-Noticing

- Plausible to be one of the reasons that people do not vote. If you never voted, it is difficult to conceive that voting can be associated with a good feeling and a sense of community

- Partner with schools, voter outreach and/or other assistance programs to tackle lack of education or false beliefs about the voting process
- utilize potential to simplify the voting process

0
Traditional
Policies

Price taxes and subsidies

- Free envelopes for voting. Voter turnout has been shown to increase 4.5 percentage points in municipalities where free postage was provided. However, on average there is still 44% of voters that aren't captured by the policy [4]

Norms, defaults, mandates and bans

- Mandatory voting. Practiced in only one canton (Schaffhausen) where a symbolic fine of 6SRF. is levied on non-participation. [5]
- Mail-in voting is used by around 90% of voters. It is estimated that the introduction of mail-in voting has increased turnout by around 4.1%. However again, on average there is roughly 45% of voters that aren't captured by the policy[6, 7]
- E-voting is only partially available

Information

- Sending booklets with information about the postal ballot

1 Intrinsic Motivation

Norms, defaults, mandates and bans

- Pre-mark alternatives on the ballot with something contrary to typical Swiss values. Requires voters to open the envelope to see what is marked.

Information

- Promote a campaign showing that regardless of the culture or religion you have, being a Swiss citizen offers you the right to vote and express your opinion
- Target advertising especially to underrepresented voter groups (e.g., pointing out to lower-income communities that wealthy people participate more in voting)
- Information campaign highlighting the diverse political (party) landscape in Switzerland. Alleviates the potential concern that there is no party or politicians that align with an individual's views

**2
Social
Expectations**

Price taxes and subsidies

- Citizens can sign up for (paid) vote counting, increasing their awareness of the elaborate voting system in place and showing that many people take voting seriously. It might incentivize them to participate since they can observe that voting is socially expected
- Have a lottery where the pot of prizes depends on the (local) voting participation rate – thus, societal pressure can increase, despite the act being unobservable per se
- The canton/municipality with the highest turnout (or above a threshold) is allocated surplus funding from the government for public projects

Norms, defaults, mandates and bans

- A mandate can highlight that society expects people to vote

Information

- Print the participation rate on the voting envelope, e.g., "In your neighborhood, x% of voters had cast their ballot last time", or "You vote x-times as frequently as your neighbors"
- People who did not vote in the previous election receive a letter with a survey on why they did not participate
- Live voter participation tracker (e.g., a website)

3
Social Image Concerns

Information

- Hand out stickers, wristbands, and pins reading "I voted!"
- Voting materials are sent out in different colored envelopes to people who did not vote last time around (e.g., red envelopes for shirkers, green for participants)

4
Impulsivity

- Does not apply (voting is not usually an impulsive action)

5
Procrastination

Price taxes and subsidies

- Giving a prize/money premium to early voters could help people to commit to voting
- Secondary deadline with a late-fee

Norms, defaults, mandates and bans

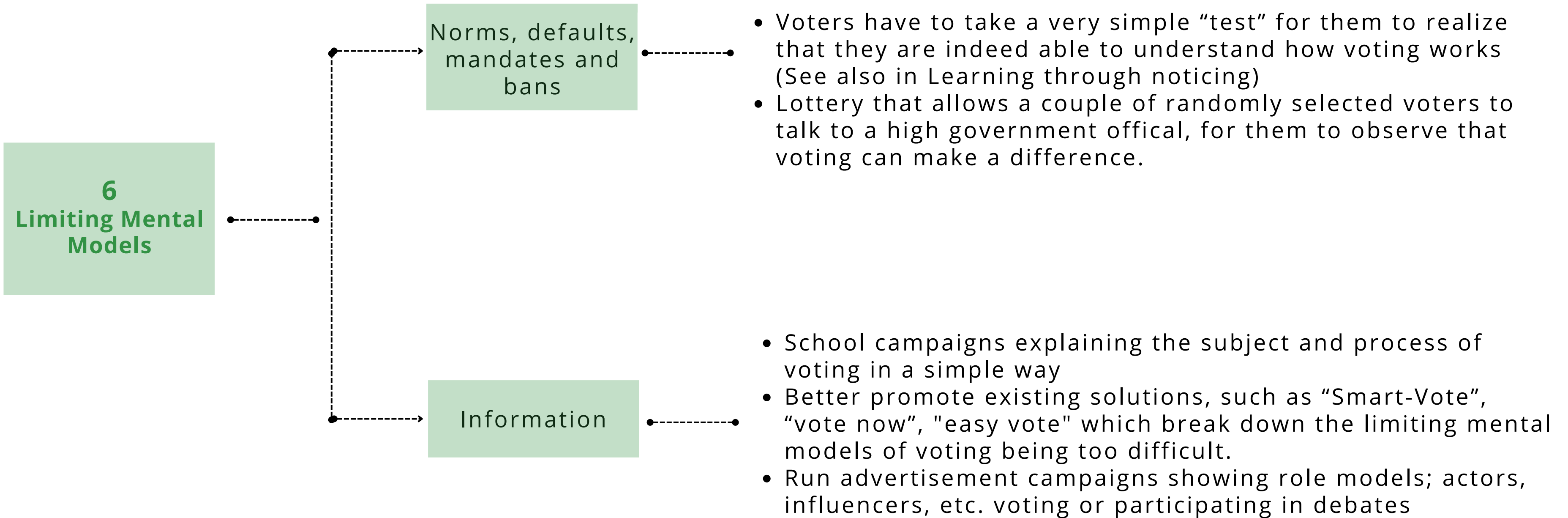- Cap the number of countable votes – first come, first served. This number might be successively increased if the cap is reached

Information

- Send a text message reminder/SMS the weekend or a couple of days before the mail-in deadline
- Get a special early-voter bracelet

**6
Limiting Mental
Models**

Norms, defaults, mandates and bans

- Voters have to take a very simple "test" for them to realize that they are indeed able to understand how voting works (See also in Learning through noticing)
- Lottery that allows a couple of randomly selected voters to talk to a high government offical, for them to observe that voting can make a difference.

Information

- School campaigns explaining the subject and process of voting in a simple way
- Better promote existing solutions, such as "Smart-Vote", "vote now", "easy vote" which break down the limiting mental models of voting being too difficult.
- Run advertisement campaigns showing role models; actors, influencers, etc. voting or participating in debates

7 Cognitive Biases
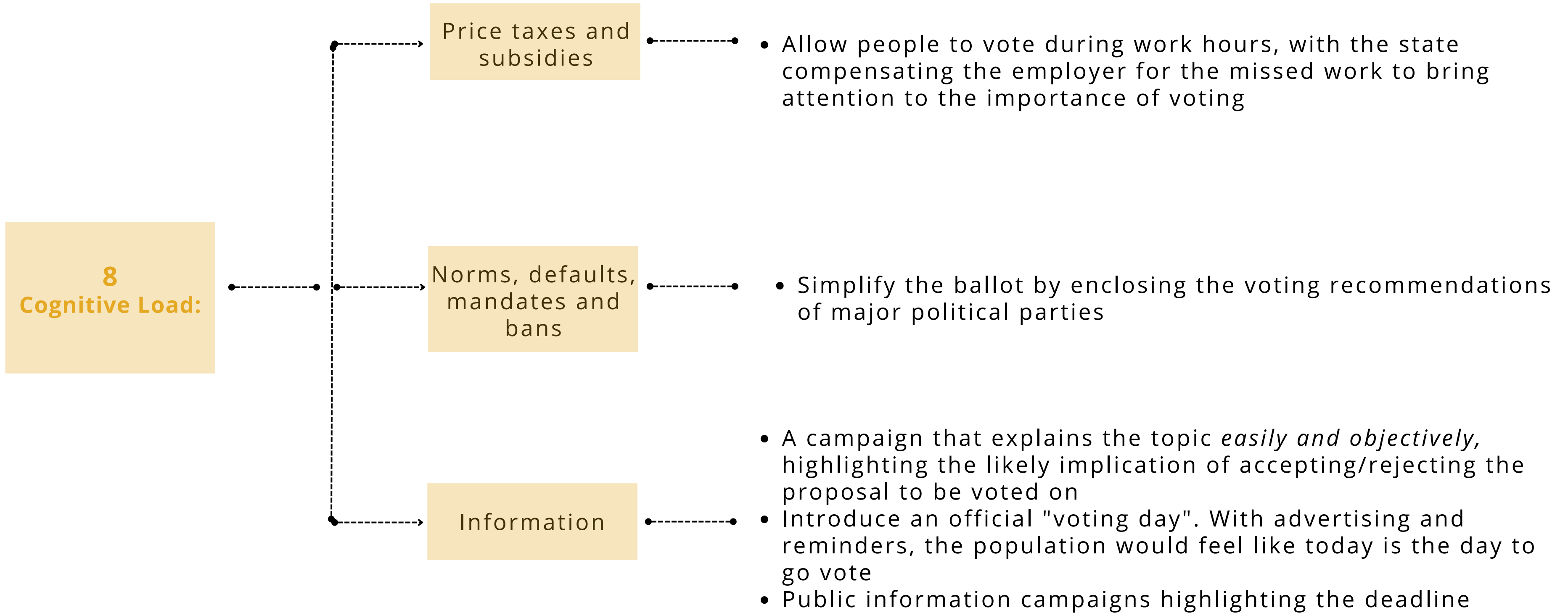
Price taxes and subsidies

- Since there are often many issues to vote on at once, there could be a premium/prize for a single one of them, leading voters to take on the remaining topics as well. The prized issue might not be known to the public beforehand
- Require voters to pay a symbolic (small) fee to vote, giving a sense that voting is a valuable privilege

Norms, defaults, mandates and bans

- Default option with the National Assembly/Federal Council's recommendation or with randomly pre-mark alternatives on the ballot, so voters need to open the envelope to see what is marked

Information

- Design the envelope to be more appealing, e.g., have local artists paint them or include a neat collector's postcard among the voting materials
- Personalize the envelope or add a personalized letter
- "Uninformative" advertisement to direct attention to voting. For instance billboards displaying "How many people do you think voted on the last poll?"
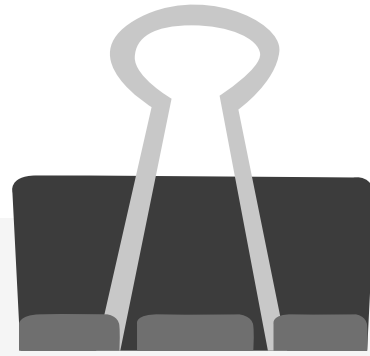- Attention reallocation through color and *Design* of the accompanying document

Price taxes and subsidies

- Allow people to vote during work hours, with the state compensating the employer for the missed work to bring attention to the importance of voting

**8
Cognitive Load:**

Norms, defaults, mandates and bans

- Simplify the ballot by enclosing the voting recommendations of major political parties

Information

- A campaign that explains the topic *easily and objectively,* highlighting the likely implication of accepting/rejecting the proposal to be voted on
- Introduce an official "voting day". With advertising and reminders, the population would feel like today is the day to go vote
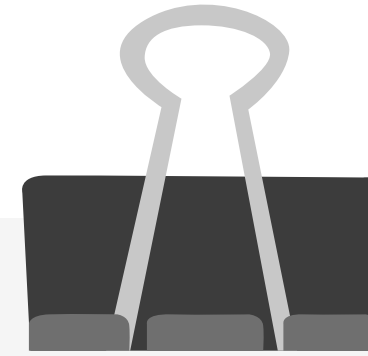- Public information campaigns highlighting the deadline

**9
Learning Through
Noticing**

Norms, defaults, mandates and bans

- Voters have to take a very simple "test" for them to realize that they are indeed able to understand how voting works
- Pay out a small premium after a given number of voting instances per year – hoping that people will keep on voting out of conviction

Information

- Print an estimate of the time needed to complete the voting papers for the current election or popular vote

COSTLY ACTIONS

Cognitive Bias Alternative

What about you?

How much time would you be willing to give to attend a seminar, where you could learn more about the policy?

- As one of the tools to increase voting participation among underrepresented groups we were discussing we could **design the envelope to be more appealing** (for example have local artists paint them or include a neat collector's postcard among the voting materials).
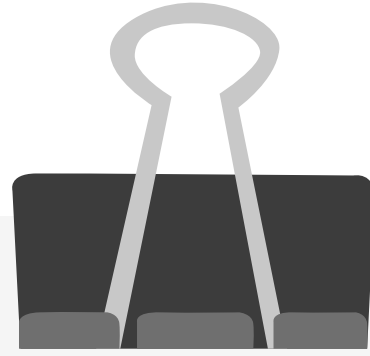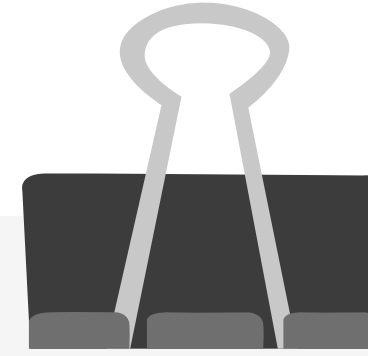
| No time at all | Max 15min | Max 30min | Max 1h | More than 1h |

COSTLY ACTIONS

Social Expectation Alternative

What about you?

How much time would you be willing to give to attend a seminar, where you could learn more about the policy?

- As one of the tools to increase voting participation among underrepresented groups we were discussing we could let municipalities compete. **Municipalities with the turnout above a certain threshold would enter a lottery** thought which it could get allocated surplus funding from the government for public projects
- As one of the tools to increase voting participation among underrepresented groups we were discussing **to print the participation rate on the voting envelope**, e.g., "In your neighborhood, x% of voters had cast their ballot last time".
- As one of the tools to increase voting participation among underrepresented groups, we were discussing to send individuals that didn't vote in the previous votation a **letter with a survey asking why they did not participate**.

| No time at all | Max 15min | Max 30min | Max 1h | More than 1h |

References

[1] Politics | Federal Statistical Office (admin.ch)

[2] Sciarini, P., & Lablih, M. (2020). L'évolution du comportement électoral dans le canton de Genève (1995-2019). Etude basée sur les enquêtes d'opinion Selects (Swiss election studies). Université de Genève: Département de science politique et relations internationales.

[3] Linder, W., & Mueller, S. (2021). Swiss democracy: Possible solutions to conflict in multicultural societies (p. 295). Springer Nature.

[4] Schelker, M., & Schneiter, M. (2017). The elasticity of voter turnout: Investing 85 cents per voter to increase voter turnout by 4 percent. Electoral Studies, 49, 65-74.

[5] Democratic? The canton where voting is compulsory - SWI swissinfo.ch

[6] How the world's most frequent voters handle postal ballots - SWI swissinfo.ch

[7] Luechinger, S., Rosinger, M., & Stutzer, A. (2007). The impact of postal voting on participation: Evidence for Switzerland. Swiss Political Science Review, 13(2), 167-202.

[8] McCann, J. A. (1998, September). Electoral participation and local community activism: spillover effects, 1991–1996. In Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, Mass.

[9] Fishkin, J. (1995) The Voice of the People: Public Opinion and Democracy, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. p. 145

[10] Milic, T., Alessandro F., & Kübler D. (2019). VOTO Studie zur eidgenössischen Volksabstimmung vom 19. Mai 2019. Aarau, Lausanne, and Luzern: ZDA, FORS, LINK.